Andrew G. Scott: An Age of Iron and Rust. Cassius Dio and the History of His Time. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2023 (Historiography of Rome and Its Empire 18). X, 258 p. € 121.98. ISBN: 978-90-04-54111-5.

Over the course of nearly a decade, there has been a profusion of studies released on the career, context and magnum opus of Cassius Dio. Within this growing bibliography, Andrew Scott has been a leading figure, both authoring and editing multiple contributions, notably within the Historiography of Rome and its Empire series by Brill. While other studies in this collection have chosen broad, thematic approaches or have been focused on Dio's work concerning Rome's early history, Scott has moved our focus to the author's own time: from the death of Commodus, on the final day of AD 192, until Dio's retirement to Bithynia in AD 229. The result of this endeavour is a monograph that will likely prove to be a standard entry point to Cassius Dio's contemporary books, fleshing out our sense of the author's perception of his own times (beyond a generically dour, oppositional reading of the Severan dynasty), while also adding a new perspective on the perennial debate concerning the composition of the Roman History.

Scott opens his volume by noting the generally poor reputation that Dio's contemporary historiography enjoys, before offering a concise overview of scholarship on Dio and the Roman History. In describing the different scholarly responses to the fragmentary and epitomized later books of Dio's opus, Scott offers a sense of his thesis and objective. Contrary to the notion of Dio as an inconsistent author producing the contemporary books as an 'add-on' (p. 18), Scott suggests that this portion of the Roman History actually retains a purpose and outlook consistent with the rest of Dio's work: clearly lambasting his perceived failure of the Severan emperors, but still doing so in a way that attempts to offer insights to course correct and address deep-rooted political dysfunction within the imperial monarchy.

Chapter One (pp. 19–37) concerns Dio's literary career during and after the Severans. Scott draws out the distinction that can be made between Dio's early pamphlets, which are overwhelmingly encouraging and positively inclined towards Septimius Severus, and the Roman History, which is far more critical. While it may come as little surprise to readers that Dio likely felt pressured to write well of Severus in his earliest output, Scott notes more incisively that these writings can also be possibly considered part of a wider process of negotiation between the senator and newly-minted emperor, or

perhaps even an attempt by Dio to influence Severus' thinking from an early stage. More noteworthy is Scott's discussion of the composition of the Roman History, in which he argues for accepting a date range from the 210s into the 230s, following Timothy D. Barnes and Cesare Letta[1] (pp. 29–34). While Scott offers a cogent defence of this choice, arguing that it afforded Dio the necessary distance to write critically of the Severan emperors, it must be noted that the debate surrounding Dio's composition remains a point of unresolved discussion.

Scott offers further grounding and contextualisation of Dio's magnum opus in the second chapter (pp. 38–62), this time setting the Roman History against a wider historiographical tradition, illustrating how Dio conforms on the one hand to a very Roman tradition of reviving an old literary form and looking into the past during periods of upheaval and change, while on the other displaying more flexibility in the annalistic style than his Roman forebears, showing a clearly Thucydidean influence on his prose. While much of this will not be new to a specialist reader, Scott nevertheless offers important observations that shape his overall picture of Dio's contemporary books. Most important in this regard is his argument that Dio's work, beyond the famous Agrippa-Maecenas debate, represents a discussion and analysis of Rome's constitutional politics throughout (pp. 51–53). This is deftly argued, and draws Dio's later books into line with the rest of his history.

Chapter Three (pp. 63–87) is focused on the transition from Republic to Empire in Dio's telling, and offers a couple important observations for the chapters that follow. Here, Scott notes that Dio does not excessively moralise his history, instead offering a sense of political realism. He shows here how Dio's Augustus set the shape and form of the imperial monarchy before noting the extent to which the author believes that Augustus' successors either met or failed to live up to it (usually the latter). Scott does this to illustrate that Dio's denigration of his own era is not merely curmudgeonly, but is actually part of a much longer constitutional analysis.

This theme is built upon further in Chapter Four (pp. 88–112), where Scott hones in on the pairing of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. For Dio, Aurelius represented the zenith of imperial monarchy, although Scott is careful

1 T. D. Barnes: The Composition of Cassius Dio's 'Roman History'. In: Phoenix 38, 1984, pp. 240–255; C. Letta: La composizione dell'opera di Cassio Dione. Cronologia e sfondo storico-politico. In: E. Gabba (ed.): Ricerche di storiografia greca di età romana. Pisa 1979 (Biblioteca di studi antichi 22), pp. 117–189.

to note that Dio's adoration of the emperor leads the author to an excessively lenient treatment of Aurelius' actions in a way that is out of step with his earlier critiques of his imperial predecessors (pp. 91–94). Commodus, by contrast, represents the polar opposite to his father: corrupt, unpredictable and easily led by ambitious subordinates. This pairing is important to understanding Dio's history, since it not only reveals the hinge point in Dio's narrative from the more distant past to his contemporary era but also, as Scott demonstrates, a shift in Dio's writing, where he transitions from his flexibly annalistic style towards an account based more heavily on his own role as an eyewitness.

Chapters Five to Eight are thus devoted to Dio's appraisal of the emperors of his own time, beginning with Septimius Severus (pp. 113–136). Contrary to Aurelius' exemplary uprightness and moral fibre, Dio's Severus is depicted as a more dissimulating character, from his initial entrance into Rome (pp. 115–117) to his attempts at displaying clemency being undermined by his brutality against individuals and cities that resist him (pp. 123–124). Scott neatly dovetails this characterisation alongside the episodes of the brigand Bulla Felix and of teacher-turned-soldier Numerianus, arguing that Dio's early Severan period is permeated by examples of false appearances. This chapter concludes with a discussion of Severus during the attempted coup of Plautianus in 205, which Dio compresses with his narrative of Severus' decennalia, and closes with a note on Severus during his campaign in Britain. As Scott observes (p. 136), Dio's Severus is clearly an oppositional reading of an emperor who had Augustan pretensions, but the Dionian analysis goes further, exposing the divide between how a good emperor was supposed to look, and their eventual actions. Again, this conforms to Scott's thesis of Dio writing a more consistent political analysis instead of an aimless complaint.

Scott widens his focus in the sixth chapter (pp. 137–159), discussing the "mixed depictions" of Dio's contemporary emperors further. After noting the presence of positive qualities in the obituary of Severus offered by Dio, Scott argues that it can only be fully understood in combination with that of Marcus Aurelius. This pairing thus allows Dio to note the difficulty faced by any emperor in remedying the systemic 'ills' of Rome, while also inferring that Severus merely hoped to mimic Aurelius while lacking any genuine moral substance himself (p. 146). Developing Dio's "mixed depictions" further, Scott devotes attention to the characters of both Pertinax and Macri-

nus, noting how Dio offers comparable assessments of both rulers, alluding to several positive personal qualities alongside the more negative assessment of their inability to control the Empire and impress their own legitimacy. While this comparison is interesting in its own right, Scott suggests that these "mixed" depictions are more significant, arguing that the ambiguity surrounding Severus' characterisation is not the result of Dio adapting earlier drafts of his work, but rather a deliberate literary strategy by the author. In this way, Severus, for all his longevity, was just as unable to achieve a golden rule as his more short-lived fellow emperors.

The figure of Caracalla represents a particularly interesting test of Scott's thesis, given the infamous animosity felt by the author towards the young emperor. In Chapter Seven (pp. 160–180), Scott seeks to move beyond the traditional sense that Dio's intense hatred of Caracalla resulted in a literary vendetta, devoid of much other significance. Instead, Scott notes that Dio's critiques are structured largely around communications from the emperor himself, thus allowing Caracalla to "tell his own story" (p. 162). While Caracalla is undoubtedly a destructive figure in Dio's eyes, his treatment is far from one-dimensional in Scott's view. The ancient author examines the volatile emperor through the same lens of appearance vs. reality that characterised his examination of Septimius Severus. With Caracalla, however, Dio goes further, adjusting his mode of narration to simultaneously deny Caracalla any possible sense of legitimacy, and emphasise his isolation as a failed ruler.

In the final chapter (pp. 181–202), Scott returns briefly to the figure of Macrinus, who displayed some admirable qualities, according to Dio, but was derailed by his inability to press his own legitimacy or shake the shadow of his predecessors (something that characterised all of Dio's contemporary emperors to some extent, being compared to Marcus Aurelius). The return of the Severans is facilitated by association with Julia Domna rather than Septimius Severus. Scott notes how Dio presents a powerful and conspicuously foreign Julia in rendering her the link between the two halves of the dynasty (pp. 191–192).

As with his Caracalla, Dio's presentation of Elagabalus is one that has provoked several modern assessments. In this section, Scott penetrates beyond the historic questions of anecdote and inaccuracy, arguing that Dio divides Elagabalus' reign thematically, namely the emperor's attempts at legitimation, his actions that were out of step with "established custom" (p. 193),

and the plot leading to his assassination. In Elagabalus, Scott identifies a Dionian critique of Septimius Severus and the wider imperial monarchy by this point: "if care was not taken to pass power to the right man, then it could fall into the hands of someone like Elagabalus." (p. 195). As Scott argues, Dio appears to believe this to be a potentially terminal decline, since while he commends Severus Alexander's actions later, such as installing men like Ulpian to high office, the structural problems had nevertheless become too great to reverse.

The book is completed by a slender but detailed conclusion (pp. 203–212) that draws together the threads found in each chapter, placing particular emphasis on the need for a re-evaluation of Dio's contemporary books: Dio's later books were an integral component of his larger work, rather than a later add-on; his "mixed" depictions of rulers are not necessarily indicative of Dio's changing or inconsistent loyalties, but rather a reflection that emperors could have good individual qualities but still fail to achieve a golden rule as laid out by Augustus and seen with Marcus Aurelius; and the failure of emperors in his own time was in large part owing to their failure to understand their own past or the governmental forms and qualities that kept the imperial monarchy afloat. Given the different contextual elements present in this book, as well as the various case studies, one can see how a volume like this could easily feel disjointed. Scott has succeeded in tying all his elements together smoothly, however, with clear flow from one chapter to the next, and the conclusion offers a further chance to refocus and take stock of the study as a whole.

Overall, this is a handsomely produced and thought-provoking monograph that succeeds in making a case to consider the later books of the Roman History as a natural part of Dio's magnum opus, in spite of the shifts in narrative focus and style. While I have no doubt that Scott's arguments for accepting a later composition of the work as a whole may still meet with some objections, the fact remains that he has revealed a level of internal consistency within the history that may cause even seasoned readers of Dio to pause and reconsider their preconceptions. This is no mean feat, given that the books discussed by Scott include the reigns of Commodus, Caracalla and Elagabalus, no less! Viewing the contemporary books as a part of a unified constitutional analysis gives new life to them. For this reader, the fact that this model could be applied even to Dio's treatment of his bête-noir, Caracalla, was particularly enjoyable. This is therefore a fine addition to the

ever-growing bibliography on Cassius Dio, and its naturally flowing style will doubtless render the volume doubly helpful to students and scholars alike.

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