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The Concept of *Kairos* in Herodian's *Ab Excessu Divi Marci*

1 Introduction

Καιρός (hereafter referred to as *kairos*) is often identified with χρόνος, i. e. time, despite their different nature. *Kairos* represents a qualitatively unique moment, contrary to χρόνος which is a measurable linear period.[1] In the archaic period, *kairos* was considered by mortals as a divine gift. In Homer and the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, it signifies the precise impact of a fatal blow or the lethal wound on the body called καίριος πληγή. These uses of the term pertaining to body parts indicate a spatial meaning that persisted throughout antiquity. From the 5th c. BCE the literal meaning of the term began to solidify as 'time', 'time span', or 'season', while metaphorical connotations also emerged such as 'accuracy', 'necessity', 'opportunity' or 'suitability' to act after logical speculation and assessment of the circumstances. In tragedy, *kairos* was subject to necessity and divine interventions or it substituted fate. In rhetoric, it literally denoted the division of time into periods and the appropriate time to act. Both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies were influenced by its meaning as 'the right time', in contrast to χρόνος which was regarded as the measure of movement. In historiography, *kairos* was subjected to either divine will or human calculation. In Herodotus, dreams, omens, and oracles influenced individuals' moves, in contrast to Thucydides where *kairos* was associated with political and military *technē*, the individuals' reasoning, and the possibilities of an outcome, which presented either an opportunity to act or a state of imminent danger.[2]

The use of the term *kairos* next to words that mean 'to cut', such as ἀκμή, or ἀποτέμνειν, led Trédé-Boulmer to define *kairos* as a temporal break or a pivotal moment that creates a balance between contrasting notions, such as the unsuitable and the appropriate, which determine whether the events will turn towards a desired or an undesired outcome.[3] *Kairos*' positive aspect, i. e. the opportune time for an individual to act or speak, is emphasised by adjectives such as ἐπιτήδειος, πρόσφορος, and συμφέρων or through the use of the noun εὐκαιρία. Its negative aspect is conveyed by

1 In antiquity, both notions were occasionally personified as Kairos and Chronos respectively. All references are to Herodian unless otherwise indicated. Translations are my own adaptions of Whittaker's 1969 – 1970 translations unless otherwise noted. The text is copied from the same edition.

2 Carter (1988) 98. On the use of *kairos* in rhetoric (esp. Isocrates and Alcidamas) see Vallozza (1985) and Quirim (2016); in Plato and Aristotle see Callahan (1979) ch. 1 and 2, Smith (1996) 204 – 209, Moutsopoulos (2006); in Herodotus and Thucydides see Trédé-Boulmer (1992) 16 – 34, 44, 54 – 55, 191 – 201, 207 – 226. See Trédé-Boulmer (1992) for a great variety of passages for all genres.

3 See also Moutsopoulos (2007) 20, 40.

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the noun ἀκαιρία and through negation.[4] Moreover, the need to act within a specific timeframe is indicated through the use of the impersonal verb καιρός ἐστι which mandated that seizing the *kairos* was imperative to achieve the desired outcome.

These connotations of *kairos* are evident in Herodian's *Ab excessu divi Marci*, on which scholars hold conflicting opinions.[5] Covering 180–238 CE, Herodian's narrative represents a critical era marked by a series of premeditated and incidental events that diverge from individuals' beliefs, expectations, hopes, or plans.[6] "Ihn [interessierten] Fakten und Namen und überhaupt die historische Wahrheit nur wenig […]" and at least for his first five books, he heavily relied on Cassius Dio's material, which he adapted according to his authorial aims; the remaining books were composed based on his memory and other sources.[7] Herodian employs leitmotifs, such as the lack of *paideia*, the soldiery's greediness, the indulgences and excesses of young emperors, and their successive rises and falls, as interpretive tools.[8] This chapter's purpose is to delve into an underexplored topic: the concept and usage of *kairos* in Herodian.[9] Previous studies of Herodian lack references to *kairos* and its derivatives, which amount to 37 throughout the text. It may seem banal,[10] but, by employing verbatim *kairos*-expressions, Herodian weaves a narratorial web of intratextual references that invite readers to make comparisons based on the similarities or differences between individuals and events. However, as in the works of Herodian's predecessors, there are cases where *kairos* simply means 'time' or 'period'.[11] The following analysis concerns only books 1–6, since the last two books of the text totally lack references to *kairos*, a topic from which I shall begin.

2 The Absence of *kairos*

According to some scholars, Herodian's work is either unfinished or unrevised. They base this hypothesis on his change of focus, which is manifested through the gradual

4 Cf. Isoc. *Ant*. 311: adherence to εὐκαιρία leads to ἀκαιρία.

5 Hidber (1999) 145–147 provides an overview of the debate.

6 Kemezis (2014) 238.

7 See Alföldy (1971) 431–432 (quote from 431); Whittaker (1969) lxi–lxxi; Hidber (1999) 166–167. For Herodian's deployment of Dio's material, see Chrysanthou (2020). Cf. Sidebottom (1998) 2792; Zimmermann (1999) 143.

8 See Chrysanthou (2022).

9 For Herodian's reception, see Zimmermann (1999) 119–123. Paul (2014) offers an interesting overview of the uses of *kairos*, esp. in the Renaissance.

10 *Pace* Cassola (1967) xvii who asserted that "nessun autore è riuscito come lui nella difficile impresa di conciliare i piú vieti artifici della retorica con un linguaggio povero, sciatto, e banale".

11 These cases are excluded from the analysis: πρόσκαιρον (1.1.5) and προσκαίρως (4.14.7) meaning 'temporary'; ἐπὶ ἄλλων ⟨καιρῶν⟩ (Reiske's addition) and οὐδένα καιρὸν εἶχεν (1.17.9) meaning 'time'; οὐδὲ καιρὸν εἶναι μελλήσεως ἢ ἀναβολῆς (1.17.7), μηδὲνα διδοὺς καιρὸν ἀναβολῆς […] μήτε διδοὺς καιρὸν ἀναπαύλης (2.11.1), and μὴ ἔχοι καιρὸν ἐς τὸ ἐπιτηδεύειν (6.1.6) meaning '(lack) of time'.

reduction in the length of books and the number of speeches.[12] Additionally, Polley attributes Herodian's shortening of narrative time to 58 years, despite other statements, to his "old age, indisposition or indolence".[13] Such "rough quantitative measures" and arguments are rightly considered as "overstated" by Kemezis (2014) 302–303, who argues that, "[t]he openness of the work's ending [...] functions as an effective anticlimax, negating all the optimism that follows Maximinus' defeat and signalling the empire's cyclical alternation from one sort of unsuitable emperor to the next".[14] However, the number of *kairos*-expressions seems to be rapidly descending through the eight books: 16–5–1–7–2–1–0–0 in each book.[15] I suggest that this gradual disappearance of *kairos*-expressions, and thus of kairotic events, is due to the increase of the references to *tychē*, which mirrors the decrease in opportunities and suitable times available to the individuals involved.

Historians frequently employ *tychē* as an interpretive tool of history, yet they do so inconsistently.[16] In Herodian, *tychē*-references amount to 7–3–7–1–5–4–7–4 (only in noun form) in each book. A comparison between the frequency figures for the two words indicates that Herodian employs *kairos* more frequently in parts of the narrative where *tychē* is less referred to.[17] For instance, the number of *tychē*-references in book three pertains to the Severan propaganda which asserted divine providence.[18] He employs *tychē* as an abstract notion to denote changes in careers,[19] outcomes of battles or of wars, or of the management of politics of the whole Empire,[20] and also to unexpected events occurring by chance or divine intervention.[21] According to Chrysanthou, Herodian believed in the contribution of both *tychē* and *gnomē* in politics and military operations, conveying that both gods and humans had a voice in the course of history, with humans having the final say.[22] To seize the *kairos* as the right timing, an individual had to calculate the probable outcome of their moves which should be in accordance with their interests, and the possible obstacles to their endeavour.[23] When

12 On Herodian's speeches, see Whittaker (1969) lviii–lxi; Sidebottom (1998) 2813–2815; Polley (2003) 207; Kemezis (2014) 252; Mallan (2021); Pitcher (2022) esp. 329–330. Cf. Hidber (1999) 148–153.

13 See 1.1.5 (60 years), 2.15.7 (70 years) with Polley (2019) 207.

14 Kemezis (2014) 303. On this topic see also pp. 57, 60–63, 73, 302–303.

15 The words that are excluded from the previous counting are πρόσκαιρον (1.1.5), προσκαίρως (4.14.7), and εὔκαιρος (1.4.3, 1.9.6, 5.8.8).

16 Hau (2011) 183.

17 The distinction between *tychē* and *kairos* is already apparent in Thucydides, where *kairos* neither arises from a fortuitous event nor is *tychē*'s diving gift (Trédé-Boulmer [1992] 215).

18 Chrysanthou (2022) 146 n. 62, 159–160; Kemezis (2014) 60–61.

19 E. g. 1.5.5; 1.8.3; 1.9.5; 1.13.6; 2.2.8; 2.4.5; 2.12.5; 3.10.6; 5.1.5 (×2); 5.3.1; 6.8.6.

20 E. g. 3.4.4 (×2); 3.7.1; 3.9.8; 4.4.6; 6.8.1.

21 *Tychē* is also considered a motive force; for bibliography see Sidebottom (1998) 2821 n. 215.

22 Chrysanthou (2022) 260–261. Cf. Pl. *Lg*. 709b.

23 Moutsopoulos (2007) 67.

laziness or inertia characterised an individual, they failed to seize the opportunity offered, and *tychē* was believed to take control of the situation.[24]

In Herodian's proem, where he demarcates periods to define his narrative time and content, *tychē* and *kairos* interplay (1.1.4):[25]

> If someone were to compare all the time that has elapsed *since* [my italics] Augustus (πάντα τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ χρόνον), when the Roman regime became a monarchy, they would find, in almost two hundred years *down to* [my italics] the time of Marcus (μέχρι τῶν Μάρκου καιρῶν), neither imperial successions so closely succeeding one another, nor the varied fortunes (τύχας ποικίλας)[26] of both civil and foreign wars, nor the national uprisings and destructions of cities, both in the empire and in many barbarian lands, nor the earthquakes, the pollutions of the air, nor the extraordinary careers of tyrants and emperors which have either rarely or never before recalled.

Χρόνον and καιρῶν seem synonymous, but Herodian uses them differently. "[A]ll the time that has elapsed since Augustus" serves as a *terminus post quem* indicating the year when Augustus' enthronement inaugurated the Empire. "[D]own to the time of Marcus" functions as a *terminus ante quem*, defining the period that transpired until Marcus Aurelius' death.[27] With these phrases, Herodian highlights a significantly extensive period of 200 years leading up to Marcus' reign, a turning point between that timeframe and Herodian's 58 years condensed in his narrative time, which is characterised as brief, yet rich in many significant events (1.1.3: μεγάλων τε καὶ πολλῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ γενομένων).[28]

Alföldy characterised Herodian's narrative time as: "ihm [erschien] die Zeitgeschichte als Ausdruck einer tiefen Krise des Reiches […]".[29] When compared to Marcus' reign, all subsequent reigns may be described in modern terms as a *décadence* of the Roman Empire. The difference between the epochs before and after him does not lie in the presence or absence of critical events, but in their prevalence (οὕτως ἐπαλλήλους), diversity and abundance (τύχας ποικίλας; ἐν πολλοῖς βαρβάροις) after Marcus as opposed to their rarity (ἢ σπανίως ἢ μηδ' ὅλως) before.[30] By employing the conjunctions οὔτε […] οὔτε and τε καί, Herodian increases the reading pace and mirrors the swiftness of crises arising, thus exciting suspense in his readers for his forthcoming narrative. Time and *kairos* establish the temporal framework *out* of which his dystopian nar-

24 Trédé-Boulmer (1992) 48–50, 59–70, 220. In fact, there are four instances in Herodian where *tychē* contradicts individuals' expectations and plans conveyed by the contrast between *tychē* and *gnomē*, see 3.9.12; 5.4.12; 6.5.5; 6.6.3. The same contrast is employed by Thucydides, see Edmunds (1975).

25 See Chrysanthou (2022) 7–8 with notes and Kemezis (2014) 230–233.

26 On focal point of *kairos* and *poikilia*, see Vallozza (1985) 123 with n. 16; on *poikilia*, see also Laporte in this volume.

27 There is a latent distinction between χρόνος in 1.1.3 (time) and 1.1.4 (year); see also Mecella in this volume, p. 164, who interprets χρόνος as a "Zeitpunkt" (a moment in time).

28 On Herodian's Thucydidean tone in the proem, see Sidebottom (1998) 2776–2780. On Herodian's narrative time, see Hidber (1999) 148–153.

29 Alföldy (1971) 433, 447.

30 Hdn. 1.1.4; see Sidebottom (1998) 2797.

rative unfolds,[31] thus underscoring the end of Marcus' 'golden age'.[32] In this manner, Herodian utilises the contrasting pair of kairotic (opportunities) and non-kairotic (unsuitable times) events as an interpretive tool.[33]

Plato's *Laws* 709a is helpful regarding specifically τύχας and their function in *Ab excessu divi Marci*. In the Platonic passage, the Athenian explicitly combines diverse concepts, stating that all sorts of changes and misfortunes (τύχαι δὲ καὶ συμφοραὶ παντοῖαι), such as wars and diseases owing to pestilences, and repeated adverse seasons (χρόνον ἐπὶ πολὺν ἐνιαυτῶν πολλῶν [...] ἀκαιρίαι), lead to revolutions and reforms. By means of an *argumentum a contrario* it can be inferred that periods lacking such grievances can be classified as καιροί. The echo in Herodian's proem (1.1.4) is noteworthy. By characterising τύχας as ποικίλας – i.e. changeable or rather unstable, and diversified – Herodian furthers *tychē*'s significance for his work and its role in the course of history.[34] While it may be an exaggeration to claim that Marcus' reign was devoid of rapid changes and misfortunes,[35] Herodian aims to emphasise his narrative time as a series of recurring ἀκαιρίαι, i.e. political and military crises causing imperial instability, and interventions of fortune.[36]

In the last two books, as I have already mentioned, Herodian does not use *kairos* at all, not even in its literal meaning,[37] yet *tychē* is 'at its best'.[38] Sidebottom states that Maximinus and the Gordians lacked *paideia*, an attribute that gave assurance of a long-lasting reign "unless a malign fortune (*tychē*), acting through its usual agents, the barbarian mercenaries who make up Rome's soldiery, cut it short."[39] In 7.1, Herodian refers to Maximinus' change of fortune three times, a change already apparent from his early career and foretold by omens and dreams.[40] Gordian I's proclamation is also characterised as a turn of fortune. The rumour that Maximinus' forces were de-

31 On Herodian's choice of timeframe, see Hidber (1999) 160 and Chrysanthou (2022) 9–10.

32 For a survey of crises in the 3rd c. CE, see de Blois (1984); esp. in Herodian, see Alföldy (1971), Marasco (1998) and Kemezis (2014) 233–235. Cf. D.C. 72[71].36.4. It should be noted that Herodian uses such a formula only for Marcus' reign; see 1.2.4, where Herodian praises Marcus' reign using the phrase τῶν ἐκεῖνου καιρῶν exclaiming that many individuals embraced his philosophical paradigm and became philosophers themselves.

33 On kairicity, see Moutsopoulos (2007). Cf. Zimmermann (1999) 124, who does not add that pair among the processing tools of historical material.

34 See Whittaker (1969) 86 n. 1.

35 So Marasco (1998) 2840.

36 Herodian does not use ἀκαιρία at all, only the adjective ἄκαιρος in the episode at the Ludi Capitolini (see below).

37 he uses temporal marks instead, e.g. 7.11.1 and 8.5.1, χρόνος; 7.5.2 and 8.4.2 ἔτος; 7.3.3, 4 and 8.2.5, ἡμέρα.

38 Used at 7.1.2 (×2); 7.5.4, 5; 7.3.5; 7.6.2; 7.7.2; 8.3.4; 8.5.1; 8.7.2, 5.

39 Sidebottom (1998) 2812.

40 7.7.1, πρῶτος ἐξ εὐτελείας τῆς ἐσχάτης ἐς τοσαύτην τύχην ἦλασε; 7.1.1, οὐκ ἐς τὴν παροῦσαν αυτού τύχην ἀφορῶσιν; 7.1.2, ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἐπὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν κεχειραγώγητο; 6.8.1, κατ' ὀλίγον αὐτὸν χειραγωγούσης τῆς τύχης ἐλθὼν διὰ πάσης τάξεως στρατιωτικῆς; 6.8.6: τὴν τοσαύτην τύχην. For Maximinus' introduction in the narrative, see Chrysanthou (2022) 53–54. Cf. 2.9.5.

stroyed is viewed as a fortuitous event guaranteeing Gordian's reign by the Senate, which immediately bestowed on him and his son, Gordian II, the title of Augustus.[41] Additionally, the uncertainty dominating events is evident through ἀμφίβολος τύχη which is expressed by two internal narrators. Firstly, a young man obliged Gordian I to take the risk and accept the imperial insignia which was the lesser of the two evils compared to the threat of death. Secondly, the people of Aquileia were equally urged by Crispinus not to surrender to Maximinus, but to trust the uncertain outcome of a war, a proposition that arouses suspense due to the balanced conditions of the city's siege.[42]

Pupienus Maximus was welcomed in Aquileia with celebrations, but Maximinus' soldiers pretended loyalty and honour towards him out of a necessity that is, in Whittaker's translation, "because of the prevailing conditions in the principate" (8.7.2, προσποιήτῳ δὲ εὐνοίᾳ καὶ τιμῇ διὰ τὴν παροῦσαν ἐξ ἀνάγκης τῆς βασιλείας τύχην).[43] *Tychē,* however is not used casually in the passage, meaning neutrally 'conditions'. Herodian draws attention to the turn of events that centres around the transfer of power from the soldiers to the Senate. The soldiers, who previously forced Maximinus (6.8.6) to accept the imperial insignia on the threat of death,[44] and had crushed Gordian I's civilian forces in Africa, were now the constrained ones.[45] Herodian's expression foreshadows Maximus' speech in Aquileia, who, in his effort to persuade the audience of his and Balbinus' justifiable proclamation, exclaimed: "The fate of the principate lies in the hands of that city [sc. Rome]" (8.7.5, καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ πόλει ἡ τῆς βασιλείας ἵδρυται τύχη). Ironically, the fate of their collegiate government lay *in* Rome, yet in the soldiers' hands, who eventually butchered both of them and proclaimed Gordian III as emperor.[46]

Lastly, Sidebottom observes that Herodian is constantly shifting his narratorial focus from one frontier of the Empire to the other in his efforts to cover as much as possible in book 7, while for more than half of book 8, Herodian centres the focus on Maximinus' activities up to his death in order to put his "reader in the same position as Maximinus' army [...] to understand the crucially important events (the state of mind and the actions of Maximinus' army)."[47] I contend that Herodian employs these techniques, together with the sequential turns of fortunes, to show the nonexistence of opportunities or suitable times to be seized, owing to the *modus operandi* of emperors

41 7.7.2, ἐκ τῆς παρούσης τύχης τὰ μέλλοντα πιστεύσαντες. Cf. also 7.5.4, τὸ τῆς παρούσης τύχης αἴτιον, on Gordian I's own reaction to the coup that brings him to power.

42 7.5.5, τοῦ μὲν ἤδη προδήλου τοῦ δὲ ἐν ἀμφιβόλῳ τύχῃ; 8.3.4, ἐνὸν πιστεῦσαι πολέμου ἀμφιβόλῳ τύχῃ; 8.5.1, ἰσόρροπος ἔμενεν ἡ τύχη τῆς μάχης. Cf. 3.7.2. For the inclinations of the Aquileians towards Maximinus, see Whittaker (1998) 264 n. 1.

43 Cf. 8.6.1 where Maximinus' soldiers from Pannonia and Thrace were equally compelled to accept his assassination and the termination of Aquileia's siege.

44 See Chrysanthou (2022) 113.

45 Davenport/Mallan (2020) 425.

46 See Davenport/Mallan (2020) 431–432.

47 Sidebottom (1998) 2815.

and the soldiers' abusive interferences.[48] If my speculation is correct in Herodian's characterisation of his narrative time as ἀκαιρίαι in the proem, and if ἀκαιρίαι are strictly defined as the 'absense of *kairos*', or of any opportunity, then the last two books offer the proem's best reflection.[49]

3 Temporal Aspect

Herodian's work appears well organised. The temporal yet metaphorical meanings of *kairos* are conveyed through recurring linguistic motifs in scattered passages: prepositional phrases indicate either a short or a long period, and single words refer to a specific moment or the duration of an action. This chapter deals with the words and phrases' temporal aspect. It is divided into three sections discussing respectively passages regarding the simultaneous attempts of imperial claimants, the crises arising during Commodus' reign, and the opportunities seized or missed.

3.1 Imperial Claimants

After Marcus, all emperors are compared to him, but they all fall short of his model. Some of them possessed credentials similar to his or at least those of Septimius Severus, who was the most successful among Herodian's emperors.[50] However, they fell victims to the praetorians' schemes or their own shortcomings. Herodian uses the formula κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρόν for the first time when narrating Titus Flavius Sulpicianus' attempt to claim the throne after Pertinax was murdered (2.6.8). Herodian states: "But at the same time Sulpicianus (κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρόν),[51] both a man of consular rank and a prefect of the city, came to bargain the office too (he was the father of Pertinax's wife)." Sulpicianus' advancement in the *cursus honorum* is compared to Didius Julianus', whose *status* is expressed by an antithesis (2.6.6, ἤδη μὲν τὴν ὕπατον τετελεκότι ἀρχήν, δοκοῦντι δὲ ἐν εὐπορίᾳ χρημάτων εἶναι). The comparison stresses Sulpicianus' high rank and his connection to Pertinax, highlighting the praetorians' false taste in emperors, who chose Julianus out of greediness.

A similar structure is observed in Gaius Pescennius Niger's introduction as a candidate emperor (2.7.3–5). He is presented in clear contrast to Julianus, whose reign is

48 See Davenport/Mallan (2020) 422–424.

49 Cf. Davenport/Mallan (2020) 436.

50 For Herodian's use of Marcus as a 'foil' for the following emperors, see Alföldy (1971) 435–437, cf. 448 n. 4; Müller (1996) 309; Sidebottom (1998) 2805; Marasco (1998) 2840–2857. Cf. Zimmermann (1999) 123 n. 28. See Scott (2023) in his most recent illuminating article.

51 δὲ here is inceptive, not antithetical.

characterised as ἐφύβριστα, opprobrious, by the Roman people.[52] Niger was cheered by the people in the Circus Maximus as a supporter of the Roman Empire and a protector of the crown, as he alleges (2.8.2–6). Herodian explains that he was governor of Syria at the same time the aforementioned events took place at Rome (2.7.4: καθ' ὃν δὲ καιρὸν τὰπροειρημένα ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπράττετο, Συρίας ἡγεῖτο πάσης). He had also served a term as consul; he was old enough and had achieved many great deeds. Apparently, Niger surpassed Julianus in virtue and career, and as Herodian adds "He had a reputation for being a gentle, fair man as though he modelled his life on the example of Pertinax" (2.7.5: φήμη τε περὶ αὐτοῦ διεφοίτα ὡς ἐπιεικοῦς καὶ δεξιοῦ ὡς τὸν τοῦ Περτίνακος βίον ζηλοῦντος).[53]

The resemblance between Sulpicianus and Niger comes to the fore: both held a connection with Pertinax, either familial or based on admiration, and both were advanced in their careers.[54] Herodian links them by their similar rank and the use of *kairos* as a signature moment for both. Specifically, by employing the *kairos*-expressions together with the antitheses created by the particles μὲν/δὲ, Herodian draws attention to the praetorians' choice: it was an opportunity for them to choose a righteous man, but they chose Julianus. Either way, though, Niger would have failed due to his inertia, a trait lacked by Severus.[55] Thus, Herodian shows how external factors, such as the praetorians, and internal ones, like personal attributes, negatively contribute in seizing a kairotic moment.[56]

The Severan claimants are also characterised by kairotic events. According to Herodian, Septimius Severus' last dream foreshadowing his ascension – or that is how he interpreted it – occurred on Pertinax's enthronement (κατὰ γὰρ τὸν καιρόν), after (μετὰ) Severus had sacrificed and taken the oath of allegiance to Pertinax, when the night fell (ἑσπέρας καταλαβούσης) (2.9.5). That last dream in January 193 was decisive in determining how he could achieve his goal. In the dream, Pertinax was thrown off his horse's back by his own horse; only then did the horse bow and

52 Marasco (1998) 2850. Didius Julianus' lifestyle manifests earlier in the narrative; he decided to take up on the emperorship amid a rather merry symposium (2.6.6). The characterisation of his reign is ethically and politically charged, since ἐφύβριστος is used another two times as an attribute to τυραννίς, see 2.4.2 and 6.1.2.

53 Niger and Pertinax's resemblance in political and military activity is also stressed by vocabulary repetition, as Chrysanthou (2022) 39 points out. For a concise characterisation of Pertinax in Herodian, see Philippides (1984). On Niger's speech and his imitation of Pertinax, see also Scott in this volume, pp. 125–126.

54 Attention to the *cursus honorum* is also merited when one or more attempted emperors are portrayed. See e.g. 7.7.5, where Herodian, as well as the mob of young men, declares Gordian's suitability to the throne (noted by Davenport/Mallan [2020] 425 n. 33). Cf. Sidebottom (1998) 2808 who does not see the comparison between Sulpicianus and Niger.

55 Niger's inertia: 2.8.9, 2.9.3, 2.10.6; Severus' hastiness: 2.11.1. On Severus' hastiness, see Chrysanthou (2022) 162 n. 121. On the relationship between emperors and their whereabouts, see Pitcher (2012) and Kemezis (2014) 239–252.

56 See Moutsopoulos (2007) 49–50.

carry Severus on its back (2.9.6). Severus could only become emperor after Pertinax's death, brought to him by his own horse,[57] or, symbolically, by his praetorian guard (2.5.8). Severus, like the aforementioned candidates, made an attempt for the throne, but he was the only one who used Pertinax's death as a vehicle for his political propaganda.[58] Severus was proclaimed emperor by the Pannonians and the Illyrians on the 9th of April 193, over three months after his decisive dream.

It seems as if Herodian is using *kairos* literally in a temporal sense, meaning "at that time". However, the temporal attributes "after etc." and "when the night came etc.", as well as the kairotic expression, that appear *prima facie* to be narrative embellishments, confine the dream to a specific part of the day. Herodian thus distinguishes this particular dream from all the other soothsaying that had given Severus hope long before Pertinax's proclamation (2.9.3). Considering that the dream is narrowed down to a specific timeframe, i. e. the night after Pertinax's proclamation, and therefore to the content of the dream itself, it is deduced that the dream's content reflects proleptically the *kairos*, or rather the appropriate time, for Severus to act; Severus paid attention to the symbols and he was patient. It is noteworthy that Herodian has Severus mention predictions for his ascension to the throne in his memoirs (2.9.4). Herodian might have read and used the memoir as a source supporting his authority, and indicating that the dream-narrative originated in Severus' memoirs, together with an equivalent Latin *kairos*-expression, based on Severus' own constructed propaganda.[59]

Both Septimius Severus and his alleged grandson, Elagabalus, ascended the throne when the *kairos* was fulfilled (5.3.8–10). Herodian portrays Julia Maesa capitalising on her relations with the imperial family (5.3.1–3).[60] Maesa had been residing at the palace with her sister, Julia Domna, Septimius Severus' wife, for the extended period (χρόνου πολυετοῦς) of Severus' and Caracalla's reigns (193–217). She was banished from Rome to Emesa, along with her two daughters, Soaemis and Mamaea, on Macrinus' order after Caracalla and Domna's death. The narrative pauses: Elagabalus' priestly duties and oriental appearance, and Heliogabalus' cult are delineated (5.3.4–7).[61] According to Herodian, the soldiers admired Elagabalus due to his royal lineage, which is retrospectively explicated by Maesa (5.3.8–10). Many of the soldiers, especially the ones of III Gallica,[62] were acquainted with Maesa and sought her protection. She got the chance to narrate his story, "either inventing it or telling the truth".[63] Herodian delivers her speech indirectly, punctuated by his overt comment that suggests the speech is

57 See Artem. 1.56, where the same symbol is used.

58 See 2.9.8, 10–11.

59 Cf. *HA Sev*. 3.1. For Herodian's scepticism on dreams, see Marasco (1998) 2899. Cf. 6.8.6, on Maximinus Thrax's ascension dream. Cf. Moutsopoulos (2007) 131–133 who asserts that a successively seized *kairos* indicates the construction of that environment.

60 On the importance of Maesa's influence, see Chrysanthou (2022) 48 n. 67.

61 On such descriptions in Herodian, see Chrysanthou (2022) 49–51.

62 Cassola (1967) 23.

63 For Herodian's scepticism on dynasties, see Marasco (1998) 2865–2866.

a fabrication. She concluded that Caracalla was Elagabalus' father, even though it was commonly believed to be someone else. Her conclusion is supported by a γάρ-clause: Maesa proclaimed (and explained) that Caracalla had slept with her daughters, when they were of age to procreate, during the period she stayed at the palace with her sister (καθ' ὃν καιρὸν ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις σὺν τῇ ἀδελφῇ διέτριβεν) (5.3.10).[64]

The formula καθ' ὃν καιρὸν is a sort of a repetition of the previously mentioned χρόνου πολυετοῦς, as both phrases refer to a specific period. However, the difference lies in the point of view. Herodian, as an external narrator, views the period of Maesa's stay at the palace strictly as a linear timeframe bounded by an enthronement and two deaths. Maesa, as an internal narrator, provides a qualitative perspective despite the quantitative similarity to Herodian's view, for she was present at the palace. *Kairos*' temporal concreteness in the past, and bribery lay the foundation for Maesa to convince the soldiers that Caracalla was Elagabalus' and Alexander Severus' father. *Kairos* is seized in the present, much like in the previous case. Maesa's past-*kairos* in the palace transforms into a present-rebirth both for her status and the Severan Dynasty. Macrinus' interlude-reign was the turning point between Caracalla's reign, and Elagabalus and Alexander's reigns that revived the Severan dynasty.[65] Thus, Herodian employs the same technique by attributing both to Severus and Maesa their own perspectives on *kairos*.

3.2 Crises

According to Cassola (1967) x, Herodian's narrative time represents "una fase culminante nella crisi politica e culturale del mondo Romano." Crises play a significant role in Herodian's narrative, almost symbolising a locomotive force in history.[66] It is remarkable that occasionally Herodian uses the formula κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ/τὸ to introduce crises. The genitive καιροῦ is partitive, indicating that *kairos* is perceived and presented as a larger period within which crises unfold.

The plague of 187/188 (1.12.1–2) is portrayed as a temporally parallel event to Cleander's malicious plan to cause famine in Rome and then appease the citizens by selling them the essential goods (1.12.3, κατ' αὐτὸ).[67] Herodian explicitly draws a parallel between the two events through the text's structure. The plague is introduced with συνέβη δὲ κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ λοιμώδη νόσον κατασχεῖν τὴν Ἰταλίαν ("At that time, plague struck all Italy"), while Cleander's conspiratorial actions are introduced with ἐπέσχε δὲ κατ' αὐτὸ καὶ λιμὸς τὴν πόλιν ἐξ αἰτίας τοιαύτης ("At the same time, there

64 So Pitcher (2022) 343. See Cassola (1967) 264–250 on 5.3.1–10. Cf. D.C. 79[78].30.2–4 who names the fathers; *HA Heliog.* 18. For a clear presentation of Elagabalus' lineage, see Bowersock (1975).

65 See 5.5.1, where Maesa is eager to return to her familiar life in Rome.

66 Cassola (1967) x; Kemezis (2014) 238.

67 Cassola (1967) 40 gives 188/189 or 187/188; Whittaker (1969) 73 with n. 2 traces a Thucydidean echo on this crisis. Cf. D.C. 73[72].12.1 with Alföldy (1971) 438.

was famine in the city because of the following reason"). The repetition of δὲ, the assonance between λοιμώδη and λιμός, the consonance between κατασχεῖν and ἐπέσχε, and the use of κατ' αὐτὸ to avoid repeating κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ bring the two events to the same temporal and interpretive level. Cleander's quest for power can thus be seen as another affliction, a λοιμός, affecting not the Italic peninsula but the capital of the Roman Empire, Rome itself, which was already devasted by the plague. Cleander's *coup d'état* failed, and after his and his accomplices' execution, Commodus adopted an aggressive behaviour pattern: he mercilessly executed his enemies, distrusting everyone and believing any slander against anyone (1.13.7).[68]

Similarly, the divine manifestations of 190/191 in the form of celestial events and teratogeneses are introduced in the narrative of Commodus' reign in the same way as the plague (1.14.1): ἐγένοντο δὲ τινες κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ καὶ διοσημεῖαι ("At that time, there were also certain portents").[69] καὶ before διοσημεῖαι is adverbial, following the formulaic expression κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ, or an emphatic assertion highlighting the mass misfortunes befallen the Romans during Commodus' reign. Of course, the plague preceded the divine manifestations, just as the divine manifestations preceded the conflagration of the temples of Pax and Vesta in 192 (1.14.4), which is introduced in the narrative with καὶ τὸν παρόντα καιρὸν (1.14.2). According to Herodian (1.14.6) "the people of that period (κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ) believed that the fire broke out and was extinguished by the will and power of the gods." Even the aftermath of these disasters is encompassed in the general period referred to as *kairos* by Herodian. As a result of these catastrophes, Commodus lost public consensus (1.14.7):

> With so many disasters constantly (συνεχῶς) befalling the city, the Roman people (ὁ Ῥωμαίων δῆμος) no longer looked upon Commodus with favour,[70] but they attributed their consecutive (ἀλλεπαλλήλων) misfortunes to his illegal murders and the other mistakes he had made in his lifetime.

Herodian's introspective and omniscient focalisation reflects the contemporary Romans' perception on the accumulated and successive crises,[71] as if they literally occurred within a year rather than over almost five years (187–192 CE).[72] Romans interpreted these events as an omen of impending wars (πολέμων σημεῖον εἶναι), who according to Herodian were proved correct by the outcome (ἐκ τῆς ἀποβάσεως). Used by Herodian to compress the latter half of Commodus' reign, *kairos*-expressions signify a critical period of consecutive disasters and foreshadow the subsequent wars between rival em-

68 See 1.8.7 and 1.11.5 for Commodus after Lucilla's and Maternus' conspiracies respectively. On Commodus' gradual alienation, see Marasco (1998) 2845, 2860; Hidber (1999) 161; Kemezis (2021) 28.

69 Cf. Hdn. 2.9.3, where Herodian seems skeptical about omens.

70 Cf. Marasco (1998) 2845; 1.4.8; 1.15.7 with Whittaker (1969) 103; *AP* 7.345.6 where δημώδης characterizes prostitutes. On δῆμος in Herodian, see Motta (2021).

71 Kemezis (2021) 24 n. 12.

72 Herodian's omniscience led modern critics to characterise his work as a historiographic novel; see Hidber (2004) 206. Cf. 1.14.4 and 5.6.6. On Herodian's focalisation, see Alföldy (1971) 434–435; Hidber (1999) 160–166.

perors that would beset the Empire. Herodian's prolepsis in this part of the narration heightens the readers' suspense since Narcissus strangles Commodus three chapters later (1.17.11). This narrative segment mirrors and confirms what Herodian described in the proem in dystopian terms (see p. 182–183): what followed Marcus' reign (diseases, wars etc.) were critical events jeopardising the Empire's stability.

Kairos is used again to denote a critical period in the narration of Macrinus' ascension to the throne (4.14.3). According to Herodian, Macrinus was elected emperor "not so much through the love and loyalty of the soldiers as through necessity and the demands of the immediate situation" (τοῦ παρόντος καιροῦ).[73] A word-to-word translation of the genitive of time τοῦ καιροῦ as "of the present time" would seem peculiar. Müller translates τοῦ παρόντος καιροῦ as "der gegenwärtigen Notlage" ("of the present emergency"), Cassola paraphrases "di una decisione immediata" ("of the immediate decision"), and Echols translates "of the impending crisis"; only the French translation of 1860 gives "des circonstances".[74] The 19th century French translator preserved the temporal aspect of *kairos*, which is indeed correct, but he did not interpret it according to the context as the other translators did. I stress that the translation of *kairos* in Herodian's narration of Macrinus' ascension reflects interpretive choices: translators navigate the nuanced meaning of *kairos*, which can imply both a specific temporal moment and an urgent or critical situation.

As is mentioned above, *kairos* can be interpreted as an emergency, a decision, or as a crisis. All of these translations are valid, considering that Artabanus arrived at Edessa with his forces while Caracalla was murdered by Martialis on Macrinus' command, leaving the army leaderless.[75] Indeed, it is preferable for readers to become familiar with and comprehend the multifaceted concept of *kairos* rather than to pave the way for a specific interpretation that lacks completeness, yet only Echols, I believe, captures the overall meaning of *kairos* within the word 'crisis' which accurately represents a time of great difficulty, danger, and the need for immediate decision-making.

Even Macrinus himself, in his *paraenesis* to the soldiers (4.14.4–8), draws attention to the critical circumstances by using a *kairos*-expression: "Now, since you have honoured the memory of the deceased as you ought to, and since you have performed the funerary rites, you must pay attention to the urgent matters" (νῦν δὲ καιρὸς […] ἔχεσθαι τῶν ἐπειγόντων).[76] The urgency of the critical situation they were facing is also conveyed through the dynamic infinitive ἔχεσθαι, two imperatives (4.14.6, ὁρᾶτε; 4.14.7, ἀγωνίζεσθε), two hortatory subjunctives (4.14.7, λαμβάνωμεν and ταττώμεθα), the adjective πρέπον (4.14.7) and adverb of time νῦν (4.14.5, 6). Macrinus achieved his

73 Cf. Hdn. 2.2.9. Also Chrysanthou (2022) 220 n. 107.

74 Müller (1996) 195; Cassola (1967) 233; Echols (1961) 131; Halévy (1860) 229.

75 Herodian clearly states the simultaneity of those events with the genitive absolute τούτων δὲ πραττομένων (4.14.3).

76 See above for the uses of νῦν καιρός by Marcus and Plautianus (stimulating), and by the philosopher in 1.9.4 (prohibitive).

goal (4.14.8): the soldiers lined up because they perceived the necessity of the situation (τὴν ἀνάγκην τοῦ πράγματος ὁρῶντες).

Indeed, other critical situations in Herodian's work are not introduced by such formula, yet the fact that these cases are interconnected by the same phraseology is telling. It may be over-speculative, but Commodus' failure to rule like his father and Macrinus' desire to overthrow Caracalla led to the end of the Antonine and the Severan dynasties respectively. Eventually, Commodus' isolation during the crises and his subsequent moral decay mirror Macrinus' turn to luxury and his masquerade escapade after his defeat. Additionally, it is noteworthy that both emperors and crises are narrated through the perspectives of the Roman people and the soldiery respectively.

3.3 Opportunities

In *Ab excess divi Marci*, *kairos* can also be identified as an opportunity characterised as εὔκαιρος or ἐπιτήδειος, opportune and suitable respectively. Both types of events can be considered as either outcomes of another event or occurrences arising out of themselves and carefully observed and anticipated by vigilant interested parties.[77] The distinction between them, though subtle due to their unpredictable nature, lies solely in the outcome or an agent's aspiration toward it.

Only three instances of εὔκαιρος καιρὸς are evident in the narrative, two of which are thematically interconnected. In the work's first direct speech, Marcus Aurelius' swan song (1.4.3), readers 'hear' the dying emperor indirectly characterising his death as the opportune time (νῦν δὲ καιρὸς εὔκαιρος) for his entourage (φίλους) to reciprocate the honours bestowed on them.[78] This would demonstrate their gratitude by taking his place in nurturing Commodus according to his principles. The omission of ἐστὶ, which would complete the impersonal verb καιρός ἐστι, allows Marcus to soften the forcefulness of such a verb that, together with the adverb of time νῦν at the beginning of the sentence, portrays his death as a critical situation.[79] The addition of εὔκαιρος emphasises the opportunity for Marcus' friends not only to prove themselves but also to reassure him of Commodus' future success, which was uncertain due to his lack of experience. Despite their strenuous efforts, they ultimately failed. In retrospect, readers would sense the contrasting echo of Marcus' reference to *kairos*, a contrast that lies in Marcus' expectations from his entourage, his hopes and fears regarding his only son, and the whirlwind of non-kairotic events that overwhelmed Commodus.[80]

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77 According to LSJ sv. εὐκαιρία is an equivalent of ἐπιτήδειος καιρός.

78 For intertextual references, see Müller (1996) 310; Chrysanthou (2022) 65–66; Scott (2023) 197–199. Cf. D.C. 72[71].6.3. On the *consilium principis*, see Crook (1955) esp. 65–85.

79 Crisis is also reflected in the metaphor of the ship sailing through storms (e.g. Cic. *Sest.* 46), in which Marcus substitutes the state for his son and the helmsman for his friends.

80 Cf. Hidber (1999) 162 on the 'shadow' of Marcus' speech on Commodus' reign.

In fact, the first book contains a total of seventeen *kairos*-expressions, the highest frequency in the entire text.

In the second case, Commodus' entourage seized the opportunity to vilify Perennis (1.9.6) following the so-called philosopher's attempt to thwart Perennis' conspiracy. Herodian begins 1.9.2 with a prolepsis: "But the conspiracy was divulged in an unexpected way (παραδόξῳ τρόπῳ)."[81] The unexpectedness of the truth's revelation lies in the contrast between the appropriateness or inappropriateness of Commodus' participation in the *Ludi Capitolini* and the informant's intervention.[82] Herodian vividly describes the scene with words that imply interruption of a ceremony (1.9.2–3). First, Commodus entered as a spectator and judge of renowned actors, taking his seat on the royal chair. Then the crowd followed, along with the officers and those with assigned seats. Just before anyone on the stage said or did anything, a partially dressed man appeared in the middle of the stage, holding a cane and a food-sack; with a wave of his hand, the people fell silent (κατασιγάσας).

The man warned: "It is not the right time for you to celebrate (οὐ πανηγυρίζειν σοι καιρός), Commodus, […] for Perennis' sword hangs over your neck […]." In this way, the unnamed man revealed that Perennis was plotting a mutiny.[83] The reason behind the man's disclosure of the conspiracy remained elusive to Herodian, as it likely did to the contemporary spectators.[84] The emperor was struck speechless (ἀφασία), and although everyone suspected the man was speaking the truth, they pretended otherwise. Perennis, in indirect speech, ordered the man to be condemned to the pyre as a lunatic (μεμηνότα) and a liar (ψευδῆ λέγοντα; 1.9.5). Herodian shifts back to his own voice (1.9.6) and characterises the man's eloquence as ill-timed (ἀκαίρου παρρησίας), a rather ironic characterisation,[85] considering that the man characterised Commodus' participation in the festival in the same way, indirectly yet justifiably. His beggarlike appearance and disorderly attitude towards the crowd and the emperor stood out amidst the formality of the event.[86]

81 Cf. Maier (2018) who discusses παράδοξον in Polybius in terms of an unexpected event leading either to a successful or an unsuccessful outcome, yet not strictly assigned to *tychē*; see also Baumann (2020) chapter 2 on the *paradoxon* as a leitmotif in Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliothēkē*.

82 On the event, see Rowan (2007) 168.

83 Note that Herodian cites the philosopher's warning in direct speech, but Perennis' order in indirect speech to point out truth's loud nature (also contrasted to the κατασιγάσας 1.9.4). Hidber (2004) 204 and Sidebottom (1998) 2817 consider the speech Herodian's composition.

84 The man was either urged by some divine fortune (ὑπό τινος δαιμονίου τύχης), or he wanted to become famous (δόξαν ἄρηται), because he was formerly unknown, or because he hoped to be rewarded (ἐλπίσαντος ἀμοιβῆς μεγαλοδώρου τεύξεσθαι) by Commodus. Herodian's triple rationale reflects the contemporary spectators' thoughts, as well as the ones made by modern readers. For Herodian's elusive narrator, see Kemezis (2014) 260–272. Cf. Arist. *Ph.* 196b5–7 and 197a18, where Aristotle declares that events happening by chance have no causality, thus they are determined as παράλογα.

85 On Herodian's characterisation techniques, see Pitcher (2017) and Chrysanthou (2020) 641–651.

86 Pitcher (2022) 336. On this scene, see Baumann and Zacharioudaki in this volume, pp. 87–91.

In this context of untimely behaviour, Commodus' entourage seized the opportunity to try to accuse Perennis, as they had already harboured a long-standing hatred towards him:

> ὃ **μὲν** δὴ ἀκαίρου παρρησίας τοιαύτην ὑπέσχε δίκην· οἱ **μέντοι** περὶ τὸν Κόμοδον, ὅσοι τε εὐνοεῖν προσεποιοῦντο, καὶ **πάλαι μὲν** ἀπεχθὼς πρὸς τὸν Περέννιον διακείμενοι (βαρὺς γὰρ καὶ ἀφόρητος ἦν ὑπεροψίᾳ καὶ ὕβρει), **τότε** ⟨**δὲ**⟩ καιρὸν εὔκαιρον ἔχοντες, διαβάλλειν ἐπειρῶντο
>
> Though the philosopher paid his penalty for speaking so freely out of turn, Commodus' companions and self-styled supporters, who had previously hated Perennis for his harshness and intolerably supercilious arrogance, judged this an opportune moment to try and bring a charge against him.

Herodian employs three antitheses in an almost schematic manner, using μὲν, μέντοι and δὲ. The first antithesis contrasts ἀκαιρία and καιρὸς εὔκαιρος, serving as the foundation of Herodian's underlying argument. The second antithesis pertains to the entourage's feelings against Perennis: they hated him from the past (πάλαι μὲν), but only then did they openly act upon it (τότε ⟨δὲ⟩).[87] Μέντοι, meaning 'however' or 'nevertheless' with a conjunctive force, brings together the man, Commodus' entourage, and those who pretended to support him (ὅσοι τε εὐνοεῖν προσεποιοῦντο)[88] in a third antithesis, complementing the previous ones. The man, unaware of or indifferent to where and when to speak, deemed it fitting to interrupt sacred games,[89] in order to chastise his emperor, carelessly accusing one of his prefects in his presence. Herodian's tripartite antithesis elucidates the temporal unsuitability of the man's intervention and the subsequent temporal appropriateness perceived by Commodus' inner circle. Despite of being suspicious that the man's words contained some truth, because of their longstanding disdain for Perennis, the entourage waited some more and seized the opportunity to act when proofs were brought.[90]

This analysis clarifies that the man's ἄκαιρος παρρησία contradicts and generates the εὔκαιρος καιρὸς seized by Commodus' entourage. The play on words can be seen as the by-product of a timely inappropriate behaviour, as well as an unexpected event just like the man who appeared on stage.[91] This episode, not found in any other source, showcases an escalation of καιρὸς (1.9.4) to ἄκαιρος (1.9.5) and finally to εὔκαιρος (1.9.6), that potentially reflects Commodus' character and his evolving relationships

87 For the ⟨δὲ⟩, see the notes to Whittaker (1969) *ad loc.*

88 On the identification of those men, see Whittaker (1969) 56–57.

89 One might even call him a "buzz-killer" (e. g. Plu. 68C–D, even though the context is sympotic) or a brave man (e. g. Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 163). Cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 272a with Thanassas (2013) 79–80 on the distinction of (in)appropriate occasions for certain speeches.

90 Cf. Pl. *Plt*. 305d on the ἐγκαιρίας or ἀκαιρίας to take measures for the city; Isoc. *C. Soph.* 13; Gorg. *Epitaph.* fr. 6 D.–K. with Carter (1988) 103–105.

91 For a similar view of the *kairos* as a fortuitous event, see Moutsopoulos (2006) 319 nn. 38–40.

with his subjects.[92] Additionally, the episode provides Herodian with an opportunity to discuss the matter of appropriateness of speech. Furthermore, one may speculate that among those individuals, there must have been some friends of Commodus. Their characterisation as both companions and soldiers brings to mind Marcus' *consilium principis* from earlier in Book 1, which, as Whittaker noted, saw themselves as "a senate in miniature".[93] In both narratives a death leads to the protection of Commodus during a critical period: Marcus' death occurs in camp on the Danube during war, and Commodus must be taken care of by his father's companions as the heir to the throne. The man's death prompts Commodus' companions to point an accusing finger at Perennis, with the aim of both safeguarding their emperor and eliminating Perennis and his son(s) (1.9.6).

The third case slightly differs in certain aspects. Elagabalus' soldiers, thinking that they had a justifiable pretext, seized the opportunity to kill the emperor, his mother Julia Soaemis, and their entire retinue (5.8.8, τότε δὲ [...] καιρὸν εὔκαιρον καὶ πρόφασιν δικαίαν νομίζοντες).[94] The soldiers harboured intense hatred towards him and desired his death under any circumstances (ἄλλως μὲν), owing to his moral depravity (5.8.1, πάντων δὲ οὕτως τῶν πάλαι δοκούντων σεμνῶν ἐς ὕβριν καὶ παροινίαν ἐκεβεβακχευμένων),[95] and his repeated attempts to eliminate Alexander (5.8.2–4), whom they supported due to his virtuous upbringing (κοσμίως καὶ σωφρόνως ἀνατρεφομένῳ).[96] Following the soldiers' mutiny (5.8.5), which was triggered by the alleged demotion of Alexander (5.8.4), and their contemptuous attitude towards Elagabalus (5.8.6), the emperor ordered the apprehension and the punishment of the culprits (5.8.7, συλλαμβάνεσθαι πρὸς τιμωρίαν); that was the 'justifiable pretext' for the soldiers.[97]

The narrative bears resemblance to the previous one.[98] Commodus' courtiers had hard feelings towards Perennis long ago (πάλαι) due to his arrogance and violent behaviour (ὑπεροψίᾳ καὶ ὕβρει), but they reached their breaking point and turned against him when the man openly accused him (τότε ⟨δὲ⟩). The opportunity to achieve their objective arose from an inopportune moment (ἀκαιρία) that led to the man's ar-

92 See Whittaker (1969) 55 n. 2; Sidebottom (1998) 2783 n. 49. See also the alternation of narrators through the transition from direct speech and first-person narration (1.9.4, philosopher) to narrator's comment and third person narration (1.9.5, narrator), and then to free indirect speech and subjective third person narration (1.9.6, narrator about the entourage's thoughts).

93 Whittaker (1969) 16. On Herodian's enmity towards senators, see Sidebottom (1998) 2794.

94 On their names see D.C. 80[79].20.2–21.3.

95 Notice also ἤχθοντο καὶ ἐδυσφόρουν (5.8.1), the repetitious use of ἠγανάκτουν (5.8.5), ἀγανακτήσαντες (5.8.5, 5.8.8) and of the phrase τὰς ψυχὰς ἐτρώθησαν. Cf. D.C. 80[79].20.2 along with Scheithauer (1990) 343.

96 Cf. 5.8.3, where Herodian claims that Mamaea bribed the soldiers to support her son. For *paideia* in Herodian, see Sidebottom (1998) *passim*.

97 Laporte/Hekster (2021) 102–103 support that Elagabalus' death mirrors his ascension, yet their approach is thematically rather than lexically centred.

98 Chrysanthou (2022) 114, 295–302 points to similarities between Alexander's and Maximinus' soldiers.

rest and execution (συλληφθῆναι [...] πυρὶ παραδοθῆναι). The analogies between the 'philosopher' and the mutineers, who defy their superior to support their desired em peror, and between Perennis and Elagabalus, who promptly take action against their accusers, are noteworthy. The only difference between the two narratives lies in the aim of Commodus' and Elagabalus' soldiers and the perspective of the *kairos.* Commo dus' soldiers wanted to protect their emperor and are presented with a *kairos*, an op portunity arising without their contribution (ἔχοντες), while Elagabalus' soldiers, push ed to their limit, perceived (νομίζοντες) their fellow soldiers' arrest as an opportunity to defend them and bring an end to Elagabalus.[99]

Contrary to these events, *kairos* can also be qualified as ἐπιτήδειος, a suitable time to act, by agents. These cases specifically pertain to conspiracies. According to Scott, Herodian utilises conspiracies as plot types to emphasise the ongoing threat posed by praetorians against emperors. This supports the idea of history repeating itself and praetorians interfering in the sequence of emperors.[100] *Kairos* plays a vital role in conspiracies as it represents the opportune moment conspirators must seize in order to achieve their goals.

The first two case studies are the conspiracies against Commodus which were orchestrated by his sister Lucilla and her lover Quadratus (1.8.5 – 6), and by Maternus (1.10.6 – 7). The motivations behind their endeavours were Lucilla's resentment due to her relegation and Maternus' aspiration to usurp the throne.[101] It is noteworthy that Lucilla and Quadratus hired Quintianus to assassinate Commodus, while Maternus acted alone as the head of the mutineers. Both Quintianus and Maternus exploited public events to target Commodus. Quintianus deemed (ἤλπισε) he had found the suitable time and place (καιρὸν φυλάξαντα καὶ τόπον ἐπιτήδειον), as he was asked to, concealed in the shadows at the entrance of the Flavian Amphitheater. Maternus relied on his cunning and deception (τέχνῃ καὶ σοφίᾳ ἤλπισε), reckoning a festival to be the suitable time to launch his attack on Commodus (ἔδοξε δὴ τῷ Ματέρνῳ καιρὸς ἐπιτήδειος εἶναι), hoping (ἤλπισε) that a masquerade costume would conceal his sudden assault (αἴφνιδίως ἐπιπεσὼν).[102] However, Quintianus' reckless and audacious nature betrayed his abrupt attack (ἐπελθών τε αἰφνιδίως): before attacking Commodus, he shouted that he was sent by the Senate;[103] Maternus' conspiracy was exposed by some of his trusted

99 On Elagabalus' death and its significance, see Kemezis (2016).

100 Scott (2018) esp. 439 – 445 and 450 – 454. Cf. Marasco (1998) 2858 who detects a connection between conspiracies as interpretive narratives of resistance to tyranny and Herodian's own view on tyranny.

101 On the honours transferred from Lucilla to Crispina, see Whittaker (1969) 46 n. 1 and Müller (1996) 311.

102 Rowan (2007) 173 – 174. The festival is identified either with the *Megalesia* in honour of Magna Mater or *Hilaria*, a day in honour of Cybele. The discrepancy should be overlooked: Cybele and Magna Mater were frequently identified (e. g. Jope (1985) on Lucr. 2.600 ff.), and Herodian tends to chronologically merge events, as Sidebottom (1998) 2814 – 2815, Hidber (1999) 159 n. 80 and Chrysanthou (2020) assert. *Pace* Müller (1996) 311.

103 Cf. D.C. 73[72].4.4 who delivers his words in direct speech. On Dio's account about Plautianus and Severus, see Scott (2017) 158 – 159.

associates who were driven by envy and a desire for an emperor rather than a thief, as described to Herodian. Both assassins' hopes were proven wrong; their unexpected attacks failed, and they were both condemned to death.

Kairos is also employed in Plautianus' abortive conspiracy against Septimius Severus and Caracalla (3.11.4–9), yet it is not characterised as either εὔκαιρος or ἐπιτήδειος. Unable to tolerate the demotion imposed by Severus (3.11.4), Plautianus summoned Saturninus, stating: "Now it is the time (νῦν σοι καιρός) to bring the goodwill and loyalty you have always shown me to a magnificent climax, and I will equally reward you as you deserve and grant you a proper favour in return".[104] Plautianus' call to action is based on the premise of Saturninus' unwavering fidelity, the threat of death in case of disobedience, and Saturninus' post as night watchman outside the imperial chambers. Lacking the suitability conveyed by an adjective such as ἐπιτήδειος, Plautianus' otherwise meticulous planning failed due to the tribune's coolheadedness (3.11.8: οὐκ ἔξω φρενῶν καθεστώς), a quality that led Saturninus to disclose the conspiracy to Severus and Caracalla (3.12) after he tricked Plautianus into confessing his capital crime resulting from the overwhelming desire for power.[105]

Macrinus' and Martialis' conspiracy against Caracalla forms the last case (4.13.2–5). After Macrinus discovered Maternianus' accusatory letter to Caracalla, he decided to take action before facing punishment.[106] He found Martialis deeply aggrieved by his brother's unjust execution and insulted by Caracalla. Herodian recounts their conversation in indirect speech, commenting on their mutual loyalty and *clientela:* Macrinus persuaded Martialis to wait for the suitable time to attack Caracalla (καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον παραφυλάξαντα), and Martialis gladly accepted (ἀσμένως ὑπισχνεῖται) to act as soon as he found the right time (καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον εὑρών). The reiteration of καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον in Martialis' response, with only a slight change in the participle form, emphasises the unity between the two conspirators, and foreshadows their success. Indeed, Martialis remained vigilant for a considerable time, as indicated by the plural inflection τοὺς καιροὺς πάντας παραφυλάττων. He achieved his goal when Caracalla, accompanied by a small garrison, was on his way to the temple of Selene outside Carrhae, and decided to relieve himself.[107]

All four conspiracies, those of Quintianus, Maternianus, Plautianus and Macrinus, are driven by the concept of *kairos*, but only Macrinus' is successful. In three of these cases, *kairos* is described as suitable, while in only one (Plautianus' conspiracy) it is characterised as an urgent action through νῦν; a hasty order nonetheless that led to the conspiracy's failure. Initially, Herodian may appear inconsistent, since – while con-

104 Pitcher (2022) 335–336 draws a comparison between this speech and Candaules' in Hdt. 1.11.2.
105 See Kemezis (2021) 38–39 on the change of focalisation; Pitcher (2022) 343–344 on Saturninus' speech as entrapment. On the trustworthiness of Herodian's account, see notes in Whittaker (1969) 335, 337; Alföldy (1971) 438; Scott (2018) 450–454.
106 An emphasis spotted by Chrysanthou (2022) 280 with n. 124 also in Dio.
107 Scott (2018) 449. Scott (2012) offers a thorough analysis, esp. p. 28 for the transference of motives between the two conspirators.

spiracies that unfold at a favorable time usually fail – Macrinus' conspiracy, despite occurring at an opportune moment, succeeds where previous ones did not. In fact, the repetition of vocabulary in the first two conspiracies highlights their lack of success, foreshadowing the tumultuous relationships between Commodus and his family, companions, and subjects. Herodian does not conceal the reasons for their failures: Quintianus' reckless character, and the thieves' envy towards Maternus' potential rise to power.[108] On the other hand, both Plautianus and Macrinus aimed to usurp the throne and relied on their subordinates, Saturninus and Martialis respectively. Both had a plan in mind since their accomplices were close to the emperor. The crucial distinction between the mental and emotional attributes of the accomplices is vital for the conspiracy's success. Saturninus remains composed and informs Severus, while Martialis is driven by his hatred for Caracalla and his grief over his brother's loss. Macrinus' conspiracy is narrated in a way that emphasises like-mindedness, patience and vigilance, virtues demonstrated by Martialis. Furthermore, Herodian's technique of not using ἐπιτήδειος from Plautianus' conspiracy and adding it in Macrinus' one increases the suspense concerning the Severan Dynasty. Readers would anticipate Caracalla being saved by his guard, just as Severus was years ago by Saturninus' intervention and Caracalla's impulsiveness (3.13.11), given that no conspiracy thrived during an ἐπιτήδειος καιρός. However, Herodian emphasises to his readers that the suitability of time exists only when one remains vigilant and committed in their role.

4 Spatial Aspect

The introduction briefly mentioned the use of *kairos* in its spatial meaning. In classical-era texts the adjective καίριος is used to connote the timely suitable advent of characters (e. g. Iocasta in S. *OT* 631) or the suitability of a topic (e. g. Hdt. 1.125; X. *Cyr.* 4.2.12). The adverb καιρίως conveys both a temporal and a spatial aspect, even in the same text (e. g. A. *A.* 1344 and 1372 where καιρίως means 'fatally' and 'at the right time' respectively). In *Ab excessu divi Marci*, Herodian conveys only the spatial meanings of these two words. Compared to the other uses of *kairos*-expressions, which signify the opportunity or suitable time to act, καίριος and καιρίως signify the outcome of the deed itself. Herodian organises his work effectively in relation to this concept, using these words with distinct meanings: that of the accurate blow and that of the subsequent fatality.[109] He employs the adjective καίριος twice, specifically as a feminine qualifying the noun πληγὴ, and καιρίως once as an adverb of manner in a death scene. All instances indicate the perpetrator's accuracy.

108 It is noteworthy that only Marcia and Eclectus' conspiracy thrived, as they wasted no time and acted pre-emptively to avoid being checked out of Commodus' death list (1.17.7, οὐδὲ καιρὸν εἶναι μελλήσεως ἢ ἀναβολῆς). See Marasco (1998) 2906.

109 Cf. e. g. Plb. 2.69.2 where καιρίως means 'mortally', not 'lethally'.

4.1 Animals' Wounds

The first case is Commodus' participation in the *Ludi Romani* (1.15.2–4). As Müller states, Herodian's alleged eyewitness account of the event (τότε γοῦν εἴδομεν ὅσα ἐν γραφαῖς ἐθαυμάζομεν) is "hochinteressant und anschaulich".[110] According to Herodian, the arena was surrounded by an elevated fence, providing Commodus with protection in close combat (συστάδην) with the animals and a secure platform from which he could attack from above without any risk (ἄνωθεν δὲκαὶ ἐξ ασφαλοῦς). Herodian divides the animals into two groups: A) deer, roes, and other horned animals, except bulls; B) lions, leopards and other fierce animals. Commodus ran alongside group A (συνθέων αὐτοῖς καὶ καταδιώκων). Upon reaching them, he struck them causing lethal wounds (ἔβαλλε φθάνων τε αὐτῶν τὸν δρόμον καὶ πληγαῖς καιρίοις ἀναιρῶν). Group B animals were struck from above as he ran around the fence (περιθέων ἄνωθεν κατεκόντιζεν).[111]

Commodus inflicted lethal wounds on both groups, but it appears as if his accuracy is stressed only for group A through the use of πληγαῖς καιρίοις. Animals of group B died by a single javelin piercing their forehead or heart as soon as they charged against him (ἅμα γὰρ τῇὸτοῦὸζώου ὁρμῇ). Commodus' precise calculation regarding the animals' movements and his elevated position, which is emphasised twice through ἄνωθεν, provide spatial information that substitute for the use of καίριος and allow for a more concise narrative. According to Herodian's exaggerated claim, Commodus needed only one javelin to produce a fatal wound on an animal, because his sole purpose was to fatally injure an animal (οὐδὲ ἐπ' ἄλλο μέρος ἦλθε τὸ ἀκόντιον τοῦ σώματος). Nevertheless, the historian considered Commodus' performance a demonstration of marksmanship rather than bravery (εὐστοχίας μᾶλλον ἢ ἀνδρείας παρέχοιτο δεῖξιν).[112]

4.2 Geta and Caracalla's Wounds

The second use of καίριος and the *hapax* use of καιρίως pertain to the murders of two brothers, who were also co-emperors.[113] Firstly, Herodian summarises Geta's final moments (4.4.2–3). Caracalla, motivated by his desire to be sole emperor, decided to undertake a daring act rather than to be his brother's victim (διέγνω δρᾶσαί τι ἢ παθεῖν γενναῖον), advancing his cause by sword and slaughter, as his attempts to kill his brother consistently failed. Mortally wounded (καιρίως τρωθείς), Geta died, drenching Julia

110 Müller (1996) 313. See also Whittaker (1969) xxxi–xxxv. Cf. D.C. 73[72].18.3, 20.1 who also claims autopsy. On Herodian's *enargeia*, Hidber (1999) 163–164.

111 The two groups are put into contrast by μὲν οὖν and δὲ. Cf. D.C. 73[72].18.1 for a full description of the arena and the animals involved.

112 On the similarities between Commodus and other emperors, see Chrysanthou (2022) 156 n. 101, 229 n. 148.

113 See Laporte/Hekster (2021) on imperial deaths in Herodian.

Domna's breast with blood (προσχέας τὸ αἷμα τοῖς τῆς μητρὸς στήθεσι). Herodian conveys Geta's direction in a word, προσχέας, meaning 'to pour to', thus indicating that Geta faced his mother. We can imagine Geta curled up in the motherly embrace, having his back turned to his fratricidal brother who struck him somewhere near the neck, hence Domna's blood-soaked breasts as she held Geta.[114]

In the same book, Herodian recounts Caracalla's murder by Martialis (4.13.4–5). In the middle of the journey to the temple of Selene, Caracalla requested a stop to relieve himself, accompanied only by a servant. Martialis seized the moment, as planned with Macrinus, and stabbed Caracalla in the back (ἀπεστραμμένον) with a dagger. The precision of the blow is stressed by the spatial information provided regarding the fatally wounded body part. "Due to the lethal blow to the clavicle (καιρίου δὲ τῆς πληγῆς ἐπὶ τῆς κατακλεῖδος) Antoninus was unexpectedly killed without any protection".

It is rather interesting that Herodian narrates Caracalla's fated death in ironic terms. As Scott observes, Macrinus organised the conspiracy driven by a similar dilemma to what Caracalla had faced when he decided to assassinate Geta: both of them chose to act first rather than wait for the consequences.[115] This places Caracalla on the same level with Macrinus, even if the latter hired Martialis as an accomplice.[116] Caracalla, therefore, needs to be compared with Martialis since both, after killing their target, attempt to flee the crime scene. Herodian uses similar-sounding verbs: Caracalla "jumped out of the room and ran throughout the palace" (προπηδᾷ τοῦ δωματίου θέων, φερόμενός τε δι' ὅλων τῶν βασιλείων); Martialis "as soon as he [sc. Caracalla] fell, jumped on his horse and left" (πεσόντος δὲαὐτοῦὰ(έμ)πηδήσας ἵππῳ ἔφυγεν ὁ Μαρτιάλιος). This places Caracalla on a third level of comparison, this time with his brother Geta. Both turned their backs to their killers, and perished: Julia Domna's maternal embrace failed to shield Geta,[117] while Caracalla was left alone with a passive servant. It may be, also, speculated that both fatal blows landed on similar body parts near the neck. It appears that Caracalla's speech after Geta's assassination (4.4.3–8), in which he profiles himself as the victim of Geta, is ironically reversed: Caracalla can be viewed as a multifaceted personality, since he is both a conspirator, a perpetrator and a victim. The fact that Herodian omits that Elagabalus died in Mamaea's arms, as described by Cassius Dio (80[79].20.2), indicates that he aimed at isolating Geta's death, leaving no room for comparisons, and focusing on the ironic turn of events in Caracalla's assassination.[118]

114 D.C. 78[77].2.4 is lachrymose compared to Herodian. On the *lacuna* of the text in this part, Whittaker (1969) 390–391 n. 2. Cf. Scott (2018) 450–454 who sees similarities between Plautianus' conspiracy against Severus and Caracalla, and Geta's assassination. Cf. Chariton 7.1.2.

115 Scott (2018) 448.

116 Herodian suppresses a mention of the centurions as co-conspirators. Cf. D.C. 78[77].2.3.

117 On Julia Domna's failure to reconcile her sons, and Caracalla's cruelty, see Chrysanthou (2022) 278.

118 For a comparison between Macrinus' conspiracy against Caracalla, and Marcia and Laetus' one against Commodus, see Laporte/Hekster (2021) 97–98.

5 Conclusions

In *Ab excessu divi Marci, kairos* pertains to a qualitatively unique moment seized or lost by humans, it is the environment within which Herodian integrates certain aspects of the 3rd c. CE. Herodian, following his predecessors, utilises the concept both in its literal and its metaphorical meaning to emphasise critical moments or the turning point of events. Employing verbatim or slightly altered expressions, he creates narrative threads which permit him to invite his readers to make connections and comparisons between individuals and events throughout the narrative. The loom of these threads is found in the proem, where Herodian uses Marcus Aurelius' reign contrasted to his narrative time in order to define his historiographical work as a narrative of ἀκαιρίαι.

In relation to the portrayal of candidates for the imperial throne and their claims to power, Herodian employs linguistic motifs and creates two sets of emperors. In the first pair, *kairos* manifests on its own and is not seized by individuals. καθ' ὃν καιρὸν introduces Sulpicianus and Niger's simultaneous attempts, viewed by the external narrator as an opportunity for the praetorians to elect a worthy emperor (Sulpicianus), and Niger to become emperor. Both failed due to external (praetorians' decision) and internal (Niger's inertia) factors, even if they qualified for the throne. In the second pair, *kairos* is seized and viewed retrospectively by Septimius Severus and Maesa because of personal motives: Severus interpreted his dream in his memoirs, and Maesa claimed eyewitness based on her residence at the palace in Rome. Both events originated in the past, yet came to fruition through exploitation of present external factors: Severus incorporated Pertinax's death in his propaganda to rise to power as the dream suggested, and Maesa made the most of the soldiers' greediness and admiration of Elagabalus to convince them of her grandsons' Severan lineage. Both internal narrators probably constructed kairotic events in the interests of their own and the Severan family.

In crisis narratives, *kairos* represents a larger period within which crises unfold, perceived by contemporaries as divine punishments foreshadowing Commodus' demise and the subsequent wars between rival emperors that would beset the Empire. The crises are compressed within the concept of *kairos*, giving the impression that they occurred within a short critical period rather than over a span of almost five years. Contrary to Commodus who detached himself from Rome and his subjects at these critical times, Macrinus accepted the responsibility to face Artabanus' forces, and even highlighted the critical circumstances using a *kairos*-expression, emphasizing the urgent matters that required immediate decision-making. Just like Commodus, though, Macrinus fell victim of his own vices and his praetorian guard.

καιροὶ εὔκαιροι, analysed as events providing a fertile ground for success, are indicated to groups of people either explicitly or implicitly. Only Marcus Aurelius' *consilium principis* fails to follow through on what they were asked to. Herodian thus emphasises the senatorial deficiencies of the time, compared to military prowess

exhibited by Commodus and Elagabalus' entourages who interfere in politics by protecting the former and killing the latter emperor; their success is based on their patience which reaches the last straw at a definite moment. καιροὶ ἐπιτήδειοι are situations with uncertain outcomes that may not necessarily be favourable to the stakeholders. Lucilla and Laetus, Maternus, and Plautianus fail due to their accomplices' characters, while Macrinus, whose accomplice is heavily motivated against Caracalla and in harmony with his plan, succeeds. In conspiracies, seizing *kairos* is a cooperative effort demanding perfect circumstances. The difference between εὔκαιρος and ἐπιτήδειος καιρὸς lies in their natures: ἐπιτήδειος is a time waited for or the expectance of an εὐκαιρία; εὔκαιρος is the final stage demanding action. It is evident, then, that tracking and seizing the *kairos* is aided by emotional states: both Commodus and Elagabalus' soldiers, and Martialis succeed because they were enraged with their victims.[119]

Uses of *kairos* with its spatial meaning signify the outcome of deeds and the accuracy of blows delivered by the perpetrators. Comparison between Geta's and Caracalla's successive assassinations reveals how Herodian manipulates imperial stories for the sake of dramatization. Readers would cheer for Commodus' victories over animals and feel sorrow for Julia Domna's loss of a child in her own arms; they would even feel pity for Caracalla's death by a literal back-stab while relieving himself. In the end, the uses of *kairos* with spatial meaning occur only in slaughter scenes, either of animals or of emperors. Could that be a hint from Herodian that emperors are raised like animals led to slaughter?

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119 Cf. Moutsopoulos (2007) 45.

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