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The Spatial Dimension of Politics in Herodian's *Historia*

1 Introduction

According to Herodian, the very beginning of Commodus' reign did not differ much from that of his father, with the new emperor staying at the imperial border, waging war and mainly following the advice of Marcus Aurelius' friends (1.6.1). However, Commodus' companions convince the young emperor to leave the war unfinished and return to Rome in order to indulge in different sorts of pleasures (1.6.1–2). Concealing his true motive, Commodus justifies his decision to leave the frontier by his fear that "one of the wealthy nobles in Rome would seize the seat of empire and then make a bid for power from his fortified citadel, by collecting forces and resources" (1.6.3).[1] Then, the emperor's advisor Ti. Claudius Pompeianus delivers a speech in which, among other things, he responds to Commodus' concerns with a statement that "Rome is where the emperor is" (1.6.5: ἐκεῖ ὅτε ἡ Ῥώμη, ὅπου ποτ᾽ ἂν ὁ βασιλεὺς ᾖ). This formula, which is presented as an axiom by a person associated with the era of Marcus Aurelius, soon proves not to be working in Herodian's turbulent post-Marcus world. Ironically, what is depicted by the author as the young Commodus' pretended fear, somewhat irrelevant to the realities of the beginning of the emperor's reign, would be well suited for the subsequent times of social unrest and power struggle, the depiction of which constitutes the main fabric of Herodian's work.[2]

According to Pitcher, Herodian, as a military historiographer and a historian of internecine strife, pays special attention to the problems of control over space, especially over the borders of the empire. For example, he highlights the situation in border areas, as well as changes in the topography of the borders and Italy, with the spatial data having thematic, symbolic, and characterizing functions within the narrative. According to Pitcher, Herodian imparts symbolic meaning, or "the symbolic charge", to certain locations. Rome and Antioch are represented as the centers of luxury and entertainment (1.6.1–2, 3.14.2, 2.8.9), Italy is associated with idleness and defenselessness (2.11.3,6), while military valor, simplicity and purity of morals are found mainly at the edges of the empire.[3]

In the wake of Pitcher's observations on this "moral geography" Kemezis has examined Herodian's depiction of the emperor's movements in space, whether it be mili-

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tary campaigns or changes of location in the city or its surroundings, as a reflection of the development of imperial policy under the Severans. Unlike their predecessors, the Severans could not afford to stay in Rome and Italy for long periods due to the growing threat to the borders of the empire. Expeditions became the norm, and staying in the capital was almost an exception. Under these conditions, the institution of imperial power moves from Rome to various border areas, and the location of the emperor varies between the center and the periphery. Since it is Roman rulers or claimants for the supreme power that occupy the central place in Herodian's narrative, the "scene" on which events unfold moves from Rome to the borders and back. According to Kemezis, Herodian demonstrates how the spatial factor, in particular the imperial movements, influenced the habits and style of government of nearly all the emperors after Marcus Aurelius.[4] He gives several examples. Herodian's representation of the rule of Elagabalus and Alexander Severus is considered to be a kind of "diptych" – the story of two young men whose reigns end in disaster, after one of them moves from the periphery to the center, and the other – from the center to the periphery. In both cases Herodian appears to demonstrate the ruinous inconsistency of the behavior of these rulers with the changed situation. As has been suggested by Kemezis, the history of the reign of Commodus and Caracalla is represented in a similar fashion. Commodus departs from the Danube to Rome after the death of his father, Caracalla travels from Rome to the border and to the provinces after the murder of his brother. In both cases this shift means the beginning of the emperor's self-destruction, since it is marked by his withdrawal from reality and self-isolation. Furthermore, even when some emperors, such as Pertinax and Julianus, do not leave Rome, their career has a spatial dimension in Herodian's narrative. Rome in this case turns out to be a miniature model of the emperors' movements between the "center" and the "periphery". Kemezis' general conclusion is that emperors, as the main actors, often find themselves in the wrong place and at the wrong time, thereby generating critical, often disastrous situations for themselves. This demonstrates the contrast between the idealized rule of Marcus Aurelius as the personification of a bygone era, when the dividing lines between the center and the periphery had not yet arisen, and the times of dysfunctionality contemporary to the author.

This picture has been recently added to by Schettino who has revealed the narrative functions of the political topography of Rome in Herodian's work,[5] as well as by Ruiz del Árbol Moro who has demonstrated that borders and the definition of limits, such as mountains and rivers, play an important role in the construction of Herodian's history,[6] and also by Mecella who has pointed to the "symbolic topography" of Italy and Rome as one of the main threads of Herodian's work.[7]

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4 Kemezis (2014) 245, 248–249, 251.
5 Schettino (2017).
6 Ruiz del Árbol Moro (2022) 264.
7 Mecella (2022) 297.

Thus, Kemezis' thought-provoking conclusions have been generally accepted by scholars, though there are still some questions to consider. As Makhlaiuk remarks in his review of the monograph, Kemezis' "approach yields conclusions that seem to be somewhat exaggerated. He claims that the success or failure of principle characters and even the general fate of the empire are determined by geographical and cultural differences between imperial center and periphery. So, for example, Alexander Severus' failure is said to be mainly the result of his movement from his natural environment in Rome to the uncongenial atmosphere of the frontier (248 – 9); and even in the cases of Pertinax and Julian, who never left Rome, there is still a geographical aspect to their careers (251). It is difficult to get rid of the impression that Kemezis here is importing his own interpretive constructs and scheme into the ancient historian's text, rather than revealing the genuine intentions of its author".[8] One of the issues highlighted by Makhlaiuk is Herodian's consistency in applying specific instances of the center-periphery dichotomy as an explanatory framework for depicting the successes or failures of Roman politicians. Can one really claim that, from Herodian's point of view, the geographical contrast between Rome and the edges of the empire decisively shaped actions and reactions of the emperors and claimants to the imperial throne? More importantly, is it possible to trace the correlation between the spatial dimension of the activities of the Roman emperors and other factors of politics, including the relations and communication between the emperor and various social groups? Evidently, Herodian regarded the necessity to cultivate the support of the army, the senate, and the people of Rome and the provinces as a key factor of imperial politics.[9] In this respect, some important observations have been recently made by Mecella who shows how landscape and topographic details are employed by the author to emphasize the unity of the Italian population and its determination to resist Maximinus' army in 238.[10] It appears that a similar approach can be applied to some other episodes of Herodian's history, especially the 190s wars of succession. Indeed, if one assumes that Herodian creates his own "narrative world", where the Roman Empire is depicted as a historical scene on which the events unfold,[11] it is tempting to take a closer look at, figuratively speaking, what the stage decorations are and how they correlate with the role of the historical characters and their performances.

Evidently, such an approach implies that Herodian might use narrative techniques characteristic of fictional genres.[12] On the other hand, Kemezis' conclusion that Herodian's "world is made to seem like a closed domain whose topography a sovereign author can shape as he pleases"[13] raises a question about the scope and scale of fictionalism of Herodian's work and its correlation with the generic features of classical

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[8] Makhlaiuk (2015).

[9] Roberto (2017) 181; Davenport/Mallan (2020) 420 – 421, 432; Motta (2022) 174.

[10] Mecella (2017) 192 – 202; Mecella (2022) 280 – 289.

[11] For Herodian's *oikumêne* as "a theatre stage", see Molinier Arbo (2018) 189, 194.

[12] Kemezis (2022) 22.

[13] Kemezis (2022) 28.

historiography, in particular with the idea that the task of a historian is to tell the truth about the past and to provide the audience with trustworthy and reliable information, as in some degree distinguishing history from a poetic narrative based on fiction (Arist. *Poet*. 9.1451b1; Plb. 1.14.5–6, 2.56.12; Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 8–9). In a Thucydidean manner, Herodian emphasizes his intention to provide the reader with well attested data (1.1.3, 1.2.5).[14] However, modern scholars are generally reluctant to recognize that Herodian wrote the same sort of narrative as Thucydides did,[15] with the former's work being characterized as a piece of "biographic",[16] "rhetorical",[17] "tragic"[18] historiography or a "a sort of historical novel,"[19] rather than true *historia*.[20] On the other hand, when Herodian claims to be narrating events that fall within the recent memory of his readers, he appeals to the communicative memory of his contemporaries as a check on his reliability as a historian.[21] Consequently, he is unlikely to fictionalize his narrative to such a level that would make it sound unrealistic to the audience. Therefore, it is quite possible that Herodian's descriptions of landscapes and regional particularities, characteristic of ancient historians since the time of Herodotus, were not entirely fictional. On the other hand, the author appears to be elaborating on the materials of his sources, which is indicated by his appeal to selectivity in dealing with geography and topographic details of the emperors' movements (2.15.6–7). Therefore, this paper aims to reveal guiding principles to understand Herodian's choices of spatial categories in order to shed more light on the narrative functions of geographic and topographic details in the author's depiction of Roman political life.

2 Herodian's Rome: The Historical Scene and the Historian's Space

Herodian provides his readers with quite a vivid depiction of the aftermath of Commodus' assassination (2.2). The imperial power is offered to Pertinax and, early in the morning, he is on his way to the praetorian camp. Meanwhile, having learned about Commodus' death, the residents of Rome share the news with their neighbors, rush

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14 For Herodian's use of literary *topoi*, especially Thucydides' considerations on method (1.21–22), in the proem, see Hidber (2006) 72–73, 77–78, 94; Hidber (2007) 198; Galimberti (2014) 33; Kemezis (2022) 23.

15 Sidebottom (1998) 2820; Kemezis (2022) 24.

16 Widmer (1967) 11 n. 33.

17 Kolb (1972) 161 n. 772.

18 Marasco (1998) 2904. For Herodian's *opus* as an example of "mimetisch-dramatischen Historiographie", see Lendle (1992) 257.

19 Alföldy (1971) 431. Sidebottom (1998) 2829–2830.

20 For a more balanced view on the Herodian's work as a history influenced by various genres, see Laporte's chapter in this volume.

21 Galimberti (2022) 1.

to the temples and altars, give thanks to the gods and shout all sorts of joyful exclamations. Many of them run swiftly to the praetorian camp in order to make sure that Pertinax is accepted by the praetorians as an emperor, and, finally, when the proclamation ceremony is over, the usual oaths are sworn and sacrifices performed. All the people together with the praetorians fetch laurel branches and escort Pertinax to the imperial palace.

According to Kemezis, the details of the episode are basically fictional,[22] a result of Herodian's treatment of the analogous scene of public reactions to Commodus' death in Dio (74[73].2).[23] He employs the comparison with Dio to identify the specifics of Herodian, especially in his representation of the movements of Pertinax and Julianus from the palace to the praetorian camp and back as a center-periphery dichotomy reproduced "in miniature": the characters of Dio's work move from one place to another "automatically" (74[73].11.2), while Herodian gives details of the route of Pertinax and Julianus through the streets of Rome from the *domus* of the princeps to the praetorian camp, and then to the imperial palace, mentioning participants in processions, the reaction of the crowd, etc. (2.2.10, 2.6.6 – 7, 2.6.12 – 13).[24] As has been recently added by Mecella, the praetorian camp might be viewed by Herodian as "the tangible border between urban civilization and the barbarism of the army".[25]

It is evident that Herodian contrasts the praetorians with the Roman populace, also there is no doubt that the cohort's camp (*castra praetoria*) and other places in Rome mentioned by the author (the *domus* of the princeps, the seat of the Senate, the Flavian Amphitheater and the Circus Maximus), could have symbolic value, as has been persuasively shown by Mecella.[26] However, the conceptual meaning of the spatial details of the Pertinax and Julianus episodes appears to be questionable. Even if we assume that the *Palatium*, definitely a symbol of imperial power,[27] could really be associated by Herodian with the "center",[28] the identification of the praetorian camp with the "periphery", i. e. the border territories, does not appear to correlate fully with the direct opposition of the "Pannonian" army of Septimius Severus to the praetorians, whom the author credits as being associated with Rome and Italy, especially in narrating the aftermath of Julianus' death (2.9.8, 2.10.2).

Apparently, the key point of this discussion is Herodian's treatment of Dio. The current trend among scholars is the presumption that Cassius Dio's "Roman History" was the main written source for Herodian's first five books, with Herodian's deviations

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22 A similar conclusion has been made by Andrews who regards all Herodian's depictions of the 193 CE processions in Rome and Antioch as formulaic scenes. See Andrews (2019) 137–144.

23 Kemezis (2022) 34.

24 Kemezis (2014) 251.

25 Mecella (2022) 293.

26 Mecella (2022) 291.

27 Schettino (2017); Mecella (2022) 290.

28 Besides, Herodian represents importance of the Forum as the center of Roman power (4.2.4 – 5). See Mecella (2022) 296.

from this *Hauptquelle* being explained mostly by the author's narrative preferences, actually his suppression, expansion, alteration, or even distortion of Dio's text rather than his use of different sources.[29] However, from a methodological point of view, the *Hauptquellentheorie* can hardly be regarded as unquestionable, given the fact that all other potential Severan era narratives (such as Marius Maximus, Asinius Quadratus or Septimius Severus' autobiography) have not survived and, consequently, one cannot say for sure whether Herodian borrowed some facts or interpretative frameworks directly from Dio or a common source for both authors.[30] More importantly, it is surprising that Herodian, who is temporally close to the chosen period and cites as an advantage his ability to write a history based on what he "saw and heard" in his lifetime or had personal knowledge of (1.2.5, 2.15.7),[31] is not allowed to rely on his own eyewitness evidence. Of course, Dio's *Roman History* could be known to Herodian and the latter might use it as *hypomnema*,[32] but, on the other hand, Galimberti is right when questioning the dependence of Herodian on Dio and arguing that the idea of Herodian as a one-source historian devalues the author's own stance towards the events he describes.[33]

Having said that, I believe that Herodian's increased attention to the scenes on the streets of Rome might be directly related to his sources. It is difficult, though not entirely impossible, to suppose the scenes taking place on the streets of Rome in times of Pertinax and Julianus are based on the author's own observations, because Herodian might have been too young to have clear memories of those events,[34] and, importantly, Herodian's descriptions of Rome's topography is too vague to suppose that the author spent much of his lifetime in the city.[35] However, Herodian shares with his reader several eyewitness impressions of events that happened in Rome at various times. For example, he refers to his presence at the games held by Commodus in 192 CE and the opportunity to see the strange animals there (1.15.4: "species which we had admired in pictures but saw for the first time on that occasion [τότε γοῦν εἴδομεν ὅσα ἐν γραφαῖς ἐθαυμάζομεν]").[36] He also witnessed various sights during the celebration of the Secular Games in 204 CE (3.8.10), as well as seeing some "ludicrous" double-faced images which Caracalla ordered set up in Rome in order to emphasize his links with Alexand-

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29 Alföldy (1971); Alföldy (1989) 70; Kolb (1972) 74–76; Sidebottom (1998) 2781–2782; Zimmermann (1999b) 7, 324; Scott (2018) 455; Chrysanthou (2020) 621–622. For an overview of the discussion, see Scott (2023) 146–147.

30 Baaz (1909) 61–62; Barnes (1975) 372; Hidber (2006) 60.

31 For Herodian's intention to employ eyewitness data, see Hidber (2007) 197; Galimberti (2014) 15–16.

32 Hidber (2006) 69.

33 Galimberti (2014) 15–17.

34 Most likely, Herodian was born in the last years of Marcus Aurelius' reign. See Galimberti (2014) 10.

35 Hidber (2006) 7. For the "provincial" perspective of Herodian's work, see Sidebottom (1998) 2824; Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 224; Mecella (2022) 280.

36 Some scholars regard these word as indicating to Herodian's own experience (Kuhn-Chen [2002] 249 n. 1), while the others believe the passage was entirely copied from Cassius Dio (Kolb [1972] 24–34; Alföldy [1989] 241–242; Zimmerman [1999b] 285).

er (4.8.2). Importantly, in all these cases Herodian associates himself with ordinary spectators of the events walking down the streets of Rome and attending public festivities.[37] Besides, his *History* is replete with references to rumors and gossip,[38] which is also relevant to the Pertinax (2.1.6, 2.4.1, 2.6.1) and Julianus (2.7.2, 2.7.5) sections of his work. Notably, the people of Rome learn about Commodus' death and Pertinax' move towards the praetorian camp because Laetus and Eclectus send out their trusted men to spread the rumor about it (2.2.2–3). The author also points to the particular place where hearsay was circulated in those times (2.7.3: "At the circus, where the people principally gather to express their opinions [...] [ἔς τε τὸν ἱππόδρομον, ὅπου μάλιστα τὸ πλῆθος συνιὸν ἐκκλησιάζει]").

The origin and social standing of Herodian has long been a matter of discussion,[39] though he is generally not supposed to be a high-ranking senator like, for example, Cassius Dio.[40] The latter shares with his readers his own memory of the day when Pertinax became emperor (74[73].1.4). Pertinax enters the senate-house and greets the senators, at least those who managed to make their way to the emperor through the throng. He delivers a brief speech, and the senators finally give him their approbation. It is not surprising that Dio remembers the arrival of Pertinax to the senate building that night. As for Herodian, he focuses on the spectacular details of what was happening in the public space of Rome that day.[41] Therefore, he seems to reflect (though it is possible he wants his audience to believe he reflects) the view of an ordinary spectator, be it the author himself or his contemporaries, familiar with the *urbs* and its population, communicating with eyewitnesses and representing his or other people's impressions of extraordinary and dynamic events on the streets of Rome in the mutinous 190s CE.

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37 Hidber (2006) 6.

38 For the anonymous sources in Herodian, see Galimberti (2014) 19; Chrysanthou (2020) 623 and Chrysantou's contribution to this volume.

39 Herodian's mention of his "imperial and public service" (1.2.5: ἐν βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις) has let scholars to identify him as an imperial freedman or son of a freedman (Widmer [1967] 69–70; Alföldy [1989] 263–269, 272; de Blois [1998] 3415; Marasco [1998] 2838–2839), someone connected with lower classes of the Roman society (Widmer [1967] 70; Alföldy [1989] 276; Scheithauer [2000] 32; Mazzarino [1990] 204); a representative of the Greek civic elites (Zimmermann [1999a] 142; Mecella [2022] 280), "a procurator who later rose to equestrian rank" (Buongiorno [2022] 203), and even a newly appointed senator (Molinier Arbo [2021] 216–219). For Herodian trying, as far as possible, to remain anonymous regarding his social position and professional activities in order to produce an impression of impartiality or for his safety see Hidber (2006) 10; Kemezis (2022) 41–40.

40 Andrews (2019) 137; Buongiorno (2022) 203; Mecella (2022) 280. However, Arbo finds Herodian's ideas "closer than is generally assumed to those of senators like Pliny and Cassius Dio, who defended an openly senatorial ideology" (Arbo [2022] 126).

41 According to Galimberti, Herodian is interested in the spectacular nature of the events of Commodus' rule (Galimberti [2014] 17). For a "plebeian" interpretation of Herodian's description of the imperial proclamation of Pertinax, see Mazzarino (1990) 206–207.

3 The Divided Empire: Geographical and Ethnic Specifics as a Factor of Politics

Herodian appears to be demonstrating accentuated differences between Rome and the individual regions and explaining political processes by geographical, cultural-geographical, or purely ethnic specifics of certain territories.[42] An example is the narrative of the wars of succession in the 190s. Thus, according to Herodian, the Pannonian troops consist of people of Illyricum (2.9.1),[43] and therefore the traits of the local population are attributed to them: on the one hand, physical strength, endurance and bloodthirstiness, and on the other hand, excessive credulity and an inability to recognize treachery (2.9.11).[44] The latter feature is what Septimius Severus took advantage of when pretending that he needed imperial power in order to avenge Pertinax (2.9.11) who had given the local population a good impression of himself when he commanded troops in Illyricum (2.9.8 – 9). Consequently, the Pannonians' motivation for supporting Septimius Severus has evident regional specifics. Via his Septimius Severus Herodian opposes the Pannonian army to the "Italians", as well as the "Syrians" under the command of Niger (2.10.5,7). The successful advance of Septimius Severus' troops is also explained not so much by Julianus' unpopularity as by the local specifics, namely the loss of combat capability by the population. From Herodian's point of view, it would be natural if the locals resisted the invasion of the Pannonians, but they do not dare, because they do not know how to fight (2.11.3 – 6). The thesis that Italy and its natives are not prepared to fight on the battlefield reappears in Herodian's narrative of Maximinus' Italian campaign,[45] in particular the siege of Aquileia by his army (8.2.4, 7.8.6). In this case, the author ignores the fact that Aquileia was besieged by the Marcomanni 70 years before the events described (Amm. Marc. 29.6.1), and it is difficult to believe that Herodian was not aware of that.[46] Thus, in the descriptions of the campaigns of the two Pannonian military commanders to Italy, a similar literary cliche is used. However, Italy is not the only part of the empire where the population lost combat skills. The same fate befell the Greeks (3.2.8). Their peculiarity is "mutual jealousy, envy, and hatred".[47] This is how the author explains the discord and strife in the east of the empire after the victory of Septimius Severus over Pescennius Niger at the Battle of Cyzicus (3.2.7).

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[42] For commonplaces and peculiarities in Herodian's representation of provincials, see Pitcher (2018) 237–238; Molinier Arbo (2018) 187–188; Bérenger (2022).

[43] For Herodian making "no distinction between military camp and area of recruitment", see Bérenger (2022) 231.

[44] Marasco (1998) 2877–2880.

[45] Maximinus is represented by Herodian as a ruler of the Pannonians and the Thracians rather than the Romans (7.8.10 – 11; 8.6.1). See Mecella (2017) 193; Bérenger (2022) 235.

[46] Hidber (2006) 260.

[47] Herodian's historical criticism of the Greeks is scrutinized by Asirvatham in this volume.

Pescennius Niger, in turn, is represented as the ruler of the "Syrians" (2.7.4). He manages easily to gain their support in the upcoming struggle for power because, firstly, the Syrians have a fickle character and are always ready to upset the established order, and, secondly, due to their innate propensity for festivities and fun. The Syrians favor Niger for the constant spectacles and holidays they were provided with by him (2.7.9–10). In the end, according to Herodian, it is the local specifics that contribute largely to Niger's destruction, namely his tendency to idleness and those amusements to which he indulges together with the Antiochians (2.8.9).[48]

Albinus commands the "Britons" (2.15.1). The Battle of Lugdunum is considered to be a confrontation of the "Britons" and the "Illyrians", who are not inferior to each other in bravery and bloodlust, and therefore the outcome of the battle remained uncertain for a long time (3.7.2). It is obvious that the regional features of the Illyrians and Britons are depicted very schematically, and, consequently, the population of these border territories is represented by the author as people of the same sort. The simplicity and severity of their morals in a number of episodes is directly opposed to the luxury of the imperial capital (1.6.6, 1.7.1, 4.7.1; cf.: 3.10.4). By contrast, Rome and Italy are marked by idleness, gluttony (1.6.1), or the ambition of noble patricians (1.6.3), cowardice and the lack of *virtus* (7.8.6). Another example of the same kind is the characterization of the Carthaginians (7.9.5). The author associates changes in the lifestyle of the historical center of the empire with the achievement of hegemony over other peoples and, as a consequence, the lack of necessity for military training (2.11.6, 8.2.4). Such a representation of the degradation of a community under particular circumstances echoes to some extent the doctrine of the moral decline which can be found in Herodotus' anecdotal explanation of the Persians staying in harsh conditions of their country instead of occupying more favorable places (Hdt. 9.122), Plato's theoretical reflections (*Lg.* 830–832), as well as in various interpretations of the Roman republican history (Plb. 6.57.5; Sal. *Cat.* 6–12). However, unlike the Latin *metus hostilis* tradition, Herodian defines Augustus' rule as the watershed in Roman history.[49] Besides, his typology of public *mores* is based on spatial rather than temporal categories, i.e. on contrasting some of the border territories to the protected area of the *orbis terrarum.*

What follows from Herodian's specific interpretations of the realities of the civil wars of the 190s is the fragmentation of the imperial political agenda and the emergence of several separate centers of political decision-making,[50] all the more so given that Herodian refers to Julianus, Niger and Albinus as "three reigning emperors

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48 For the particularities of Herodian's depiction of Niger's communication with the people of Antioch, see Bérenger (2022) 224.

49 See also Asirvatham's chapter in this volume.

50 According to Molinier Arbo, Herodian accentuates the division lines within *orbis terrarum* when representing the war of Severus with Niger as a conflict between Europe and Asia (2.8.7; 2.14.7) or when mentioning the plan of partitioning the Empire by Caracalla and Geta (4.3.5–8). See Molinier Arbo (2018) 195–197. For Herodian demonstrating that Italy was no longer always the center of the Empire, see Ruiz del Árbol Moro (2022) 262.

(τρεῖς […] βασιλέας ἤδη κρατοῦντας)" (3.7.8). Such a perspective from a mid-third century author implies that, already in those times, Rome could not necessarily be where the emperor was. On the other hand, Herodian is far from representing all the edges of the empire as homogeneous. The East, Syria in particular, characterized by the effeminacy and idleness of its population, in terms of cultural and geographical specifics, is closer to the capital rather than the northern regions.[51] Furthermore, in one of the episodes, Rome is opposed to Antioch in much the same way that Pannonia is opposed to Italy. This is Severus' preparation for a military campaign against Niger. The latter is inactive and wastes his time in luxurious living in Antioch, while his opponent is preparing an unexpected blow, with Italy becoming the center of the formation of the army, in which young men from Italian cities are conscripted (2.14.6), and the triremes available in Italy are involved (2.14.7). Similarly, in 238 CE, Maximus chooses generals and calls up men for service from all parts of Italy (7.12.1, 8.6.5) which, in fact, becomes a matter of concern for Maximinus' troops (8.5.6). Alexander Severus' preparation for the Eastern campaign also implies the enlisting of "selected warriors" from various regions, including Italy (4.3.2). Thus, Herodian can be optimistic about the military capabilities of the population of Italy.

The fragmentation of the empire is accentuated by the author not only through the depiction of the regional political agendas, but also via the demonstration of the dividing lines between various social groups and primarily between the soldiers and the rest of the population.[52] The nature of the soldiers' participation in politics changes after the proclamation of Julianus as emperor. It was then that "the character of the soldiers (τὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἤθη) was corrupted for the first time; they acquired their insatiable and disgraceful lust for money and their contempt for the sanctity of the emperor", which resulted in revolts and assassinations in later times (2.6.14).[53] This is how the author comments on the action of the imperial bodyguards. On the other hand, Herodian provides a detailed account of how nearly all subsequent emperors were killed by various groups of Roman soldiers, not exclusively the praetorians. Therefore, the author's remark on the changing "character of the soldiers" might be relevant to the transformation of the attitudes of the armed forces to the imperial power. From that very moment, which was a triggering one, they started playing a key role in the overthrow and appointment of new rulers. In any event, such a depiction of the soldiers largely coincides with some of Cassius Dio's considerations on the issue of *disciplina militaris* (68.3.3, 78[77].4.1ᵃ, 80[79].18.4, 80[80].2.2; 80[80].4.1 – 5.1).

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51 Herodian might have drawn a parallel between the 190s and 230s when Maximinus Thrax, who never went to Rome during his entire reign. For Herodian's interpretation of the events of 238 CE in light of those of 193, see Mecella (2022) 284.

52 For Herodian being focused rather on describing the symptoms than on finding the origins, see Kemezis (2014) 360; Davenport/Mallan (2020) 420.

53 Cf. the motives of the soldiers killing Severus Alexander (6.8.4).

4 Political Failures and Space of a Failed Politician

One can hardly deny that, according to Herodian, Alexander Severus' troubles begin after the emperor finds himself outside Italy. The image of Alexander's peaceful and serene life in the capital is clearly idealized because, judging by other sources, Rome, due to the rebelliousness of the praetorians, was not such a safe place for the emperor, especially after the death of Ulpian. Herodian, on the other hand, considers the first thirteen years of Alexander's stay in power as a period of stable, impeccable governance of the state (6.2.1). The end of this era is marked by Ardashir's invasion of Mesopotamia (6.2.1–2). Alexander's inability to cope with the situation, the "great confusion" with which the emperor meets the news from the East, is explained by the fact that the ruler "had spent his entire life in urban ease and comfort" (6.2.3).[54] The main motive for the murder of Alexander Severus is his inappropriate behavior in a particular situation: instead of decisive actions against the Germans, he indulges in luxury and enjoys chariot riding, shows slowness, indecision and lack of courage, which in turn does not bring any benefits to the soldiers (6.7.10, 6.8.4, 6.9.4). Nevertheless, the life and style of Alexander's rule is represented primarily as a result of his upbringing by Syrian women and a consequence of their maintaining control over the emperor (6.8.3, 6.9.4), which correlates quite well with Herodian's characterization of the propensity for luxury and enjoyment as a trait not only of the metropolitan life, but a phenomenon characteristic of the cities of the eastern part of the empire (2.7.10).[55] Furthermore, Alexander appears to be one of those emperors or pretenders to the throne (Julianus, Niger, Macrinus, Severus Alexander, Gordian I) who, according to Herodian, fail because of their own inaction.[56]

Much has recently been written about Herodian's deployment of a gallery of imperial portraits represented as recognizable character types,[57] as well as typification and parallelism in Herodian's depictions of the falls of various rulers.[58] Some of the spatial details of Herodian's narration about those leaders who lost their power, especially in the periods of *staseis*, appear to be among the author's narrative devices.

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54 As appears, Herodian underscores the historical situation at the eastern borders of the Empire and distorts historical evidence when depicting Alexander Severus as a weak and indecisive ruler, alien to matters of war. See Roberto (2017) 167.

55 Another example of Herodian's demonstration of an emperor's inconsistency with the environment in which he found himself is the narrative of the reign of Elagabalus, most of which consists of a description of the emperor's performance of Phoenician religious rites, including performances and orgies introduced by the emperor into the public life of Rome (5.5–6). The main reason for the death of Elagabalus is the desire of the military to eliminate the obscenely behaved sovereign (5.8.8), which demonstrates the fatal role of cultural and regional inconsistencies.

56 Chrysanthou (2022) 316–317.

57 Pitcher (2018) 249; Kemezis (2022) 30–31; Chrysanthou (2022) 90.

58 Scott (2018); Laporte/Hekster (2022) 89.

According to Pitcher, "the career of Commodus is perhaps the most extended exploration of the possibilities of symbolic geography in the text of Herodian".[59] It can be added here that this "symbolic geography" correlates with the issue of his communication with various groups of the population. Indeed, according to Herodian, the emperor's self-destruction begins when he arrives in Rome from Pannonia. Commodus' guides to the realm of luxury and idleness are the imperial freedmen, who tempt him with stories about Italian wealth, and make him abandon his previous modest lifestyle in the border province (1.6.1–2). Thus, initially, the issue of Commodus' inner circle turns out to be at the heart of the problematic of his reign.[60] The representation of freedmen (see also 1.13.1) fits well with the traditions of the Roman imperial historiography (Sen. *Ben.* 2.5.1–2; 3.23.5; Plin. *Pan.* 88.2–3; D.C. 52.37.5). At the same time, there are more political and social implications of the emperor's movements. The successor of Marcus Aurelius begins to rule a state in which both the senate, the army, and the entire people support the ruler (1.6–7). After a series of conspiracies, the emperor moves away from the people (1.11.5): "After his escape from Maternus' plot, Commodus surrounded himself with a stronger guard and rarely appeared in public, spending most of his time avoiding legal and imperial business away in the suburban districts or on his imperial estates far away from Rome." During the events connected with the conspiracy of Cleander, Commodus "was living on the outskirts of the city (ἐν προαστείῳ)", and was not only unaware of the situation, but also forbade anyone to report to him about the issues (1.12.5–6). Thus, at a certain stage, the emperor finds himself outside Rome. He is removed from the real political process, while the conspiracy of Cleander is suppressed by the Roman people themselves. After these events, trust disappears from the relations between the emperor and the people (1.13.7, 1.14.7). Commodus goes so far as to wish to make the gladiator barracks a residence (1.15.8) and arrange a solemn exit from there accompanied by gladiators (1.16.3), which is quite symbolic not only in terms of the decline of his character, as Pitcher has rightly suggested,[61] but also in terms of the degradation of his relations with his subjects. Thus, as in the case of Alexander Severus who initially "pleased the people, the army, and especially the senators" (6.1.2) yet finally controls nothing but the space of the quarters where he is staying with his mother and awaiting his executioners (6.9.6),[62] the spatial details of Commodus' movements characterize the scale of his policy and its public support at different stages of his reign. These details clearly show the deterioration of his regime, i. e. the gradual removal and alienation of the emperor from all the population groups that supported him in the very beginning.[63] Such is the symbolic correlation between spatial and social characteristics of the political process in the case of Commodus.

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59 Pitcher (2012) 278

60 Hidber (2006) 258.

61 Pitcher (2012) 278.

62 Cf. circumstances of Maximinus's death (8.5.8–9).

63 For Herodian's Commodus narrative as a story of a growing alienation of the emperor from the entire population, see Hidber (2006) 157, 181–182; Motta (2022) 175–179.

Let us consider more examples. Having found himself deprived of the support of both the Roman populace and praetorians (2.11.7), Julianus, in complete despair, does not heed the requests of his friends who urge him to occupy the passes in the Alps but focuses on the military fortifications around Rome, which, from the author's point of view, are useless (2.11.8 – 9).[64] When the enemy has already approached the city, he remains in the imperial palace and never attends the meeting at which his fate is being decided (2.12.5). Thus, Julianus isolates himself from the rest of the world in what becomes his final shelter, where he, "the cowardly, wretched, old man", is found by his assassin (2.12.7).

Niger's plan is to contain the enemy by building a fortification on the mountain path in Cappadocia[65] in order to prevent Severus from entering Cilicia, because, as the author remarks, he thought "that an impassable mountain range would be a powerful protection" (3.1.4)[66]; he also seeks to occupy Byzantium in order to prevent any crossing from Europe and Asia, mistakenly believing that he will protect himself from the approaching army of Severus in that way (3.1.6 – 7). Notably, having lost the battle at Issus, Niger finds no place for himself in Antioch among the evacuating, weeping and wailing residents; he has to hide in "one of the outlying areas of the city" (ἔν τινι προαστείῳ) where he is finally assassinated (3.4.6).[67]

Albinus is characterized as someone in a state of complete confusion amid negligence and revelry (3.7.1). On the eve of a decisive battle with Severus, he stays in Lugdunum and sends an army into battle;[68] the warriors are defeated, because at the right moment they cannot correctly assess the combat situation (3.7.6). So, the actions of the unsuccessful rivals of Severus are described by Herodian in a similar way and at the same time very schematically. Claiming supreme power, they nevertheless prefer to seek for shelter from a real struggle, be it a city fortress or an imperial residence. The author indicates that they all control a very limited space on the eve of defeat, which could have a symbolic meaning. Importantly, they do not try to defeat the enemy and gain control of the entire empire, but try to fight back their enemies, retaining part of the imperial space. The depiction of Macrinus's fall has similar features. When the critical moment comes, he underestimates the threat of the rebellion instigated by Julia Maesa and stays at home, while sending to Emesa a limited contingent of troops, "which he considered large enough to crush the rebels" (5.4.2). He is finally

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64 This contrasts with the behaviour of Maximus who, in quite a similar situation, departs from Rome proactively to Ravenna and attracts to his side the population of Italy, as well as some of the provincial troops, isolating Maximinus (8.6.5 – 6).

65 According to Kemezis, the Cappadocian torrent which finally ruins those fortifications (3.3.2) emphasizes the unstoppable energy of Severus (Kemezis [2022] 35).

66 Cf. By contrast, Septimius Severus orders to occupy the narrow passages of the Alps and guard the entrances to Italy, but only in order to cross the conditional border upon arrival (3.6.10). For Herodian's emphasis on the tactical importance of the Alps, see Ruiz del Árbol Moro (2022) 264 – 265.

67 According to Dio, Niger was on his way to Euphrates when he was captured and beheaded by his pursuers (75[74].8.3).

68 Dio's version is different: both leaders were present at the battlefield (76[75].6.1).

found by his pursuers "in the outskirts (ἐν προαστείῳ)" of Chalcedon in Bithynia (5.4.11).[69] This kind of location, as in Commodus or Niger's cases, reappears in Herodian as a symbol of a failed imperial career. Herodian's Gordian puts the whole province of Africa under his control, but when the population of the province proved to be incapable of protecting him against a well-trained army he finds himself trapped in Carthage (7.9.4), and, according to one of the versions, meets his end at home alone in his room (7.9.9). Maximinus, another failed emperor who tried to be the leader primarily for the troops under his command, was cornered by the Romans themselves when he turned from the besieger into the besieged at Aquileia, with his isolation from the rest of the empire being emphasized by the author (8.4–5).

Thus, as follows from Herodian's *stasis* narrative, "non si può conquistare l'impero senza conquistare Roma".[70] In this respect Rome still retains its central place in the Herodian's imperial space where the signs of the political fragmentation are already discernible. Indeed, in a number of episodes the author emphasizes the political significance of the *urbs* as the only possible *sedes imperii*.[71] Indeed, Herodian's Septimius Severus recognizes that he needs to be the first to take Rome as "the very seat of the Empire (ἡ βασίλειος [...] ἑστία)" (2.10.9). The author reproaches Niger for not rushing to Rome after getting involved in the struggle for power (2.8.9) and, later, Macrinus for not hurrying off to Rome immediately after his proclamation as emperor. As Buongiorno has noted, Rome was important to Herodian because of the formal conferment of imperial power through the enactment of a *senatus consultum de imperio* and a popular approval (*lex curiata de imperio*).[72]

On the other hand, from Herodian's point of view, the presence of the emperor in Rome and control over the center could hardly be the only guarantee of survival in periods of political turbulence, rather one of the conditions. One of the most important of these conditions is support of the Roman people. When the praetorians enter the imperial palace, Pertinax is advised by his attendants to "escape and rely on the people to help him" (2.5.3).[73] Importantly, Herodian refers to such a recommendation as "a piece of good advice (τὸ ὠφέλιμα)",[74] implying that the emperor could be effectively saved hand not he thought escaping would be unworthy of him (2.5.4). The assassins, for their part, are afraid of the popular rage and quickly run from the palace to find a shelter in the praetorian camp (2.5.9). Macrinus should have moved to Rome because he was popular among the Romans, but, instead, "he loitered at Antioch, cultivating his beard" (5.2.3). Here, Herodian sees the prospect of moving to Rome as contrary to

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69 According to Dio, Macrinus was seized in Chalcedon (79[78].39.5).

70 Mecella (2017) 189. See also Davenport/Mallan (2020) 426.

71 Mecella (2017) 188–192; Mecella (2022) 280–281; Buongiorno (2022) 209; Ruiz del Árbol Moro (2022) 271. See also Makhlaiuk's chapter in this volume.

72 Buongiorno (2022) 206–208.

73 Alternatively, Dio suggests that Pertinax could simply lock the palace doors or kill the impostors with the help of his bodyguards, or escape to some place (74[73].9.3–4).

74 This is a literal translation of what Whittaker renders into English as "an easy way out".

the way of life and style of the easterners that Macrinus preferred to adopt. The problem was not only trying to rule the Roman Empire from Antioch,[75] but also to rule as an Antiochian. Conversely, Gordian I tries to rule as a Roman from Carthage, which begins to look "like a simulacrum" (ὥσπερ ἐν εἰκόνι) of the city of Rome (7.6.2). Herodian ridicules such an attempt to recreate Rome in the province of Africa when he refers to Gordian as "the simulacrum of an emperor" (7.9.10).[76] However, the author lays emphasis on the communication of Gordian with the Romans, in particular with the Roman nobles, which helps him to win support from the senate and the people (7.7.5–6) not only for himself, but also for his descendants, especially his grandson Gordian III.

On the other hand, what ruined Gordian I, as many others, was the lack of support from the army. As a historian, Herodian demonstrates that control over the space of the empire depends mainly on the support provided to emperors by the army, especially the praetorian camp at Rome, Pannonian and Syrian troops, that had local characteristics and political agendas of their own. In this respect the Danube border could be no less important than Rome. Thus, Niger's mistake was not only to fail to arrive at the capital, but also not to appear before the troops in Illyricum as soon as possible in order to attract them to his side (2.8.10). The outcome of the civil strife would have been different if, as Niger hoped, it had been possible to gain the support not only of the camps located in the East but also, as Herodian hypothetically suggests, of the Pannonian troops (2.8.10). Similarly, from Herodian's point of view, the necessary prerequisite for the survival of Macrinus is to immediately disband the armies and send the soldiers back to their regular stations (5.2.3). Consequently, the author draws some distinction between gaining control over Rome and obtaining control over the Empire, which is a more complex task to solve.

5 Concluding Remarks

Herodian's contemporary narrative world is marked by political fragmentation with a number of division lines emerging between various regions of the empire, as well as between different groups within Roman society. There could be an emperor staying away from Rome, as well as the Romans opposed to the emperor. This contrasts significantly with the idealized era of Marcus Aurelius when, according to Herodian, the army, the senate and the people were united around the emperor who controlled the entire imperial space. No emperor proved capable of restoring the consensus, which, according to Roberto, testifies to Herodian's feeling of the irreversible decline of the empire.[77] However, as it appears, even if Herodian might have had little hope for reinstatement of the Marcus' model of the principate, there is still a place for re-

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75 For Antioch "as a common denominator to characterize bad emperors", see Bérenger (2022) 226, Kemezis (2014) 250–251.

76 Davenport/Mallan (2020) 426–427.

77 Roberto (2017) 182.

served historical optimism in how the author treats the victory of the Romans over Maximinus, when Rome and Italy reaffirmed their central place within the imperial space.[78] It is also noteworthy that Herodian ends his work with the de-escalation resulting from the elevation of Gordian III (8.8.7). There might be an irony, of course, in Herodian's remark about the praetorians proclaiming Gordian Caesar emperor, since at the moment they did not have anyone else at hand (8.8.7). Nonetheless, the final point of Herodian's narrative is the moment when the unprecedented upheavals of the year 238 CE are over.

The author's initial plan was to cover seventy years from the death of Marcus (2.15.7),[79] but for some reason he limited his narrative to sixty years and finished it with the accession of young Gordian III in 238 CE. One may suggest that it would be too predictable for Herodian and, possibly, would make no sense to tell another story of an adolescent ruler who finally meets his end somewhere at the edge of the empire during another eastern military campaign, or the author might not have felt safe to write about those events under the changing political circumstances.[80] I believe one more explanation can be added, which does not necessarily contradict the previous two. If Herodian finishes with the mention of Gordian III coming to power (8.8.8), the moment itself might be important for the author's narrative purpose, probably more important than the subsequent years of the new emperor's reign. The author introduces his audience to a new emperor who rules the empire from Rome and whose candidacy suits, temporally at least, the main political actors of the time: the praetorians, the Roman people and the German troops (8.8.7). So, Herodian leaves his reader with a farewell scene where such a compromise, if not consensus, is still attainable.[81]

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78 Dialectically, the crisis triggers the revival of the Italian military prowess. In 238 CE, the people of Rome and Italians are mobilized, ready to meet the challenge (7.12.1, 8.5.2; 8.6.5), the besieged Aquileans have enough courage to stand firm against Maximinus and fight (8.4.7, 8.5.2). Obviously, the victory comes as an important event for the author who spends several passages to depict the atmosphere of rejoicing in Rome and Italian cities when the news about the fall of Maximinus spread across the country (6.7–7.2, 6.7.7–8). Importantly, the Senates's envoys convince the majority of the provincials to abandon Maximinus and take the side of the Roman people (7.7.5–6).

79 Hidber (2006) 10–15; Hidber (2007).

80 Davenport/Mallan (2020) 438.

81 I am grateful to Adam Kemezis and Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki for comments on a draft of this chapter.

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