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*STUDIA DIONEAE NOVISSIMA: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE,
INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS
OF CASSIUS DIO'S "ROMAN HISTORY" (Part II)*

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The article, continuing the overview of current Cassius Dio scholarship, focuses on the debates surrounding issues of narrative modes and patterns of his *Roman History*, including the role of various speeches in their dramatic context, the correlation between annalistic and biographical techniques, Dio's treatment of Roman public institutions and especially their evolution within the transition from the Republic to Principate. The discussions concerning Dio's political and literary career, his political thinking, and the constitutional debate in Book 52 also are under consideration. The present survey demonstrates that modern scholars have completely abandoned the outdated preconception of Dio as a 'copyist' or a 'compiler'. Currently, this historian is treated as an author who had a distinct narrative strategy, elaborated the structure of his work and made deliberate choices between historiographic methods and techniques. Recent studies show, on the one hand, the diversity of methodological agendas applied to different parts of Dio's work, and on the other hand, a number of recurrent themes and issues. The majority of these elements of consistency belong to the sphere of the author's political agenda, with the entire conceptual framework of Dio's narrative being closely connected to the demonstration of paradigms of proper political leadership.

Keywords: Cassius Dio, Graeco-Roman historiography, historical causation, historical narrative, historiographic methods and techniques, political agenda, Cassius Dio scholarship

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STUDIA DIONEAE NOVISSIMA: ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЙ
НАРРАТИВ, ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ ПРОШЛОГО
И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ КОНТЕКСТЫ «РИМСКОЙ ИСТОРИИ»
КАССИЯ ДИОНА (Часть II)

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В статье, продолжающей обзор современных исследований Кассия Диона, основное внимание уделяется спорным вопросам о повествовательных модусах и моделях его «Римской истории», в том числе рассматриваются роль различных речей в их историческом контексте, корреляция между анналистическим и биографическим нарративами, трактовка Дионом государственных институтов, и прежде всего их эволюции в период перехода от Республики к Принципату. Анализируются также мнения современных исследователей, касающиеся политической и литературной карьеры Диона, его политических воззрений, дискуссии о наилучшей форме правления в книге II. Настоящий обзор показывает, что современные исследователи полностью отказались от устаревшего представления о Дионе как о «плагиаторе» или «компиляторе». В настоящее время Дион оценивается как автор, у которого была четкая повествовательная стратегия, детально проработанная структура нарратива и осознанный выбор историографических методов и литературной техники. Недавние исследования обнаруживают, с одной стороны, разнообразие подходов историка, применяемых к различным частям его труда, а с другой — ряд повторяющихся тем и вопросов. Большинство этих связующих элементов относится к сфере политических установок автора, и вся концептуальная основа дионовского повествования тесно связана с репрезентацией парадигм политического лидерства.

Ключевые слова: Кассий Дион, греко-римская историография, историческая причинность, исторический нарратив, методология историографии, современная историография

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Narrative modes and patterns

A body of recent scholarship has looked at Dio's narrative in terms of its literary and rhetorical characteristics. The *Roman History* is recognized to be a literary construct reflecting the author's version of the Empire and its past. Such an approach provided fruitful ground for exploring diverse forms of Dio's narrative discourse: political, ideological, cultural. Particular attention has been paid to peculiarities of Dio's methods and historiographic approaches, the narrative structuring, in particular

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the annalistic and biographical techniques and the principles behind the deployment of speeches. A survey of the recent scholarship on these issues is represented below.

Modern scholarship has found Dio's methodological agendas to be closely linked to his take on human nature, as well as his overall understanding of history. For instance, Hose explains the impact of Thucydides' paradigm upon the *Roman History* by Dio's inability 'to establish rudimentary "teleological" principles such as those found in Herodotus, Polybius, or Diodorus. It is thus understandable that in searching for another model of historiography he lit upon Thucydides'¹. As noted in Part One of this article, the Thucydidean paradigm is more detectable in the republican section of Dio's work than in the imperial one. Obviously, Dio could have different methodological agendas for different parts of his work or switch methods according to the plot itself. As Rich rightly notes, sometimes 'he was the cynical student of *Machtpolitik*, sometimes the political moralist, ready with edifying sentiments or models for conduct'². The question which arises here is to what extent such a diversity of Dio's narrative techniques depends on his sources. Did he simply follow from one mass of material to another one? For decades the affirmative answer to this question remained quite common among scholars, with Dio being regarded as a 'single-source historian'. Recent studies have challenged this traditional view. A number of case-studies have revealed various thematic and interpretative differences between Dio's materials and the parallel narratives and other sources on the Regal period³, Second Punic War⁴, Late Republic⁵, Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods⁶ or the Severans⁷. As a historian of his own right, Dio elaborates on all these topics and in some cases offers independent information.

A detailed analysis of compositional and methodological particularities of different parts of Dio's work has been carried out by Kemezis who undertook a rare attempt to interpret Dio's extensive work as a literary whole⁸. Based on narratological approaches applied primarily to modern fiction⁹, he employs 'narrative world' concept in order to reveal and explore the intrinsic conceptual integrity of Dio's narrative, though admitting that different parts of it might have their independent functions. According to Kemezis, Dio re-imagined the history of Rome and created his own version of the Roman Empire as a stage for the historical process¹⁰. Methodologically, the study of Dio's 'narrative world' implies that the text should not always be taken at face value. Sometimes subtexts and hints should be identified, while the main aim is to define the general principles of the construction and functioning of the narrative. Therefore, Kemezis advocates for making assumptions, formulating generalized explanatory models, and providing general

¹ Hose 2007, 464.

² Rich 1990, 14.

³ Briquel 2016; Fromentin 2016.

⁴ Simon 2016.

⁵ Simons 2009; Baron 2019.

⁶ Devillers 2016a.

⁷ Molin 2016c. The general survey of the sources for emperors see now in Letta 2021.

⁸ Kemezis 2014, 10.

⁹ For a concise introduction to Dio in narratological perspective, see Hidber 2004.

¹⁰ Kemezis 2014, 11.

assessments without delving into rhetorical analysis in each particular case¹¹. The basic premise for such an approach is that the ancient texts were designed for readers capable of understanding ‘narrative worlds’, because people do not, either in the time of the Severans, or in our own times, perceive the world of the text and reality as identical¹². Unfortunately, Kemezis does not refer to concrete examples of such reflection in ancient times. Therefore, it is tempting to inquire about the correlation between the ostensibly conscious and deliberate construction of the ‘narrative world’ and the genre specifics. In fact, many Greek and Roman historians expressed their commitment to *aletheia*¹³ and believed that an accurate and trustworthy account of the past events distinguished history from poetry, which was based on fiction (e.g., Polyb. 1. 14. 5–6; 2. 56. 12; Arist. *Poet.* 9. 1451b. 1; Luc. *Hist. conscr.* 8–9). Another issue closely linked to the previous one is the relationship between the individual author’s creativity and the literary trends of his times. In this regard, Burden-Strevens rightly points to Kemezis’s selectiveness in dealing with the massive modern scholarship on the Second Sophistic¹⁴.

In comparison with the previous historiography, the novelty of Dio’s work, according to Kemezis, is the creation of an original compositional structure of the narrative, covering several historical epochs. Dio’s ‘narrative world’ is not static. It changes at different historical stages defined by Dio in his comments on the periodization of the history of Rome (52. 1. 1; 72 [71]. 36. 4): early and middle Republic, Late Republic, Principate, contemporary period. These periods are associated by Kemezis with different types of narrative, i.e. ‘narrative modes’, such as republic, *dynasteia*, Principate and the ‘eyewitness’ mode¹⁵. The first two modes are distinguished in accordance with the periodization of the history of Rome in the opening chapter of Book 52. The identification of two other modes within the imperial period is based on Dio’s famous reference to the ‘realm of iron and rust’ which replaced the kingdom of gold after the death of Marcus Aurelius (72 [71]. 36. 4); and his pledge to describe the contemporary events in more detail and more carefully, since he was a witness to them (72 [71]. 18. 4). Importantly, such a narrative structuring is never mentioned by Dio. It has been reconstructed by Kemezis, albeit tentatively, as the author himself acknowledges¹⁶. He concludes: ‘Each of the four discernible modes – Republic, *dynasteiai*, Principate and contemporary – functions as its own domain within the overall story world. Each has its own modalities or rules for what sorts of events are knowable and worth telling, for what sorts of motivations and possibilities for action characters have and for what is the nature of the Roman commonwealth and its relationship to individuals. Literary techniques also differ greatly; each mode has its own way of deploying speeches, digressions, narrative asides, vivid or emotive descriptive passages and so forth’¹⁷. Consequently, different elements of Dio’s narrative – for example the speeches – might have a different meaning and function in each mode.

¹¹ Kemezis 2014, 11, 14.

¹² Kemezis 2014, 14.

¹³ Dio is not an exception in this respect: 1. 1. 2.

¹⁴ Burden-Strevens 2016a, xi.

¹⁵ Kemezis 2014, 98.

¹⁶ Kemezis 2014, 109.

¹⁷ Kemezis 2014, 98.

Kemezis' thought-provoking conception has been taken in account by Coudry, Bertrand, Fromentin and Coltelloni-Trannoy, the authors of two articles on Dio's treatment of different periods in Rome's history¹⁸. They suggest that Dio gave each epoch a special 'flavour', derived from distinctive *lexica* and themes (for instance, ambition, rivalry, greed, corruption in the republican times). Besides, they find more aspects of Dio's treatment of temporality: his periodization is characterized as 'polymorphous or polyphonic', which means it might be based on different principles and include numerous periodization frameworks, with specific methodological and political agendas being allocated to each. Another issue is Kemezis' idea that Dio uses two different modes for narrating the history of the early / middle and Late Republic / *dynasteia*. According to him, the Republican period is presented by Dio as a time when collective interests prevailed, and the activities of individuals were aimed at achieving the common good. The next mode is characterized as a specific narrative about the civil wars in Rome, which revolves around the description of the individual political leaders' struggle for power. However, some scholars have rightly pointed to the fact that Dio's early-republican narrative 'abounds in internecine conflict'¹⁹ and is not much different in terms of highlighting the role of violence than the late-republican account²⁰. In Rich's words, 'Dio portrays the early Republic in a way which is less idealized and has more in common with his view of the Late Republic than Kemezis has allowed'²¹.

More specifically, Lindholmer argues that Dio's central passage on periodization (52. 1. 1) has been misinterpreted by Kemezis and others: 'δυναστείας should not be seen as a discrete period and especially not as a governmental form but rather refers to the numerous malfunctions of the δημοκρατία throughout its history'; the Late Republic is thus not δυναστεία but rather a poorly functioning δημοκρατία²². Indeed, Dio's take on the periodization of Roman history, particularly the chronology and sequence of the periods, is marked by some inconsistencies²³: three different dates for the beginning of monarchy are provided²⁴, δυναστεία is occasionally ignored as a period (44. 1. 1–2. 3; 53. 19. 1; 56. 21. 4); the end of δημοκρατία coincides not only with the establishment of the Principate of Augustus, but also with the dictatorship of Julius Caesar (43. 20. 3), as well as with the moment when Octavian and Antony divided power between themselves (50. 1. 1); the concept of a 'monarch' and its derivatives can be occasionally used by the author with respect to 'dynasts' (43. 20. 3; 45. 1–3; 47. 27. 2; 39. 3)²⁵. Nevertheless, it feels that δυναστεία cannot be entirely divorced from Dio's version of Roman historical periodization, which appears to correspond to some classical theories of ἀνακύκλωσις, the cycle of political transformations, as a universal and inevitable process due to the

¹⁸ Bertrand *et al.* 2016; Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016a.

¹⁹ Burden-Strevens 2016a, xii.

²⁰ Lange 2019, 165.

²¹ Rich 2019, 278.

²² Lindholmer 2018a, 565. Similarly, Carsana states that Dio, being close in this respect to Plutarchan *De unius in re publica dominatione*, considers dynasts to be constitutional office holders abusing their power (Carsana 2016).

²³ For more details see Markov 2021.

²⁴ Dio identifies it variously with Actium (50. 1. 2; 51. 1. 1; 56. 30. 5), the debate of 29 BCE (52. 1. 1), and the settlement of 27 BCE (53. 17. 1; 19. 1).

²⁵ For Dio representing Caesar as a monarch, see Carsana 2016, 555; Urso 2020, 21–25.

peculiarities of human nature²⁶. Therefore, the transition from the Late Republic to the Principate is represented by the author as corrosion of δημοκρατία into δυναστεία, a period when political power is concentrated in hands of ambitious leaders while democracy remains mostly as a façade (41. 17. 3; 45. 11. 1)²⁷.

One could bring up more issues with Kemezis' stimulating conclusions about the correlation between Dio's periodization of history and his methodological agendas. On the one hand, Dio himself states that his methodology in writing the history of the Principate differs from that adopted for the Republican narrative (53. 19. 1–6). However, in this passage, the difference is explained by the changing nature of the historian's sources, not by his own personal intention to set a special methodological agenda for the Principate. Furthermore, Dio's reference to his personal observations as providing a more accurate and more detailed account of the contemporary events corresponds to the Greek historiographical tradition (cf. Thuc. 1. 1; Luc. *Hist. conscr.* 47) and does not necessarily indicate a considerable methodological change within the imperial books. More convincingly, Rich, having explored Dio's principles of speeches deployment, comes to conclusion that Dio switches to a new mode in his narrative after Augustus. The basic features of this new mode are: the author's focus on the characters of individual emperors as rulers; the lack of extended speeches as less appropriate for a society where the political decisions are made secretly; the abundance of remarks by emperors and replies from those subjects who dared to respond, with accounts of the worse emperors containing more direct-discourse episodes of this sort²⁸. All this shows obvious dissimilarities in the methodological agendas determined by the author's deliberate choice of subject and of cause-effect interpretations.

Narrative modes apart, the distinct range of narrative techniques deployed in different sections of Dio's work could be allocated to the narrative patterns depending on the plot itself²⁹. Apparently, one of the most telling examples is Dio's depiction of violence, war and civil war, which has become the subject of one of the recent Brill volumes on Dio³⁰. This collective study has brought fruitful results. Regarding the foreign wars, as Bertrand shows, Dio stands for a defensive imperialism throughout the entire work, depicting Roman expansion as a cause of domestic political problems³¹. On the other hand, his recognition of the risks threatening the Roman Empire determines his recurrent interest in the geography and history of some peripheral areas related to Severan conflicts³². Another recurrent theme in Dio's work is the representation of the emperors' military achievements, their authority as commanders-in-chief and their relations with the soldiers. According to Havener, Dio makes depiction of the imperial military persona one of the

²⁶ Markov 2021, 115–117.

²⁷ Markov 2021, 114–115. For Dio's usage of Aristotelean vocabulary and his contraposition of lawless and arbitrary dynasteia to such legitimate forms of government as monarchy and democracy, see Bellissime 2016.

²⁸ Rich 2019, 224.

²⁹ Markov 2021, 122.

³⁰ Lange, Scott 2020.

³¹ Bertrand 2020, 120–121; cf. Simons 2012; 2014.

³² Bertrand 2020, 135.

leitmotifs of his work³³. However, the historian's literary focus was more on cases of civil discord. Imrie makes a number of insightful observations on how Dio presents Rome as a prize for a winning party, with its population being plunged into the atmosphere of fear and concealment of true emotion, while the restoration of peace and security brings a sense of freedom of expression³⁴. Besides, an indispensable element of Dio's depiction of the physical city of Rome in times of *staseis* is the scenes of decapitation and display of heads on the Rostra and elsewhere, which, as Lange claims, may have a strong symbolic meaning for Dio himself and his envisaged readers³⁵.

Definitely, there are a number of similarities between Dio's dim picture of the Late Republic and his pessimistic view of the Severan era marked by the lack of consensus among the Romans³⁶ and their moral and political decline³⁷. However, the picture might be more complicated. As Osgood has shown, Dio drew the reader's attention not only to the parallels but also to contrasts between the two epochs and their representatives, as, for example, in case of Caesar's and Septimius Severus' attitudes towards their political rivals³⁸. Given his criticism towards the ruling dynasty, the historian is even referred to as 'Dio the Dissident'³⁹. Thus, Mallan has noticed that the propaganda of Dio's contemporary emperors is refuted and subverted by Dio, which concerns not only Commodus or Septimius Severus, but also Severus Alexander under whom Dio supposedly completed his work⁴⁰. Furthermore, one can agree with Scott that, in contrast with Septimius Severus' self-representation, Dio depicts the founder of the new dynasty as an anti-Augustus in terms of the outcomes of the civil wars both emperors waged. Having defeated his adversaries Augustus, as well as, later, Vespasian, established a consensus-based governmental system, while Severus' coming to power resulted in further repressions and bloodshed, with the Romans getting further and further from regaining concord and stability⁴¹.

Indeed, different forms of violence including wars and civil strife, as well as the issues of social stability, appear to be the author's prime concern and occupy a privileged position within the structure of Dio's narrative. Importantly, they appear to be recurrent themes of speeches deployed abundantly in *Roman History*. This is what clearly follows from some of the studies on the role of speech in Dio's work.

Speeches and their functions

Obviously, Dio was very much a representative of the Second Sophistic era. Scholars have shown a number of his sophistic features: his own self-presentation as an educated elite member who could write in polished Attic and was familiar with classical texts; his general interest in sophistic society, as well as his consistent focus on relations between

³³ Havener 2020, 138–164. Cf. also Davenport 2021.

³⁴ Imrie 2020, 165–191.

³⁵ Lange 2020, 192–218.

³⁶ For Dio's treatment of *homonoia* as a running theme in his work, see Asirvatham 2020, 309.

³⁷ Molin 2016a, 259–270; Madsen 2016, 155–156.

³⁸ Osgood 2020, 313–333.

³⁹ Rantala 2016, 159.

⁴⁰ Mallan 2016, 273–274.

⁴¹ Scott 2020a, 334–354.

the *literati* and Roman emperors⁴². Most of all the Second Sophistic influence manifests itself in speeches deployed abundantly in Dio's work⁴³. Indeed, the fragmentary Books 1–21 alone contain, according to Rich, 36 'short' and 16 'extended' pieces of oratory, while there are also short and informal instances of *oratio recta*, more characteristic of the imperial section of *Roman History*⁴⁴. On the other hand, the overall impression of Dio as 'a rhetorician, eager to show off his skills'⁴⁵, diminished scholarly opinions on the quality and function of speeches in his work. Until relatively recent times they were characterized mostly as a sort of declamatory exercises, *suasoria* or *controversia*, based on commonplaces and conventional tropes⁴⁶, while the general influence of rhetoric on Dio's narrative might even lead to pessimistic conclusions about Dio as a historian⁴⁷. Current scholarship considers the rhetorical dimension of the *Roman History* as an integral part of historical narrative⁴⁸. More optimistically, Fomin allows Dio's speeches to be somewhat more than 'empty rhetoric': they go beyond imitation of classical authors and reflect Dio's individual values and political conceptualization, as well as his experiments with rhetorical techniques⁴⁹. However, the scholar emphasizes the epideictic quality of Dio's speeches, finds them 'largely theoretical' or 'tending to universality' and, as *ars gratia artis*, frequently being 'not very firmly anchored in the historical context'⁵⁰.

Contrary to such an approach, the 2010s saw a number of studies aiming to reintegrate Dio's various speeches into the historical context they are deployed in⁵¹. For example, Kemezis has shown that Caesar's address to the Vesontio mutineers (38. 34–47) is by no means a 'detachable rhetorical exercise' and can hardly be divorced from its dramatic setting. A technique of 'collusive mendacity', as Kemezis puts it, is employed in this speech, 'in which the speaker presents lies or obfuscations that the audience recognizes as such but nonetheless finds in some way useful or gratifying and chooses to accept'⁵². Dio frequently represents late republican speakers resorting to such manipulations. This is for him a way to emphasize the 'political dysfunction' of the period when Roman republican institutions were on the verge of collapse but the language of *libera res publica* was still in use⁵³.

This idea has been further developed by Burden-Strevens, the author of several works, including a monograph, aimed at reconsideration of the role of speeches in Dio's

⁴² Sidebottom 2007, 77; Freyburger-Galland 2013; Jones 2016, 303–305; Burden-Strevens 2015b, 297; 2016b, 214.

⁴³ On speeches in general and on individual samples see Adler 2008; Davenport, Mallan 2014; Fomin 2016; Lachenaud 2016; Burden-Strevens 2016b; 2018; Mastroso 2017; Rich 2019.

⁴⁴ Rich 2019, 224, 275.

⁴⁵ Rich 1989, 89.

⁴⁶ Millar 1961; 1964; Reardon 1971, 207–210; Stekelenburg 1971; McKechnie 1981; Reinhold 1988; Lintott 1997; Rodgers 2008.

⁴⁷ Lintott 1997, 2498–2503.

⁴⁸ Cf. Fromentin 2021, 39–40.

⁴⁹ Fomin 2016, 237.

⁵⁰ Fomin 2016, 232, 237. Cf. Fomin 2015, 220–221.

⁵¹ Markov 2013; Davenport, Mallan 2014; Mastroso 2014; Kemezis 2016; Coudry 2016a.

⁵² Kemezis 2016, 254.

⁵³ Kemezis 2016, 239, 252–254.

republican and early imperial narrative⁵⁴. According to Burden-Strevens, Dio deliberately created explicit contradictions between the speakers' statements and the depicted dramatic context in order to highlight the ineffectiveness or corruption of all public speech in the final decades of the Roman Republic. Public debates could no longer function properly because the formal orations were delivered by politicians who disguised their true motives behind fine words. Burden-Strevens convincingly argues that Dio used speeches as an instrument of historical analysis. Furthermore, based on the techniques of *analepsis* and *prolepsis* Dio demonstrates the changing character of public speech throughout his Republican narrative, which becomes a part of his causation of the decline of the *libera res publica*. 'Dio explored the destructive impact of oratory upon political life more fully than any surviving historian of the first century BC: its destabilising influence could not be countered, he argues, until the fora of debate themselves were restricted. This is another important component of his theoretical critique of δημοκρατία and justification of monarchy'⁵⁵. This method of deploying speeches in order to provide explanations for specific events and trends appears to be closer to Polybius than to 'epideictic tastes of Lucian, Quintilian, and Diodorus'⁵⁶. Further, Burden-Strevens recognizes the important role of moralizing in Dio's narrative structuring, in particular in his speeches: 'Dio seems to have placed *sententiae* into his history in such a way as to present individual moral failures as the cause of even major political and military events in the Late Republic'⁵⁷.

Annalistic and biographical techniques

One of the traditional issues pertaining to the Dio's narrative is the author's use of annalistic and biographical techniques. There is a long-established consensus among scholars that Dio wrote traditional annalistic history of Rome⁵⁸, though we can agree with Rich that at the same time Dio aspired to 'high Greek literary standards'⁵⁹. 'The last annalist' – this is, for instance, how Kemezis refers to our historian⁶⁰. However, as Rich has persuasively demonstrated, some of Dio's early republican history materials were not organized annalistically, or the annalistic structure was deployed 'with notable flexibility'⁶¹. Sometimes he passes fluently between domestic and warfare topics or adds institutional excurses, sometimes events of several years can be grouped around certain regions, while for some of the years Dio found no materials meeting his standard of inclusion. Obviously, this was an elaborate structuring technique which enabled Dio to represent a compressed account of several centuries of the early and mid-republican period in the first twenty books, i.e. one fourth, of his work⁶².

⁵⁴ Burden-Strevens 2016b; 2018; 2020.

⁵⁵ Burden-Strevens 2020, 181.

⁵⁶ Burden-Strevens 2020, 181.

⁵⁷ Burden-Strevens 2020, 119.

⁵⁸ Rich 1990, 8–11; Swan 1997.

⁵⁹ Rich 2020, 329.

⁶⁰ Kemezis 2014, 90.

⁶¹ Rich 2016, 286.

⁶² Rich 2016, 271–286.

Some modifications to basic annalistic structure are detectable also in the late-republican and imperial books. These are primarily the biographical insertions, especially characterizations of emperors that open and summarize each reign⁶³. Having carried out a detailed analysis of this biographical component, especially in the initial imperial books, Bono demonstrates their important structuring role which corresponds to Dio's description of the compositional principal preceding his account of the battle of Mutina and the subsequent establishment of the triumvirate (46. 35. 1): to set forth λογισμοί as the reasoned explanation of the facts (ἔργα) that he is preparing to narrate in the following chapters, so that the nature of the reasoning might be confirmed by its concordance with the historical reality⁶⁴. This insightful study basically supports Rich's conclusion that Dio's framing of the annalistically structured narrative with biographical insertions was his own innovation⁶⁵. Similarly, Coltelloni-Trannoy comes to conclusion that Dio created his own narrative technique, based on the combination of annalistic and biographical elements, apparently independent from Tacitus and Suetonius⁶⁶. As Coltelloni-Trannoy argues, Dio as a narrator has certain features of 'behavioural psychologist'⁶⁷: for him the driving force of history is the encounter between characters, events, institutions, as well as their interdependence. Thus the imperial regime is analyzed in the light of the institutional framework, which, for its own part, can be modified by each emperor through his style of rulership⁶⁸.

In fact, Dio's occasional shifts toward biographical narration have become a subject of a number of recent studies⁶⁹. Traditionally, Dio has been characterized by scholars as a quasi-biographer⁷⁰, while his usage of biographical techniques has been labeled by Pelling as 'biostructuring' for 'the lack of personal individuation and understanding'. Though, Pelling allows Dio to 'bring out the importance of individual character in defining the flavor of different reigns', and claims that 'his characterization is more unsatisfactory by modern than by ancient standards'⁷¹. Nevertheless, Kemezis finds Dio indifferent to 'the staple subject-matter of true biography' due to his limited interest in the internal psychology of his rulers or dynasts⁷². The scholar considers Dio equally distant from Suetonius' attention to private lives and habits⁷³ and from Plutarchan mode of ethical evaluation; unlike both biographers Dio is concerned mostly with public actions of political leaders⁷⁴.

⁶³ Rich defines Dio's imperial narrative mode as 'a partly biographical' and points to possible Suetonius' influence on Dio (Rich 2020, 332). Cf. also Devillers 2016b.

⁶⁴ Bono 2020, 48–49.

⁶⁵ Rich 2016, 272.

⁶⁶ Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016a, 354, 358.

⁶⁷ For Dio's commitment to behavioral generalizations, see Pelling 1997, 133.

⁶⁸ Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016a, 362.

⁶⁹ For the most recent analyses of Dio's portrayals of individual emperors, see Malik 2021; Mallan 2021a and the useful overview by Davenport, Mallan 2021.

⁷⁰ Questa 1957; Ameling 1997, 2479–2482.

⁷¹ Pelling 1997, 144.

⁷² Cf. Pelling 1997, 134.

⁷³ According to Coltelloni-Trannoy (2016a, 354), Dio's work was not conceived as a catalogue of curiosities.

⁷⁴ Kemezis 2014, 139.

The purpose and function of Dio's biographical narrative have been recently studied by Verena Schulz. She demonstrates that Dio used the same, basically senatorial, criteria for evaluating monarchs' *virtutes* and *vitia* in both the Regal and Imperial Period. This is what reflects the distinct and unique character of his account of early kings, with Dio's perspective on Rome's first monarchy being obviously different from those of Dionysius or Livy. Furthermore, Schulz reveals common features in Dio's individual depictions of Roman emperors and early kings. For example, our historian could develop parallels between his early Lucius Tarquinius Priscus and Marcus Aurelius, and, on the other hand, between the similarly vicious qualities of Tarquinius Superbus and Nero or Commodus. Apparently, Dio employed this approach to imperial representation in order to set paradigms for his high-ranking audience in the third century CE⁷⁵. Thematic continuity and cohesiveness appear to be a remarkable feature of Dio's imperial narrative. As has been shown by Pelling, Dio elaborates on some 'trans-regnal' themes, such as the 'dissimulation' of emperors, especially those who rule tyrannically, and the 'bewilderment of the senate'⁷⁶. Schulz has recently afforded a deeper insight into these and other elements of continuity of the imperial narrative, having interpreted them as parts of Dio's major conception of 'deconstruction of imperial representation'⁷⁷. According to the scholar, Dio employed special narrative strategy for depicting emperors-tyrants (Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Commodus, Caracalla, Elagabalus), which was based on the opposition of the historiographical discourse to panegyric one. Panegyric poets, like, for example, Martial and Statius under Domitian, intended to praise emperors for exceeding the limits of public expectations with regard to their programmes and projects. The deconstruction implies recoding the panegyric discourse and reinterpreting the emperors' motifs for going beyond the usual boundaries, so their activities might be represented as violations of established norms, dangerous extremities, deviations and sometimes manifestations of madness⁷⁸. Dio could use different deconstruction strategies that have been divided by Schulz into 'five groups focusing on different aspects of imperial actions: the aspect of action and social norm; of action and character; of the combination of several actions; of the choice of actions to be presented; of actions and emotions'⁷⁹. As regards the first group, Dio could expose hubristic, unmanly and bizarre actions of emperors, like Nero's wedding with Sporus and Domitian's funeral banquet. Negative character traits of the emperors could be highlighted by comparison with other figures, like Boudicca or Corbulo in the case of Nero, or Vindex in Domitian's case. Another deconstruction device is 'focalization', the representation of the emperor's motives from the perspective of other characters. In Dio, the 'focalizers' could be the emperor's relatives, friends and confidants, as well as the people or even contrasting figures⁸⁰. In order to demonstrate the contradictory nature of the emperor's behaviour Dio could use associative combinations of imperial actions taken out of chronological order, which resembles Suetonius and his mode of presenting his rubrics. The way Dio selected his

⁷⁵ Schulz 2019a, 311–332.

⁷⁶ Pelling 1997, 125–135.

⁷⁷ Schulz 2016; 2019b.

⁷⁸ Schulz 2016, 276–277.

⁷⁹ Schulz 2019b, 264.

⁸⁰ Schulz 2019b, 211–212.

materials is also regarded by Schulz as a deconstruction technique. Dio could catalogue 'bad' emperors' deeds and performances, as well as omit certain details and circumstances. In some cases, Dio depicts emotions of the emperors and their subjects in order to create an atmosphere of fear and tyranny. Obviously, Dio's imperial representation is not simply a reflection of the events of the past. According to Schulz, Dio's *Roman History* was created for setting political paradigms, so they might be 'an important part of political communication and a medium for negotiating the boundaries of the emperors' behaviour'⁸¹. Having compared Dio's imperial methods with Tacitus and Suetonius, she comes to conclusion that the three authors created three different modes of deconstruction, though the peculiarities she finds in Dio are quantitative rather than qualitative. Dio's form of deconstruction is characterized as 'the most complete' and accompanied with less uncertainty. Substantially, Dio's imperial representation appears to be 'closely intertwined with the sociopolitical discourses under the Severans: Dio's typologies offer an alternative, opposing reading to the genealogies claimed by the Severans, which were an important part of their own imperial representation'⁸².

As follows from the survey above, modern scholars have reconsidered the outdated preconception of Dio as a 'copyist' or a 'compiler'. Currently, our historian is treated as an author who elaborated on the themes he wrote about, was selective in historiographic methods and techniques, and had a distinct narrative strategy. Recent studies have shown, on the one hand, the diversity of the methodological agendas applied to different sections of his work, and, on the other hand, a number of recurrent themes and issues. The majority of these elements of consistency belong to the sphere of the author's political agendas, with the entire conceptual framework of Dio's narrative being closely connected to the demonstration of paradigms of proper political leadership.

DIO AS POLITICIAN AND POLITICAL THEORIST

Dio's political and literary career

Cassius Dio's work has always been regarded as a monument of political thought of the Severan era, all the more so given that the author was a high-standing senator whose career peaked with his second consulate in 229 CE⁸³. Indeed, this is what emerges from Dio's numerous and, sometimes, rather extended interjections regarding his *cursus honorum*⁸⁴. Evi-

⁸¹ Schulz 2016, 277.

⁸² Schulz 2019b, 362.

⁸³ Madsen 2018, 284–285. Modern scholars emphasize that Dio belonged to the inner circle of Severus Alexander's closest assistants, which is attested by his position of *consul ordinarius iterum* as a colleague of the Emperor, also by his urgent appointment to the Latinized and strategically important province of Pannonia Superior, which was a rare exception for a senator of Greek origin (Millar 1964, 26; Hose 1994, 357–358; Markov 2016, 60; Letta 2019, 171).

⁸⁴ Member of the Roman senate under Commodus (73 [72]. 16. 3), praetorship nominee under Pertinax (73 [72]. 12. 2), Caracalla's travel companion in the journey to eastern provinces (77 [76]. 17. 3–18. 4), *curator ad corrigendum statum civitatum* in Pergamum and Smyrna under Elagabalus (80 [79]. 7. 4; 18. 4), governor of the province of Africa (49. 36. 4; 80 [80]. 1. 2); imperial legate in Dalmatia and Pannonia (49. 36. 4). Dio's position in Africa is a matter of discussion. Letta following Vrind's suggestion (Vrind 1923, 158) believes that Dio held position of commander of *legio III Augusta* stationed in Numidia (Letta 1979, 131–135; 2016b,

dently, the vicissitudes of Dio's career influenced his vision of the evolution of the Roman political institutions. For example, his remark on insignificance of a second consulship, in the 'Consolation-Dialogue' between Cicero and Philiscus (38. 28) may be interpreted as an allusion to Dio's own misfortunes of 229⁸⁵, when the pinnacle of his career, marred by the conflict with the praetorians (80. 5. 1), was followed by the author's abrupt withdrawal from Rome for his home town of Nicaea. Obviously, as a politician, Dio viewed the Roman past through the lens of his political experience. Therefore, scholars have always looked for a correlation between the stages of the historian's public career and the political agendas the author apparently sets in his work⁸⁶.

It should be noted, however, that Dio's career, as well as its precise chronology, is still a debatable issue. The most extensive reconstruction has been recently suggested by Michel Molin, who makes some proposals regarding Dio's biography⁸⁷, though some of them go beyond the existing evidence⁸⁸. Importantly, Molin shares the traditional view on Dio as making a successful career under Septimius Severus and becoming a member of the *consilium principis*, the emperor's *amicus* and *comes*⁸⁹. This version has been recently questioned by Letta, for the second time since 1979⁹⁰. Usually, scholars find no direct correlation between Dio's critical remarks on the Severans and the vicissitudes of his career⁹¹, all the more so given that another historian of Imperial Rome, Tacitus, might have been a good example in this respect⁹². Letta, on the contrary, regards Dio's expressions of indignation or resentment with Severus' or Caracalla's activities as indications that our historian fell into disgrace already in the 190s, mostly because of his pro-Albinus sympathies, and resumed his *cursus* no earlier than when Macrinus had usurped the imperial power. Letta's main argument is Dio's brief mention of three thousand indictments for adultery entered on the docket which he had an opportunity to see when consul (77 [76]. 16. 4). Letta's idea that Dio's acquaintance with the documents could hardly be connected with his consular duties, and, therefore, that Dio could not be a consul under Septimius Severus, appears to be too rigid. Even if we admit that praetors, not consuls, presided over *quaestiones de adulteriis* in Severan times, one cannot exclude the involvement of a consul in administering justice in such cases *extra ordinem* or, as a variant, in a case of a senator, with judicial

274–275; 2019, 168–169). However, this version has been convincingly rejected by Barnes (1984, 394–395) and others (Rich 1990, 141; Molin 2016b, 442). On Dio's autobiographical remarks in the context of his narrative strategy and cultural identity, now see Scott 2018; Mallan 2021b; Kuhn 2022; Makhlayuk, Markov 2019, 46–62.

⁸⁵ Kemezis 2014, 289–290.

⁸⁶ For instance, according to Millar (1964, 78, 83–84) and Hose (1994, 431), the work of Dio is imbued with political ideas that reflect particular aspects of Caracalla's reign and are addressed directly to the emperor.

⁸⁷ Dio's praetorship – 195 CE, *proconsulat de rang prétorien*, presumably in Asia Minor or Lycia-Pamphylia – 197–198 CE, first consulate – 207 CE (Molin 2016b, 431–446).

⁸⁸ This primarily concerns the idea that Dio, jointly with Septimius Severus, traveled to Britain in 209–211 (Molin 2016b, 440, 445).

⁸⁹ Molin 2016b, 439–441.

⁹⁰ Letta 2019, 164–166; 1979, 128.

⁹¹ Millar 1964, 17; Molin 2016b, 439–441.

⁹² Madsen 2016, 137.

hearings being held in the senate under the chairmanship of consuls⁹³. At the same time, Letta is right when arguing for reconsidering the meaning of Dio's remarks on assisting the emperor at court (76 [75]. 16. 4: πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς συνδικάζοντας αὐτῷ; 77 [76]. 17. 1: ἡμῖν τοὺς συνδικάζουσιν αὐτῷ). Traditionally, these formulations are supposed to be indications of Dio's membership in the *consilium* of Septimius Severus⁹⁴. However, Letta has convincingly shown that Dio might refer to senatorial trials, with συνδικάζοντες being all the senators, not necessarily a selected group of advisors⁹⁵.

The discussion on Dio's career under the first Severans is tightly connected with another issue, namely the chronology of the composition of Dio's work. When reaching the end of Commodus' reign Dio gives an account of his literary activities, including 10 years spent on collecting materials for his *Roman History* and another 12 years devoted to composing the text (73 [72]. 23. 1–5). Dio's formulation does not necessarily imply that the later stage follows the former immediately⁹⁶, but modern scholars usually regard the total amount of 22 years as an uninterrupted period⁹⁷. According to the author himself, he still continued writing after his retirement in 229 (80 [80]. 5. 2), and consequently the final stage belongs to the early 230s. Nevertheless, it is commonly believed that only a limited portion of the text could have first appeared at that time, while the bulk of the work had been written and published much earlier⁹⁸.

Debates on the exact chronology of the 22-year period of Dio's work have been ongoing for decades, with two main versions, 'the early' and 'the late', prevailing. The former implies that Dio started collecting materials in times of the civil war of 194–197 and finished writing towards the end of Caracalla's reign at the earliest or in the first year of Elagabalus' rule at the latest⁹⁹. Already in the 1960s, 'the early' version was questioned by Bowersock, pointing to Dio's open hostility towards some of the members of the ruling dynasty, which makes publication of Dio's work under the Severans, i.e. before 235, doubtful¹⁰⁰. Therefore some scholars, having placed the 22-year period in the 190s–210s, admit that Dio subjected his work to thorough editing in the end of the 220s and 230s¹⁰¹. However, even this version can be met with the following objection: if Dio spent ten years collecting materials on the history from the ancient times until the death of Severus (73 [72]. 23. 5), he could not have commenced earlier than in 201¹⁰². Therefore, some scholars suggest that Dio collected materials from the early 200s to the early or middle 220s¹⁰³. However, it does not

⁹³ Theoretically at least, such a possibility is attested by the rescript *ad Tertullum et Maximum consules* (D. 48. 5. 30. 5) and one of the instructions from Ulpianus' *De officio proconsulis* (D. 48. 2. 16). Cf. Garnsey 1967, 57.

⁹⁴ Barnes 1984, 243; Reinhold 1988, 1, 4; Rich 1990, 2; Hose 1994, 358; Kemezis 2014, 142; Scott 2015, 172; Molin 2016b, 440, 445.

⁹⁵ Letta 2019, 165–166.

⁹⁶ Reinhold 1988, 12.

⁹⁷ Schmidt 1997, 2598–2599.

⁹⁸ Kemezis 2014, 282.

⁹⁹ Schwartz 1899, 1686, 1720; Gabba 1955, 295–297; Millar 1964, 28–30; Hose 1994, 425–426; Schmidt 1997, 2598–2625; Sordi 2000, 391–396; Lindholmer 2021, 133–159.

¹⁰⁰ Bowersock 1965, 469–474.

¹⁰¹ Eisman 1977, 657–673; Murison 1999, 8–12; Kemezis 2014, 282.

¹⁰² Bowersock 1965, 471; Rich 1990, 3–4; Markov 2008, 148.

¹⁰³ Millar 2005, 31; Rich 1990, 4; Swan 1997, 2549–2556; Schettino 2001, 555; Zecchini 2016, 123.

specifically follow from Dio's account on the origin of his work that it was 201 or any other particular year when he started collecting materials¹⁰⁴. He only mentions the fact that he decided to write *Roman History* when his previous work on *stasis* of the 190s won high approval of the audience including Septimius Severus himself (73 [72]. 23. 3).

Adherents of 'the late' version have suggested that Dio started working on his *opus* no sooner than in the end of 211, i.e. after the death of Septimius Severus. Consequently, the ten years of scrutinizing the sources lie between 211/212 and 220/222, while the writing stage corresponds to 220/222–231/234¹⁰⁵. However, the main obstacle for placing the bulk of the work in the late 220 – early 230s is Dio's passage on the eruption of Vesuvius in 202 (77 [76]. 2. 1). Of course, Dio might have heard about the event later, after purchasing the estate in Capua¹⁰⁶. Nevertheless, in Book 77 [76], Capua is represented as a place where Dio writes history, not his native Bithynia. Therefore, a precise chronology of the 22-year period is still a problem, though we can suggest *termini post/ante quem* for more authorial interventions in different sections of the work. It can be assumed that Book 46 was finished no earlier than 218, Book 48 no earlier than 218/219, Book 11 no earlier than 220, Book 43 after 220, Book 52 no earlier than 223, Book 49 in 225 or later, Book 40 before 226 at the earliest¹⁰⁷. Consequently, it was before the end of 229 but still in the 220-s when Dio actively worked on his *Roman History*¹⁰⁸, or, as Kemezis puts it, 'exercised substantial editorial control until the entire history was circulated in the early 230s, probably after his death'¹⁰⁹. In any case, the *Roman History* in its current form appears to be a product of the Alexander Severus' era.

From Republic to Principate

Recent decade has seen an array of studies devoted to Dio's treatment of Roman public institutions and, especially, their evolution in times of the transition from the Republic to the Principate. Among others, Andrew Scott proposes some thoughtful suggestions¹¹⁰. He notes that Dio charted and analyzed changes in government from the regal period to the Augustan principate, and in doing so, the author of the *Roman History* might have hoped that his contemporary readers would find proper models to emulate or avoid. What clearly emerges from Scott's work is, on the one hand, Dio's representation of a number of occasions when emperors from his own time misunderstood or misinterpreted history, and, on the other hand, Dio's belief in the utility of history and its transformative function. As appears, Dio considered all forms of government to be eventually degenerating. Nevertheless, he may have had an idea that filling in 'the long gap in writing the history of Rome in its entirety' would help to 'appropriately reform Rome's degenerated monarchy'¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁴ Markov 2008, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Barnes 1984, 240–255; Letta 1979, 183–185; 2007, 41–47; 2019, 163–180. 'The late' chronology is also accepted by Kuhn-Chen (2002, 137) and Molin (2016b, 445–446).

¹⁰⁶ Letta 2007, 46–47.

¹⁰⁷ Letta 1979, 169; Barnes 1984, 251; Markov 2008, 153.

¹⁰⁸ Markov 2008, 153.

¹⁰⁹ Kemezis 2014, 283.

¹¹⁰ Scott 2020b.

¹¹¹ Scott 2020b, 186.

Obviously, among the Roman constitutional changes Dio's prime concern is the fall of the Republic. According to Madsen, Dio 'tries to convince his readers' that any democratic form of government was doomed to fall due to the inability to maintain stability and peace, which was to Dio, as Madsen puts it, 'a structurally unresolvable problem'¹¹². However, the historian makes his Maecenas claim that the Romans were quite comfortable with their government when they were a tiny community, while their venturing into foreign lands and conquering the Mediterranean resulted in factional strife that shattered the state (52. 16. 2). Based on this comment and, to an even larger extent, on the different tone of the mid- and late-republican speeches, Kemezis comes to the conclusion that a key element of Dio's depiction of the early and middle Republic is the supremacy of collectivity over individualism. 'During that period, Dio presents the Roman people as a viable collective actor that was generally capable of determining and pursuing its own interests rather than those of its leaders'¹¹³. As mentioned above, one can agree with those scholars who believe that such a characterization of Dio's early Republic is overly idealizing, with Dio's account of the Struggle of the Orders being full of violence¹¹⁴. On the other hand, Rees has demonstrated that Dio's mid-republican narrative is more nuanced and distinctly has its own modality. In the passage from Dio's account of the outbreak of the Second Punic War (218 BCE) this period is represented as 'a zenith' (ἄκμῃ) of the Republic when Rome was as strong as never before and its citizens lived in absolute harmony among themselves, which facilitated their later military achievements (frg. 52. 1). The problems began when the Romans reached military supremacy, commenced emulating the prodigal habits of the defeated, and neglected the traditions of their fathers (frg. 64). Rees has rightly noticed that the latter fragment matches Dio's assertions in Book 44 and the claim in Maecenas' speech that power and excessive wealth corrupted the Republic and caused its collapse. This, Rees maintains, proves the cohesiveness of Dio's considerations on the moral decline of the Roman Republic¹¹⁵. Besides, Coudry has scrutinized Dio's portraits of Scipio, Camillus, and Fabricius, the so-called 'great men' of the middle Republic, to show the historian's conceptualization in covering such topics as extra-legal power and extraordinary commands, respect for *mos maiorum*; the destructive impact of envy; and the political consequences of military success and the Roman triumph. These issues, recurrent in Dio, form the historian's explanatory framework for the crisis of the Republic¹¹⁶.

Recent studies also have demonstrated Dio's keen interest in constitutional function and dysfunction of the Late Republic. Coudry and Bertrand thoroughly investigated the role of Senate and magistrates in Dio's account of the period. According to these scholars, Dio deliberately highlighted the role of extended supra-provincial commands in weakening the existing political structures of the Republic. Such commands are represented by Dio as potentially leading to *dynasteia*¹¹⁷. Coudry has also explored Dio's observations on the dysfunction of the consulship, censorship, and tribunate during the 60s and 50s BCE¹¹⁸, as

¹¹² Madsen 2018, 286–287.

¹¹³ Kemezis 2014, 105. Cf. Simons 2009.

¹¹⁴ Burden-Strevens 2016a, xii; Lange 2019, 165; Rich 2019, 278.

¹¹⁵ Rees 2011, 42–51.

¹¹⁶ Coudry 2019a, 126–164.

¹¹⁷ Bertrand, Coudry 2016, 599–605.

¹¹⁸ Similarly, Burden-Strevens reveals Dio's interest in the dictatorship as an important magistracy, with its failure being intertwined with the fall of the Republic (Burden-Strevens 2019).

well as the increasing irrelevance of the Senate and its loss of control of both the domestic and external affairs, with the political process being now centered on the competition between the dynasts. As follows from Coudry's works, Dio depicted the Roman Republic 'comme régime politique', with its collapse being caused by the institutional crisis afflicting the system as a whole, not simply by rivalry among the 'strong men'¹¹⁹. Complementing the articles of Coudry, Lindholmer emphasizes that Dio presents political competition as 'the central destructive driving force in the Late Republic'. This means that, for Dio, the institutionalized competition went beyond the individual blunders of particular politicians¹²⁰. At the same time, it is hard to agree with Lindholmer's statement that Dio considered political rivalry to be 'an institutional problem, rather than a moral one'¹²¹, since one does not necessarily exclude the other. In any case, recent studies have revealed Dio's critical approach to the late Republican period, as well as his focus on the institutional and structural changes. Burden-Strevens is right when pointing to the fact that it was basically Dio's vision of that age which shaped the modern explanation of the collapse of the Republic. Importantly, Dio understood that 'the empire was simply too large and diverse to practically accommodate a system of annually elected magistrates, and military operations in different spheres required that specific expertise which is necessarily developed by time and experience'¹²². Such a recognition of the inevitability of the fall of the Republic did not, however, prevent Dio from emphasizing certain benefits of δημοκρατία. For him, as Mallan has demonstrated, the collapse of the Republic resulted in the loss of 'genuine freedom of speech' (ἀκριβὴς παρρησία). The idea of παρρησία appears to be a recurring theme in the *Roman History*, while Dio himself is characterized as 'the last non-Christian author from antiquity to discuss *parrhēsia* in any sort of detail'¹²³.

Current scholarship provides new interpretations of Dio's view on Caesar. It is noted by some scholars that he represents Caesar's dictatorship as an important turning point in late Republican history. In Madsen's opinion, Dio portrays Caesar rather as a dynast than a monarch, even though the dictator is shown as attempting to put an end to the Republic¹²⁴. More unequivocally, Urso argues that, for Dio, it is Julius Caesar who was the founder of μοναρχία, not Augustus¹²⁵. Urso asserts that a specific feature of Dio's narrative was the lack of continuity between the 'Republic', which ended by 42 BCE, and the 'Monarchy', which was established between 29 and 27 BCE¹²⁶. It should be however noted that Dio employs mixed terminology to characterize Julius Caesar's dictatorship defined occasionally as δυναστεία (43. 20. 3; 43. 25. 3; 44. 35. 1)¹²⁷. Besides, according to Dio himself, Rome's μοναρχία begins with Augustus (52. 1. 1), though, as we have seen above, the author can be inconsistent in defining the chronology and sequence of the historical periods, with the

¹¹⁹ Coudry 2016c; 2019b.

¹²⁰ Lindholmer 2018b, 139; 2019a; 2019b, 93.

¹²¹ Lindholmer 2018b, 139.

¹²² Burden-Strevens 2020, 255.

¹²³ Mallan 2016, 272–275.

¹²⁴ Madsen 2019, 259–282.

¹²⁵ Urso 2020, 32. For Dio representing Caesar as 'il fondatore della monarchia imperiale', see also Carsana 2016, 555.

¹²⁶ Urso 2020, 19–38.

¹²⁷ Coudry 2016b, 519–528; Markov 2021, 113–114.

end of Rome's δημοκρατία, as well as the establishment of monarchy, being announced by Dio in a number of authorial interventions scattered across the accounts of different years¹²⁸. Obviously, the historian considered the transition from one governmental form to another as a process and traced it back to Caesar, who is hailed by Dio as the first *imperator* – a new meaning for this word. Furthermore, the period from the dictatorship of Caesar to the Augustan settlement is represented as the establishment of Julio-Claudian rule; this, as Madsen shows, reflects the importance of dynastic questions in Dio's historical views¹²⁹. One can also agree with Madsen that Dio was more positive about Augustus' ambitions and his reign than about Julius Caesar, with the founder of the Principate being commended for providing a more stable form of government¹³⁰. It should be added here that Dio portrays young Octavian as less responsible for the civil wars' bloodshed and less hypocritical, if compared to other triumvirs, though, of course, the author had some reservations concerning Octavian's role during the civil wars¹³¹. Moreover, Dio pays attention to certain flaws of Augustus' rule and his person¹³². Definitely, for our historian, Octavian was not a paragon of traditional republican virtues. What Dio emphasizes is the statesman's pragmatism and efficiency. In his accent on the utility of political activities one can see him coming close to finding a path that would lead European political thinking to the Machiavellian idea of separation of politics and morality¹³³.

Much has been recently written about Dio's treatment of the Principate, and some innovations appear in the interpretation of particular points. Evidently, he regarded this form of government as intertwined with the Republic and marked the elements of continuity between the two systems¹³⁴. Provocatively, Coltelloni-Trannoy claims that Dio's principate is (or should be), in fact, a 'mixed constitution'¹³⁵, a 'forme binaire' in which a monarch occupies a top place in the well-structured hierarchical society where each class performs its own duties, with genuine political power being monopolized by the elite¹³⁶. Such a characterization rather matches Dio's political ideal represented in the speech of Maecenas than his depiction of the Roman imperial realities, in particular his revelations about the true nature of the Augustan regime and the Principate in general (53. 17. 1–3). Obviously, for Dio, Rome's μοναρχία was an unmixed form of government subjected to degeneration. This is attested by his comment on the transition of Rome from 'a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust' after the death of Marcus Aurelius (72 [71]. 36. 4). Such a formulation is supposed to be one more indication that Dio regarded history as an ἀνακύκλωσις (or 'cycle') of forms of government¹³⁷. Kemezis and Bertrand associate the 'kingdom of gold' with the Principate before Commodus, while

¹²⁸ Markov 2021, 114.

¹²⁹ Madsen 2019, 270. See also Markov 2021, 125.

¹³⁰ Madsen 2019, 277–279.

¹³¹ Markov 2019, 284–289.

¹³² Markov 2019, 289–293.

¹³³ Markov 2019, 296.

¹³⁴ Burden-Strevens *et al.* 2020, 9.

¹³⁵ For the influence of the ancient theories of a mixed constitution on Dio's representation of Augustan principate, see also Carsana 1990, 15.

¹³⁶ Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016b, 562.

¹³⁷ Kemezis 2014, 143; Bertrand 2015, 163–172; Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016a, 341.

the reign of ‘iron and rust’ is supposed to be Dio’s critical reflection on the degeneration of the Empire in his own times from 180 CE onwards. This view, as Bertrand holds, emerged not only from the emperors’ violence, senate purges or licentiousness of the young monarchs, which definitely had parallels and precedents in the vices and imperfections of the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians, but, more importantly, from the novelties of the Severans’ rule, such as the admission of the lowborn to the Senate and high positions in the government, as well as the loss of the senatorial monopoly on the imperial throne after Macrinus’ rise to power¹³⁸. Schulz, having applied to Dio Jan Assmann’s theory of collective memory, claims that the ‘metal metaphor’ appeals primarily to Dio’s envisaged audience’s ‘communicative memory’ encompassing presumably 80 years to the end of Trajan’s and the beginning of Hadrian’s reign. The death of Marcus Aurelius is, therefore, interpreted as a watershed distinguishing the idealized Antonine principate from the subsequent emperors-tyrants¹³⁹. These interpretations, however, raise questions. The Severan innovations mentioned by Bertrand became observable no less than twenty years after the beginning of the period of ‘iron and rust’. On the other hand, Dio’s Antonine narrative (from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius) can hardly be represented as ‘one continuous entity’, given the author’s critical evaluation of Hadrian (69. 3. 3), which is evidently at odds with Schulz’s version. Intriguingly, Noe has noticed a similarity between Dio’s metaphor and Pseudo-Seneca’s *Octavia* in which Nero’s regime is branded an Iron Age, whereas the emperor himself depicted his reign as a new golden one¹⁴⁰. Similarly, Commodus’ rule was voted to be named the ‘Golden Age’ (73. 15. 6). It should be also noted that both Pseudo-Seneca and Dio (47. 15. 4) use a ‘metal metaphor’ with respect to an individual rule, not a series of them. However, the difference between the two lies in the terminology. Dio mentions ‘the kingship’ (βασιλεία), not ‘the age’. Therefore, one might look for a parallel in Polybius’ conception of ‘despotism’ ruining any ‘kingdom’ (βασιλεία) just as ‘rust in the case of iron’ (Polyb. 6. 10. 3–4)¹⁴¹.

Regardless of the interpretation of the ‘metal metaphor’, Dio is quite alarming about the imperial realities of his own time. One of his concerns is the relations between the emperors and the senators. This is another recurrent topic which occupies an important place within Dio’s political agendas. Traditionally, the *Roman History* has been considered to be a ‘political project’ or a monument of senatorial political thinking, with Dio apparently intending to influence the opinions of his peers and to contribute to the political debate under the Severans¹⁴². Definitely, Dio is concerned with the role the senators might have hoped to play on the political arena of the imperial Rome, as well as the forms and scope of political opportunities the *patres* actually had¹⁴³. According to Bono, Dio’s ideal principate owes much to the classical ‘mixed constitution’ theories¹⁴⁴. It has certain aristocratic flair, with its key ele-

¹³⁸ Bertrand 2015, 167. According to Kemezis (2014, 143), Dio’s criticism stems from ‘the apparent inability of the system to recover from internal crises under the Severans as it did under the Flavians and Antonines’.

¹³⁹ Schulz 2019b, 254–255.

¹⁴⁰ Noe 2020, 151.

¹⁴¹ Markov 2021, 120.

¹⁴² See Madsen’s recent considerations on the matter: Madsen 2016, 158.

¹⁴³ Mallan 2016, 272.

¹⁴⁴ In this respect the scholar is close to the above-mentioned views of Coltelloni-Trannoy.

ments being *libertas* and active involvement of the senatorial body in politics. Therefore, the Augustan mode of reorganizing the πολιτεία of the Romans into a mixture of μοναρχία and δημοκρατία (56. 43. 4) was possibly a paradigm for Dio and his readers¹⁴⁵.

However, the most recent trend among scholars is to reconsider of the idea that Dio could rely on a high potential for senatorial involvement in the political decision-making process under the Principate. Thus, Coltelloni-Trannoy comes to conclusion that Dio represents communication between the emperors and the senate as a form of political theatre in which outer details, like attendance rules, placement, costume, public vows and ruler's conduct, appear to be a significant aspect of the imperial power manifestation from Augustus' reforms down to Dio's own day¹⁴⁶. On the other hand, Platon has spotted Dio's critical evaluation of the senate's role in the degenerating relationship between the senatorial order and Tiberius, as well as other emperors¹⁴⁷. This, however, can hardly undermine Dio's position as a 'senatorial historian'. Similarly, Tacitus, for example, could blame the senators for servility, flattery and covetousness, but this does not make his political agendas less associated with the interests of the order he belonged to. Nevertheless, Lindholmer has questioned the widespread idea of Dio advocating for the senate's prominent role in the ideal imperial constitution. He emphasizes that Dio viewed the senate 'as a passive pool of administrative experts' rather than 'the key forum of debate'¹⁴⁸. This, of course, can be true about Dio's picture of the historical imperial realities, though Lindholmer's attempt to insert a minimalist role for the Senate into the sphere of Dio's political ideals is based on his specific interpretation of one particular passage in the speech of Maecenas (52. 15; see below). Importantly, it is primarily the content of Maecenas' oration which has led Madsen to conclusion that Dio's 'ideal is not a mixed constitution but rather absolute monarchy'¹⁴⁹, with the role of the senate being reduced to giving advice to the emperor and depending on the monarch's predisposition towards cooperating with the senatorial elite¹⁵⁰. In general, in Madsen's view, Dio held a middle ground between a traditional Greek understanding of monarchy – in which the king with the support of a number of hand-picked advisors, enjoyed absolute power – and the view of such Roman authors as Pliny and Tacitus, who thought the senators to have some share in what would still be one-man rule¹⁵¹. Again, Madsen's and Lindholmer's arguments depend largely on the interpretation of the speech of Maecenas. However, Madsen recognizes the fact that, according to Dio, all those monarchs who ruled the Empire despotically (and such emperors were the majority) proved to be too far from the *civilis princeps* ideal. Therefore, Dio gave thought to mechanisms preventing Rome's monarchy from declining into tyranny. As Madsen has shown, our historian may have employed the Flavian narrative to demonstrate the disadvantages of dynastic succession and later made his dying Hadrian deliver an extended speech in favor of the adoption practice¹⁵².

¹⁴⁵ Bono 2020, 42–46.

¹⁴⁶ Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016c.

¹⁴⁷ Platon 2016, 653–678; for Dio's representation of the senators' activities as a factor of violence and civil war, see Markov 2020; for Dio's claims on the senatorial responsibility in the despotic degeneration of the principate, see Pistellato 2020, 134.

¹⁴⁸ Lindholmer 2020, 68.

¹⁴⁹ Madsen 2020, 101.

¹⁵⁰ Madsen 2016, 136–159; 2019, 115–20; 2020, 100–101.

¹⁵¹ Madsen 2022, 98.

¹⁵² Madsen 2020, 95–114. Cf. Davenport, Mallan 2014, 638–662.

Constitutional debates in Book 52

In any event, it goes without saying that Cassius Dio's constitutional thinking is best manifested in his Book 52, the greater part of which is occupied by the famous bipartite debate between Agrippa and Maecenas before Octavian on the constitution of the Empire (52. 1–40)¹⁵³. Agrippa insists on the preservation of the Republic, while Maecenas advocates for 'monarchy' and presents a coherent project of constitutional regulations. Since Meyer's 1891 dissertation¹⁵⁴, these speeches continue to capture the scholarly attention in respect to their rhetorical form, historicity, political implications and ideological message, and their compositional and conceptual significance within the framework of the *Roman History* as a whole¹⁵⁵. It should be noted, however, that numerous studies of this debate focus mainly on Maecenas' oration, mostly because of his extended political project, while the speech of Agrippa, in contrast, usually stays in the background. Recent decades have seen a reconsideration of the role of Agrippa's oration, with scholars emphasizing the compositional and conceptual unity of the whole of Book 52 as marking an epochal change in the history of Rome¹⁵⁶.

However, interpretations of the content of the speeches can be radically different. Some scholars have tried to employ Book 52 as a basis for the reconstruction of the political views of the historical Agrippa and Maecenas¹⁵⁷. More commonly, the debates, especially the Maecenas' constitutional proposals, are interpreted as a political program of Dio himself reflecting realities of the Severan era¹⁵⁸. Recently, Burden-Strevens has questioned such an approach to Dio's speeches as a sort of 'epideictic ornamentation'. He insists on the reintegration of both orations into their historical and narrative context. Compositionally, Burden-Strevens argues, the debates serve to highlight the flaws of the Republic and, on the other hand, are used 'to foreshadow the political structure of the Principate and in short to summarise in one place Dio's interpretation of the reasons for Augustus' success'¹⁵⁹. When characterizing the Maecenas' program as 'the roadmap for a successful monarchy' based mostly on the practices pursued by

¹⁵³ Reinhold classes these speeches among parallel *suasoriae* practised in Roman schools (Reinhold 1988, 166). For historical writing such political debate was a tradition that began with Herodotus (3. 80–82) and was followed by some of Dio's contemporaries (Philostr. *VA*. 5. 32–37). See Reinhold 1988, 167; Rodrigues 2021, 264–265. Dio himself inserted similar orations at other periods of constitutional changes. See, for instance, frg. 12 (on the expulsion of kings), or the speech of Julius Caesar (43. 15. 2–18. 5). For Dio and declamations, see Millar 1964, 19, 104; Gowing 1992, 290; 1998, 377–378; Freyburger-Galland 1997, 10; Ameling 1997, 2491; Lachenaud, Coudry 2011, lx–lxi.

¹⁵⁴ Meyer 1891.

¹⁵⁵ See most recently Zawadzki 1983; Espinosa Ruiz 1987; Favuzzi 1990; Smyshlyayev 1990; 1991; Horst 2010; Kuhlmann 2010; Adler 2012; Cresci Marrone 2016; France 2016; Bono 2019; Lindholmer 2020; Burden-Strevens 2023; for overviews of modern scholarship on the discussion: Kemezis 2014, 127; Burden-Strevens 2020, 45–46; Madsen 2020, 100; Fromentin 2021, 33–34.

¹⁵⁶ Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 475; 1987, 313; Escribano 1999, 177–184; Kemezis 2006, 121–127; 2014, 129–132; Markov 2013; Burden-Strevens 2020, 45–52.

¹⁵⁷ Avallone 1962, 18; André 1967, 78–82; France 2016, 773–86. For the correlation between some characteristics of historical Agrippa and Maecenas and Dio's choice of *dramatis personae*, see Cresci Marrone 2016, 61.

¹⁵⁸ Millar 1964, 78, 111; Reinhold 1988, 198; Smyshlyayev 1990; 1991; Hose 1994, 392–394, 430–231.

¹⁵⁹ Burden-Strevens 2020, 46.

Augustus¹⁶⁰, Burden-Strevens is close to those scholars who read the dialogue as a reflection of Dio's view of the Principate's evolution¹⁶¹. Of course, Burden-Strevens rightly points to Maecenas' take on late Republican issues including factional strife (especially in Chapters 14, 16), and, definitely, the debates cannot be divorced from the dramatic context, given the rhetorical canons Dio obviously followed¹⁶². However, among Maecenas' proposals there are none that relate exclusively to Augustus' principate, some relate only to the second century CE or the era of the Severans, and, importantly, there are a number of suggestions that anticipate the time of Diocletian or were never implemented at all and occur only in Dio¹⁶³.

Among those scholars who regard the speech of Maecenas as Dio's own political project there are different opinions on the essence of Dio-Maecenas' ideal state. According to one of the interpretations, Dio's main objective was a return to political consensus and the principles of interaction of the emperor and the elite, characteristic of the 'Golden Age' of the Antonines, which Dio traced back to Augustan times¹⁶⁴. Some scholars argue that Dio's ideal state is a remoulded version of a mixed constitution¹⁶⁵. However, the most recent trend among Dio experts is the reiteration of a long-established view on Dio as an advocate for strengthening imperial power¹⁶⁶. As Madsen emphasizes, Dio's ideal form of government represented in Book 52 is not a mixed constitution but rather absolute monarchy, since Dio-Maecenas' emperor is the one responsible for enacting new laws, selecting commanders and senior magistrates, with ostensibly no checks and balances between the emperor and the Senate being envisaged in the dialogue¹⁶⁷. Lindholmer adds to this picture that Maecenas minimalizes the importance of the senate as a platform for political decision-making, with only a limited group of advisors of senatorial rank being handpicked by the emperor for consultations¹⁶⁸. However, both scholars seem to be quite selective in

¹⁶⁰ Burden-Strevens 2020, 51–52.

¹⁶¹ This approach dates back to Hammond (1932, 101–102); see also Aalders 1986, 296–299; Reinhold 1988, 165, 170; Fomin 2016, 217–20; Adler 2012, 512.

¹⁶² For the similarities between Dio's depiction of the speeches of the republicans and Agrippa's oration, see Markov 2013, 222–224.

¹⁶³ These include the establishment of the position of a 'subcensor' (21. 3–7), lowering the status of Italy to the level of an ordinary province, division of the Empire into small provinces, establishment of salaries for all civil officers from a soldier to a governor of the province, the division of civil and military administration (22. 1–6), concentration of finances exclusively in the Imperial Treasury (25. 1–5), introduction of a system of public education for senators and equestrians (26. 1–8), elimination of local coinage (30. 9). See Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 479; Reinhold 1988, 198.

¹⁶⁴ Gabba 1955, 311–325; Bleicken 1962, 445–467; Letta 1979, 168–169; Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 471–490; De Blois 1998–1999, 268–272, 278; Kuhn-Chen 2002 199–201, 243–247; Kemezis 2006, 126–127; 2014, 132–133; Roberto 2010. For the complexity and ambiguity of Dio's depiction of Augustus' consensus policy, see Dalla Rosa 2019, 153–171. Importantly, Kemezis has noticed that Maecenas basically address the issues highlighted by Agrippa, but some of them (such as the lack of patriotism under monarchies, promotion of the 'worst' people and alienation of the 'best') are not argued away by Maecenas, remaining recurrent themes throughout Dio's narrative (Kemezis 2014, 130–132).

¹⁶⁵ Carsana 1990, 59–60; 2016, 557–558; Bono 2020, 44–47.

¹⁶⁶ Hose 1994, 392–393, 430–231; Lindholmer 2020, 69; Madsen 2020, 100–101; Noe 2020, 149–150, 159–160; Madsen 2022, 82.

¹⁶⁷ Madsen 2020, 100–101; 2022, 83–85.

¹⁶⁸ Lindholmer 2020, 69; cf. Noe 2020, 149–150, 159–160.

their dealing with the content of the Maecenas' speech, with their conclusions depending largely on the interpretation of Chapters 14–15. Alternatively, it has been noticed that, in Chapter 14, Maecenas presents the idea of monarchy as 'true democracy', with all citizens receiving rewards according to their merits (52. 14. 3; cf. frg. 23. 5)¹⁶⁹, which ensures the integrity of the hierarchical social order and appears as aristocratic in origin¹⁷⁰. Moreover, what clearly emerges from the language of Chapter 15¹⁷¹ is Dio-Maecenas' emphasis on collaboration between the emperor and his peers in making decisions on the key issues of foreign and domestic policy. Responding to Madsen's argument one might refer to Smyshlyayev's article which, as well as its later English version, has regrettably remained mostly unnoticed by the western scholars. Smyshlyayev tried to track what consequences the implementation of Maecenas' practical suggestions might have had in the Severan era and came to the conclusion that Dio's ideal monarchy is the same as 'Augustus' principate in reverse'. According to Smyshlyayev, Maecenas' ideal emperor can exercise all his powers only through the senate's administration, and thus state affairs turn out to be in the hands of the senate's oligarchy¹⁷². One can agree with Smyshlyayev that the implementation of Maecenas' proposals would have enabled senators to strengthen their influence in the provinces, while the replenished and transformed senate would have gained an importance it had never had either during the reign of the Severans, or that of the Antonines. Nevertheless, Madsen and others are right when pointing to the fact that Maecenas suggests 'no mechanism for the Senate to check the emperor's decision – nor could they enact laws on their own initiative'¹⁷³. On the other hand, the emperor is supposed to share his responsibilities with the senators, and, given the institutional innovations proposed by Maecenas, would not have been able to make and, more importantly, implement any decision had it run contrary to the senatorial political agenda.

Therefore, the recent characterization of Dio's political ideal as 'absolute monarchy' appears to be questionable, all the more so given that it does not take in account the discrepancy between the social basis of the absolutist tendencies (the increasing political role of the equestrians and the imperial bureaucracy) under the Severans and their precursors and the particular Maecenas' proposals confronting those trends.

CONCLUSION. *STUDIA DIONEA* AS A HISTORIOGRAPHIC PHENOMENON

To sum up, it should be stressed that questions of historical interpretation of Cassius Dio's opus magnum are closely overlapped with those of his literary technique, methodological tools and the author's political agendas, with entire conceptual framework of his narrative being indissolubly connected to the demonstration of proper political leadership paradigms.

In general, it should be emphasized once again that Dio scholarship is now a vast and dynamically progressing field of research. Due to successful fulfillment of large academic projects and individual efforts of many intensively working scholars, it has brought

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 1. 32. 49; 3. 31. 43.

¹⁷⁰ Markov 2013; Molin 2016c, 470, 482; Bono 2020, 44.

¹⁷¹ Here, Dio actively uses the second person plural: πρὸς τὰ ὑμέτερα βουλήματα, ἐφ' ὑμῖν, ὑμᾶς (52. 15. 1–3).

¹⁷² Smyshlyayev 1990; 1991.

¹⁷³ Burden-Strevens *et al.* 2020, 12.

fruitful results. This booming rise of *studia Dionea* can be explained primarily by the effectiveness of world-wide scholarly collaborations which have produced very fertile ground which stimulates active discussions, raising new issues and thorough revision of old questions, inventing and applying new original approaches. Dio's work appears to be so attractive for contemporary scholarship, on the one hand, because of its coverage of a millennium of Roman history that allows to trace how different periods are mirrored in one narrative; on the other hand, because Dio himself, as the Severan Greek-born senator-turned-historian, embodies dramatic controversies of his own age, as well as the outcomes of the imperial Graeco-Roman cultural synthesis.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that during two recent decades our knowledge of Cassius Dio as an uncommon historical writer and political thinker has progressed radically in examination of his History as a coherent whole, as well as in its various specific points, which reveals very much 'another' Cassius Dio represented in broad intellectual, cultural and political contexts of his times. His political thought and historiographical masterliness are proved to be more sophisticated, with more layers and fascinating nuances than has been given credit for not long ago. So, as Davenport and Mallan state, 'it can no longer be said that Dio is an underappreciated or under-studied historian. The boom in Dio scholarship over the past twenty years... has done much to bring the historian into the scholarly mainstream'¹⁷⁴. Indeed, in the light of ongoing studies, Dio's work appears as one of the central achievements of Graeco-Roman historiography. All parts of Dio's History, including the cruelly dismembered early books and epitomized portions, is now under close scrutiny, and because of this tremendous scholarly efforts, today we know much more about how ancient historians worked than few decades ago. Nevertheless, as we have seen, numerous traditional as well as new topics and issues remain acutely debated, which means that there is much work to be done in further studies of this monumental historical narrative, as well as there are many questions to be raised in different fields¹⁷⁵, including the realm of intellectual history, religion or gender studies, Classical reception.

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¹⁷⁴ Davenport, Mallan 2021, 29.

¹⁷⁵ For further possible directions and questions of Dionean studies, see an excellent essay by Pelling in one of the newest collective volumes on Dio: Pelling 2021.

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