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# News and Messages in Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire*

News and messages have a continuous presence throughout Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire.* They play a notable role in the society and culture of the Principate and shape political actions at both individual and collective levels. Herodian uses a diverse vocabulary to denote the process of transmitting oral and written reports. The verbs used include δηλόω ('make known'),[1] ἐπιστέλλω ('send a message, especially by letter'),[2] θρυλέω ('chatter'; 'babble'),[3] διαβοάω ('proclaim'),[4] διαφοιτάω or διατρέχω ('spread' a report),[5] διαπέτομαι/διΐπταμαι ('fly in all directions', esp. of messages),[6] πέμπω ('send'),[7] διασκεδάννυμι ('scatter abroad'),[8] and ἀγγέλλω ('bring a message').[9] Other verbs express the receiving of (new) information: πυνθάνομαι ('learn, whether by hearsay or by inquiry'),[10] ἀκούω ('hear'; 'know by hearsay'),[11] μανθάνω or γιγνώσκω ('learn'),[12] and ἀναγιγνώσκω ('read').[13] Verbs are often combined with nouns such as φήμη ('report'; 'rumour'; 'news'),[14] ἀγγελία ('message'),[15] γράμμα or ἐπιστολή ('letter'),[16] ἄγγελος ('messenger'; 'herald'),[17] γραμματεῖον ('tablets'),[18] κήρυγμα ('proclama-

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**1** 1.10.3; 2.7.7; 2.8.10; 2.13.1; 3.12.1; 3.12.5; 5.5.2; 6.2.1 – 2; 6.3.1; 6.6.1; 6.7.3; 7.10.1. I use the *LSJ* for the translation of the words throughout this paragraph.
**2** 1.10.3; 2.8.8; 2.13.1; 2.15.4; 3.5.2; 3.7.1; 3.9.12; 5.1.1; 5.6.2; 6.2.1 – 2; 6.2.4; 6.7.2; 3.14.1; 4.3.2; 4.10.1; 4.11.1; 4.12.4; 4.13.1; 4.15.7; 7.6.3; 7.6.5; 7.6.9.
**3** 7.1.2.
**4** 2.2.2.
**5** 2.6.1; 2.6.5; 3.2.7; 3.8.10; 5.4.1; 7.5.7; 7.7.1.
**6** 2.8.7.
**7** 3.7.1; 4.10.1; 4.15.7; 5.4.10; 6.2.3. Cf. the compound verbs διαπέμπω ('send off a report in different directions', 2.9.12; 3.1.1) and ἐκπέμπω ('send out or forth'; 'dispatch', 2.13.2; 7.6.3).
**8** 5.8.5.
**9** 1.12.6; 1.13.1; 2.12.1; 3.1.1; 3.12.1; 4.14.1; 6.5.6; 6.9.3; 7.6.7; 7.8.5; 8.1.4; 8.6.6. Cf. the compound verbs διαγγέλλω ('give notice by a messenger', 1.7.1; 1.15.2; 2.6.6; 2.7.6; 2.9.1; 4.4.5; 4.8.7; 7.8.2; 7.8.7), ἐπαγγέλλω ('announce'; 'proclaim', 1.6.8; 3.14.2), and ἀπαγγέλλω ('bring tidings'; 'report', 1.13.4; 2.2.3; 2.9.5; 2.11.7; 3.7.1; 4.14.4; 5.4.1; 6.6.5; 6.9.1; 7.8.1; 7.9.4; 7.9.9; 8.2.2; 8.3.1).
**10** 2.9.3; 2.11.3; 2.11.6; 3.3.4; 3.4.7; 3.5.3; 4.8.7; 5.4.5; 5.4.10; 6.7.3; 8.6.1; 8.8.5; 8.8.7.
**11** 2.11.3; 2.12.3; 2.12.4; 3.5.2; 3.11.8; 3.14.2; 3.14.4; 4.5.2; 5.5.2.
**12** 3.2.1; 3.3.3; 3.4.1; 3.6.1; 8.8.7.
**13** 1.17.6; 2.1.10; 4.15.8; 5.2.1.
**14** 1.4.8; 1.7.1; 1.9.8; 1.15.1; 2.1.3; 2.2.3; 2.4.1; 2.4.2; 2.7.5; 2.7.7; 2.8.7; 2.11.3; 3.2.7; 4.11.1; 5.4.1; 5.4.8; 5.8.5; 6.8.7; 7.1.8; 7.5.7; 7.6.9; 7.10.5; 8.5.6. On the frequent inclusion of φήμη-references in Herodian's work, which is unparalleled in earlier and contemporary Greek historiography, see Chrysanthou (2023). There, I suggest that Herodian follows the practice of Latin-language historians such as Tacitus and Livy.
**15** 1.4.8; 3.11.7; 6.2.3; 6.9.1.
**16** 1.6.8; 1.9.8; 1.9.9; 2.12.3; 2.13.1; 2.15.3 – 4; 3.5.4; 3.5.8; 3.8.1; 3.8.6; 3.11.9; 3.12.2; 4.10.2; 4.10.5; 4.12.6 – 7; 4.12.8; 5.2.1; 6.2.1; 6.2.3; 6.2.4; 6.3.5; 6.7.2; 7.2.8; 7.6.3; 7.6.5; 7.6.6; 7.6.8; 7.6.9; 7.7.5.
**17** 1.7.1; 1.9.9; 6.7.2; 8.6.8.

tion'; 'announcement'),[19] πρεσβεία ('body of ambassadors'),[20] and κῆρυξ ('herald').[21] These nouns indicate the specific means by which news was disseminated and became known. Moreover, Herodian uses some elaborate phrases to communicate the propagation of information, such as διάπυστος/διαβόητος γίγνομαι ('to become well-known'),[22] διαβόητον/ἔκπυστον καὶ γνώριμον ποιῶ ('to make famous'),[23] and ἔκπυστος γίγνομαι ('to be heard of'; 'discovered').[24] In the prologue to his work Herodian highlights the unstable and chaotic political circumstances which prevailed after the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (1.1.4–5).[25] Naturally, this situation caused many rumours and messages to flow.

But what kind of information do these messages provide? References to both oral and written reports are placed at emphatic points in Herodian's narrative and concern a wide range of topics, such as deaths,[26] plots,[27] wars and military movements,[28] public

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**18** 1.17.1; 1.17.3–4; 1.17.6; 2.1.10; 3.11.8; 3.11.9; 3.12.2; 3.12.4.

**19** 2.6.5; 2.6.6.

**20** 2.4.3; 2.8.7; 2.12.6; 3.14.4; 4.10.1; 4.15.7; 6.2.3; 6.4.4; 6.4.5; 6.7.9; 7.7.5; 7.7.6; 8.3.1; 8.7.2.

**21** 3.8.10; 5.4.10; 8.6.8.

**22** 2.12.2; 3.11.9; 4.4.8.

**23** 2.7.7; 5.3.10.

**24** 3.12.6.

**25** See esp. 1.1.4: "A comparative survey of the period of about two hundred years from Augustus (the point at which the regime became a monarchy) to the age of Marcus would reveal no such similar succession of reigns, variety of fortunes in both civil and foreign wars, disturbances among the provincial populations, and capture of cities in both Roman territory and many barbarian countries. There have never been such earthquakes and plagues, or tyrants and kings with such unexpected lives, which were rarely if ever recorded before". On Herodian's prologue, see Hidber (2006) 72–123; Chrysanthou (2022) 3–9. For the translation of Herodian's text I use throughout Whittaker (1969, 1970), adapted at several points.

**26** E.g., of Marcus (1.4.8); Perennis (1.9.8); Commodus (2.1.3; 2.2.2); Pertinax (2.6.1); Caracalla (4.15.7–8); Severus Alexander (5.8.5, this is a false rumour, not a reality); Maximinus (7.6.9; 7.7.2; again a false rumour, not a reality); Gordian I (7.10.1); Maximinus (8.6.1); Maximus and Balbinus (8.8.7).

**27** E.g., Commodus against Perennis' son (1.9.8–9); Maternus against Commodus (1.10.3); Cleander against Commodus (1.12.6; 1.13.1); Commodus against Laetus, Eclectus, and Marcia (1.17; 2.1.10); Severus against the praetorians (2.13.1–2); Severus against Albinus (3.5.4); Plautianus against Septimius Severus and Caracalla (3.11.7; 3.11.9; 3.12.2; 3.12.4); the supposed plot of Geta against Caracalla (4.4.5–6); Caracalla against the Parthian king (4.10.1–2; 4.10.5); Magnus against Maximinus (7.1.8); Gordian I against Vitalianus (7.6.5–7).

**28** E.g., Commodus' decision to abandon the Marcomannic war (1.6.8; 1.7.1); Severus' threatening arrival in Italy (2.11.3; 2.11.6; 2.11.7; 2.12.1–2; 2.12.4); Severus' victory in the battle of Cyzicus (3.2.7;); the revolt of Laodicea and Tyre against Niger (3.3.4); Severus' successful crossing of the Taurus mountains (3.4.1); Severus' approach against Albinus (3.7.1); the rebellion of the barbarians in Britain (3.14.1–2); Severus' arrival in Britain (3.14.3–4); Artabanus' looming danger (4.14.1; 4.14.4); the threatening presence of the Persian King Artaxerxes (6.2.1–2; 6.3.1); the destruction of the Roman troops by Artaxerxes (6.6.1); the Germans against the Roman Empire (6.7.2–3); Maximinus' approach against Severus Alexander (6.9.3); the rioting in Rome against Maximinus (7.8.1–2; 8.5.6); the advance of Capellianus' army against Gordian I (7.9.4; 7.9.9); the city of Aquileia against Maximinus (8.2.2; 8.3.1).

spectacles and ceremonies,[29] and imperial accessions.[30] Various tidings are also communicated by individuals in order to gain support in the struggle for imperial power,[31] reconciliation,[32] and self-advertisement.[33] As for the specific dynamics of communication itself, Herodian sometimes makes explicit references to the sender, especially in those cases where certain individuals disseminate, and sometimes manipulate, reports for specific purposes, such as sharing information, shaping the opinion of recipients, scheming plots, and acquiring power. In most cases, however, the source of the tidings remains unspecified, presumably reflecting the way it was received by the public. The reader, for example, is left wondering about the source of the report of Marcus' death (1.4.8), Commodus' *adventus* in Rome (1.7.1), Maternus' plot against Commodus (1.10.3), and numerous other incidents which become known to other people independently of identifiable human agents. Rather than taking such unattributable pieces of information as evidence of Herodian's poor historical method,[34] we should look at them as providing significant pathways for understanding the atmosphere of the time, meaning what contemporaries said, felt, and thought, regardless of whether the specific message delivered is historically reliable or not.

Closely related to this point is the fact that the truth or falsehood of reports in Herodian's history is usually not a matter of interest to the narrator or in-text characters. Herodian is often interested in stressing the unexpected arrival of a message (e.g. 6.2.1; 6.7.2; 6.9.1; 8.6.7) or its secret and privacy (2.13.1 – 2; 3.5.2; 3.8.6), but he is normally not so attentive to clarifying whether it is true or not.[35] This point is of special signifi-

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**29** E.g., Commodus (1.15.1 – 2); Septimius Severus (3.8.10).

**30** E.g., Pertinax (2.2.2 – 3; 2.9.5); Niger (2.8.7; 2.9.1); Septimius Severus (3.1.1); Macrinus (5.1.1 – 2; 5.2.1); Elagabalus (5.4.1; 5.5.2); Maximinus (6.8.7; 6.9.1); Gordian I (7.5.7; 7.6.3 – 4); Maximus and Balbinus (8.6.6).

**31** E.g., Severus (2.9.12; 2.10.1); Albinus (3.7.1); Geta and Caracalla (4.3.2).

**32** E.g., Didius Julianus with Septimius Severus (2.12.3); Severus Alexander with the Persian King Artaxerxes (6.2.3 – 5; 6.4.5).

**33** Septimius Severus (3.8.1; 3.9.12); Maximinus (7.2.8).

**34** Modern historians have often judged Herodian as a second-rate historian and have disparaged him for his dramatic style, patterning, inventions, omissions or alterations (e.g. Burrows [1956] 36; Sidebottom [1998] 2813 – 2822; Scott [2018] 435 with n. 3 for further references). However, more recent studies have rejected imposing modern standards on Herodian's historiography and approached him on his own terms, particularly focusing on the close connection between his literary artistry, historiographical practice, and underlying conception of history (e.g. Hidber [2006]; [2007]; Pitcher [2012]; Kemezis [2014] 227–272; Scott [2018]; Pitcher [2018]; Andrews [2019] 121–188; Davenport and Mallan [2020]; Pitcher [2021]; Chrysanthou [2022]; several articles in Galimberti [2022]; Scott [2023]; Chrysanthou [2025]).

**35** Exceptions include 2.1.3 (Laetus, Eclectus, and Marcia spread a rumour that Commodus' death had been due to a sudden apoplexy. We are clearly told that "they believed that the rumour would carry ready conviction" because of Commodus' abominable lifestyle); 2.15.3 – 4 (Severus pretends to honour Albinus by sending him 'friendly' letters and making him Caesar); 5.3.10 (Herodian clearly expresses uncertainty on the issue of Elagabalus' descent from Caracalla); 5.8.5 (Elagabalus spreads a rumour that Severus Alexander was about to die in order to test how the soldiers would take it); 7.1.8 (Herodian clearly states that the rumour of Magnus' plot against Maximinus may have contained some truth or been instigated by Maximinus himself); 8.5.6 (Herodian reveals that the rumours concerning the universal hatred in Rome and the provinces against Maximinus were exaggerated and based on suspicion only).

cance, for it reveals how easily unverifiable information circulated throughout the Empire and the credulity of the people who received it. Crucially, in-text recipients of news standardly believe the message recorded, even if the reader is often primed to deduce from the surrounding narrative the falsehood or deceptive nature of a report.[36] Indeed, it is often this disjunction between the knowledgeable reader and the unwitting characters that conveys interpretative insight into the deception and misinformation involved in imperial politics.

In this chapter, I will not focus on the historicity of news either. Instead, I will carry out an analysis of the presence and function of news and messages in Herodian's work, taking into account on each occasion the main parts of the communicative act: the sender, the receiver, the message, and the context. How does the insertion of different messages, even those which are deceptive, false and destructive, contribute to the composition of Herodian's narrative and characterisation? Herodian's literary artistry has received much scholarly attention during the last few decades.[37] My contribution will further illuminate Herodian's deliberate and careful narrative planning. It will show that news and messages have a prominent place in Herodian's narrative art, since they have various functions throughout his work. First, they recur as an organising and structuring literary device, especially in moments of transition, where one scene progresses to the next in articulating a coherent plot (1). Second, news and messages function as a motivating force which shapes the action and often initiates a new plot episode (2). What is more, they cause cognitive and emotional reactions in historical agents, and thus contribute to the construction of literary characters as well as provide guidance for the reader's reception of them (3). News and messages were the mechanisms through which individual and public opinions were created and transmitted in the Roman Empire. A careful consideration of their narratological role in Herodian's work gives a good illustration not only of the historian's thematic program and methodology, but also the experience of living in the post-Marcus social and political world.

# 1 Scene-Shifting and Structure

Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire* covers the period of around 58 years from the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius to the accession of Gordian III (AD 180–238). In

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**36** See 2.13.1–3 (Severus sends welcoming letters to the praetorians); 3.12.6 (Saturninus deceives Plautianus by sending him a report that Severus and Caracalla were dead); 4.4.5–6 (The news about Geta's supposed plot against Caracalla); 4.8.7–8 (The news about Caracalla's goodwill towards the Alexandrians); 4.10.2 (The letters expressing Caracalla's desire to marry the daughter of the Parthian king); 5.3.10–11; 5.4.1 (The soldiers accept the dubious rumour of Elagabalus' descent from Caracalla); 7.6.5–7 (Gordian I sends written messages against Vitalianus in order to destroy him); 7.6.9 (The rumour of Maximinus' supposed death).

**37** See the bibliography cited earlier on n. 34.

the prologue to his work, Herodian makes clear that he will proceed to provide a linear chronology of events: "How all this happened I intend to relate in chronological order, taking each reign in turn" (1.1.6).[38] Naturally, the narration of history in chronological order leads Herodian to place next to each other events that are not closely related thematically or geographically. The insertion of news, oral or written messages, serves to smoothen the transition from one place to another or from one subject to another, thus hardly interrupting the narrative flow of the *History*.[39]

To give a few examples, the report (φήμη) of Commodus' homecoming (1.7.1) brings about a narrative shift from Danube to Rome where Commodus is enthusiastically welcomed (1.7.2–3). The news about the Roman people's positive feelings and their shouting in favour of Niger (2.7.6: διαγγελθείσης δὲ τῆς τοῦ δήμου Ῥωμαίων γνώμης καὶ τῆς ἐπαλλήλου ἐν ταῖς συνόδοις βοῆς) moves the scene from Rome and the emperor Didius Julianus to Antioch where Niger strives for the purple himself (2.7.7–8.10). Then another report of what happened (διηγγέλλετο τὰ πραττόμενα) in Rome (and/or Antioch?)[40] reaches Pannonia (2.9.1) and thus shifts narrative attention from Niger to Septimius Severus. The latter is another aspirant to the title of *princeps*, whose actions and immediate departure from Pannonia are detailed in the following chapters (2.9.2–11.6). The narrative then follows Severus' trip towards Rome and his arrival in the city is marked by the announcement of the news to Julianus (2.11.7: ὡς δὲ ταῦτα τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ ἀπηγγέλλετο). After Julianus' death and Severus' acclamation as emperor in Rome (2.12.1–13.1), the narrative turns to Niger by referring again to the circulation and reception of news: "When Niger received the totally unexpected news (cf. ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷ μηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ) that Severus had taken Rome, where he had been hailed as emperor by the senate, and was now leading a combined force of the whole Illyrian army and a second land and naval force, he was thrown into a state of complete panic" (3.1.1). This news shifts attention to and introduces the fighting between Niger and Severus, which is the subject of the following narrative (3.1.2–4.9). The news of Albinus' imperial aspirations has the same effect – "when Severus learned (γνούς) what had happened, he no longer made any secret of his enmity [...] Now he summoned the entire army and addressed them" (3.6.1) – as does the news of Severus' subsequent hostility,[41] which signals the beginning of the civil war between the two

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[38] ὡς δ᾽ ἕκαστα τούτων πέπρακται, κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας διηγήσομαι. Cf. 2.15.7: "I shall, therefore, in what follows narrate the most significant and distinguished of Severus' separate actions in chronological order" (τὰ κορυφαιότατα τοίνυν καὶ συντέλειαν ἔχοντα τῶν κατὰ μέρος πεπραγμένων Σεβήρῳ ἐν τοῖς ἑξῆς διηγήσομαι). On Herodian's handling of time, see Hidber (2007).

[39] A point also underlined by Sidebottom (1998) 2814–2815; Hidber (2007) 207–208.

[40] See Whittaker (1969) 197 n. 3: "The Greek does not make it clear what news it was that reached Pannonia. In actual historical fact it was news of events in Rome not those in Syria which reached Severus". Cf. Roques (1990) 236 n. 85: "Le texte grec ne précise pas s'il s'agit des événements d'Antioche ou de Rome".

[41] 3.7.1: "When the news reached Albinus that Severus was rapidly approaching (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Ἀλβίνῳ μὴ μέλλων ὁ Σεβῆρος ἀλλ᾽ ἤδη παρεσόμενος) and would soon be upon him, it terrified him, be-

rivals. In this connection, Hidber has noticed that, by following the track of letters and news, Herodian switches between the different story-lines and thus skillfully depicts the turbulent year of AD 193, which features more than one emperor or claimant to the throne.[42]

The use of news and messages to convey transitions recurs in the presentation of the emperors' wars with foreign powers as well. For example, Herodian changes the view from what happens inside Rome (and in particular the growing antagonism between Severus' two sons, Geta and Caracalla, and Plautianus' plot, 3.10–13) to what happens outside the city through references to messages and news. In 3.14.1 Herodian relates: "At the time when Severus was upset by his sons' way of life […] the governor of Britain sent a dispatch (cf. ἐπιστέλλει) to say that the barbarians of the province were in a state of rebellion". Also, at 3.14.2 he notes that "this was welcome news for Severus" because of his desire to gain glory and move his two sons away from the luxury of Rome; "so Severus announced that he would make an expedition to Britain".[43] One can compare the exchange of letters and messages in Herodian's account of Caracalla's attempt to prevail over the Parthian king,[44] which allows the story to move smoothly from Antioch, where Caracalla is (4.9.8), to Parthia which he enters next (4.11.2). Letters also mark the beginning of Herodian's account of Severus Alexander's Persian expedition and are repeatedly used to alternate the focus of the narrative between the East and the West (6.2.1–5; 6.3.1).[45]

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cause he was idly whiling away his time in easy living. Crossing from Britain to the opposite shore, he set up his forces in Gaul and from there dispatched messages to the neighbouring provinces".

**42** Hidber (2007) 207–208. See also Sidebottom (1998) 2814, who stresses that Herodian's narrative of the events of AD 193 is to some extent unhistorical: "Assuming Herodian knew the truth, the text has sacrificed accuracy […] to make itself more readable and accessible".

**43** ὁ δὲ Σεβῆρος ἀσμένως ταῦτα ἀκούσας […] ἐπαγγέλλει τὴν εἰς τὴν Βρεττανίαν ἔξοδον.

**44** 4.10.1–2: "He wrote to the Parthian king, called Artabanus, and sent a diplomatic mission to him bearing gifts of every kind of valuable material and intricate workmanship. In the letters he alleged that he was anxious to marry the king's daughter" (ἐπιστέλλει τῷ βασιλεῖ Παρθυαίων [Ἀρτάβανος δ᾽ ἦν ὄνομα αὐτῷ], πέμπει τε πρεσβείαν καὶ δῶρα πάσης ὕλης τε πολυτελοῦς καὶ τέχνης ποικίλης. τὰ δὲ γράμματα ἔλεγεν ὅτι δὴ βούλεται ἀγαγέσθαι αὐτοῦ τὴν θυγατέρα πρὸς γάμον); 4.10.5: "On the receipt of such letters the initial Parthian reaction was to speak in opposition" (τοιούτοις αὐτοῦ γράμμασιν ἐντυχὼν ὁ Παρθυαῖος τὰ μὲν πρῶτα ἀντέλεγε) and 4.11.1: "Such were the initial letters of refusal" (τὰ μὲν οὖν πρῶτα τοιαῦτά τινα ἐπιστέλλων παρῃτεῖτο).

**45** 6.2.1: "Unexpected letters came (cf. αἰφνιδίως ἐκομίσθη γράμματα) from the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia with information that Artaxerxes, king of the Persians […] was causing unrest by refusing to be contained by the River Tigris and was crossing the banks which were the boundary of the Roman Empire. Mesopotamia was being overrun and Syria threatened"; 6.2.3: "With this news from the dispatches of the eastern governors, Alexander was badly upset at the suddenness and unexpectedness of the report that had come" (τοιαῦτά τινα τοίνυν δηλωσάντων καὶ ἐπιστειλάντων τῶν ὑπὸ ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς ἡγεμόνων, πρὸς τὴν αἰφνίδιον καὶ παρ᾽ ἐλπίδα κομισθεῖσαν ἀγγελίαν οὐ μετρίως ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐταράχθη); 6.2.4: "With this letter Alexander hoped to persuade or frighten the barbarian into docility" (τοιαῦτα μὲν δή τινα ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐπιστείλας ᾤετο πείσειν ἢ φοβήσειν εἰς τὸ ἡσυχάζειν τὸν βάρβαρον); 6.2.5: "But Artaxerxes paid no attention to what was written" (ὁ δ᾽ οὐδέν τι φροντίζων τῶν ἐπεσταλμένων); 6.3.1 "While Alexander was lingering in Rome the news of the bold action of the barbarian in the East came to him. Such acts, he

Herodian further uses news, oral and written reports as a means of moving from one place, character, or topic to another in the following transitions: from Caracalla's death to Macrinus' opposition to Artabanus (4.14.1; 4.14.4);[46] Macrinus' accession in Antioch (5.1.1)[47] to his acclamation in Rome (5.2.1);[48] Elagabalus' acclamation as emperor in the camp in Emesa (5.3.12) to Macrinus' reaction in Antioch (which signals the beginning of the fighting between the two men, 5.4.1);[49] Gordian I in Carthage (7.6.1–6) to Vitalianus' killing in Rome (7.6.7–9);[50] the rioting among the people, the Senate, and the praetorians in Rome (7.7) after the assassination of the praetorian prefect by Gordian I (7.6.6–9) to Maximinus in Pannonia (7.8.1);[51] and Gordian's death in Carthage (7.9.9–10) to the reactions of the senate and the people in Rome (7.10.1),[52] including their election of Maximus and Balbinus as co-emperors (7.10.2–9).[53]

Taken together, all these examples show that Herodian makes use of the power of news, oral or written tidings, to spread from one place to another, to position next to each other events in his narrative that do not share close proximity geographically or thematically. News and messages are employed as a structuring device, and often as a subject heading, allowing Herodian to introduce new, or even parallel, story lines. This narrative technique is designed to smoothen transition points in the story and ensure the generally linear progression of the narration. Without any loss of narrative con-

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believed, could not be tolerated" (ὡς δὲ τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ἐδηλώθη διατρίβοντι ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ τὰ κατὰ τὰς ἀνατολὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ βαρβάρου τολμώμενα, οὐκ ἀνασχετὰ ἡγούμενος).

**46** 4.14.1: "On top of this came the announcement that Artabanus was advancing with a large and powerful force" (καὶ γὰρ ἠγγέλλετο μετὰ πολλοῦ πλήθους καὶ δυνάμεως ἐπιὼν Ἀρτάβανος); 4.14.4: "When he received news of their approach, Macrinus summoned the troops and made a speech to the following effect" (ὡς δ' ἀπηγγέλη προσιών, συγκαλέσας τοὺς στρατιώτας ὁ Μακρῖνος ἔλεξε τοιάδε).

**47** 5.1.1: "On arrival at Antioch, Macrinus sent off a letter to the senate and Roman people with the following message" (γενόμενος δὲ ἐν τῇ Ἀντιοχείᾳ ὁ Μακρῖνος ἐπιστέλλει τῷ τε δήμῳ Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῇ συγκλήτῳ, λέγων τοιάδε).

**48** 5.2.1: "After the reading of this letter, the senate acclaimed him emperor and voted him all the honours of an Augustus" (ἀναγνωσθείσης δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐπιστολῆς, εὐφημεῖ τε αὐτὸν ἡ σύγκλητος καὶ τὰς σεβασμίους τιμὰς πάσας ψηφίζεται).

**49** 5.4.1: "As the news reached Macrinus while he was delaying in Antioch, the rumour also spread throughout the rest of the army that a son of Antoninus had been found" (ὡς δὲ ταῦτα ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Μακρίνῳ ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ διατρίβοντι, ἥ τε φήμη διέδραμεν ἀνὰ τὰ λοιπὰ στρατόπεδα ὅτι τε Ἀντωνίνου υἱὸς εὑρέθη).

**50** 7.6.8: "They gave Vitalianus the letter, and while his attention was turned to the seals, they drew their swords and stabbed him to death" (ἐπιδόντες δὲ τὰ γράμματα, ἐκείνου ταῖς σφραγῖσι τὰς ὄψεις ἐπιβάλλοντος προβαλόντες τὰ ξιφίδια καὶ παίσαντες φονεύουσιν).

**51** 7.8.1: "While this was the condition of the city and the state of opinion in Rome, news of the events reached Maximinus" (τὰ μὲν κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμαίων πόλιν τε καὶ γνώμην τοιαῦτα ἦν· ὡς δ' ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Μαξιμίνῳ τὰ πεπραγμένα).

**52** 7.10.1: "When the news of the old emperor's death reached Rome, it caused stunned consternation among the people and especially among the senate" (ὡς δὲ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἐδηλώθη ἡ τοῦ πρεσβύτου τελευτή, ἐν πολλῇ ταραχῇ καὶ ἀφασίᾳ ὅ τε δῆμος ἦν ἥ τε σύγκλητος μάλιστα).

**53** See also Sidebottom (1998) 2815 who notes the use of news and letters as scene-shifters in Herodian's book 7 as well.

tinuity, Herodian's reader is given a bird's-eye view of the turbulent post-Marcus history, where events and people in different regions of the Empire succeed each other quickly and restlessly. However, news and reports not only play a part in articulating a coherent plot, but also function as forces that influence and determine the course of subsequent events.

## 2 Plot-driving

News and messages are also important at various points in the action of Herodian's history. First and foremost, letters are a recurrent device to get a conspiracy started. Commodus traps Perennis' son by sending him a 'friendly' letter (γράμματά τε φιλικὰ ποιήσας) and asking him to return to Rome and promising him promotion (1.9.8). Commodus plots against Laetus, Eclectus, and Marcia by writing their names on a writing tablet (γραμματεῖον),[54] which is later accidentally found by Marcia (1.17.1–5). This discovery initiates a lethal plot against Commodus himself (1.17.6–12). Septimius Severus deceives the praetorian soldiers by sending private letters in secret (ἐπιστέλλει [...] ἰδίᾳ λανθάνοντα γράμματα) to their tribunes and centurions and promising them rich rewards, if they persuade their soldiers to obey his orders (2.13.1). He also sends an open letter (ἐκπέμπει δὲ καὶ κοινὴν ἐπιστολήν) to the soldiers that they should come to him full of hopes for the future (2.13.2). Septimius Severus manages to win the friendship of Albinus by cunning, sending him a letter that contained a thoroughly friendly request (ἐπιστέλλει δὲ αὐτῷ φιλικώτατα γράμματα δῆθεν) for him to become his Caesar (2.15.4). Here we may compare his deception of the Parthian king, which also involves letters (4.10.1–2; 4.10.5; 4.11.1). Plautianus schemes against Septimius Severus and Caracalla by giving Saturninus "a tablet with written instructions for the murder" (γραμματεῖον [...] τοῦ φόνου φέρον τὰς ἐντολάς) (3.11.8–9). Here Herodian clearly states that "it was the practice of tyrants, when they sent someone to carry out an execution without a trial, to put their orders in writing (ἐντέλλεσθαι τοῦτο διὰ γραμμάτων) so that the deed should not be executed simply on verbal authority" (3.11.9). This letter is necessary for the revelation of Plautianus' intrigue later (3.12.2; 3.12.4).

Letters also play a critical role in initiating the plot of the prefect Macrinus against the emperor Caracalla (4.12.4–8; 4.13.1). On this point Scott has observed that "Herodian's conspiracy narratives of the praetorian prefects Laetus, Plautianus, and Macrinus [...] show various similarities among themselves", including the fact that "a written document plays a crucial role, either as a motivation to action or proof of guilt".[55] This is also the case in Herodian's account of the plot of Gordian I against the praetorian prefect Vitalianus: "Gordian transferred to his command some centurions and sol-

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**54** Scott (2018) 447, comparing Herodian's account with that of Cassius Dio and the *HA*, notes that "the appearance of a 'hit list' in Herodian's account [...] appears especially fictive".
**55** Scott (2018) 445.

diers, to whom he gave a letter sealed in folding tablets (κατασεσημασμένα γράμματα ἐν πτυκτοῖς πίναξι), the normal method used by the emperor to send private, secret messages" (cf. δι᾽ ὧν τὰ ἀπόρρητα καὶ κρυπτὰ ἀγγέλματα τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐπιστέλλεται) (7.6.5). Written documents thus reveal themselves to be central to the development of conspiracy narratives in Herodian's history: they not only make a plot known, but also drive it. A plot unfolds according to and because of a written message. Notably, the same effect can occur in the case of suppressing the diffusion of news. Here we may think of the development of Cleander's move against Commodus due to the isolation of the emperor and the fact that Cleander was not subject to suspicion (1.12.6; 1.13.4).[56]

Messages and reports play a driving role in military contexts as well. Severus decides to begin his struggle for imperial power after learning from reports that the affair of the acquisition of the Empire was uncertain (2.9.3). The φήμη of Severus' victory in Cyzicus is the reason for the outbreak of civil strife among the Eastern provinces (3.2.7). News of the revolt of the cities of Laodicea and Tyre incites Niger to dispatch against them a military force (3.3.4). Likewise, the news of Severus' successful crossing of the Taurus Mountains prompts Niger's military reaction, culminating in their fight at the bay of Issus (3.4.1–2). The news of Severus' hostile approach arouses Niger (3.1.1) and later Albinus (3.7.1) to take military action. Severus' British expedition follows from a written request for help by the governor of Britain (3.14.1–2). Similarly, Severus Alexander's German expedition comes as a response to the arrival of letters with a message for help from the governors in Illyria (6.7.2–3). The report of Artabanus' threatening approach gives rise to Macrinus' military harangue (4.14.3–4), while later Macrinus' letter announcing Caracalla's death makes the Parthian king Artabanus stop the fighting (4.15.8–9).[57] On the other hand, Severus Alexander's letters to the Persian king Artaxerxes, through which he tries to check his invasion, have no impact, since Artaxerxes "believed that it was weapons, not words, that must settle the issue" (6.2.3–5). It is precisely the spreading of the news of this failure which stirs Alexander's military reaction and marks the beginning of the clash between the two (6.3.1).

Besides battles, other momentous events such as imperial accessions and deaths are profoundly affected by the intervention of news and messages. The news of the soldiers' auction of the Empire plays an active role in the sequence of events leading to Julianus' accession (2.6.6–7). Similarly, the reputation (φήμη) of Niger's good character (2.7.5) and the announcement of the news about the positive feeling of the Romans towards him (2.7.6) contribute to Niger's rise to power in Antioch. The senate acknowledges Septimius Severus as emperor only after they learn of Julianus' complete loss of morale (2.12.6). Notice also the causal link drawn between Macrinus' accession and the announcement of Artabanus' approach towards Rome (4.14.1–2): "Macrinus obtained

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56  Cf. Severus' success in gaining the support of the Illyrian armies partly because of Niger's neglect of giving them news of his accession in Antioch and cultivating their acquaintance (2.8.9–10.9).

57  Cf. 5.4.10 where Elagabalus sends heralds to announce to the soldiers that Macrinus flew from battlefield and that they should not waste their time fighting. The soldiers are persuaded and desert to him.

the Principate not so much through the love and loyalty of the soldiers as through necessity and the demands of the immediate situation" (4.14.3). Also notable is his acclamation in Rome by the senate and the people after they read the letter he wrote from Antioch, in which he proclaimed a regime of *aristokratia* and made several promising statements about his rule (5.1.1–8; 5.2.1). Furthermore, the rumour that Elagabalus was the son of Caracalla leads him to win over the soldiers and help his rise to power (5.3.10–11; 5.4.1–2). The spread of the news that some young men have offered the Empire to Gordian I causes the whole population of the city to gather and acclaim Gordian as Augustus (7.5.7). Similarly, the false rumour that Maximinus has been killed (7.6.9) leads the senate to give the title of Augustus to Gordian I and his son (7.7.1–2). As far as death is concerned, one might think in particular of Gordian I's suicide, brought about by the news of Capellianus' march on Carthage (7.9.4; 7.9.9).

## 3 Characterisation

In addition to serving as a structuring device and a motor for the plot, news and messages contribute to the construction of literary characters. That messages can serve as an index of emotions and perceptions is apparent at two points in Herodian's text. First, Herodian relates that Severus, "in a letter announcing his victory to the Roman people, added a postscript to say that he had sent Albinus' head to be displayed in public so that the Roman people could see for themselves the measure of his temper and his anger with Albinus' friends (οἷόν [περ] ἐδείκνυεν †αὐτοῦ τὸν θυμὸν† ἤδη καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἐκείνους ὀργήν)" (3.8.1). Additionally, after the false rumour about Maximinus' death circulated, "embassies composed of senators and well-known equestrians were sent to all the governors with letters which clearly revealed the attitude of the senate and the Roman people (cf. τὴν Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου γνώμην δηλοῦντα)" (7.7.5).

Herodian uses written and oral reports to illustrate the merits or demerits of individuals in several ways. First, an important theme in Herodian's work concerns the quickness or slowness in one's handling of news spreading. Consider, for example, Commodus' quick reaction in killing Perennis' son before the news of his father's death became known (1.9.8). Herodian characterises Commodus by his promptness, despite the fact that this trait did not remain constant throughout Commodus' reign (cf. 1.13–17). Severus arrived in Italy before any news of his coming had reached the inhabitants (2.11.3). Severus' swiftness and energy – two recurrent elements in Herodian's characterisation of Severus[58] – are clearly brought to the fore. The same is perceptible in Severus' British expedition: "He and his sons completed the march to the coast sooner than they were expected and before the news of their arrival" (3.14.3). Similarly, Maximinus, after being acclaimed by the soldiers as emperor, advised them "to get hold of their

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[58] See 2.12.2; 2.14.6; 3.1.1.

arms and quickly overpower Severus Alexander before the news arrived, while he was still in the dark" (6.8.7). Here, as with Septimius Severus, Maximinus' energy and military prowess are highlighted and reinforce Herodian's overall picture of Maximinus as a soldierly emperor.

Φήμη, with the meaning of 'reputation', is indispensable to Herodian's characterisation of Niger. Herodian emphasises that "Niger had a reputation for being a gentle, fair man as though he modeled his life on the example of Pertinax" (2.7.5). These were the qualities that made the Romans choose him as emperor. Reports have a characterising function in Herodian's story of Maximinus' rise to power as well: "He is reported (cf. ὡς ἐλέγετο) to have come from a village where he was a shepherd-boy once. As he grew to manhood, he was drafted into the army as a horseman [...] Soon, with the help of a bit of luck, he progressed through all the ranks in the army" (6.8.1).[59]

In emphasising written or oral reports, Herodian highlights several characteristics of the messenger who sends the news in question. For instance, Severus' letters which announce his victories to Rome after his battle against Albinus (3.8.1) and his successful capture of Hatra and Ctesiphon (3.9.12) illuminate his great ambition and desire for glory. Similarly, Maximinus, after his victory over the Germans, "made a report on the battle and his own distinguished part in a dispatch to the senate and the people" (7.2.8). The first letter of Severus, including the instruction that he sent Albinus' head to be publicly exposed so that the Roman people could learn his anger against Albinus' friends (3.8.1), clearly reflects his cruel and fierce character as well. Written reports are also indicative of an individual's intentions or inclinations, such as the preference of Macrinus (4.15.7) and Severus Alexander (6.2.3–5) for peace-seeking diplomacy over war. Notice also Herodian's account of Macrinus' accession-story and the detailed reference to the letter that Macrinus sent to the senate and the Roman people. In this letter, Macrinus accuses Caracalla of tyranny, promises a rule of aristocracy, and thoughtfully reflects on the relationship between imperial power, *nobilitas* and *virtus*, emphasising the importance of accession due to one's individual qualities rather than inheritance and noble origin (5.1.1–7). Macrinus also highlights the continuity of his reign with that of Pertinax and that of Marcus Aurelius (5.1.8). All these statements in the letter, which clearly reflect ideas that Herodian himself propounds throughout his work, raise expectations about Macrinus' good character and leadership, although these expectations are ultimately subverted in the ensuing narrative. A similar complex characterising movement is present in Gordian I's letters to the senate and the people after his accession in Africa (7.6.3–4).[60]

In all these cases, reports and messages are used to achieve a particular end, which in turn contributes to the characterisation of the sender. Further examples include

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**59** Cf. 7.1.2: "There was a scandalous story (τεθρύλητο γὰρ παρὰ πᾶσι καὶ διεβέβλητο) widely circulated that he was supposed to have been a shepherd in the Thracian mountains until he offered himself for service in the small, local army because of his physical size and strength". On the subtle differences in the disposition and treatment of the same material at 6.8.1 and 7.1.2, see Pitcher (2018) 238–240.
**60** See Chrysanthou (2022) 120–121.

Commodus' 'friendly' letters to Perennis' son, which underline his cruelty and wiliness (1.9.8–9). Severus' messages, which are filled with false promises, to the praetorians after his assumption of imperial power in Rome, point to his art of trickery and deception (2.13.1–3). So too Severus' 'friendly' letter to Albinus to become his Caesar (2.15.4) and Caracalla's letters to the Parthian king, in which he cunningly expresses his desire to marry the daughter of the king (4.10.1–2). Herodian leaves open the possibility that the plot organised by Magnus against the emperor Maximinus might have been manufactured by Maximinus himself (7.1.8), thus illustrating further Maximinus' tyrannical character. News and messages thus can be purposely circulated as instruments of political and military propaganda in order to spread falsehood and manipulate the responses of others. One might compare here the deliberate false rumour about Maximinus' death (7.6.9), which points to the general sense of people manipulating an anarchic situation.[61]

Indeed, Herodian shows an acute awareness of the characterising effect that the response to the dissemination of a specific message has. Accordingly, he often describes how individuals react to the news of an imminent threat, creating interesting parallels and juxtapositions within his text. Consider, first, Julianus' reaction to the news of Severus' approach to Rome: "When Julianus received news of this, he was reduced to a state of utter desperation" (ὡς δὲ ταῦτα τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ ἀπηγγέλλετο, ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἀπογνώσει ἦν) (2.11.7). Compare the similar reaction of Niger: "When Niger received the totally unexpected news (ὁ δὲ Νίγρος, ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷ μηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ) that Severus had taken Rome [...] and was now leading a combined force of the whole Illyrian army and a second land and naval force, he was thrown into a state of complete panic (ἐν μεγίστῃ ταραχῇ ἦν)" (3.1.1). Albinus' reaction is also noteworthy: "When the news reached Albinus that Severus was rapidly approaching and would soon be upon him, it terrified him, because he was living idly whiling away his time in easy living" (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Ἀλβίνῳ μὴ μέλλων ὁ Σεβῆρος ἀλλ᾽ ἤδη παρεσόμενος, ὑπτιάζοντι καὶ τρυφῶντι μεγάλην ταραχὴν ἐνέβαλε) (3.7.1). The parallel reactions of the three men, which are highlighted to the reader by identical words and phrases,[62] illuminate Severus' superior strength, which was similarly emphasised by the panic of the Italians at the news of his approach (2.11.6)[63] and Severus' own bold and energetic reactions to the reports of other daring challenges.[64] At the same time, they create a more general pattern of inappropriate imperial behaviour in war. This behavioural pattern characterises other less ideal emperors in Herodian's subsequent narrative as well,

**61** I thank Adam Kemezis for this point.

**62** On the thematic continuity here, see Chrysanthou (2022) 152–153 with further bibliography.

**63** Cf. the similar reaction of the Roman people when they heard of the news of Severus' arrival in Rome (2.12.1–3).

**64** Esp. the announcement of the news that the imperial throne was available (2.9.3) and that the senate acclaimed him emperor (2.13.1). Cf. his pleasure at the news of the barbarian threat in Britain and his eagerness in undertaking the expedition due to his love of glory and desire to recall his sons to their senses (3.14.2).

thus giving a warning signal for the future of their reigns. One might think, in particular, of Severus Alexander's reaction to the news of the Persian threat – "Alexander was badly upset at the suddenness and unexpectedness of the report that had come" (πρὸς τὴν αἰφνίδιον καὶ παρ' ἐλπίδα κομισθεῖσαν ἀγγελίαν οὐ μετρίως ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐταράχθη, 6.2.3) – as well as that of Gordian I to the news of the imminent approach of Capellianus and his army: "The news of the army's advance on the city reduced Gordian to a complete panic and the Carthaginians to a state of indiscipline" (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Γορδιανῷ ὁ στρατὸς προσιὼν τῇ πόλει, αὐτός τε ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δέει ἦν, οἵ τε Καρχηδόνιοι ταραχθέντες) (7.9.4). Contrast Maximinus' reaction to the news of the unexpected resistance of the Aquileians, which reminds us of Septimius Severus' prompt reactions earlier: "Maximinus was very angry with the Pannonian generals for not putting their hearts into the battle, and he hurried there in person with his army, expecting to take the city without any difficulty" (8.2.2).

The recipient of news or messages in Herodian's history is often not an individual but a group of people. One case in point is Herodian's description of the aftermath of an emperor's death.[65] The circulation of the news (cf. ἐπειδὴ διεφοίτησεν ἡ φήμη) of Marcus Aurelius' death, for instance, caused universal acclamation of the emperor: "There was not a single subject throughout the Roman Empire that did not grieve at such message and join together with one voice to proclaim his praise. Some praised his kindness as a father, some his goodness as an emperor, others his noble qualities as a general, still others his moderation and discipline as a ruler. And everyone was telling the truth" (1.4.8). So too Commodus: "When the Roman people heard the news (cf. τῆς φήμης) of Commodus' death and Pertinax's rise to power, they went practically mad with excitement (cf. πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἐνθουσιῶντι ἐοικὼς ἐξεβακχεύετο). Everyone rushed to and fro and took delight in telling their relatives the news (cf. διέθεόν τε, καὶ τοῖς οἰκείοις ἕκαστος χαίρων ἀπήγγελλε), especially if they were people of importance or wealth, since they were the ones whom it was known Commodus was always making plans to destroy" (2.2.3). Pertinax's murder is also greeted by the multitude: "When the news of the emperor's [i.e. Pertinax's] murder became generally known among the people (cf. ἐπειδὴ δὲ διεφοίτησεν εἰς τὸν δῆμον ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀναίρεσις), everyone was thrown into a confusion of grief and rushed about as though possessed" (2.6.1). Similarly, as soon as the head of Maximinus was brought to Rome, together with the news of victory, there were scenes of celebration (8.6.7): "People of all ages ran to the altars and the temples; no one stayed indoors. They were swept along as though a

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65 Another example includes the collective reactions to news of an emperor's arrival in a city (Commodus in Rome at 1.7.1–2; Caracalla in Alexandria at 4.8.7–8; and Caracalla in Parthia at 4.11.1–2). Interestingly, in all these cases the enthusiastic reactions of the collectives are frustrated, thus pointing towards the inability of the Romans, the Alexandrians, and the Parthians to read their emperor correctly either because the latter is too manipulative (Caracalla) or because he is inclined to be delusional and go off script (Commodus). This failure illuminates the tension between *semblance* and *reality*, which is recurrent in Herodian's history. On the Roman's failed reading of Commodus, see also Zimmermann (1999) 60–61; Ward (2011) 114–115, 126–134.

spirit was in control of them, congratulating each other and all rushing together to the circus, as though there were a public assembly" (cf. ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐφέροντο συνηδόμενοὶ ὅτε ἀλλήλοις καὶ ἐς τὸν ἱππόδρομον συνθέοντες ὥσπερ ἐκκλησιάζοντες) (8.6.8). There are clear verbal correspondences between all these scenes, which are designed to bring into sharp relief the unanimous displeasure of all social/military groups with Marcus' death – a unique situation of cohesiveness resulting from Marcus' exceptional leadership – as well as opposing the popular enthusiasm towards the death of the tyrants Commodus and Maximinus with the popular annoyance with the death of the virtuous Pertinax. Such detailed descriptions of collective responses to news of death tell us not only about the persons whom the message concerns (cf. Marcus' and Pertinax's virtues vs. Commodus' and Maximinus' tyranny) but also about the character of the people who receive it.

# 4 Conclusion

This study has examined the significant power of news and messages in Herodian's history. It has argued that the chaotic and turbulent period following the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius gave rise to the creation and dissemination of multiple, often unattributable, unreliable, and (deliberately) misleading oral and written reports. Herodian, who clearly states in the prologue to his work that he wrote a history of events that he *saw* and *heard* (cf. εἶδόν τε καὶ ἤκουσα) in his lifetime (1.2.5), skillfully inserts them into his work and uses them as a rhetorical device for constructing his narrative. Herodian is not alone in this technique. Oral and written messages are regularly incorporated in works of different genres of Greek and Roman literary traditions to structure narratives, unfold plots, and guide internal and external audiences emotionally.[66]

The foregoing discussion has further shown that Herodian resorts to the spread of news in organising his narrative discourse. He makes use of how news spreads like wildfire, noting its ability to travel across different places, in order to bring about a narrative shift and smoothen the transition from one place, character, or subject to another. News often functions as a subject heading, allowing Herodian to introduce new or parallel story lines, in the manner of a camera following in a sequential manner

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[66] See e.g. in the ancient Greek novel, particularly Chariton's *Callirhoe*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, Tilg (2010) 241–270; in drama and epic, Ogle (1924); Clément-Tarantino (2016) 65–67; in Greek tragedy, Fornieles (2023) 60–72; in historiography, esp. Livy and Tacitus, Gibson (1998); Hardie (2012) 226–313; Grethlein (2013) 140–167; Autin (2015); Schulz (2019) 144–147. On Cassius Dio, in particular, see Davenport (2021) who analyses news and rumours as "a sense-making phenomenon" in the late Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, flourishing in a political culture of uncertainty, anxiety, and secrecy. Fornieles (2023) is the most recent examination of the concept of news, focusing on the word ἄγγελος and its derivatives, in ancient Greek literature. Her main interest, however, lies in lexical and semantic analysis rather than narratological.

places, events, and actions which are not closely linked by their geographical location or their subject. It thus articulates a coherent plot by putting into order the material of a most disordered historical period and making history more readable and intelligible.

Besides the centrality of messages and news for the arrangement of Herodian's plot, these aspects also serve as a factor in historical causation. They not only mark remarkable events (such as accessions, deaths, battles, conspiracies, and ceremonies), but also play a major part in their initiation and development. Finally, the creation, dissemination, and reception of oral and written reports are seen as crucial to the portrayal of characters. This happens either by revealing specific traits, virtues, and vices of certain persons and groups, which are confirmed or subverted in the ensuing narrative, or by drawing attention to the acts of construction, propagation, manipulation, or even the falsification of news by specific individuals – a clear evidence of the dissimulation that characterised the Principate – as well as the multiple affective and evaluative responses generated in the recipients. The latter exhibit the uncertainty and turmoil that prevailed in the Empire after Marcus' death. On several occasions Herodian repeats, even with the same vocabulary, specific responses to the circulation of news, such as how an emperor reacts to an imminent threat or how a group of people is affected by an emperor's death. Such repetitions call attention to recurrent, 'transregnal' themes[67] and patterns of behaviour, which are central to Herodian's narration and interpretation of the post-Marcus history.[68]

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**67** The term belongs to Pelling (1997) who uses it in his discussion of Cassius Dio's history.

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