Herodian

Millennium-Studien

zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.

Millennium Studies

in the culture and history of the first millennium C.E.

Herausgegeben von / Edited by
Wolfram Brandes, Laura Carrara,
Dennis Pausch, Rene Pfeilschifter,
Karla Pollmann

Volume 112

Herodian

Historiography and Literature at the End of the High Empire

Edited by
Mario Baumann, Adam M. Kemezis, and
Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki

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ISBN 978-3-11-170665-8
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-170674-0
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-170678-8
ISSN 1862-1139
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111706740

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Library of Congress Control Numver: 2025932064

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

© 2025 with the author(s), editing © 2025 Mario Baumann, Adam M. Kemezis, and Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki,
published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston, Genthiner Straße 13, 10785 Berlin.
This book is published with open access at www.degruyterbrill.com.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

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Editors’ Preface

This book is the result of a conference of the same title that took place at TU Dresden on 14 – 15 July 2022, organized by the editors. We would like to thank Anton Kürzinger and Anna D. Uschner for their invaluable work throughout the days of the conference. We are also most grateful to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for their generous financial support of the conference which they provided as part of the TU Dresden-based project “Ein Kommentar zu Herodians *Geschichte des Kaisertums nach Marc Aurel*” (Projektnummer 415492189).

In the editing and production of the volume, we gratefully acknowledge the labors of Anton Kürzinger, Paula Ulfig, Anna D. Uschner, and Lea Maria Wildner in preparing the manuscript for submission and compiling the index. The support and guidance of Laura Carrara as the responsible series editor and of Jessica Bartz, Katharina Legutke, and Mirko Vonderstein at Walter de Gruyter have also been most welcome and appreciated.

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Introduction

Herodian's period of life, place of origin, and social standing are shrouded in mystery.[1] The only testament to his existence is the *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus*, a work he composed in the third century.[2] In eight books the historiographer narrates the series of imperial successions and usurpations of the Roman throne over a sixty-year period of unrest and turbulence. The narrative begins with the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE, which deprives the empire of a putatively exemplary leader, leaving it adrift in the throes of successive disputes for power, civil wars, and sociopolitical ferment, and concludes with the ascent of Gordian III in 238 CE. Even as the narrative persona though, Herodian remains anonymous, only providing his readers with the information that he writes about events he allegedly saw and heard during his lifetime, or even participated in during his "imperial or public service", advertising thus his work as contemporary history (Hdn. 1.2.5: ἃὸδὲὸμετὰὸτὴν Μάρκου τελευτὴν παρὰ πάντα τὸν ἐμαυτοῦ βίον εἶδόν τε καὶ ἤκουσα – ἔστι δ᾽ ὧν καὶ πείρᾳ μετέσχον ἐν βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις γενόμενος – ταῦτα συνέγραψα[3]).

Herodian's composition has received less attention than other works, chiefly the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio (books 72 – 80) and the *Historia Augusta*, which both describe the incidents of the same period. Regardless, important content- or methodology-related aspects of the Herodianic *History* such as the biography of Herodian and the dating of his work (see Càssola [1957a], Alföldy [1971b], Sidebottom [1997] and Polley [2003]),[4] the author's approach, evaluation, and consequent use of his sources (such as Càssola [1957b], Gascó [1984], Torres Esbarranch [1985] 59 – 70 and Coloru [2022]),[5] as well as issues of textual and stylistic criticism (such as Szelest [1951], Stein [1957], Càssola [1963], Roques [1990b], Lucarini [2005b, 2017], Mecca [2004], Arbo [2022]) constitute the focal point of numerous studies. Even so, historical and philological research has – up to a point – dismissed the *History* as a vulgar, low-ranking source, closer to a

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1 Roques (1990a) 1; Hidber (2004) 201; for a discussion on Herodian's potential status see e. g. Whittaker (1969) xix–xxxi; de Blois (1984) 358; Torres Esbarranch (1985) 19 – 32; Sidebottom (1998) 2822 – 2824; Zimmermann (1999a) 305 – 319; Hidber (2006) 5 – 10; on his birthdate and origins see e. g. Gascó (1982), Torres Esbarranch (1985) 7 – 19, Hidber (2006) 1 – 16.

2 The majority of scholars place the composition under the emperor Philip the Arab (244 – 249) or Decius (249 – 251), see e. g. Grosso (1964) 30 – 31, Whittaker (1969) ix–xix, Rubin (1980) 17, 87 – 88, Alföldy (1989) 245 – 255, Marasco (1998) 2839, Zimmermann (1999a) 285 – 302, Polley (2003), Hidber (2006) 12 – 15, Kemezis (2014) 300 – 304; for a different opinion see Sidebottom (1997).

3 On the debated contemporary status of Herodian see e. g. Rubin (1980) 17, 85 – 89, Torres Esbarranch (1985) 7 – 19, Sidebottom (1997) 272 – 273, Kuhn-Chen (2002) 251 – 252 with n. 11, Hidber (2007) 197 – 198, Scott (2023) 156 – 164.

4 See also Whittaker (1969) ix–xxxvi, Torres Esbarranch (1985) 7 – 19, de Blois (1998) 3415 – 3423, Hidber (2006) 1 – 16.

5 See also Whittaker (1969) lxi–lxxi, Kolb (1972), Rubin (1980) 89 – 92.

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novel than to actual history due mainly to Herodian's occasionally artistic style embellished with a plethora of dramatic elements that create an allegedly selective and unsophisticated narrative.[6] This perspective led to Cassius Dio's work being upheld for decades as the ultimate authoritative source for this period Roman history. However, even though some scholars have been eager to undermine and question Herodian's veracity (see e.g. Hohl [1954, 1956], Alföldy [1971a] 431–432, Ameling [1997] 2491–2492) many others, such as Whittaker (1969) xxxvi–lxi, Bowersock (1975), Piper (1975), Galimberti (2014) 9–32, and Kemezis (2016) mainly 190–191, (2022) rush to the historiographer's defense.

Especially the dawn of the 21st century (mostly from 1990 onwards) marks a currently increasing interest in Herodianic studies, best exemplified by Lucarini's (2005a) new edition of the text[7] and some illuminating and influential publications. To begin with, the works of Zimmermann (1999b, 1999c), Sidebottom (1998), Kuhn-Chen (2002, 249–327), Hidber (2004), Pitcher (2009 39–44), Kemezis (2014) mainly 227–272, (2022), Chrysanthou (2020), and Baumann (2022) examine Herodian's narrative technique and methodology. In particular, Pitcher (2012, 2018 respectively) explores the narrative space and characterization technique in our source,[8] and Hidber (1999, 2007, cf. Castelli [2008]) the topic of narrative time. Chrysanthou (2023, 2024 respectively) elaborates on the concept of "group mind" thinking in Herodian as well as the use of digressions, while Timonen (2000),[9] Bingham/Imrie (2015), and Scott (2018) focus on the plot and scene patterns in Herodian's storyline.[10] Moreover, the publications of Zimmermann (1999a), Marasco (1998), Hidber (2006), and Chrysanthou (2022a) along with the volumes edited by Galimberti (2017a, 2022a) analyze the Herodianic corpus from different and manifold viewpoints, whereas the recent commentaries of Galimberti (2014) and Guida (2022) center on the first and eighth book respectively.

The research has also given prominence to the general theme of "crisis" in the narrated period (see e.g. Buongiorno [2017], Gonzales [2017], Andrews [2019], Davenport/Mallan [2020])[11] and to concrete thematic strands of the text such as religion (see e.g. Rowan [2005], Galimberti [2022b]), rhetoric and speeches (see e.g. Kemezis [2014] 252–260, Mallan [2022], Pitcher [2022], Iglesias Zoido [2023]), topography (Schettino [2017] mainly 86–89, Mecella [2022], Ruiz del Árbol Moro [2022]), ethnography (Sánchez Sánchez [2020]), *paideia* (Asirvatham [2017], Roberto [2017, 2022]),[12] imperial

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6 On the reception of Herodian's text from the fifteenth century onwards see Zimmermann (1998) with Hidber (2006) 20–58.

7 The widely used translation for Herodian's text is Whittaker's (1969–1970) Loeb edition. Other translations include Echols (1961) (English), Càssola (1968) (Italian), Torres Esbarranch (1985) (Spanish), Roques (1990a) (French), Müller (1996) (German).

8 See also Hidber (2006) 188–272.

9 Timonen includes the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio and the *Historia Augusta* in his analysis.

10 See also Hidber (2006) 124–187.

11 See also Gascó (1986), de Blois (1984), Marasco (1998) 2910–2914, Sidebottom (1998) 2792–2803.

12 See also e.g. Zimmermann (1999b) 20–23, Sidebottom (1998) 2804–2812, 2822 and (2007) 80–81, Kuhn-Chen (2002) 273–277.

authority and power (de Blois [2003], Buongiorno [2017], Hekster [2017], Bérenger [2020], Arbo [2021]), Greek and Roman cultural identities (Bekker-Nielsen [2014]); popular morality (Rodríguez Horrillo [2009]) and wonders and marvels (Arbo [2017]).[13] Last but not least, person-centered studies rely on Herodian's *History* or employ the text among other sources, in order to form the portraits or explore specific aspects of individual imperial figures like Commodus (see e.g. de Ranieri [1997], Kozlowski [2008], Hekster [2002], Cadario [2017]), Pertinax (see e.g. Hohl [1956], Philippides [1984], Appelbaum [2007]), Septimius Severus (see e.g. Bersanetti [1938], Meulder [1999], Hekster [2017], Chrysanthou [2022b], Scott [2023]),[14] Julia Domna (Laporte [2021]), Caracalla (see e.g. Marasco [1996a], Hekster/Kaizer [2012], Scott [2012], Davenport [2017], Galimberti [2017b], Motta [2020], Baumann [2022]), Macrinus (see e.g. Marasco [1996b], Bérenger [2017]), Elagabalus (see e.g. Scheithauer [1990], Sommer [2004], Kemezis [2016], Bérenger [2017]), Severus Alexander (see e.g. Roberto [2017, 2022]), and Maximinus (see e.g. Burian [1988], Martin [2006], Speidel [2016], Mecella [2017], Boragno [2021]).

The *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus* establishes more and more its place among the literary studies of ancient historiography. In this regard, this volume aims to contribute to the ongoing, growing attention to Herodian and enrich the scope of research by highlighting various aspects of the text itself and analyzing its correlation with other literary works, of its own time and/or genre and beyond. In doing so, the volume brings together two strands of looking at and interpreting Herodian's work: on the one hand, our contributors shed light on the textual and literary side of the *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus*, an approach which, on the other hand, also has significant historicizing implications which are consciously explored in the volumes' articles. As for Herodian's literary technique, three aspects stand out as important topics – and also findings – of the present volume.

First, many of our articles show how Herodian employs certain recurring key motifs to shape his narrative and lend significance to its individual episodes by connecting them around common notions and concepts. Time and space are important here (cf. Androulakis on the right moment (καιρός) in Herodian and Markov on the symbolic and thematic functions of imperial space), but also emotion markers (for example desire [πόθος], see Baron) and plot elements such as news and messages (see Chrysanthou). In all these cases, the motifs serve to highlight important narrative junctions, form vivid descriptions of battles or places, explain historical causation or contribute to the portrayal of characters – in short: they are crucial in making Herodian's "story" forceful and readable, in the double sense of enjoyable (cf. the notion of τέρψις, pleasure, in the proem, 1.1.3) and understandable.

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[13] See also e.g. Zimmermann (1999c) and Motta (2017, 2022) on the *demos*, Bérenger (2022) on provinces, Opelt (1998) on the depicted emotion of fear, Laporte/Hekster (2022) on imperial deaths and Buongiorno (2022) on the Senate.

[14] See also Rubin (1980) 85–131.

Moreover, our contributors frequently draw attention to the marked intertextuality of Herodian's *History*. Herodian interacts, of course, with various other works of historiography. A prime example is Thucydides: Herodian proclaims a kinship to him, but at the same time reinterprets and adapts the concepts of his classical predecessor to meet his own aims and needs (cf. Pitcher on civil unrest (στάσις) in Thucydides and Herodian). Perhaps more surprising is the broad literary outlook that emerges when the authors of the volume investigate the intertextual backdrop against which Herodian unfolds narratives of failing philosophers and educators (cf. Baumann/Zacharioudaki) or generically "mixed" depictions of (again all too often failing) accessions to the throne (see Laporte on Didius Julianus). Throughout Herodian's *History*, pre- and intertexts of numerous genres come into play, from Greek and Roman drama and philosophical texts to epigrams and elegy. These results not only help to grasp the complex characterization of the protagonists in Herodian's narrative, but they also provide new insights into the literary composition of the *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus,* in particular the textual layers Herodian employs to create meaning in the act of narration.

A further aspect of the literary strand of interpreting Herodian are audience-related questions. Many articles of the volume highlight how the *History of the Empire from the Death of Marcus* appeals to its readers, invites them to engage with the text and, at times, challenges them to reassess their understanding of Roman history and the processes that underlie it. In this vein, our authors show how Herodian takes up the disparate memories of his readers and forms them into an organized narrative (Scott), describe the deliberate ambivalence in the portrayal of characters and how it invites the readers to rethink their assumptions (Baumann/Zacharioudaki), analyze the effect of recurring motifs on the narratees' appreciation of the story (Chrysanthou), and demonstrate that the variegation (ποικιλία) of Herodian's *History* serves the purpose of both pleasure and utility (Laporte). In addition, the volume's perspective is further enriched by taking the reception of Herodian in later antiquity into account (see Kemezis on how the author of the *Historia Augusta* read – and used – Herodian).

As mentioned above, the textual approaches to Herodian seen in this volume also have a significant historicizing component that reveal him as a part of many ongoing stories of his own, in addition to the immediate political action he describes. Herodian can at times create a feeling of timelessness, as if he is a detached observer of events even as he lives through them, but this is a deceptive effect: Herodian's work is as specific to its time as is that of many an author who gives themselves a more explicit setting. Writing in the 240s–250s, he is the immediate heir of authors such as Philostratus, Cassius Dio and Lucian, who have done much to create our modern periodization of a unified high empire elite culture that flourishes under the Antonines and slowly breaks down under the Severans.[15] An earlier generation of scholarship thus tried to fit him into a narrative centered around a pre-determined "third-century crisis", but as the idea of a monolithic universal crisis has receded, so also its limited usefulness as an interpretive guide to Herodian has become clear.[16] On the other hand, Herodian's most notable direct contemporaries among authors are probably Origen (d. 254/255) and Plotinus (d. ca. 270), and it remains for a brave historian to place them in the same context with him.[17] He is a witness to a post-Severan moment in the empire's historical and ideological development, linked by experience and outlook to earlier generations but writing a work that often points the way to forms and historical problems familiar from late antiquity.

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[15] For dating, see note 2 above.

The experience and outlook come through above all in his choice of a time-scale. It is probably best not to read literally Herodian's claim to be an eyewitness of events going back into the 180s, but it is highly significant that he imagines the years back to Marcus' death as a unified episode that might represent a single life-experience, just as it is still possible for us to think of one person's memory covering all the years since World War II.[18] Violent political upheaval dominates this experience: roughly half of Herodian's narrative content is taken up with two four-to-five year periods, one leading up to and including the Severan dynasty's beginning (192 – 197) and the other dealing with its fall and the succeeding chaos (235 – 238). Several of our articles look at Herodian as he processes especially the earlier of those two periods. This means digesting imperial propaganda and generating counter-narratives (see Galimberti); reassessing the value of an existing Thucydidean template for internal violence (Pitcher); and plotting the trajectory between the two great periods of violence and finding the zero point of Marcus' reign from which to measure later events (Scott).

Civil war, however, is far from the only historical development in which our contributors aim to place Herodian. The imagined lifetime he posits, from the 170s to 240s, saw important changes in the cultural geography of the empire, the meaning of Roman identity and its relationship to the rulers whose stories are Herodian's main concern. Although Herodian appears to have lived and written in Rome, he rarely uses the city as a concrete *lieu de mémoire:* if anything its peculiar institutions and sacred geography are an object of quasi-ethnographic curiosity.[19] Instead he sees it in more abstract relational terms, as a center that then defines a periphery, and the interaction between the two is a key dynamic that drives imperial history (as explored in this volume by Markov). On to this increasingly multi-polar geography Herodian still has to map the traditional ecumenical claims of Roman imperialism and Hellenistic culture, and to mark

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16 The most influential argument for Herodian as indicative of a crisis is Alföldy (1971a) and (1974); a more measured approach is found at e.g. Hidber (2006) 274 – 276.

17 The closest approach is perhaps Alföldy (1974). Galimberti (2022b) 165 – 168 places Herodian in the context of contemporary Christian culture, though without direct comparison with specific authors.

18 Sidebottom (1998) 2777– 2778 and Hidber (2006) 69 – 71 both consider Herodian's decision to write the events of his own lifetime unusual for the era, though see the considerations of Kemezis (2014) 238 n. 29.

19 Schettino (2017) explores Herodian's use of Roman topography in the Pertinax-to-Severus narrative of Book 2, but his overall portrayal of the city would still reward a fuller study.

out a narrative identity that incorporates them both (see Makhlaiuk). That evolving version of the empire also had to be defined in relation to its ruler. Chronologically, Herodian stands roughly at a halfway point between Augustus and Justinian. The monarchy he describes is ever less associated with the language of magistracy and imperial consensus familiar from the Principate, while retaining and enhancing its sacral aspects and the sense of the emperor as an epoch-defining figure that will persist into later historiography (see Mecella's article).

This link with the formal aspects of Herodian's work brings up another story in which he represents a key stage, that of the historical genre and its development. Given Herodian's self-positioning as an old man remembering the days of Marcus, his Atticizing style, and his gestures toward a classical tradition running from Thucydides to Lucian, there are many ways to see him as continuation or even end point.[20] Connections to an earlier world can be seen in his intertextual fluidity (an aspect that has already been mentioned above), where he continues a tradition going back to Tacitus and before of incorporating *topoi* and narrative modes from a surprising range of genres, not excluding comedy or elegy (see Laporte's essay). New historical realities in the mid-third century enable reassessments and reappropriations of authoritative elements of the past. These include, as we have seen, Thucydidean paradigms of στάσις (Pitcher) as well as the infinitely applicable figure of Alexander, the ruler as object of desire (Baron). Conversely, however, the dysfunction of Herodian's world gives him a chance to question the entire value of historical knowledge and experience for ruler seeking guidance (Asirvatham). Much work remains to be done in positioning Herodian as a starting point or link to a later world.[21] His way of structuring narrative around rulers points the way to Eunapius or the breviarists (Mecella) and he serves as a significant conduit for facts and object of emulation for authors including Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* author (Kemezis). These are only initial soundings, and we look forward to future explorations of how Herodian's mobile geographical vision and fictionalizing narrative technique may have resonances not just with classicizing authors but with the emerging Christian world of hagiography and ecclesiastical history.

An Outline of the Volume

The first part of the volume emphasizes *the sources, the genre, and the reader in Herodian's narrative.* The contribution of Alessandro Galimberti starts from the historical question of the role Pertinax played in the overthrow of his predecessor Commodus. After reviewing Pertinax's remarkable career in high administration, Galimberti rejects the view found in most (but not all) literary sources that he remained ignorant of the plot until the conspirators selected him after their coup. Rather he was a significant player in factional politics and emerged as candidate from a field that included Claudius Pompeianus and Didius Julianus. Herodian's version does not give us explicit details but does, in Galimberti's view, include useful information, independent of Cassius Dio, for reconstructing the reactions of such figures as Sosius Falco to the coup. The question remains of how to account for Herodian's highly favorable view of Pertinax and his actions as emperor. In addition to ideological factors posited in the work of Chrysanthos Chrysanthou, Galimberti argues for Herodian's use of Septimius Severus' autobiography, which would presumably have invoked Pertinax positively as the predecessor Severus set out to avenge. Galimberti concludes by considering the place of Pertinax, with his relatively humble origins, in the ideology of ἀριστοκρατία favored by Herodian elsewhere and notably in his narrative of Macrinus.

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[20] For his place in a larger-scale development of Roman-era Greek historiography, see Potter (2011).

[21] The area most studied thus far is his source-relationship to the *Historia Augusta* and other later traditions, for which see Rohrbacher (2013), Paschoud (2018) and other works cited in Kemezis' article in this volume.

The genre of Herodian's *History* is the focus of Karine Laporte's contribution. Central to her argument are the notions of mixture (μίξις) and variegation (ποικιλία) that characterize literary genres in general and Herodian's complex textuality in particular. Laporte traces the development and conceptualization of generically "mixed" forms of historiography, with Dionysius of Halicarnassus as the most important reference. On a methodological level, she adopts the concept of "literary interaction" (König/Whitton) as the most appropriate model to describe "mixed" historiographical compositions. Laporte then devotes the main part of her paper to a detailed analysis of Herodian's account of Didius Julianus. She shows that this passage is generically "mixed" in the sense that Herodian takes up numerous elements from comedy (Julianus as another *miles gloriosus*) and elegy (Julianus as a kind of *exclusus amator*). All these elements, as Laporte demonstrates, are fused into a composition that remains a work of historiography, albeit a much enriched one, both in terms of literary form and content. Laporte concludes that this way of writing history is particularly effective in combining utility and pleasure, the principal functions of such "variegated" forms of historiography.

Adam Kemezis in his article looks forward to a notable reader of Herodian in Late Antiquity, namely the author of the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*). That unknown author relies heavily on Herodian as a source for his accounts of Maximinus, Pupienus/Balbinus and the Gordians. Kemezis is mostly interested, however, in the rhetorical use that the *HA* makes of Herodian through explicit citations, of which there are around a dozen. These citations, while accurate in a strict sense, do not give a very good impression of how fully the *HA* has used Herodian. Rather, in Kemezis' view, they set Herodian up as a counterpoint to the version of late Severan and subsequent history found in Eutropius, Victor and the Latin breviary tradition. Curiously, the *HA* explicitly sides with the Latin authors against Herodian for the reign of Alexander Severus, only to switch and endorse Herodian's version when it comes to the (parodically exaggerated) controversies over the number of Gordians and the correct nomenclature of Pupienus/Maximus. Kemezis reads this as part of the *HA*'s overall fiction about its own authorship: this is considered both as applied to readers who are unaware of Herodian's text and those who know Herodian and can understand the *HA*'s manipulation, and its implications for the stability of past emperors as objects of knowledge and sources of political authority.

Moving on to the concept of '*communities and communication*' *in Herodian*, the contribution of Mario Baumann and Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki investigates the presence of philosophical criticism in the *History*, focusing on two aspects: the recurrent motif of pseudo-philosophers and the failure of parental and teaching figures to initiate their sons or students in philosophical principles. In 1.9.1 – 6, a man with the outward appearance of a philosopher appears before the assembled Roman crowd and warns Commodus about Perennis' plot. Despite the soundness of the advice, the man is seemingly dismissed as a caricature of a philosopher, who merely seeks to satisfy his greedy self-interest. The article begins with an analysis of this exemplary and remarkably ambivalent episode, which gives rise to a series of similarly ambiguous "caricatures" in Herodian's text, this time in the guise of emperors. In the second part, Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus are assessed as rulers but also as fathers based on their equal inability to educate their sons and provide worthy heirs to the Roman throne. Specifically, Commodus, the son of a "philosopher king", and Caracalla, the son of an aspiring imitator of Marcus, turn out to be immoral tyrants and thus negative counterparts of their predecessors. Delving into the younger emperors' upbringing, the reasons for their eventual debasement are explored and inevitably bring the flaws in their fathers' character and life choices to the fore. This discussion on futile pedagogical strategies underpins the well-known pattern of ineducable students and unsuccessful teachers of philosophy, which is intertextually examined through parallel texts in the final section of the article.

The concepts of memory, emulation, and imitation in Herodian's work are the focus of Andrew Scott's article. In the preface of the *History*, Herodian highlights his aim to record the incidents of a period still fresh in the readers' minds. The starting point of his narrative is the death of Marcus Aurelius, whose idealized figure and reign are set as a benchmark. The article points out that despite the allegedly eternal memory of Marcus Aurelius, some emperors turn away from his example, and model their imperial careers on other rulers, such as Commodus, Pertinax, or Caracalla, embracing and emulating these men's deeds, stance, and way of ruling. Even the emperors who indeed attempt to imitate Marcus, such as Macrinus, fail to properly follow his example. The shifting preferences of the different components of society as well as their conflicting viewpoints regarding the qualities of an ideal leader become also a matter of discussion. For instance, the populace longs for the revival of a Marcus-like regime, whereas the soldiers always desire to reinstate a rule by Commodus' standards. Therefore, the article investigates how the sequence of successions, and the subsequent Roman decline, is after all in Herodian's work inextricably associated with, and to an extent defined by, the different rulership models that aspiring rulers prefer to emulate, and that social groups support or seek for.

In his contribution, Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou analyzes the presence and function of news and messages in Herodian's work, taking into account on each occasion the main parts of the communicative act: the sender, the receiver, the message, and the context. In particular, Chrysanthou highlights three aspects that characterize Herodian's use of news and messages: (1) Herodian resorts to the spread of news in organizing his narrative discourse. He makes use of how news spreads like wildfire, noting its ability to travel across different places, in order to bring about a narrative shift and smooth the transition from one place, character, or subject to another. (2) News and messages also serve as a factor in historical causation. They not only highlight remarkable events (such as accessions, deaths, battles, conspiracies, and ceremonies), but also play a major part in their initiation and development. (3) The creation, dissemination, and reception of oral and written reports are crucial to the portrayal of characters. This happens either by revealing specific traits, virtues, and vices of certain persons and groups or by drawing attention to the acts of construction, propagation, manipulation, or even the falsification of news by specific individuals as well as the multiple affective and evaluative responses generated in the recipients.

Concerning *time and space in Herodian's text*, Laura Mecella's contribution aims to place Herodian within a long-term developmental narrative about the historiographical genre. For her, Herodian is in part the heir of a high-imperial historical tradition that includes both Thucydidean-style pragmatic history (represented by Cassius Dio) and a more biographical form that had become increasingly anecdotal (as seen in Marius Maximus). Herodian, in Mecella's view, concentrates less on either of these than on particular reigns as political units, each with a particular *Regierungsstil* that consists above all of the monarch's relationship with key political groups such as senate and army. Politically, Mecella sees in this a connection to the increasingly military and sacral nature of Severan dynastic ideology. In literary terms, it draws on the existing elements of "Kingship Literature" as seen in Philostratus' *Apollonius*, ps-Aristides' *Eis Basileia* and the fragments of Ecphantus' treatise on kingship. Looking forward, however, Mecella sees Herodian as above all the forerunner of a kind of historiography common in Late Antiquity that uses emperor-reigns as a time-structuring device. This can be seen in the works of Eunapius as well as the Latin breviarists, but makes its first appearance before the traditional historiographical watershed of the mid-third century, in Herodian.

Panagiotis Androulakis explores the concept and usage of καιρός in the *History* of Herodian. The author defines καιρός as a pivotal, advantageous moment in time dissociating it with the notion of χρόνος, which represents the linear time period. At first, the article examines how καιρός and τύχη (chance) principally coexist in an inversely proportionate way in the text. In a second section, the temporal aspects of καιρός are thoroughly addressed, since Herodian underscores the critical moments when he recounts the emergence of imperial claimants as well as the prevalent and temporally extended crises during the reign of Commodus. The author also elaborates on the right timing in the *History*, namely the use of καιρός as an indicator of an opportune moment, which is seized or – most of the time – missed by the agents. In this regard, the failure or success of the narrated conspiracies appears to significantly hinge on whether the perpetrator is adept at acting in a suitable moment. The final section of the article concerns the spatial aspect of καιρός, since Herodian specifically employs the adjective καίριος and the adverb καιρίως to describe fatal wounds opportunely inflicted in a vital place of the body crowning an attack with success.

The contribution of Konstantin Markov revolves around the spatial aspects and their particularly symbolic and thematic functions within Herodian's narrative and his depiction of Roman political life. Herodian often emphasizes the importance of control over space (especially borders) as a main struggle for every emperor and aspiring usurper throughout the *History.* This observation leads the author to the conclusion that the success or failure of political leaders is actually defined by their ability to dominate (more) imperial space; the place from which they would choose to govern plays a similarly crucial role, considering – for instance − the fact that withdrawal into the city's outskirts seals the failure of Commodus. In addition, Herodian often records the prevailing sociopolitical and topographical conditions in different regions, providing vivid descriptions of landscapes as well as ongoing scenes mainly in the streets of Rome. These specific references open up a further discussion on whether and to what extent the historiographer was an eyewitness of the narrated events. The article also investigates how the spatial factor and specifically the *cliché* physical and behavioral characteristics attributed to various ethnicities can predetermine the support of an emperor and subsequently, his chances to succeed, the public reaction to a social change, or even the outcome of battles.

The last part of the volume is devoted to *the Greek tradition in Herodian's* History. In her chapter, Sulochana Asirvatham sets out to survey Herodian's view of the longer-range past, in the few asides found in his text. She is particularly interested in the internal function of such stories, as Herodian's characters try to process earlier iterations of the history they are living through, and surprisingly often fail. This begins with a few glimpses into earlier Greek and Persian history: Herodian in Book 3 engages with a metanarrative of intra-Greek conflict in which the disunity of Classical Greece, which made it vulnerable to conquest, continues in the form of inter-city rivalries that allow Severus and Niger to enlist various cities in their civil war. More unexpected is Herodian's treatment of the Sasanian Ardashir in Book 6. That monarch shows a remarkable awareness of his Achaemenid predecessors and their place in Greek history. As Asirvatham argues, he is able to place himself on the winning side of an East-versus-West narrative and to assert that role in warfare against Alexander Severus, who proves deficient both in battle and as an interpreter of earlier history. Asirvatham goes on to consider the ultimately unsuccessful ways in which Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla both try to enlist *exempla* as a way of framing dynastic succession, and then concludes with the original exemplary emperor, Augustus. He makes a cameo appearance in Book 8 in a curiously negative role, blamed for the demilitarization of Italy that leaves it vulnerable to barbarized armies from the frontier.

Alexander V. Makhlaiuk starts from the observation that there are great discrepancies, and even contradictions, in current scholarly assessments of Herodian's general view of the Roman empire and the extent of his "Greekness" and "Romanness". His paper aims to evaluate the arguments in favor of or against the proposed points of view and, by clarifying some nuances of Herodian's narrative, to accentuate the author's specific "Greek Romanness" (*une romanité grecque*, as Denis Roques defines it) in his perception and representation of Rome's empire. To this end, Makhlaiuk focuses on three pivotal points: firstly, Herodian's view of the Roman world as a kind of common fatherland and ecumenical empire in its spatial and ethnic dimensions; secondly, his "constitutional" vision of the Empire in its social and political constraints and driving contradictions; and thirdly, the historian's positive ideal of the imperial statehood. Makhlaiuk concludes that on the whole, it must be acknowledged that Herodian not only was reconciled to, but even identified himself with Rome and saw its Empire as his own world, that is the Graeco-Roman *oikoumenē* where the power was Roman and the culture was Greek.

Christopher Baron explores the concept of πόθος in Herodian's text. The noun appears for the first time in the dying words of Marcus Aurelius, who considers public goodwill and longing to be the most substantial protective measure for an emperor. The first part of the article focuses on the opening scenes of the *History*, where the usage of the term functions as an indicator of the contrast between Commodus and his father. Specifically, the death of Marcus signals a widespread longing for an exemplary ruler now deceased, whereas Commodus' desires will be what reveal his corrupted character from the beginning. Given the term's prominent place in Greek historiography owing to the famous figure of Alexander the Great, in a second section, the author examines how Herodian employs the πόθος-leitmotif in his narrative of Commodus' accession to the throne, as well as in his description of the young man's physical attributes, to potentially create allusions to the Macedonian king. The article concludes with a discussion on the appearance of the word πόθος in the rest of Herodian's work, and mostly its use to denote the love or affection felt by groups of people for seemingly good rulers and their eventual unfulfilled expectations. The discussion is thus brought back to Marcus and the failure of Commodus to live up to his father's example.

To conclude the volume, Luke Pitcher examines the concept of στάσις (civic unrest) in Herodian. He shows that Thucydides' analysis of στάσις in Corcyra (Th. 3.70.1 – 81.5) may have nudged Herodian in the direction of fashioning his own generalizing account of στάσις. In a complex intertextual movement, Herodian redeploys Thucydidean vocabulary to develop a vision of στάσις, inter- rather than intra-civic, which is at some distance from Thucydides, even as it proclaims a kinship to that earlier work. As Pitcher demonstrates, Herodian's concept of στάσις is in line with some expansions in the sense of that term which we find in other historiographical and para-historiographical texts of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, Herodian's usage reflects the particular interests and interpretations that inform his unique work: by shying away from Thucydides' earlier sense of στάσις, in a way imperial Greek authors such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian do not when talking about the Roman Republic, Herodian cements his own vision of how power works in the Rome of his lifetime. Contention between senate and people, or the other axes of social conflict which are central to older treatments of intra-civic discord, are not altogether impossible in Herodian. But the settled power of the emperor and the armies makes such contention a lot less relevant than it was. As Pitcher concludes, the world has changed since the early Republic, and Thucydides' Corcyra.

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I Herodian’s Narrative: Sources, Genre and Readers

Alessandro Galimberti

Tra storia e propaganda: Erodiano, Pertinace e Settimio Severo

La figura di Pertinace in Erodiano potrebbe essere definita una felice anomalia in quanto lo storico addita nel principe ligure un modello da imitare, quasi al pari dell'irraggiungibile Marco Aurelio.

Tuttavia, ad incrinare questo modello,[1] c'è il fatto che il principato di Pertinace non può che essere giudicato fallimentare: sia per la sua brevità (tre mesi) sia per i risultati ottenuti (un difficile tentativo di riforma economica e il mancato consenso dei soldati).

Per avere un quadro più completo bisognerebbe dunque innanzitutto prendere in considerazione la sua carriera sotto Commodo e soprattutto il ruolo da lui giocato nella congiura che mise a morte l'ultimo degli Antonini, che già una parte delle fonti antiche mettevano in risalto.

Ritengo altresì che ci siano valide ragioni per collocare sotto Settimio Severo l'elaborazione della propaganda a lui favorevole tesa a costruire il suo personaggio in senso assolutamente positivo, di cui Erodiano si fa entusiasta promotore e il cui entusiasmo necessita a sua volta di una spiegazione adeguata.

Pertinace era stato fra i più autorevoli consiglieri di Marco Aurelio a tal punto da apparire ai contemporanei come l'erede del principe filosofo. Cassio Dione (73[72],4,1–2), riferendosi all'insieme di tutta la sua carriera, lo mette allo stesso livello di altri due protagonisti del regno di Marco e poi di Commodo: Claudio Pompeiano (genero di Marco) ed Aufidio Vittorino (uno dei più illustri generali di Marco). Sebbene Pertinace non fosse presente nel momento in cui morì Marco (nel 180 era *legatus Augusti* in Siria), anche a lui si rivolgeva il messaggio dell'imperatore sul letto di morte che affidava ai propri amici la guida e la tutela del figlio Commodo. Come è noto, Marco nelle sue ultime ore si era espresso per non interrompere le guerre contro Quadi e Marcomanni, mentre il primo atto di Commodo dopo la morte del padre fu quello di interromperle e fare ritorno a Roma. Non abbiamo elementi certi per ipotizzare quale fosse la posizione di Pertinace in questa circostanza: tuttavia, tutto lascia pensare che egli, da valoroso uomo d'armi quale era stato nel corso della sua carriera[2], si trovasse tra quegli *amici Marci* che diffidava di Commodo e intendeva proseguire la controffensiva sul Danubio iniziata da Marco e interrotta dalla sua morte.

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[1] Sulla carriera di Pertinace cfr. *PIR*² H73; Cassola (1964). Per il giudizio storiografico mi riferisco a Garzetti (1964); Grosso (1964). Questo giudizio è già incrinato nelle pagine di Cassola (1964) nonché più recentemente in Strobel (2004) e Pasek (2013).

[2] Sulla carriera di Pertinace, e in particolare sulle vicende del 170 che comportarono il suo allontanamento dalla Dacia, cfr. ora Jarvis (2022) 180–188.

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Tornato a Roma dalla Siria nel 182, dovette schierarsi subito apertamente contro il prefetto del pretorio Tigidio Perenne il quale, nello stesso momento in cui riusciva a sbarazzarsi del collega Tarrutenio Paterno, lo costrinse ad abbandonare la vita pubblica e a ritirarsi nel luogo natio in Liguria (Pertinace era nato nel 126 ad *Alba Pompeia* nella *regio IX Liguria*), ove dimorò per un triennio: la mitezza del provvedimento da parte di uomo abile e severo come Perenne dimostra che era impossibile formulare accuse gravi contro Pertinace. Tuttavia nel 185 Perenne fu sospettato di preparare un colpo di stato e di conseguenza ucciso con i suoi figli. Erodiano (1,9,6) afferma che alcuni consiglieri di Commodo, già ostili a Perenne, soffiavano sul fuoco: sebbene l'unico nome a noi giunto sia quello di Aurelio Cleandro, che già aveva contribuito ad eliminare Saotero e gli era succeduto nella funzione di *a cubiculo*, è molto probabile che al suo fianco avesse personaggi che appartenevano al gruppo di Pertinace, che poteva contare sull'amicizia di T. Aio Santo, uno dei *magni atque optimi viri* chiamati da Marco ad educare Commodo, di cui divenne uno degli eredi.

Lo stesso ritorno alla vita pubblica di Pertinace nel 185 non è peraltro una coincidenza: dopo la caduta di Perenne, tornò a svolgere quello che considerava il suo compito, collaborando al governo dell'impero. Nei giorni in cui faceva rientro nella vita pubblica si era accesa una rivolta delle truppe stanziate in Britannia, che avevano manifestato in modo clamoroso la loro ostilità contro Perenne. Per domarla occorreva un uomo energico e risoluto ma stimato e amato dai legionari: per questo la scelta ricadde proprio su Pertinace; non si può neppure escludere che la sua scelta fosse dovuta al fatto che l'ostilità delle truppe in Britannia contro Perenne fosse da ricondurre all'influsso di ufficiali favorevoli a Pertinace o comunque d'accordo con lui. Egli dunque ora che, caduto il prefetto, aveva guadagnato grande prestigio, aveva tutto l'interesse a restaurare l'ordine ed era particolarmente qualificato per imporre ai soldati un ritorno alla disciplina. I soldati arrivarono addirittura ad acclamarlo imperatore, nomina a cui oppose apertamente il suo rifiuto.

Dopo aver condotto a termine il suo governo in Britannia, Pertinace fu nominato *praefectus alimentorum* poi, probabilmente tra il 188 e il 190, ottenne il proconsolato nella provincia d'Africa e infine, negli ultimi anni di Commodo, fu *praefectus urbi.* Nel 190, da prefetto, fu tra i protagonisti della repressione della rivolta di Cleandro, al quale in precedenza si era legato, ma dal quale era stato indotto dalle circostanze a prendere le distanze. La tendenza di Commodo alla teocrazia iniziò ad avere le sue manifestazioni più appariscenti proprio subito dopo l'eliminazione di Cleandro, fra il 191 e il 192. Tra i vecchi amici di Marco supersititi c'erano ancora Pertinace e Pompeiano e i loro seguaci, i quali erano, in linea di principio, fedeli a Commodo; ma, dato che l'imperatore col tempo andava accentuando le sue tendenze assolutistiche e le sue stranezze, finirono col comprendere che le loro speranze erano vane e la loro posizione insostenibile, finché non si giunse a formare una congiura che pose fine al governo del figlio di Marco.

Gli obiettivi che i congiurati avevano cercato di perseguire attraverso l'assassinio di Commodo non sono chiariti esattamente dalle fonti: tuttavia possiamo farcene un'idea dagli eventi che ne seguirono. In questo contesto è interessante un episodio che si dice sia avvenuto non molto tempo dopo l'ascesa al trono di Pertinace. Il prefetto del pretorio Emilio Leto insieme a Marcia, concubina di Commodo, ed il cubiculario Ecletto, avrebbero inviato alcuni soldati ad inseguire una delegazione di barbari per richiedere la restituzione dei pagamenti che avevano ricevuto da Commodo per la conclusione della pace sul Danubio.[3] Il modo in cui Leto li aveva mandati via era inteso a far capire loro che d'ora in poi Pertinace, che già avevano imparato a temere, sarebbe stato il loro imperatore. Questo episodio suggerisce che qualcosa doveva ovviamente cambiare nelle relazioni esterne con i barbari: non si doveva più impedire loro di devastare il territorio dell'impero romano attraverso pagamenti monetari, come avveniva sotto Commodo. Ciò lascia intravedere che uno degli obiettivi era la riorganizzazione della politica estera.[4] Era chiaro che la sicurezza dell'impero doveva essere nuovamente garantita dalle armi dei legionari e non più da vergognosi pagamenti monetari.

Il desiderio di restituire 'sovranità' all'esterno può indicare un riorientamento fondamentale della politica imperiale. È probabile che anche le relazioni interne dovessero essere riformate in modo analogo, per ottenere anche qui un maggiore 'stato di diritto'. Ciò sembra confermato dal pacchetto di misure che Pertinace introdusse dopo la sua ascesa al trono.[5] L'ampiezza di queste misure suggerisce che l'obiettivo era quello di riequilibrare gli affari interni dell'impero, che erano precipitati nel disordine, e di procedere con alcune riforme. In un simile contesto le esigenze del popolo romano e dell'impero nel suo complesso avranno avuto un'importanza secondaria, sebbene fosse certamente previsto un riorientamento politico. La sicurezza personale di quanti erano coinvolti nell'assassinio di Commodo era invece certamente importante, sebbene questa minaccia non fosse affatto così chiara come Erodiano, ad esempio, vuole farci credere con la presunta condanna a morte che Commodo avrebbe comminato a Leto, Marcia ed Ecletto.[6] Tuttavia, è innegabile che il timore per la propria vita abbia giocato

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3 D.C. 74[73],6,1: «Leto faceva propaganda a favore di Pertinace e infieriva contro la memoria di Commodo. Per esempio, dopo aver fatto richiamare alcuni barbari che in cambio di una pace avevano ottenuto da Commodo una cospicua quantità d'oro (costoro si trovavano ancora sulla via del ritorno), ne pretese la restituzione dicendo loro: 'Riferite ai vostri connazionali che l'imperatore è Pertinace!'. Infatti essi conoscevano il suo nome sin troppo bene a causa delle perdite che avevano subito al tempo in cui egli aveva condotto una campagna militare al fianco di Marco». Sulla pace stipulata da Commodo con Quadi, Marcomanni e altre popolazioni germaniche minori dopo la morte di Marco Aurelio nella primavera del 180 cfr. D.C. 73[72],2,1–3; Hdn. 1,6–7; Alföldy (1971); Galimberti (2010).

4 Bering-Staschewski (1981) 38.

5 *HA Pert.* 6,8–11; 7,1–6; 8,8–11; 9,2–3. Lo Cascio (1980).

6 Hdn. 1,17,1: «Commodo, persa la pazienza, li congedò, e si ritirò nelle sue stanze mostrando di voler dormire, come era solito fare nelle ore meridiane. Colà prese uno di quei fogli sottilissimi che si ricavano dalla scorza di tiglio, e possono piegarsi per ogni verso; e vi scrisse una lista di persone che voleva far uccidere in quella notte. Il primo nome era quello di Marcia; subito dopo venivano Leto ed Ecletto; quindi molti dei senatori piú eminenti. Voleva infatti eliminare i piú anziani, e gli amici di suo padre ancora viventi, perché gli rincresceva che le sue scelleratezze fossero giudicate severamente; meditava inoltre di spartire i beni dei piú ricchi, facendone dono ai soldati e ai gladiatori: agli uni, un ruolo di un certo peso nello spingere i congiurati ad agire. Non bisogna infine trascurare il fatto che essi si erano resi conto che soprattutto la *plebs urbana* si era allontanata definitivamente da Commodo,[7] come rivelava il comportamento di quanti si erano accordati con il senato dopo che era stata resa nota la sua morte. I congiurati piuttosto temevano probabilmente una tale esplosione di violenza da condurre alla morte dell'imperatore ma, in ogni caso, non potevano controllare un tale frangente: un inaccettabile scoppio di violenza avrebbe senz'altro destabilizzato troppo la situazione. Pensarono dunque che fosse meglio un trasferimento 'controllato' del potere. I motivi di una simile scelta dovevano essere molteplici. Il comportamento di Commodo, in particolare durante l'ultimo anno della sua vita, mostrava la sua crescente imprevedibilità; la facilità con cui venivano inflitte ed eseguite condanne a morte era tale da mettere in pericolo anche i suoi cari e pertanto il timore per la propria vita serpeggiava tra i congiurati. Ciò peraltro rivelava drammaticamente che anche l'influenza di chi gli stava più vicino, come nel caso di Marcia, stava svanendo.

1 La scelta di Pertinace come successore

Alla luce di tutto ciò dobbiamo dunque chiederci quale fu il ruolo e il comportamento di Pertinace in occasione della congiura che condusse a morte di Commodo.[8] C'è infatti chi pensa che Pertinace fosse estraneo alla congiura e il suo presunto coinvolgimento sia frutto di voci ostili diffuse *post eventum;*[9] c'è invece chi ritiene che egli fosse al corrente di tutto e si fosse prestato alla messinscena dei congiurati[10].

Le fonti presentano il complotto e la morte di Commodo come un avvenimento spontaneo, tutt'altro che organizzato. In realtà sappiamo dall'*HA* (*Pert.* 4,4) che la congiura ebbe inizio quando Pertinace rivestiva il secondo consolato, vale a dire nel 192, e aveva peraltro come collega Commodo stesso (console per la settima volta). Si potrebbe dunque pensare che alla fine del 191 o all'inizio del 192 il gruppo dei congiurati si era già formato e stava pianificando l'assassinio di Commodo e la sua successione. Inoltre, la sommossa che determinò la fine di Cleandro e che ebbe tra i protagonisti Pertinace in qualità di *praefectus urbi*, potrebbe essere stata il momento in cui i congiurati stessi trovarono una prima intesa. In questo senso i due avvenimenti, la fine di Cleandro e quella di Commodo, potrebbero essere messi in relazione tra loro. L'attuazione della congiura contro Commodo diede vita ad un vero e proprio piano a

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perché lo difendessero; agli altri, perché lo divertissero». La traduzione dei passi di Erodiano è di Cassola (2018 = 1967).

[7] Galimberti (2014) 30 – 32.

[8] Hekster (2022) 80 – 83. La migliore ricostruzione si trova ora in Pasek (2013).

[9] Grosso (1964) 393.

[10] Birley (1974) 267; Carini (1976 – 1977) 361 – 368.

cui i congiurati lavorarono con meticolosità. Tuttavia, Erodiano (2,1,1–2)[11] afferma che a tirare le fila del complotto erano stati Leto, Ecletto e Marcia e che soltanto subito dopo la morte di Commodo, dopo aver fatto trasportare la salma in gran segreto in campagna, si erano riuniti per consultarsi sul da farsi. La scelta di un nuovo imperatore doveva servire a due scopi: in primo luogo il nuovo titolare della porpora avrebbe garantito che non ci sarebbero stati colpevoli per quanto era stato commesso, inoltre bisognava trovare un candidato popolare, che godesse cioè di un vasto consenso, in modo che il popolo si sentisse sollevato da quel che aveva patito sotto Commodo.[12] Al termine di frenetiche consultazioni Leto, Ecletto e Marcia giunsero alla conclusione che non c'era uomo migliore di Elvio Pertinace per rivestire la porpora: egli infatti poteva vantare un passato di tutto rispetto sia sotto il profilo politico sia sotto quello militare. Egli peraltro era stato scelto da Marco Aurelio tra i consiglieri che avrebbero dovuto affiancare il giovane Commodo (e di cui il giovane principe si era subito in gran parte liberato) ed aveva condotto una brillante carriera sotto Commodo, come s'è visto, raggiungendo la *praefectura urbi.*

Cassio Dione attribuisce espressamente le ragioni della scelta di Pertinace alla sua virtù e al suo rango.[13] Sia Dione sia Erodiano danno l'impressione che la scelta di Pertinace sia avvenuta molto rapidamente subito dopo la morte di Commodo.[14] Ciò tuttavia appare del tutto inverosimile, poiché dopo l'assassinio non c'era tempo per simili discussioni: se non fosse stato designato in anticipo un successore l'operazione sarebbe miseramente fallita. È stato viceversa ipotizzato che esistesse già prima dell'assassinio di Commodo una *factio Pertinacis* favorevole alla sua ascesa al trono[15]: soprattutto il gruppo degli *amici* di Pertinace che facevano parte della cerchia dei congiurati e che spingevano per una sua candidatura. Tuttavia, non dobbiamo pensare che la scelta di Pertinace sia stata del tutto priva di alternative. Le valutazioni riferite da Erodiano avranno certamente giocato un ruolo determinante nella scelta del candidato e senz'altro la prima preoccupazione da parte dei congiurati era ottenere l'impunità; in secondo luogo, era importante assicurarsi che il successore avesse un *cursus honorum* inattaccabile: la gioventù e gli eccessi di Commodo dovevano essere rimpiazzati da un uomo di esperienza e ancor più bisognava presentare al senato un candidato sul cui conto non si potessero sollevare obiezioni.[16] Di fatto il primo criterio non era soddisfatto dalla ristretta cerchia dei congiurati: certo, Marcia in quanto donna, era già stata esclusa fin dall'inizio come possibile successore di Commodo, ma anche gli altri non sarebbero stati candidabili; il cubiculario Ecletto non poteva nemmeno nei suoi sogni più sfrenati poteva sperare di essere eletto, visto che non apparteneva all'aristocrazia romana. Anche se si è ritenuto da parte di alcuni[17] che il prefetto del pretorio Emilio Leto potesse rientrare nei giochi, in realtà, proprio in considerazione del suo peso nella cospirazione, una sua candidatura sarebbe stata impensabile: ciò che la ostacolava in via definitiva era il fatto che egli apparteneva all'*ordo equester* e, come è noto, fino al III secolo, senza eccezioni, gli imperatori appartenevano all'*ordo senatorius.* Questa situazione dunque restringeva il numero dei potenziali candidati agli appartenenti all'ordine senatorio.

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[11] «Come si è narrato nel primo libro di quest'opera, Commodo fu ucciso; e i congiurati, volendo celare l'accaduto, perché non se ne accorgessero i pretoriani che erano a guardia del palazzo imperiale, avvolsero il cadavere in un tappeto di poca apparenza, e lo legarono; quindi lo affidarono a due schiavi di loro fiducia e lo fecero portar via come se fosse stato un arredo inutile delle camere interne. Gli schiavi lo portarono passando in mezzo ai pretoriani, alcuni dei quali dormivano in preda all'ebrietà, mentre quelli ancora svegli stavano cedendo anch'essi alla sonnolenza, e reclinavano il capo sulle mani che tenevano le lance. Comunque, vedendo che un oggetto veniva portato fuori, non si interessarono affatto di ciò che poteva essere: la cosa non li riguardava minimamente. Cosí la salma dell'imperatore giunse di nascosto fuori del palazzo, e durante la notte, caricata in un carro, fu trasportata in campagna. Intanto Ecletto e Leto si consultavano con Marcia sul da farsi».

[12] Hdn. 2,1,9: «È nostro proposito offrire il trono a te, che fra tutti i senatori primeggi per austerità di vita, gloria, esperienza, e sei amato e onorato dal popolo; confidiamo che il nostro gesto apporterà gioia per tutti, e salvezza per noi». Tuttavia, se c'è un tema su cui le fonti insistono (Erodiano compreso) a propostio di Commodo è la sua popolarità. Cfr. Galimberti (2014) 32 e *passim*; Galimberti (2021).

[13] 74[73],1,1: «Pertinace era da annoverare tra gli uomini eccellenti [...] Quando ancora era tenuta segreta la notizia della morte di Commodo, i seguaci di Ecletto e di Leto giunsero da lui e lo informarono dell'accaduto, poiché erano favorevoli a sceglierlo in ragione della sua virtù e del suo rango».

[14] Domaszewski (1898) 639; Heer (1901) 114–115; Werner (1933) 312–313; Grosso (1964) 392–393; Spielvogel (2006) 63.

[15] Balla (1971) 73–76; Strobel (2004) 531.

A questo gruppo appartenevano almeno cinque personaggi di spicco: Elvio Pertinace, Claudio Pompeiano, Flavio Sulpiciano, Didio Giuliano e Acilio Glabrione. Per Erodiano (2,1,8) un fattore importante doveva essere l'età del candidato: da questo punto di vista tutti e cinque potevano essere considerati alla pari, dal momento che appartenevano alla medesima generazione; bisognava dunque ricorrere al secondo criterio, quello in base al quale non si potevano sollevare obiezioni giustificate contro il candidato. Se seguiamo Erodiano ci rendiamo conto che i congiurati convenivano sul fatto che il successore avrebbe dovuto avere una certa esperienza sia politica sia militare. Questo criterio favoriva innanzitutto Pompeiano, Pertinace e Didio Giuliano; Sulpiciano e Glabrione a loro confronto avevano percorso una carriera meno brillante. Trai primi tre poi Pompeiano era di gran lunga il più avvantaggiato: egli infatti aveva rivestito il supremo comando durante le guerre marcomanniche e dunque poteva vantare un'enorme esperienza militare; era inoltre il più illustre senatore del gruppo ed era sposato con l'*Augusta* Lucilla (e dunque Marco Aurelio era stato suo genero): era quindi molto probabile che i congiurati inizialmente avessero offerto a lui la successione. Tuttavia, sappiamo che Pompeiano si era già in passato rifiutato di partecipare alle trame della congiura – poi miseramente fallita – organizzata da sua moglie Lucilla ai danni di Commodo, opponendo un suo sdegnoso ritiro dalla politica: è ragionevole supporre che egli avesse già dichiarato in modo inequivocabile ai congiurati nel corso delle loro consultazioni la sua indisponibilità ad accettare la porpora e, anche se non sappiamo esattamente cosa lo avesse spinto a questa rinuncia, non si può escludere che egli lo avesse fatto per l'età ormai avanzata. Rimanevano ancora due candidati, se si ipotizza, come è stato fatto,[18] che Didio Giuliano apparteneva alla cerchia dei congiurati. Sia Pertinace sia Didio avevano maturato una buona esperienza politico-militare. In termini di prestigio e lignaggio Didio era superiore a Pertinace per la sua appartenenza all'aristocrazia imperiale, ma durante le consultazioni i congiurati giunsero infine alla conclusione che Pertinace era la persona più adatta ad assumere la popora imperiale date le circostanze.

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[16] Hdn. 2,1,8: «È nostro proposito offrire il trono a te, che fra tutti i senatori primeggi per austerità di vita, gloria, esperienza, e sei amato e onorato dal popolo; confidiamo che il nostro gesto apporterà gioia per tutti, e salvezza per noi».

[17] Howe (1942) 43.

La domanda che sorge spontanea è cosa avesse fatto pendere la bilancia a suo favore. Non è improbabile che Pompeiano, che poteva rivendicare per sé l'impero se non fosse stato per la sua età ormai avanzata, si fosse espresso a favore del suo amico Pertinace; dal momento che Pompeiano godeva di grandissima reputazione, non si può escludere che proprio il suo intervento avesse alla fine determinato la decisione a favore di Pertinace. Tuttavia Pertinace, in quanto figlio di un liberto, non poteva vantare una discendenza illustre quanto quella di Didio o di Acilio Glabrione, e questa sua origine era, per così dire, in contrasto con i requisiti richiesti per divenire imperatore sino ad allora. In ogni caso, la sua rilevante carriera militare aveva molto probabilmente giocato un peso decisivo, poiché in questo modo era possibile conquistare il consenso dei soldati degli eserciti provinciali: la sua reputazione negli ambienti militari, sia tra gli ufficiali sia tra i soldati, era un fattore da non sottovalutare; si aggiunga che in quel momento Pertinace era l'unico a ricoprire un importante incarico come la prefettura urbana e ciò potrebbe essere stata una sua lucida scelta. In tale contesto non va dimenticato che Flavio Sulpiciano, successore di Pertinace alla *praefectura urbi* e suo suocero, aveva anch'egli cercato di diventare imperatore dopo la morte di Pertinace stesso, senza successo. È possibile che la *praefectura urbi* di Pertinace fosse ritenuta politicamente più conveniente e dunque destinata a prevalere sull'orientamento dei pretoriani, che sembravano godere di maggior peso. Non si può comunque escludere che i congiurati inzialmente cercassero solo un imperatore di transizione, in attesa di un successore effettivo, e Pertinace per questo ruolo sembrasse il più adatto in considerazione della sua eccellente carriera e del suo prestigio[19]; l'unico suo punto debole erano le origini libertine.

Si può ipotizzare che Pertinace si fosse impegnato a non nominare suo figlio come successore, rinunciando così alla fondazione di una propria dinastia[20]: non appena la situazione generale si fosse calmata e stabilizzata, si sarebbe scelto un successore tra i congiurati attraverso l'adozione e il parere di Pertinace. In questo contesto si poteva quindi prevedere che Pertinace assumesse il ruolo richiestogli e avrebbe governato fino a quando non fosse subentrato un erede adatto. In linea di principio è ragionevole supporre che la designazione di Pertinace come futuro imperatore si basasse su una concezione del principato che si opponeva a quella dinastica: il *princeps* era solo il più alto funzionario in grado, non il *dominus.* Senza dubbio questa impostazione, così come il successivo rifiuto di Pertinace degli onori per suo figlio e sua moglie, intendeva indicare la ripresa di una pratica che era stata comune nella dinastia antonina sino a Commodo. Se mai tale procedura fosse stata adottata, si sarebbe trattato di una deliberata ripetizione degli eventi del 96: una nuova edizione dell'impero adottivo, ove Pertinace sarebbe stato un novello Nerva a cui sarebbe spettato il compito di nominare un nuovo Traiano come successore. Già all'interno della dinastia antonina c'erano stati buoni modelli in questo senso, sebbene l'imperatore e il successore designato fossero sempre imparentati tra loro. Adriano aveva dato l'esempio con Giulio Serviano e Pedanio Fusco e, successivamente, con Antonino Pio e Lucio Vero.[21]

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[18] Pasek (2013) 31–37.

[19] Birley (1969) e (1988^2) 81–88.

[20] È quanto si potrebbe ricavare da *HA Pert.* 6,9: *Filium eius senatus Caesarem appellavit. Sed Pertinax nec uxoris Augustae appellationem recepit et de filio dixit: «Cum meruerit».*

Come s'è detto, nel gruppo dei congiurati e delle persone a loro vicine, potevano esserci diversi candidati che avrebbero potuto succedere a Pertinace. Il fatto che due esponenti della dinastia antonina, in quanto legittimi rappresentanti della dinastia stessa, si fossero apertamente schierati a favore di Pertinace come imperatore, suggerisce l'ipotesi che come successore di Pertinace fosse stato scelto un discendente della dinastia.[22] Potrebbe trattarsi del figlio maggiore di Claudio Pompeiano (sposato con Lucilla, figlia di Marco Aurelio), Lucio (o Marco) Aurelio Commodo Pompeiano. Questa ipotesi è suffragata dal fatto che Pertinace era un cliente di Claudio Pompeiano. Dunque, mentre Pertinace stabilizzava la situazione stando sul trono, Claudio Pompeiano sullo sfondo assicurava l'impero al figlio. D'altra parte, non si poteva evitare di scegliere un discendente diretto della dinastia Antonina come futuro imperatore. Tuttavia, se questa doveva essere la regola, anche Settimio Severo poteva essere destinato all'adozione e alla contemporanea elevazione a Cesare. Ciò potrebbe essere rafforzato dal fatto che a Settimio e a suo fratello Publio Settimio Geta erano state assegnate in anticipo province limitrofe; ma si può pensare anche che i due fratelli avrebbero potuto distinguersi per una particolare fedeltà a Pertinace e perciò essere incaricati dell'amministrazione delle due province senza per questo considerare Severo un possibile successore. L'importanza che la dinastia Antonina[23] ebbe nell'opinione pubblica anche dopo la morte di Commodo, depone quindi a favore del fatto che un rampollo degli antonini fosse considerato come possibile successore dell'imperatore.

2 Pertinace e la congiura contro Commodo

Alla luce delle considerazioni sin qui svolte è lecito dunque ipotizzare che Pertinace conoscesse il piano dei congiurati. Di fatto l'unica fonte che afferma che Pertinace fosse al corrente della congiura è *HA Pert.* 4,4: *Tunc Pertinax interficiendi Commodi conscientiam delatam sibi ab aliis non fugit*; da Dione (74[73],1,2) apprendiamo invece che Pertinace credette alla notizia della morte di Commodo soltanto quando uno dei suoi emissari gli assicurò che Commodo era cadavere.

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[21] Champlin (1976) e (1979); Barnes (1967) per Adriano e Lucio Vero. Per l'opposizione 'dinastica' a Pertinace durante il suo regno cfr. ora Jarvis (2022).

[22] Pasek (2013) 64.

[23] Critico su questo punto Hekster (2001), ma cfr. ora Pistellato (2022).

Erodiano, il quale è molto favorevole a Pertinace, dedica ampio spazio alla sorpresa e al terrore che colse Pertinace quando i congiurati andarono da lui, temendo che lo volessero uccidere (2,1,3–11). Pertinace infatti stentava a credere alla notizia della morte di Commodo per apoplessia diffusa dai congiurati, e si era infine convinto della morte di Commodo soltanto quando i congiurati avevano rivelato di essere i responsabili dell'assassinio e gli mostrarono la lista con i nomi delle vittime vergata da Commodo: soltanto di fronte a ciò si convinse e si dichiarò pronto a ricevere l'impero.

Risulta dunque difficile pensare che i congiurati avessero improvvisato un successore dopo la morte del tiranno. Ci sono infatti una serie di circostanze che mi spingono a ritenere che Pertinace fosse al corrente della congiura, sebbene non vi avesse partecipato in prima persona. Innanzitutto la posizione dei congiurati: essi avevano la necessità, ancor prima di agire, di individuare un personaggio che, in cambio del beneficio da loro ricevuto, vale a dire l'impero, si assumesse l'impegno della loro incolumità (cfr. Hdn. 2,1,3: ὅπως αὐτοί τε σωθεῖεν), cosa che Pertinace fece.

Leto – che godeva di scarsa stima da parte di Pertinace – e Marcia furono infatti messi a morte solo dopo la morte di Pertinace, da Didio Giuliano che, per parte sua, aveva rivendicato l'eredità di Commodo.[24] Anche la data, particolarmente felice, scelta dai congiurati per il crimine, l'ultimo giorno dell'anno, difficilmente poteva essere frutto di improvvisazione, senza che ci fosse stato un accordo con chi poi doveva essere il successore.

Non deve poi essere sottovalutato, come s'è detto, il prestigio di cui godeva Pertinace (valente uomo d'armi, console per due volte, governatore e prefetto urbano)[25], il quale poteva godere del consenso del senato, nonostante il console Sosio Falcone avesse espresso la sua profonda delusione nei suoi confronti già il 1° gennaio 193[26]: «Ma dopo che Pertinace aveva ringraziato Leto, il console Falcone disse: ‹Quale imperatore tu sarai, lo comprendiamo già dal vedere dietro di te Leto e Marcia, complici delle scelleratezze di Commodo›. E Pertinace gli rispose: »Sei giovane, o console, e non conosci ancora ciò che comporta la necessità di ubbidire. Hanno dovuto ubbidire a Commodo contro la loro volontà, ma appena ne hanno avuto la possibilità, hanno dimostrato ciò che avevano sempre voluto«. Ma Falcone era senz'altro animato da inimicizia personale nei confronti di Pertinace e probabilmente si aspettava che la scelta ricadesse su di lui giacché, due mesi dopo, fu scelto come candidato dai congiurati che misero a morte Pertinace.[27] Dal discorso di Falcone si può inoltre chiaramente evincere che la versione della morte di Commodo per un colpo apoplettico non era stata creduta da nessuno, tant'è che fu utilizzata per ammansire i pretoriani, che esitavano a riconoscere Pertinace come nuovo imperatore.[28] La risposta di Pertinace lascia infine intendere che egli fosse al corrente del complotto. Che i congiurati non avevano agito da soli è affermato poi da Erodiano in due passi laddove parla della presenza di altri congiurati attorno a Leto ed Ecletto, sebbene la loro identità ci sfugga[29]. Va rilevato inoltre che nella versione di Erodiano (2,1,11), quando i congiurati si presentarono davanti a Pertinace, egli rimase sbigottito alla lettura dell'elenco delle vittime vergato dall'imperatore che il prefetto del pretorio Leto gli aveva sottoposto: viene da pensare che in quell'elenco ci fosse anche il suo nome. Pertinace infatti aveva detto a Leto, prima ancora che gli venisse mostrata la tavoletta di Commodo, che da tempo temeva di venire ucciso in quanto ultimo superstite degli *amici Marci* (Hdn. 2,1,7). Ma l'episodio di cui parla Erodiano ha tutta l'aria di essere una ricostruzione studiata *post eventum* e che dunque la tavoletta vergata da Commodo con l'elenco delle sue prossime vittime e contenente anche il nome di Pertinace sia un falso con il quale i congiurati intendevano tutelarsi coinvolgendo Pertinace stesso. Che Commodo fosse così sprovveduto da compilare un elenco delle sue vittime appare francamente poco credibile. Probabilmente la lista era un espediente architettato dai congiurati stessi per scagionarsi dalla responsabilità di aver messo a morte l'imperatore. Di fatto di questa lista parlano tutte le fonti (anche se discordano sulla sua composizione) ed è dunque probabile che essa esistesse davvero, tuttavia è lecito dubitare che essa fosse stata compilata da Commodo. Ciò inoltre è, a mio avviso, un indizio del fatto che Erodiano non dipende da Dione, dal momento che mentre il primo racconta che Pertinace si convinse immediatamente ad assumere l'impero quando i congiurati gli mostrarono la lista, Dione tace della lista e Pertinace si convince solo quando i suoi gli riferiscono che Commodo era senz'altro morto.[30]

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[24] Cfr. D.C. 74[73],16,5; *HA Pert.* 10,9; *Did. Iul.* 2,6 e 6,2.

[25] Cfr. *supra* D.C. 74[73],1,1.

[26] *HA Pert.* 5,2–3: Sed cum Laeto gratias egisset Pertinax, Falco consul dixit: «Qualis imperator es futurus, hinc intellegimus, quod Laetum et Marciam, ministros scelerum Commodi, post te videmus». cui Pertinax respondit: «Iuvenis es consul nec parendi scis necessitates. paruerunt inviti Commodo, sed ubi habuerunt facultatem, quid semper voluerint ostenderunt».

Da ultimo non sottovaluterei quanto afferma l'imperatore Giuliano in *Caes.* 312c ove accusa espressamente Pertinace di essere stato a conoscenza della congiura che condusse a morte Commodo: καὶ σὺ δέ, ὦ Περτίναξ, ἠδίκεις κοινωνῶν τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς, ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς σκέμμασιν, ἣν ὁ Μάρκου παῖς ἐπεβουλεύθη («Anche tu, Pertinace, hai

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27 D.C. 74[73],8,2.

28 Hdn. 2,2,5 e 9; *HA Pert.* 4,7.

29 Hdn. 2,1,5: πρὸς δὴ τοῦτον τὸν Περτίνακα νυκτὸς ἀκμαζούσης πάντων τε ὕπνῳ κατειλημμένων ἀφικνοῦνται ὁ Λαῖτος καὶ ὁ Ἔκλεκτος ὀλίγους τῶν συνωμοτῶν ἐπαγόμενοι; 2,2,2: διαπέμπουσι δή τινας τῶν πιστῶν τοὺς διαβοήσοντας ὅτι ὁ Κόμοδος μὲν τέθνηκε, Περτίναξ δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον βασιλεύσων ἄπεισι. Lo stesso afferma Aurelio Vittore (*De Caes.* 17,8), che indica come *princeps factionis* il medico che raggiunse Commodo ai bagni prima che fosse strangolato da Narcisso. L'esistenza di un «African party» che avrebbe sostenuto la congiura non è suffragata da alcuna testimonianza, nonostante le ulteriori supposizioni di Tomassini (1994) 79–88, così come la candidatura di Settimio Severo (Domaszewski (1898) 638–639 *contra* Grosso (1964) 392–393, con bibliografia precedente). Cfr. soprattutto Letta (1991) 645 con cui concordo.

30 Cfr. la discussione di questa divergenza in Carini (1976–1977) 367–368.

commesso ingiustizia, prendendo parte alla congiura, che, secondo i piani, mise a morte il figlio di Marco»). Se è così, ciò costituisce, a mio avviso, un importante indizio della colpevolezza di Pertinace.

Insomma: dopo l'assassinio di Commodo il 31 dicembre del 192 Pertinace non fu scelto a caso né poteva essere ignaro dei progetti esistenti; egli inoltre doveva apparire all'opinione pubblica come l'uomo predestinato al potere: nel 172 o nel 173, durante le guerre danubiane di Marco Aurelio contro Quadi e Marcomanni, Pertinace comandava i distaccamenti romani che, rimasti isolati e senz'acqua in pieno territorio nemico erano stati salvati da un'improvvisa pioggia, ritenuta miracolosa[31]; Pertinace, oltre ad essere benvoluto in tutti gli ambienti militari, era già stato acclamato imperatore nel 185 dall'esercito britannico: tale periodo doveva senza dubbio lasciare una traccia profonda; Commodo inoltre aveva avuto grandissima stima di Pertinace. Insomma, nel 191–192, quando gli amici di Commodo si accorsero che la loro vita era in pericolo per la follia dell'imperatore e che era necessario ucciderlo per non essere uccisi, Pertinace era uno dei pochi superstiti tra gli amici di Marco e uno dei generali più insigni; era stato governatore di cinque province imperiali, tutte consolari, fra cui la Siria e la Britannia; due volte console e proconsole d'Africa, era inoltre *praefectus urbi.* Egli era effigiato sulla colonna di Marco Aurelio come protagonista di un miracolo; era stato acclamato imperatore dai legionari e, implicitamente, dal popolo di Roma: nessuno meglio di lui avrebbe potuto assumere l'impero in un momento di così grave incertezza.

3 Erodiano, Pertinace e Settimio Severo

Erodiano ha per Pertinace ripetute parole di ammirazione: i pretoriani appaiono perplessi della scelta di Pertinace da parte dei congiurati perché il suo sarebbe stato un governo all'insegna della moderazione (2, 2, 5)[32]: questo prima ancora che divenisse imperatore, ma con il chiaro intento di contrapporlo all'indisciplina dei pretoriani «avvezzi a servire un tiranno esercitando la violenza e la rapina»; al pari di Marco, Pertinace, nelle parole rivolte da Leto ai pretoriani, sarà non solo un imperatore ma anche un «ottimo padre» e il popolo lo acclama imperatore chiamandolo padre (2, 2, 8); l'avvento del regno di Pertinace segna il passaggio a un regime «più onesto, più moderato, più economo» rispetto alla tirannide commodiana (2, 3, 9); Pertinace fu «universalmente acclamato e fatto segno a manifestazioni di onore e di rispetto» (2, 3, 11); «conquistava facilmente la simpatia di tutti, poiché aveva dato loro una vita regolata e tranquilla dopo una tirannide ingiusta e crudele. La fama della sua moderazione si diffuse per tutte le province, i popoli alleati, e gli eserciti, inducendo tutti a esaltare il suo governo» (2,4,2); anche i barbari «che in precedenza nutrivano sentimenti ostili, o erano in aperta lotta, furono intimoriti dal ricordo del valore che egli aveva dimostrato come generale; e ben sapendo che, essendo alieno dall'ingiustizia quanto dalla violenza, mai avrebbe fatto di sua volontà un torto ad alcuno, e avrebbe riconosciuto a ognuno ciò che gli spettava, spontaneamente gli si piegarono» (2,4,3) per cui «tutti gli uomini si rallegravano, in pubblico e privatamente, per il nuovo governo moderato e pacifico» (2,4,4).

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[31] Sordi (2022 = 1960); cfr. ora Israelowich (2008) Kovács (2009).

[32] «I pretoriani, avvezzi a servire un tiranno esercitando la violenza e la rapina, non avrebbero visto di buon occhio un governo ispirato alla moderazione. I cittadini dunque accorrevano in massa, per costringere i pretoriani a sottomettersi».

Come spiegare questo giudizio? A mio avviso un possibile tentativo di spiegazione va articolato in due direzioni: sul piano storico-propagandistico e sul piano storiografico, in relazione cioè alla 'ideologia' di Erodiano. Recentemente, in un bel saggio, Chrysanthos Chrysanthou ha confrontato, tra l'altro, la testimonianza di Cassio Dione e quella di Erodiano su Pertinace, evidenziando una serie notevole di differenze e addebitandole ad una diversa rielaborazione da parte di Erodiano del testo di Dione[33]. Ora, a me sembra che questa spiegazione sia da integrare con altre osservazioni. Credo infatti che per comprendere la rappresentazione di Pertinace di Erodiano non si possa trascurare il fatto che Erodiano – per sua stessa ammissione (2,9,3–4)[34] – conoscesse e dunque utilizzasse nella sua opera l'*Autobiografia* di Settimio Severo.[35] Come rivela 2,15,6–7[36] Erodiano ben conosce la storiografia relativa a Settimio Severo[37] e la critica aspramente per il suo spirito di parte e deriva senz'altro dall'*Autobiografia* il presagio menzionato a 2,9,5–6 relativo ad un sogno di Settimio prima dell'avvento di Pertinace al potere in cui gli sarebbe apparso un cavallo montato da Pertinace che attraversava Roma avanzando lungo la Via Sacra: giunto all'ingresso del Foro, il cavallo s'impennò disarcionando Pertinace e si piegò dinanzi a Severo che era lì vicino, lasciandolo salire in sella, e quindi lo portò senza ribellarsi al centro del Foro, cosicché tutti potevano vederlo ed ammirarlo. A ricordo di questo sogno, aggiunge Erodiano, «rimane ancor oggi in quel luogo una grande statua di bronzo».

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[33] Chrysanthou (2020). Non condivido l'affermazione secondo la quale Erodiano «offers no explicit conclusion or critical judgment of Pertinax» (639). A me sembra invece che la presentazione di Pertinace da parte di Erodiano sia tutt'altro che neutra (cf. *supra*). Altrettanto arbitraria mi sembra l'impostazione di Chrysanthou circa il ritratto di Settimio Severo che sarebbe «reflective of his overall literary and historiographical methods rather than his use of (now) lost 'biased' sources» (641). Ora, al di là della difficoltà di individuare il metodo letterario e storiografico di Erodiano, non bisogna dimenticare che è lo stesso Erodiano a dirci che ha fatto uso di fonti diverse nella sua opera: escludere che il nostro storico abbia fatto uso di fonti (anche perdute per noi!) che deformavano eventi e personaggi in un senso o in un altro (come sempre accade) non mi sembra corretto.

[34] «Egli era incoraggiato anche da sogni, da oracoli, e da tutti i fenomeni che appaiono a presagire il futuro: i quali, quando si avverano, sogliono essere considerati infallibili. Per la maggior parte li narrò egli stesso nella sua *Autobiografia*, e li fece rappresentare in opere esposte al popolo». Per l'*Autobiografia* cfr. *HA Sev*. 3,2 and 18,6; *Nig.* 4,7–5,1; *Alb.* 7,1 Hdn. 2,9,4–7; D.C. 76[75],7,3; Vict. *De Caes.* 20,22.

[35] Mi sembra un'inutile complicazione quella introdotta da Rubin (1980) 138–144. che ritiene che Erodiano conoscesse l'*Autobiografia* indirettamente attraverso una fonte intermedia.

[36] «Le tappe della sua marcia; i discorsi da lui pronunciati nelle varie città; i frequenti prodigi, spiegati come manifestazioni della volontà divina; il teatro della guerra; gli schieramenti; il numero dei soldati che caddero in battaglia dalle due parti: sono stati esposti fin troppo ampiamente da molti storici e poeti, che avevano come specifico argomento della loro opera la vita di Severo. Il mio scopo è invece di esporre in sintesi le gesta di molti imperatori per un tratto di settant'anni, in base alle mie conoscenze. Pertanto esporrò nel prossimo libro solo i fatti essenziali, e le conclusioni che ebbero le varie imprese di Severo, nulla esagerando per accattivarmi le simpatie (come fecero quelli che scrissero ai suoi tempi) e nulla omettendo di ciò che merita ricordo e considerazione»

[37] Scott (2023). Tra questi storiografi criticati in modo anonimo da Erodiano è da annoverare molto probabilmente Antipatro di Hierapolis, *ab epistulis Graecis* di Severo e autore di Σεβέρου τοῦ βασιλέως ἔργα.

Si tratta di un sogno che solo Severo aveva interesse a propalare[38] e che Erodiano riferisce in quanto si incastona perfettamente nel criterio da lui esposto: era narrato da Severo stesso e l'imperatore lo aveva fatto rappresentare in un'opera 'esposta al popolo'. Erodiano cioè qui si vuole rendere fededegno ai suoi lettori applicando rigorosamente il criterio tucidideo dell'autopsia esposto nel proemio della sua opera: ciò di cui egli scrive non solo l'ha trovato negli scritti dell'imperatore, vale a dire in una fonte di prima mano, ma ha visto il monumento che si riferisce al contenuto della testimonianza con i suoi occhi. L'*Autobiografia* peraltro è lo stesso testo che Erodiano sembra usare nelle parole di biasimo rivolte ai pretoriani da Severo ove riferisce che «*criticava* (διέβαλλε) inoltre i pretoriani per la loro infedeltà per aver contaminato il giuramento spargendo il sangue di un Romano e di un imperatore. Egli *diceva* (ἔλεγε) che era necessario porre un argine a tutto ciò, e vendicare la morte di Pertinace. Ben sapeva infatti che tutti i soldati illirici ricordavano ancora di aver combattuto agli ordini di Pertinace» (2,9,8). A mio parere dunque non è improbabile, in considerazione dell'atteggiamento assunto da Severo nei confronti di Pertinace – di cui si fece vendicatore non appena conquistò il potere – che la presentazione di Pertinace offerta da Severo nell'*Autobiografia* e dunque la costruzione del suo personaggio, fosse molto positiva che è ciò che corrisponde al ritratto offerto da Erodiano.

A me sembra pertanto che le differenze di cui parla Chrysanthou tra Dione ed Erodiano non siano dovute tanto ad una rielaborazione diversa da parte di Erodiano del testo di Dione quanto dal fatto che Erodiano utilizza qui una fonte diversa da Dione, probabilmente l'*Autobiografia* di Severo.

Sotto il profilo ideologico è importante rilevare che Erodiano in più luoghi della sua opera manifesta una spiccata inclinazione per il regime che egli identifica nell'ἀριστοκρατία (parola che significativamente non compare nel lessico di Cassio Dione), fatta salva ovviamente l'autorità dell'imperatore il cui ruolo è fuori discussione. A questo proposito bisogna osservare che i discorsi (alla maniera tucididea) che Erodiano mette in bocca a Pertinace (2,3,10), a Settimio Severo (2,14,3) e a Macrino (5,1,4: qui si tratta della lettera che Macrino scrive al senato nel 218) prospettano tutti come miglior forma di governo l'ἀριστοκρατία. Anche il governo di Alessandro Severo (6,1,2), per la scelta di Giulia Mesa e di Giulia Mamea di affiancare al giovane Alessandro sedici senatori «eminenti per l'età veneranda e la vita intemerata affinché fossero collaboratori e consiglieri del principe», «era gradito al popolo e ai soldati, ma soprattutto al senato, in quanto si allontanava dall'assolutismo tirannico, ispirandosi a principi aristocratici (ἐς ἀριστοκρατίας τύπον μεταχθείσης)». Se da un lato ciò può essere spiegato come volontà di rispettare il senato, atterrito e violentemente esautorato dalle varie crisi in cui intervengono i diversi neo-imperatori, dall'altro, tenendo conto che si tratta per lo più di discorsi la cui rielaborazione è da addebitare al nostro storico, sembra mettere in luce come Erodiano accordi le sue preferenze – come rivela soprattutto la lettera di Macrino – per un regime che preveda non solo il governo del ceto senatorio, ma una collaborazione tra senatori e i cittadini migliori (aristocratici nel senso letterale del termine).

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[38] Sei dei sette *omina* citati da Dione nella *Storia romana* provenienti dal suo trattatello sugli *omina* di Severo sono sogni. Cfr. Rubin (1980) 21–25.

In questa prospettiva la nobiltà di nascita non è un requisito necessario tale da pregiudicare la partecipazione al governo dell'impero, per cui la provenienza sociale non può oscurare i meriti e le virtù individuali e dunque, in ultima analisi, anche le personalità dei singoli imperatori, che infatti vengono giudicati non sulla base delle loro origini ma per le loro qualità. Ciò che Erodiano intende mostrare è che la *sola* nobiltà non è requisito sufficiente – e questo appare chiaramente già nel primo libro della *Storia* dove i richiami alla nobiltà di Commodo sono frequenti – a fare un buon principe. Questi, per essere tale, oltre alle sue doti personali, deve sapersi inoltre avvalere della collaborazione di buoni consiglieri. Da questo punto di vista in Erodiano è del tutto assente, rispetto a Dione, la polemica ad esempio su Macrino per via della sua non elevata estrazione sociale. Il regime vagheggiato da Erodiano trova il suo campione, oltreché naturalmente nell'irraggiungibile Marco Aurelio, nel nostro Pertinace, di origini non nobili, ma meritevole del trono per i suoi meriti soprattutto militari. Del resto Pertinace si accontentò del solo titolo di *princeps senatus*[39] e promise di restaurare lo spirito di Marco Aurelio.

Ritengo dunque che nella costruzione del ritratto di Pertinace di Erodiano convergano diverse componenti: ideologiche, storiche e storiografiche e che tutte e tre queste componenti vadano tenute nel debito conto per valutare la costruzione di un personaggio a tratti persino idealizzato dal nostro autore.

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[39] D.C. 74[73].5.1; *CIL* II 5128; III 14149; XIII 4323.

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Karine Laporte

Mélange et variété des genres chez Hérodien : le cas de Julianus

> Et si c'était impossible, de ne pas mêler les genres ? Et s'il y avait, logée au cœur de la loi même, une loi d'impureté ou un principe de contamination ?[1]

On pouvait lire, dans des études désormais démodées, que l'*Histoire des empereurs* d'Hérodien était un « (genre de) roman historique »,[2] voire une « série de romans »,[3] une version tarabiscotée du récit de Cassius Dion,[4] une « série de biographies »,[5] un « exercice de rhétorique »,[6] « comme des mémoires »,[7] et même un roman historique moderne avant l'heure.[8] Selon ces avis, cette œuvre pouvait être, au vu de ses lacunes méthodologiques, ses erreurs factuelles ou ses élans dramatiques, à peu près tout, sauf de l'histoire. Ces efforts d'identification générique, ou plutôt de désidentification historique, se fondaient notamment sur des techniques de composition jugées fautives ou même contraires au genre historique. Si la plupart des études parues au cours des dernières décennies s'entendent sur la nature historique de l'*Histoire des empereurs* et le statut d'historien d'Hérodien, il semble qu'il demeure encore une certaine disjonction entre les aspects plus « littéraires » du texte et son essence historique, surtout en ce qui a trait aux épisodes les plus étonnants. Dans le but de réconcilier ces deux côtés, je me propose, dans cet article, de revenir sur la question du genre de l'œuvre à la lumière des concepts de « mélange » et de « variété ».

Les mélanges de genres et de styles déployés dans l'*Histoire des empereurs* ont été notés assez tôt par la critique,[9] qui y voyait au mieux les défauts d'une histoire de seconde zone, au pire la preuve d'une œuvre de fiction d'inspiration vaguement his-

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Remerciements : La rédaction de cet article a été menée à bien grâce à une bourse accordée par la Fondation Hardt pour un séjour de recherche. Je remercie également les éditeur·ice·s de ce volume pour leurs commentaires et suggestions.

[1] Derrida (1986) 254.

[2] E. g. Hohl (1956) 4, 42 ; Alföldy (1971) 431 ; cf. Kolb (1972) 30, 161. Le rapprochement au roman remonte au moins au dix-neuvième siècle, avec Zürcher (1868); cf. Fuchs (1895) 226. Voir une liste plus complète dans Hidber (2006) 65 n. 327 et Chrysanthou (2022) 15 n. 63.

[3] Alföldy (1974) 90.

[4] Kolb (1972) e. g. 160 – 161.

[5] Reardon (1971) 216.

[6] Rubin (1980) 92.

[7] Christol (1990) 132 ; c'est ainsi que sont parfois perçus les derniers livres de Cassius Dion, e. g. Scott (2017).

[8] Sidebottom (1998) 2828 – 2830. Le texte semble en outre avoir été utilisé comme un miroir des princes (*Fürstenspiegel*) durant la Renaissance, cf. Zimmermann (1998) et Hidber (2006) 28 – 32.

[9] E. g. Zürcher (1868) ; Fuchs (1895) et Fuchs (1896).

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torique.[10] Or la réticence des études modernes à classer l’*Histoire des empereurs* dans la même catégorie que les histoires « sérieuses » ne trouve pas vraiment d’échos chez les auteurs anciens ou byzantins, qui ont cependant pu apprécier différemment Hérodien en sa qualité d’historien.[11] Par ailleurs, bien qu’on ne sache pas le titre original de ce récit, les manuscrits qui nous sont parvenus livrent une variété d’intitulés, dont plusieurs comportent le mot ἱστορία.[12] On retrouve également cette terminologie chez Photius qui, au neuvième siècle, écrit avoir lu les « huit livres de l’*Histoire* d’Hérodien » (Phot. *Bibl.* 99 : Ἡρωδιανοῦ ἱστορικοὶ λόγοι ὀκτώ). Hérodien lui-même s’identifie clairement à la tradition historiographique post-thucydidéenne dès les premières lignes de l’ouvrage :

> οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν περὶ συγκομιδὴν ἱστορίας ἀσχοληθέντων (1.1.1).
>
> ἐγὼ δ’ ἱστορίαν […] μετὰ πάσης ἀκριβείας ἤθροισα ἐς συγγραφήν (1.1.3).[13]

S’il faut reconnaître que le terme moderne d’« histoire » ne recouvre pas toute la complexité de son étymon grec (selon le Bailly : « recherche, information, exploration » ; « résultat d’une information, connaissance » ; « relation verbale ou écrite de ce qu’on a appris, récit » ; « histoire »), le refus de voir Hérodien comme un historien n’était pas tellement fondé sur cette distinction sémantique, mais surtout sur un contentieux épistémologique moderne qui posait une stricte opposition entre fiction et histoire.

Il y eut, vers les années 80 – 90, un virage « rhétorico-linguistique » dans les études portant sur l’historiographie antique, qui fut notamment à l’avantage de certains historiens jusqu’alors peu appréciés par la critique. Hérodien en a ainsi largement bénéficié.[14] En plus d’un bon nombre de travaux s’intéressant aux techniques d’écriture et à la représentation historique chez Hérodien, deux articles ont récemment mis l’accent sur des procédés littéraires utilisés par l’auteur qui seraient plus représentatifs du roman ou du théâtre.[15] Dans son analyse des techniques narratives d’Hérodien, A. Kemezis s’est interrogé sur la façon dont l’auteur se conforme aux codes de l’historiographie, ou les rejette, en s’intéressant surtout aux ressemblances avec les méthodes du roman, par exemple sur le plan de la structure narrative et des descriptions vivantes. Pour sa part, M. Baumann a analysé le mode dramatique de Hdn. 4.7–11, en se penchant plus spécifiquement sur la focalisation variée du passage, ainsi que sur le «jeu» et la «direction» de Caracalla. Dans la même lignée, la récente monographie de C.S. Chrysanthou examine de façon plus générale les techniques narratives utilisées par Hérodien.[16] Si l'on persiste encore parfois trop à séparer le fictif, ou le «littéraire», de l'historique à proprement parler, et que les procédés qu'on dira empruntés à la comédie, la tragédie, le roman, ou même la poésie élégiaque, demeurent en marge du récit historique, cette vision tend de plus en plus à s'estomper.

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[10] Voir Hidber (2006) 65 – 70 pour un survol de la littérature.

[11] Cf. Hidber (2006) 20 – 26.

[12] Lucarini (2005) ix, n. 1 répertorie les divers titres donnés par les manuscrits ; cf. Whittaker (1969 – 1970) n. 1 *ad* 1.1.1.

[13] Et plus loin : 2.1.1 (ὡς ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ συντάγματι τῆς ἱστορίας δεδήλωται), 2.15.6 (ἱστορίας τε πολλοὶ συγγραφεῖς καὶ ποιηταί). Cf. Stein (1957) 76 – 90 sur les correspondances thucydidéennes de la préface d’Hérodien. Pitcher, dans ce volume, analyse la conception de la *stasis* chez Hérodien comme une réinterprétation de celle de Thucydide (3.70.1 – 81.5), mais adaptée à sa propre réalité de l’Empire romain du troisième siècle.

[14] Voir les discussions sur le genre de l’*Histoire* dans Sidebottom (1998), Zimmermann (1999), Hidber (2006), Kemezis (2014).

[15] Kemezis (2021) et Baumann (2021).

S'inscrivant dans le sillon de ces relectures d'Hérodien, cet article entend contribuer à un travail de déconstruction du genre historique «pur», par le biais d'une réflexion sur les notions de mélange et de variété. Afin d'en apprécier pleinement leur application, il sera également question d'une analyse détaillée de ces pratiques dans un épisode de l'*Histoire des empereurs* qui a longtemps été considéré comme entièrement fictif et sans intérêt : l'accession impériale de Didius Julianus (2.6.4–14). Un nouvel examen de ce passage, à l'aune de codes tirés de la comédie et de l'élégie, permettra de relire certains éléments du récit qui résonnent avec d'autres genres littéraires plus couramment associés à la fiction, entre autres en ce qui concerne le traitement des personnages et la mise en récit, et de repenser leur relation à la nature historique de l'œuvre, notamment dans le contexte de la littérature de l'époque impériale. Ces thèmes serviront à poursuivre la discussion sur l'intégration de tels procédés dans la conception d'un récit historique et, plus particulièrement, d'une histoire impériale du troisième siècle.

1 Genres, bigarrure, mélanges, interactions

Il convient tout d'abord de définir brièvement ce que j'entends par «genre». Si l'on souhaite explorer la notion de mélange, il faut reconnaître une certaine spécificité générique, qui s'appuie sur un ensemble de critères internes, par exemple la métrique, un système référentiel propre ou encore un mode d'énonciation. Cela dit, la présente étude se fonde sur une vision assez perméable et flexible du genre. L'objectif, dans le cadre de cet article, n'est pas de redéfinir ce qu'est, précisément, le genre de l'historiographie antique ; cette question a bien été explorée par J. Marincola, qui s'est intéressé à la narrativisation, la focalisation, les limites chronologiques, la structure chronologique et le sujet du récit historique antique. Pensant déjà au phénomène de mélange, l'on pourra simplement rappeler que, selon Marincola, les formes traditionnelles de ce genre étaient constamment modifiées par l'esprit novateur des auteurs et que, comme G.B. Conte l'a montré pour la poésie latine, «genre is not a static concept, functioning as a »recipe« with a fixed set of ingredients that the work must contain, but rather is dynamic and should be seen as a »strategy of literary composition«. »[17] Bien plus, tout effort de la critique moderne d'imposer une forme unique aux œuvres historiques anciennes fait fausse route, car ces formes, « *like other literary genres in antiquity*, were in a constant state of flux, of reaction and revision, of challenge and counter-challenge. »[18]

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[16] Chrysanthou (2022).

Dans la foulée de ces réflexions, on comprendra la mixité générique non pas sur le plan de la « contamination » ou de la « corruption », *pace* Derrida, mais sur celui du « mélange ». Un glissement vers une optique plus favorable de cette pratique permettra de déhiérarchiser les relations entre les différents genres et d'apprécier les pratiques scripturaires en fonction de leur contexte socioculturel et de leur environnement intellectuel. Nous suivons en ce sens A. Fowler, pour qui l'intérêt du genre n'est pas taxinomique, mais doit plutôt être considéré en termes de communication et d'interprétation.[19] Par ailleurs, le mélange n'est pas compris ici selon une perspective téléologique : s'il faut admettre que les genres évoluent, les formes mélangées ne sont pas forcément fixées comme des nouveaux genres, mais s'inscrivent certainement dans des tendances et des courants. Ce phénomène de « modulation générique », comme le désigne Fowler, est étroitement lié aux goûts littéraires d'une époque donnée : « [f]or in modulation we have to do with one of the principal ways of expressing literary taste. »[20] C'est également ce que suggérait la discussion de Marincola citée plus haut, par sa perception du genre de l'historiographie antique comme une forme dynamique, en constante évolution. Le concept de « mélange » sert en outre à recouvrir différents degrés d'incorporation entre les genres littéraires, qui peuvent donner lieu à une variété de textures au sein d'une même œuvre.

On voit cette pratique de la variation apparaître dans les textes grecs notamment sous le terme de *poikilia*, « bigarrure ». De façon très générale, on parle, dans la critique antique de *poikilia* (parfois de *metabolē*, « changement » ou, en latin, de *uarietas / uariatio*) au sens de changement de style, ton, débit, ou de diversité des mots et des figures.[21] C'est un aspect de composition qui, en évitant la monotonie et la répétition, participe au divertissement et à l'intérêt soutenu du public.[22] Bien que ces objectifs puissent paraître contraires à la pratique historiographique, des historiens comme Diodore de Sicile ou Denys d'Halicarnasse ont embrassé pleinement la bigarrure dans leur rédaction.[23] Comme l'expliquent A. Lukinovich et A.-F. Morand, la *poikilia* gagne en importance à l'époque impériale :

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[17] Marincola (1999) 282 ; cf. Conte (1994) 106 – 108. Voir aussi Marincola (2018) sur les distinctions entre (sous-)genres historiques faites par les auteurs anciens eux-mêmes.

[18] Marincola (1999) 301 (je souligne), avec Kraus/Woodman (1997) 1 – 9.

[19] Fowler (1982) part. chap. 3. Fait intéressant, Fowler place l'importance du genre plus du côté de la production, et moins de celui de la réception.

[20] Fowler (1982) 191, et plus généralement 191 – 212.

[21] Voir Nünlist (2009) 198 – 202, avec bibliographie générale à la note 16.

[22] Cf. Grand-Clément (2015), avec la bibliographie, part. sur la *poikilia* esthétique et artistique. Selon Lukinovich/Morand (1994) xiv, l'adjectif *poikilos* peut également noter « la versatilité, la complexité, la richesse de ressources, et souvent aussi, dans un sens péjoratif, la fourberie. » On a par exemple reproché à Isocrate de représenter, par ses discours « bigarrés », un danger pour la jeunesse athénienne, cf. Prodic. ap. X. *Mem.* 2.1.21 – 22 ; Philostr. *VS* 482.18 – 23, 496. Voir aussi Hdn. 1.1.5.

> Elle reçoit alors une définition stylistique et esthétique plus précise et finit même par s'imposer aux esprits comme le programme intellectuel et esthétique le plus conforme aux nouveaux besoins d'une culture qui se perçoit elle-même comme désormais excessivement vaste, riche, diversifiée, et sur laquelle pèse l'héritage d'une longue tradition [...].[24]

Cette idée de variété de composition se trouve même au centre d'un genre littéraire très populaire au cours des premiers siècles de notre ère, les miscellanées, à mettre en lien avec les genres narratifs en prose, dont le roman et la biographie.[25] Parfois difficiles à classer, ces œuvres, comme les *Propos de table* de Plutarque, les *Nuits attiques* d'Aulu-Gelle, les *Deipnosophistes* d'Athénée ou les *Histoires variées* d'Élien, mélangent à dessein plusieurs genres : histoire, biographie, roman, commentaire, anecdotes, etc.[26] Si les miscellanées sont largement tributaires des pratiques savantes de l'époque hellénistique, c'est sous l'impulsion de la Seconde Sophistique qu'elles intègrent de façon plus importante le paysage socio-littéraire gréco-romain. L'époque n'est pas indifférente : S. Smith appréhende, par voie métaphorique, ces nouvelles formes polymathiques et disparates comme des « textual maps of the Imperial world, inextricably implicated in Rome's expansive geopolitical domination. »[27] C'est dans ce contexte social, littéraire et géopolitique que s'inscrit l'œuvre d'Hérodien.

Le genre des *poikiliai* recouvre par ailleurs l'idée de la *mixis*, du « mélange », puisant à la fois dans la variation et dans la combinaison[28]. Il est important de noter que le mélange générique est un trait assez caractéristique de la littérature hellénistique.[29] Sauf Polybe,[30] les historiens de cette période ont ainsi été souvent méprisés par les études modernes : on trouvait leurs œuvres trop tragiques et trop rhétoriques, et il y avait même, chez certains, un rejet plus ou moins explicite du modèle thucydidéen. En ce sens, le recours à des procédés ou des figures surtout associées à la tragédie ou à l'art oratoire, et donc à la fiction, « contaminaient » ces œuvres. La posture de Denys est un contre-point intéressant, puisqu'elle favorise une approche historiographique fondée sur le mélange, qui admet à la fois l'utile et l'agréable, sans sacrifier l'un pour l'autre.[31] Marquée par le courant de la Seconde Sophistique, la littérature impériale, dont l'historiographie, autorise également la pratique du mélange.

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[23] D. S. 1.3.2, 20.2.1 ; D. H. *Dem.* 8.4, 20.6, 34.5, 48.3, 50.11, *Pomp.* 3.12, 6.4, *Is.* 3–4, 12, *Isoc.* 2.4.

[24] Lukinovich/Morand (1994) xv. Comme le note Smith (2014) 54, la *poikilia* restait pour certains « a sign of superficiality, of a lack of discipline, and of effeminate tastes. » Cf. Philostr. *VS* 486, mais voir aussi chez le même auteur, *VA* 1.4 ; Ael. *NA* 5.21.26–31 vs. Ael. *VH* 4.22, 9.3, 12.1.

[25] On remarquera que les conceptions de la *poikilia* oscillent parfois entre esthétique et genre, de sorte que les traductions modernes varient : par exemple, « miscellany » pour le genre et « variety », *vel sim*, en anglais, mais « bigarrure » pour l'esthétique et *poikilia* (parfois « miscellanées ») pour le genre en français. J'utilise ici le terme « genre » par esprit pratique, mais on pourrait éventuellement penser à un « mode d'écriture » (ce qui rejoindrait, finalement, la vision du genre de Fowler abordée plus haut, p. 40).

[26] Voir la liste donnée par Aulu-Gelle en *NA praef.* 6–9. Sur le genre des *poikiliai*, voir Lukinovich/Morand (1994) xiv–xvi ; Nünlist (2009) 198–202 ; Smith (2014) chap. 3 ; Oikonomopoulou (2017), avec la bibliographie ; Heath (2020) 36–55.

[27] Smith (2014) 48. Le contexte géopolitique de l'époque impériale serait comparable à celui de la période hellénistique, où la *poikilia* occupe une place importante, à la fois sur le plan de la pratique chez les auteurs et de la sensibilité chez les exégètes. Voir aussi, sur la littérature de la période antonine, Kemezis (2014) 34–43.

[28] Voir par exemple D. H. *AR* 1.8.3, où l'auteur situe son œuvre, sur le plan de la forme, en opposition aux monographies militaires ou politiques, dont le sujet est trop limité, ainsi qu'aux chroniques locales attiques (les textes des « Atthidographes »), qu'il juge « monotones » (μονοειδεῖς).

[29] Cf. Kroll (1924) 225–246, avec les réflexions de Barchiesi (2001).

En ce qui concerne plus particulièrement l'*Histoire* d'Hérodien, T. Hidber a abordé la notion de *poikilia*, par rapport à la rhétorique (via les préceptes de Denys), au contenu et à la variété des événements présentés dans l'œuvre, et rapprochait ce texte de l'œuvre d'Hérodote.[32] Chrysanthou conçoit, de façon similaire, la *poikilia* comme une « presentational repetition and variation » dans la composition de notre auteur, que ce soit au niveau de la matière ou de la narration. Pour Chrysanthou, les procédés narratifs utilisés par Hérodien « offer pleasure to the readers by empowering them to contribute meaning to his *History.* »[33] Cette technique a également été remarquée dans la caractérisation des personnages, qui est menée chez Hérodien selon une stratégie globale de comparaisons et de contrastes.[34] Comme chez les historiens hellénistiques, le concept de *mixis* a surtout été vu comme une concession à la qualité historique du texte d'Hérodien : c'est un récit historique *malgré* ses envolées rhétoriques ou ses scènes dramatiques. En plus du rapprochement générique au roman, on a aussi souvent considéré l'*Histoire des empereurs* d'Hérodien comme de la biographie, avec le sous-entendu que ce genre serait inférieur à l'histoire parce qu'il s'intéresse à la vie personnelle et/ou quotidienne de personnages historiques.[35] Les lectures de la mort de Marc Aurèle (1.2–4) dévient légèrement de ces tendances interprétatives, notamment en raison de l'aspect programmatique de l'épisode, qui le place hors du récit principal (n'oublions pas qu'Hérodien écrit l'histoire « après Marc »). M. Zimmermann a par exemple exploré les influences d'autres genres littéraires dans la construction de la

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[30] Cette préséance accordée à Polybe peut s'expliquer par le sujet militaire de son récit et son imitation explicite de Thucydide, en plus d'un état du texte moins incomplet. Sur l'historiographie hellénistique plus généralement, voir p. ex. Connor (1985) ; Marincola (2001) 104–112 ; Cuypers (2010) 317–323 ; Gowing (2010) ; Dillery (2011).

[31] Voir les notes 23 et 28 ci-dessus.

[32] Hidber (2006) 114–116 ; cf. Kemezis (2014) 36–38, à propos d'Aulu-Gelle. Pour sa part, Szelest (1951) a montré que la pratique d'Hérodien se rapproche, au niveau des clausules métriques, du style de Chariton, Lucien et Polémon de Laodicée.

[33] Cf. Chrysanthou (2022) 8, voir aussi 315–316.

[34] Sur la caractérisation des personnages chez Hérodien, voir par exemple Pitcher (2018) et Chrysanthou (2022) *passim.*

[35] E.g. De Blois (1998) 3415 : « Herodian's work is even more a mixture of history and biography than that of Dio. ». On pourra rapprocher cette mixité à la pratique de Théopompe dans les *Philippica* (*FrGrHist* 115), où Philippe agit comme figure programmatique et comme principe d'organisation structurelle, cf. Connor (1985) 464.

figure du bon empereur : éloge, discours funèbre, miroir des princes, discours sur la royauté, etc.[36] Pour le reste du texte, c'est-à-dire le sujet véritable, l'emprunt de procédés relevant d'autres genres, surtout la tragédie, a également été noté par la critique, mais généralement dans une perspective disjonctive entre fiction et histoire.

Pour harmoniser ce type de composition mixte au genre historiographique, la notion d' « interaction littéraire » entre les traditions grecque et romaine s'avère très utile. Cette approche, plus productive, réciproque et organique même que celle d' « influence », semble particulièrement pertinente pour la littérature impériale du troisième siècle, puisqu'on ne parlait désormais plus d'assimilation ou de résistance de l'une tradition par rapport à l'autre, mais d'un brassage socioculturel.[37] Il ne s'agit évidemment pas de défendre l'idée d'une culture parfaitement lisse et homogène, mais plutôt d'insister sur son aspect composite et, pourrait-on dire, « bigarré ».[38] Ce genre de relations littéraires est par ailleurs assez pratique pour aborder une œuvre comme l'*Histoire des empereurs*, dont l'auteur se contente de se rattacher globalement à l'époque dont il traite, sans donner d'autres précisions sur son identité, ses origines, son statut ou sa profession (cf. 1.1.3, 1.2.5, 2.15.7).[39] On voudrait bien reconstituer la bibliothèque d'Hérodien, ce que plusieurs ont tenté en s'adonnant à la recherche des sources historiques de l'auteur. Or, si l'on écarte le contrôle des aspects strictement factuels, ce que visait la populaire *Quellenforschung* des siècles précédents malgré l'état fragmentaire de la littérature de cette époque (même les derniers livres de Dion nous sont parvenus en bonne partie par des épitomés tardifs), il faudrait aussi considérer que la réception et la conception de parallèles spécifiques peuvent varier d'une personne à l'autre, et même d'une lecture à une autre.[40] Les liens directs, à part pour quelques cas comme Cassius Dion ou Thucydide (encore que Sidebottom suggérât qu'Hérodien n'ait eu accès à ce dernier que par le biais d'extraits ou de manuels[41]), restent ainsi difficiles à établir de façon définitive. Et même s'il était possible de tracer une parenté claire entre l'*Histoire* et d'autres œuvres, il faudrait tout de même prendre en considération certains facteurs, comme la composition de celles-ci et la filiation de leurs propres formes.

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[36] Zimmermann (1999) 24 – 34. Alföldy (1973) Par exemple, Alföldy, identifiant l'*Histoire* comme un « roman historique », s'est intéressé à la composition littéraire de l'épisode d'un point de vue rhétorique et dramatique, mais il maintenait qu'Hérodien était un « Literat » et que le passage n'avait pas grande valeur historique. Mecella, dans ce volume, s'intéresse au développement de la forme historiographique à l'époque d'Hérodien, à ses liens avec les axes principaux de l'idéologie sévérienne et à sa filiation avec les discours sur la royauté.

[37] König/Whitton (2018) 21 : « Interactivity might be thought of as a superset of which intertextuality is just a part: it not only embraces those »allusions« or »references« that can be captured and displayed in specimen jars, but also seeks to give voice to the fuzzier echoes and dialogues between the lines of our texts, and to invoke the sociohistorical communication and exchange that went along with literary production. » Voir aussi Kemezis (2014) 25 – 29.

[38] Cf. Swain (2007) 3 : « Knowledge of the past empowered the Severan elite, and synthesising knowledge in encyclopedic works, including especially »miscellaneous« collections which entertained and informed through *poikilia* (a term originally referring to a medley of colours, French bigarrure) is a *feature of imperial period literature which continues under the Severans.* » (je souligne).

[39] Voir par exemple les échanges de Fromentin et Marincola dans Fromentin, ed. (2022) 155 – 156. Makhlayuk, dans ce volume, réinterroge la « grécité » et la « romanité » d'Hérodien, et plus largement la vision de l'auteur du monde de l'Empire romain.

[40] E. g. Fowler (1997).

Enfin, on pourra réitérer qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de restreindre les «bonnes» influences de l'*Histoire des empereurs* aux récits historiques antérieurs, comme l'ont souvent envisagé les études modernes. Marincola soutenait ainsi, au sujet de l'*Anabase* de Xénophon qui faisait l'objet de questions similaires de classification : «the reason that the work has appeared formally problematic is that scholars have artificially limited their inquiry of possible models to previous narrative prose histories, even though few existed in Xenophon's time, and there was no obligation on him to consider only those models.»[42] La situation décrite par Marincola n'est pas entièrement applicable au cas d'Hérodien, puisque cet auteur, œuvrant au troisième siècle de notre ère, disposait bien sûr de plusieurs modèles historiographiques, dont Xénophon lui-même, mais le raisonnement reste pertinent. D'ailleurs, même les sources historiques des historiens sont élaborées à partir de modèles littéraires et peuvent elles-mêmes assumer ce rôle pour d'autres œuvres, historiques ou non.

2 La «vente» de l'Empire

De tous les épisodes de l'*Histoire des empereurs* d'Hérodien qui ont pu être vus par la critique moderne comme exagérés ou inventés, celui de l'avènement de Didius Julianus et de ce fameux encan, qui aurait eu lieu dans la foulée du meurtre de Pertinax aux mains des prétoriens le 28 mars 193, est particulièrement intéressant à relire à travers le filtre du mélange des genres et de la variété, puisque, du fait de sa singularité, voire de son extravagance, ce récit a même été perçu comme complètement insensé. Cet angle de lecture exclurait de considérer ce passage comme appartenant au genre historique ; l'épisode serait en ce sens une digression «dramatique» (à rapprocher, éventuellement, des digressions ethnographiques d'Hérodien[43]), et n'aurait rien à voir avec la nature historique, donc véridique, du récit. Or, si l'on accepte que le mélange et la variété font bien partie des pratiques historiographiques, l'accession de Julianus, telle que la présente Hérodien, est un cas d'étude privilégié, car il permettra d'éprouver les limites du type de lecture, bigarrée, que nous proposons.

Avant de nous intéresser au récit d'Hérodien à proprement parler, il convient d'abord de se tourner vers la version que produit Cassius Dion de cet événement, puisque Dion a longtemps été considéré, à tous égards, comme le plus fiable des deux, et que leurs récits ont constamment été comparés, à la défaveur de notre auteur. Pour certaines critiques modernes, l'histoire d'Hérodien aurait en effet été reprise d'une figure trouvée chez Dion et amplifiée par notre auteur au point d'en créer un véritable encan.[44] A. Appelbaum désigne ce choix d'Hérodien comme « a misreading of Dio », ce dernier n'ayant utilisé cette image qu'à titre de comparaison (ὥσπερ), et non pas de représentation.[45] Or, pour apprécier ce passage de Dion en tant que source véridique, par opposition au récit « imaginaire » d'Hérodien, il faut recourir à une certaine élasticité herméneutique : d'abord, l'histoire de Dion, puisqu'elle est d'emblée tenue pour vraie, doit être débarrassée de toutes traces de fiction, ce qu'il est possible de faire en les interprétant comme métaphores ; ensuite, si ces mêmes éléments fictifs se trouvent chez Hérodien, c'est que celui-ci a mal compris son prédécesseur et qu'il n'était même pas présent à ces événements (il était sans doute encore trop jeune pour y avoir personnellement assisté) ; enfin, puisqu'il reste de toute façon un historien inférieur à Dion, Hérodien s'est ainsi servi de ces figures pour les amplifier au point d'en venir à une profession de vérité historique.

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[41] Sidebottom (1988) 2777 n. 6.

[42] Marincola (1999) 316.

[43] Cf. Chrysanthou (2024).

Mais que dit réellement le texte de Dion ? Selon le sénateur, Julianus vint au camp prétorien pour briguer le principat par des promesses d'argent :

> C'est alors que se produisit une affaire des plus honteuses et indigne de Rome : *comme* (ὥσπερ) *dans un marché ou une salle des ventes* (ἐν ἀγορᾷ καὶ ἐν πωλητηρίῳ τινί), à la fois Rome et son empire tout entier *furent vendus aux enchères* (ἀπεκηρύχθη). Les *vendeurs* (ἐπίπρασκον) étaient les assassins de leur empereur et les *acheteurs* (ὠνητίων), Sulpicianus et Julianus qui *enchérissaient* (ὑπερβάλλοντες) l'un contre l'autre, l'un à l'intérieur du camp des prétoriens, l'autre à l'extérieur.[46]

Dans la suite du récit, Dion décrit avec précision les montants, les enchères et les surenchères (ὑπερέβαλε, ὑπερβολῇ), tout en insistant sur les gestes très expressifs de Julianus (τῇ φωνῇ μέγα βοῶν καὶ ταῖς χερσὶν ἐνδεικνύμενος).[47] Pour Appelbaum, comme pour M. Icks, le récit de Dion ne peut être qu'une métaphore, car les détails ne sont pas crédibles : il n'y a que deux seuls acheteurs potentiels, et la séquence ne va pas non plus, puisque, dans la réalité.[48] Or cette lecture métaphorique serait uniquement fondée sur la conjonction ὥσπερ – qui d'ailleurs régit ἐν ἀγορᾷ καὶ ἐν πωλητηρίῳ τινί, mais non l'ensemble du passage –, et un présupposé favorable à l'égard de Dion comme historien. Bien qu'Appelbaum et Icks voient dans le texte d'Hérodien une

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44 Appelbaum (2007) 201 : « This vivid but overstated metaphor was adopted as fact and embellished by Herodian in his adaptation of Dio, and by his modern successor ». Cf. Icks (2014) 92 : « Undoubtedly, this ludicrous version of events is an embellishment of Dio's story. »

45 Appelbaum (2007) 206.

46 D.C. 74[73].11.3 : ὅτε δὴ καὶ πρᾶγμα αἴσχιστον τε καὶ ἀνάξιον τῆς Ῥώμης ἐγένετο – ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν ἀγορᾷ καὶ ἐν πωλητηρίῳ τινὶ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀρχὴ αὐτῆς πᾶσα ἀπεκηρύχθη. καὶ αὐτὰς ἐπίπρασκον μὲν οἱ τὸν αὐτοκράτορά σφων ἀπεκτονότες, ὠνητίων δὲ ὅ τε Σουλχικιανὸς καὶ ὁ Ἰουλιανὸς ὑπερβάλλοντες ἀλλήλους, ὁ μὲν ἔνδοθεν ὁ δὲ ἔξωθεν (trad. Freyburger ; je souligne).

47 D.C. 74[73].11.4 – 6.

48 Appelbaum (2007) 201 – 202.

exagération de l’*Histoire romaine* de Dion, on peut se demander si notre auteur n’en présenterait pas en fait une version édulcorée. En outre, si Dion, historien fiable, nous présente ainsi l’accession de Julianus, pourquoi ne serait-il pas possible de voir, dans la version qu’on trouve dans l’*Histoire des empereurs*, une pratique historiographique similairement correcte ? Je mets à dessein l’accent sur la pratique historiographique, car ce qui m’intéresse ici, ce n’est pas tellement de prouver l’historicité de cet épisode, ni même de réévaluer les rapports entre Dion et Hérodien, mais bien de mieux comprendre la mise en récit opérée par Hérodien et les effets de celle-ci sur l’interprétation et l’explication d’un événement insolite[49].

La séquence narrative chez Hérodien diffère légèrement de ce qu’on peut lire dans l’*Histoire romaine* de Dion, qui raconte que Julianus, qui était à Milan, se rendit de lui-même à Rome en apprenant la nouvelle de la mort de Pertinax (cf. D.C. 74[73].11.1–2). Selon Hérodien, les prétoriens, après avoir assassiné Pertinax, s’enferment dans leur camp, attendent de voir s’il y aura des représailles et, constatant qu’ils s’en sont sortis en toute impunité, décident de mettre l’Empire en vente :

> les soldats firent monter sur le rempart à l’intérieur duquel ils restaient ceux d’entre eux dont la voix portait le plus loin et leur firent *proclamer que l’Empire était à vendre* (προεκήρυττον ὤνιον) ; ils promettaient de livrer le pouvoir *au plus offrant* (τῷ πλέον ἀργύριον δώσοντι) […].[50]

Puis, comme chez Dion, Julianus se présente au rempart pour faire des promesses extravagantes aux soldats (2.6.7–8).[51] La suite est passablement différente chez Hérodien : les soldats refusèrent même d’envisager l’offre de Sulpicianus, qui s’était aussi présenté au rempart dans l’idée d’acheter l’Empire (2.6.9 : ἧκε τὴν ἀρχὴν ὠνούμενος). Pour Icks, l’encan chez Hérodien, et donc l’hyperbole, se voit clairement dans la criée des prétoriens sur le mur de leur camp.[52] Pour Appelbaum, la scène paraît « even more dramatic », et cette vente aux enchères est « even less likely », puisqu’il n’y aurait eu, en fait, qu’un seul acheteur.[53] Toute l’affaire peut s’expliquer, selon Appelbaum, par des machinations de Laetus, qui aurait tenté d’installer tour à tour Pertinax, Falco et Julianus.[54]

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[49] Cf. Whittaker (1969–1970) n. 1 *ad loc.* : Dion et Hérodien « agree that the scene of the auction took place. » Mais voir aussi Potter (2004) 97 n. 88 (le texte de la note se trouve à la page 603) : « There is *no auction* in Herod. 2.6.10, which *merely records* that he promised more money than any man had thought possible » (je souligne).

[50] Hdn. 2.6.4–5 : οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται […], ἔμενον μὲν ἐντὸς τοῦ τείχους κατακλείσαντες ἑαυτούς, ἀναγαγόντες δὲ τοὺς εὐφωνοτάτους ἑαυτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος προεκήρυττον ὤνιον τὴν βασιλείαν, τῷ τε πλέον ἀργύριον δώσοντι ἐγχειριεῖν ὑπισχνοῦντο τὴν ἀρχὴν […] (trad. Roques ; je souligne). Dion introduit l’affaire par deux adjectifs forts, αἴσχιστον et ἀνάξιον, qui expriment d’emblée son avis sur la question, tandis qu’Hérodien paraîtrait plus neutre. Or, pour Chrysanthou (2022) 37–38, la tournure introductive Ἰουλιανῷ δὲ τινι trahirait déjà la désapprobation d’Hérodien ; à mettre en parallèle avec l’entrée en scène de Maximin en 6.8.1.

[51] Voir ci-dessous, p. 52–54, pour une analyse de ce passage.

[52] Icks (2014) 92 : « Herodian goes even further » ; cf. Leaning (1989) 555–556 et Appelbaum (2007) 201.

[53] Appelbaum (2007) 203.

Ce type d’approche «factualisante» pose, dans ses excès, quelques problèmes : en voulant comparer les versions de Dion et d’Hérodien afin de trouver l’unique «vérité», on en vient à refuser de penser l’historiographie autrement que comme une réserve factuelle, à lui nier toute qualité littéraire (malgré ce qu’en disaient les anciens eux-mêmes) ainsi que toute posture au sein d’une tradition (historiographique, mais plus largement littéraire), et donc à ignorer les impératifs (narratifs, thématiques, stylistiques) propres à chaque récit. Ce genre d’interprétation a également pour effet d’évacuer les particularités d’une écriture (présentée comme) contemporaine des événements relatés, en plus de dévaloriser l’apport du ressenti, de la perception ambiante et de la mémoire, surtout face à une affaire comme l’achat aussi explicite du pouvoir impérial.[55] Dans cette quête de «ce qui s’est réellement passé», on chercherait en outre un genre historiographique «pur» et inchangé à travers les sous-genres, les auteurs et les époques. Or, comme discuté dans la section précédente, la littérature classique est, bien au contraire, un objet dynamique, en mouvement constant ; c’est d’autant plus vrai dans l’empire bigarré du troisième siècle, dont la culture se renouvelle sans cesse grâce aux interactions. Ces principes informeront notre lecture du récit de l’encan dans l’*Histoire des empereurs.*

3 La mise en récit par le mélange et la variété chez Hérodien

Étant donné le peu de détails sûrs que nous possédons à propos du court règne de Julianus, il serait aisé de voir cet épisode de l’*Histoire des empereurs* comme une pure invention, un interstice temporel à remplir afin de pouvoir relier plus aisément la mort de Pertinax au règne de Sévère. Dans un tel enchaînement rapide et confus de règnes, il n’est pas invraisemblable que même un historien plus ou moins contemporain de ces événements (ou à tout le moins se présentant comme tel) n’ait pas eu accès à tellement plus d’information, en raison par exemple du court laps de temps, de la simultanéité de plusieurs épisodes, ou encore de la réécriture de ceux-ci par le vainqueur.[56] Mais si l’on met de côté la stricte historicité de l'avènement de Julianus, comment appréhender le récit d'Hérodien, avec toutes ses aspérités et son « invraisemblance » ? Au lieu d'opérer selon un processus disjonctif, qu'il reflète des tendances critiques plus anciennes (« soit de l'histoire soit de la fiction »,) ou d'autres plus récentes (« de l'histoire malgré la fiction »), notre lecture s'appuiera sur une vision conjonctive (« la fiction participe de l'histoire »),[57] c'est-à-dire qu'elle embrassera les techniques et les aspects relevant de genres littéraires dits antinomiques à l'historiographie comme des composantes de celle-ci. Prenant à l'envers le paradigme voulant qu'Hérodien soit un mauvais historien en raison de ses élans dramatiques, nous examinerons l'épisode de l'encan à l'aune de procédés comiques et élégiaques afin de montrer en quoi ceux-ci peuvent contribuer à l'écriture d'une histoire impériale romaine.[58]

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[54] Appelbaum (2007) 203–207, sur la base de D.C. 74[73].8.2 ; cf. *HA Pert.* 10.1–2, 10.9–10. Pour une réévaluation des dynamiques factionnelles entourant l’avènement de Pertinax, voir Galimberti dans ce volume.

[55] Sur ce point, voir p. 55–56 ci-dessous. Scott, dans ce volume, s’intéresse plus longuement au concept de mémoire et à ses liens avec les pratiques d’émulation et de distanciation des empereurs avec leurs prédécesseurs.

[56] Cf. Kemezis (2014) 55–57, aussi pour le traitement de Clodius Albinus et Pescennius Niger. Pour Leaning (1989) 563, le règne de Julianus n’aurait pas été aussi catastrophique que le montrent les récits d’Hérodien et de Dio ; il suffit de les comparer à la version donnée par l’*Histoire Auguste*, composée environ un siècle et demi plus tard (cf. *HA Did. Iul.* 2.6). Mecella (2021) 293 n. 38 considère les deux récits

Il nous faut dire encore quelques mots sur la part, inévitable, d'invention dans toute opération historiographique, qui intervient constamment dans la pratique d'Hérodien. En plus d'être confronté à des lacunes du matériau historique – le règne de Julianus est un bon cas de figure –, l'historien doit aussi rendre les faits clairs, en montrer les causes et les conséquences. Pour cela, il s'attache à ficeler un récit, notamment en comblant certains silences. Cette mise en récit est, selon H. White, « essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation. And to call it that in no way detracts from the status of historical narratives as providing a kind of knowledge. »[59] Le cadre de cette opération scripturaire, même littéraire, chez notre auteur a déjà été notée ailleurs, en tout cas sur le plan factuel : Sidebottom écrivait par exemple qu'il y avait des « strict limits to Herodian's inventions. »[60] Ce geste poïétique n'est donc pas du

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comme le reflet d'une propagande sévérienne ; cf. Leaning (1989) 548–549 (« the official version of events ») ; Potter (2004) 97 (« a false tradition »). Voir aussi Kolb (1972) 54–60 sur les correspondances entre Dion, Hérodien et l'*Histoire Auguste* pour cet épisode.

[57] Cf. Rancière (1992) part. p. 18 pour cette formulation.

[58] Je n'aborderai pas, dans le cadre limité de cet article, les procédés plus typiquement tragiques pour deux raisons. D'abord, la tragédie est généralement perçue, au sein des genres de fiction, comme une forme élevée – certainement par rapport à la comédie, mais aussi à l'épopée (cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1462b et *passim*). En ce sens, elle se rapprocherait déjà trop du genre dit sérieux de l'historiographie. Ensuite, et peut-être de façon contradictoire, l'historiographie qu'on a appelée « tragique » suivant les propos de Polybe à l'égard de ses contemporains (cf. Plb. 2.56–63) constitue une question trop large pour la présente étude : même si cette sous-catégorie du genre devient souvent un raccourci épistémologique servant à discréditer des historiens jugés médiocres comme Hérodien, la critique moderne a également longtemps débattu sur l'existence réelle de cette forme, son invention, ses codes et ses adhérents. Voir par exemple Walbank (1960) pour un survol du problème.

[59] White (1978) 185.

[60] Sidebottom (1998) 2821 : « Herodian does not invent people, let alone emperors. But rather, he appears to give to historical personages plans and actions they, in reality, did not have. » Cf. Whittaker (1969–1970), xliii, l, lxxiv et Roques (1990) 9, 10, 13, sur le principe directeur de sélection factuelle chez Hérodien.

tout aléatoire, mais répondrait à un principe de vraisemblance («true enough»[61]) par rapport au sujet traité, ainsi qu'à une logique interne de l'œuvre, notamment au niveau narratif et thématique.

Il est évidemment possible de mettre en relation le Julianus d'Hérodien avec celui de Dion, puisqu'il s'agit, pour le dire trop simplement, du même personnage dans le même genre d'œuvre. Cependant, en s'aventurant en dehors de ces frontières génériques, on arrive à percevoir, dans plusieurs personnages de cet épisode de l'*Histoire des empereurs*, des attributs qui rappellent des figures plus représentatives d'autres genres. Comme dit plus haut, la scène de l'encan a souvent été remise en question en ce qui a trait à son authenticité, et sa mise en récit chez Hérodien est particulièrement prenante par son ridicule. L'historien raconte ainsi comment, à la nouvelle de la mise aux enchères de l'Empire, Julianus bondit, court, crie, gesticule :

> Sa femme, sa fille, ses nombreux parasites (πλῆθος) le convainquent alors de bondir (ἀναθορόντα) hors de son lit de repos, de courir (δραμεῖν) au rempart, d'y apprendre la tournure que prennent les événements, et tout au long de la route (παρὰ πᾶσαν τὴν ὁδόν) ils lui conseillent de saisir cet Empire jeté en pâture et de ne pas épargner son argent pour surpasser par sa munificence tous les rivaux qui viendraient à lui contester le pouvoir. Il s'approcha des remparts, promit à grands cris (ἐβόα) de donner tout ce que l'on voudrait et expliqua qu'il possédait quantité de richesses et de trésors d'or et d'argent.[62]

Selon M. Hellstrom, «Herodian adds an element of comedy by having Didius jump straight from his dinner table and rush to the camps, egged on by women and a πλῆθος ('throng') of parasites. These escort him as he runs, discussing how to seize power in a mockery of the philosophical stroll.»[63] On remarquera en effet la physicalité exagérée (contraire, par ailleurs, à l'équanimité des bons empereurs de l'*Histoire*) et l'aspect comique, voire absurde, des déplacements de Julianus, qui s'élance d'un banquet pour se précipiter vers le camp des prétoriens afin d'acheter l'Empire.

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[61] Cf. Pelling (1990) 35–43, à propos de Plutarque. On pensera aussi au principe de convenance préconisé par Thucydide dans la composition et l'intégration de discours dans une œuvre historique ; cf. Thuc. 1.22.1, avec D.H. *Thuc.* 41.4.

[62] Hdn. 2.6.7–8 : πείθουσιν οὖν αὐτὸν ἥ τε γυνὴ καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ τό τε τῶν παρασίτων πλῆθος ἀναθορόντα τοῦ σκίμποδος δραμεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος καὶ τὰ πραττόμενα μαθεῖν, παρὰ πᾶσαν τὴν ὁδὸν συμβουλεύοντες ἐρριμμένην τὴν ἀρχὴν ἁρπάσαι, ἀφειδῶς δὲ χρημάτων ἔχοντα μεγαλοδωρίᾳὸἅπαντας ὑπερβαλεῖν, εἰ καί τινες ἀμφισβητοῖεν. ἐπεὶ τοίνυν τῷ τείχει προσῆλθεν, ἐβόα τε πάντα δώσειν ὅσα βούλονται ὑπισχνούμενος, παρεῖναί τε αὐτῷ πάμπλειστα χρήματα καὶ θησαυροὺς χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου πεπληρωμένους ἔλεγε (trad. Roques, légèrement modifiée).

[63] Hellstrom (2015) 49.

4 Julianus : *miles gloriosus* ?

On pourrait pousser l'image encore plus loin, en reliant les comportements de l'entourage de Julianus au personnage comique du parasite, mais surtout en voyant dans cette représentation de Julianus la manifestation d'un *alazōn*, et même d'un *miles gloriosus.* De façon générale, le « soldat fanfaron » de la comédie antique s'inscrit dans la catégorie plus large du « vantard » et reprend ses extravagances vestimentaires, sa verve grandiloquente, sa pusillanimité et, bien sûr, ses fabulations.[64] Comme ces types comiques, Julianus fanfaronne volontiers à qui veut l'entendre qu'il a les moyens d'acquérir l'Empire, se laisse facilement convaincre par sa « cour » de parasites, mais se révèle finalement pauvre, peu compétent et, quand Sévère arrive aux portes de Rome, très peureux. Au contraire des vantards comiques, souvent caractérisés par la maîtrise d'une rhétorique grandiose, mais superficielle,[65] Julianus ne démontre pas, chez Hérodien, de telles capacités oratoires, mais incarne plutôt son personnage à travers la gestuelle, voire la gesticulation. Certes, les discours dans l'*Histoire des empereurs* ne sont généralement pas très abondants,[66] mais la comparaison inévitable avec la longue conversation tenue entre Laetus, Eclectus et Pertinax (2.1.7–10) juste avant l'avènement de ce dernier rehausse l'aspect comique, même grossier, de ce Julianus.[67] Il est en outre intéressant de souligner la nature militaire du personnage dramatique, qui est souvent un mercenaire, étranger à la cité où se déroule la pièce, et a parfois exercé quelque fonction de commandement, et de l'opposer à la carrière de Julianus, qui ne comporte chez Hérodien aucune charge militaire, et encore moins quelconque succès guerrier.[68] Bien plus, Julianus ne dispose même pas des richesses qu'un Pyrgopolinice, *miles* plautien par excellence, a pu accumuler au cours de ses campagnes militaires.[69] Son contact avec l'armée, et plus particulièrement les prétoriens, est seulement transactionnel ; ce sont eux, lorsqu'ils le proclament empereur, qui décident de se préparer au combat pour l'escorter ensuite jusqu'au palais impérial (2.6.13 : un *kōmos* inversé, allant du banquet au palais ?). Le reste de l'épisode est marqué de l'incompétence totale de Julianus qui n'écoute même pas ses amis lui conseillant d'empêcher l'avancée de Sévère en occupant les passes des Alpes (2.11.8). Pire, il préfère mener le combat dans les rues de Rome, car il « n'osait pas » (2.11.9 : οὐδὲ […] ἐτόλμα) s'aventurer hors des murs de la ville.

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[64] Sur les caractéristiques de ce type comique et ses diverses incarnations, cf. Konstantakos (2015) 42–48 et Konstantakos (2016) 112–142, avec les références bibliographiques.

[65] E. g. Pl. *Cur.* 533–536 et *Mil.* 1–9, avec les exemples relevés dans Konstantakos (2016) 133–136 de mots et de tournures poétiques utilisés notamment par Lamachos dans les *Acharniens* d'Aristophane.

[66] On a fait grand cas de la rareté des discours de l'*Histoire des empereurs* dans les derniers livres afin de prouver un état inachevé du texte : cette question a bien été résumée dans Sidebottom (1998) 2813. Les discours eux-mêmes sont analysés dans plusieurs études récentes, e. g. Mallan (2022), Pitcher (2022).

[67] Le caractère plus solennel de cet épisode, de même que l'accent mis sur le déroulement lent, en une journée (cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1449b9), pourrait le rapprocher davantage de la tragédie : les avènements de Pertinax et de Julianus seraient ainsi configurés selon des modes dramatiques différents, l'un la tragédie, l'autre la comédie.

[68] Mais voir *HA Did. Iul.* 1.6–9, où lui sont attribuées des victoires contre des peuples germaniques.

[69] Pl. *Mil.* 1063–1065 (éd. Ernout) : *Non mihi auaritia unquam innatast ; satis habeo diuitiarum. / Plus mi mille est modiorum Philippi.* Voir aussi Konstantakos (2016) 122–123 pour une liste d'occurrences.

Tandis que les soldats fanfarons se font démasquer par les héros comiques, Julianus trouve sa contrepartie « héroïque » en Sévère, dont le Sénat se fait le porte-voix à Rome.[70] La confrontation entre Lamachos et Dikaiopolis dans les *Acharniens* d'Aristophane (à partir du vers 572) montre toute la couardise du soldat fanfaron : celui-ci s'en remet à crier et à supplier, sans jamais tenter d'agir. C'est une scène populaire des pièces comiques où figure ce type de personnage, servant à illustrer, et même amplifier, l'artifice de sa posture initiale.[71] Les nouvelles de l'arrivée imminente de Sévère à Rome poussent Julianus « dans un profond désespoir » (2.11.7 : ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἀπογνώσει), puis l'entrée clandestine dans la ville le laissent dans l'incompréhension et l'indécision, « incapable de parler et d'agir » (2.12.3 : πολλῇ […] ἀφασίᾳ τε καὶ ἀπορίᾳ).[72] Malgré ses préparatifs, certes minimes, Julianus s'en remet finalement à se lamenter sur son sort et supplier le Sénat de le laisser abdiquer (2.12.5 : καὶ τὰς παρούσας ὀδυρομένου τύχας, ἱκετεύοντός τε ἐξομόσασθαι τὴν ἀρχήν). Devant ce spectacle (ὁρῶντες), le Sénat demeure impassible et se range vite du côté de Sévère, tandis que Julianus est relégué, avec une certaine désinvolture, à l'arrière-scène.[73]

Puisque la récompense du héros comique (ou parfois, chez Ménandre, celle du fanfaron) est typiquement de nature érotique et sympotique,[74] on peut également voir la défaite impériale de Julianus, et son incompréhension des processus politiques, comme un échec comique : comme Hérodien le raconte, Julianus, après avoir gagné l'Empire, s'est aussitôt abandonné aux plaisirs (2.7.1 : τρυφαῖς εὐθέως καὶ κραιπάλαις ἐσχόλαξε), même si sa « quête » commençait à peine. Cette incompétence comique se solde en une faillite double : Julianus n'arrive pas à se conformer aux codes du genre, qui l'auraient soumis à une violente maltraitance et une profonde humiliation sous tous les regards,[75] ni même, au contraire des personnages ménandriens, à les subvertir de façon satisfaisante. Sa défaite face à Sévère, toujours « hors-champ », se conclut par une morte plate, sans éclat, loin de tous. La rencontre entre les deux n'aura jamais lieu, et Hérodien nous présente la mort de Julianus presque comme un non-événement : un tribun, dépêché par le Sénat, « le trouva seul, abandonné de tous, et bien que Julianus versât de honteuses larmes, il le mit à mort. » (2.12.7 : ὁ μὲν οὖν εὑρεθεὶς ἔρημός τε καὶ

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70 Cf. Rosen (2014) sur les implications de la notion de « héros comique ».

71 Voir Konstantakos (2016) 128 – 131 pour d'autres exemples dans la comédie antique.

72 Cf. Hdn. 2.12.3 : τὸν Ἰουλιανὸν ἀποδειλιῶντα καὶ ἐν ἀπογνώσει ὄντα.

73 On pourrait même avancer qu'aux traits du soldat fanfaron se superposent ceux du parasite et de l'esclave comiques, par exemple par la tromperie à laquelle se livre Julianus, promettant aux prétoriens des sommes qu'il n'a pas réellement en échange du pouvoir impérial. Soulignons que ces deux autres caractères sont même évoqués par Dion : selon cet auteur, Julianus s'occupait des affaires de l'État comme un esclave (ἀνελευθέρως) et un parasite (θωπεύειν), cf. D.C. 74[73].14.1 – 2.

74 E. g. Ar. *Ach.* ; Pl. *Bac.*, *Mil.*, *Ps.* ; Ter. *Eun.*, et la subversion de ce motif chez Men. *Mis.*, *Per.*, *Sik.* Sur ces passages, voir Konstantakos (2012) 137 – 140.

75 Pl. *Mil.* 1394 – 1437 est un exemple frappant, à comparer avec Ar. *Ach.* 1190 – 1234.

ὑπὸ πάντων καταλειφθείς, αἰσχρῶς ὀλοφυρόμενος ἐφονεύθη) Alors que les *milites* de la comédie gémissent à grands cris sous les coups subis, Julianus se lamente tout seul, sans bourreau ni public. Même le comique du personnage, surprenant à son entrée en scène, se révèle inopérant et d’un désintérêt notable autant pour un public intra- qu’extradiégétique : sa sortie du camp et sa marche vers le palais n’attirent ni acclamations ni rires, mais des insultes et des reproches lancés à distance (2.6.13 : μήτε μὴν εὐφημοῦντος ὥσπερ εἰώθασι […] καὶ πόρρωθεν ἑστῶτες ἐβλασφήμουν καὶ κακῶς ἠγόρευον).[76] Soulignons enfin que les personnages comiques, peu importe la période du genre dont ils proviennent, et la version de Julianus qu’on trouve chez Hérodien ne sont certes pas identiques, malgré ces points de connexion. En ce sens, l’idée n’est pas tellement de soutenir qu’Hérodien s’inspire directement de Plaute, ou de la comédie grecque, mais que ce type de personnage et les images qui lui sont liées étaient passés, à l’époque d’Hérodien, dans l’imaginaire collectif et que les actions attribuées à Julianus pouvaient réactiver certaines résonances comiques dans l’esprit du public de l’*Histoire des empereurs.*

5 … ou *exclusus imperator* ?

Si l’on se penche plus particulièrement sur l’intrigue amoureuse dans laquelle se retrouve souvent le *miles gloriosus* et dont il sort généralement perdant, cette absurdité du personnage pourrait même être bonifiée par un rapprochement au *paraklausithyron.*[77] Ce motif populaire de l’élégie est une version particulière de l’*exclusus amator*, de «l’amant qui a été laissé dehors», et met typiquement en scène un homme amoureux cherchant à rejoindre, en vain, sa bien-aimée et qui adresse à la porte close lui faisant obstacle une complainte. À travers une même sorte de réflexes d’associations entre le récit d’Hérodien et des genres littéraires plutôt classés comme fictifs, il est ainsi possible d’ajouter un autre niveau d’interprétation à cet épisode jugé stupéfiant. Dans cette version d’une scène typique de la poésie élégiaque, Julianus prendrait les traits de l’*exclusus amator*, confronté au mur du camp prétorien derrière lequel se trouve l’objet de sa convoitise, c’est-à-dire le pouvoir impérial.[78] On note d’emblée une présence importance du «rempart» dans l’ensemble du passage (2.6.4–9) : ἔμενον ἐντὸς τοῦ τείχους ; ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος προεκήρυττον ; δραμεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος ; τῷ τείχει προσῆλθεν ; τὸν Ἰουλιανὸν ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἀνεβίβασαν.[79] Un peu comme l'amant qui s'adresse au portier chez Ovide (*Am.* 1.16.15 : *tibi blandior uni*), Julianus négocie un droit d'entrée avec les prétoriens, en leur promettant richesses et privilèges.[80] L'objet de convoitise est une source de motivation à la fois pour le poète et l'aspirant. En *Am.* 1.9, Ovide affirme que l'amour l'a sorti de sa torpeur : « Moi, enfin, j'étais paresseux, né pour l'oisiveté et son laisser-aller : le lit de repos et la pénombre avaient amolli mon âme. Mon amour pour une jeune beauté me stimula et me poussa à m'engager à son service. »[81] De même, l'annonce de la vente poussa Julianus à se jeter hors de son lit pour se précipiter au camp prétorien afin de s'emparer du pouvoir. En outre, admettant que le *topos* du *paraklausithyron* dérive bien du *kōmos*, on verrait donc une couche additionnelle à la course folle de Julianus vers le camp prétorien, tout à fait en lien avec le banquet et, comme le relevait Hellstrom, la promenade philosophique.[82]

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[76] Les loisirs «scandaleux et contestables» de Julianus lui valent certaines moqueries du peuple (2.7.2 : ἐπ’ αἰσχραῖς τε καὶ ἀμφιβόλοις ἡδοναῖς σκώπτειν), mais il est notable de voir que cette réaction ne se produit pas en direct et qu’elle est formulée selon un mode plutôt descriptif que narratif (2.7.2 ὡς προϊόντα τε […]).

[77] Sur les rapports entre comédie et élégie, notamment en ce qui concerne le passage à l’étude, voir ci-dessous.

[78] Sur ce *topos*, lié au thème de l’*exclusus amator*, voir par exemple Copley (1956) ; Yardley (1976) 21–73 ; Cairns (2020).

Certains détails du *topos* sont simplement adaptés par Hérodien : par exemple, les *ianitores* de l'empire ne sont certes pas des esclaves enchaînés, même s'ils sont, en quelque sorte, asservis à leur cupidité. L'entrée ne se fait pas par le seuil d'une porte, mais par l'ascension d'un mur. D'autres éléments sont permutés. L'*amator* est poète et se proclame très pauvre.[83] Dans la course vers le camp prétorien, les parasites de Julianus lui conseillent de ne pas lésiner sur les dépenses, afin de l'emporter facilement sur tous ses rivaux : à terme, Julianus deviendrait ainsi le rival de l'amoureux qui, portant cadeaux et promesses, est admis à l'intérieur, tandis que Sulpicianus resterait l'amant exclus. On trouve même, un peu plus tard, la suggestion d'une bagarre de rue entre « amants rivaux »,[84] quand Julianus « fit des préparatifs comme s'il devait engager la lutte contre Sévère dans la ville même ».[85] Il y a évidemment bon nombre d’éléments typiques des épigrammes et des poèmes élégiaques qui ne figurent pas du tout dans le récit d’Hérodien (e. g. la guirlande, la nuit comme toile de fond, les insultes à la porte, le temps inclément) – ce n’est pas, en effet, une application directe du thème, mais une incorporation de certains «ingrédients» poétiques à un récit historiographique.

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[79] Le mur apparaît également dans le *Miles gloriosus* : Palestrion perce un trou à l'arrière de la maison de Pyrgopolinice afin de réunir Philochomasie et Pleusiclès. Le rempart est aussi un élément important de l'épopée (Hom. *Il.* 3.161–244), puis de la tragédie (e.g. E. *Ph.* 88–201, éventuellement *IA* 185–302, et A. *Th.* 375–652) à partir duquel il est possible d'orienter le regard vers un point précis, tout en recourant à un mode narratif plus large : la *teichoscopia* (cf. Fuhrer [2015]). Hérodien use de cette technique lorsqu'il présente le dernier combat entre Sévère et Niger (3.4.2–5), mais le souci du spectacle et du regard est présent tout au long de son œuvre, cf. Ward (2011) et Baumann (2021) part. 77–80.

[80] E.g. Prop. 1.16.36, 2.16.15–21 ; Ov. *Am.* 3.8.29–44, 3.8.64–66. Quand Hérodien écrit, en 2.6.5, que les prétoriens « confieront » l'empire à celui qui offrira le plus d'argent (τῷ τε πλέον ἀργύριον δώσοντι ἐγχειριεῖν ὑπισχνοῦντο τὴν ἀρχήν), le terme utilisé, ὑπισχνέομαι, « promettre », n'est peut-être pas anodin. Bien qu'il soit d'usage courant et généralement de coloration neutre, il serait possible d'y déceler une certaine nuance érotique, car le mot se trouve aussi au sens de « promettre en mariage, fiancer » (Bailly, I.2).

[81] Ov. *Am.* 1.9.41–44 : *ipse ego segnis eram discinctaque in otia natus ; / mollierant animos lectus et umbra meos ; / inpulit ignauum formonsae cura puellae / iussit et in castris aera merere suis* (éd. et trad. Bornecque).

[82] Cf. Plu. *Erot.* 8.753b. Sur les origines komastiques du thème, voir les travaux cités à la note 78 ci-dessus.

[83] E.g. Catul. 13 ; Ov. *Am.* 1.8 ; Prop. 1.8, 1.15 ; Tib. 1.5, mais les exemples de ce thème abondent.

[84] E.g. Plu. *Erot.* 8.753b, avec Prop. 1.16.5–6, 2.19.5 ; Tib. 1.1.73–76.

[85] Hdn. 2.11.9 : καὶ τὴν πρὸς Σεβῆρον μάχην ὡς ἐν τῇ πόλει ποιησόμενος παρεσκεύαζε (trad. Roques).

Il est par ailleurs intéressant de noter que si le *paraklausithyron* est passé dans la tradition comme un motif surtout élégiaque, on en trouve aussi certaines itérations comiques, comme chez Plaute (*Cur.* 1–157) ou chez Térence (*Eun.* 46–206). Ces genres sont liés notamment par certains aspects textuels et certains codes génériques, mais aussi par les structures sociales et les rapports de celles-ci à la sexualité.[86] Dans cette narrativisation élégiaque de l’épisode, le rôle de Julianus déboucherait sur un échec moins grand que sa contrepartie comique. On peut ainsi renverser la défaite comique de Julianus, sur le plan amoureux, en évoquant la perception différente du mariage dans la comédie et l’élégie : si dans la première forme, le mariage est souhaité, dans la seconde, l’union officielle des deux personnages est pensée comme un frein à l’amour (Prop. 2.7), mais aussi comme un retour à la réalité et la reprise, pour l’amant, de ses responsabilités civiques.[87] Dans cette perspective, une trame élégiaque serait plus satisfaisante pour le personnage de Julianus, car elle pourrait finir plus aisément avec le banquet et les plaisirs, malgré des rivalités imminentes avec d’autres prétendants, dans la mesure où le mariage ne scelle pas le succès de l’*amator.*

On pourrait, bien sûr, utiliser ces correspondances avec des genres littéraires de fiction comme la preuve d’une falsification de l’auteur, ce qui autoriserait le rejet de cet épisode sur la base de son inintérêt historique. Plus largement, cela pourrait contribuer au déclassement d’Hérodien comme véritable historien, et de son œuvre comme histoire sérieuse, comme il est fréquemment arrivé par le passé. Or, si l’on tente d’aller au-delà de la binarité faux-vrai et fiction-histoire, on pourrait aussi y voir la marque d’une «configuration», comme le nomme White[88], c’est-à-dire l’explication d’événements historiques par leur mise en récit. Dans l’épisode de l’avènement de Julianus, ce procédé serait notamment fondé sur des ressemblances entre des personnages historiques et des figures littéraires, qui auraient été exagérées jusqu’à la caricature. Pensons ainsi au rôle prédominant de la femme et de la fille de Julianus au début de l’épisode : cette importance donnée aux deux personnages féminins ajoute certes un élément comique au récit, mais elle est également attestée dans le monnayage de Julianus.[89]

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86 James (2012).

87 James (2012) 261 et 264–265 sur le personnage du rival ; voir aussi Konstan (1986).

88 White (1978) part. 84–86.

89 Voir par exemple Woodward (1961), qui donne la liste des types pour Manlia Scantilla et Didia Clara.

6 Un regard «contemporain»

Même si l'on peut assez facilement envisager, de notre perspective actuelle, que cet épisode n'ait pas eu une grande postérité – les récits du siècle suivant tendent déjà à atténuer l'image d'un encan[90] – et qu'il présente des ressemblances avec d'autres avènements, comme celui de Claude en 41, il n'est pas inutile de s'intéresser à la façon dont il aurait pu être perçu, et vécu, au moment même. Bien qu'il en rejette la réalité, B. Campbell note en effet que l'épisode eut «a traumatic effect on contemporaries».[91] Chez Hérodien, cette «configuration» deviendrait donc plus précisément l'écriture, de même que la *ré*écriture, d'un événement historique «traumatique», dont il se prétend le contemporain.[92] Au-delà de considérations strictement chronologiques (on suppose qu'il y aurait un décalage d'au moins une cinquantaine d'années entre le règne de Julianus et le moment où Hérodien a pu composer son histoire), on entendra surtout par «contemporain» que l'historien se présente comme appartenant à la même génération qui a vécu ces événements et qui s'en rappelle encore (cf. 1.1.3). Cette mémoire, appelée «communicationnelle» par J. Assmann, serait celle d'un passé récent qui est partagée avec ses contemporains et qui s'applique à une période de quelque 80 ans.[93] Le sujet de l'*Histoire des empereurs*, c'est-à-dire l'histoire impériale romaine des années 180 à 238, correspondrait à ce phénomène d'une mémoire léguée, s'intégrant à un souvenir collectif. On pourrait donc envisager ce (prétendu) manque de distance critique, aussi présent dans les derniers livres de Dion, comme une des clés dans notre appréhension d'un tel passage.

Reflétant la «bigarrure» de la situation, ce mélange des genres pourrait également témoigner d'une tentative de «faire du sens» d'une succession pour le moins étonnante, d'autant plus que l'avènement de Pertinax avait semblé annoncer un retour à l'ordre après le règne de Commode. Pour le dire avec White, « [a]nother way we make sense of a set of events which appears strange, enigmatic, or mysterious in its immediate manifestations is to encode the set in terms of culturally provided categories, such as metaphysical concepts, religious beliefs, or *story forms.* »[94] Par l'incorporation et l'adaptation d'autres genres littéraires, comme la comédie ou l'élégie, Hérodien est en mesure d'ordonner et de façonner la matière historique de cet enchaînement rapide d'événements insolites. La configuration à la fois comique et élégiaque du personnage de Julianus et de l'épisode de son avènement permet de donner à cette affaire une structure et des points d'ancrage familiers afin d'accompagner son souvenir ou bien sa découverte à travers une mise en scène vivante.[95] Comme Denys le déclarait, l'historiographie devrait rechercher à la fois l'utilité et le plaisir de la lecture : les techniques mises en œuvre par Hérodien dans la composition de cet épisode répondent ainsi à ces deux impératifs.

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[90] Cf. Vict. 19 et *HA Did. Iul.* 2.6. Notons cependant que Zosime, au sixième siècle, parle clairement d'une vente (Zos. 17.2 : ὠνίου, ὠνεῖτα). Voir aussi la note 49 ci-dessus.

[91] Campbell (1984) 119. La conscience chez Hérodien d'une crise, et la notion même de «crise» du troisième siècle, a été remise en question par certains pans de la critique de moderne : Liebeschuetz (2015), qui propose un survol des tendances pour ou contre, conclut qu'il faut reconnaître «the traumatic nature of much of the third century» (p. 19).

[92] Voir Morley (2017), pour une lecture de Thucydide en tant que composition traumatique. Par ailleurs, l'historiographie contemporaine serait propice à l'intégration d'autres genres narratifs, cf. Fromentin (2022) 6, qui évoque les épopées, les inscriptions, les biographies et les évangiles chrétiens.

[93] Assmann (2010) 45–47 : les témoins de la première moitié de cycle ont souvent une posture plus prospective, « tournée vers l'avenir », tandis que ceux de la seconde arrivent à un « âge où le souvenir prend plus de place et, avec lui, le désir de le fixer et de le transmettre. » (citation à la page 46) Schulz (2011) 254–263 utilise ces concepts mémoriels, en particulier celui de «mémoire chaude», pour expliquer la transition narrative, littéraire et idéologique, dans l'*Histoire romaine* de Dion, entre les Antonins et les Sévères, ainsi que les parallèles proposés par l'historien entre les mauvais empereurs du premier siècle et ceux du troisième. Le processus pour l'épisode de Julianus chez Hérodien n'est pas entièrement dissimilaire, mais les éléments de fixation sont de nature différente : pour lui, archétypes proprement littéraires, pour son prédécesseur, personnages historiques (mais qui ont certes pu être filtrés à travers certain types littéraires).

Enfin, si l'on repense à la notion d'interactions littéraires, il ne s'agit pas tellement de soutenir qu'Hérodien a tiré ces éléments directement de la comédie et de l'élégie pour la mise en récit de l'avènement de Julianus, mais qu'il se trouve, dans l'ensemble des textes et des traditions de l'époque, certaines images, comiques ou élégiaques, qui sont susceptibles d'être réactivées par l'abord de cette scène et de ses personnages : à court terme, l'émotion provoquée par l'affaire peut être neutralisée par l'absurdité, à plus long terme, le processus de compréhension et d'interprétation historique peut commencer à prendre forme à travers l'accentuation de certains éléments-clés.[96]

7 Conclusion

Suivant Fowler, pour qui les mélanges génériques sont l'expression des goûts littéraires d'un moment donné, et Marincola, qui perçoit les genres antiques en état de perpétuel changement, on rappellera que les innovations génériques ne sont pas le symptôme d'un déclin ou d'une décadence, mais bien d'une vitalité et d'un essor qui ont assuré la survie de ces genres, et qu'elles participent à des stratégies de composition propres à chaque œuvre, chaque auteur ou chaque période.[97] Comme le note Potter, la littérature du troisième siècle de notre ère fut marquée par « a genuine change in taste ».[98] Qu'Hérodien soit donc un historien «typique» de cette époque, un «produit de son temps», cela va de soi.[99] En outre, le mélange générique, même entre genres fictifs et non-fictifs, n'appauvrit pas le récit, mais l'enrichit : le recours au «mélange» ou à la «variété» permet d'établir des rapports horizontaux entre les genres et d'éviter les connotations négatives liées à la «contamination» ou à la «dilution». Dans cette perspective, même l'historiographie peut incorporer des techniques plus couramment associées à la fiction, et cela, loin de porter atteinte à sa nature, permet notamment de rendre des événements ou des personnages qui, au premier abord, seraient moins transparents plus clairs pour le public.

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[94] White (1978) 86 (je souligne).

[95] Il aurait été également pertinent de se tourner vers des théorisations du rire et des processus thérapeutiques de réappropriation de l'événement traumatique afin d'explorer plus avant le recours à la comédie (serait-ce une tentative d'amplifier l'absurdité jusqu'à pouvoir la dédramatiser ?), mais ce prolongement dépasserait le cadre du présent article. On renverra en tout cas aux études de Halliwell (2008) et de Beard (2014) pour une première exploration du rire dans l'Antiquité.

[96] Ammien Marcellin compare l'usurpation de Procope à l'accession de Didius Julianus (Amm. Marc. 26.6.14 : *ut* […] *quondam*). Ammien reprend des éléments significatifs du récit d'Hérodien : des « soldats à vendre » (*uendibilium militum*), des promesses démesurées (*opes*), une escorte nombreuse et armée pour son apparition au peuple. Ce texte est plus explicitement comique : l'épisode est rapproché d'une « caricature » (*simulacrum*) ou d'un pantomime, et l'avènement est qualifié de « dérisoire » (*ludibriose*). Sur ce passage, voir Alonso (2016) 255 – 259, avec les références de la note 34.

Dans la composition de l'*Histoire des empereurs*, Hérodien a donc pu configurer le récit de l'avènement de Julianus selon des codes plus typiquement comiques ou élégiaques : l'aspirant apparaît sous les traits à la fois du *miles gloriosus* et de l'*exclusus amator.* Les motifs de ces genres ne sont pas appliqués de façon automatique, à l'emporte-pièce (ils sont même déjà modulés au sein de leurs propres genres), mais en sont tirés certains éléments qui sont ensuite adaptés à la matière historique : la présence de parasites, la gestuelle comique et la vantardise, le contexte sympotique, le rôle central du rempart à partir duquel se constitue l'action principale, la rivalité érotique. Il est intéressant de rappeler qu'il existe des liens profonds entre la comédie et l'élégie et qu'en ce sens, il n'est pas incongru qu'Hérodien ait eu recours à des procédés participant de ces deux genres dans la mise en récit d'un même épisode. En outre, les différences entre les codes comiques et élégiaques, par exemple au niveau des critères opposés de succès du héros, expriment bien la complexité de cette scène et illustrent les incompréhensions et les échecs de Julianus : l'*amator* est sorti vainqueur, il l'a emporté sur son rival, mais le *miles* est démasqué et se fait humilier et même mettre à mort. L'incompétence comique de Julianus, cristallisée par son exécution mandatée par le Sénat, se voit à travers l'ensemble de son règne, et l'empereur ne se produit jamais devant un public particulièrement favorable, quand il arrive à en attirer un. Comme Hérodien le raconte, la population l'insulte et le raille, se tenant à distance, et l'accomplissement du rôle comique de Julianus se passe finalement à huis clos, sans grande cérémonie.

En lien avec la question du genre de l'*Histoire des empereurs*, on a fait grand cas du but qu'Hérodien déclarait poursuivre dans sa préface, c'est-à-dire d'avoir écrit ce texte

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[97] Marincola (1999) 310. Bowersock (1985) 711, comparant les récits et les méthodes de Dion et Hérodien : «the times were visibly changing.» Cf. Sidebottom (1998) 2778 : «Herodian may have introduced a new and viable sub-genre to the flourishing Greek historiography of the third century.»

[98] Potter (2011) 334.

[99] Cf. Echols (1961) 7 ; Reardon (1971) 216 ; Bowersock (1975) 230, etc. Sur une dépréciation similaire des historiens hellénistiques, sauf – et par comparaison à – Polybe, qui est également fondée sur une vision pessimiste de l'historiographie post-thucydidéenne, voir ci-dessus, p. 41 – 42. Bowersock (1985) 711 voit même dans l'œuvre d'Hérodien «a pre-echo of Byzantium.»

« dans l’idée que les générations ultérieures n’éprouveraient pas elles non plus un mince plaisir à prendre connaissance » de cette période singulière.[100] Pour plusieurs critiques modernes, le plaisir n’appartiendrait pas au genre historique, mais plutôt à la fiction. Or, si Denys reconnaît l’importance du récit de Thucydide, il reproche à son auteur d’avoir produit un texte trop sec, monotone, peu accessible sauf aux plus lettrés.[101] Comme pour les *poikiliai*, la variété et le mélange dans l’historiographie peuvent servir à la fois le divertissement et l’apprentissage, soit par l’intégration immédiate de la matière, la faculté de rétention d’information ou même l’intérêt à revisiter le sujet à un moment ultérieur. Il n’est pas incongru de lier ces fonctions à l’abord d’un texte historique de la même époque, « bigarrée », comme l’*Histoire des empereurs* d’Hérodien, surtout dans la mise en récit d’un événement atypique et à première vue plutôt opaque, qu’on voudrait à la fois élucider et rendre (plus) plaisant, et dont on souhaiterait préserver la mémoire.

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[100] Hdn. 1.1.3 : οὐκ ἀτερπῆ τὴν γνῶσιν καὶ τοῖς ὕστερον ἔσεσθαι προσδοκήσας ἔργων μεγάλων τε καὶ πολλῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ γενομένων (trad. Roques). Cf. Pitcher (2009) 39 – 44 ; Kemezis (2014) e. g. 232 – 234 et 272 – 275 ; Chrysanthou (2022) e. g. 6 – 7 et 19 – 20.

[101] D. H. *Thuc.* 51.4 : αὐχμηρὰν καὶ ἀκόσμητον καὶ ἰδιωτικὴν τὴν ἱστορικὴν εἶναι πραγματείαν ἀξιώσαιμ᾽ ἄν, ἀλλ᾽ ἔχουσάν τι καὶ ποιητικόν· οὔτε παντάπασι ποιητικήν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ὀλίγον ἐκβεβηκυῖαν τῆς ἐν ἔθει· (trad. Fromentin). Cf. Lukinovich/Morand (1994) xvi, à propos d’Élien, part. *NA* : « variété et simplicité étaient les ingrédients complémentaires de tout ouvrage qui se voulait à la fois érudit et divertissant, attrayant et instructif ».

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Adam M. Kemezis

Herodian as Real and Fictional Source for the *Historia Augusta*

Unlike many of the questions considered in this volume, the relationship between Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*) is far from under-studied. This is only to be expected, given how rare it is that we possess full texts both of an earlier historian and of a later author that uses them as a source.[1] But given the mainly source-research-oriented focus of much existing work on the topic, there remain important literary questions not just about how the *HA* actually uses Herodian, but how it presents him within the elaborate fiction it creates around itself. In exploring these questions I hope to illuminate how the *HA* functions as a work of historical imagination, and in particular how source-citations are deployed rhetorically, but also, and appropriately for this volume, to show a little of how Herodian's text was understood and used a century and a half after his death in a very different Rome from the one in which he lived.

The *HA* is well known as a collection of 30 lives of emperors from the second and third centuries, written in Latin likely in Rome around 400 CE by an unknown author, although the text includes an elaborate authorial fiction that has it being written a hundred years earlier by six invented authors.[2] The entire content of the collection is fictionalized to varying degrees, and its generic identity and intent remain highly contentious. However, it does include solid information taken from authentic traditions, of which Herodian is one, serving as the *HA*'s main source for the reign of Maximinus and the events of 238. Comparison of content reveals many stretches of the *HA* that amount to a loose Latin paraphrase of Herodian, and other sections are basically condensed versions of Herodian's narrative.[3] Furthermore, the *HA* includes roughly a dozen explicit citations of Herodian, which will be the main concern of this article.

Acknowledgments: Many thanks are due to my fellow organizers/editors and to all the attendees for their helpful contributions to the paper and for a splendidly productive and enjoyable conference. In what follows, translations are my own. For Herodian and the *HA*, I have used the Teubner editions of Lucarini (2005) and Hohl (1971), in the latter case taking into account the textual suggestions of Stover (2020).

[1] Works on *HA* sources that will be cited throughout this study include Kolb (1972, 1995); Barnes (1978); Rohrbacher (2013) and the relevant parts of Paschoud (2018).

[2] For summaries of the authorship question, see Chastagnol (1994) ix–li or Rohrbacher (2016) 4 – 15. Although I refer to the author with gender-inclusive "they", I take it they are a single person. The *HA*'s various fictional narrative personae consistently refer to themselves in the masculine, and I do the same.

[3] For overviews of a the *HA*'s use of Herodian in these books, see Kolb (1972) 18 – 22; Rohrbacher (2013) 164. A useful synoptic table of correspondences between Herodian and the *HA*'s *Maximini, Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus* can be found at Paschoud (2018) xv–xvii. I hope in the near future to publish a study of my own thoroughly surveying the *HA*'s use of Herodian from a source-critical perspective, as a complement to the rhetorical analysis seen in this piece.

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My aim is to read these citations as part of the *HA*'s fiction.This is not to claim that they are factually inaccurate or misleading. As we will see, the citations are generally accurate in a narrow sense, albeit the overall picture they create is incomplete at best. What matters more for my purposes, though, is that they are part of the overall story the *HA* constructs of who wrote it and how, and in what literary circumstances. That story as a whole is fictional. Even where the author has chosen to include elements that correspond to their own practice, they attribute those elements to fabricated *scriptores* writing under invented historical circumstances. Citing Herodian contributes to the *scriptores*' ostensible authority and, for readers who are unaware of the fiction, helps position the collection as a supplement or corrective to their existing knowledge. In another sense, however, the citations point knowing readers to cues that both critique Herodian and ironically undermine the *HA*'s own coherence and the credibility of its authorial fiction. My argument will consist of a two-stage reading of the various citations. First I go through the citations roughly in order of their appearance and ask how they present Herodian to readers with no previous knowledge of that author, and then I look again at how some of them would work differently for readers who were indeed familiar with the corresponding text in Herodian.

This second stage assumes that, for the Herodian citations as for the *HA*'s larger fiction, the text is devised to generate different meanings for readers at different knowledge levels. Some people are supposed to "get it" to varying degrees and others not at all, but the unknowing readers will still construct a coherent set of meanings that allows the text to meet their expectations without requiring them to be stupid or unduly gullible. The more knowing readers will construct additional levels of meaning and will also generate many of the same meanings as their unknowing counterparts, but will modify or reject them.[4] The picture is complicated by readers who become more knowing as they respond to cues and incoherencies in the text to in some measure "solve the puzzle". The citations create a version of Herodian that corresponds only partly to the real author, both as to his content and the *HA*'s relationship to him. Readers who are familiar with him will realize this and draw further conclusions as to the content and overall meaning of the *HA* itself.

This presupposes, first, that the *HA* itself has direct access to Herodian's text, and second, that its target readership, seemingly Latin-speaking *litterati* in Rome around 400 CE, includes a meaningful number of people who are also familiar with Herodian, in addition to the probably larger number who are not. As to the first, direct consultation, presumably in the original, is most often taken for granted in studies of the *HA*'s sources.[5] However, it has sometimes been argued that the *HA*'s knowledge and citations of Herodian, and also perhaps of Dexippus, comes at second hand from an intermediate Latin source.[6] However, the *HA*'s word-level engagement with Herodian's text is simply too close to be wholly accounted for without direct consultation.[7] One would have to imagine a Latin source that amounted to a full translation of Herodian Books 7–8, but it is hard to see how such a work would integrate Dexippus, or continue past 238 based on Dexippus' much less full narrative. It is possible that a Latin source based on Herodian was used as a supplement to direct consultation (not unlike the *HA*'s use of multiple Latin breviaries) and this would indeed be helpful in explaining some features that Herodian shares with the Zonaras tradition.[8]

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[4] See on this point Kemezis (2022).

[5] See e.g. Barnes (1978), Rohrbacher (2013); Paschoud (2018) or the brief note at Brandt (1996) 48.

[6] The position of Homo (1919) esp. 217–220 and Potter (1990) 365–369, the latter arguing that the same is true for the *HA*'s use of Dexippus.

Regarding the *HA*'s readers' presumed knowledge of Herodian, what I envision here might range from deep engagement with his text through simply recognizing his name and forming expectations accordingly. We have two significant clues as to what presence Herodian might have had in Theodosian-era Rome. The first is internal, consisting of the implicit assumptions lying behind the *HA*'s own references to Herodian. These, as we will see, do not portray Herodian as everyday reading. However, neither do they portray him as arcane or inaccessible, like some of the bogus works mentioned in later lives.[9] At one point (*Alb.* 12.14, #2)[10] the narrator suggests his readers might consult Herodian for further information.[11] More vaguely, several of the references to Herodian seem only to be there on the assumption that some readers will be aware of his version, and the narrator is thus obliged to address it even though it does not support his point.[12] Both of these are left at the level of weak implication, however, and Herodian seems to be rather less familiar than his Latin counterparts Marius Maximus and "Cordus".[13] There is the further issue that, given the fictional date of the *scriptores*, the *HA* might be conjuring a world in which Herodian is more or less current than in the author's own present.

Our external evidence for Herodian is limited to say the least. No Latin author other than the *HA* mentions him by name. However, convincing arguments have been made, most recently by Gavin Kelly, that Ammianus Marcellinus is familiar with Herodian.[14] Herodian could most obviously have served as a source for Ammianus' lost account of the period 180 – 238, but it is perhaps more significant that, in Kelly's view, Ammianus uses Herodian not just as a source but as a target of allusion, creating meanings that presuppose readers who know Herodian's text.[15] This level of engagement, if accepted, has obvious implications for what the *HA* might be able to do with Herodian. The *HA* is typically seen as coming out a few years after Ammianus, and in literary circles where the latter also circulated.[16] It is likely the *HA* makes references that we can no longer detect to Ammianus' lost early books and their relationship to Herodian. Similarly, it is quite possible the *HA*'s readers were familiar with other earlier authors who may have used or cited Herodian.[17] In short, there is strong, if indirect evidence to suppose a meaningful part of the *HA*’s target readers knew basic facts about Herodian, associated him with other later authors and were in some instances familiar with his text.

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[7] For examples of particularly close word-level verbal correspondence see Brandt (1998) 60.

[8] As argued by Bleckmann (2021), see also Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lii–lxi. It is implausible, however, that that source was Aurelius Victor or whatever source is shared by the Victorine *Caesares*, Eutropius and other works in their tradition, as argued by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 292–297. Once again, one cannot imagine a work that replicated so much of Herodian while still conveying the radically different narrative found in the extant *Caesares.* This is a point I mean to address more fully in a future publication, see above n. 3.

[9] See e. g. *Arln.* 1.4–10, where the narrator ("Vopiscus") mentions several varieties of inaccessible texts requiring privileged access, see Kemezis (2018). The same passage seems to imagine that Greek works in general are considerably less commonly read than their Latin counterparts but not unknown or unduly difficult to obtain.

[10] The #2 here and similar numbers given with some citations of the *HA* in this article refer to Table 2.

[11] Similarly at *Gord.* 2.1, the narrator claims that the *inperiti scriptores* who only know of two Gordians could have learned the truth from "Arrianus" or Dexippus, seemingly without unreasonable effort.

[12] See esp. *Alex.* 52.1–3 (#4) on the "bloodless" reign.

[13] Thus there is nothing for Herodian comparable to *Alex.* 65.4, where "Lampridius" explictly says that his addressee Constantine has read Maximus, or *Mxmn.* 28.10, where "Capitolinus" says he has put in an anecdote about Maximinus' shoes in case anyone who has read (or will read?) "Cordus" should criticize its omission.

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[14] See Kelly (2008) 231 – 240 and also Sotinel (2003) 386 – 387. Ammianus' use of Herodian as a source has been widely accepted since Humanist times, and arguments are briefly summed up by Baaz (1909) 69 – 71. It is taken as certain by Gilliam (1972) in his survey of Ammianus' surviving references to second-and-third century emperors (e. g. 135), followed by Barnes (1998) 213. The Dutch commentators on Ammianus generally concur, see Den Boeft *et al.* (2008) 166, 238. Dissenters include Brok (1977) and Rohrbacher (2006). Most of the former's arguments can be refuted if one assumes that Ammianus was capable of combining Herodian with other source traditions. Rohrbacher (111 – 112) considers that because Ammianus refers to Gordian I and Gordian III as *senior* and *iunior* (in separate passages, respectively 26.6.20 and 23.5.17) this means he cannot have read Herodian, since then he would have known to distinguish three Gordians. This is to place too much weight on a casual usage, and to take the *HA*'s own rhetoric about the controversy too seriously (*Gord.* 2.1). Given Gordian II's limited significance, Ammianus might reasonably have felt that in contexts where his identity was irrelevant, it was better to stick with the more common usage familiar from the breviaries.

[15] Kelly (see previous n.) looks particularly at Amm. 31.10.19 ~ Hdn. 1.15.6; Amm. 22.9.5 – 6 ~ Hdn. 1.11.1 – 2; Amm. 26.8.15 ~ Hdn. 3.4.1 – 3; and Amm. 26.6.16 ~ Hdn. 2.6.13.

[16] The fullest arguments for the *HA* writing in conscious reaction to Ammianus are Syme (1968) esp. 103 – 104 and Rohrbacher (2016) 134 – 169, both with references to considerable earlier scholarship. Gilliam (1972) is somewhat more cautious. Such a reading evidently presupposes that the *HA* postdates Ammianus, i. e. that it dates to the mid-390s or later. Such a dating has been the majority view for some decades, but Cameron (2011) 743 – 782, with 749 – 750 specifically addressing Ammianus, argues for a date between the mid-370s and mid 380s, and has attracted some support. This dating relies heavily on reading one passage of Jerome (*Vit. Hil.* 1.1 – 4) as deriving from *HA Prob.* 1.1 – 4 rather than, as is usually supposed, the other way round. Cameron's argument is plausible in itself but not so conclusive as to outweigh the many other passages of the *HA* that appear connected to events of the late 380s to 390s. For detailed counter-arguments, see Paschoud (2012) 380 – 383 and Rohrbacher (2016) 104 – 111, 158 – 169.

[17] I am not, however, persuaded by the arguments of Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 101 – 102 that Herodian was heavily consulted by Aurelius Victor (i. e. for them the extended work by that author of which the extant *Caesares* would then be an epitome, see below n. 30). The parallels they cite are mostly generic statements that could easily have been included in an independent source describing the same events as Herodian, as opposed to the more specific details shared by Ammianus and Herodian. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this article, the *HA* positions Herodian as a quite distinct tradition from the Latin breviaries, and it is hard to see how this would work if readers were familiar with an account by Victor in which the two traditions were amalgamated. It is possible that details from

Starting from that basis, this article will begin with a brief survey of how the *HA* actually uses Herodian, as established from comparison of the texts rather than relying on the explicit citations. I then proceeed to the two-part analysis as detailed above. The *HA*, among its many aspects, is a playful but not unserious fictional evocation of the extensive literary tradition on Roman emperors available in its author’s literary milieu, and Herodian is a rare instance where we can survey in full the process whereby an existing text is incorporated into the parallel fictional world that the *scriptores* inhabit. The resulting insights will shed light on how the *HA* dealt with those of its real sources that are now lost, the “good source,” often identified as Marius Maximus, who lies behind its earlier, more accurate, lives. It will also work towards a comprehensive picture of the bizarre literary games that our anonymous author contrived to play with their dead rulers.

1 Usage of Herodian: An Overview

The *HA*’s lives run from Hadrian (117–138) to Carus and his sons (282–285). They thus include the entire period covered by Herodian (180–238), and for most of that overlap period (down to 229) we also have substantial remains of Cassius Dio.[18]

The *HA* does not engage with Herodian consistently across this period (see Table 1). For the lives down to the *Caracalla*, we have only one instance, in the *Clodius Albinus*, where he is clearly the source for a significant piece of narrative.[19] For this period, the *HA* most often draws on a source tradition no longer extant, usually thought to be a single Latin biographer, a continuator of Suetonius who has often been identified as Marius Maximus.[20] This source appears to end somewhere in the sequence Caracalla-Macrinus-Elagabalus, and starting with the reign of Macrinus we can see evidence of the *HA* using Herodian more frequently but still sporadically. The *Macrinus* relies on Herodian for its core factual section on that emperor’s reign (*Macr.* 8.3–10.6), though that section amounts to only a little over 10 percent of the life, which is mostly made up

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Herodian made their way into the breviary tradition, but any influence must have been small enough for the two to appear independent.

[18] The question whether the *HA* used Dio is beyond the scope of this article, but I broadly agree with those (e.g. Chastagnol [1994] lix–lxi and Mecella [2016] 44–47) who see at least some use.

[19] See *HA Alb.* 7.2–8.4, on Severus’ plot to have letter-carriers assassinate Albinus, which is adapted without citation from Hdn. 3.5.2–8. Kolb (1972) argues for use of Herodian as well as Dio in all the lives from the *Commodus* forward, though his criteria for diagnosing correspondences are very broad.

[20] For the considerable debate on this early source, see Rohrbacher (2013) 153–162 and the literature cited there. The objections to identifying that source with Maximus voiced by Paschoud (1999) and by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 235–264 are significant, though the nature of the *HA*’s information still suggests a single biographical source.

of fictional material.[21] The *Heliogabalus* and *Alexander* are larger and more diffuse compositions, which both include individual items probably taken from Herodian, but no single section of adapted material like what is found in the *Macrinus.*[22]

Table 1: Use of Herodian in HA Lives.

HA Life	***Scriptor***	**Use of Herodian**
Commodus	Lampridius	Use not definitely established
Pertinax	Capitolinus	Use not definitely established
Didius Julianus	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Septimius Severus	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Pescennius Niger	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Clodius Albinus	**Capitolinus**	**One short section**
Caracalla	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Geta	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Macrinus	Capitolinus	One long and one short section
Diadumenus	**Lampridius**	**Use not definitely established**
Heliogabalus	Lampridius	Scattered details
Alexander Severus	**Lampridius**	**Scattered details**
Maximini Duo	**Capitolinus**	**Principal source**
Gordiani Tres	Capitolinus	Principal source
Maximus et Balbinus	**Capitolinus**	**Principal source**
Triginta Tyranni	**Pollio**	**Tangential relationship**

Lives containing citations in **bold.**

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[21] *Macr.* 8.3–10.6 is based on Hdn. 4.15–5.4, but the *HA* version is about one-sixth as long as Herodian's (1.5 vs. 9.5 Teubner pages). The life as a whole is about twelve and a half pages. For its limited factuality and other possible sources, see Barnes (1978) 55–56.

[22] Lists of passages seemingly reminiscent of Herodian are provided by (for the *Hel.*) Zinsli (2014) 50–54 and (for the *Alex.*) Barnes (1978) 57–59, on the latter see also Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lii–lxi and for both lives Kolb (1976). Kolb and Zinsli both posit more extensive use of Herodian in these lives than what I am describing here.

Where we really find Herodian's influence is in the three lives that present sometimes overlapping narratives of the events of 238, that is the *Maximini*, the *Gordiani* and the *Maximus et Balbinus.*[23] The first of these, which is also the longest, derives nearly all its factual content from Herodian, and the last is nearly as reliant, though in both cases there is a large mixture of fiction, a few items from Dexippus and some reference to the Latin breviary tradition that survives to us in Eutropius and in the *Caesares* traditionally attributed to Aurelius Victor.[24] The *Gordiani* includes more Dexippan material but still takes significant parts of its main narrative of the first two Gordians' revolt (esp. §7–10) from Herodian. It is worth noting that all five of the lives that contain extended adaptation of Herodian (*Albinus, Macrinus, Maximini, Gordiani, Maximus-Balbinus*) are attributed to "Julius Capitolinus".

It is not possible to survey fully the ways in which the *HA* adapts Herodian's material, but the *HA*'s various overlapping narratives all condense Herodian to one degree or another, in uneven ways.[25] For the more action-filled sections, the *HA* often resorts to close paraphrase of its source, while omitting altogether some of Herodian's descriptive scene-setting and simplifying some of his already streamlined narrative. It does make additions of its own, typically consisting of implausible points of detail, such as that Maximinus was not merely very tall (Hdn. 7.1.12), he was exactly "eight feet plus one finger" in height (*HA Mxmn.* 6.8).

2 Citation of Herodian: An Overview

Depending how one counts, there are 10 to 14 citations of Herodian in the *Historia Augusta.* This is not a massive presence, scattered as the citations are over 200 pages of text, but it still makes him the fourth most-cited author in the corpus. The other three are (in descending order of frequency) Marius Maximus, Junius (or Aelius) Cordus and Dexippus. The first and last are real attested authors but outside of the *HA* have only brief testimonia (Maximus) or substantial fragments (Dexippus), whereas "Cordus" is a fiction of the *HA*'s with no external existence. There is then a considerable gap in frequency between these four and the mass of mostly fictional authors that the *HA* cites throughout the corpus, although more common still are vague anonymous references to *quidam*, *plerique, alii* and so forth.[26] All four are cited over extended periods, but only Herodian is ever explicitly identified as the fundamental basis for an large stretch of narrative (*Max.-Bal.* 15.3, #7) and Herodian's is the only case where we can check the citations against an extant original. The first thing that should be emphasized is that the citations are all in some measure authentic, inasmuch as there really is something in Herodian corresponding to what the *HA* claims is there, even though, as we will see, in many instances the citation is misleading.[27] This basic accuracy is not something to be taken for granted with the *HA*, given that the collection contains 24 citations of the fictional "Cordus", and there are good reasons to question several of the citations of Maximus and Dexippus.[28]

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[23] For overviews of the source-picture for these three lives, see Barnes (1978) 59–64; Paschoud (2018) x–xxi and, specifically to the *Maximus-Balbinus*, Brandt (1996) 46–67. Lippold (1991) has extensive discussion of sources for the *Maximini*, though tending to hypothesize alternate sources for items that most scholars would see as fictional.

[24] For the attribution and the recent arguments of Stover and Woudhuysen (2023), see below n. 30.

[25] For examples, see refs. in n. 3 above.

[26] For anonymous citations in particular, see Burgersdijk (2017).

As seen in Table 2, the distribution of the 10 undisputed citations of Herodian (not counting those of "Arrianus", for which see below), does track the *HA*'s actual usage of that author, though only loosely. Herodian is both cited and paraphrased at length in the *Albinus*, but in entirely different places. Similarly, the *Macrinus* makes substantial use of Herodian, but never cites him, whereas he is named in the pendant life of that emperor's son Diadumenianus. The *Heliogabalus* never mentions Herodian, but the *Alexander* does so twice, while the *Maximini* and *Maximus-Balbinus* account for about half of the existing citations, with none in the *Gordiani* and one back-reference in the *Thirty Tyrants.* The citations overlap somewhat with those for Marius Maximus (both are found in the *Alb.* and *Alex.*) and more heavily with Dexippus, with both names often appearing in the same locations. They also correspond with those of Cordus, whose bogus citations are found overwhelmingly in the *Mxmn.*, *Gord.* and *Max.-Bal.*, as well as in the *Alb.* and *Macr.,* though his name is never mentioned directly alongside Herodian's. While, as we saw, the most intensive use of Herodian is found in lives attributed to "Julius Capitolinus", citations are also found in lives by "Aelius Lampridius", specifically the *Diadumenus* and *Alexander.*

My task for the next few pages will be to reconstruct what impression readers without previous knowledge of Herodian would have formed of him if all they had to work with was the *HA*'s citations, without being able to gauge their accuracy as I have just done. Most such readers would not have systematically collated the citations or fully traced the connections among them, especially the earlier isolated ones in the *Albinus* and *Diadumenus.* Even later, in the *Alexander* and after, their impressions would be governed more by the near context of each individual citation than by its relationship to other citations many pages earlier or in different lives.[29] Nonetheless, the *HA*'s entire rhetoric of citation presupposes some readers who use its name-dropping to reconstruct otherwise unknown authors, and there is enough about Herodian to provide them materials. Even casual readers would at least have registered that he was a *Graecus*, since the word occurs in 5 of the 10 citations, and a contemporary of the events he described (*Alex.* 52.2 [#4]; *Max.-Bal.* 15.5 [#8]). No further biographical information is given about the author, but the *HA* does deliver two evaluative comments on his work, namely that he and Maximus both "tell things honestly for the most part", at least as regards Severus' behavior toward defeated enemies (*Alb.* 12.14 [#2] *ad fidem pleraque dixerunt*) but also that Herodian "showed much favor [to Maximinus] to slander Alexander" (*Mxmn.* 13.4 [#6] *in odium Alexandri plurimum favit*).

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[27] The one exception, which will not figure significantly in my further discussion, is the textually uncertain citation after *Max.-Bal.* 15.7 (#11, see n. 29). Stover (2020) 169 – 170 makes codicological arguments for its authenticity that appear strong to a non-specialist and have not to my knowledge been refuted. However, if the citation is authentic, it is an outlier, above all because it cannot be connected with anything in Herodian's actual text, and secondarily because its content is a stand-alone (and presumably invented) anecdote rather than a factual dispute or variant, as in all or nearly all the other citations.

[28] For Maximus, the later citations, in the *Hel.* and *Alex.*, have aroused suspicion since at least the observations of Hönn (1911) 47, see also Paschoud (1999). For full treatment of Dexippus citations, see Paschoud (1991) and (less skeptically) Mecella (2013) 29 – 34. Burgersdijk (2017) and Mundt (2017) are useful studies of the overall function of literary citations in the *HA.*

Beyond the explicit comments, the content of the citations gives a consistent impression that Herodian presented a distinctive version of events that differed in key points from that found in the Latin breviary tradition, which for many readers would have been the most accessible "standard" version.[30] This is clear simply from the kinds of things Herodian is cited for. Nearly all of the citations concern significant and fundamental facts about the emperors of the period and their actions: Whether Albinus or Diadumenianus held imperial rank at all, and at what level; How Septimius Severus and Alexander Severus treated the nobility; How successful Alexander's and Maximinus' wars were; How the revolt of Titus/Quartinus unfolded; whether Balbinus' co-emperor was Maximus or Pupienus, or whether those are two names for the same person. Many of these, above all the last, are also discussed at other points without an explicit citation. The *HA* has an ongoing, self-conscious preoccupation with distinguishing appropriately serious biographical material from trivia, and comments on the subject throughout the corpus.[31] Clearly Herodian's material falls on the "serious" end of the axis, and is meant to be seen that way, since the *HA* provides him with a useful foil in the person of Cordus.[32]

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[29] Nor will all readers have approached the text sequentially (see Kemezis [2022] 235–236), though there are certainly items in the *Maximini* and *Maximus-Balbinus* that work best for readers who have first read the *Alexander*, as argued below.

[30] By "the breviary tradition" I mean primarily the breviary of Eutropius and the *Caesares* that is usually taken to be the work of Aurelius Victor. For their literary-cultural context, see Sehlmeyer (2009). The entire accepted picture has now been called into question by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023), who argue that the *Caesares* is an epitome of a much longer and extremely influential work by Victor, which would also then be a principal source for Eutropius and ultimately the *HA.* The arguments are plausible for seeing the *Caesares* as an epitome rather than Victor's principal work, but it still appears likely to me that even if the shared source of the *Caesares*, Eutropius *et al.* was substantially longer than generally supposed, the short-form histories remained more widely read and were the more significant reference point for the *HA.* In deference to the open question, I will use the familiar, though not ancient, title of *Caesares* rather than (as is common in scholarship to date) simply identifying it as "Victor" or using the manuscript title of *Historiae abbreviatae.*

[31] For an overview and ironic reading of this technique, see Van Nuffelen (2017).

[32] Den Hengst (1981) 46–50 gives an overview of the Cordus fiction, see also Chastagnol (1994) cviii–cix for a useful table of citations.

Table 2: Citations of Herodian in the *HA.*

HA Location	Corresponding Passage of Herodian	Content	Accuracy
A. Citations of "Herodianus"			
1. *Alb.* 1.1–2	2.15.3	Albinus was Severus' *Caesar* (cf. *Sev.* 6.9)	Accurate, although context in Herodian very different.
2. *Alb.* 12.13–14	3.8.6–7	Herodian and Maximus both reliable sources for Severus' cruelty towards defeated enemies.	Accurate as regards Herodian.
3. *Diad.* 2.5	5.4.12	Diadumenianus only held rank of *Caesar* and was killed along with father (cf. *Macr.* 10.4).	Accurate, though Herodian is in error on both points.
4. *Alex.* 52.2	6.1.7, 6.9.8 (*contra* 6.1.10)	Alexander's reign characterized as "free from bloodshed" because he killed no senators (cf. *Alex.* 25.1)	Accurate as to the characterization, but Herodian makes no qualification regarding senators,
5. *Alex.* 57.3	6.6.3	Herodian represents a minority view claiming that Alexander suffered major losses on his Persian campaign; most historians more favorable.	Accurate with word-level variants, though the immediately preceding passage (57.2) gives a misleading impression of Herodian's version. Latin breviarists are indeed more positive about the Persian war.
6. *Mxmn.* 13.3–4	7.2.9	Maximinus would have conquered all of northern Europe if he had lived, presented as example of Herodian's bias for Maximinus and against Alexander (cf. *Mxmn.* 12.1).	Accurate but misrepresents Herodian's overall stance.
7. *Max.-Bal.* 15.3	7.10.3–6	Claims in death notice on Maximus to have gotten *haec* from Herodian, may refer to entire account or to some more specific fact in the immediate context.	Accurate.
8. *Max.-Bal.* 15.5	Books 7–8 *passim.*	Herodian calls the emperor of 238 "Maximus" rather than "Puppienus", *HA* rejects the idea they might be same person.	Accurate, though inconsistent with #9 and #12.
9. *Max.-Bal.* 16.6–7	8.6.5–6	Herodian and Dexippus both use "Maximus" and say that he never directly fought against Maximinus but was at Ravenna during the decisive period. HA affirms they are the same person.	Accurate, at any rate as regards Herodian, inconsistent with #8 and #14.

Table 2 *(Continued)*

HA Location	Corresponding Passage of Herodian	Content	Accuracy
10. ***Trig.*** **32.1–4**	7.1.9–10	Herodian and Dexippus describe revolt of "Titus" during reign of Maximinus. (cf. *Mxmn*. 11.1–6)	Accurate insofar as it seems to correspond to a "Quartinus" mentioned in Herodian, but details very different from Hdn.'s account.
11. After ***Max.-Bal.*** **15.7 (authenticity uncertain)**[33]	n/a	Brief conversation between Maximus and Balbinus at the time of their elevation by the Senate.	Inaccurate, there is no such exchange in Herodian.
B. Citations of "Arrianus" (always with Dexippus)			
12. ***Mxmn.*** **33.2–4**	8.6.5–6	A and D talk about Maximus whereas Latin authors talk about Puppienus, possibly same person. Also disagree about whether he fought Maximinus.	Accurate for Herodian, inconsistent with #8 and #14.
13. ***Gord.*** **2.1**	Books 7–8 *passim*	*Inperiti scriptores* identify only two Gordians, A and D correctly name three. Both authors said to have *ad fidem omnia persecuti sunt.*	Accurate in that Herodian does mention three emperors, though not all at once in the same passage.
14. ***Max.-Bal.*** **1.2**	7.10.2–4	First mention of Maximus and Balbinus includes dispute over the former's identity, Pupienus and Maximus seen as different people.	Accurate for Herodian, inconsistent with #9, #12.

Most of the latter's citations are for discrete details or anecdotes that could easily be characterized as frivolous, such as Maximinus eating sixty pounds of meat a day (*Mxmn.* 4.1).[34] In case any readers fail to register the pattern, the *HA* narrator repeatedly delivers polemical comments against Cordus' frivolity.[35] This does suggest a picture of Herodian as Cordus' serious counterpart, but it is significant that the *HA* never makes this explicit or indeed mentions the two in the same place at all: it is part of the *HA*'s rhetoric that some dots are left unconnected and implications remain open.[36]

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[33] These lines appear in no extant manuscripts or modern printed editions before the recent revised Loeb (Magie and Rohrbacher [2022]), but are found, along with four other substantial passages and a number of variant readings, in a Venetian edition of 1489. They have usually been dismissed as interpolations (see esp. Peter [1908]), but Edwin Patzig (Patzig [1904] 44–50) argued that the Venice editors were using a now lost manuscript, and Justin Stover (Stover [2020] esp. 169–170) has used new codicological evidence to reassert Patzig's claim.

[34] Not all the Cordus citations fall under this heading, and he is sometimes cited for things like the age at death of Gordian III (*Gord.* 22.2) or the deification of Gordian II (*Max.-Bal.* 4.2).

[35] The longest such passage is *Macr.* 1.3–5, see also *Mxmn.* 31.4; *Gord.* 21.4; *Max.-Bal.* 4.5.

Moving on to specific citations and starting with the earliest ones from the *Albinus* and *Diadumenus* (#1–3), the narrator of the *Albinus* does give Herodian something of a vote of confidence, saying that "anyone who wants to know in more detail about [Severus' treatment of Niger's and Albinus' partisans] should read, among Latin authors, Marius Maximus and among Greek authors Herodian, both of whom give an honest account for the most part."[37] Herodian is placed on a level with Marius Maximus, though perhaps as a *Graecus* he is the less accessible option, and we get little sense how much the narrator himself has used him. However, for the other two, modern readers have often seen in them a certain incongruity, or even suspected them of being later insertions.[38] It is hard to see what specific point the citations are there to make, partly because both the *Albinus* and the *Diadumenus* are full of incongruities of all sorts. Furthermore, the citations are somewhat isolated, so that it is unlikely readers who come across Herodian in the *Alexander* will immediately think of him from the *Albinus* or *Diadumenus.*

Other than the evaluation I have just mentioned (#2), the other two both concern whether the emperor in question held the rank of *Caesar*, and in both cases this is part of a larger question that the *HA* is largely inventing. In Albinus' case (#1), the *Caesar* title is spun into a complicated fictional narrative in which Albinus is actually named as *Caesar* by Commodus, a status that Severus then recognizes.[39] Several other authors are also cited and Herodian's role is unclear. In the *Diadumenus* (#3), the title of *Caesar* is a secondary concern, since the *HA* is far more preoccupied with a fanciful discussion of how Diadumenianus received the name "Antoninus", which is part of an extended play with the *nomen Antoninorum* that extends over several lives.[40] Herodian, we are told "leaves out these things" (*haec praeteriens*). Since more than half of the (short) *Diadumenus* is given over to discussion of the "Antoninus" name/title, Herodian's relevance appears as uncertain as it did in the *Albinus.* Readers who are unaware of Herodian's content will find little to pique their curiosity, unless perhaps they have become suspicious of the Albinus-as-Caesar story and/or the *nomen*

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[36] The obvious place to draw an explicit contrast would have been *Max.-Bal.* 4.5, where Cordus' uncritical approach is contrasted with Suetonius, as well as a fictional "Valerius Marcellinus" and a "Curius Fortunatianus", the latter of whom *omnem hanc historiam perscripsit*, not unlike the unmentioned Herodian.

[37] See Alb. 12.14 (#2) *Quae qui diligentius scire velit, legat Marium Maximum de Latinis scriptoribus, de Graecis scriptoribus Herodianum, qui ad fidem pleraque dixerunt.*

[38] E.g. Baaz (1909) 67.

[39] There is extended discussion of Commodus' promotion of Albinus at *Alb.* 2.1–3.5 (with citation of Marius Maximus) and again at 13.3–10, see also *Alb.* 3.4, 6.4–5, 7.3 (citation of "Cordus") and 10.3, with *Sev.* 6.9 and *Nig.* 4.7 (citation of Severus' autobiography).

[40] For the *nomen Antoninorum* question in the *HA*, see most fully Burgersdijk (2010) 108–210, also Pistellato (2022). It is accurate that Diadumenianus' nomenclature included "Antoninus", but the specifics given in the *HA* are wholly (and, to modern readers at least, absurdly) fictional.

Antoninorum rigamarole, and associate Herodian in some way with these possible fictions.

The *Alexander* is a more complicated proposition altogether, since it is the longest life in the whole *HA* at 54 Teubner pages, consisting largely of idealizing fiction spun out of a hugely briefer positive account found in the Latin breviary tradition. Herodian's full account is used only sporadically, but is cited twice in a relatively short space (a little over four pages) in a way that gives a more distinct impression of the author than the previous citations. Both citations (#4 – 5) occur during the episode of military narrative (§ 50 – 58) that complements and brings to a climax the *HA*'s praise of Alexander's peacetime virtues. The *HA* makes Alexander into a heroic war leader who wins a magnificent victory over the Persians after imposing iron discipline on his troops (whence supposedly the name "Severus"). Such a picture is compatible with that in the Latin breviaries, and may thus seem familiar to readers. Herodian is cited in connection with counter-narratives that call this version of Alexander into question. At *Alex.* 52.2 (# 4), after giving an example of Alexander intimidating discontented soldiers, the narrator feels compelled to explain that "his reign was called 'bloodless,' though he was harsh and stern, for this reason, namely that he did not kill any senators, as the Greek author Herodian states in his writings on his own time" (ἀναίματον *imperium eius, cum fuerit durus et tetricus, idcirco vocatum est, quod senatorem nullum occiderit, ut Herodianus Graecus scriptor refert in libris temporum suorum*). A few pages later, after describing the campaign and subsequent triumph in Rome, the *HA* adds a surprising qualification (#5, *Alex.* 57.2 – 3), that:

> *haec nos et in annalibus et apud multos repperimus. sed quidam dicunt a servo suo eum proditum non vicisse regem, sed, ne vinceretur, fugisse. quod contra multorum opinionem dici non dubium est his, qui plurimos legerint. nam et amisisse illum exercitum dicunt fame, frigore ac morbo, ut Herodianus auctor est contra multorum opinionem.*
>
> This is what we have found in annals and from many authors. But some people do say [Alexander] was betrayed by a slave and did not defeat the king, but fled so as not to be defeated. Nobody who has read a variety of authors will doubt that this goes against the views of many. For they also say he lost an army by hunger, cold and disease, as Herodian has it, contrary to the views of many.

Both of these instances pose potential major problems for the *HA*'s narrative. They suggest the existence of an alternative that is incompatible not simply on particular facts but in its whole characterization of Alexander: mild but incompetent rather than harsh and effective. The narrator manages to explain away the first with a qualification about senators that still leaves the impression that the two narratives, even if not contradictory, are very different. This is strengthened if readers remember an earlier reference (*Alex.* 25.2) to *quidam* (plural) who had made the same claim about bloodlessness, which the *HA* at that point dismissed as flat wrong (*quod contra est*) without naming Herodian specifically. The second citation about the Persian campaign cannot reach even that level of resolution. Either Alexander won his war and told the truth about it or he did not: rather than suggest any "in-between" solution, the narrator leaves the binary alternative in place and gives a strong impression that he sides with the majority of sources.

Together the *Alexander* citations suggest an alternative version of Alexander's military achievements that is associated with Herodian but not restricted to him. That version is not wholly hostile to Alexander – the *quidam* who call Alexander's reign "bloodless" presumably mean it as a compliment – but it is basically at odds with the *HA*'s own version and that of the Latin breviaries, such that if Herodian is correct, the *HA* or its sources must be fundamentally untruthful and vice versa. This may have any of several rhetorical effects on unknowing readers: those who find the narrator's point of view familiar and comforting may see the citations as an appeal for support in the face of Herodian's skepticism ("*some people* think differently from you and me […]"); some will appreciate his honesty and diligence but be unsure what to believe; and yet others will begin to read more ironically and see the author as signaling and undermining their own hyperbole.

Turning to the "238 lives", the *scriptor* has ostensibly changed ("Capitolinus" rather than "Lampridius"), and Herodian's first appearance, at *Mxmn.* 13.4 (# 6), positions him a bit differently relative to the narrator. After describing Maximinus' early campaigns in Germania, the narrator adds that the emperor intended to conquer all of the northern regions up to the ocean "and would have done so, if he had lived, so Herodian says, a Greek author, who shows him much favor, as far as we can tell, to slander Alexander" (*quod fecisset, si vixisset, ut Herodianus dicit, Graecus scriptor, qui ei, quantum videmus, in odium Alexandri plurimum favit*). The idea of Herodian being "anti-Alexander" is at least compatible with what we saw in the *Alexander,* but in this case the narrator, while certainly criticizing Herodian, does not explicitly take a side against him, nor does he exclude the possibility that his own narrative is based on Herodian (as in fact it is).[41] What the narrator has done, however, much as "Lampridius" did in the *Alexander* with the anonymous *quidam*, is introduce another version of the same material at a different point. Just a page before (*Mxmn.* 12.1), the narrator himself had presented the same counterfactual, but with a different "if only" variable: Maximinus might have conquered all of Germania if the Germani had been willing to give battle rather than retreating to woods and swamps. This last is not presented as a real possibility (why would they be willing?), whereas Herodian's "if he had lived" is meant to propose a genuine element of contingency, which "Capitolinus" has pre-emptively discounted.

However, readers will have little immediate chance to reflect on Herodian's relationship to "Capitolinus", because he will not be mentioned again for over 50 pages, until the later stages of the *Maximus-Balbinus.* In between, there will be a great many citations of fake authors, especially "Cordus", but most curiously three references to a certain "Arrianus". This author is cited, always alongside Dexippus and twice as a

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[41] It may be significant that Herodian is not actually named in the final parts of the *Alexander* where his supposed bias toward Maximinus might have been in evidence. At one point (*Alex.* 59.7) his version of events is mentioned but his name is not: for Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lv–lxi, this is a sign that the *HA* is consulting Herodian through an intermediary source.

Graecus, in reference to items that are actually found in Herodian. Modern scholars have often lumped these citations in with those of Herodian, but for unknowing readers there is nothing in the citations themselves that would link them with Herodian or suggest that "Arrianus" was not a real and distinct author.

The "Arrianus" citations concern two controversies over imperial identity. He and Dexippus are cited twice (*Mxmn.* 33.2 – 4 [#12] and *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 [#14]) for the view that Balbinus' colleague as emperor was Maximus rather than, as others have it, Pupienus. Furthermore the Greek authors are aware that there are three distinct emperors named Gordian (*Gord.* 2.1 [#13]) whereas others are aware of only two. In this latter case "Capitolinus" explicitly sides explicitly with the Greek authors, while on the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" question he affects to be somewhat baffled. In both cases the *HA*'s actual narrative follows the "Arrianus and Dexippus" position, referring consistently to "Maximus"[42] and distinguishing Gordian II from Gordian III.[43] Also in both cases the opposing view is associated with anonymous *scriptores*, who are qualified variously as *Latini* (*Mxmn.* 33.3 [#12]) and *inperiti* (*Gord.* 2.1 [#13]), and in fact the views in question are found in surviving Latin breviaries.[44]

This play with "Arrianus" is the background to understanding a startling moment toward the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus.* After describing the killing of the two senatorial emperors, "Capitolinus" delivers a summary of their virtues and honors, after which he adds that "these things are what I have found out about Maximus, mostly from Herodian, a Greek author" (*Max.-Bal.* 15.3 [#7] *haec sunt, quae de Maximo ex Herodiano, Graeco scriptore, magna ex parte collegimus*). This is a quite unusual statement for a Roman historical author to make, at least if one interprets *haec* in its obvious sense, as referring to the entire account,[45] and is something of a surprise revelation, given readers have not heard about Herodian since early in the *Maximini.* What follows, however, is all too familiar: "Capitolinus" treats us to his third digression on the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" question (cf. *Mxmn.* 33.2–4 [#12]; *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 [#14]). Except that in this case (*Max.-Bal.* 15.5 [#8]), and in a fourth passage a page later (*Max.-Bal.* 16.6 [#9]), Herodian is invoked as an authority alongside Dexippus, just as "Arrianus" had been previously. Even readers who are unaware of Herodian's content have at this point some reason to suspect he is the same person as "Arrianus", and they may indeed sense that a parallel name game is going on alongside the "Pupienus vs. Maximus" controversy.[46]

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[42] The *HA* typically uses "Maximus" alone without comment, but in a few places mentions *Maximus sive Puppienus* in a way that suggests those were two names for the same person, see *Gord.* 10.1, 19.8, 22.1; *Max.-Bal.* 11.1, 15.1, also *Mxmn.* 24.5; *Max.-Bal.* 16.2.

[43] This is at any rate true for the *Maximini, Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus.* Earlier on (*Macr.* 3.5; *Diad.* 6.3; *Hel.* 34.6) the *HA* itself has spoken of *Gordiani duo* as if there were only two emperors of that name. However, the discrepancy is not obvious enough that many readers of the *Gordiani* will have registered it. Throughout the narrative of 238, the *HA* makes something of a fetish of referring to the father-and-son rebels as *Gordiani duo* distinct from Gordian III, or otherwise over-clarifying the numerical aspects of the mini-dynasty (*Mxmn.* 16.6 – 7, 20.1; *Gord.* 10.1, 11.4, 14.2, 15.1, 16.4, 22.1, 22.6, 23.4; *Max.-Bal.* 1.4; 4.1 – 2; 15.5; 16.6).

[44] While the wording of *Gord.* 2.1 does not specify that the *inperiti* are Latins, it is implied by the labeling of "Arrianus" and Dexippus as *Graeci*, see also *Max.-Bal.* 18.2. For an argument that the *HA*'s critique misrepresents the breviaries' shared source, see Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 297 – 300, though in my view the *HA*'s apparent confusion is not to be taken at face value. Any misrepresentation is the *HA*'s fictional self-positioning rather than genuine failure of comprehension.

[45] It is read thus by e. g. Brandt (1996) 228 and Paschoud (2018) 334, who notes how remarkable such a blanket attribution is not just for the *HA* but for ancient historians generally. The *haec* could conceivably be read as referring only to the data on the two emperors' consulships and prefectures (cf. Hdn. 7.10.4; 8.8.4). In either case it is not clear why only Maximus and not Balbinus is named: most likely it is an anticipation of the immediately subsequent reprise of the onomastic controversy.

Other than one mention in the *Thirty Tyrants* (*Trig.* 32.1 [#10]), these references at the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus* are the last readers will see of Herodian. The references from the *Alexander* through *Maximus-Balbinus* will have created a relatively coherent picture for those who choose to assemble it. They are part of an overall rhetorical strategy in which the *HA* draws explicit contrasts between relatively obscure Greek sources, including Herodian, as against the various Latin authors who idealize Alexander, recognize only two Gordians and think an emperor named Pupienus defeated Maximinus at Aquileia. The latter will be associated in readers' minds with the fourth-century breviaries that appear to be the most common version of imperial-era history in circulation.[47] The *HA* uses these contrasts to position its own narrative. We saw earlier the various ways this could play out for the *Alexander.* The *Maximus-Balbinus* and perhaps its immediate predecessors will by contrast endorse that alternative version as against the familiar, and the change will not go unnoticed. Some readers will take it to reflect the views of the different *scriptores*, "Lampridius" versus "Capitolinus", and they may see some opposition between the two authors and side with one or the other. Others, however, may pay less attention to authorial ascriptions and see a single evolving story in which Herodian goes from an outlier complicating the main narrative to a key authority upholding it. And for others, the incongruity of the change, along with the "Arrianus" question and perhaps the contrived nature of the controversies in which "Arrianus" and Herodian are involved, will incline them toward a skeptical reading which will, as we will see, be shared by those of their peers who are more familiar with Herodian.

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[46] This sense will be heightened if they realize that Herodian is being cited twice in two pages in support of contradictory views: at §15.5 the narrator strongly rejects the view that Maximus and Pupienus are the same person, while at §16.6 he endorses it even more strongly, spending the remaining two pages of the *Maximus et Balbinus* adducing spurious evidence for the homonymity (see Stover [2020] 193 for possible additional text). The two previous discussions had come to similarly inconsistent conclusions, with *Mxmn.* 33.2 speculating that they might be the same and *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 treating them as two different people. Throughout this discussion, the more substantive issue of whether Maximus/Pupienus was present for the fighting at Aquileia is raised but then lost in the identity/onomastic debates.

[47] Unknowing readers will not infer that the *scriptores* are drawing on the *Caesares*, Eutropius or any common source, because those authors all wrote in the later 300s, after the fictional composition dates of the *scriptores.* These readers would presumably infer that the anonymous Latin authors referred to by "Lampridius" and "Capitolinus" were the shared ultimate sources of Victor, Eutropius *et al.* See on this point Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 332–333.

3 Knowing Readers

It remains to ask how the *HA*'s references to Herodian would have struck such readers as opposed to their less ironically aware counterparts. They would naturally have realized that the picture generated by the citations, of Herodian being an outlier in the earlier citations but central to the narrative of the *Maximini*, *Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus*, was broadly accurate: many would have recognized "Capitolinus'" dependence on Herodian well before he announced it at the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus*, and they had likely figured out the correlation between "Arrianus" and Herodian, along with any joke that might lie behind the choice of pseudonym.[48] If such readers were not already aware of the *HA* fiction, then the "Arrianus" joke and the silliness of the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" controversy would have had a similar effect to that posited above for unknowing but suspicious readers, only more so. If readers realize that much of the narrative material they are reading is Herodianic, they see more clearly the difference between that and the more far-fetched anecdotal material, much of it attributed to "Cordus" or grafted uneasily on to items from Herodian, as with the inflated figures for Maximinus' height (*Mxmn.* 6.8) or the numbers executed after the Magnus conspiracy (*Mxmn.* 10.6): the citations only add to this sense and push readers ever toward the "more skeptical" end of the spectrum.

The same push, however, could also come from the earlier citations of Herodian, before the narrative actually comes to be based on him. These citations, while they are not strictly speaking inaccurate, often turn out to be misleading. Sometimes they point to places where Herodian himself is vague or inconsistent: Herodian does indeed call Alexander's reign "bloodless", (6.1.7; 6.9.8), but he does not, as the *HA* claims, make any explicit qualification that this applies only to senators. Herodian's first use of ἀναιμωτί does include an explanation that he never executed anyone without trial (ἀκρίτως), although a page later Herodian describes the unjust execution of Alexander's senatorial father-in-law (6.1.10).[49] Similarly, the *HA*'s citation of Alexander's failed campaign is accurate (*Alex.* 57.3 [#5] ~ Hdn. 6.6.3), but closer readers of Herodian will realize that shortly after giving his damning verdict, the earlier historian qualifies it substantially (6.6.5–6) by noting that Alexander's forces did inflict heavy casualties

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48 The most likely explanation for the name "Arrianus" is that Arrian of Nicomedia and Dexippus both wrote works on "the events after Alexander", meaning Alexander of Macedon, which the *HA* then playfully associates with Alexander Severus. See Potter (1990) 368 n. and Paschoud (1991) 219–220, both with references to other explanations.

49 Whittaker (1969) 2.84 treats the *HA*'s observation about senators as a reasonable inference, or even based on an explicit word that has dropped out of Herodian's text. Kolb (1976) 146–147 sees the *HA* as an over-literal reader of Herodian.

on the Persians and eliminated them as a short-term military threat.[50] And when the *HA* throws cold water on Maximinus' boast about conquering all of Germania (*Mxmn.* 33.4 [#6], cf. 12.1), its observation about Germani retreating to woods and marshes rather than fighting is taken from Herodian's own narrative (7.2.3 – 7), where it does seem somewhat at odds with that historian's optimism about Maximinus' campaigns.[51]

More often, however, readers who can compare the *HA* citations with their context in Herodian, to varying degrees of precision, will get some idea of how misleading and even incoherent the *HA*'s account is. Thus the passage about Maximinus' Germanic campaigns concludes with the observation about Herodian's *favor* toward that emperor and his stirring up *odium* toward Alexander. Even casual readers of Herodian will realize the inaccuracy of the statement, and those with any rhetorical training will recognize that Herodian makes a neat antithesis between Alexander as a good emperor in domestic affairs but a poor military leader, while Maximinus is the reverse. And in fact the context for the counterfactual about conquering the North makes this explicit: Herodian immediately follows the speculation with the further observation (7.3.1) that Maximinus' military exploits cease to be praiseworthy (τί γὰρ ἦν ὄφελος) considered alongside his oppression of his own subjects, and it is at that point that Herodian begins his much longer narrative of Maximinus' fall.

More complicated is the case of Albinus. When the *HA* cites Herodian for Albinus being Severus' *Caesar* (*Alb.* 1.2 [#1]), it fails to note what Herodian makes clear in the corresponding passage (2.15.3), that Severus offered him the title as a ruse, and that Albinus' vanity and gullibility (χαῦνον καὶ ἀπλοϊκώτερον) made him an ideal target.[52] The *HA* instead invents a narrative in which Albinus is in fact promoted by Commodus, but still taken seriously by Severus as a successor. Furthermore, in the *HA* version, Albinus actually refuses the title of *Caesar* from Commodus, because he believes the latter is doomed (*Alb.* 3.1, 6.5). This seems like a conscious reversal: where Herodian's Albinus stupidly accepts a title from a successful emperor, his *HA* counterpart shrewdly refuses one from a failing emperor. Moreover, the one place where the *HA Albinus*, without citing Herodian, actually does rely on him for an extended period (*Alb.* 7.2 – 8.4 ~ Hdn. 3.5.2 – 8) describes an incident where Albinus, contrary to Herodian's earlier characterization, displays appropriate suspicion toward Severus and avoids an assassination attempt.[53] The *HA* is once again pointing out Herodian's inconsistencies, but also signaling its gratuitous manipulation of his content.

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[50] For Herodian's overall verdict on the war, see Roberto (2017) 177 and Chrysanthou (2022b) 177 – 178, neither of whom sees a major inconsistency between 6.6.3 and 6.6.5 – 6.

[51] Some historians, however, have taken Herodian's statement about Maximinus' intentions more seriously in light of recent archaeological discoveries possibly connected with this campaign, see Mecella (2017) 195 – 198.

[52] For the Severus-Albinus conflict in Herodian, see most recently Chrysanthou (2022a).

[53] As if to emphasize the point, the section adapted from Herodian has inserted in it a fake letter (*Alb.* 7.4 – 6), supposedly found in "Cordus", in which Severus uses just the kind of flattery to which Albinus was ostensibly subject.

A last example of the *HA*'s play with Herodian can be found in the last of the Herodian citations, that from the *Thirty Tyrants* (*Trig.* 32.1 – 4 [#10]). This later life is a collective account of usurpers mainly from the reign of Gallienus, ostensibly by the *scriptor* Trebellius Pollio, but it includes a notice of a rebel from Maximinus' reign named Titus, who clearly corresponds to a figure in Herodian named Quartinus, whose revolt is described at 7.1.9 – 11. The *Thirty Tyrants* cites Herodian along with Dexippus, but the account it actually gives is barely recognizable from Herodian: not only is the man's name different, so is his military position and he is killed in a different way. This is more than usually surprising, because the *HA* (under a different *scriptor*-name) has already given an account of this character in the *Maximini* (11.1 – 6) which does not mention Herodian by name but in fact corresponds much more closely to his account, although still calling the usurper "Titus". In effect what we have in the *Thirty Tyrants* is one Latin author, "Pollio", citing Herodian and Dexippus as implicit refutation of another Latin author "Capitolinus", although "Capitolinus'" account is actually taken from Herodian and "Pollio's" is not.

4 Conclusion

By any measure, most citations in the *HA* are devices of fiction. They refer to authors who never existed and facts the *HA* author invented themselves, and the narrative voices that deliver them are fake authors. It is in this sense that Herodian is a "fictional source" for the *HA*. Even though he really existed and the things the *HA* attributes to him correspond in some way to reality, he cannot stand outside of the regime of ambiguous truth-claims and implicit fictional contracts with which the *HA* presents its readers. They will approach his citations as they do the others, even if they eventually come to different conclusions for him than for "Cordus", "Acholius" and their spurious companions. They do not see the quotation marks I have just used, even if they eventually apply them themselves. I hope to have shown in this article how the *HA*'s citations of Herodian function as fictional elements, creating a picture of the *scriptores*' literary activity but also helping to deconstruct that picture. This is in line with a widespread and compelling view of the *HA* as an ironic literary game in which the author is displaying their knowledge and creative skill for their own and readers' amusement, without necessarily any further ideological agenda.[54]

However, the *HA*'s subject matter makes an entirely "innocent" reading hard to sustain. The sequence of emperors and their good and bad features were a part of the authoritative past of the *HA*'s society, and to make this kind of play with them is to assert ownership of that resource. To immerse the imperial past in gleeful fakery, and to solicit readers' complicity in such mystification, is to pose questions about the claims contemporary emperors used that past to make, even if no clear answers emerge. This is perhaps where Herodian comes in. Much of the *HA*'s fiction can be dismissed as trivia: the items attributed to "Cordus" about Maximinus' physical prowess and gluttony amount to chaff that one might detach from a factual kernel. But Herodian, at least for the "238 lives" *is* that kernel. On one hand, the *HA* presents him that way, as the full and correct version superior to the more widely read *inperiti* who only know of two Gordians and cannot figure out what is going on with Pupienus and Maximus. But for knowing readers the *HA*'s signposting of Herodian's inconsistencies, and its self-conscious misuse or misconstruction of his information, undermines any neat picture. Even when it is a question of a real author and substantive questions about imperial identity, the *HA* can apply the same kinds of manipulation it does with fantastic trivia, thus removing the apparent safe ground and more effectively undermining any use of dead emperors to further contemporary political agendas.

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[54] Such a view has been standard in Anglophone scholarship above all since Syme (1968) and the same author's many subsequent works: different recent versions include Cameron (2011) 743 – 782 and Rohrbacher (2016).

Modern scholars of Herodian are perhaps unused to seeing him presented as the historiographical "safe ground". We are more inclined to see him as the manipulator and fictionalizer of history than as the object of those operations. Yet the fiction the *HA* creates around him implies that some readers have a pre-existing impression of him as an authority in the way I have just outlined. The *HA* has likely not invented the controversy between Herodian and the breviary tradition out of thin air, especially if Ammianus' new version, or any other Latin work incorporating Herodian, was current in the same milieu where the *HA* circulated.[55] Herodian had originally addressed himself to a post-Severan audience trying to process acute political crisis: a century and a half later we find him speaking to a Theodosian literary elite on the eve of still greater political and cultural upheavals.

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[55] Cameron (2011) 750 argues that since the *HA* does not seem to have access to Ammianus' narrative, that must mean the *HA* predates it. However, other explanations are possible, notably that the authorial fiction is precisely meant to evoke a historiographical landscape before Ammianus.

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II Communities and Communication in Herodian

Mario Baumann, Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki

Vain Ambition, Futile Imitation: The Pattern of Failing ‘Philosophers’ in Herodian’s Narrative

This contribution to the present volume has a twofold aim. First, it highlights a recurrent motif in Herodian’s narrative: at various stages of the *History of the Empire after Marcus*, characters aspire to be perceived as philosophers, emulating and performing words and deeds that make them appear ‘philosophical’. As our analysis will show, the result of these ambitions is highly ambiguous, which not only contributes to the characterization of the agents of Herodian’s history but also has broader implications for the readers who are invited by the narrator to reflect on the ambivalences of the story he relates. Here the second aim of this article comes into play: we try to demonstrate that for a full appreciation of the ambiguous portrayal of ‘philosophers’ and the effect this depiction has on the audience, an intertextual analysis is required. Such an analysis shows how Herodian takes up various literary traditions and discourses to form his specific image of true or dubious philosophers and prompt his readers to compare his narrative to these pre- or intertexts. We will discuss these questions in two steps: in the first, shorter section of this article we will focus on an exemplary scene from Herodian’s first book that quite literally sets the stage for the topic of philosophers in the *History of the Empire after Marcus.* In a second, more extensive section we will turn to the complex issue of parental and teaching figures in Herodian’s narrative and compare two imperial pairs of father and son, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, Severus and Caracalla; here the movement from a primarily intra-textual perspective to an inter-textual analysis is reflected by a division in two subsections (nos. 2 and 3 below).

1 “A Man Dressed Like a Philosopher” (Hdn. 1.9.3): Literary Stereotypes and Narrative Ambiguity in an Exemplary Scene

The first passage we would like to highlight is an episode in the long series of plots against Commodus that forms the greater part of the narrative Herodian devotes to Marcus Aurelius’ son and successor. Perennis, the all too powerful praetorian prefect,

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Funding note: This chapter is a result of the work on our research project “Ein Kommentar zu Herodians *Geschichte des Kaisertums nach Marc Aurel*”, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Projektnummer 415492189.

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plans a coup d’état (Hdn. 1.9.1: ἐπεβούλευε τῇ ἀρχῇ); his attempt, however, is thwarted by the unexpected intervention of a man who, in the narrator’s words, “has the appearance of a philosopher” (Hdn. 1.9.2: φιλοσόφου φέρων σχῆμα). The story is told by the narrator in a characteristically dramatic fashion. First, the stage is set – we are in Rome at the theater, where a festival is taking place (Hdn. 1.9.2):[1]

> ἐγνώσθη δ’ ἡ ἐπιβουλὴ παραδόξῳ τρόπῳ. ἱερὸν ἀγῶνα τελοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι Διὶ Καπετωλίῳ, θεάματά τε ⟨μούσης⟩ καὶ ἰσχύος πάντα ἀθροίζεται ὡς ἐς βασιλίδα πόλιν πανηγυρίζουσαν. θεατὴς δὲ καὶ ἀθλοθέτης σὺν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἱερεῦσιν, οὓς ἐκ περιόδων χρόνου ἡ τάξις καλεῖ, ὁ βασιλεὺς γίγνεται.
>
> But news of the plot leaked out in a remarkable way at the festival the Romans celebrate in honor of Capitoline Jupiter. On this occasion there are all kinds of artistic shows and athletic contests, to see which the people flock to the capital. The emperor attends the festival and acts as judge jointly with other members of the priestly colleges, who are designated each year in rotation.

Then the audience and the protagonists of the scene enter, first Commodus, afterwards the philosopher, and the drama unfolds (Hdn. 1.9.3–4):

> (3) κατελθόντος δὴ τοῦ Κομόδου ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρόασιν τῶν ἐνδόξων ἀγωνιστῶν, καὶ αὐτοῦ μὲν προκαθίσαντος ἐν τῇ βασιλείῳ ἕδρᾳ, πληρωθέντος δὲ τοῦ θεάτρου μετὰ πάσης εὐκοσμίας, τῶν τε ἐν ἀξιώσεσιν ⟨ἐν⟩ ἐξαιρέτοις ἕδραις καὶ ὡς ἑκάστοις διετέτακτο ἱδρυμένων, πρίν τι λέγεσθαι ἢ πράττεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς ἀνὴρ φιλοσόφου φέρων σχῆμα (βάκτρον γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ μετὰ χεῖρας, ἡμιγύμνῳ τε αὐτῷ ἐκκρεμὴς πήρα) εἰσδραμὼν καὶ στὰς ἐν μέσῃ τῇ σκηνῇ τῷ τε τῆς χειρὸς νεύματι τὸν δῆμον κατασιγάσας (4) “οὐ πανηγυρίζειν σοι καιρός” ἔφη “Κόμοδε, νῦν, οὐδὲ θέαις καὶ ἑορταῖς σχολάζειν. ἐπίκειται γάρ σου τοῖς αὐχέσι τὸ τοῦ Περεννίου ξίφος, καὶ εἰ μὴ φυλάξῃ κίνδυνον οὐκ ἐπαιωρούμενον ἀλλ’ ἤδη παρόντα, λήσεις ἀπολόμενος. αὐτός τε γὰρ ἐνταῦθα δύναμιν ἐπὶ σοὶ καὶ χρήματα ἀθροίζει, οἵ τε παῖδες αὐτῷ τὴν Ἰλλυρικὴν στρατιὰν ἀναπείθουσιν. εἰ δὲ μὴ φθάσεις, διαφθείρῃ.”
>
> (3) This time Commodus was attending the performance of celebrated actors, and took his place in the imperial seat. The theater filled with people, who went to their places in an orderly way, nobles to their special seats and each person to the place allocated for him. A man ran out on to the front of the stage, dressed like a philosopher (that is, he carried a staff in his hand and had a wallet hanging round his half-bared shoulders). Before anyone could say anything to stop him, he stood in the middle of the stage, silenced the people with a gesture of his arm and began to speak. (4) “Commodus,” he said, “this is no time for you to be enjoying yourself by spending your time at theaters and festivals. The sword of Perennis hangs poised over your head. Unless you take precautions against this danger, which is not just threatening but already here, you will be destroyed before you realize it. Here in Rome he is collecting forces and money to use against you; in Illyria his sons are bribing the army to support him. If you do not act first against him, you will be finished.”

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[1] The year is probably 184 CE, the *ludi Capitolini* were held on 15th October. See Whittaker (1969) 53 n. 3; Galimberti (2014) 102–103 for details. Translations in this chapter are taken from the respective Loeb editions, with occasional adaptations.

Finally, the result of the philosopher's intervention is described (Hdn. 1.9.5 – 6):

> (5) ταῦτα εἰπόντος αὐτοῦ, εἴτε ὑπό τινος δαιμονίου τύχης ἐπειχθέντος, εἴτε καὶ τολμήσαντος ἵνα δόξαν ἄρηται πρότερον ἄγνωστος καὶ ἄσημος ὤν, εἴτε ἐλπίσαντος ἀμοιβῆς μεγαλοδώρου τεύξεσθαι παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἀφασία τὸν Κόμοδον καταλαμβάνει. καὶ πάντες ὑπώπτευον μὲν τὰ λεχθέντα, πιστεύειν δὲ οὐ προσεποιοῦντο. κελεύει δὲ αὐτὸν συλληφθῆναι ὁ Περέννιος, οἷά τε μεμηνότα καὶ ψευδῆ λέγοντα πυρὶ παραδοθῆναι. ὃ μὲν δὴ ἀκαίρου παρρησίας τοιαύτην ὑπέσχε δίκην· (6) οἱ μέντοι περὶ τὸν Κόμοδον, ὅσοι τε εὐνοεῖν προσεποιοῦντο, καὶ πάλαι μὲν ἀπεχθῶς πρὸς τὸν Περέννιον διακείμενοι (βαρὺς γὰρ καὶ ἀφόρητος ἦν ὑπεροψίᾳ καὶ ὕβρει), τότε <δὲ> καιρὸν εὔκαιρον ἔχοντες, διαβάλλειν ἐπειρῶντο, ἐχρῆν τε ἄρα τὸν Κόμοδον τὴν ἐπιβουλὴν ἐκφυγεῖν καὶ τὸν Περέννιον σὺν τοῖς παισὶ διολέσθαι κακῶς.

> (5) It may have been just an uncanny piece of luck which drove the man to utter these words, or it may have been that, as a completely unknown person before, he was trying to win himself a reputation, or hoping to get a rich reward from the emperor for his information. Commodus was dumbfounded; although everyone suspected that the words were true, they pretended not to believe them. Perennis gave orders for the man to be arrested and punished for his insane lies by being burned. Though the intruder paid his penalty for speaking so freely out of turn, (6) 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. As it turned out Commodus was destined to escape the plot, while Perennis and his sons met a sorry end.

The outcome of the whole scene is thus remarkably ambivalent: on the one hand, the unnamed philosopher pays with his life for what the narrator describes as a frankness that misses the right moment (Hdn. 1.9.6: ἀκαίρου παρρησίας). But then again, the unexpected speech provides the suitable moment (Hdn. 1.9.6: καιρὸν εὔκαιρον) for others to take action against Perennis, whose end is recounted in a quick-paced narration in the few paragraphs that follow the scene in the theater (Hdn. 1.9.7 – 10).

Beyond the important motif of the appropriate time (καιρός),[2] the story of the anonymous philosopher is characterized by an even more fundamental ambiguity: how are we to judge this man and his speech act? Is he a philosopher at all, or should the term in his case be put in quotation marks – in other words, could he be just a pseudo-philosopher, an impostor playing this role, as the very context of theater and festival might suggest anyway? Again, as for the outcome of the scene, no unequivocal answer can be given. The narrator immediately casts doubt on the 'philosopher's' motives: none of the possible reasons mentioned (luck/chance, search for fame, hope for a monetary reward, Hdn. 1.9.5) is a compliment to the man's character, and all these explanations create the image of a person who is neither in control of the situation nor of himself. If we follow the narrator's hints, the anonymous who enters the stage lacks a key quality that is expected from a true philosopher, namely ἐγκράτεια, self-control and, in particular, mastery over affects and desires.[3]

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[2] On this motif and its role in Herodian's history, see Androulakis in this volume.

The description of the man's dress works in the same direction. According to the narrator, he has the σχῆμα, the appearance or habitus, of a philosopher (Hdn. 1.9.3), which inevitably raises the question of whether there is any substance to support or corroborate the outward impression. Moreover, the details given by the narrator all point towards well-known stereotypes brought up time and again in ancient discourses about philosophers (and pseudo-philosophers), especially of a Cynic (or would-be Cynic) kind: the philosopher's staff (βάκτρον) and wallet (πήρα) have by Herodian's day long become a cliché,[4] as has the half-naked (ἡμίγυμνος) body of the Cynic.[5] The impression that the narrator's depiction devalues the unnamed protagonist is reinforced by the fact that this costume of a philosopher frequently appears in polemical or invective texts. Lucian, for example, uses the staff several times as the main 'prop' of comical scenes which show 'philosophers' resorting to sheer violence: these self-declared wise men turn to beating up other people with their sticks.[6] Another case in point is Lucilius' scathing epigram *AP* 11.154:

> Πᾶς, ὃς ἂν ᾖ πτωχὸς καὶ ἀγράμματος, οὐκέτ' ἀλήθει
> ὡς τὸ πρὶν οὐδ' αἴρει φορτία μισθαρίου·
> ἀλλὰ τρέφει πώγωνα καὶ ἐκ τριόδου ξύλον ἄρας
> τῆς ἀρετῆς εἶναι φησὶν ὁ πρωτοκύων.
> Ἑρμοδότου τόδε δόγμα τὸ πάνσοφον· εἴ τις ἀχαλκεῖ,
> μηκέτι πεινάτω θεὶς τὸ χιτωνάριον.

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[3] Cf. the characteristic phrase used by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* for a definition of the virtue of σωφροσύνη ("moderation, temperance"): ἡδονῶν τινων καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια ("mastery over any pleasures and desires", 430e). See also *Smp.* 196c.

[4] See e.g. the many epigrams on Diogenes of Sinope which mention staff and/or wallet alongside his cloak: *AP* 7.65.1–4 (Antipater of Sidon), 7.66.1–3 (Honestus), 7.67.5–8 (Leonidas of Tarentum), 7.68.5–8 (Archias). This 'image' was also used by (or for) other persons who emulated the Cynic lifestyle, as *AP* 7.413 (Antipater of Sidon on Hipparchia) demonstrates. Cf. also Diogenes Laertius on Diogenes (6.23: διὰ παντὸς ἐφόρει [sc. τὴν βακτερίαν], οὐ μὴν ἐν ἄστει, ἀλλὰ καθ' ὁδὸν αὐτῇ τε καὶ τῇ πήρᾳ, "He would carry it [sc. the stick] everywhere, not indeed in the city, but when walking along the road with it and with his wallet") and others (4.51–52: Bion, 6.13: Diodorus of Aspendus), and Epictetus on the basic objects of a Cynic's "wardrobe" (*Diss.* 3.22.10: 'τριβώνιον καὶ νῦν φορῶὰ[…] πηρίδιον προσλήψομαι καὶ ξύλον', "'I wear a rough cloak […] I shall take a wallet and a staff'").

[5] To quote but two examples: Epictetus refers to the stereotypical habit of the Cynic to "show off his fine shoulder" (*Diss.* 3.22.50: καλὸν τὸν ὦμον δεικνύειν). In Lucian's *Vitarum Auctio*, when Hermes is trying to sell philosophical ideas and their owners, the Cynic is described as someone with "the wallet slung about him and a sleeveless shirt" (*Vit. Auct.* 7: οὗτος ὁ τὴν πήραν ἐξηρτημένος, ὁ ἐξωμίας).

[6] See Luc. *Symp.* 16 (the Cynic Alcidamas, after stripping himself naked, is about to hit someone with his staff but is distracted by food), *Pisc.* 1 (Socrates asks Diogenes and others to beat Parrhesiades ["Frankness"]: παῖε τοῖς ξύλοις τὸν ἀλιτήριον […]. σὺ δέ, ὦ Διόγενες […] χρῶ τῷ ξύλῳ) and 24 (Diogenes is ready to attack Frankness and prove that the philosophers "do not carry sticks in vain" [δείξω γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι μὴ μάτην ξυλοφοροῦμεν]).

> Everyone who is poor and illiterate does not grind corn as formerly or carry burdens for small pay, but grows a beard and, picking up a stick from the cross-roads, calls himself the chief dog of virtue. This is the sage pronouncement of Hermodotus, "If anyone is penniless, let him throw off his shirt and no longer starve".

Again, stick and nakedness are combined in the strong imagery of an illiterate impostor laying claim to the status of philosopher.[7]

There is, however, one aspect of the story around Herodian's philosopher-warner that does not fit into the neat cliché of a greedy charlatan yearning for 'philosophical' fame: what the anonymous man says is actually true – Perennis *is* plotting against Commodus, so it *is* about time for the emperor to act against the prefect. And in fact, as the narrator stresses, the audience in the theater realize that the warning is right and believe the words of the anonymous adviser; they only *pretend* otherwise (Hdn. 1.9.5: πιστεύειν δὲ οὐ προσεποιοῦντο). So rather than the philosopher, it is the others, the mass in the theater, who are dishonest and play a deceitful game. This is where the fundamental ambiguity of the whole scene lies: even if the unnamed man's motifs were questionable and his status as philosopher dubious, his advice is sound. What Herodian does here, it seems, is to take up a well-established critique of 'philosophers' and turn it upside down: while usually 'philosophers' are criticized for successfully adopting the outward appearance but failing to live up to that image in their actual words and deeds,[8] here the appearance casts doubt on the anonymous philosopher whereas, in fact, he shows philosophical substance in terms of true words and righteous advice.

In this way, Herodian tells a story that entertains his readers, who are invited to compare the scene to the literary stereotypes they are familiar with and appreciate their reversal. At the same time Herodian's narrative makes its readers think about deceptive appearances and the ambiguous character of the protagonists of history. If an apparently dubious philosopher like the one of Hdn. 1.9.1–6 is right, might then true or seemingly trustworthy philosophers be wrong? In what follows, we argue that in Herodian's account of Roman history this is indeed the case. We take another important aspect of philosophy in practice, teaching and learning, as a test case to demonstrate that ambiguities similar to those of 1.9.1–6 abound in Herodian's narrative and are particularly important for the narrator's portrayal – and the reader's appreciation – of the emperors.

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[7] For a further mocking epigram about the Cynics and their appearance (including *baculum* and *pera*, staff and wallet), see Martial 4.53.

[8] Again, the texts of Lucian are important here. See the last section of this article for a full discussion of the most relevant passages from the Lucianic oeuvre.

2 “This is my Son” (Hdn. 1.4.3): ‘Philosophers’/Fathers and the Upbringing of Prodigal Successors

In this section of the article, the pattern of ineducable students and unsuccessful teachers will be brought up, focusing on two of the most important parental and teaching figures in Herodian’s narrative. In particular, Marcus Aurelius’ futile attempts to educate Commodus and Commodus’ subsequent character will be juxtaposed with the equivalent case of Severus and Caracalla.

2.1 Marcus Aurelius and Commodus

In the first chapters of his own work, *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius refers to the values and virtues he acquired not only from his teachers (*Med.* 1.5 – 15)[9] but also from his family members (*Med.* 1.1 – 4,[10] 1.17.4). Judging by his writings, Antoninus Pius seems to have played the most crucial role in Marcus Aurelius’ upbringing. Two chapters (*Med.* 1.16, 6.30) are exclusively devoted to the character and moral excellence of his adoptive father from whom Marcus has apparently inherited numerous virtuous traits. Antoninus served as the exemplar for his son and later legendary emperor (*Med.* 6.30.2: Πάντα ὡς Ἀντωνίνου μαθητής: “Do all things as a disciple of Antoninus”),[11] while his behavior and principles (*Med.* 1.16, 1.17.3, 6.30) seem to encapsulate the sum of the teachings and virtues that his son’s tutors tried to enrich the boy with (*Med.* 1.5 – 15). As a result, M. Aurelius indeed became an erudite intellectual (Hdn. 1.2.3: ἀρετῇ δὲ πάσης ἔμελεν αὐτῷ, λόγων τε ἀρχαιότητος ἦν ἐραστής[12]) and an emperor on the model of the Platonic philosopher-king[13] who constantly displayed philosophical principles in his behavior and judgment (Hdn. 1.2.4: μόνος τε βασιλέων φιλοσοφίαν οὐ λόγοις οὐδὲ δογμάτων γνώσεσι, σεμνῷ δ’ ἤθει καὶ σώφρονι βίῳ ἐπιστώσατο[14]), and in this way himself became a model for his subjects.[15]

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[9] Marcus Aurelius’ personality and moral values reflected the wide spectrum of philosophical principles according to which he was nurtured. His teachers were mainly Stoic philosophers: Rusticus (*Med.* 1.7), Apollonius (*Med.* 1.8), Sextus of Chaeronea (*Med.* 1.9), Catulus (*Med.* 1.13), and Maximus Claudius (*Med.* 1.15). Alexander the Grammarian, Alexander the Platonist, and Fronto the orator were also Marcus’ educators and tutors (*Med.* 1.5, 1.10, 1.12, 1.11 respectively). Diognetus was the one who first introduced him to philosophy (*Med.* 1.6: τὸ οἰκειωθῆναι φιλοσοφίᾳ), while Severus seems to have played an equally important role in M. Aurelius’ later consistent appreciation of philosophical thinking (*Med.* 1.14: τὸ ὁμαλὲς καὶ ὁμότονον ἐν τῇ τιμῇ τῆς φιλοσοφίας); for Severus’ identity see Haines (1916) 409. Severus and Rusticus contributed specifically to his acquaintance with specific texts and philosophers as well (*Med.* 1.14 and 1.7 respectively).

[10] E. g. *Med.* 1.1: Παρὰ τοῦ πάππου Οὐήρου, τὸ καλόηθες καὶ ἀόργητον: “From my Grandfather Verus [I had an example of] a kindly disposition and sweetness of temper”, 1.2: Παρὰ τῆς δόξης καὶ μνήμης τῆς περὶ τοῦ γεννήσαντος, τὸ αἰδῆμον καὶ ἀρρενικόν: “From what I heard of my [biological] Father and my memory of him, [I had an example of] modesty and manliness”, 1.3: Παρὰ τῆς μητρός, τὸ θεοσεβὲς καὶ μεταδοτικόν […] τὸ λιτὸν κατὰ τὴν δίαιταν καὶ πόρρω τῆς πλουσιακῆς διαγωγῆς: “From my Mother, (I had an example of) the fear of God, and generosity […] and simple life, far removed from the habits of the rich”.

[11] See *Med.* 1.16.9 for a comparison of Antoninus Pius with Socrates by his son.

Having set his heart on philosophy (*Med.* 1.17.8: ἐπεθύμησα φιλοσοφίας;[16] cf. 6.30.1) and with true appreciation of the benefits of education,[17] he made excellent pedagogical provision for his son,[18] aiming to provide a worthy heir. Marcus summoned distinguished scholars from all over the world to educate Commodus (Hdn. 1.2.2: ὅπως συνόντες ἀεὶ παιδεύοιεν αὐτῷ τὸν υἱόν), and – as he writes – was happy and proud of his ability to provide suitable tutors for his sons (*Med.* 1.17.7: τὸ ἐπιτηδείων τροφέων εἰς τὰ παιδία εὐπορῆσαι). Commodus was thus protected by paternal care (Hdn. 1.2.1: τὸν Κόμοδόν […] ὁ πατὴρ μετὰ πάσης ἐπιμελείας ἀνεθρέψατο) and educational guidance, and, according to Herodian’s text, he later refers to his father’s numerous attempts to teach him and other young men about virtues (Hdn. 1.5.4: πατὴρ […] πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ἐπαίδευεν). Nevertheless, Marcus Aurelius did not succeed in sufficiently inspiring his own child: in the long tradition of sons who did not continue their fathers’ rule effectively, Commodus holds a prominent place, since he grew up to become a negative counterpart of his respected father.[19]

In Herodian’s narrative, M. Aurelius thinks before his death that it is now the right moment to bequeath his power (Hdn. 1.4.3: νῦν δὲ ὁ καιρὸς εὔκαιρος), but at the same time, he is worried (Hdn. 1.4.1: κυμαίνουσαν οὖν ἔχων τοσαύταις φροντίσι τὴν ψυχήν)[20] about the way Commodus would behave and be received as an emperor due to his young age (Hdn. 1.3.5: οὐ μετρίως δ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐτάραττον καὶ οἱ Γερμανοὶ γειτνιῶντες […] ὑπώπτευεν οὖν, μὴ τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ μειρακίου καταφρονήσαντες ἐπιθῶνται αὐτῷ,[21] see also Hdn. 1.3.1 – 4, 1.4.3).[22] His last speech could be seen as a prolepsis about his son's problematic character, and the consequently unsuccessful forthcoming reign.[23] The emperor enumerates the vices in which Commodus actually indulged later on, such as vulnerability to physical pleasures, extravagant splendid life, urges, impulses, and appropriation of unchecked power (Hdn. 1.3.1). In addition, he recalls former young unsuccessful emperors and highlights their evil characteristics,[24] while also touching upon the matter of a successor's ability to shame the former ruler by his actions (Hdn. 1.3.2: τὴν ἐκείνου ἀρχὴν κατῄσχυναν). This is exactly what Commodus achieved, being a man who displayed all the above censurable characteristics. Despite the emperor’s foreshadowing of his son’s inability to rise to the challenge of rulership and his apprehension for the future[25] (Hdn. 1.3.5: τοιαύτας δὴ τυραννίδος εἰκόνας ὑποτυπούμενος ἐδεδίει τε καὶ ἤλπιζεν ⟨εἰκότως⟩[26]), Commodus is designated as his successor and this decision seems to have been the greatest mistake of M. Aurelius.[27]

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[12] “He cultivated every kind of virtue, and loved ancient literature”; Hdn. 1.3.2: οἷα δὴ ἄνδρα πολυίστορα: “he was a well-read man”.

[13] A philosopher king is a king (an emperor in our case) who can practically be a philosopher, while at the same time applying the philosophical principles during his reign (Pl. *R.* mainly 471c–509c). According to Plato, only if philosophers become kings or if the recent kings are educated in philosophy there can be rest from troubles in the state and the human race (Pl. *R.* 473c–d).

[14] “He was the only emperor who gave proof of his philosophy by his dignified, sober manner rather than by words and a knowledge of doctrine”.

[15] Hdn. 1.2.4: πολύ τε πλῆθος ἀνδρῶν σοφῶν ἤνεγκε τῶν ἐκείνου καιρῶν ἡ φορά· φιλεῖ γάρ πως ἀεὶ τὸ ὑπήκοον ζήλῳ τῆς τοῦ ἄρχοντος γνώμης βιοῦν: “The product of the age of Marcus was a large number of scholars since subjects always model their lives on the ideals of their ruler”; cf. Chrysanthou (2020) 629–630.

[16] Throughout his *Meditations* he is constantly referring to philosophers (e.g. 2.10, 2.15, 4.46, 6.42, 6.47, 7.19, 7.44–46, 7.64, 8.3, 11.25, 11.34, 12.3) and his philosophical way of thinking (e.g. 2.17, 3.12, 3.16, 4.23, 4.30, 4.47, 5.9–10, 5.27, 6.2, 6.12, 8.5, 8.26, 9.3, 9.29, 9.41, 10.15, 11.7, 12.3, 12.23).

[17] *Med.* 1.4: τὸ μὴ εἰς δημοσίας διατριβὰς φοιτῆσαι, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθοῖς διδασκάλοις κατ᾽ οἶκον χρήσασθαι, καὶ τὸ γνῶναι, ὅτι εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα δεῖ ἐκτενῶς ἀναλίσκειν: “[from my grandfather’s father I was in the way to learn] to dispense with attendance at public schools, and to enjoy good teachers at home, and to recognize that on such things money should be eagerly spent”, 1.9.3: τὸ πολυμαθὲς: “[From Sextus I was in the way to learn] to possess great learning”, 1.13: καὶ τὸ περὶ τῶν διδασκάλων ἐκθύμως εὔφημον: “[From Catulus I was in the way to learn] to speak with wholehearted goodwill of one’s teachers”; cf. *Med.* 1.17.1.

[18] For Commodus’ education see Hekster (2002) 32–33; Galimberti (2014) 46–47.

[19] For the idealized image of Marcus as a “figure of nostalgia” see Kemezis (2014) 46–47.

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[20] "With a heavy heart because of these worries"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.1: φροντίσι τετρυχωμένον, 1.3.2: ἐτάραττε, 1.3.4: ἐλύπει, 1.3.5: ἐδεδίει […] ἐταράττον. Chrysanthou (2022a, 251 – 252; cf. *Med.* 11.3) states that Marcus Aurelius' anxiety "disturbs the impression of Stoic dignity that the scene would otherwise have". For his exemplary death see Chrysanthou (2022a) 251 – 256; Laporte/Hekster (2022) 88 – 89.

[21] "He also felt considerable anxiety about the Germans on the frontier […] he suspected (that they) would despise Commodus for his youth and attack him". In the very first paragraphs Herodian highlights in advance the contrast between an emperor of advanced age and a young inexperienced one (Hdn. 1.1.6: οἱ μὲν τὴν ἡλικίαν πρεσβύτεροι διὰ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιμελέστερον ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ὑπηκόων ἦρξαν, οἱ δὲ κομιδῇ νέοι ῥᾳθυμότερον βιώσαντες: "The more mature emperors took greater care to control themselves and their subjects because of their political experience. The very young ones led rather less disciplined lives"; cf. 1.3.1: ῥᾷστα γὰρ αἱ τῶν νέων ψυχαὶ ἐς ἡδονὰς ἐξολισθαίνουσαι ἀπὸ τῶν παιδείας καλῶν μετοχετεύονται: "Young men's passions are easily diverted from learning moral values and slip into a life of pleasure"). Commodus' youth is frequently mentioned throughout the text (Hdn. 1.4.3: τῆς μειρακίων ἡλικίας, 1.6.1: νέου […] βασιλέως, 1.6.2: τῷ μειρακίῳ, 1.6.7: τὸ μειράκιον, 1.8.3: τὸν νεανίσκον; cf. 1.5.1, 1.6.4, 1.7.1 – 2, 1.8.1 – 2, 1.8.7, 2.10.3), and this topic turns out to be a pattern in the narrative regarding also (mainly) Geta and Caracalla (Hdn. 3.10.3 – 4, 3.11.1, 3.11.7, 3.12.10, 3.13.6, 3.15.3), Elagabalus (Hdn. 5.3.7, 5.3.9, 5.4.3, 5.7.1, 6.6.1), and Alexander (Hdn. 5.8.10, 6.1.5, 6.9.5). Moreover, Maesa and later Mamaea take over the power of the empire due to Elagabalus' and Alexander's young age (Hdn. 5.5.1, 6.1.1).

[22] Hdn. 1.3.1: δεδιὼς μὴ νεότης ἀκμάζουσα καὶ ἐν ὀρφανίᾳ ἐξουσίαν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ ἀκώλυτον προσλαβοῦσα μαθημάτων μὲν καλῶν καὶ ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἀφηνιάσῃ, μέθαις δὲ καὶ κραιπάλαις ἐπιδῷ ἑαυτήν: "He was afraid that the young man would grow up in control of absolute, unchecked power without parental authority. As a result, he might refuse the discipline of his moral studies and habits and devote his time to drunken debauchery", 1.4.3: μή ποι φερόμενος ὑπ᾽ ἀτελοῦς τῆς τῶν δεόντων ἐμπειρίας ἐς φαῦλα ἐπιτηδεύματα προσαραχθῇ: "there is a danger that he will be carried away and dashed against the rocks of evil habits because he has an imperfect experience of what to do".

[23] See Baumann (2025) 142 – 150. It is worth mentioning that in *Meditations*, Marcus writes down a phrase from Euripides' lost play *Antiope* (fr. 208), which would be proven right: "Though both my sons and me the gods have spurned, / for this too, there is a reason" (*Med.* 7.41, 11.6: Εἰ δ᾽ ἠμελήθην ἐκ θεῶν καὶ παῖδ᾽ ἐμώ, / ἔχει λόγον καὶ τοῦτο).

[24] Domitian and Alexander's successors are mentioned for their cruelty (Hdn. 1.3.2, 1.3.4), Nero for ruthlessness but also for being an object of ridicule (Hdn. 1.3.4), and Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrant, for his luxurious life and lack of self-control (Hdn. 1.3.2).

Roman citizens have high hopes for Commodus’ reign, as they expect him to resemble his father (Hdn. 1.7.1: χρηστὰς εἶχεν ἐλπίδας νέου αὐτοκράτορος ἐπιδημίᾳ, πατρῴζειν τὸ μειράκιον ἡγούμενοι),[28] and to perpetuate his memory.[29] The young man, though, ends up being an unpopular and deeply despised emperor (Hdn. 1.14.7: οὐκέτι ὁ Ῥωμαίων δῆμος μετ᾽ εὐνοίας τὸν Κομοδον ἐπέβλεπεν[30]), who unifies the aforementioned vices of the well-known tyrants in his persona (Hdn. 1.3.2 – 5, 1.14 – 17).[31] Even though he arrogantly[32] considers citizens’ support and acceptance as owed and takes them for granted (Hdn. 1.5.4: καὶ ῥᾷστα πάσης εὐνοίας μεθέξειν πρὸς ὑμῶν ἤλπικα, τῶν μὲν πρεσβυτέρων τροφεῖά μοι ταῦτα ὀφειλόντων;[33] cf. 1.5.3 – 6), the numerous plots against him (Hdn. 1.8 – 10, 1.12.3 – 13.6), and the celebrations that follow his death (Hdn. 2.2.3: πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἐνθουσιῶντι ἐοικὼς ἐξεβακχεύετο: “people went practically mad with excitement”; see 2.2.3 – 4),[34] confirm his failure to win the people’s favor.

First of all, Commodus increasingly withdraws from the political stage swayed by (physical) pleasures (Hdn. 1.13.7: δεδούλωντο δὲ πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν […] ἐπάλληλοι καὶ ἀκόλαστοι σώματος ἡδοναί, 2.7.2: τῇ Κομόδου ἀσωτίᾳ καὶ ἀφειδέσι[35]), while fawners soon enough gain control over him (Hdn. 1.8.1: ἔπεισεν αὐτὸν τρυφαῖς σχολάζειν καὶ κραιπάλαις τῆς τε φροντίδος καὶ τῶν βασιλείων καμάτων ἀπῆγεν αὐτόν,[36] 1.9.1: ποιησάμενός τε αὐτὸν ἐπ ἐξουσίας, 1.13.8: εἶχον αὐτὸν ὑποχείριον).[37] His cruel and bloodthirsty character becomes obvious as well, mainly in the final stages of his government through merciless killings (Hdn. 1.13.7: ἀφειδῶς τε φονεύων, 1.14.7: ἀκρίτους φόνους) and numerous executions of anyone who could possibly improve his character (Hdn. 1.13.8).[38] Most importantly, Commodus' mental state is presented as having been disturbed (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἐς τοσοῦτόν τε μανίας καὶ παρανοίας προὐχώρησεν: “such was his mental derangement”, 1.15.8: ἐς τοσοῦτον δὲ προεχώρησε μανίας: “his madness reached such a state”). He decides to adopt Heracles' persona and attire (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἀποδυσάμενός τε τὸ Ῥωμαίων καὶ βασίλειον σχῆμα λεοντῆν ἐπεστρώννυτο καὶ ῥόπαλον μετὰ χεῖρας ἔφερεν[39]) and gives orders that he should be called “Heracles, son of Zeus, instead of Commodus, son of Marcus” (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἀντὶ δὲ Κομόδου καὶ Μάρκου υἱοῦ Ἡρακλέα τε καὶ Διὸς υἱὸν).[40] This could be interpreted as an invocation of lineage, since Commodus discards his family name,[41] offering a striking contrast with the initial emphasis on his birthright to the throne (Hdn. 1.5.5 – 6).[42]

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[25] Marcus Aurelius’ hopes lie in his advisers and relatives, to whom he entrusts the welfare and guidance of his son and essentially of the empire (Hdn. 1.4.3: ὁρᾶτε δή μοι τὸν υἱὸν […] δεόμενον ὥσπερ ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ζάλῃ τῶν κυβερνησόντων: “Here is my son […] he stands in need of guides through the tempest and storm of life”, 1.4.4: γένεσθε δὴ οὖν αὐτῷ ὑμεῖς ἀνθ᾽ ἑνὸς ἐμοῦ πατέρες πολλοί, περιέποντές τε καὶ τὰ ἄριστα συμβουλεύοντες: “You who are many must be fathers to him in place of me alone. Take care of him and give him sound advice”; cf. 1.3.1, 1.4.1 – 6). See Chrysanthou (2020) 643.

[26] “With such examples of tyrants in mind, Marcus was properly apprehensive about the future.”

[27] Dio presents Marcus Aurelius as having been explicitly disappointed in Commodus (D.C. 72[71].36.4: πλεῖστον αὐτοῦ ὅσον διήμαρτε), while the author of the *Historia Augusta* writes: “he foresaw that after his death Commodus would turn out as he actually did, and expressed the wish that his son might die so that he not, as he himself said, become another Nero, Caligula, or Domitian” (*Marc.* 28.10); for Zimmermann’s different viewpoint see (1999) 36 – 37, 150.

[28] Hdn. 1.7.1 – 6; cf. Caligula’s ascension to the throne (Suet. *Cal.* 13; D.C. 59.6.1).

[29] “The attendees are urged to look after Commodus in order to be able to keep Marcus’ memory alive forever” (Chrysanthou [2022a] 254; cf. Hdn. 1.4.6: ἀίδιον μνήμην).

[30] “The people of Rome no longer viewed Commodus in such a favourable light”.

[31] See also Zimmermann (1999) 138.

[32] Marcus Aurelius credited his lack of conceit to paternal guidance (*Med.* 1.17.3), whereas Commodus’ boastful confidence can be traced already in this first speech as an emperor (Hdn. 1.5.3 – 8).

[33] “I shall win your complete loyalty without difficulty. The older ones among you owe me this service as your protégé”.

[34] Cf. the citizens’ reaction to Marcus Aurelius’ death: Hdn. 1.4.8: οὐδέ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέχετο (“There was not a single subject throughout the Roman empire that did not grieve at the news”).

[35] Hdn. 1.13.7: “he continually gave his whole mind to the slavish pursuit of unrestrained physical pleasure”, 2.7.2: “his wasteful and indiscriminate expenditure”, 1.12.6: ἡδοναῖς σχολάζοντος ἀγνοοῦντός τε τὰ

θρυλούμενα: “Commodus was spending his time enjoying himself […] without any idea of the commotion going on”; see also 1.6.1 – 3, 1.8.1, 1.17.2, 2.1.3, 2.2.6.

[36] Hdn. 1.8.1: “[Perennis] began to relieve him of the responsibilities and cares of his office by persuading him to spend his time in a life of pleasure and drunkenness”.

[37] For instance, influenced by these parasites (Hdn. 1.6.8: ἐγκειμένων δὲ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν θεραπόντων; cf. 1.6.1 – 3) and unable to restrain his impulses (Hdn. 1.6.2: ἤγειρον αὐτοῦ τὰς ὀρέξεις ἐς τὴν ἡδονῶν ἐπιθυμίαν: “they whetted his appetite for a taste of these pleasures”), Commodus abandons the war against the Germans only to return to Rome's extravagant everyday life (Hdn. 1.6.1, 1.8.1 – 9.10, 1.12.3 – 13.3, 1.13.8, 2.10.3). His young age eases the way for these devious men to accomplish their goals (Hdn. 1.6.1: διαφθείρειν ἐπειρῶντο νέου ἦθος βασιλέως: “they tried to corrupt the character of the young emperor”, 1.6.2: τοιαῦτα δή τινα τῷ μειρακίῳ ὑποτυπούμενοι: “by putting such ideas into the young man's head”, 1.8.1: τῇ τοῦ μειρακίου ἀποχρώμενος ἡλικίᾳ: “Perennis took advantage of the emperor's tender age”, 1.8.2: ἐς ὑποψίαν ἄγων τὸ μειράκιον ἐφόβει: “he sowed suspicion in the young emperor's mind”); cf. Hdn. 1.3.2 (ὑπὸ τῆς ἄγαν ἀκρασίας καινὰς ἡδονάς) for the tyrant Dionysius' luxurious and intemperate life.

[38] The equivalent cruelty of Domitian and Alexander's successors is mentioned in Hdn. 1.3.4: ἐσχάτης ὠμότητος and 1.3.2: ὕβρεις τε καὶ βίαι retrospectively; for similarities in Commodus' and Domitian's deaths see Zimmermann (1999) 139 – 142; Chrysanthou (2020) 626 – 627. For Nero's matricide (Hdn. 1.3.4) and Commodus' possible patricide see below.

[39] “He took off the dress of a Roman emperor, put on a lion skin and carried a club in his hand”. Cf. Hdn. 1.3.3, where Antigonus is criticized for modeling himself completely after Dionysus (Διόνυσον πάντα μιμούμενος).

[40] For Commodus as Hercules see Zimmermann (1999) 128 – 136, 143 – 144; Hekster (2002) 11 – 13, 99 – 111, 117– 129, 135 – 136, 146 – 148, 152 – 155, 178 – 188; Hekster (2005a) 208 – 214; Galimberti (2014) 148 – 150; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 – 227 with n. 134 – 135; for Domitian as Hercules see Hekster (2005a) 205 – 207, cf. Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 – 227 with n. 135; for Nero in the role of *Hercules Insanus* see Hekster (2002) 156; OKell (2005) 185 – 204; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 with n. 135.

[41] Zimmermann (1999) 136; Laporte/Hekster (2022) 95; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 – 227.

[42] Hdn. 1.5.5: ὁμοῦ δέ με εἶδεν ἥλιος ἄνθρωπον καὶ βασιλέα: “On that day I was born man and emperor”; on this topic see Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 – 228. New names are also provided for the months after

A similar attitude is observed later on when he starts participating in gladiatorial combat (Hdn. 1.13.8, 1.15.1 – 9)[43] and inscribes his name in the base of the Colossus as “Victor of a Thousand Gladiators” without using the title Germanicus (Hdn. 1.15.9: ἀντὶὀδὲ Γερμανικοῦὀ̔μονομάχους χιλίους νικήσαντος’).[44] Commodus thus reverses his status of visibility during the games: instead of being the spectator (Hdn. 1.9.2: θεατής)[45] from the amphitheatrical seats, he himself becomes the spectacle in the arena (Hdn. 1.15.1: συνέθεον […] θεασόμενοι,[46] 1.15.7: εἶδεν ὁ δῆμος θέαμα, 1.16.3: ὀφθῆναι τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις). At the same time, Romans are gathering to see Marcus’ son, who was willingly stripped of his imperial insignia (cf. Hdn. 1.7.1 – 6) and adopted the clothes (Hdn. 1.16.3) and the quality of a gladiator.[47] Even though they are indeed entertained, the citizens gradually become ashamed to watch their ruler, a descendant of an exalted father and triumphant forebears, disgracing his office with a thoroughly degrading exhibition (Hdn. 1.15.7: Ῥωμαίων βασιλέα μετὰ τοσαῦτα τρόπαια πατρός τε καὶ προγόνων […] καθυβρίζοντα δὲ τὸ ἀξίωμα αἰσχίστῳ καὶ μεμιασμένῳ σχήματι).[48] In the end, Commodus becomes a laughing stock (Hdn. 1.14.8: καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν), just like Nero

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Commodus’ titles, which were supposed to refer to the brave Heracles (Hdn. 1.14.9). Chrysanthou ([2022a] 228) highlights Domitian’s and Nero’s renaming of October and April as Domitianus (D.C. 67.4.3 – 4) and Neroneus (Suet. *Nero.* 55) retrospectively.

[43] Commodus participated in the arena as a gladiator (*munera*; Hdn. 1.15.1, 1.15.7– 9, 1.16.3 – 5), a fighter against wild beasts (*venationes*; Hdn. 1.13.8, 1.15.1 – 7, 1.17.8), and was at least trained to become a charioteer (Hdn. 1.13.8); cf. Futrell (1997) 24 – 38, 44 – 51, 205 – 213; Hekster (2002) 137– 145.

[44] Toward the end of his gladiatorial ‘career’, he disclaims the assumed Heracles’ identity and arrogates the name of a dead gladiator (Hdn. 1.15.8: ἑαυτὸν δὲ οὐκέτι Ἡρακλέα […] καλεῖσθαι προσέταξε).

[45] Cf. Tac. *Ag.* 45.2: *praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici* (“Under Domitian it was no small part of our sufferings that we saw him and were seen by him”). On the importance of imperial visibility see Hekster (2005b) 162 – 177.

[46] “People flocked (to Rome) […] to be spectators”. On Commodus as gladiator and participant in games see Zimmermann (1999) 128 – 136; Hekster (2002) 128 – 129, 137– 138, 146 – 162; Kemezis (2014) 250; Chrysanthou (2022a) 228 – 230. The exact gradual transition from a spectator to a participant in shows can be found in the reign of Caligula, who also competed as a gladiator and a charioteer (D.C. 59.5.5: ἅρματά τε γὰρ ἤλασε καὶ ἐμονομάχησεν), while at first had been just “one man in the crowd” (D.C. 59.5.4: τὰ μὲν πρῶτα θεατὴς […] τις ἐκ τοῦ ὁμίλου ὤν; cf. Hekster (2002) 148 – 150, 157– 158). Nero similarly displayed himself publicly as – mainly – an actor, a singer, and a charioteer (D.C. 62[61].20; 62[62].24; 62[62].29; 62[63].8 – 11, 14, 17.5 – 18, 21; 63[63].22 – 23; 63[63].26; 63[63].28.4 – 5; Suet. *Nero* 20 – 25, 40.1 – 3, 41, 44, 53; Tac. *Ann.* 14.14, 14.20 – 21, 15.33, 16.4; cf. Hekster [2005b] 173 – 174).

[47] According to Futrell ([1997] 245 with n. 179), “gladiators typically came from the ranks of the marginalized in Roman society […] For a free man to voluntarily enter the arena, it meant an automatic loss of social and civic status”. Cf. Hekster (2002) 148; for gladiators as the most despised men see Chrysanthou (2022a) 229 with n. 149.

[48] Cf. Hdn. 1.13.8: τοῦ δὲ ἀπρεπέστερον μετιόντος ἢ βασιλεῖ σώφρον ἥρμοζε: “was less than proper for an emperor of modesty”, 1.6.4: ἐδεῖτο μήτε τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν καθυβρίσαι: “begging him not to bring disgrace to the Roman empire”, 1.16.5: πείθειν ἐπειρῶντο μηδὲν ἀνάξιον τῆς βασιλείας ποιεῖν: “trying to dissuade him from any action unworthy of an emperor”; see also. D.C. 62[63].9.1 (for Nero): “Yet how could one endure even to hear about, let alone behold, a Roman […] an emperor, an Augustus, named on the program among the contestants” (καίτοι πῶς ἄν τις καὶ ἀκοῦσαι, μὴ ὅτι ἰδεῖν, ὑπομείνειεν ἄνδρα Ῥωμαῖον […] αὐτοκράτορα Αὔγουστον ἔς τε τὸ λεύκωμα ἐν τοῖς ἀγωνισταῖς ἐγγραφόμενον).

(Hdn. 1.3.4: καταγέλαστον θέαμα; cf. D.C. 62[63].9.1, 11.1), confirming his father's doubts and worries.[49] Simultaneously, he is incorporated into the general pattern of ridiculed ineducable students, a topic we will turn to shortly.

Due to these facts, Zimmermann ([1999] 129, 136) describes Commodus' catastrophic reign as "a negative climax: from βασιλεύς (king) to Hercules and then to gladiator", as a transition from an imperial 'referee' of the state and of festivals or agons to a fighter and an entertainer. In Marcus Aurelius' inner monologue (Hdn. 1.3.1 – 4.1) and first speech (Hdn. 1.4.2 – 6), we get the chance to see an ideal Commodus through the eyes of his father, who envisions his son's reign as ἀρίστη (Hdn. 1.4.6).[50] However, according to our sources, an empire ruled with dignity up to the reign of Marcus degenerated into a reign of slavery and suppression[51] (Hdn. 2.10.3: ἐς Κόμμοδον δὲ μεταπεσοῦσα; cf. D.C. 72[71].36.4: κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων […] καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας).[52] Despite his famous ancestors (Hdn. 1.7.4, 1.17.12), his education (Hdn. 1.2.1 – 2), his noble birth, and the initial support of the citizens (Hdn. 1.7, 1.13.7), Commodus fails as an emperor and debases these 'gifts' by corrupt living (Hdn. 1.17.12: εἰ μὴ τὴν τούτων εὐμορίαν αἰσχροῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι κατῄσχυνεν).[53]

2.2 Severus and Caracalla

Caracalla's behavior during his reign creates a further profound opportunity to draw attention to the failure of paternal pedagogic strategies. A first parallel with the aforementioned father-son couple can be detected in Septimius Severus' self-adoption as Marcus' son,[54] a narrative constructed to promote his new dynasty and connect the power he had not inherited but merely acquired with worthy predecessors. By affiliating his own house with the dynasty of the Antonines, he could establish his and his sons’ right to the throne.[55] Furthermore, according to Herodian, Severus looked up to Marcus Aurelius’ rule (Hdn. 2.10.2 – 3) and promised to provide a period of similar prosperity for his subjects by taking Aurelius’ way of ruling as a model for his actions (Hdn. 2.14.3: καὶ πάντα πράξειν ἐς ζῆλον τῆς Μάρκου ἀρχῆς). His political aspiration is promoted by – allegedly – predictive oracles or signs (e. g. Severus’ dream of undertaking Pertinax’s power in Hdn. 2.9.3 – 7[56]), and by references to his good fortune[57] and divine favor, which seemingly indicate that his seizing of power is the work of providence (Hdn. 2.9.7: θείᾳ προνοίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν [αὐτὸν] καλεῖσθαι). Divine intervention had been said to play an important role in Marcus Aurelius’ reign from an early stage[58] and Severus aimed to convince the Roman citizens that he could and would be equally victorious and successful.[59] Indeed, he displayed some of Marcus Aurelius’ virtues: he is depicted as an efficient, vigorous, brave administrator, not negligent of his responsibilities or afraid of undertaking any hardship or pain (Hdn. 2.9.2: γενναῖος ἅμα καὶ θυμοειδής […] πόνοις τε ἀντέχων, 2.10.8: οὔτε ἐμοῦ ῥᾳθυμίαν ἢ ἀδρανίαν καταγνώσονται, 3.6.10: προθυμίας καὶ ἀνδρείας, 3.8.8: καρτερίᾳ ψυχῆς καὶ ἀνεξικακίᾳ πόνων).[60] What they have in common though, is their failure as educators of their sons.

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[49] See Zimmermann (1999) 139; Chrysanthou (2022a) 228.

[50] Chrysanthou (2022a) 31 – 33, 36 with n. 29, 251; cf. Zimmermann (1999) 31.

[51] Hdn. 1.16.1: τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν τυραννουμένην, 2.2.4: τὸν τύραννον, 2.1.3: ἀπὸ τῆς πικρᾶς καὶ ἀκολάστου τυραννίδος πάντες ἀναπνεύσειαν: "a respite from the bitter violence of tyranny" (see also 1.14.9 – 15.1, 2.2.4, 2.4.2); cf. Hdn. 1.4.5. Commodus suffered *damnatio memoriae* (Varner [2004] 136 – 146; Galimberti [2014] 57, 61; for Nero's and Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* see Varner [2004] 46 – 85, 111 – 135). His memory though was soon rehabilitated by Julianus (Hdn. 2.6.10) and Severus who also brought about Commodus' deification. (For bibliographical references see below.)

[52] "Commodus war in jeder Hinsicht das Gegenteil seines Vaters" (Hohl [1954] 12; cf. Kemezis [2014] 45).

[53] Marcus Aurelius' accountability for Commodus' character will be pursued once Severus' and Caracalla's cases have been examined.

[54] "The best-known Roman example of openly invented genealogical claims" (Hekster [2015] 205); for Severus' self-adoption and the consequent propaganda see Rubin (1980); Galimberti (2014) 44; Kemezis (2014) 16, 57– 74, 253; Hekster (2015) 144 – 148, 205 – 221. Severus became *Marci filius* of his own accord, and consequently established Commodus' deification since Commodus was his new brother (D.C. 76[75].7.4: τοῦ τε Μάρκου υἱὸν καὶ τοῦ Κομμόδου ἀδελφὸν ἑαυτὸν ἔλεγε) and "a still-valuable strand of Antonine propaganda" (Kemezis [2014] 65; cf. Hdn. 2.10.3); for Severus as *Divi Commodi Frater* and Commodus' deification see *HA Sev*. 11.3 – 5, 12.8; *HA Comm.* 17.11: *inter deos rettulit*: "he raised this man to the rank of the gods"; Zimmermann (1999) 17, 146 – 150; Hekster (2002) 186 – 195; Varner (2004) 147– 148; Galimberti (2014) 44; Hekster (2015) 144, 146, 208, 210, 216 – 217, 222; Chrysanthou

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(2022a) 202. For the representation of Julia Domna as heir to Faustina and Crispina in relation to Severus’ attempts to boost his invented ancestral lineage see Hekster (2015) 143 – 153, 159, 210.

[55] Particularly, by naming Caracalla “Antoninus” (Hdn. 3.10.5: Ἀντωνῖνον ὠνόμασε) he “stressed the dynastic continuity and made clear who was from now on the intended heir” (Hekster [2015] 210; see also Rubin [1980] 73).

[56] Potter (2008) 220 – 221.

[57] In Herodian’s text, Severus is presented as having been favored and “accompanied by fortune throughout his career” (Chrysanthou [2022b] 211 – 212; cf. Rubin [1980] 47 with n. 36; Potter [2008] 220 – 222). See e. g. the spontaneous victory over the Parthians τύχῃ μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμῃ (Hdn. 3.9.12: “more by good luck than good judgment”) when the ships unintentionally drifted and grounded in the Parthian banks (Hdn. 3.9.8: ἡ συναιρομένη τότε τοῖς ἐκείνου πράγμασι τύχη; cf. 3.9.7– 12, 2.14.1). “Stressing his own luckiness evidently served his purposes” (Kemezis [2014] 60).

[58] E. g. ‘weather miracles’ (mainly water elements suddenly appearing) were experienced by both emperors. This pattern emerges in Severus’ battle against Niger (Hdn. 3.3.1 – 8), when the enemies are defeated due to a sudden rain interpreted as προνοίᾳ θείᾳ (Hdn. 3.3.8: divine providence; D. C. 75[74].7.7: παρὰ τοῦ θείου βοηθουμένοις: “aided by god”; Rubin [1980] 66 – 74, 83 – 84, 117 – 120, 205 – 206; Kovács [2009] 146 – 147; for further similar incidents concerning Severus’ army see D. C. 75[75].1.3; for Herodian’s and Dio’s spatial disagreements see Rubin [1980] 66 – 74), while Marcus Aurelius subdues the Quadi similarly due to a providential rain which saves the Roman army (D. C. 72[71].8.2: τὸ θεῖον ἐξέσωσε, see 72[71].8 – 10; cf. Tert. *Apol.* 5.25, *Ad Scap.* 4; Eus. *Hist. Eccles.* 5.5.1 – 7; Orac. Sib. 12.195 – 200; Claud. *VI. Cons. Hon.* 347– 348; *HA Marc.* 24.4; Rubin [1980] 67– 74; Potter [2008] 222; Kovács [2009]; Kemezis [2014] 60 – 61, with n. 96).

[59] Rubin (1980) 74; Potter (2008) 220.

[60] For Severus’ bravery and endurance see Hdn. 2.10.6, 2.11.1 – 2, 2.14.1 – 3, 3.7.7– 8, 3.8.8, 3.14.2 – 3, 3.4.1 – 4. He is specifically described as undisturbed by adverse weather conditions (Hdn. 3.6.10: κρύους καὶ θάλπους ὁμοίως καταφρονῶν: “without regard for cold or heat”, διὰ τῶν δυσχειμέρων καὶ ὑψηλοτάτων ὀρῶν […] ἀκαλύπτῳ τῇ κεφαλῇ ὡδοιπόρει: “while crossing the high mountain barriers where weather

Severus' paternal anxiety (Hdn. 3.10.1: ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἐπείγετο: "he grew anxious to get to Rome") is triggered by the same realization as Marcus': his sons had now reached manhood (Hdn. 3.10.1: τοὺς παῖδας ἐς ἡλικίαν ἐφήβων ἤδη τελοῦντας; cf. 1.3.1: ἑώρα τε τὸν παῖδα τῆς μειρακίων ἡλικίας ἀρχόμενον ἐπιβαίνειν, δεδιὼς […][61]). His ambition and provision for his sons' education and moral principles are clearly indicated by Herodian, with the keyword being the verb σωφρονίζω (to be chastened, recalled to senses, learn self-restraint[62]) which repeatedly denotes the emperor's attempts to initiate them into the art of self-control and moderation (Hdn. 3.10.2: τούς τε υἱεῖς παιδεύων καὶ σωφρονίζων, 3.10.4: σωφρονίζειν ἐπειρᾶτο, 3.10.5: γάμῳ σωφρονίσαι θέλων[63]). Moreover, Chrysanthou ([2022b] 218) notes that Geta is provided with a council of Severus' senior friends as advisors (Hdn. 3.14.9: συνέδρους τῶν φίλων τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους) just as Marcus Aurelius entrusted his friends and relatives with his son's care and guidance (Hdn. 1.4.1–6).[64] Herodian most probably consciously aims at giving prominence to Severus' new role as educator, as he avoids any reference to Euodus' role as Caracalla's τροφεύς (D.C. 77[76].3.2)[65] and describes the boys' rivalry in some detail from the mo-

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conditions were difficult he marched bareheaded"), becoming an exemplar for his soldiers to imitate (Hdn. 3.6.10: μιμήσει καὶ ζήλῳ τοῦ βασιλέως; cf. 1.2.4: ζήλῳ τῆς τοῦ ἄρχοντος γνώμης βιοῦν: "subjects model their lives on the ideals of their ruler"); cf. *Med.* 6.2: Μὴ διαφέρου, πότερον ῥιγῶν ἢ θαλπόμενος τὸ πρέπον ποιεῖς, καὶ πότερον νυστάζων ἢ ἱκανῶς ὕπνου ἔχων: "Make no difference in doing thy duty whether thou art shivering or warm, drowsy or sleep-satisfied"; for more statements of Marcus Aurelius on φιλοπονία ("love of labour") and the consequent sense of duty see *Med.* e.g. 1.5, 1.15, 1.16.1, 3.4.3, 5.5, 6.2, 6.30.1, 8.5, 11.13.

[61] "Realizing that his son (Commodus) was at the age of early adolescence, he was afraid […]"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.5, 1.4.3. This young age once more seems, as in Commodus' case, to be the main reason why Geta and Caracalla are easily influenced by fawners (Hdn. 3.10.4: πρὸς τὸ ἡδὺ τῆς ἡλικίας κολακεύοντες καὶ ἀνθέλκοντες: "fawning attendants were flattering and encouraging them to seek the pleasures of youth"; cf. 3.13.6; for the brothers' youth and for Commodus' case see previously) and indulged in the pleasures Rome provided (Hdn. 3.10.3: ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τρυφῆς; cf. 1.6.1 ὑπεμιμνήσκοντες αὐτὸν τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τρυφῆς: "the fawners […] reminded Commodus of Rome's luxuries"; see also 1.7.1). In addition, the excessive enthusiasm for and occupation with spectacles and shows (Hdn. 3.10.3: περὶ τὰ θεάματα ὑπερβαλλούσης σπουδῆς; cf. 3.10.4, 3.13.1–2) remind us of Commodus' similar 'hobbies' (Hdn. 1.9.4: θέαις καὶ ἑορταῖς σχολάζειν: "spend your time at theaters and festivals"; for Commodus as gladiator see previously), and is characterized in both cases as 'improper' for an emperor (Hdn. 3.14.1: περὶ τὰ θεάματα ἀπρεπεῖ σπουδῇ, 3.13.1: ἀπρεπέστερον ἢ βασιλεῦσιν ἥρμοζεν; cf. 1.13.8: τοῦ δὲ ἀπρεπέστερον μετιόντος ἢ βασιλεῖ σώφρον ἥρμοζε; see also Hdn. 1.16.5). Therefore, Severus tries to move the young men away from Rome's temptations (Hdn. 3.13.1: ἀπάγειν γὰρ ἤθελε τοὺς παῖδας τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ διαίτης; cf. 3.14.2).

[62] Liddell/Scott (1940) s.v.

[63] "He hoped that the marriage would sober Caracalla"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.1–5, 13.1–6, 14.1–2, 14.9–15.1. Severus also gives his son the name of Marcus (Hdn. 3.10.5: Μάρκου θελήσας αὐτὸν προσηγορίαν φέρειν) in order to bear the glorious emperor's name and – hopefully – character; cf. Zimmermann (1999) 194–213; Chrysanthou (2020) 630–631; Chrysanthou (2022a) 224.

[64] Hdn. 1.4.1: τοὺς φίλους ὅσοι τε παρῆσαν τῶν συγγενῶν: "summoned his advisers and the relatives that were with him", 1.4.4: γένεσθε δὴ οὖν αὐτῷ ὑμεῖς […] πατέρες: "you must be fathers to him".

[65] Cf. Zimmermann (1999) 195–199, 199 with n. 243; Chrysanthou (2020) 630–631.

ment they appear in the narrative (Hdn. 3.10.3).[66] The readers thus have the time to focus on and attend to Severus' efforts to morally reform his sons' characters and especially his subsequent failure, since every attempt is pointless: Geta and Caracalla are already irreversibly corrupted by their luxurious way of life[67] and hate each other dreadfully (Hdn. 4.3.1: ἐμίσουν, 4.4.1: μῖσος).

This fraternal loathing is indeed Septimius Severus' main concern during the last years of his reign. He unsuccessfully tries numerous times to mend their dispute (συνάγειν ἐπειρᾶτο[68]) and convince them of the disastrous consequences of a siblings' enmity (Hdn. 3.13.3: ἀεὶ βασιλέων ἀδελφῶν συμφορὰς ἐκ στάσεως). Caracalla and Geta, though, are mutually antagonistic and hostile (Hdn. 3.13.2: ἔριδος καὶ ἔχθρας: "quarrel and enmity", 4.4.1: ἡ στάσις ηὔξετο: "the rivalry grew"),[69] which leads to Geta's brutal murder by his own brother (Hdn. 4.4.2 – 3). The fratricide recalls a statement from M. Aurelius on the importance of love for family members. In passage 1.14. of *Meditations,* the word φιλοίκειον is used, in which Marcus had failed – just like Severus – since Lucilla plotted against her brother, Commodus, who consequently ordered her execution (Hdn. 1.8.8: ἀκριβεστέρας τήν τε ἀδελφὴν ὁ Κόμοδος διεχρήσατο; cf. 1.8.3 – 8). Additionally, Herodian states that Caracalla tried to hasten his father's death as well,[70] an act which reflects the rumors about Commodus' attempted or actual patricide (D.C. 72[71].33.4.2: μετήλλαξεν, οὐχ ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου […] ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν […] τῷ Κομμόδῳ χαριζομένων[71]). Therefore, Caracalla is clearly portrayed as a "second Commodus"[72] because of the way he handles power, notably when he crowns himself as the sole emperor. At the same time, this brings some problematic aspects of Severus' character and role as paternal figure to the fore.

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[66] In Dio's text, it is the death of Plautianus that signals the two boys' uncontrollably extravagant behavior (D.C. 77[76].7.1), while Severus' advice to his sons concerning their anticipated harmonious coexistence is given just before his death (D.C. 77[76].15.2: ὁμονοεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλουτίζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε: "Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men"; cf. Hdn. 3.13.1 – 5; Chrysanthou [2020] 630 – 631).

[67] Hdn. 3.13.6: ἐς πάσας ἡδονῶν ὀρέξεις ἀπλήστως ὁρμωμένους: "seeking every kind of pleasure without restraint", 3.10.3: ὑπὸ […] τρυφῆς καὶ διαίτης […] τὰ ἤθη διεφθείροντο: "they were corrupted in their habits by the life of luxury"; for Geta's and Caracalla's corrupted and immoral life see Hdn. 3.10.3 – 4, 3.13.1 – 2, 3.13.5 – 6, 3.14.1 – 2. However, after Severus' death, Geta is established as a more positive figure than Caracalla in the narrative (Hdn. 4.3.1 – 4).

[68] Hdn. 3.13.3: αὐτὸς δὲ ἐπειρᾶτο συνάγειν ἀεὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἐς φιλίαν καὶ προτρέπειν ἐς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ συμφωνίαν: "he was always trying to reconcile his sons and bring them to live in harmony and agreement", 3.13.5: ποτὲ μὲν λιπαρῶν ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιπλήττων, σωφρονίζειν αὐτοὺς ἅμα καὶ συνάγειν ἐπειρᾶτο: "sometimes pleading with them and sometimes upbraiding them, trying to bring them to their senses and make them cooperate"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.4, 3.13.3 – 6.

[69] See also Hdn. 4.3.1: πάντα τε ἔπραττεν ἑκάτερος πειρώμενος τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἀποσκευάσασθαι: "Each brother tried every way to get rid of the other"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.3 – 4, 3.13.2 – 6, 3.15.4 – 5, 4.1.1, 4.1.5, 4.3.1 – 2, 4.3.5 – 4.1.

[70] Hdn. 3.15.2: ἀνέπειθέ τε ἰατροὺς καὶ ὑπηρέτας κακουργῆσαί τι περὶ τὴν θεραπείαν τοῦ γέροντος, ὡς ἂν θᾶττον αὐτοῦ ἀπαλλαγείη: "he tried to persuade his doctors and attendants to mistreat him so that he would be rid of him sooner"; cf. Hdn. 3.15.4. Dio mentions a direct attempted murder (D.C. 77[76].14.3: ὁ δ᾽ Ἀντωνῖνος ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτὸν ἄντικρυς αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἐπεχείρησεν: "Antoninus attempted to kill his father outright with his own hand").

[71] "He passed away […] not as a result of the disease […] but by the act of his physicians […] who wished to do Commodus a favor"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.4 for M. Aurelius' reference to Nero's matricide (ἐχώρησε μέχρι

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that the first thing Caracalla does after his father dies is to put an end to the war with the barbarians by granting them peace, since he is uninterested in joining the warfare (Hdn. 3.15.1: μετρίως ἐφρόντιζεν; cf. 3.15.6). Commodus had similarly abandoned the war against the Germans, meeting the barbarians' financial demand "to buy his peace of mind" (Hdn. 1.6.9: τὸ ἀμέριμνον ὠνούμενος).[73] Furthermore, both of them end up becoming cruel emperors, and Herodian emphasizes Caracalla's insatiably murderous and aggressive temper (Hdn. 4.9.3: φύσει ὄντα ὀργίλον καὶ φονικόν; cf. 4.12.8).[74] The most gruesome instances are the massacres against the Alexandrians (Hdn. 4.8.6 – 9.8) and the Parthians (Hdn. 4.10.1 – 11.9). In the first case, Caracalla arrives in Alexandria to allegedly see the city founded by Alexander (Hdn. 4.8.6: πρόφασιν, 4.8.7: προσεποιεῖτο). Even though he joins the local celebrations (Hdn. 4.8.7– 8, 4.9.4), this attitude is a pretense, a part of his plan to slaughter the residents (Hdn. 4.9.1: λανθάνουσαν γνώμην: "secret intention", ὑπεκρίνατο: "he was acting"). Caracalla likewise formulates a plan to attack the Parthians (Hdn. 4.10.1: μηχανᾶται τοιόνδε τι): longing to bear the title of Parthicus (Hdn. 4.10.1: ἐπιθυμήσας […] Παρθικὸς κληθῆναι), and boast about it,[75] he feigns a desire to marry the king's daughter. The wedding feast then provides the setting for the massacre (Hdn. 4.11.4 – 8). Caracalla's role-playing (ὑπόκρισις)[76] is also obvious right after Geta's murder[77] when he successfully enacts the role of victim (Hdn. 4.4.3 – 5.7).[78] Thus, just like Commodus, who turned into Heracles and a gladiator in the arena, Caracalla appears as an actor and a director[79] with an extensive repertoire on Herodian's theatrical stage.[80]

μητρῴου φόνου). It could be assumed that Herodian omits any reference to Commodus' patricide for "konzeptionellen Gründen" (Zimmermann [1999] 201), for the "aura of excellence" in Marcus' death to be preserved (Chrysanthou [2022a] 253).

[72] Chrysanthou (2020) 628 – 629.

[73] Cf. Kemezis (2014) 250 – 251.

[74] Hdn. 3.15.1 – 2, 3.15.4, 3.15.6, 4.5.7– 6.5, 5.1.3.

[75] Hdn. 4.10.1: Ῥωμαίοις ἐπιστεῖλαι ὡς χειρωσάμενος τοὺς κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν βαρβάρους: "He wanted to report to the Romans that he had mastered the barbarians in the East".

[76] Baumann (2022) 71 – 72, 74, 79, 82 – 83.

[77] Caracalla's motive for killing his brother is again the desire for power and glory (Hdn. 4.4.2: ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ τῆς περὶ τὴν μοναρχίαν ἐπιθυμίας ἐλαυνόμενος; cf. 4.10.1).

[78] E. g. Hdn. 4.4.3: ἐβόα μέγαν κίνδυνον ἐκπεφευγέναι μόλις τε σωθῆναι ("he claimed that he had just escaped from a great danger"), 4.5.4: ἐπῆλθέ μοι ὄντι ξιφήρεις ("Geta attacked me with a sword"). Similarly, he enacted the role of a German soldier (Hdn. 4.7.3 – 7, where the keyword προσεποιεῖτο also appears [§6]), of Alexander (Hdn. 4.8.1: Ἀλέξανδρος ἦν), and Achilles (Hdn. 4.8.4: Ἀχιλλέα ἐμιμεῖτο), while always adopting the relevant clothing (Hdn. 4.7.3, 4.8.2).

[79] The reenactment of Patroclus' funeral is the best example of Caracalla's directing skills (Hdn. 4.8.4 – 5).

[80] According to Baumann ([2022] 70 – 71), in chapters 4.7– 11, the historiographer "turns his readership into an audience of a theatrical play"; for Caracalla as an actor and director see Baumann (2022) 70 – 85.

Occasioned by the aforementioned plots, Zimmermann’s remark ([1999] 211; cf. 203 – 214) about Caracalla as “Severus’ caricature” seems apposite: the young emperor’s hypocritical attitude reminds us of his father’s similar behavioral patterns. Severus had managed to gain the support of the army by promoting his expedition as a necessary retaliatory act for Pertinax’s murder (Hdn. 2.9.8: ἔλεγέ τε δεῖν ἐπαμῦναι καὶ ἐπεξελθεῖν τῷ Περτίνακος φόνῳ; see 2.9.5 – 10.4, 2.14.3).[81] Judging by the vocabulary used, his claims were false and concealed his true aspirations to personal power and accession to the throne (Hdn. 2.9.10: προσποιούμενος,[82] 2.9.11: τῷὸΣεβήρῳὸπροσποιουμένῳ). Herodian underscores the underlying character of Severus (Hdn. 3.5.6: ὕπουλον αὐτοῦ ἦθος), who is presented as an expert at deception (Hdn. 2.14.4: ὑποκρίνασθαί τε καὶ προσποιήσασθαι πᾶν ὁτιοῦν ἱκανώτατος; cf. 2.9.13, 3.8.7) and a master of stratagems (Hdn. 2.14.4: εἴη ἀνὴρ πολύτροπός τις καὶ μετὰ τέχνης εἰδὼς προσφέρεθαι πράγμασιν). In particular, he plots against Albinus (Hdn. 2.15.3: τιμῇὸτοίνυν προσποιήτῳ: “pretending to pay him honor”, 3.5.3: ἐξαπατήσας αὐτόν; cf. 2.15.1 – 3, 3.5.2 – 8) and tricks him (Hdn. 2.15.2: ἠθέλησεν ὁ Σεβῆρος σοφίσματι προλαβὼν; cf. 4.10.1) with insidious techniques used by his sons later on as well.[83] For instance, the attempted poisoning of Albinus (Hdn. 3.5.5: ἔδωκε δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶὸδηλητήρια φάρμακα) evokes the brothers’ poisoning attempts against each other (Hdn. 4.4.2: ἐμβαλεῖν δηλητήρια φάρμακα; cf. 4.1.1, 4.5.4, 4.8.4), while the supposedly friendly letters sent to the British general (Hdn. 2.15.4: φιλικώτατα [γράμματα δῆθεν]) remind us of Caracalla’s letters to Artabanus (Hdn. 4.10.1 – 2: ἐπιστέλλει […] γράμματα). Moreover, Severus devises a plan against Pertinax’s murderers (Hdn. 2.13.1: σοφίσματι ἐχρήσατο; cf. 2.13.12),[84] according to which he lures them into a trap with a feeble excuse. When these soldiers are gathered in his camp, they are encircled and caught in a ring of weapons (Hdn. 2.13.4: κυκλώσασθαι αὐτοὺς, 2.13.5: σαγηνεύσας[85] ἐντὸς τῶν ὅπλων δοριαλώτους εἶχε), just like the Alexandrians who, at Caracalla’s signal (Hdn. 4.9.6: ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ δὲ σημείῳ),[86] find themselves surrounded by arms, like animals trapped in a net (Hdn. 4.9.6: πᾶν ἐκυκλώσατο […] ἐντὸς τῶν ὅπλων περιειλημμένους ὥσπερ ἐν δικτύοις σεσαγηνευμένους).[87]

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[81] Severus organizes his propaganda using Pertinax’s name and popularity to his advantage, aiming to secure the Romans’ content and approval by reviving his memory (Hdn. 2.10.1: ἤλπιζε […] εἶναι κεχαρισμένον […] διὰ τὴν ἐκείνου μνήμην; cf. 2.10.4) and presenting himself as an allegedly destined substitute for the former emperor (Hdn. 2.9.7: θείᾳ προνοίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν [αὐτὸν] καλεῖσθαι, cf. 2.9.3 – 7; Hdn. 2.14.3: ἕξειν δὲ τοῦ Περτίνακος οὐ μόνον τοὔνομα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γνώμην: “adopting both the name and outlook of Pertinax”; cf. 2.10.1). It should also be mentioned that in the narrative, Pertinax has the role of Marcus’ ‘alter ego’, which underscores the aforementioned references to Severus’ desire to imitate Marcus.

[82] προσποιούμενος οὐχ οὕτω τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀντιποιεῖσθαι, οὐδ᾽ αὑτῷ τὴν ἐξουσίαν μνᾶσθαι, ὡς θέλειν ἐπεξελθεῖν τοιούτου βασιλέως αἵματι: “he pretended that his aim was not so much to lay claim to the empire or to win personal power as the desire to avenge the murder of so fine an emperor.”.

[83] Zimmermann (1999) 203 – 206.

[84] For the whole episode see Hdn. 2.13.

[85] σαγηνεύω: “surround and take fish with a drag-net” (σαγήνη), generally, “catch as in a net” (Liddell/Scott [1940] s.v.); cf. Hdn. 4.9.6 – 8.

[86] Severus also gives the signal for his soldiers to encircle Pertinax’s murderers: ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ συνθήματι (Hdn. 2.13.4). The same phrase marks the beginning of Caracalla’s massacre against the Parthians (Hdn. 4.11.4 – 5), who must have also been surrounded by soldiers.

Caracalla displays Severus' insatiable imperialism and lust for glory as well. It has been stated before that he slaughters the Parthians just to gain the title of 'Parthicus' (Hdn. 4.10.1). His father likewise insisted on attacking Britain because he was still "keen to win a British victory and title" (Hdn. 3.14.5: βουλόμενος προσκτήσασθαι τὴν κατὰ Βρεττανῶν νίκην τε καὶ προσηγορίαν), and also made an expedition to the East since he was naturally ambitious (Hdn. 3.14.2: φύσει […] φιλόδοξος ὑπάρχων; cf. 3.14.1–5) and eager to win a reputation for himself (Hdn. 3.9.1: βουλόμενος δόξαν ἄρασθαι νίκης […] καὶ κατὰ βαρβάρων ἐγεῖραι τρόπαια;[88] cf. 4.10.1). Generally speaking, Caracalla adopts and exaggerates all of Severus' negative qualities.[89] He eventually turns into "a tyrannical distorted image of his father",[90] and Severus' pedagogical methods prove to have been insufficient. The latter hopes that changing his name along with forcing him to marry (Hdn. 3.10.5–6) might call his older son to reason, while a demonstration of financial and military abundance and power could become a motive for the brothers to unite (Hdn. 3.13.4–5). At this moment, Severus' vices emerge: he projects onto his sons what he himself would enthusiastically pursue.[91] Particularly regarding Caracalla, Severus' failure as a father and educator is illustrated by the fact that he himself is not the right exemplar to be imitated by his son.[92] The young emperor is unable to absorb the virtues his father preached about, not only because his character is corrupted but also because Severus only advocated those principles in theory.[93]

Severus dies in anxiety and sadness due to his children's way of life (Hdn. 3.14.1: ἀσχάλλοντι, 3.15.2: λύπῃὸτὸ πλεῖστον διαφθαρείς), just like M. Aurelius who, on his deathbed, seems to be really worried about Commodus’ upbringing (Hdn. 1.3.1–4.7).[94] Nonetheless, the ascent of Commodus and Severus’ sons is not debated but rather granted in the text. In a broader sense, it might be suggested that Severus was unable to reverse the succession since Caracalla and Geta had clearly overpowered him with their already corrupted and intractable characters. Commodus’ unsuitability for the throne, though, was – at least in Herodian’s text – still not a settled fact and only detected by his father’s insightfulness (also in D.C. 73[72].1.2: καί μοι δοκεῖ […] ὁ Μᾶρκος σαφῶς προγνῶναι and *HA Marc.* 28.10). Therefore, theoretically, Marcus could have protected Rome by not choosing Commodus as his heir. However, according to Hekster ([2002] 25), “the dynastic principle was too engrained in Roman imperial succession to ignore”.[95] It was then nearly impossible for Commodus, as a natural son, to be excluded from power,[96] and Marcus could only offer him either the throne or the death blow.[97] Interestingly enough, in the *Historia Augusta* it is explicitly stated that he indeed would prefer Commodus’ premature death (*HA Marc.* 28.10: *fertur filium mori voluisse*),[98] while, if we trust Dio, Severus blamed Marcus for not eliminating his son (D.C. 77[76].14.7: τὸν Μᾶρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξεῖλε),[99] a crime that he himself refrained from committing against Caracalla (D.C. 77[76].14.7: πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ υἱεῖ ἀπειλήσας τοῦτο ποιήσειν). We cannot be sure whether M. Aurelius actually ever considered passing over his son as heir, but his actions to promote him are well-attested:[100] he enhanced his prestige and granted him social and military recognition. Commodus became the youngest consul in Rome, was integrated into the political stage, and had a place to rule next to his father (*HA Comm.* 2.4–5, 12.4–6; *HA Marc.* 16.1–2, 17.3).[101] After all, whether Marcus was betrayed by his judgment (Jul. *Caes.* 312a: τὰ περὶ τὸν υἱὸν […] πολυπραγμονῶν ἁμαρτήματα)[102] or was unable to act against his son – even though he foresaw his vices – due to social or personal[103] commitment issues, Commodus' ascent to power proves to be destructive and so does Marcus' choice to entrust him with his legacy.

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[87] For the repeated identical patterns of action between Severus and his son see Zimmermann (1999) 210–211.

[88] "He wanted to gain the glory of victory […] and to raise monuments for victories against the barbarians".

[89] Zimmermann (1999) 207; e.g. Severus' occasional aggressiveness (Hdn. 3.6.1: πάντα μὲν ἐκθύμως πράττων, ὀργῆς δὲ ἥττων ὢν φύσει: "He brought furious energy to all his actions and was by nature short-tempered") and cruelty (Hdn. 3.2.3–5, 3.8.1–3, 3.8.7–8) is turned into ruthless bloodthirstiness by his son (see previously; D.C. 78[77].6.1a); for the attacks against the Parthians as a concrete example for the comparison see Zimmermann (1999) 213–214.

[90] "tyrannisches Zerrbild seines Vaters" (Zimmermann [1999] 207, see also 206).

[91] Zimmermann (1999) 200.

[92] "Die These, daß sich an Geta and Caracalla die Folgen einer verfehlten Erziehung durch einen hierfür ungeeigneten Vater studieren lassen, versucht Herodian […] zu stützen" (Zimmermann [1999] 207); cf. X. *Mem.* 1.2.17: τοὺς διδάσκοντας […] αὐτοὺς δεικνύντας τε τοῖς μανθάνουσιν, ᾗπερ αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσιν ἃ διδάσκουσι, καὶ τῷ λόγῳ προσβιβάζοντας: "all teachers show their disciples how they themselves practice what they teach, and persuade them by argument".

[93] As will be suggested below, the lack of virtues' practical appliance is what makes an advocator of philosophy or moral life, in general, a caricature.

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[94] For similarities between Severus’ and M. Aurelius’ last moments in Herodian’s narrative see Chrysanthou (2020) 630; Chrysanthou (2022a) 205–207, 252–253; Mallan (2022) 49 with n. 12.

[95] For Roman monarchy, the transfer of power to a biological son represented the continuation of a well-ordered universe (Kemezis [2014] 45; see 45–47).

[96] Even if Marcus Aurelius had adopted someone else or disinherited his son, Commodus would still have had the right to claim the throne or could have contested this decision of disinheritance (Hekster [2002] 28). Hekster ([2002] 29) continues by mentioning the high risk of civil war if Commodus was ignored as a successor.

[97] Hekster (2002) 30, cf. 25–30; Hekster (2005a) 208–209.

[98] See previously for the whole passage; cf. Kemezis (2014) 46 with n. 45.

[99] Zimmermann ([1999] 201 with n. 252) regards this passage as fabricated; cf. Galimberti (2014) 58.

[100] In 1.17.4 of *Meditations*, Marcus expresses his gratefulness for not having children devoid of intelligence or physically deformed (τὸ παιδία μοι ἀφυῆ μὴ γενέσθαι μηδὲ κατὰ τὸ σωμάτιον διάστροφα), which could potentially indicate the hope to be succeeded by a son; see Zimmermann (1999) 37 with n. 98.

[101] See Mattingly/Sydenham (1968) 207–268; Hekster (2002) 32–39.

[102] See 312a–c; cf. Hekster (2011) 318.

It should be mentioned at this point that both emperors tried to educate[104] their sons themselves (D.C. 78[77].12.3: πᾶσι τοῖς ἐς ἀρετὴν τείνουσι,[105] 72[71].36.4: θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν ἄριστα[106]) and, in addition, to find the best teachers for the boys, even while they were absent from their lives for an extended period of time: "Marcus spent his son's whole youth in wars",[107] and Severus most probably did the same.[108] The lack of close paternal supervision and guidance contributed to the youngsters deviating from the road of virtue,[109] a possibility that Marcus had taken into consideration (Hdn. 1.3.1). In the end, both Commodus and Caracalla misused their inherited power (Hdn. 5.1.6: ἀποχρῶνταί τε καὶ ἐνυβρίζουσιν ὡς ἄνωθεν ἰδίῳ κτήματι) proving themselves to be unworthy of the Romans' expectations and their fathers' aspirations. These cases of failures prompt us to consider to what extent the political and military successes of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus hindered them from properly training and educating worthy successors.

3 Interpreting the Ambiguous Pairs: Pretexts and Intertexts

Herodian's presentation of two young emperors' inability to be taught and improve their characters along with their fathers' ineffective role in the educational process constitutes a well-established recurrent theme that can be traced in many texts of various genres and authors. These figures of unteachable people are typically comical and this is the reason why they 'star' mostly in works with comic coloring (such as comedies, satires, satirical compositions). As a result, the fact that – to some extent – Herodian depicts Commodus and Caracalla as 'laughing stocks' (Hdn. 1.14.8: καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν,[110] 4.8.2: καὶὸχλεύης εἴδομεν ἀξίας εἰκόνας,[111] 4.8.5: ἐγελᾶτο,[112] 4.9.3: ἐκεῖνον δὲ χλευαζόντων[113]) cannot be coincidental.

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[103] This would be odd for Marcus Aurelius since he advocated common interest (*Med.* 3.4: κοινωφελὲς), which should have been, according to him, the only goal of conduct (*Med.* 12.20: μὴ ἐπ᾽ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ κοινωνικὸν τέλος τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ποιεῖσθαι; see also 10.6).

[104] For the topic of *paideia* see Zimmermann (1999) 29–31, 36–37, 45, 62, 233–237; Hekster (2002) 32 with n. 83; Chrysanthou (2020) 631; Roberto (2022).

[105] "[Severus] had trained Caracalla in absolutely all the pursuits that tended to excellence"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.1–5, 13.1–6, 14.1–2, 14.9–15.1.

[106] "[Marcus] reared and educated his son in the best possible way"; cf. Hdn. 1.2.2, 1.5.3–4.

[107] Kemezis (2014) 48. Commodus must have been around eight years old when his father left for war, and in his early teenage years when Marcus saw him again (175 CE, Hekster [2002] 35–38).

[108] Severus comes back from his expedition in the East when his sons were in the age of manhood (Hdn. 3.10.1: ἐς ἡλικίαν ἐφήβων ἤδη τελοῦντας; cf. Whittaker [1969] 325 with n. 1).

[109] According to Wiedemann ([1992] 169) Marcus Aurelius was obliged to ensure the resumption of *ludi* and *munera* "during his absences on the northern frontier", which allowed Commodus "to become more interested in the arena".

Plautus will be the first example since he raises the issue of how crucial it is for a child’s upbringing that the father, a figure that usually serves as an exemplar, is present and adheres to moral principles. Philolaches, in the play *Mostellaria*, clearly manifests the role of parents by comparing them with builders. They are responsible for building their children’s characters with solid foundations so that they can be preserved and sustained through the years (Plaut. *Mostell.* 119 – 122: *homines aedium esse similis arbitremini. / primumdum parentes fabri liberum sunt: / i fundamentum supstruont liberorum; / extollunt, parant sedulo in firmitatem*: “You should consider man to be similar to a house. First, parents are the builders of their children: they lay their children’s foundation. They raise them, eagerly prepare them to be strong”).[114] In the play *Bacchides*, the necessity of solidarity between a father and an educator is indicated as well as the consequent obstacles that the lack of cooperation between them creates (Plaut. *Bacch.* 447– 448: [Lydus:] *hocine hic pacto potest / inhibere imperium magister, si ipsus primus uapulet?*: “Can a teacher exert authority here under such conditions, if he himself is the first to get a thrashing?”).[115] Specifically, Pistoclerus is seen by his tutor, Lydus, entering a house of “ill-repute” to meet his mistress, Bacchis (Plaut. *Bacch.* 109 – 169). Lydus is instantly disappointed in his student’s habits and points out that his efforts to guide him down the path of morality were eventually in vain as Pistoclerus proved to be an ineducable student.[116] His father, Philoxenus, though does not seem to be really interested in reforming his son’s conduct by at least rebuking him (Plaut. *Bacch.* 409 – 410: *minus mirandum est illaec aetas si quid illorum facit / quam si non faciat. feci ego istaec itidem in adulescentia*: “It’s less of a surprise if a man of that age does some of those things than if he doesn't. I too did this in my youth").[117] In this case, the father's personal deviation from virtuous principles and his detachment from his son's educational advancement is what has caused his tutor to appear as unsuccessful: "If it weren't for you, I would have turned him into a decent man" (Plaut. *Bacch.*, Lydus in v. 412). Even though Philoxenus eventually realizes his mistakes concerning Pistoclerus' misconduct (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1076 – 1083), his own vices emerge in the final scene when he succumbs to Bacchis' charm (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1155a–1206).[118]

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[110] ὡς εἶναι καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ σχήματι καὶ θηλειῶν πολυτέλειαν καὶ ἡρώων ἰσχὺν μιμούμενον: “making himself a laughing-stock by wearing clothes which gave the impression of feminine extravagance and heroic strength at the same time”.

[111] ἔσθ᾽ ὅπου δὲ καὶ χλεύης εἴδομεν ἀξίας εἰκόνας, ἐν γραφαῖς ἑνὸς σώματος ὑπὸ περιφερείᾳ κεφαλῆς μιᾶς ὄψεις ἡμιτόμους δύο, Ἀλεξάνδρου τε καὶ Ἀντωνίνου: “In some places we saw some ludicrous pictures portraying a single body surmounted by a head whose circumference was split into two half faces, one of Alexander and one of Antoninus”.

[112] πάνυ τε ὢν ψιλοκόρσης, πλόκαμον ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ πυρὶ ζητῶν ἐγελᾶτο: “He made himself an object of derision by wanting to throw a lock of his hair upon the fire, as he was almost completely bald”; for the context, the reenactment of Patroclus’ funeral, see Hdn. 4.8.3 – 5.

[113] ἐκεῖνον δὲ χλευαζόντων ὅτι δὴ μικρὸς ὢν Ἀλέξανδρον καὶ Ἀχιλλέα γενναιοτάτους καὶ μεγίστους ἥρωας ἐμιμεῖτο: “[…] jeering at him for imitating Alexander and Achilles who were very strong, tall men, while he himself was only a small man”; for the context of the Alexandrians’ mockery against Caracalla see 4.9.2 – 3.

[114] Plaut. *Mostell.* 126: *expoliunt: docent litteras, iura, leges*: “They polish them: they teach them literature, laws, and statutes”; cf. 117– 130.

[115] See also Plaut. *Bacch.* 437– 448.

[116] Plaut. *Bacch.* 164 – 165: [Lydus:] *nimio es tu ad istas res discipulus docilior / quam ad illa quae te docui, ubi operam perdidi*: “You are a much more docile student of those subjects [namely, vices] than of the ones I taught you, where I’ve wasted my effort”; see also 132 – 137, 146 – 154, 159 – 167.

The motif of ineducable students and unsuccessful teachers of (mainly philosophical) virtues also occurs in Aristophanes. In his play *Clouds*, Phidippides is a corrupted, lazy young boy (see e. g. Ar. *Nu.* 10 – 16, 25 – 32), urged by his father, Strepsiades, to enroll in Socrates' school (Ar. *Nu.* 85 – 125, 826 – 841) and give up his current discourteous manners (Ar. *Nu.* 88: ἔκτρεψον […] τοὺς σαυτοῦ τρόπους). After the young boy's tuition, though, Phidippides is presented as a violent, insolent, immoral man (Ar. *Nu.* 1321 ff). He beats up his parents (Ar. *Nu.* 1322: [Strepsiades:] μοι τυπτομένῳ πάσῃ τέχνῃ; cf. 1321 – 1446),[119] while using arguments to justify his actions and to prove them right.[120] Consequently, despite Strepsiades' high hopes concerning his son's education and moral improvement (Ar. *Nu.* 1457),[121] his choice to trust Socrates' instructional methods is proved – according to the text – to be mistaken.[122] In the end, he admits his preference for his son's previous "commitment" to the horses (Ar. *Nu.* 1406 – 1407: ἵππευε […] ἔμοιγε κρεῖττόν ἐστιν / ἵππων τρέφειν τέθριππον ἢ τυπτόμενον ἐπιτριβῆναι[123]). Moreover, in Lucian's text *Hermotimus*, a philosopher is blamed for a child's corrupted character, and the inability of philosophy to mold virtuous people is highlighted. In particular, Lycinus narrates an incident in which an uncle of a student complains about his nephew's immorality despite his philosophical studies: "And what about my hopes in sending the young man to you in the first place? […] As for passion and anger and shamelessness and recklessness and lying, he was far better last year than he is now” (Luc. *Herm.* 81).[124]

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[117] Plaut. *Bacch.* 416 – 418; for Lydus' and Philoxenus' episode see 406 – 498.

[118] Moreover, Nicobulus, Mnesilochus' father, constitutes a similar paternal figure in the play: he enjoys – like Mnesilochus – a prostitute's company (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1193 – 1206), as one of many fathers who "turn into their sons' rivals" at such places (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1210: *apud lenones riuales filiis fierent patres*).

[119] For Phidippides' behavior after his apprenticeship see Ar. *Nu.* 1321 – 1378, 1409 – 1451.

[120] Ar. *Nu.* 1405: [Phidippides:] οἶμαι διδάξειν ὡς δίκαιον τὸν πατέρα κολάζειν: "I'm sure I can demonstrate that it's right to spank one's father"; cf. 1331 – 1344, 1378 – 1446.

[121] At first, Strepsiades regarded Socrates' school as his salvation (Ar. *Nu.* 77: ἢν ἢν ἀναπείσω τουτονί, σωθήσομαι: "if I can talk this boy into, I will be saved").

[122] On a closer look, Phidippides is not the only ineducable student in the text: Strepsiades himself also attended Socrates' lessons without success and was suspended for his inability to learn (Ar. *Nu.* 783: [Socrates:] οὐκ ἂν διδαξαίμην σ᾽ ἔτι: "I am not going to teach you any longer", 785: εὐθὺς ἐπιλήθει σύ γ᾽ ἅττ᾽ ἂν καὶ μάθῃς: "you immediately forget anything you've learned"; cf. 427– 509, 627– 804).

[123] "Back to the cavalry […] I'd much rather support a four-horse team than get beaten to a pulp". Disappointment over philosophical education is also evident in the parody *Silloi* written by Timon of Phlius, in which a student laments about his futilely wasted fortune in philosophical schools (840 SH=66 D, see Clayman [2009] 146 – 148; for fragments see Lloyd-Jones/Parsons [1983] 391 – 392; Diels [1901] 202; Di Marco [1989] 98). Cf. Luc. *Herm.* 1 – 6, 23, 25, 60, 71, 83.

Moving beyond purely comical and satirical contexts, one of the most relevant and famous cases are Critias and Alcibiades, who were Socrates’ students[125] but proved to be emblematic figures of corrupted men.[126] Alcibiades was an Athenian politician and military commander, a man with uneven nature – according to our sources (Plu. *Alc.* 16.6: φύσεως ἀνωμαλίαν) – who is considered to be corrupted by his luxurious way of life (Plu. *Alc.* 16.1: τρυφὴν τῆς διαίτης; Plu. *Comp. Alc. Cor.* 3.1: τρυφὴν καὶ ἀκολασίαν; cf. Th. 6.15.3), and drawn by rivalry, preeminence (Plu. *Alc.* 2.1: τὸ φιλόνεικον ἰσχυρότατον ἦν καὶτὸ φιλόπρωτον),[127] distinction and fame (Plu. *Alc.* 6.3: φιλοτιμίας […] φιλοδοξίας). Critias is perceived as an immoral, cruel person[128] and a leading member of the Thirty Tyrants (404/3 BCE: Arist. *Ath.* 33–41; X. *HG* 2.3.11–4.23), whom Philostratus characterizes as “the most evil of all men, who possess a reputation for evil” (Philostr. *VS* 1.16: κάκιστος ἀνθρώπων ἔμοιγε φαίνεται ξυμπάντων, ὧν ἐπὶ κακίᾳ ὄνομα). It is obvious, then, why these two men could be clearly treated as ineducable students of philosophy: their characters did not improve, and Socrates failed to instill moderation and virtue into them, while he was later proclaimed responsible for their corruption (Aeschin. *In Tim.* 173: Σωκράτην […] ἀπεκτείνατε, ὅτι Κριτίαν ἐφάνη πεπαιδευκώς: “you put to death Socrates […] because he was shown to have been the teacher of Critias”).[129] Furthermore, there is one interesting connection between Commodus and Critias: Commodus put up a statue of himself as an archer[130] in front of the senate-house, aiming to inspire the senators with fear (Hdn. 1.14.9). After his death it was removed and replaced by a Statue of Liberty, a sign that his reign was a byword for slavery (Hdn. 1.15.1: τὸν μὲν οὖν ἀνδριάντα μετὰ τὴν ἐκείνου τελευτὴν καθελοῦσα ἡ σύγκλητος Ἐλευθερίας εἰκόνα ἵδρυσεν). Similarly, when Critias died, a memorial is attested for him, depicting personified Oligarchy carrying torches and setting Democracy on fire.[131] Additionally, Philostratus (*VS* 1.16) wonders why the highly educated (ἄριστα μὲν ἦν πεπαιδευμένος) Critias with honored ancestry (ἐς Δρωπίδην δ᾽ ἀναφέρων, ὃς μετὰ Σόλωνα Ἀθηναίοις ἦρξεν[132]) did not grow up to be like his teacher of philosophy, namely Socrates, who was a man with the reputation of being "the wisest and most just of his times" (ἄτοπον Σωκράτει […] μὴ ὁμοιωθῆναι αὐτόν ᾧ πλεῖστα δὴ συνεφιλοσόφησε σοφωτάτῳ τε καὶ δικαιοτάτῳ τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ δόξαντι). This question could easily be applied to Commodus, who, weirdly enough, is portrayed by Herodian as having nothing in common with his father, philosopher, and educator M. Aurelius, despite his noble lineage.

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[124] τὰ δ᾽ ἄλλα ὧν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐπιθυμῶν συνέστησά σοι τὸν νεανίσκον, ὁ δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἀμείνων γεγένηται διὰ σέ […] τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐς ὀργὴν καὶ θυμὸν καὶ ἀναισχυντίαν καὶ ἐς τόλμαν καὶ ψεῦδος μακρῷ τινι ἄμεινον εἶχε πέρυσιν ἢ νῦν; cf. Ath. 3.103b–c with Kock (1888) 328–329 and Olson (2014) 94. Eupolis also offers a variety of accusations against philosophers (especially Socrates) and sophists who seem unable to educate their students, such as fr. 367 K.-A. (337 K.) with Storey (2011) 248–249 and Olson (2014) 92–93; fr. 388 K.-A. (353 K.) with Storey (2011) 254–255 and Olson (2014) 138–139.

[125] Especially Alcibiades was said to have been ‘mastered’ by his love for the philosopher Socrates (Plu. *Alc.* 6.1: Σωκράτους ἔρως […] ἐκράτει τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου, cf. 4.1–2; see also Pl. *Smp.* 215–222).

[126] X. *Mem.* 1.2.14: ἐγενέσθην μὲν γὰρ δὴ τὼ ἄνδρε τούτω φύσει φιλοτιμοτάτω πάντων Ἀθηναίων: “The ambition was the very life-blood of both: no Athenian was ever like them”.

[127] Cf. X. *Mem.* 1.2.12: τῶν ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ πάντων ἀκρατέστατός τε καὶ ὑβριστότατος: “exceeded all in licentiousness and arrogance under democracy”.

[128] See e.g. X. *HG* 2.3.15: προπετὴς ἦν ἐπὶ τὸ πολλοὺς ἀποκτείνειν: “eager to put many to death”; cf. 2.3.15–17, 2.3.24–34; Philostr. *VS* 1.16: ὠμότητι δὲ καὶ μιαιφονίᾳ τοὺς τριάκοντα ὑπερεβάλλετο: “in savagery and bloodthirstiness he surpassed the Thirty Tyrants”; cf. X. *Mem.* 1.2.12.

[129] Cf. X. *Mem.* 1.2.12: Ἀλλ᾽ ἔφη γε ὁ κατήγορος, Σωκράτει ὁμιλητὰ γενομένω Κριτίας τε καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης πλεῖστα κακὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐποιησάτην: “his accuser argued, having become associates of Socrates, Critias and Alcibiades did a great deal of harm to the state”; see 1.2.12–48.

[130] For this statue see Zimmermann (1999) 134; Hekster (2005a) 211–212.

At the same time, it cannot be ignored that Alcibiades' guardian was Pericles (Pl. *Alc*. 2.143e: Περικλέα τὸν σεαυτοῦ ἐπίτροπόν; cf. Pl. *Alc*. 1.124c), whose principles and – allegedly – purely democratic ideas were again unable to tame the young man's depraved character.[133] However, Pericles was a controversial figure on the Athenian political stage and thus could be placed in the aforementioned pattern of fathers (or guardians in this case) who may not uphold the moral principles they themselves seek for their sons (or wards). He is described by numerous sources as a man who "seduced the audience"[134] due to his charming – but not always implemented[135] – words (X. *Mem*., 2.6.13: ἤκουσα μέν, ὅτι Περικλῆς πολλὰς ἐπίσταιτο, ἃς ἐπᾴδων τῇ πόλει ἐποίει αὐτὴν φιλεῖν αὐτόν: "I have heard that Pericles knew many (spells) and cast them on the city, and so made her love him";[136] Pl. *Phdr.* 269e: [Socrates:] ὁ Περικλῆς πάντων τελεώτατος εἰς τὴν ῥητορικὴν γενέσθαι: “The supreme master of all in respect to rhetoric”;[137] Plu. *Per.* 8.1 – 4), a tyrant[138] unable to control his personal desires and passions,[139] acting solely for his own political motives and goals.[140] Even Thucydides, who was one of his biggest supporters,[141] admits that Periclean democracy existed “only in name”,[142] while Athens “gradually became, in fact, a government ruled by its foremost citizen” (Th. 2.65.10: ἐγίγνετόὸτε λόγῳὸμὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή).[143]

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[131] Ober (2005) 237–238; Tuozzo (2011) 59–60; Tanner (2018) 298–299; Moore/Raymond (2019) 20.

[132] "His family dated back to Dropides who was archon at Athens after Solon"; for Alcibiades' also glorious family lineage see Pl. *Alc.* 1.103a, 121a; Plu. *Alc*. 1.1; Stuttard (2018) xv–xviii.

[133] Alcibiades is presented as a man who rejects "the democratic ideal of equality" (Balot [2001] 170; see e.g. Th. 2.37.1, 6.16.4), "the democratic norms that once had held Athens together as a political community" (Balot [2001] 168; see e.g. Th. 8.47.2: ὅτι ἐπ᾽ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ βούλεται […] κατελθὼν: "he wished to come home on condition of there being an oligarchy"; Plu. *Alc*. 16.2), and also "Pericles' civic eros" (Balot [2001] 170; cf. e.g. Th. 2.43.1: τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους: "fix your gaze upon the power of Athens and become lovers of her" and 6.92.2: τῇ ἐμαυτοῦ μετὰ τῶν πολεμιωτάτων, φιλόπολίς ποτε δοκῶν εἶναι, νῦν ἐγκρατῶς ἐπέρχομαι: "I, who seemed once to be a lover of my city, now make an assault with all my might upon her"; for Alcibiades as traitor see Th. 6.88.9–93.1), in order to ardently pursue personal ambitions, power, glory, pleasure, and wealth (cf. e.g. Th. 6.12.2, 6.15.2–3, 6.16; Plu. *Alc*. 2.1, 6.2–3, 15.3, 16, 17.2; for Pericles' opposed presentation see Th. 2.40.1, 2.60.5–7, 2.65.5, 2.65.7–11; Plu. *Per.* 7.4–5, 15.5). For Alcibiades as Pericles' successor, and a comparison between them see Balot (2001) 159–172; Mara (2009) 119–123; Matzouranis (2018). In the following analysis, though, it will become obvious that Pericles and Alcibiades "might have been both similar and different" (Mara [2009] 122).

[134] Christodoulou (2013) 238, see 238–239, 241–242, 247, 251–252.

[135] See Cratinus fr. 326 K.-A.: λόγοισι προάγει Περικλέης, ἔργοισι δ᾽ οὐδὲ κινεῖ ("In word has Pericles pushed the thing; in fact he does not budge it", see also Plu. *Per.* 13.5) and fr. 327 K.-A: γλῶττάν τέ σοι / δίδωσιν ἐν δήμῳ φορεῖν / καλῶν λόγων ἀείνων, / ᾗ πάντα κινήσεις λέγων ("Offers you a tongue with fine flowing words to wield among the people, with which you will sway all when you speak"). Cf. Christodoulou (2013) 237–238.

[136] Socrates' 'opinion'; see also X. *Mem.* 2.6.10 ff. Cf. Christodoulou (2013) 238–239.

In Xenophon’s work *Memorabilia*, Pericles is presented as being carried away by Alcibiades’ arguments and opinions (X. *Mem.* 1.2.40 – 46) and in the end, “contests the nature of democratic law”[144] (X. *Mem.* 1.2.43: Alc.: Καὶ ἂν τύραννος οὖν κρατῶν τῆς πόλεως γράψῃὸτοῖς πολίταις ἃ χρὴὸποιεῖν, καὶὸταῦτα νόμος ἐστί;: “If, then, a tyrant, being the sovereign power, enacts what the citizens are to do, are his orders also law?” / Per.: Καὶ ὅσα τύραννος ἄρχων, φάναι, γράφει, καὶὸταῦτα νόμος καλεῖται: “Yes, whatever a tyrant as ruler enacts is also known as law").[145] Moreover, Socrates in Plato's work *Gorgias* states that Pericles has corrupted the Athenian citizens and made them "idle, cowardly, talkative, and avaricious" (Pl. *Grg*. 515e: Περικλέα πεποιηκέναι Ἀθηναίους ἀργοὺς καὶδειλοὺς καὶ λάλους καὶφιλαργύρους)[146] while concluding that the notorious Athenian general "was not a good statesman" (Pl. *Grg*. 516d: Οὐκ ἄρ᾽ ἀγαθὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ Περικλῆς ἦν, see 515e–516a).[147] The fact that Pericles may be included among the cases of unsuitable paternal figures concerning his inability to provide a worthy 'successor'[148] is likewise underlined by his attempts to educate Alcibiades, which, unlike Marcus' and Severus', were not particularly deliberate or serious.[149] Specifically – according to our sources – the young boy was entrusted to Zopyrus, a Thracian common slave (Plu. *Lyc*. 16.4: Ζώπυρον ἐπέστησε παιδαγωγὸν Περικλῆς, οὐδέν τι τῶν ἄλλων διαφέροντα δούλων), "so old as to be the most useless of all the other slaves in Pericles' household" (Pl. *Alc*. 1.122b: Περικλῆς ἐπέστησε παιδαγωγὸν τῶν οἰκετῶν τὸν ἀχρειότατον ὑπὸ γήρως).

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[137] See also Pl. *Phdr.* 269. Plutarch, using Plato’s words, writes that Pericles proved rhetoric to be “an enchantment of the soul” (*Per.* 15.4: ἔδειξε τὴν ῥητορικὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα ψυχαγωγίαν οὖσαν). According to some sources, Pericles’ art of speaking was inspired by his teacher Anaxagoras (Pl. *Phdr.* 270a; Plu. *Per.* 4.4 – 6; for the ironic innuendos see Pl. *Phd.* 97d–99 with Emlyn-Jones/Preddyn [2022] 497 n. 114). Pericles – according to Plutarch – was also closely linked with Zenon, and Protagoras (Plu. *Per.* 4.3 – 6, 8, 32, 36.2 – 3); cf. Pl. *Alc.* 1.118c; Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 295.

[138] Comic poets – mostly and clearly – vigorously attack Pericles; e. g. Cratinus (fr. 171 K.-A. 22 – 23: ὡς δὲ τυραννίδος ἀρχὴ λ[έλυται / δῆμος δὲ κρατεῖ: “Now that the rule of tyranny <is over> and the people rule”, similarly fr. 258 K.-A; for Cratinus’ fragments see Kassel/Austin [1983]; cf. Plu. *Per.* 3.3 – 4) presents “Pericles’ death as the end of tyranny” (Christodoulou [2013] 237; cf. Gomme [1956] 188 – 189). Pericles is also compared to Peisistratus (Plu. *Per.* 7.1: καὶ γὰρ ἐδόκει Πεισιστράτῳ τῷ τυράννῳ τὸ εἶδος ἐμφερὴς εἶναι: “it was thought that in feature he was like the tyrant Peisistratus”, see also 15 – 16; cf. Cratinus fr. 258 K.-A.; Christodoulou [2013] 234 – 235); cf. also Tamiolaki (2016) 14 – 24.

[139] For the criticism of Pericles’ sexual conduct see Plu. *Per.* 13.9 – 12, 32 with Christodoulou (2013) 235 – 236.

[140] Christodoulou (2013) 232 – 233, 236.

[141] Th. 2.65.5: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐπ᾽ ἐκείνου μεγίστη (“it was under him that Athens reached the height of her greatness”, see also 1.139.4, 2.65.1 – 13); cf. Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 286; Mara (2009) 112 – 113; Christodoulou (2013) 233 – 234, 240 – 252. Nevertheless, “the way Thucydides has presented Pericles ‘democracy’ does not constitute historical reality. It is rather […] a literary representation of the ideal relationship between the charismatic leader, the constitution and the citizens” (Christodoulou [2013] 253 – 254; cf. Foster [2010] 119 – 218).

[142] Thompson ([2009] 81) states that “the only lasting model of an anti-tyrannical posture is not found in Pericles, the doer of deeds, but in the historian who shapes his memory” (cf. Straus [1964] 229 – 230). For the characterization of Pericles’ rule as “a tyranny” see Th. 2.63.2: ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν; cf. also Th. 1.122.3, 1.124.3, 3.36.6 – 40.7; Ar. *Eq.* 1111 – 1114. For a discussion see Gomme (1956) 175 – 176; Strauss (1964) 169; Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 286 – 287; Thompson (2009) 90 – 91.

[143] “Thucydides was no radical democrat […]. If Pericles had not maintained this aristocratic authority, it is doubtful whether Thucydides […] would have accepted him so warmly” (Chambers [1957] 82). For Thucydidean criticism of Pericles see Strauss (1964) 144 – 145, 151 – 154, 229 – 231; Monoson/Loriaux (1998); Balot (2001) 148 – 149; Mara (2009) 112 – 116.

[144] Tamiolaki (2016) 15. Danzig ([2014] 20) declares that “Pericles deserved the treatment he received at Alcibiades’ hands, since as leader of the government he ought to have had some understanding of law”.

With that being said, even though Commodus, Caracalla – but also Alcibiades – are political and military figures whose careers are stigmatized by lust, violence, and arrogance, the responsibility of an unsuccessful father (or fatherly figure) or/and educator is again pointed out. Consequently, the status of Marcus and Severus as fathers and therefore as rulers is at stake. Especially Severus, who – as was mentioned before – clearly failed to embody the virtues he extolled, raises the issue of philosophical virtues applied solely in theory. A comic motif enters the picture here again. The satirist Lucian persistently highlights in his works the failure of these virtues' practical application and at the same time criticizes people who are "clever only in words" (Luc. *Symp.*

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[145] For the dialogue between Pericles' son and Socrates (X. *Mem*. 3.5) as "a rewriting of Athenian history based on un-Periclean principles" by Xenophon see Tamiolaki (2016) 20 – 24.

[146] See also Plu. *Per*. 9.1: πολλοὶ πρῶτον ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου φασὶ τὸν δῆμον ἐπὶ κληρουχίας καὶ θεωρικὰ καὶ μισθῶν διανομὰς προαχθῆναι, κακῶς ἐθισθέντα καὶ γενόμενον πολυτελῆ καὶ ἀκόλαστον ὑπὸ τῶν τότε πολιτευμάτων: "But many others say that the people was first led on by him into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures"; cf. Herodian's similar statement on Severus' soldiers, who are lured into greediness by the emperor himself (Hdn. 3.8.5: χρημάτων τε ἐπιθυμεῖν διδάξας καὶ μεταγαγὼν ἐς τὸ ἁβροδίαιτον: "teaching the men to be greedy for riches and seducing them into a life of luxury").

[147] See also Th. 2.59.1 – 65.4 and Plu. *Per*. 24.1 – 6, 30.4, 32; cf. Ar. *Ach*. 523 – 539. On this topic see also Gomme (1956) 182 – 189.

[148] Socrates points out that Pericles (except for Alcibiades) reared two stupid sons, and a mad ward, Cleinias (Pl. *Alc*. 1.118e: Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν Κλεινίας μὲν μαίνεται, τὼ δὲ Περικλέους υἱέε ἠλιθίω ἐγενέσθην). Alcibiades, in the same conversation, realizes that there is actually no man who "has become wiser through converse with Pericles" (Pl. *Alc*. 1.119a: Soc.: εἰπέ, ὅστις αἰτίαν ἔχει διὰ τὴν Περικλέους συνουσίαν σοφώτερος γεγονέναι […] Alc.: οὐκ ἔχω); for the debate on whether virtues can actually be taught and transmitted in general but also from a father to a son see Pl. *Prt*. 319 – 328, *Men*. 93 – 100b, *Alc*. 1.118 – 119a.

[149] "The results of Pericles' indifferent guardianship of Alcibiades are thus laid at his door" (Vickers [2012] 155).

34: περιττοὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις; cf. 30: ῥημάτια δύστηνα καὶ ἐρωτήσεις μόνον: "nothing but miserable phrase-makers and question-mongers"). He characterizes them as σχήματα φιλοσόφων (Luc. *Symp.* 30: "philosophers in dress"),[150] namely shameful impersonations (Luc. *Pisc.* 32: τὴν αἰσχύνην τῆς ὑποκρίσεως, 46: ἀνδρὶ ὑποκριτῇ φιλοσοφίας)[151] of genuine philosophers who have adopted only the philosophical outward appearance (Luc. *Pisc.* 37: [Frankness:] πώγωνας ἔχουσι καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν φάσκουσι καὶ σκυθρωποί εἰσι [...] ἀλλὰ ἤνεγκα ἄν, εἰ πιθανοὶ γοῦν ἦσαν καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ὑποκρίσεως αὐτῆς: "they have long beards and claim to be philosophers and look sour [...] I could have put up with it if they were at least convincing in their roles").[152] Unfeigned virtue however can be perceived only through someone's behavior[153] (Luc. *Herm.* 79: [Lycinus:] ἡ μὲν ἀρετὴ ἐν ἔργοις δήπου ἐστίν, οἷον ἐν τῷ δίκαια πράττειν καὶ σοφὰ καὶ ἀνδρεῖα: "virtue lies in action, in acting justly and wisely and bravely") and Lucian predicates that philosophical education is thus pointless if its principles are not practically implemented in everyday life and do not improve someone's character and moral quality (Luc. *Symp.* 34: ὡς οὐδὲν ὄφελος ἦν ἄρα ἐπίστασθαι τὰ μαθήματα, εἰ μή τις καὶ τὸν βίον ῥυθμίζοι πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον[154], see also 35; *Pisc.* 34: τοὺς μὲν λόγους ὑμῶν πάνυ ἀκριβοῦσιν οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν, καθάπερ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἀναγιγνώσκοντες αὐτοὺς καὶ μελετῶντες, ὡς τἀναντία ἐπιτηδεύοιεν, οὕτως βιοῦσιν[155]).

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[150] In contrast to the people who "truly cultivate philosophy" (Luc. *Pisc.* 37: ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφίαν ζηλοῦντες).

[151] They are also perceived as "impostors", see Luc. *Pisc.* 15: γόητας ἄνδρας, 42: πιθανώτεροι γὰρ οἱ γόητες οὗτοι πολλάκις τῶν ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφούντων: "These cheats are often more convincing than the genuine philosophers".

[152] See also Luc. *Pisc.* 31: [Frankness:] πολλοὺς οὐκ ἔρωτι φιλοσοφίας ἐχομένους ἀλλὰ δόξης μόνον τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος ἐφιεμένους, καὶ τὰ μὲν πρόχειρα ταῦτα καὶ δημόσια καὶ ὁπόσα παντὶ μιμεῖσθαι ῥᾴδιον εὖ μάλα ἐοικότας ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσι, τὸ γένειον λέγω καὶ τὸ βάδισμα καὶ τὴν ἀναβολήν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀντιφθεγγομένους τῷ σχήματι: "many were not in love with Philosophy, but simply coveted the reputation of the thing, and that although in all the obvious, commonplace matters which anyone can easily copy they were very like worthy men (in beard, I mean, and walk and garb), in their life and actions, however, they contradicted their outward appearance", cf. 34; Luc. *Symp.* 35: [Lycinus:] οἰόμενοί τινας εἶναι ἀπὸ τῶν σχημάτων: "thinking that they were men of importance because of the garb they wore". Similarly, Juvenal in his second *Satire* points out that appearances cannot be trusted (2.8: *frontis nulla fides*), cf. Luc. *Herm.* 15–21, *Symp.* 28. On the topos of outward appearance versus philosophical substance see also the first section of this article where we analyze Hdn. 1.9.

[153] Luc. *Herm.* 20: [Lycinus:] Πῶς οὖν οἷόν τέ σοι ἦν ἀφ᾽ ὧν ἔφησθα ἐκείνων τῶν γνωρισμάτων διορᾶν τὸν ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντα ἢ μή; οὐ γὰρ φιλεῖ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὕτω διαφαίνεσθαι, ἀλλ᾽ ἔστιν ἀπόρρητα καὶ ἐν ἀφανεῖ κείμενα, λόγοις καὶ συνουσίαις ἀναδεικνύμενα καὶ ἔργοις τοῖς ὁμοίοις: "How could you distinguish the true philosopher from the false by the marks (of external appearance) you mentioned? Such things are not usually shown in that way; they are secret and not visible, showing themselves in conversation and discussion and corresponding action".

[154] [Lycinus:] "It is no good knowing the liberal arts if one doesn't improve his way of living, too".

[155] [Frankness:] "most of them (the philosophers' imitators) are thoroughly up in your (Philosophy's) writings, but live as if they read and studied them simply to practice the reverse". For more instances of philosophers' caricatures in Lucian's works, where alleged philosophers behave disgracefully and totally in contrast to philosophical principles, see *Pisc.* 1–15, 17, 24, 29–38, 47–51; *Herm.* 9–13, 15–18, 76–83;

In contrast to Severus and Pericles, Marcus Aurelius indeed went down in history as a true philosopher. Yet although his personality and writings had a huge impact on thousands of people, who were initiated into philosophical thought and acquainted with the benefits of introspection, his words and direct teaching failed to pass on to his son the lessons that his pen had taught to mankind. Septimius Severus, on the other hand, advertised himself as Marcus' and Pertinax's replacement and continuator but clearly ended up being one of Lucian's caricatures of philosophers, a fact which impacted his sons' upbringing and later character and led to the famous fratricide. Eventually, even though he had managed to restore a period of overall stability and order for the empire, he totally failed in maintaining a peaceful family home.[156] In conclusion, despite the honest efforts of both emperors to provide worthy heirs, M. Aurelius and Severus chose poorly, confusing their familial paternal 'law' with Rome's well-being, thus condemning the empire to suffer. These tragic ironies led to their reigns being overshadowed by the underwhelming performances of their sons, which subsequently invite us to rethink to what extent they share the failure of their unworthy successors.

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DMort. 21; *Symp.* (the whole text of Lucian's *Symposium* narrates a philosophers' banquet where these men ridicule themselves due to their short-temperedness, aggressiveness, drunkenness, gluttony, and generally improper behavior); cf. also Juv. 2.1 – 8.

[156] According to Christodoulou ([2013] 236 with n. 62) "the leader who has stasis in his own home, who is unable to harmoniously govern his own oikos, is probably unable to govern the city"; cf. Isoc. *Nic.* 41. This remark also applies to Marcus Aurelius since, as previously stated, Lucilla conspired against her brother, Commodus, who rushed her execution.

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Andrew G. Scott

Memory and Emulation in Herodian's *Roman History after Marcus*

Herodian's *Roman History after Marcus* is positioned as a contemporary history of the recent past rooted in the collective memory of its readers.[1] This collective memory begins with the figure of Marcus Aurelius, whom Herodian memorializes in his final days as he is about to pass power to his son Commodus. With this scene, Herodian introduces the issues of memory and emulation that will play a significant role in the history.[2] In Herodian's work, Marcus left behind a political world in which he united his constituencies through his own virtuous behavior.[3] By beginning with the collective memory of Marcus Aurelius, Herodian emphasizes Marcus' status as a model ruler.[4] For this turbulent period of Roman history, Herodian also recognizes the importance of the connections that emperors made between themselves and their predecessors, which they used to legitimize their positions and advertise the type of ruler they would be.[5] If we trace the ideas of memory and emulation throughout Herodian's history, however, we observe that Marcus' undying memory from the beginning of the history is employed less frequently and with less faithfulness over time. Marcus' memory is therefore a touchstone for Herodian's readers that anchors the tumultuous events of this period and provides an explanatory rubric for what went wrong. Emperors after Marcus could use his memory to fashion their own personas in order to tap into the tradition that Marcus left behind and bring stability to their own day. But more frequent are instances in which Marcus' memory is replaced with someone else's or is forgotten en-

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[1] For Herodian's self-presentation as a contemporary historian and his interaction with the tradition, see Alföldy (1971); Sidebottom (1998) 2776 – 2780; Zimmermann (1999) 17 – 42; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 253 – 260; Hidber (2006) 73 – 100; Kemezis (2014) 229 – 239; Chrysanthou (2022a) 3 – 9; Scott (2023c) 193 – 197. Translations of Greek passages are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[2] Chrysanthou (forthcoming): "Paying tribute to one's memory (μνήμη) is another recurrent idea in Herodian's *History* […]" (with further examples from Herodian's history, many of which are discussed in detail below).

[3] Davenport/Mallan (2020) 420. Chrysanthou (2022a) 23 – 24 discusses these changes in models for imperial behavior, stressing the tension between appearance and reality. My concern in this paper is focused more on the issue of how the memory of the past within the history interacts with the collective memory of Herodian's readers and his role as narrator in pulling together the disparate events into a meaningful whole.

[4] As many have observed, Herodian's idealized image of Marcus Aurelius can be used to judge the emperors to come, See, for example, Alföldy (1973); Marasco (1998) 2840 – 2857; Sidebottom (1998) 2804 – 2805; Hidber (2006) 188 – 195; Chrysanthou (2002a) 251 – 256. Laporte and Hekster (2022) use Marcus' death scene in this manner as a point comparison with others throughout the history.

[5] These connections can be gleaned, for example, through the use of Marcus' name in official titulature, which stretched from Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus (e. g., *ILS* 392 – 399) to Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander (e. g., *ILS* 479 – 483). See also Hekster (2015) 205 – 221 for this development over the course of the second century and through the Severan period.

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tirely. In these cases, we observe examples of misjudgment, pandering to shifting allegiances, and, finally, the overall oblivion of tradition and the power of memory. This chapter examines the role that the memory of emperors, good and bad, plays in this work, especially with regard to how the memory of emperors changed over time and how Herodian uses this focus as a way of explaining how Rome went from the stability of Marcus' reign to the upheaval of the subsequent decades.

Collective Memory and Herodian's *Roman History after Marcus*

From the very outset of his work, Herodian appeals to collective memory as the basis for his narrative, stating that he has included only material that is found "in the recent memory of his readers" (1.1.3: ὑπὸ νεαρᾷ δὲ τῇ τῶν ἐντευξομένων μνήμῃ). This statement is a claim of accuracy, as it suggests that Herodian will not be able to deviate from the facts of which his audience is already aware.[6] It also emphasizes the knowledge of this period that Herodian and all of his readers shared.[7] Herodian chose to write about this period because it witnessed more disruption than usual. He cites the uniqueness of the successive reigns, changing fortunes in civil and foreign wars, disorder in the provinces, the devastation of cities, earthquakes and plagues, and the incredible lives of tyrants and kings (1.1.4). According to Herodian, similar things "had previously been recorded either rarely or not at all" (1.1.4: ἢ σπανίως ἢ μηδ' ὅλως μνημονευθέντας).[8] With his use of the participial form of μνημονεύω, Herodian draws attention to the commemorative power of historical narrative, through which he will formalize the events that populate his readers' collective memory and provide an understanding of the interconnectivity of those events.

The key component of collective memory that Herodian taps into is the memory of Marcus Aurelius. After enumerating Marcus' virtues, which included his clemency, fairness, respectability, bravery, moderation, and overall excellence (1.2.4–5), Herodian writes that the brave and moderate actions that showcased Marcus' military and political skill had already been recorded "by many wise men" (1.2.5: πολλοῖς καὶ σοφοῖς ἀνδράσι). This short sequence sets up a model for what an ideal emperor could be, and the overall achievement of universal consensus is expressed by Herodian after Marcus' death.[9] There Herodian records the reactions to his passing across the empire: "No one within Rome's empire received this message [of his death] without tears" (1.4.8: οὐδέ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέξατο).

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[6] See Hidber (2006) 94–100 for this idea, as well as a broader discussion of Herodian's methodological statement within the tradition. See also Zimmermann (1999) 17–18; Galimberti (2014) 36–37.

[7] Hidber (2007) 197: Herodian writes "as a representative of his generation."

[8] This entire section in Herodian draws on Thucydides 1.23, which also employs a participial form of this verb to mean "recorded" (Thuc. 1.23.3). See further Hidber (2006) 107–108.

[9] See Kemezis (2014) 234–235; Chrysanthou (2022a) 255–256.

This universal consensus is reflected in the way that Herodian discusses Marcus' memory in the death scene proper. There he twice, in quick succession, mentions the emperor's "undying memory." The first comes in a speech that Marcus gives to his advisors about handling the young Commodus, in which the ailing emperor lays out what differentiates the good emperor and the tyrant (1.4.4 – 5). Money and a bodyguard, he says, are not enough to protect a tyrant; only the ruler's goodwill (εὔνοια) toward his subjects can do that. The goodness of a ruler, he continues, is superior to the fear brought by bad monarchs, and people only become restive if they are treated with violence and arrogance. The references to Marcus' undying memory follow, one placed in the mouth of Marcus himself and another in the narrative itself, both using the same language (ἡ ἀίδιος μνήμη) (1.4.6 – 7):

> "τοιαῦτα δὴ συμβουλεύοντες αὐτῷ, καὶ ὧν ἀκούει παρὼν ὑπομιμνήσκοντες, ὑμῖν τε αὐτοῖς καὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστον ἀποδείξετε βασιλέα, τῇ τε ἐμῇ μνήμῃ χαριεῖσθε τὰ μέγιστα, οὕτω τε μόνως ἀίδιον αὐτὴν ποιῆσαι δυνήσεσθε." [...] ὃ μὲν οὖν νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐπιβιώσας μιᾶς ἀνεπαύσατο, πόθον τε τοῖς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀνθρώποις ἐγκαταλιπὼν ἀρετῆς τε ἀίδιον μνήμην ἐς τὸν ἐσόμενον αἰῶνα.
>
> "Giving such advice to him, and reminding him of what he is hearing at this moment, you will create for yourselves and all people the best ruler, and you will honor my memory most significantly, as it is only in this way that you can make my memory eternal." [...] He lived one more day and night before passing, leaving behind a longing for him among those of his day and an undying memory of his virtue for the coming ages.

The repeated references to Marcus' memory are striking. The passage strongly associates Marcus' undying memory with virtuous ruling, with examples of such in the speech itself as well as in the preceding passages, seen above. In this sequence, Herodian presents two ideas with which he assumed his audience agreed. First, the good ruler would be in possession of these virtues and rely on them to be an excellent monarch, and that such a ruler would govern with universal consensus.[10] Second, Marcus' memory would hover above the subsequent narrative, remaining in the mind of the reader as a point of comparison and, more frequently, contrast.

Contrary to the chaotic and confusing events that Herodian suggests swirl in the minds of his readers (1.1.4), Marcus' undying memory serves as a mnemonic touchstone that provides a firm footing from which Herodian can launch his subsequent narrative. The stability of Marcus' memory in Herodian's time of writing was made possible by the refinement that it had undergone in the preceding years, which Herodian obliquely references with his comment that many wise men had written of his reign, as noted above. Through this process of refinement, Marcus Aurelius had been dehistoricized and had become a stereotypical image of an ideal ruler, and Herodian expects his reader to share this idea.[11] In these opening passages, Herodian highlights several ideas, namely how less recent events or figures become part of the collective memory and shape the understanding of the more recent past, and how the writing of history serves as a way to remember the events of the past and to shape them into a cohesive narrative.[12] There is a tension, however, between the consensus-based world of Marcus Aurelius and the chaos of Herodian's contemporary period. Herodian indicates that by tracing the supposedly undying memory of Marcus Aurelius we can understand the causes of the confusion and lack of consensus, and thus form the disparate memories of his readers into an organized narrative.

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[10] My view here aligns with that of Kemezis (2014) 270 – 271, who argues that Herodian's point is that even a virtuous ruler in the mold of Marcus Aurelius would not be able to bring back the consensus of Marcus' age.

1 Commodus and the memory of Marcus Aurelius

Soon after his death, we see Marcus' memory play an important role during the reign of his son Commodus. Following Marcus' funeral, Commodus' first act, arranged by his advisors, was to visit the army camp to distribute a donative. There, Commodus makes a speech in which Marcus figures prominently. Commodus cites Marcus as the link between himself and the soldiers, a relationship that began even in his boyhood (1.5.3). Commodus pins his acceptance on his familiarity with the older soldiers and his claim of hereditary succession with the younger soldiers (1.5.4–6). This is an important distinction, as it shows that Marcus' memory and authority are active in the imagination of the younger soldiers and remain a unifying concept. This idea is continued in his following statements, when he encourages the soldiers to finish the war bravely by appealing directly to the memory of his father and what is owed to the late emperor: "This will bring you fame and in this way will pay back the memory of our common father with worthy gratitude" (1.5.6–7: "ὑμῖν τε γὰρ ταῦτα δόξαν οἴσει καὶ τὴν τοῦ κοινοῦ πατρὸς μνήμην χάρισιν ἀξίαις οὕτως ἀμείψεσθε"). Marcus' memory is employed here as a way to unify the soldiers and the newly acclaimed emperor, though Herodian suggests that the power of Marcus' memory is more potent with the older than the younger generation, a distinction that looks ahead to what will happen to Marcus' memory in the years to come.

The distinction between old and young can be seen again in the following episode. In an effort to get the young emperor to resist the urge to return to Rome, Claudius Pompeianus advises Commodus that he need not fear an uprising against him in

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[11] Zimmermann (1999) 322. See also Bruch and Hermann (2012) for Marcus' reception as an ideal ruler in the subsequent centuries; Rosen (1996) discusses the idea of Marcus as *civilis princeps* through the *Meditations.* Hutton (1993) 6–7 discusses the process of individual memories coalescing into collective memory over time around stereotypical images that are adopted by the larger group. For this process of refinement of Marcus' image in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, see Scott (2023a) 89–93.

[12] Cf. Schulz (2019) 258: "Historiography is an instrument to influence those who share a collective memory."

Rome and warns against inciting the enemy by his absence (1.6.5–6). In a sense, Pompeianus appeals to the *consensus universorum* that developed under Marcus as a reason why Commodus should trust his decision to remain at the frontier.[13] He closes his speech with an appeal to Marcus' undying memory, claiming that it has made all of Commodus' subjects loyal to him: "Your father's undying memory has confirmed the loyalty and goodwill of your subjects" (1.6.6: ἥ τε τοῦ πατρὸς μνήμη αἰώνιόν σοι πίστιν καὶ εὔνοιαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχομένων ἐβεβαίωσεν). Commodus, however, does not follow Pompeianus' advice and instead sends away his advisors (τοὺς φίλους), preferring the advice of his attendants (τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν θεραπόντων).

While his departure from the frontier causes a great disturbance (κίνησις) among the soldiers, upon his return to Rome the people are excited to see their emperor, who they hope will act like his father (πατρῴζειν) (1.7.1). We can therefore see at the outset of Commodus' reign that the emperor was expected to be a younger Marcus. In this same vein, Herodian reports that Commodus continues to follow his advisors for a few years, but that his powerful prefect Perennis eventually alienates the young emperor from them (1.8.1–2).[14] Still, we find that "thus far, the memory of his father and respect toward his friends held the young man in check" (1.8.3: μέχρι μὲν οὖν τινὸς ἐπεῖχε τὸν νεανίσκον ἥ τε τοῦ πατρὸς μνήμη καὶ ἡ πρὸς τοὺς φίλους αἰδώς). The inhibitive power that Marcus' memory had on Commodus was challenged when Lucilla formed a plot against her brother with Quadratus and other senators. This conspiracy turned the young emperor against the Senate (1.8.7), and it was followed by a series of other plots against his life, which were led by Perennis (1.9), by Maternus (1.10), and by Cleander (1.12–13.6). The result was the increased isolation of Commodus, who lost even the support of the people (1.15.7). His life came to an end in an eventual final plot and assassination (1.13.7–17.12).

For Commodus, Marcus' "undying memory" was intended to guarantee the loyalty of his subjects and to restrain the young emperor within the traditional behaviors of a more mature emperor. By the time of his death, however, the young emperor had lost the loyalty of the soldiers on the frontier and the people of Rome, and Marcus' memory was no longer able to curb his behavior. Yet aspects of Marcus' memory would remain important touchstones, at least for a short while, as we will see in the following episodes.

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[13] Hekster (2002) 46 notes that, contrary to the presentation in Herodian, it is likely that there were people in Rome who wished to undermine the authority of the new emperor. We should note the irony that, as Pitcher (2012) 273–274 points out, for two subsequent emperors (Pescennius Niger and Macrinus) the "failure to secure Rome" undermines their ability to establish their rule.

[14] Some advisors survived this initial period of hostility against them; at 1.17.2, Herodian states that Commodus had the names of the remaining advisors on the list of those he intended to kill (a group that appears to have included Pertinax, 2.1.4).

2 Pertinax as the new Marcus Aurelius

The fall of Commodus initially appears to be a failure of the younger emperor to adhere to the model of his father, rather than a faltering of his father's memory in its ability to unite the empire. This much seems to be confirmed when his murderers, in search of a replacement, look for someone who could recall the memory of Marcus Aurelius. When Laetus attempts to convince the praetorians that Pertinax should be the next emperor, he describes Pertinax, in language reminiscent of that used to described Marcus Aurelius earlier, as "a man respected for his age, moderate in his lifestyle, and acquainted with virtuous action" (2.2.7: ἄνδρα τὴν μὲν ἡλικίαν σεμνόν, τὸν δὲ βίον σώφρονα, ἀρετῆς δὲ τῆς ἐν ἔργοις ἔμπειρον).[15] Laetus goes on to state that the soldiers in the provinces carry the trials of Pertinax's deeds in their memory.[16] Although it is unclear why this would appeal to the praetorians, Laetus' comment has important implications.[17] It hints at the importance of the memory of Pertinax to come, and it also reveals the mixed reception that the successors of Marcus Aurelius would receive among Rome's constituent groups. This mixed reception has immediate consequences, as the praetorians acclaim Pertinax, but not with the same fervor as the people (2.2.9).

Pertinax expects a similarly mixed reception in the Senate, fearing that some might be dissatisfied with his non-noble birth, despite his moderate way of life and military distinction (2.3.1–2). The Senate, however, acclaims him unanimously (2.3.3). A speech of Pertinax follows, in which he urges the Senate to join him in administering an aristocracy and in keeping tyranny at bay (2.3.10).[18] As he reports the reaction to this speech, Herodian draws us back to Pertinax' virtues and makes an explicit reference to Pertinax' emulation of Marcus Aurelius (2.4.1–2):

> ἐπεὶ δὲ διεφοίτησεν ἡ φήμη τῶν τε λεχθέντων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ συγκλήτῳ καὶ τῶν πρὸς τὸν δῆμον γραφέντων, ὑπερήδοντο πάντες, σεμνὸν καὶ ἤπιον ἄρχοντα καὶ πατέρα, οὐ βασιλέα ἕξειν ἐλπίζοντες. τούς τε γὰρ στρατιώτας ἐκέλευσε παύσασθαι τῆς πρὸς τοὺς δημότας ὕβρεως καὶ μήτε πελέκεις φέρειν μετὰ χεῖρας μήτε παίειν τινὰ τῶν παριόντων, ἔς τε τὸ κόσμιον καὶ εὔτακτον μετάγειν πάντα ἐπειρᾶτο, ἔν τε ταῖς προόδοις καὶ τοῖς δικαστηρίοις πρᾶον καὶ ἥμερον ἦθος ἐπεδείκνυτο. καὶ τῆς Μάρκου ἀρχῆς ζήλῳ τε καὶ μιμήσει τοὺς μὲν πρεσβυτέρους ὑπομιμνήσκων εὔφραινε, τοὺς δ' ἄλλους πάντας ἐξ ὠμῆς καὶ ἐφυβρίστου τυραννίδος ἐς σώφρονα καὶ ἀμέριμνον βίον μεταχθέντας ῥᾷστα ἐς εὔνοιαν ᾠκειώσατο.
>
> When the report of what he had said in the Senate and written to the people became known, all rejoiced, hoping that they would have a venerable and gentle ruler and father, rather than a king. He ordered the soldiers to end their violence against the people, nor could they carry axes in their

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[15] For Herodian's portrait of Pertinax, see Galimberti in this volume.

[16] 2.2.8: οἳ τὴν πεῖραν αὐτοῦ τῶν ἔργων φέρουσι διὰ μνήμης ("[they] bear the experience of his deeds in their memory").

[17] Kemezis (2014) 257–258 comments on the irrelevance and ineffectiveness of the approach to the praetorians that is taken by both Laetus and Pertinax.

[18] For ἀριστοκρατία in Herodian as shared rule between emperor and Senate, see Marasco (1998) 2859–2862; Roques (1990) 44–45. See also Arbo (2022) 127–129.

> hands or strike anyone who happened to be present. He attempted to bring all affairs into a state of decency and good order, and he showed a mild and gentle character in his public appearances and in the courts. In his imitation of Marcus' rule, he pleased the older men by reminding them of him, and he easily brought all the others over to goodwill toward himself by giving them a moderate and carefree way of life after a cruel and violent tyranny.

In his chapters on Pertinax, Herodian repeatedly discusses the emperor's moderation, gentle rule, and turn away from tyranny.[19] In this passage, we see, not surprisingly, that Pertinax emulated Marcus' manner of ruling. This statement shows that, at least for the older generation, Marcus' memory continued to live on, and that Pertinax actively tried to live up to his predecessor's example, as well as to the citizens' expectations (2.3.7). Yet this comment also raises questions about the immortality of Marcus' memory if at this moment soon after his death it is not valuable for the younger generation. Furthermore, the praetorians remained alienated. Herodian reports that they resisted "being called back into discipline and good order" (2.4.1: ἔς τε τὸ εὔτακτον καὶ κόσμιον ἀνακαλούμενοι) and considered the gentleness and civility of Pertinax' rule (2.4.1: τὸ πρᾶον καὶ ἥμερον τῆς ἀρχῆς) to be an insult against them, which constitutes a resistance to the very goals of Pertinax' reign, as outlined in the passage above. The repetition of these terms from the passage above demonstrates that the very things that pleased the Senate and people upset the soldiers. This marks an important break, as the introductory passages on Marcus insinuate that these characteristics helped unite all Romans under him; now those same virtues irritate an important constituent group. Herodian appears to indicate that the praetorians never shared in the positive, undying memory of Marcus and that they rejected the consensus about Marcus' good rule that generally pertained otherwise.

Herodian picks up this theme again when he begins his narration of the praetorian uprising against Pertinax. He notes that Pertinax had established a well-ordered government and that only the praetorians were upset that their bad behavior was being curtailed, a complaint that ultimately led to their plot against him. In his description of the attack on the palace, it is not surprising to see Herodian noting that Pertinax faced his death with a "moderate and noble expression" (2.5.5: ἐν σώφρονι καὶ σεμνῷ σχήματι), a bearing that mirrors the emperor's previously described virtues.[20] His brief speech even persuaded some of the praetorians to turn back, "respecting the old age of the noble emperor" (2.5.8: σεμνοῦ βασιλέως γῆρας αἰδούμενοι). The vocabulary (σώφρων, σεμνός) emphasizes Pertinax' standing and also recalls Marcus' "noble character and moderate way of life" (1.2.4: σεμνῷ δ' ἤθει καὶ σώφρονι βίῳ). Upon Pertinax' death, the city fell into confusion (ταραχή), and the senators considered it a misfortune for all “to lose a gentle father and excellent ruler” (2.6.2: πατέρα τε ἤπιον καὶ χρηστὸν προστάτην ἀποβαλόντες; cf. σεμνὸν καὶ ἤπιον ἄρχοντα καὶ πατέρα at 2.4.1, above). They also feared a return to a tyranny, the soldier’s preferred mode of governance (2.6.2), the exact thing that Pertinax and the Senate had united to fight against.

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[19] In addition to above, see 2.4.4 ("all people rejoiced in common and in private in the orderliness and gentleness of his rule" / οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ κοινῇ καὶ ἰδίᾳ τῷ εὐτάκτῳ καὶ ἡμέρῳ τῆς βασιλείας ἔχαιρον) and 2.4.9 ("measured and interested in maintaining equality of privilege" / μέτριος καὶ ἰσότιμος); cf. 2.5.1, 2.5.5, 2.6.2.

[20] See Chrysanthou (2022a) 263–264 for Herodian's careful construction of this scene and its resonances with other parts of the history.

The reign of Pertinax is thus part Marcus Aurelius, part Commodus. Pertinax emulates Marcus, and Herodian describes him in much the same language: older, moderate, gentle, etc. Yet his emulation of Marcus only reveals the inadequacy of Marcus’ supposedly undying memory in the face of other pressures: Pertinax dies not in old age at the end of a long reign, but mere months into a brief reign, through an internal conspiracy, similar to the death of Commodus. His emulation of Marcus was able to please most constituencies, including the Senate, people, and soldiers in the provinces, but not the praetorians.

3 From Didius Julianus to Septimius Severus: conflicting models

After the death of Pertinax, Marcus’ supposedly undying memory fades and begins to be replaced with the memory of others. Pertinax’ assassination introduces Didius Julianus and his unorthodox path to power. Herodian focuses his account of Julianus’ rise almost exclusively around the issues of praetorian discontent and the so-called auction of the empire.[21] Bidding was undertaken by Julianus and Flavius Sulpicianus (2.6.8), but the praetorians did not trust the latter because of his ties to Pertinax, his son-in-law (2.6.9). Welcomed by the praetorians, Julianus first promised to rehabilitate Commodus’ memory (τήν τε Κομμόδου μνήμην […] ἀνανεώσεσθαι), as well as his honors and statues, while giving the praetorians the freedom they possessed under Commodus and a lot of money (2.6.10). The soldiers soon acclaimed Julianus emperor and gave him the name Commodus (2.6.11). Herodian goes on to state that Julianus acted with force in leaving the camp because he had gone against the opinion of the people (2.6.12), who cursed him as he passed with his armed guard (2.6.13).[22]

Julianus’ surprising and non-traditional rise to power reveals a lack of consensus about who would rule and how, which Herodian expresses through the language of memory and emulation. In this episode, we see that the memory of Commodus, not of Marcus (or especially of Pertinax), carries greater weight, at least among the praetorians.[23] The reasons for Julianus' desire, or even need, to rehabilitate Commodus' memory are obvious in relation to his path to power through the influence of the guard. They clash, however, with the repeated praise of Marcus Aurelius and Pertinax that was seen earlier, and they break with the inclination to emulate Marcus.

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[21] Appelbaum (2007) 201 is highly critical of Herodian’s account of these events, considering Herodian’s discussion of an auction as an “embellishment” of the material he found in Dio. See his article generally for a synthesis of the sources and political situation that led to Julianus’ accession.

[22] On the historiographic elements of this section of Herodian’s history, see Laporte in this volume.

Julianus' accession was novel in other ways as well, at least in Herodian's view. The praetorians were, according to Herodian, corrupted for the first time, becoming greedy and having no respect for their emperors, a change that for Herodian would last into the future (2.6.14).[24] The immediate problem with the soldiers' newfound love of money was that there was not much of it in the treasury. Ironically, it was Commodus' profligacy that had left Julianus with nothing with which to pay the soldiers the promised rewards (2.7.1–2). The contempt in which the soldiers now began to hold Julianus affected the outlook of the people, who at the circus began to call on Pescennius Niger as their protector (2.7.2–3, 5).

The memory of Pertinax, however, was not yet dead and would soon be employed by Pescennius Niger. Herodian's initial description of Niger matches that of the mature emperors seen earlier. Herodian states that Niger "was somewhat up there in age" (2.7.5: ἦν δὲ αὐτὸς τὴν μὲν ἡλικίαν ἤδη μετρίως προβεβηκώς) and accomplished in various areas. Further, Herodian reports the rumor that Pescennius Niger imitated Pertinax (2.7.5):

> φήμη τε περὶ αὐτοῦ διεφοίτα ὡς ἐπιεικοῦς καὶ δεξιοῦ καὶ τὸν τοῦ Περτίνακος βίον ζηλοῦντος· ὑφ' ὧν μάλιστα οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἐπείθοντο.
>
> A story made its rounds about him that he was fair and upright and that he emulated the life of Pertinax; the Romans were especially influenced by these traits.[25]

The language of emulation that Herodian uses recalls the earlier instance of Pertinax, who modeled himself on the behavior of Marcus Aurelius. In his alleged emulation of Pertinax, Pescennius Niger offers to the Roman people the potential return of a mild and fair ruler placed in opposition to the upstart Didius Julianus. The emulation of Pertinax, however also recalls the brevity of his rule and the violent death that he suffered, both symptoms of a lack of consensus around Rome's emperor. It is perhaps noteworthy that Herodian introduces Pertinax and Pescennius Niger similarly. Pertinax "was well regarded for both his many military and political deeds" (2.1.4: ἐν δὲ πολλαῖς στρατιωτικαῖς τε καὶ πολιτικαῖς εὐδοκιμήσας πράξεσι), while Niger "was well regarded for his great and many deeds” (2.7.5: εὐδοκιμήσας δὲ ἐν πολλαῖς καὶ μεγάλαις πράξεσι). Such an introduction hints that their fates may be similar.[26]

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[23] Cassius Dio (74[73].2.1) notes Commodus' damnation after his death, and also relates the praetorian's calling Julianus "Commodus" (74[73].12.1), though his focus is more on the reaction of the Senate rather than of the people.

[24] Chrysanthou (2022a) 84; Mallan (2022) 56. Herodian perhaps means corrupted by money here, since the praetorians had already assassinated Pertinax.

[25] There is a textual disagreement here. Stavenhagen (1922) and Lucarini (2005) print ὡς ἐπιεικοῦς καὶ δεξιοῦ **καὶ** τὸν τοῦ Περτίνακος βίον ζηλοῦντος, whereas Whittaker (1969) prints ὡς ἐπιεικοῦς καὶ δεξιοῦ **ὡς** τὸν τοῦ Περτίνακος βίον ζηλοῦντος. In either case, we see Niger as a Pertinax-like figure, whether he actively modeled himself as such or was simply perceived by others in that way.

Niger’s persona as a mature ruler is strengthened by his following speech, in which he extols his gentleness (2.8.2: τὸ πρᾶον). He presents himself as a champion of people, who have been calling for him to be their emperor (2.8.4). The praetorians, he says, will not protect Julianus, since he has not delivered on his promises to them (2.8.5). The soldiers set him up as emperor (2.8.6), and Herodian reports that Niger rejoiced and believed that he would become emperor through the will of the people and the eagerness that his men showed toward him (2.8.7). The empire seems to support him, but Niger decides to live luxuriously at Antioch and neglects to depart for Rome (2.8.9 – 10). Niger is also neglectful of the legions in Illyria, “expecting that the soldiers there, if they should ever learn of it, would be of the same mind with the wishes of the Romans and with the opinion of the soldiers in the East” (2.8.10: ἐλπίζων τοὺς ἐκεῖ στρατιώτας, εἴ ποτε καὶ μάθοιεν, ὁμογνώμονας ἔσεσθαι τῇὸτε Ῥωμαίων εὐχῇ καὶ τῇ τῶν κατὰὸτὴν ἀνατολὴν στρατοπέδων γνώμῃ). The potentiality of Niger’s rule is key here: he seems to think that playing the part of the good, mature emperor is enough, but he does not realize how Roman politics have shifted from the consensus-based rule of Marcus Aurelius. This lack of understanding is apparent from his emulation not of Marcus but of Pertinax, who ultimately failed in his ability to re-unite all Romans under his rule.

In the face of Niger’s failures, Septimius Severus represents an important turning point in his use of a multifaceted approach to appeal to various groups. The memory of Pertinax would remain potent, but only in the right hands. After it was not fully exploited by Niger, Septimius Severus comes on the scene and uses it for his own ends. His use of Pertinax’ memory, however, is much more strategic than Niger’s. Severus’ aim is not to turn himself into the next Pertinax, but rather to exploit his memory among the troops in order to win them to his side. He criticizes the praetorians while in Pannonia and says that Pertinax’ death needs to be avenged (2.9.8), as he reflects on what Pertinax meant to these soldiers (2.9.8 – 10):

> ᾔδει δὲ πάντας τοὺς κατὰ τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸν στρατιώτας μεμνημένους τῆς Περτίνακος ἡγεμονίας […] ὅθεν αὐτοῦ τὴν μνήμην τιμῶντες ἐπὶ τοῖς οὕτως ὠμῶς κατ’ αὐτοῦ τετολμημένοις ἠγανάκτουν. ταύτης δὴ τῆς προφάσεως λαβόμενος ὁ Σεβῆρος εὐμαρῶς αὐτοὺς ἐς ἃ ἐβούλετο ὑπηγάγετο, προσποιούμενος οὐχ οὕτω τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀντιποιεῖσθαι, οὐδ’ αὐτῷ τὴν ἐξουσίαν μνᾶσθαι, ὡς θέλειν ἐπεξελθεῖν τοιούτου βασιλέως αἵματι.
>
> He knew that all the soldiers in Illyricum remembered Pertinax’ leadership […] for which reason they honored his memory and were angry at those who dared to act so savagely against him. Taking this as a pretext, Severus easily got them to do what he wanted. He pretended that he was not in this way seeking the empire or to gather power to himself, but that he wished to punish the murder of such a great ruler.

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[26] For this connection, see also Chrysanthou (2022a) 39.

This passage brings us back to the accession of Pertinax, when Laetus told the praetorians that the soldiers in the provinces remembered Pertinax' earlier ordeals (2.2.8). Herodian reports that it was easy for Severus to win the Pannonian soldiers' support in this way, and he states outright that Severus was using his claim to avenge Pertinax' death as a cover for his desire to gain the empire (2.9.10). The ruse succeeds, as they quickly declare Severus emperor (2.9.11).[27] Severus then moves to win over the troops in Illyria by taking the name Pertinax, which he thought would also help him gain the favor of the Roman people, "through his [Pertinax'] memory" (2.10.1: διὰ τὴν ἐκείνου μνήμην).

The subsequent speech of Septimius Severus accords with the depictions of previous emperors in the history thus far. Like Herodian, Severus cites the death of Marcus as a turning point. Changes occurred under Commodus, who made mistakes because he was young, though they were "covered up by his noble birth and the memory of his father" (2.10.3: τῇ εὐγενείᾳ καὶ τῇ τοῦ πατρὸς μνήμῃ ἐπεσκιάζετο). This point reminds us of the inhibitive power of Marcus' memory that limited Commodus' actions, as we saw earlier. Severus then revises the story that Herodian previously told, claiming that these mistakes were not entirely Commodus' fault, as he was led astray by his advisors. These claims give Severus the opportunity to discuss in positive terms the reign of Pertinax, a "respected older man, the memory of whose courage and excellence is fixed in our minds" (2.10.4: σεμνὸν πρεσβύτην, οὗ τῆς ἀνδρείας τε καὶ χρηστότητος ἔτι ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν ἡ μνήμη ἐνέστακται). Severus is saying all the right things about Pertinax to the right audience, but the goal of his speech is not the universal consensus achieved by Marcus Aurelius. Instead, it is civil war, against both the praetorians in Rome and Niger's supporters in Syria (2.10.6–7). After the speech, the soldiers acclaim Severus as Augustus and Pertinax (2.10.9), and civil war becomes a foregone conclusion.

In these scenes, Septimius Severus successfully exploits the memory of Pertinax to win military and popular support. We must note, however, that this is not a matter of emulation, but rather it was a calculated move to become emperor. While claiming to honor the memory of Pertinax, Severus defines his persona by playing the role of *commilito* on the trip to Rome (2.11.2), which further garners the support of the military. In 193 CE, the memories of good emperors were no longer used for emulation, but had become a means of political manipulation.

Severus' return to the capital is a key moment in how he will define his reign. Having already brought the provincial soldiers (at least in Pannonia and Illyria) to his side, Severus must now present himself to the Senate and people of Rome, and he also must deal with the praetorians. Out of fear, the Roman people pretend to support Severus, and they condemn Didius Julianus' cowardice and Niger's delay (2.12.2). The lack of genuine support for Severus undercuts his earlier claims about the memory of Pertinax and their effect on the people. This reflects poorly, however, not on Pertinax and his memory, but on Severus' exploitation of it. As for the Senate, when they see Julianus' cowardice, they side with Severus (2.12.3).

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[27] Cf. Chrysanthou (2022a) 218.

Once in Rome, Severus carries out his promise to avenge the death of Pertinax. In a speech to the praetorians, he states, "You killed a good emperor who was noble in his seniority and whom you should have protected and guarded" (2.13.6: σεμνὸν πρεσβύτην καὶ βασιλέα χρηστόν, ὃν ἐχρῆν σώζειν καὶ δορυφορεῖν, ἐφονεύσατε). Severus here employs elements of the vocabulary of the good emperor that we have seen applied to figures like Marcus and Pertinax and thus reactivates the ideal, mature emperor-type. Yet there is no indication that Severus himself will adopt these characteristics, and in fact, it is for other reasons that he finds favor among the Roman people and the Senate. The Roman people, still fearful, later greet Severus and are impressed that he won the empire without bloodshed (ἀναιμωτί) (2.14.1).[28] In a subsequent speech to the Senate, Severus promises that he will "offer to his subjects the greatest prosperity, do all things in emulation of the reign of Marcus, and will take on not only the name but also the mindset of Pertinax" (2.14.3: ἀλλὰ βαρυτάτην εὐδαιμονίαν τοῖς ἀρχομένοις παρέξειν, καὶ πάντα πράξειν ἐς ζῆλον τῆς Μάρκου ἀρχῆς, ἕξειν δὲ τοῦ Περτίνακος οὐ μόνον τοὔνομα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γνώμην). It is important to note that these are Severus' own words, not the judgment of the Senate or of Herodian. The older senators, who earlier were said to have remembered Marcus and missed him, knew Severus was a man of deception and did not trust him; Herodian adds that "this very thing in fact was shown later" (2.14.4: ὅπερ καὶ ὕστερον ἔργῳ δέδεικται). For Herodian, Severus claimed that he would rule like Marcus or Pertinax, but in fact, because of his lack of complete hold on power, did not actually do so.

At the time of his reported speech, Severus' domination was not total, as his Caesar, Clodius Albinus, was still a possible rival. Herodian reports that some senators wanted Albinus to come to Rome and become emperor in Severus' absence.[29] The Albinus threat, and possible defection of the Senate, leads Severus to double down on his military support. After a speech of Severus, the army declares Albinus a public enemy (3.6.9), while Severus reprises his role on the march as *commilito*, "so that they endured their toil not only out of fear or expectation, but also in imitation and emulation of their emperor" (3.6.10: ὡς μὴ μόνον αὐτοὺς φόβῳ καὶ νόμῳ ἀντέχειν πρὸς τοὺς καμάτους, ἀλλὰ καὶ μιμήσει καὶ ζήλῳ τοῦ βασιλέως). Herodian also reports that Severus raised troop pay, which, according to Herodian, undermined military discipline (3.8.5) and connects Severus not to predecessors such as Marcus or Pertinax, but to Didius Julianus, whose path to power resulted in the corruption of the praetorians for the first time, as observed above. Herodian further notes that Severus ruled by fear rather than goodwill (3.8.8). These examples show that no longer does emulation make a princeps, but rather fear, expediency, and money are key in holding power.

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[28] See 2.8.8 for similar sentiment (that Niger would rule without bloodshed); for the term, see also 4.15.9, 5.1.4, 6.1.7, 6.9.8.

[29] See 3.5.1–2; Zimmermann (1999) 190–191 sees the favor that some senators show Albinus as evidence of a lack of a previously existing senatorial consensus.

4 Marcus Aurelius and the Later Severans

Despite his behavior to the contrary, Severus was still determined to make connections to Marcus Aurelius, especially through his succession plans. Severus named Caracalla Antoninus "wishing that he have the name of Marcus" (3.10.5: Μάρκου θελήσας αὐτὸν προσηγορίαν φέρειν). Severus' reasons for naming his son after Marcus Aurelius are clear. In the context of Herodian's narrative, however, it strikes an ironic note, as the reader of this history knows that Caracalla would not live up to the figure of Marcus Aurelius, a point made even more powerfully by the fact that Herodian reports in this passage that "his real name was Bassianus, prior to his entering the royal house" (3.10.5: ᾧ γνήσιον μὲν ἦν ὄνομα Βασσιανὸς πρὶν ἐς τὸν βασίλειον οἶκον παρελθεῖν). Perhaps more important, however, is the death scene of Septimius Severus (3.15), which recalls the opening death scene of Marcus and the passage of power to Commodus.[30] In his brief eulogy, Herodian notes that Severus was the most militarily successful Roman emperor, against both civil and foreign foes, and that he was passing to his sons immense wealth and a powerful army (3.15.2–3).

Upon Severus' death, Caracalla seized power and behaved in some ways like a fast-tracked Commodus, killing attendants and advisors immediately and trying to gain the favor of the army with gifts so that they would name him sole ruler (3.15.4–5). This latter act, however, is clearly in the tradition that Didius Julianus and Severus had set. In the face of Caracalla's desire to be acclaimed sole emperor, the soldiers, however, "remembered Severus" (μεμνημένοι δὲ τοῦ Σεβήρου) and instead supported the brothers' joint rule (3.15.6).[31] The memory of Severus initially protects Geta, but it is only a temporary postponement of what is to come and suggests a further attenuation of the power of memory in his work.

Herodian presents Caracalla and Geta as a study in contrasts. We are told that the majority favored Geta, who "exhibited an appearance of uprightness" (φαντασίαν γάρ τινα ἐπιεικείας ἐπεδείκνυτο). He was also moderate and gentle (μέτριόν τε καὶ πρᾶον) and acted with kindness and humanity toward his associates (χρηστός τε ὢν καὶ φιλάνθρωπος τοῖς συνοῦσι); with his excellent reputation and name he brought others into his goodwill and friendship (φήμῃ καὶ δόξῃ ἀρίστῃ πλείους ἐς εὔνοιαν καὶ φιλίαν προυκαλεῖτο) (4.3.2–3). Caracalla, on other hand, "did everything in a violent and vicious manner" (4.3.3: ἐμβριθῶς τὰὸπάντα καὶ θυμοειδῶς ἔπραττε). In the figure of Geta, we have a young emperor with some of the characteristics of the ideal, mature emperor, though Caracalla represents almost his complete opposite.[32]

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[30] Hekster (2017) 112–114; Chrysanthou (2022a) 274.

[31] Commenting on this passage, Chrysanthou (forthcoming) notes the similarities to Commodus' speech to the soldiers upon his accession, in which he calls upon Marcus' memory to win their favor in much the same way that the memory of Septimius Severus compels the soldiers to support Caracalla and Geta, at least initially.

Despite the army's support for him, Geta is unable to survive his brother's violent inclinations. After the murder of Geta, Caracalla is faced with the need to win over the Senate, people, and army. He delivers a speech to the Senate, in which he invokes and praises Romulus, Germanicus, Britannicus, Titus, and Marcus Aurelius as examples of those who plotted against family members (4.5.5 – 6).[33] This list of names from the Roman past resembles Marcus' visions of past tyrants from the opening scene of the history, but the evil emperor Caracalla inverts these examples for ill. It is therefore not surprising to later witness his novel forms of emulation that are not tied to appropriate models of the recent past. Caracalla begins his sole reign by mimicking the actions of his father and stressing his role as fellow soldier (4.7.4 – 7; cf. 4.12.2; 4.14.4). He soon settles on Alexander the Great as his model (4.8.1):

> ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ παρὰ τῷ Ἴστρῳ στρατόπεδα διῴκησε, κατῆλθέ τε εἰς Θρᾴκην Μακεδόσι γειτνιῶσαν, εὐθὺς Ἀλέξανδρος ἦν, καὶ τήν τε μνήμην αὐτοῦ παντοίως ἀνενεώσατο […]
>
> After he brought the camps on the Ister into order, he went down into Thrace where it borders Macedonia. All of a sudden he was Alexander, and he renewed his memory in many ways […]

This choice is not surprising, coming on the heels of the description of Caracalla as a *commilito*, but Herodian's consistent use of the language of memory and emulation shows that it is aberrant, which is further reinforced by Caracalla's supposed admiration of Sulla and Hannibal (4.8.5).[34] These emulative choices come to a head when Caracalla visits Alexandria, allegedly to honor the memory of Alexander (4.8.7).[35] We learn, however, that the Alexandrians had been jeering Caracalla over the death of Geta, as well as for imitating Alexander and Achilles.[36] The reaction of the Alexandrians to Caracalla's deeds highlight not only his vicious act of murdering his brother but also bizarre ways that he chose to present himself publicly. With his consistent focus on memory and emulation, Herodian underlines the severe disconnect between the undying memory of Marcus and the modes of emulation deployed by Caracalla.

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[32] Herodian's depiction of Caracalla and Geta is a little inconsistent. Both are said to have hated and plotted against the other (3.3.1), though, as noted above, Geta is also portrayed as the moral superior of Caracalla (3.3.2 – 4).

[33] See Kemezis (2014) 259 – 260 on the oddness of this speech and the Senate's inability to do anything about it.

[34] See further Zanin (2020) and Chrysanthou (2022b) 58 – 59, as well as the contributions of Asirvatham and Baron in this volume. Herodian (4.8.4) also says that Caracalla imitated Achilles, though it makes more sense for him to mean that Caracalla imitated Alexander's honoring of Achilles. See Whittaker *ad loc.*, as well as Chrysanthou (2022a) 233 – 235.

[35] See also 4.8.4, in which Caracalla imitates Alexander's emulation of Achilles; see Pownall (2022) 264 and especially Chrysanthou (2022b) 62 – 64, with many intratextual references.

[36] 4.9.3: "[…] making fun of him because he, being a small man, was imitating the most noble and mighty heroes Alexander and Achilles" (ἐκεῖνον δὲ χλευαζόντων ὅτι δὴ μικρὸς ὢν Ἀλέξανδρον καὶ Ἀχιλλέα γενναιοτάτους καὶ μεγίστους ἥρωας ἐμιμεῖτο). See Davenport (2017) for the historiographic implications of this rumor. Chrysanthou (2022a) 235 – 236 takes this example, and of Macrinus' flawed emulation of Marcus Aurelius that follows, as evidence of Herodian's attention to the differences between appearance and reality. While this is certainly true, my emphasis here is on their improper choices

After the death of Caracalla, we find the equestrian emperor Macrinus pulled in two directions. The first concern can be seen in Macrinus' letter to the Senate, with which Herodian initiates his narrative of this reign. In this letter, Macrinus presents himself as one of the older emperors of the past – not through specific mention of their names, but through the vocabulary that he uses. He notes that Caracalla "often attacked publicly my moderation and goodwill toward his subjects" (5.1.3: δημοσίᾳ πολλάκις τὸ μέτριόν μου καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχομένους φιλάνθρωπον διαβάλλων). He contrasts his good qualities with the shortcomings of inherited succession, asking, "Of what use is nobility, unless an upright and humane manner go along with it?" (5.1.5: τί γὰρ ὄφελος εὐγενείας, εἰ μὴ χρηστὸς καὶ φιλάνθρωπος συνοικεῖ τρόπος;). He further notes that fairness and honesty (ἐπιείκεια δὲ καὶ χρηστότης) are better than wealth and nobility (5.1.5–6) and that the nobility of wellborn emperors descends into disdain for their subjects, while those who come to power from their moderate actions show respect and honor to their subjects (5.1.7). Finally, he promises that they will live in security and freedom, which Marcus and Pertinax had given them (5.1.8). Importantly Macrinus here separates the "wellborn emperors," who were born to the purple and include Commodus and Caracalla, from Marcus and Pertinax, who came to power because of their virtues and in turn allowed their subject to live "in safety and freedom" (5.1.8: ἐν ἀδείᾳ καὶ ἐλευθερίᾳ).[37] Despite these claims about his character and even the promised connection back to Marcus and Pertinax, we learn that Macrinus was acclaimed by the Senate only because the threat of Caracalla had been removed. Herodian notes, however, that Macrinus did deliver on his promise of living in security and semblance of freedom, even if it was only for one year (5.2.2: ἐν ἀδείᾳ πολλῇ καὶ εἰκόνι ἐλευθερίας). This passage employs similar vocabulary to the passage at 5.1.8, though it is notable that the genuine freedom referred to earlier is now just the appearance of it.

Macrinus' second major concern is dictated by the potency of Caracalla's image among the soldiers.[38] In his initial speech to the troops in the East, the upstart equestrian emperor states (4.14.5):

> ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνου μνήμη ἔν τε τοῖς ἡμετέροις στέρνοις ἐγκείσεται, τοῖς τε ἐς ὕστερον παραδοθήσεται [καὶ] δόξαν ἀίδιον φέρουσα μεγάλων τε καὶ γενναίων ἔργων ὧν ἔδρασε, φίλτρων τε καὶ εὐ-

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of emulation or they failed attempts at proper emulation – essentially reflecting a lack of proper knowledge of the past and thus an inability to deploy appropriate and effective modes of self-presentation.

[37] As Whittaker notes (*ad loc.*), Severus had made a similar promise at 2.14.3.

[38] Herodian takes a real problem for Macrinus and filters it through his theme of memory and emulation. Macrinus seems to have tried to present himself as the champion of Caracalla's memory to the soldiers in the East, while courting the senators in different ways; see Scott (2018) 62–63.

> νοίας καμάτων τε κοινωνίας τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς. νῦν δὲ καιρός, τιμήσαντας ὡς χρὴ τὴν μνήμην τοῦ τετελευτηκότος, ἀφοσιωσαμένους τε τὰ πρὸς ἐκεῖνον, ἔχεσθαι τῶν ἐπειγόντων.
>
> His memory will endure in our hearts, and it will be handed down to those in the future, carrying with it the undying honor of the great and noble deeds that he performed, as well as of the affection and goodwill from the labors shared with you. But now it is time, having honored as necessary the memory of this dead man and having carried out these matters on his behalf, to take up more urgent affairs.

These words refer not only to the reality of the soldiers' affection for Caracalla but also to the rest of the story that Herodian will tell. The memory of Caracalla is not passed on *per se*, but the figure of the youthful emperor who requires above all support of the military will remain a part of future accessions. This concern also ties into the first aspect of Macrinus' self-presentation. While unable to reject Caracalla's memory completely, he fashions himself as a new Marcus Aurelius, at least according to Herodian. Macrinus' efforts to be another Marcus Aurelius, however, were superficial and suggest that Marcus' memory was being improperly recollected.[39] Herodian writes (5.2.3–4):

> ἐν δὲ τῇ Ἀντιοχείᾳ διέτριβε γένειόν τε ἀσκῶν, βαδίζων τε πλέον τοῦ δέοντος ἠρεμαίως, βραδύτατά τε καὶ μόλις τοῖς προσιοῦσιν ἀποκρινόμενος ὡς μηδ' ἀκούεσθαι πολλάκις διὰ τὸ καθειμένον τῆς φωνῆς. ἐζήλου δὲ ταῦτα ὡς δὴ Μάρκου ἐπιτηδεύματα, τὸν δὲ λοιπὸν βίον οὐκ ἐμιμήσατο.
>
> He wasted time in Antioch growing a beard and going about more quietly than was necessary, and speaking to those who were present very slowly and with difficulty, such that he was often not heard because of the lowering of his voice. He emulated these habits as if they were Marcus', but he did not imitate the rest of his life.

Worse for Macrinus, the soldiers see his luxurious living and dislike him for not being a military man (5.2.5), which was exactly the persona that Caracalla had built for himself.[40] The irony here is thick, as Macrinus' poor attempts at emulating Marcus end up alienating him from the troops, who had been accustomed to the emperor being their fellow soldier, as under Septimius Severus and Caracalla.[41]

This alienation from the troops eventually leads to Macrinus' demise. Herodian reports a rumor that a son of Caracalla had been found (which the soldiers believe) and that Julia Domna's sister was distributing cash (5.4.1). According to Herodian, the soldiers were affected by various inducements (5.4.2):

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[39] Chrysanthou (2022a) 105 notes the remarkable comparison that Herodian makes here.

[40] 4.7.7: "Account of these and similar actions he was beloved by them as a military man and he was held in esteem for his excellence" (διὰ δὴ ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τούτοις ὅμοια ὡς στρατιωτικὸς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐφιλεῖτο καὶ ὡς γενναῖος ἐθαυμάζετο). Cf. 4.3.4.

[41] Macrinus' connection to the soldiers was never strong; Herodian (4.14.3) notes that upon his accession Macrinus did not win the loyalty of the soldiers but was acclaimed because of the necessity of the moment.

> ἐνῆγε δ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀνέπειθεν ἐς πραγμάτων καινοτομίαν τό τε Μακρίνου μῖσος καὶ⟨τὸ⟩ Ἀντωνίνου τῆς μνήμης πάθος, καὶ πρό γε ἁπάντων ἡ τῶν χρημάτων ἐλπίς, ὡς πολλοὺς καὶ αὐτομολοῦντας φοιτᾶν πρὸς τὸν νέον Ἀντωνῖνον.[42]
>
> Their hatred of Macrinus and their passion for the memory of Antoninus that urged them on and convinced them to revolt, and above all of these things there was the hope of money that resulted in many of them deserting to the new Antoninus.

Thus, the very memory that Macrinus initially exploits ends up bringing about his demise, and he is also overthrown by soldiers who care mostly for money, in an echo of Didius Julianus' rise to power through the praetorians.[43] It is worth noting here that Macrinus' situation witnessed in geographic terms the split between the wishes of the Roman people versus those of the soldiers in the provinces. According to Herodian, it was said that Macrinus hastened to Rome, believing that the people there would be favorable to him (5.4.11), and Herodian himself states that Macrinus died, like Niger, doing what he should have long ago done, which was return to Rome (5.4.12).[44]

5 After Macrinus

Macrinus' attempt to transform himself into a physical manifestation of Marcus Aurelius turns out to be the last mention of Marcus' memory in Herodian's work, and following the overthrow and death of Macrinus, the language of memory and emulation is largely absent in Herodian's text.[45] In the remaining history we glimpse only a few examples of emperors in the mold of Marcus, and both of those are problematic. Alexander Severus was trained in moderation and received an education in Greek and Latin letters (5.7.5; cf. 5.8.1–2), and "he naturally possessed a mild and gentle character that was predisposed toward magnanimity" (6.1.6: ὑπῆρχε δέ τι καὶ φυσικὸν ἦθος πρᾶον καὶ ἥμερον τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ἔς τε τὸ φιλάνθρωπον πάνυ ἐπιρρεπές).[46] There was always, however, the boy's youth, which Herodian stresses (5.8.10), and we are reminded of Herodian's earlier statement that only mature, virtuous emperors brought stability in this period (1.1.6).[47] In this instance, the recent memory of the soldiers is what works against Alexander Severus, for when the troops turn against Alexander Severus and toward Maximinus, they recalled Alexander Severus' military failures in Parthia and his lack of bravery (6.8.3). This notice comes on the heels of Herodian's statement that Maximinus taught his soldiers to be emulators and imitators of his bravery (6.8.2), placing him more in the tradition of Septimius Severus and Caracalla with their self-presentations as fellow soldiers and models for their men to follow.

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[42] The variant καὶ ἡ ἀντωνίνου μνήμη καὶ ὁ πόθος from manuscript A (*codex monancensis graecus* 157) is included in the *apparatus criticus* by Mendelssohn (1883) 137 and Whittaker (1970) 26, but is ignored by Stavenhagen (1922) 143 and Lucarini (2005) 112.

[43] See also Chrysanthou (2022a) 285.

[44] See Cass. Dio 79[78].39.3–4 for a similar sentiment. For the connection between Macrinus and Niger in this regard, see Chrysanthou (2022a) 286.

[45] A sampling of similar usages from the remaining text suggests that these instances of memory, imitation, and emulation have no or little connection to the undying memory of Marcus Aurelius or the events and characters in the first five books: 6.1.7: no one could remember a person put to death without a trial; 6.5.10: no one likes to remember Alexander Severus' defeat by the Parthians; 8.7.6: in a speech Maximus says that there will be no remembrance of crimes that were committed under orders; 6.2.4, Alexander Severus' letter to Artaxerxes reminds the king of Parthian victories of Augustus, Trajan, Lucius Verus, and Septimius Severus.

[46] Alexander Severus thus shows the same promise as Geta, but, although his reign will be lengthier, he was able to stabilize the empire for only a brief time.

Toward the end of the history, several examples of older, virtuous emperors appear, though the consensus that held under Marcus was not able to be achieved again.[48] Herodian describes Gordian as a man about eighty years old whom the Senate and people would accept as emperor because of his previous experience and noble birth (7.5.2). He came to power, however, during an uprising in Libya led by young men who wanted to overthrow Maximinus' tyranny and who demanded, under threat of death, that Gordian become emperor (7.5.5 – 6). The Senate eventually did proclaim Gordian emperor (7.7.2), but "there occurred deeds of civil war under the pretense of liberty and freedom from fear" (7.7.4: ἐν προσχήματι ἐλευθερίας ἀδείας τε εἰρηνικῆς ἔργα πολέμου ἐμφυλίου ἐγένετο). The Senate also urged the provinces to rebel against Maximinus (7.7.5 – 6), and Gordian, facing an uprising against him in Carthage, died by suicide (7.9.4, 9).

As war with Maximinus approached, the Senate decides that they need co-rulers, to be chosen from of men "of the proper age and merit" (7.10.3: ἐν ἡλικίᾳ καὶ ἀξιώματι).[49] They eventually select Maximus and Balbinus, though the people are unhappy with this decision and demand a member of Gordian's family instead, eventually choosing Gordian's grandson, whom Herodian describes as "a mere boy" (ἦν τι παιδίον νήπιον) (7.10.5 – 8). For a moment, consensus rule is achieved again, with Gordian as Caesar alongside the older emperors, Maximus and Balbinus. Herodian writes that the emperors "from then on ruled the city with great decency and order, and they were applauded by all both privately and publicly" (8.8.1: ἦρχον δὲ τοῦ λοιποῦ τῆς πόλεως μετὰ πάσης εὐκοσμίας τε καὶ εὐταξίας, ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ πανταχοῦ εὐφημούμενοι). Everyone approves them, that is, except for the soldiers, who resented the praise bestowed on them by the people and the fact that they were chosen by the Senate (8.8.1). Furthermore, each man really desired sole rule, which Herodian attributes to their ultimate demise (8.8.5), and the men are soon killed by the praetorians (8.8.7). Herodian closes his work lamenting Maximus and Balbinus, who were "venerable older men worthy of account, both well born and having gained power through their own worth" (8.8.8: σεμνοὶ καὶ λόγου ἄξιοι πρεσβῦται, εὐγενεῖς τε καὶ κατ' ἀξίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐληλυθότες). They of course were replaced by the thirteen-year-old Gordian III. The positive nature of the death notice for Maximus and Balbinus is indicative of Herodian's belief about the decline that occurred after the death of Marcus.[50]

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[47] See Roberto (2022) for the similar view that in spite of Alexander Severus' good qualities, his demise is evidence on an ongoing decline.

[48] See Davenport/Mallan (2020) for an analysis of books 7 – 8 and the lack of consensus that contributed to the chaotic events of this period.

[49] For a possible recalling of Pertinax, see Chrysanthou (2022a) 56, with further references.

6 Conclusion

Despite the fact that Herodian emphasizes the undying memory of Marcus Aurelius at the beginning of the history, his narrative shows how Marcus' successors embraced different models of emulation and also how the memory of other emperors, such as Pertinax, Septimius Severus, and Caracalla, was in turn passed down or needed to be reckoned with. From the reign of Pertinax, we see the shifting preferences of important political groups and the turning away from the consensus-based rule that existed under Marcus. Pertinax' memory is used to create legitimacy among certain groups, while other means, either the memory of bad emperors such as Commodus or the appearance as a fellow soldier, are used to appeal to the military. After the death of Pertinax, we find Septimius Severus drawing on the examples of Marcus, Pertinax, and Didius Julianus in varying ways, deploying their individual models as he saw fit for his own gain. Caracalla, while playing a role similar to Commodus, ultimately rejected the models of the recent past in favor of Alexander, though his use of that traditional model was ultimately unsuccessful. Macrinus attempted to revive the memory of Marcus Aurelius, but his imitation of the ideal emperor was feeble and ineffective. As the history comes to an end, the continuity with the past feels completely broken. The events of the final three books are evidence of the lack of consensus within the empire, which is mirrored by the absence of the language of memory and emulation that was so frequent in books 1–5. By the end of the history, Marcus' memory has become a fossilized notion from the past of what a good emperor was supposed to be, and the attenuation of its power emphasizes the disconnect between past and present in Herodian's work.

As noted above, Herodian writes that the events that he records were part of the collective memory of his readers but had been recorded infrequently or not in their entirety. The goal of his work is therefore to create a cohesive narrative from these disparate and ununified memories. The instability of his age, which Herodian names as his theme, is mirrored in the way that he tracks the preservation of memory and the emulation of emperors throughout his history. Herodian's achievement as the narrator of these events is to take the information shared among his contemporaries and make sense of it through his narrative. Throughout the first five books, his repeated emphasis on memory and emulation draws the reader back, again and again, to the ideal portrait of Marcus Aurelius and his undying memory. The replacement of Marcus' memory with another is not just a way to make comparisons between Herodian's ideal emperor and his successors. It is an analytical tool that tracks the changes and challenges that emperors faced among Rome's various groups. By tracing the memory of Marcus and others throughout the history, Herodian emphasizes the difficulty of returning to consensus-based rule, an idea that mirrors the uncertainty and volatility with which his history ends.

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[50] Laporte/Hekster (2022) 106.

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Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou

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

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

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[1] 1.10.3; 2.7.7; 2.8.10; 2.13.1; 3.12.1; 3.12.5; 5.5.2; 6.2.1–2; 6.3.1; 6.6.1; 6.7.3; 7.10.1. I use the *LSJ* for the translation of the words throughout this paragraph.

[2] 1.10.3; 2.8.8; 2.13.1; 2.15.4; 3.5.2; 3.7.1; 3.9.12; 5.1.1; 5.6.2; 6.2.1–2; 6.2.4; 6.7.2; 3.14.1; 4.3.2; 4.10.1; 4.11.1; 4.12.4; 4.13.1; 4.15.7; 7.6.3; 7.6.5; 7.6.9.

[3] 7.1.2.

[4] 2.2.2.

[5] 2.6.1; 2.6.5; 3.2.7; 3.8.10; 5.4.1; 7.5.7; 7.7.1.

[6] 2.8.7.

[7] 3.7.1; 4.10.1; 4.15.7; 5.4.10; 6.2.3. Cf. the compound verbs διαπέμπω ('send off a report in different directions', 2.9.12; 3.1.1) and ἐκπέμπω ('send out or forth'; 'dispatch', 2.13.2; 7.6.3).

[8] 5.8.5.

[9] 1.12.6; 1.13.1; 2.12.1; 3.1.1; 3.12.1; 4.14.1; 6.5.6; 6.9.3; 7.6.7; 7.8.5; 8.1.4; 8.6.6. Cf. the compound verbs διαγγέλλω ('give notice by a messenger', 1.7.1; 1.15.2; 2.6.6; 2.7.6; 2.9.1; 4.4.5; 4.8.7; 7.8.2; 7.8.7), ἐπαγγέλλω ('announce'; 'proclaim', 1.6.8; 3.14.2), and ἀπαγγέλλω ('bring tidings'; 'report', 1.13.4; 2.2.3; 2.9.5; 2.11.7; 3.7.1; 4.14.4; 5.4.1; 6.6.5; 6.9.1; 7.8.1; 7.9.4; 7.9.9; 8.2.2; 8.3.1).

[10] 2.9.3; 2.11.3; 2.11.6; 3.3.4; 3.4.7; 3.5.3; 4.8.7; 5.4.5; 5.4.10; 6.7.3; 8.6.1; 8.8.5; 8.8.7.

[11] 2.11.3; 2.12.3; 2.12.4; 3.5.2; 3.11.8; 3.14.2; 3.14.4; 4.5.2; 5.5.2.

[12] 3.2.1; 3.3.3; 3.4.1; 3.6.1; 8.8.7.

[13] 1.17.6; 2.1.10; 4.15.8; 5.2.1.

[14] 1.4.8; 1.7.1; 1.9.8; 1.15.1; 2.1.3; 2.2.3; 2.4.1; 2.4.2; 2.7.5; 2.7.7; 2.8.7; 2.11.3; 3.2.7; 4.11.1; 5.4.1; 5.4.8; 5.8.5; 6.8.7; 7.1.8; 7.5.7; 7.6.9; 7.10.5; 8.5.6. On the frequent inclusion of φήμη-references in Herodian's work, which is unparalleled in earlier and contemporary Greek historiography, see Chrysanthou (2023). There, I suggest that Herodian follows the practice of Latin-language historians such as Tacitus and Livy.

[15] 1.4.8; 3.11.7; 6.2.3; 6.9.1.

[16] 1.6.8; 1.9.8; 1.9.9; 2.12.3; 2.13.1; 2.15.3–4; 3.5.4; 3.5.8; 3.8.1; 3.8.6; 3.11.9; 3.12.2; 4.10.2; 4.10.5; 4.12.6–7; 4.12.8; 5.2.1; 6.2.1; 6.2.3; 6.2.4; 6.3.5; 6.7.2; 7.2.8; 7.6.3; 7.6.5; 7.6.6; 7.6.8; 7.6.9; 7.7.5.

[17] 1.7.1; 1.9.9; 6.7.2; 8.6.8.

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

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

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

[19] 2.6.5; 2.6.6.

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

[21] 3.8.10; 5.4.10; 8.6.8.

[22] 2.12.2; 3.11.9; 4.4.8.

[23] 2.7.7; 5.3.10.

[24] 3.12.6.

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

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

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

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

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

Closely related to this point is the fact that the truth or falsehood of reports in Herodian's history is usually not a matter of interest to the narrator or in-text characters. Herodian is often interested in stressing the unexpected arrival of a message (e.g. 6.2.1; 6.7.2; 6.9.1; 8.6.7) or its secret and privacy (2.13.1–2; 3.5.2; 3.8.6), but he is normally not so attentive to clarifying whether it is true or not.[35] This point is of special significance, for it reveals how easily unverifiable information circulated throughout the Empire and the credulity of the people who received it. Crucially, in-text recipients of news standardly believe the message recorded, even if the reader is often primed to deduce from the surrounding narrative the falsehood or deceptive nature of a report.[36] Indeed, it is often this disjunction between the knowledgeable reader and the unwitting characters that conveys interpretative insight into the deception and misinformation involved in imperial politics.

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

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

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

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

[33] Septimius Severus (3.8.1; 3.9.12); Maximinus (7.2.8).

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

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

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

1 Scene-Shifting and Structure

Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire* covers the period of around 58 years from the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius to the accession of Gordian III (AD 180 – 238). In the prologue to his work, Herodian makes clear that he will proceed to provide a linear chronology of events: "How all this happened I intend to relate in chronological order, taking each reign in turn" (1.1.6).[38] Naturally, the narration of history in chronological order leads Herodian to place next to each other events that are not closely related thematically or geographically. The insertion of news, oral or written messages, serves to smoothen the transition from one place to another or from one subject to another, thus hardly interrupting the narrative flow of the *History.*[39]

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

[37] See the bibliography cited earlier on n. 34.

To give a few examples, the report (φήμη) of Commodus' homecoming (1.7.1) brings about a narrative shift from Danube to Rome where Commodus is enthusiastically welcomed (1.7.2–3). The news about the Roman people's positive feelings and their shouting in favour of Niger (2.7.6: διαγγελθείσης δὲ τῆς τοῦ δήμου Ῥωμαίων γνώμης καὶ τῆς ἐπαλλήλου ἐν ταῖς συνόδοις βοῆς) moves the scene from Rome and the emperor Didius Julianus to Antioch where Niger strives for the purple himself (2.7.7–8.10). Then another report of what happened (διηγγέλλετο τὰ πραττόμενα) in Rome (and/or Antioch?)[40] reaches Pannonia (2.9.1) and thus shifts narrative attention from Niger to Septimius Severus. The latter is another aspirant to the title of *princeps*, whose actions and immediate departure from Pannonia are detailed in the following chapters (2.9.2–11.6). The narrative then follows Severus' trip towards Rome and his arrival in the city is marked by the announcement of the news to Julianus (2.11.7: ὡς δὲ ταῦτα τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ ἀπηγγέλλετο). After Julianus' death and Severus' acclamation as emperor in Rome (2.12.1–13.1), the narrative turns to Niger by referring again to the circulation and reception of news: "When Niger received the totally unexpected news (cf. ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷὰμηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ) that Severus had taken Rome, where he had been hailed as emperor by the senate, and was now leading a combined force of the whole Illyrian army and a second land and naval force, he was thrown into a state of complete panic" (3.1.1). This news shifts attention to and introduces the fighting between Niger and Severus, which is the subject of the following narrative (3.1.2–4.9). The news of Albinus' imperial aspirations has the same effect – "when Severus learned (γνούς) what had happened, he no longer made any secret of his enmity […] Now he summoned the entire army and addressed them" (3.6.1) – as does the news of Severus' subsequent hostility,[41] which signals the beginning of the civil war between the two rivals. In this connection, Hidber has noticed that, by following the track of letters and news, Herodian switches between the different story-lines and thus skillfully depicts the turbulent year of AD 193, which features more than one emperor or claimant to the throne.[42]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Plot-driving

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

Letters also play a critical role in initiating the plot of the prefect Macrinus against the emperor Caracalla (4.12.4 – 8; 4.13.1). On this point Scott has observed that "Herodian's conspiracy narratives of the praetorian prefects Laetus, Plautianus, and Macrinus […] show various similarities among themselves", including the fact that "a written document plays a crucial role, either as a motivation to action or proof of guilt".[55] This is also the case in Herodian's account of the plot of Gordian I against the praetorian prefect Vitalianus: "Gordian transferred to his command some centurions and soldiers, to whom he gave a letter sealed in folding tablets (κατασεσημασμένα γράμματα ἐν πτυκτοῖς πίναξι), the normal method used by the emperor to send private, secret messages" (cf. δι᾽ ὧν τὰ ἀπόρρητα καὶ κρυπτὰ ἀγγέλματα τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν ἐπιστέλλεται) (7.6.5). Written documents thus reveal themselves to be central to the development of conspiracy narratives in Herodian's history: they not only make a plot known, but also drive it. A plot unfolds according to and because of a written message. Notably, the same effect can occur in the case of suppressing the diffusion of news. Here we may think of the development of Cleander's move against Commodus due to the isolation of the emperor and the fact that Cleander was not subject to suspicion (1.12.6; 1.13.4).[56]

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

[55] Scott (2018) 445.

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

Besides battles, other momentous events such as imperial accessions and deaths are profoundly affected by the intervention of news and messages. The news of the soldiers' auction of the Empire plays an active role in the sequence of events leading to Julianus' accession (2.6.6–7). Similarly, the reputation (φήμη) of Niger's good character (2.7.5) and the announcement of the news about the positive feeling of the Romans towards him (2.7.6) contribute to Niger's rise to power in Antioch. The senate acknowledges Septimius Severus as emperor only after they learn of Julianus' complete loss of morale (2.12.6). Notice also the causal link drawn between Macrinus' accession and the announcement of Artabanus' approach towards Rome (4.14.1–2): "Macrinus obtained the Principate not so much through the love and loyalty of the soldiers as through necessity and the demands of the immediate situation" (4.14.3). Also notable is his acclamation in Rome by the senate and the people after they read the letter he wrote from Antioch, in which he proclaimed a regime of *aristokratia* and made several promising statements about his rule (5.1.1 – 8; 5.2.1). Furthermore, the rumour that Elagabalus was the son of Caracalla leads him to win over the soldiers and help his rise to power (5.3.10 – 11; 5.4.1 – 2). The spread of the news that some young men have offered the Empire to Gordian I causes the whole population of the city to gather and acclaim Gordian as Augustus (7.5.7). Similarly, the false rumour that Maximinus has been killed (7.6.9) leads the senate to give the title of Augustus to Gordian I and his son (7.7.1 – 2). As far as death is concerned, one might think in particular of Gordian I's suicide, brought about by the news of Capellianus' march on Carthage (7.9.4; 7.9.9).

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

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

3 Characterisation

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

Herodian uses written and oral reports to illustrate the merits or demerits of individuals in several ways. First, an important theme in Herodian's work concerns the quickness or slowness in one's handling of news spreading. Consider, for example, Commodus' quick reaction in killing Perennis' son before the news of his father's death became known (1.9.8). Herodian characterises Commodus by his promptness, despite the fact that this trait did not remain constant throughout Commodus' reign (cf. 1.13 – 17). Severus arrived in Italy before any news of his coming had reached the inhabitants (2.11.3). Severus' swiftness and energy – two recurrent elements in Herodian's characterisation of Severus[58] – are clearly brought to the fore. The same is perceptible in Severus' British expedition: "He and his sons completed the march to the coast sooner than they were expected and before the news of their arrival" (3.14.3). Similarly, Maximinus, after being acclaimed by the soldiers as emperor, advised them "to get hold of their arms and quickly overpower Severus Alexander before the news arrived, while he was still in the dark" (6.8.7). Here, as with Septimius Severus, Maximinus' energy and military prowess are highlighted and reinforce Herodian's overall picture of Maximinus as a soldierly emperor.

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[58] See 2.12.2; 2.14.6; 3.1.1.

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

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

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

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

[60] See Chrysanthou (2022) 120 – 121.

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

Indeed, Herodian shows an acute awareness of the characterising effect that the response to the dissemination of a specific message has. Accordingly, he often describes how individuals react to the news of an imminent threat, creating interesting parallels and juxtapositions within his text. Consider, first, Julianus’ reaction to the news of Severus’ approach to Rome: “When Julianus received news of this, he was reduced to a state of utter desperation” (ὡς δὲ ταῦτα τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ ἀπηγγέλλετο, ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἀπογνώσει ἦν) (2.11.7). Compare the similar reaction of Niger: “When Niger received the totally unexpected news (ὁ δὲ Νίγρος, ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷ μηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ) that Severus had taken Rome […] and was now leading a combined force of the whole Illyrian army and a second land and naval force, he was thrown into a state of complete panic (ἐν μεγίστῃ ταραχῇ ἦν)” (3.1.1). Albinus’ reaction is also noteworthy: “When the news reached Albinus that Severus was rapidly approaching and would soon be upon him, it terrified him, because he was living idly whiling away his time in easy living” (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Ἀλβίνῳ μὴ μέλλων ὁ Σεβῆρος ἀλλ’ ἤδη παρεσόμενος, ὑπτιάζοντι καὶ τρυφῶντι μεγάλην ταραχὴν ἐνέβαλε) (3.7.1). The parallel reactions of the three men, which are highlighted to the reader by identical words and phrases,[62] illuminate Severus’ superior strength, which was similarly emphasised by the panic of the Italians at the news of his approach (2.11.6)[63] and Severus’ own bold and energetic reactions to the reports of other daring challenges.[64] At the same time, they create a more general pattern of inappropriate imperial behaviour in war. This behavioural pattern characterises other less ideal emperors in Herodian’s subsequent narrative as well, thus giving a warning signal for the future of their reigns. One might think, in particular, of Severus Alexander’s reaction to the news of the Persian threat – “Alexander was badly upset at the suddenness and unexpectedness of the report that had come” (πρὸς τὴν αἰφνίδιον καὶ παρ’ ἐλπίδα κομισθεῖσαν ἀγγελίαν οὐ μετρίως ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐταράχθη, 6.2.3) – as well as that of Gordian I to the news of the imminent approach of Capellianus and his army: “The news of the army’s advance on the city reduced Gordian to a complete panic and the Carthaginians to a state of indiscipline” (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Γορδιανῷ ὁ στρατὸς προσιὼν τῇ πόλει, αὐτός τε ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δέει ἦν, οἵ τε Καρχηδόνιοι ταραχθέντες) (7.9.4). Contrast Maximinus’ reaction to the news of the unexpected resistance of the Aquileians, which reminds us of Septimius Severus’ prompt reactions earlier: “Maximinus was very angry with the Pannonian generals for not putting their hearts into the battle, and he hurried there in person with his army, expecting to take the city without any difficulty” (8.2.2).

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[61] I thank Adam Kemezis for this point.

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

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

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

The recipient of news or messages in Herodian’s history is often not an individual but a group of people. One case in point is Herodian’s description of the aftermath of an emperor’s death.[65] The circulation of the news (cf. ἐπειδὴ διεφοίτησεν ἡ φήμη) of Marcus Aurelius’ death, for instance, caused universal acclamation of the emperor: “There was not a single subject throughout the Roman Empire that did not grieve at such message and join together with one voice to proclaim his praise. Some praised his kindness as a father, some his goodness as an emperor, others his noble qualities as a general, still others his moderation and discipline as a ruler. And everyone was telling the truth” (1.4.8). So too Commodus: “When the Roman people heard the news (cf. τῆς φήμης) of Commodus’ death and Pertinax’s rise to power, they went practically mad with excitement (cf. πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἐνθουσιῶντι ἐοικὼς ἐξεβακχεύετο). Everyone rushed to and fro and took delight in telling their relatives the news (cf. διέθεόν τε, καὶ τοῖς οἰκείοις ἕκαστος χαίρων ἀπήγγελλε), especially if they were people of importance or wealth, since they were the ones whom it was known Commodus was always making plans to destroy” (2.2.3). Pertinax’s murder is also greeted by the multitude: “When the news of the emperor’s [i. e. Pertinax’s] murder became generally known among the people (cf. ἐπειδὴ δὲ διεφοίτησεν εἰς τὸν δῆμον ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀναίρεσις), everyone was thrown into a confusion of grief and rushed about as though possessed” (2.6.1). Similarly, as soon as the head of Maximinus was brought to Rome, together with the news of victory, there were scenes of celebration (8.6.7): “People of all ages ran to the altars and the temples; no one stayed indoors. They were swept along as though a spirit was in control of them, congratulating each other and all rushing together to the circus, as though there were a public assembly” (cf. ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐφέροντο συνηδόμενοίὸτε ἀλλήλοις καὶ ἐς τὸν ἱππόδρομον συνθέοντες ὥσπερ ἐκκλησιάζοντες) (8.6.8). There are clear verbal correspondences between all these scenes, which are designed to bring into sharp relief the unanimous displeasure of all social/military groups with Marcus’ death – a unique situation of cohesiveness resulting from Marcus’ exceptional leadership – as well as opposing the popular enthusiasm towards the death of the tyrants Commodus and Maximinus with the popular annoyance with the death of the virtuous Pertinax. Such detailed descriptions of collective responses to news of death tell us not only about the persons whom the message concerns (cf. Marcus’ and Pertinax’s virtues vs. Commodus’ and Maximinus’ tyranny) but also about the character of the people who receive it.

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

4 Conclusion

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

The foregoing discussion has further shown that Herodian resorts to the spread of news in organising his narrative discourse. He makes use of how news spreads like wildfire, noting its ability to travel across different places, in order to bring about a narrative shift and smoothen the transition from one place, character, or subject to another. News often functions as a subject heading, allowing Herodian to introduce new or parallel story lines, in the manner of a camera following in a sequential manner places, events, and actions which are not closely linked by their geographical location or their subject. It thus articulates a coherent plot by putting into order the material of a most disordered historical period and making history more readable and intelligible.

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

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

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

[68] This article is funded by the European Union (ERC, GROUPMINDS, 101115022). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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III Time and Space in Herodian’s Text

Laura Mecella

Zwischen pragmatischer Geschichtsschreibung und Biographie: Herodian und ein neues Zeitmaß

1 Herodian in der Debatte über Biographie und Geschichte

> Οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν, ἀλλὰ βίους, οὔτε ταῖς ἐπιφανεστάταις πράξεσι πάντως ἔνεστι δήλωσις ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας, ἀλλὰ πρᾶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ῥῆμα καὶ παιδιά τις ἔμφασιν ἤθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχαι μυριόνεκροι καὶ παρατάξεις αἱ μέγισται καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων. (Plu. *Alex.* 1.2)
>
> Denn ich schreibe nicht Geschichte, sondern zeichne Lebensbilder, und hervorragende Tüchtigkeit oder Verworfenheit offenbart sich nicht durchaus in den aufsehenerregendsten Taten, sondern oft wirft ein geringfügiger Vorgang, ein Wort oder ein Scherz ein bezeichnenderes Licht auf einen Charakter als Schlachten mit Tausenden von Toten und die größten Heeresaufgebote und Belagerungen von Städten. (Übers. K. Ziegler)
>
> *Pelopidas Thebanus, magis historicis quam vulgo notus. Cuius de virtutibus dubito quem ad modum exponam, quod vereor, si res explicare incipiam, ne non vitam eius enarrare, sed historiam videar scribere* […] (Nep. *Pel.* 1.1)
>
> Pelopidas aus Theben ist mehr dem Geschichtskundigen als dem großen Publikum bekannt; daher bin ich mir auch über den Umfang einer Darstellung seiner Leistung im Zweifel. Gehe ich auf die Einzelheiten ein, so laufe ich Gefahr, historische Untersuchungen zu verfassen statt einer Lebensbeschreibung […] (Übers. H. Färber)

Diese berühmten Erklärungen von Cornelius Nepos und Plutarch verdeutlichen trotz ihrer unterschiedlichen Intentionen die in der antiken literarischen Empfindung wahrgenommene Distanz zwischen ἱστορία (der Geschichte) und βίοι, sprich der biographischen Gattung *stricto sensu.*[1] Weder die griechische noch die römische theoretische Reflexion ist je zu einer eindeutigen Definition des ἱστορικόν gelangt: Zwar wurde es einstimmig der γραμματική τέχνη (*opus oratorium maxime*, wie es Cicero nannte[2]) zugeordnet, die klassische Kultur bemühte sich jedoch vergeblich darum, seine Umrisse und seinen epistemologischen Status festzulegen.

Beispielhaft ist unter diesem Gesichtspunkt die Analyse des Sextus Empiricus. In der Kontroverse mit den Rhetoren bezeichnet der Skeptiker die Geschichte nicht nur als

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[1] Für eine entsprechende Kontextualisierung – und Interpretation – der erwähnten Texte vgl. die Anmerkungen von Mazzarino (1966) II 2, 136 – 139, Desideri (2012) 219 – 227, Muccioli (2012) 17, 53 – 73, 255 – 259.

[2] Cic. *Leg.* 1.2.5, *Or.* 2.15.62. Aus der unerschöpflichen Bibliographie zum Thema möchte ich nur Wiseman (1979) 27 – 40, Woodman (1988), Nicolai (1992) 11 – 247 erwähnen.

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ἀμέθοδος ὕλη (also als Fach, das keiner Methode unterliegt), sondern er missbilligt die Lehre des Stoikers Asklepiades von Myrlea (1. Jh. v. Chr.), der das ἱστορικόν in den Bereich der Grammatik einordnete und es auf dieser Grundlage in „wahre Geschichte", „falsche Geschichte" (Mythen und Genealogien) und in „pseudowahre Geschichte" (Komödien und Pantomime) unterteilte. Nach Asklepiades umfasst nur die erste Kategorie in etwa das, was wir gewöhnlich unter der eigentlichen Geschichtsschreibung verstehen, sprich Erzählungen über: a) Götter, Helden und berühmte Männer, b) Orte und Zeiten, c) πράξεις:

> Ἀσκληπιάδης δὲ ἐν τῷ Περὶ γραμματικῆς τρία φήσας εἶναι τὰ πρῶτα τῆς γραμματικῆς μέρη, τεχνικὸν ἱστορικὸν γραμματικόν, ὅπερ ἀμφοτέρον ἐφάπτεται, φημὶ δὲ τοῦ ἱστορικοῦ καὶ τοῦ τεχνικοῦ, τριχῇ ὑποδιαιρεῖται τὸ ἱστορικόν· τῆς γὰρ ἱστορίας τὴν μέν τινα ἀληθῆ εἶναί φησι τὴν δὲ ψευδῆ τὴν δὲ ὡς ἀληθῆ, καὶ ἀληθῆ μὲν τὴν πρακτικήν, ψευδῆ δὲ τὴν περὶ πλάσματα καὶ μύθους, ὡς ἀληθῆ δὲ οἷά ἐστιν ἡ κωμῳδία καὶ οἱ μῖμοι· τῆς δὲ ἀληθοῦς τρία πάλιν μέρη· ἡ μὲν γάρ ἐστι περὶ τὰ πρόσωπα θεῶν καὶ ἡρώων καὶ ἀνδρῶν ἐπιφανῶν, ἡ δὲ περὶ τοὺς τόπους καὶ χρόνους, ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰς πράξεις. τῆς δὲ ψευδοῦς, τουτέστι τῆς μυθικῆς, ἓν εἶδος μόνον ὑπάρχειν λέγει τὸ γενεαλογικόν. ὑποτάσσεσθαι δὲ τῷ ἱστορικῷ κοινῶς φησι, καθὼς καὶ Διονύσιος, τὸ περὶ τὰς γλώττας· ἱστορεῖ γὰρ ὅτι κρήγυον ἀληθές ἐστιν ἢ ἀγαθόν. ὡσαύτος δὲ καὶ τὸ περὶ παροιμιῶν καὶ ὅρων. (S. E. *M.* 1.252 – 253)
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> Asklepiades, Über Sprachwissenschaft, behauptet, die drei wichtigsten Bestandteile der Sprachwissenschaft seien das Wissenschaftliche, Historische und Grammatische, das auch mit den beiden anderen zu tun habe. Das Historische unterteilt er wieder dreifach, je nachdem, ob es das Wahre, Falsche oder Quasi-Wahre betrifft. Das Wahre enthält das Tatsächliche, das Falsche Fiktives wie Mythen und das Quasi-Wahre Dinge wie die Komödie und die mimischen Künste. Das Wahre hat auch drei Teile: den über Göttergestalten, Heroen und bedeutende Menschen, den über Landschaften und Zeitepochen und den über Taten. Zum falschen Historischen, d. h. Mythischen, gehöre nur das Genealogische. Und wie Dionysios behauptet er, dem Historischen werde allgemein das Kapitel über die Glossen untergeordnet; denn es informiert etwa, dass κρήγυον wahr oder gut bedeutet. Gleiches gilt vom Kapitel über Sprichwörter und Definitionen. Dass sie das Historische für einen Teil der Sprachwissenschaft halten, ist nun deutlich geworden. (Übers. F. Jürß)

Sextus beanstandet diese Klassifikation und schließt aus, dass die Geschichte Teil der Grammatik sein kann, eben weil sie ἀμέθοδον ist: Seiner Ansicht nach müssten die ἱστορούμενα (sprich der einer geschichtlichen Untersuchung zugrunde liegende Erzählstoff) einfach nur in ἱστορία (Erzählung von realen Dingen, die sich tatsächlich ereignet haben) auf der einen Seite und μῦθος und πλάσμα (falsche und irreale Dinge) auf der anderen Seite, oder anders gesagt in die eigentliche Geschichte und in die fiktionale Literatur unterteilt werden. Für den skeptischen Philosophen ist der entscheidende Punkt bei der Definition des ἱστορικόν als ἄτεχνον – das also der γραμματικὴ τέχνη wesensfremd ist – die Unmöglichkeit, ein eindeutiges Kriterium für die Unterscheidung zwischen wahr und falsch, zwischen objektivem Bericht und Fantasieerzählung auszuarbeiten.[3]

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[3] S. E. *M.* 1.254 – 269, bes. 267: οὐδὲ τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς κριτήριον ὑπόστατόν ἐστι. Während Slater (1972) die Ansicht vertritt, dass der ursprüngliche Gedanke von Asklepiades – der laut Slater wahrscheinlich nicht mit dem Grammatiker aus Myrlea, sondern mit einem gleichnamigen Arzt aus Bithynien zu identifi-

Wie unterschiedlich die Positionen auch sind, so zeigt diese Debatte – die vom Hellenismus bis zu den Anfängen der Spätantike reicht – sehr deutlich auf, wie schwierig es einerseits ist, eindeutig den Beginn der historischen Zeit zu bestimmen (der ins Religiöse abgleitet, da die Angelegenheiten der Götter darin Aufnahme finden), andererseits das Wahre vom Falschen, die Belletristik von der Geschichtsschreibung klar zu trennen.[4] Biographie und pragmatische Geschichte zählen beide zu der ἀληθῆ ἱστορία, werden jedoch als eigenständige Gattungen dargestellt, was die Überlegungen des Asklepiades bestätigt. Das soll natürlich nicht heißen, dass eine Biographie nicht ein äußerst hohes Forschungsniveau erreichen konnte (wenngleich sie von zahlreichen Vorurteilen belastet war, weshalb sie als eine zweitrangige Gattung galt); gewiss hatte sie aber Eigenschaften, die sie sowohl von einer ausgedehnten monographischen Erzählung als auch von den großen Synthesen der Weltgeschichte unterschied. Wenn das *genus biographicum* also in erster Linie darauf abzielte, den Charakter (das ἦθος) einer Person vor allem durch deren Verhältnis zu den Tugenden und Lastern zu beschreiben, so waren andere Formen von ἱστορία eher darauf bedacht, die „großen Ereignisse“ (die ἀξιόλογα, die erwähnenswerten Vorkommnisse) zu erzählen, die vor allem in Zusammenhang mit politisch-militärischen Angelegenheiten standen.[5]

Mag uns Asklepiades’ Formulierung noch so überspitzt vorkommen, so fasst sie doch anschaulich die Aporien zusammen, mit denen das historische Denken der Antike zu kämpfen hatte. Nimmt man die Datierung des Sextus Empiricus auf den Beginn der severischen Zeit als korrekt an, so erweist sich der Text des Philosophen als besonders wertvoll für die Kontextualisierung der zahlreichen zu Beginn des 3. Jahrhunderts kursierenden ἱστορίαι.[6]

Die imposante Persönlichkeit des Cassius Dio mit seiner Autorität und seinem Fortleben in der östlichen Tradition hat oft auch in der modernen Wahrnehmung all

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zieren ist – missverstanden worden sei, ist Rispoli (1988) 170 – 204 im Gegenteil davon überzeugt, dass die von Sextus in 1.252 übertragene Dreiteilung im Großen und Ganzen dem Vorschlag des Vorgängers entspricht.

[4] Zu den Schwierigkeiten der paganen Denkweise, eine klare Trennlinie zwischen historischer Zeit und mythischer Zeit zu ziehen, vgl. Rispoli (1988) 29 – 56, Mecella (2010) bes. 160 – 167.

[5] Zu einer Verringerung der Kluft zwischen den beiden Untergattungen in der antiken Geschichtsreflexion neigen Gentili/Cerri (1983) 65 – 90 und Giua (1990); es ist jedoch anzumerken, dass die Feststellung mehrfacher Verschmelzungen und Überlagerungsbereiche in der Praxis nicht die Abweichungen aufhebt, die auf theoretischer Ebene formuliert und/oder manchmal in den Texten festgestellt werden: s. Adams (2020) 24 – 31, dessen Schlussfolgerungen ich teile; hilfreich auch die Betrachtungen von Musti (1987) über die Entstehung der griechischen Biographie. Zur modernen Reflexion s. z. B. Riosa (1983).

[6] Siehe dazu neben der wegbereitenden – wenn auch in gewisser Hinsicht oberflächlichen – Studie von Schissel von Fleschenberg (1913) auch Mazzarino (1966) I, 484 – 494, Meijering (1987) 72 – 87, Rispoli (1988) 21 – 27, 57 – 169, Nicolai (1992) 124 – 139, 192 – 197, Mazza (1999) 95 – 108 (dessen Schlüssen ich hier folge). Interessante Anmerkungen – wenn auch mit Bezug auf einen anderen Bereich (den Begriff „Zeit“) – über die Verbreitung der Theorien von Sextus Empiricus in der griechischen Kultur des 3. Jahrhunderts formuliert Quet (2006) 548 – 552. Zur Datierung des Philosophen auf die ersten Jahrzehnte des dritten Jahrhunderts vgl. House (1980); zu seiner Gedankenwelt s., für einen ersten Überblick, Allen (1990) und – neuer – Svavarsson (2014).

jene Strömungen verdeckt, die nicht mit den thukydideisch-polybianischen Maßstäben vereinbar waren. Zurecht hat Peter Wiseman in seinen mittlerweile klassischen Essays daran erinnert, dass die πραγματικὴ ἱστορία niemals das dominierende Modell war; und Lukians Aufforderung in *Wie man Geschichte schreiben soll,* zu den von Thukydides genannten methodischen Prinzipien zurückzukehren, hat offensichtlich keine breite Zustimmung erhalten.[7] Wir kennen beispielsweise die Ποικίλη ἱστορία des Claudius Aelianus: Soweit wir wissen, waren die Interessen an der Vergangenheit – nämlich ihr Fokus auf Ekphraseis und wissenschaftliche Kuriositäten – das, was wir heute als „Altertumskunde“ (in Sinne von antiquarischer Wissenschaft) bezeichnen würden, die jedoch in der Antike als die eigentliche Geschichte galt.[8] Eine Persönlichkeit vom Kaliber eines Marius Maximus, der als Senator eine glänzende politische Karriere machte, entschied sich für die traditionelle Gattung der Biographie, schmückte aber sein Werk mit Anekdoten und Klatsch aus;[9] in der Zwischenzeit setzte sich auch die erste christliche Geschichtsschreibung durch, die in den *Chronographiae* des Julius Africanus eine ihrer höchsten Ausdruckformen erfuhr.[10]

Das ist das kulturelle Umfeld, in das Herodians Ἱστορία einzuordnen ist. In diesem Band legt Karine Laporte die unscharfen Grenzen zwischen den literarischen Gattungen dar, und Adam Kemezis hat kürzlich den romanhaften („novelistic“) Charakter der herodianischen Erzählung hervorgehoben.[11] Vor allem aber haben Forscher seit langem schon Herodians Kompromiss (die Bezeichnung stammt von Thomas Hidber) zwischen einer pragmatischen Geschichtsschreibung und Interessen biographischer Natur herausgestrichen.[12]

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[7] Wiseman (1979) bes. 41 – 53, 143 – 166 und Wiseman (1993). Nützlich auch Fornara (1983) bes. Kap. I und III, Bowersock (1994) 1 – 53, Gabba (1995) 11 – 37.

[8] Zur *Varia historia* des Aelianus vgl. Stamm (2003), Campanile (2006). Wenn wir ins 2. Jahrhundert zurückgehen, können wir zum Beispiel die Καινὴ ἱστορία von Ptolemaios Chennos (bekannt aus Phot. *Bibl.*, cod. 190) erwähnen, die überwiegend gelehrte Themen mythologisch-literarischer Natur, etymologische Anmerkungen und paradoxographische Elemente behandelte. Zu Ptolemaios Werk s. jetzt Parmeggiani (2022), der eine genaue Analyse des *testimonium* von Photios liefert; seine Schlussfolgerung, nach der die Καινὴ ἱστορία „consapevolmente si differenziava per genere e per forme dall’opera storiografica“ (Zitat auf S. 166), teile ich jedoch nicht: Meiner Ansicht nach beabsichtigte Ptolemaios im Gegenteil, ein historisches Werk *stricto sensu* zu schreiben, obwohl dieses natürlich sehr weit von unserem modernen Verständnis entfernt ist (Mazza [1999], 86 – 95, 127– 150). Vorsichtshalber berücksichtige ich hier die Figur des Serenus Sammonicus, des Autors der *Rerum reconditarum libri*, nicht, die Mastandrea (2012) mit überzeugenden Argumenten auf die Zeit der Tetrarchie datiert hat. Allgemein zur Unmöglichkeit einer klaren Trennung zwischen antiquarischer Geschichte und Historiographie *stricto sensu* in der Antike vgl. auch die tiefgründigen Bemerkungen von Bravo (2006).

[9] Mazzarino (1966) II 2, 208 – 210, Birley (1997).

[10] Für eine erste Annäherung s. Roberto (2011).

[11] Kemezis (2022). Marasco (1998) 2904 – 2908 überbewertet sicherlich die für Herodian typische Neigung zum Pathetischen und zum Dramatischen und macht ihn sogar zu einem Vertreter der tragischen Historiographie.

Herodian verbinden nämlich viele Elemente mit der *classicising historiography* (um Blockleys Definition zu benutzen[13]): der Appell an die Wahrheit, bei dem jegliche Absicht des Lobes oder der Verleumdung abgelehnt wird, wodurch das Werk zu einer Errungenschaft für die kommenden Generationen wird; die Entscheidung für die zeitgenössische Geschichte (die eine Überprüfung der Informationen unter anderem mittels Autopsie zulässt); die Forderung nach Akribie (ἀκριβεία); der Nachdruck auf der αὔξησις der erzählten Ereignisse, die die wichtigsten der letzten Jahrhunderte sind; die auf die ἀξιόλογα beschränkte Auswahl der Themen, um sowohl unnötige Abschweifungen, als auch übermäßige Trockenheit der Erzählung zu vermeiden;[14] die Bevorzugung der πράξεις (nicht ohne eine gewisse Aufmerksamkeit für die religiösen Aspekte).[15]

Angesichts des soeben beleuchteten Panoramas erscheint dieser Ansatz weniger voraussehbar, als man auf den ersten Blick glauben möchte, vor allem deshalb, weil Herodian sich im Bereich der pragmatischen Geschichte für eine sehr eigene Auswahl an Themen entscheidet. So widmet er zum Beispiel der militärischen Geschichte *stricto sensu* nur geringe Aufmerksamkeit: Über Kriege und Aufstände gibt er zwar geographische oder topographische Informationen, man findet aber kaum Überlegungen in Bezug auf die Versorgungslogistik in den unterschiedlichen Gebieten, auf die Eigenschaften der Märsche, auf die Dynamik der Stadtguerilla. Dies ist besonders an der Beschreibung der Ereignisse von 238 erkennbar, oder auch an der Oberflächlichkeit, mit der die Feldzüge von Septimius und Alexander Severus erwähnt werden.[16]

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[12] Hidber (2006) 131 – 152. An seiner Analyse (ebd. 66 – 70, 104 – 105) überzeugt das klare Urteil, dass das Werk trotz der Eigenschaften, die es an die Novellistik annähern, nicht als Roman klassifiziert werden kann.

[13] Blockley 1981 – 1983.

[14] Zu Photios’ Urteil über Herodians Stil (*Bibl.*, cod. 99.85b–86a) s. Hidber (2006) 26 – 28, Maltese (2021) 113 – 114; besonders zur *imitatio Thucydidis* bleibt Stein (1957) eine wichtige Bezugsgröße. Zur Sprache vgl. Lucarini (2017).

[15] Für eine detaillierte Analyse des Prooimions – mit angemessener Unterstreichung sowohl der herodoteischen als auch der thukydideisch-polybianischen Tradition – vgl. Hidber (2006) 72 – 123; s. auch Kemezis (2014) 229 – 234, Hose (2020) 39 – 44, Scott (2023) 193 – 197. Zu einigen möglichen Übereinstimmungen zwischen Herodians *modus operandi* und Lukians *De historia conscribenda* vgl. Hidber (2006) 4 – 5, 15 – 16, 100, 123 (notwendige Abwesenheit von Lokalpatriotismus zugunsten eines unabhängigen Urteils des Geschichtsschreibers, das in Herodians Schweigen über seine eigene Herkunft und seine eigene Tätigkeit zum Ausdruck kommt), 78 – 79 (Ablehnung des μυθῶδες), 96 – 97 (Geschichte als Errungenschaft für die Zukunft statt Schmeichelei für die Gegenwart), Kemezis (2014) 227–230, 235 – 238 (der aber betont: „it is unlikely that Herodian consciously intended to follow Lucian; quite possibly he was unaware of his writing on the subject, but he was entirely aware of the Antonine orthodoxy, which Lucian was reflecting rather than creating“: 237), 260 – 262.

[16] Wie Hidber (2006) 3 – 4 in Bezug auf die geographischen Anmerkungen schreibt: „ins Blickfeld von Herodians historischer Darstellung geraten immer nur jene Gegenden, in denen sich ein Kaiser oder ein Prätendent gerade aufhält“ (Zitat auf S. 3). Der literarische Charakter der Beschreibungen von Feldzügen und Schlachten wird nun von Chrysanthou (2022) 130 – 196 deutlich hervorgehoben, der jedoch meiner

In der *Geschichte des Kaisertums nach Marc Aurel* ist die πράξις die politische Praxis schlechthin; aber auch in diesem Bereich finden wir bedeutende Lücken: Es ist bekannt, dass Herodian über wesentliche Ereignisse wie zum Beispiel die Verkündigung der *Constitutio Antoniniana* oder die Ernennung der *Vigintiviri*-Kommission schweigt.[17]

Zugleich versäumt Herodian nicht, die Außergewöhnlichkeit des Lebens der Kaiser und Usurpatoren hervorzuheben, die Gegenstand der Erzählung sind.[18] Dennoch folgt er keinem strengen biographischen Kanon, wie vor allem an dem Auseinandertreten zwischen der Bucheinteilung und der Abfolge der einzelnen Regierungszeiten ersichtlich ist (allein bei Commodus und Severus Alexander wird ein gesamtes Prinzipat in der Erzähleinheit des βίβλος abgeschlossen)[19] sowie an den Grundsatzerklärungen am Ende des zweiten Buches, wo der Geschichtsschreiber ausdrücklich erklärt, kein βίος über Septimius Severus schreiben zu wollen, sondern die Absicht zu verfolgen, die ruhmreichen Taten (die erinnerungswürdigen πράξεις) der einzelnen Kaiser im Laufe von 70 Jahren ohne Schmeicheleien zu erzählen.[20] In diesem Schema findet sich bestimmt eine gewisse Aufmerksamkeit für das Wesen der Hauptpersonen, weshalb man sogar von „Psychologismus“ gesprochen hat;[21] zwar überwogen Elemente von ἠθοποιία in der Gattung der βίοι, sie waren aber ein wichtiger Bestandteil in allen Formen der Geschichtsschreibung und sind aus diesem Grund wenig spezifisch.

Was Herodians Erzählweise hauptsächlich von der Biographie *stricto sensu* unterscheidet, ist das Fehlen einer Rekonstruktion (fast) aller Lebensabschnitte der Persönlichkeiten, und nicht nur jener, die direkt mit ihrem Ruhm zusammenhängen:[22] Dies

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Ansicht nach übertreibt, wenn er Herodian eine „close attention to details of topography“ (131) zuschreibt. Zur Behandlung des Raumes bei Herodian s. auch die Anmerkungen von K.V. Markov in diesem Band.

[17] Vgl. Mazza (1986) 18 – 19, Galimberti (2016). Darauf basiert das vernichtende Urteil über die Qualität des Werkes, das häufig von den modernen Kritikern gefällt worden ist: zur Geschichte der Herodian-Forschung s. Hidber (2006) 32 – 63.

[18] Für eine entsprechende Kontextualisierung der in Hdn. 1.1.4 (τυράννων τε καὶ βασιλέων βίους παραδόξους) verwendeten Formel und die entsprechenden Verweise vor allem auf die hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung s. Hidber (2006) 108 – 116; seine Interpretation von τύραννοι als „die besonders grausamen Herrscher“ (ebd. 113 mit Anm. 156) teile ich jedoch nicht. Die Tatsache, dass der Begriff bei Herodian polyvalent ist – sich also auch auf die schlechten *principes* wie Commodus und Maximinus bezieht – hindert uns nicht daran, in diesem Abschnitt einen spezifischen Hinweis auf die Usurpatoren zu finden, an denen der Geschichtsschreiber ein offensichtliches Interesse hat. Diese Interpretation scheint mir in den darauffolgenden Zeilen durch die Verwendung von δυναστεία statt βασιλεία bestätigt zu werden: Mit dieser Wortwahl unterstreicht Herodian die Kurzlebigkeit einiger Regime (s. dazu unten) und weist ausdrücklich darauf hin, dass es sich bei einigen Regierungen nur dem Anschein nach um ein Imperium handelt, nicht jedoch um echte Machtausübung.

[19] S. im Detail Hidber (2006) 132 – 146, bes. 139: „[…] bilden die formalen Einschnitte der Buchgrenzen keine besonders favorisierten Orte für Rhythmuswechsel. Solche finden sich hingegen regelmäßig zu Beginn und am Ende der Berichte über die Herrscherwechsel, welche stets in zusammenhängenden Geschichten mit durchgehenden Handlungssträngen erzählt werden“.

[20] Hdn. 2.15.6 – 7.

[21] Mazzarino (1966) II 2, 207– 208.

[22] Hidber (2006) 271 – 272.

war das eigentliche konnotative Element des βίος, da es ermöglichte, die μεταβολή des Einzelnen unter seinen Schicksalsschlägen in seiner Gänze zu erfassen. Bei Herodian gibt es nur in Bezug auf Maximinus Thrax den Versuch, den Ursprung seines wilden Temperaments zu ermitteln;[23] in Bezug auf andere Persönlichkeiten findet man nur vereinzelte Hinweise auf Ereignisse vor ihrer Thronbesteigung oder vor Usurpationsversuchen, und die einzelnen Charaktereigenschaften weisen eine deutliche Starre auf, bei der jeglicher Evolutionsprozess ausgeschlossen zu sein scheint (Commodus ist ein niederträchtiger junger Mann; Septimius Severus ist intelligent und fähig, aber arglistig; Caracalla ist grausam, und so weiter). In den meisten Fällen haben wir bescheidene Persönlichkeiten vor uns, die oft im entscheidenden Moment nicht fähig sind, sich zu profilieren: Den Akteuren fehlt die wichtige Gabe der μεγαλοψυχία.[24]

In Wirklichkeit steht nicht das Leben der *principes* im Mittelpunkt der Erzählung, sondern ihr Regierungsstil: die Beziehung zu den einzelnen Institutionen des Staates (dem Senat *in primis*), die möglichen tyrannischen Neigungen, die Entscheidungen in der Innen- und Außenpolitik.[25] Jedes Regime übt die Macht auf eine andere charakteristische Art aus, von der aufgeklärten Herrschaft Marc Aurels bis zur brutalen Gewaltherrschaft des Maximinus Thrax, um nur die zwei chronologischen Extreme des Werkes zu nennen, die zugleich auch die Polarität darstellen, mit der das monarchische System ringt. Da bei jedem Führungswechsel der politische Raum neu definiert wird, markiert er unvermeidlich einen zeitlichen Einschnitt:[26] Dies führte, wie im Prooimion anschaulich dargelegt, zur Wahl einer Gliederung κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας (1.1.6), was in einer Erzählweise zum Ausdruck kommt, die sich auf die Entwicklung der μοναρχία τῶν Καισάρων und auf die Regierungsweise der Autokratie konzentriert – die Formen der Macht und die Quellen ihrer Rechtmäßigkeit sind das Herz des Werkes.

2 Die Zeitfolge und der Spiegel der Macht

Von besonderer Bedeutung ist hier die Wahl des Terminus δυναστεία als Bezeichnung für die Modulation des Erzählrhythmus. Der Ausdruck kann nicht – wie es häufig der Fall ist – einfach als Synonym von βασιλεία angesehen werden. Das Wort steht an wenigen Stellen im Werk und benennt eine Machtposition im allgemeinen Sinn, die nicht immer mit einer formell anerkannten Macht (die als ἀρχή oder βασιλεία bezeichnet wird[27]) identifizierbar ist: δυναστεία ist zum Beispiel die Herrschaft von Zeus, der den Vater Chronos entmachtet, und unter den Dynasten finden sich sowohl Kaiser als auch Usurpatoren.[28]

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[23] Hidber (2006) 148.

[24] In diesem Sinne stimme ich Hidber (2006) 105, zu, dass Herodian nicht die Absicht gehabt habe, eine Galerie von (positiven oder negativen) *exempla* wiederzugeben; im Gegensatz zu Hidbers Ansicht (s. auch ebd. 235–237) bedeutet das jedoch nicht, dass es keine Verbindungen zu den zeitgenössischen Abhandlungen περὶ βασιλείας gibt (s. u.).

[25] Hidber (2006) 277. Im Gegensatz zu ihm (ebd. 142) würde ich jedoch nicht von einer geringen Beachtung der verwaltungstechnischen, juristischen oder innenpolitischen Maßnahmen sprechen (man denke zum Beispiel nur an die Bedeutung, die die Behandlung der Denunzianten bei der Bewertung der einzelnen *principes* gewinnt), sondern eher von einer ausgeprägten Selektivität bei der Themenwahl; s. dazu auch die Bemerkungen oben.

[26] Vgl. Hidber (2006) 152–187, der jedoch vielleicht ein wenig zu stark auf der *Machtwechselgeschichte* als bezeichnendem Charakterzug des herodianischen Werks besteht.

Besonders erwähnenswert ist die Verwendung des Terminus zu Beginn des Werkes: Die Ära (χρόνος) des Augustus wird als jener Zeitpunkt ausgewiesen, da ἡ Ῥωμαίων δυναστεία μετέπεσεν ἐς μοναρχίαν: δυναστεία bezeichnet hier allgemein das politische System, die *Romana res publica* vor der Zeit Octavians (1.1.4). Bezeichnenderweise wird anderswo die staatliche Organisation Roms in ihrer Gesamtheit immer mit ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχή angegeben: Es kann also nicht ausgeschlossen werden, dass Herodian sein Prooimion unter dem Einfluss der Reflexion von Cassius Dio geschrieben hat, der zwischen der „Demokratie“ der republikanischen Zeit und der kaiserlichen „Monarchie“ eine Übergangsphase eingefügt hatte, die von den δυναστεῖαι der „Kriegsherren“ des 1. Jahrhunderts vor Christus (vor allem während des zweiten Triumvirats) gezeichnet war.[29] Wenn das zutrifft, haben wir einen weiteren Beweis für die spezifische Bedeutungsnuance, die Herodian dem Begriff zukommen lassen will: eine Machtausübung, die nicht unbedingt auf Legitimität beruht und meist von Gewaltanwendung gekennzeichnet ist.[30]

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[27] Für eine Analyse der zwei Begriffe bei Herodian verweise ich auf Arbo (2022), laut der βασιλεία das Königtum schlechthin ist, das mit der kaiserlichen *auctoritas* identifiziert wird, während ἀρχή auch eine Machtform ziviler Natur bezeichnen kann, die mehr auf Gesetz als auf Gewalt aufbaut; Buongiorno (2022) 203 bezeichnet die βασιλεία als „the power of one which derives from ἀρχή (that is the *imperium* in its objective dimension)“.

[28] Vgl. Hdn. 1.1.5: die hier erwähnten δυνάσται sind sowohl Kaiser als auch Usurpatoren, die manchmal auch kurzlebig sind – δυναστεία scheint also ein autokratisches Regime zu bezeichnen, unabhängig von seiner Legitimität oder seinen Erfolgschancen; 1.16.1: mit Bezug auf den Ursprung der *Saturnalia* erinnert Herodian daran, wie Chronos die δυναστεία des Sohnes Zeus fürchtete, der ihn entthront hatte; 2.12.5: mit Severus' Soldaten vor den Toren fleht Didius Julianus darum, aus seiner ἀρχή abdanken und seine gesamte δυναστεία abtreten zu dürfen (hier ist klar, dass nach Herodians Sprachgefühl ein bedeutender semantischer Unterschied zwischen den beiden Begriffen bestehen muss). Insgesamt erscheint die δυναστεία also als eine nicht vollkommen legitime Macht, die häufig mit Gewalt erlangt wird.

[29] S. hierzu Kemezis (2014) 102 – 126, der daran erinnert, dass „the inability of the Severans to right the system stems not from their personal characteristics, but from a wider dysfunction analogous to the *dynasteiai* of the late Republic“ (Zitat auf S. 103, vgl. auch 139 – 145). Die Perspektive des Cassius Dio könnte durchaus einen Einfluss auf Herodians Wortwahl ausgeübt haben. Zur weitreichenden Bibliographie über die politische Terminologie bei Dio, vor allem was die Bezeichnung der Regierungsformen angeht, erwähne ich, neben der unten zitierten Literatur, Anm. 48: Freyburger-Galland (1996), Bellissime (2016), Burden-Strevens *et al.* (2020b). Zum Übergang von der Republik zum Prinzipat in Dios Sichtweise s. Urso (2020), laut dem für Dio das Ende der Republik vom Aufstreben der δυναστεῖαι verursacht worden sei, einer Reihe von Ein-Personen-Regimen, die ihren Höhepunkt mit Caesar erreicht habe; der plötzliche Tod des Diktators habe jedoch die volle Entfaltung dieses Prozesses gebremst. Das Ereignis um Caesar habe also das Ende der Republik bedingt, die sich endgültig mit der Errichtung des Triumvirats und der Niederlage der Caesar-Mörder aufgelöst habe; allerdings seien noch einmal fünfzehn Jahre bis zur Gründung einer ἀκριβὴς μοναρχία zwischen 29 und 27 v. Chr. vergangen. Zwischen Philippi und der Geburt des Prinzipats habe es also eine nur schwer definierbare Übergangsphase gegeben, die von einem nicht mehr republikanischen, aber auch noch nicht monarchischen Regime gekennzeichnet gewesen sei: Genau hier ist der Begriff δυναστεία in seiner gesamten Polysemie sichtbar. Daher stimme ich nicht ganz mit Lindholmer (2018) überein, laut dem in Dios Werk der Begriff δυναστεία „should not be seen as a

Die Wendung κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας sollte demnach nicht als „chronologisch und nach Regierungen“ verstanden werden,[31] sondern sie ist ein schwer übersetzbarer Ausdruck, der eine Abfolge der Zeit und der verschiedenen Machtformen bezeichnet, die häufig nebeneinander existierten und untereinander in Konflikt standen.[32] Nicht nur das *imperium stricto sensu* also, sondern jede Herrschaftsform: Dies erklärt die wichtige Rolle, die sowohl die Usurpatoren als auch einige dem Princeps zur Seite stehende Personen, wie die alte Iulia Maesa oder die berüchtigten Cleander und Plautian, im gesamten Werk spielen.[33] Herodian hält sich nicht nur länger bei der Figur des Kaisers auf, sondern streicht die Eigenschaften aller auftretenden Persönlichkeiten heraus.[34]

In dieser scharfsinnigen politischen Differenzierung kann man das Echo jener bemerkenswerten Praxis von Abhandlungen περὶ βασιλείας erkennen, die im Orient in der ersten Hälfte des 3. Jahrhundert erblüht war. Die Forschung hat sich bisher vor allem auf Philostratos *Vita Apollonii*, eine Art *speculum principis ante litteram*,[35] und auf die anonyme Rede Εἰς βασιλέα konzentriert: Obwohl ihre exakte Datierung noch *sub iudice* steht, spiegelt die Rede doch ganz gewiss wider, wie sehr eine bereits von den ersten

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discrete period and especially not as a governmental form but rather refers to the numerous malfunctions of the δημοκρατία *throughout its history* […]. The Late Republic is thus not δυναστεία through and through but rather a δημοκρατία, albeit a poorly functioning one, which has been plagued by δυναστεῖαι from its inception as the proper workings of the state frequently break down“ (Zitat auf S. 565). Diese Interpretation erfasst meiner Meinung nach nicht ganz die unterschiedlichen Bedeutungsnuancen, die der Begriff in den einzelnen Passagen im Werk annimmt: Es trifft tatsächlich zu, dass Dio ihn auch mit Bezug auf andere Geschichtsperioden verwendet und dass die so schematisch formulierte Gleichung „δυναστεία = governmental form“ unhaltbar ist, aber das ändert nichts daran, dass nach Dio das *saeculum Sillanum*, und vor allem die Zeit des zweiten Triumvirats, auf institutioneller Ebene eine eigene Charakteristik hatten (s. z. B. die sorgfältigen Analysen von Coudry [2016], Carsana [2016], Potter [2022] 37 ff.; in diese Richtung geht auch Bertrand [2023]). Dies macht es meiner Ansicht nach unmöglich, die δυναστεῖαι der späten Republik *sic et simpliciter* den Krisen der vorhergehenden und nachfolgenden Epochen gleichzustellen. In jedem Fall gilt auch für Lindholmer, dass bei Dio δυναστεία „refers to power that is irregular in the sense that it is untraditional or excessive and has generally been obtained by exploiting, forcing, or manipulating the system“ (Zitat auf S. 567), und es könnte zutreffen, dass Herodian seine Reflexion auf Basis dieser negativen Bedeutung – die, wie Lindholmer gebührendermaßen unterstreicht, auf Thukydides und Aristoteles zurückgeht – aufgebaut hat.

[30] *Contra* Lindholmer (2018) 570 – 571, laut dem Herodian den Ausdruck immer mit einem „neutral approach“ verwendet.

[31] Hidber (2006) 120.

[32] Statt der Übersetzung auf S. 120 bevorzuge ich jene von Hidber auf S. 151: „nach Herrschaften“.

[33] Wie zum Beispiel von Arbo (2022) 119 unterstrichen, setzt die Definition als δεσπότης Plautian einem Herrscher gleich.

[34] Dieser Punkt wird auch von Hidber (2006) 146 – 147 hervorgehoben.

[35] Zu diesem Werk verweise ich auf Mazza (1982), Mazza (1986) 34 – 53, Swain (1996) 381 – 395, Gangloff (2019) 304, 313 – 326, 353 – 396, Kemezis (2020) (für die literarischen Aspekte).

Symptomen der „Krise“ betroffene Gesellschaft nach Frieden und Erneuerung strebte.[36] Neben diesen bekannteren Texten darf nicht eine zweitrangige Textproduktion vergessen werden, die nur in Fragmenten erhalten ist: Ich denke insbesondere an die Abhandlung von Ekphantos, die in der Anthologie von Stobaeus erhalten ist und die Walter Burkert überzeugend in die severische Zeit eingeordnet hat.[37] Hier ist eine Art „passive Opposition“ gegenüber der zeitgenössischen Politik erkennbar: Obwohl im Text das Wort τύραννος fehlt, schwebt die Figur des Despoten über dem gesamten Inhalt des Werkes und trägt *e contrario* dazu bei, das Ebenbild des idealen Herrschers darzustellen. Dieser wird als Abbild der Gottheit und Mittler zwischen der himmlischen und der irdischen Sphäre beschrieben: In dieser Metaphysik des Herrschertums sind neben pythagoreischen und stoischen Einflüssen auch ethisch-politische Motive erkennbar, die der mittelplatonischen Schule eigen sind.[38] Ebenfalls in die severische Zeit oder in die mittleren Jahrzehnte des 3. Jahrhunderts kann vielleicht auch der apokryphe „Brief an Alexander über die Politik gegenüber den Städten“, der als arabische Übersetzung zu uns gelangt ist, datiert werden; ursprünglich handelte es sich dabei wahrscheinlich um einen Teil eines „Briefromans“ zwischen Aristoteles und dem makedonischen Herrscher, der auf recht einfache und banale Weise die politischen Anliegen der Lokalaristokratie in der Kaiserzeit abhandelte.[39]

Vor allem die griechische Welt ließ also eine Reflexion über die monarchische Macht reifen, die häufig Anschauungen des hellenistischen Zeitalters wieder aufgriff: Zur Diskussion standen die Tugenden des guten Herrschers, die Legitimität des Auf-standes gegen den Tyrannen, der Einfluss der φίλοι auf die Entscheidungen des *princeps*;[40] all diese Themen sind sehr wohl in Herodians Werk vorhanden, das zweifellos vom platonischen Archetypen des von Marc Aurel verkörperten Philosophenkönigs bestimmt wird.[41] Diese Problematiken waren nie ganz aus der intellektuellen Debatte verschwunden,[42] aber erst in der Severerzeit drängten sie wieder in den Vordergrund: Die autokratische Wende durch die neue Dynastie reizte zu einer tiefgreifenden Reflexion über die Prinzipien einer guten Regierung und über die Möglichkeit, Handlungsmodelle für ein tugendhaftes Gleichgewicht zwischen Regierenden und Regierten zu formulieren, mit dem Bewusstsein der zunehmenden Überlegenheit des Kaisers über die anderen sozialen Gruppen.[43]

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[36] Zur Rede s., mit unterschiedlichen Positionen, Mazza (1986) 64 – 74, 82 – 88, Körner (2011), Gangloff (2019) 434 – 456, Mallan (2020).

[37] In der modernen Geschichtsschreibung schwankt die Datierung des Werks (gemeinsam mit jener der anderen beiden von Stobaios erhaltenen Abhandlungen Περὶ βασιλείας, die Diotogenes und Stenidas zugeschrieben wurden) zwischen der Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts vor Christus und dem 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus; für eine erste Annäherung an die Debatte vgl. Chesnut (1978) 1313 – 1315, Squilloni (1991) 3 – 19, 35 – 43 (zu deren Positionen s. u., Anm. 38). Ich folge hier der Rekonstruktion von Burkert (1971), Mazza (1986) 8 – 10, 55 – 64, 74 – 81, Bertelli (2002) 43 – 55.

[38] S. hierzu Squilloni (1991), die das Werk nicht zufällig zeitlich ins erste bis zweite Jahrhundert nach Christus, in die Blütezeit des Mittelplatonismus, einordnet, gefolgt von Schofield (1999) 742. An das mittelplatonische Milieu denkt, vor allem aufgrund einer Auseinandersetzung mit Philon von Alexandria, auch Calabi (2008) 185 – 215; s. schon früher Centrone (1990) 13 – 44, mit einer weitreichenden Reflexion über die Schwierigkeiten der Definition des sogenannten „Neopythagoreismus“ der Kaiserzeit, da die Gesamtheit der von Stobaios überlieferten pseudopythagoreischen Schriften eher auf überwiegend (mittel-)platonische und aristotelische Kontaminierungen verweist. Vgl. vor Kurzem Adorjáni (2018) *passim* und bes. 397 – 399, der jedoch zu einer Datierung in die hellenistische Zeit tendiert (nach Thesleff [1971], der allerdings den exzentrischen Charakter der Abhandlung von Ekphantos im Vergleich zum Rest des *corpus* anerkennt) und im Gegenteil die pythagoreischen Vorbilder der Gedanken von Diotogenes und von Ekphantos betont. Es muss jedenfalls hervorgehoben werden, dass eine mögliche mittelplatonische Prägung des Werks dessen Datierung auf die severische Zeit nicht ungültig macht, in der man angesichts des neuen politischen Klimas auch kulturelle Impulse des vorhergehenden Jahrhunderts wieder aufgriff.

[39] Mazza (2013), Swain (2013) 108 – 122, 180 – 207.

Der Aufstieg des Septimius Severus und seines Sohnes Caracalla hatte zu einer Metamorphose der kaiserlichen Ideologie in ausnehmend monarchischem Sinne geführt, was sich unter anderem in der Übernahme eines konsequenten Systems von Symbolen widerspiegelte: Man denke an den Bau der prächtigen *domus Severiana* auf dem Palatin, bei der die Loggia in Richtung Circus Maximus errichtet wurde, um dem Volk direkt die kaiserliche Erhabenheit zu demonstrieren, oder an die stark zunehmende Verwendung des Purpurmantels bei der Investitur (man könnte aber noch viele weitere Beispiele nennen).[44] Der *princeps* erschien immer seltener als *primus inter pares* und immer öfter als ein *a diis electus*, mit einer starken Betonung der sakralen Weihe seiner Macht (es ist kein Zufall, dass Severus auf den Münzen gleich Jupiter, Serapis und Herkules abgebildet ist und damit jene politische Theologie vorweggenommen wird, die später typisch für die Tetrarchen war).[45] Die äußere Erscheinung der Macht (wie Kleidung, Schmuck, Zeremonielle) erlangte eine wesentlich größere Bedeutung und wurde zu einem der wichtigsten Kommunikationsmittel zwischen den Augusti und ihrem Publikum: Herodians Aufmerksamkeit für das visuelle Erscheinungsbild der Herrscher, die vor allem in der detaillierten Beschreibung der Kleidung von Macrinus und Elagabal deutlich wird, überrascht deshalb keineswegs. Sie passt einerseits zu einer ganz bestimmten literarischen Strategie, wie die Forschung bereits festgestellt hat,[46] andererseits spiegelt sie aber auch, wie ich glaube, ein verändertes politisches Bewusstsein wider, das in der Lage ist, die historische Bedeutung dieses Wandels des gesellschaftlichen Klimas zu erfassen.[47]

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[40] Kemezis (2014) 9 („instances of the same phenomenon, the cultural effect of dynastic political change") und *passim.*

[41] S. bes. Arbo (2022) 114 – 117. Zu Marc Aurel als *exemplum virtutis*, mit dem sich die nachfolgenden Kaiser zu messen haben, vgl. Hidber (2006) 188 – 272, Kemezis (2014) 234 – 235, Roberto (2017, 2022).

[42] Man denke nur zum Beispiel an die Rede Περὶ βασιλείας von Dion von Prusa; vgl. dazu bes. Desideri (1978) 283 – 375, Desideri (2019) bes. 239 – 278, Carsana (1990) 57 – 64, Moles (1990), Veyne (1999) 560 – 564. Im Allgemeinen vgl. Whitmarsh (2001) 181 – 246.

[43] Bereits Kemezis (2014) 9 und *passim* hatte von Cassius Dios, Philostratos und Herodians Schaffen als einem kulturellen Produkt derselben politischen Veränderung gesprochen; vgl. jüngst den Versuch von Noe (2020), deutliche stoische Einflüsse in Cassius Dios Reflexion zu finden. S. auch Markov (2022) für einen weiteren Vergleich mit dem kulturellen Umfeld der Zweiten Sophistik.

[44] Mazza (1996) 219 – 220, Tantillo (2011) 16 – 17, Lusnia (2014). Interessante Ansätze lassen sich auch im Band von Schöpe (2014) (bes. Kap. 3. und 5.) finden, der eine gute Sammlung an derartigen Informationen enthält.

[45] Vgl. die eingehenden Bemerkungen von Roberto (2011) 123 – 135, 148 – 155, Rowan (2012) 32 – 109, Gangloff (2019) 397 – 456.

Im historiographischen Bereich sind die Auswirkungen der schrittweisen Abwendung vom Geiste des „augusteischen Kompromisses“ bereits bei Cassius Dio erkennbar, nicht nur im berühmten Dialog zwischen Agrippa und Maecenas im 52. Buch, sondern im gesamten Aufbau der Erzählung über die Kaiserzeit, wo die Person des Princeps immer gewichtiger wird.[48] Christopher Pelling hat diesbezüglich von einer Bewegung Dios zur *biostructure* gesprochen, die in dem deutlichen Fokus auf den Charakter der Kaiser sichtbar ist, die die Abhandlung einer jeden Regierungszeit abschließen.[49] Wie bereits mehrfach erwähnt, könnte Herodian von seinem berühmten Vorgänger beeinflusst worden sein; aber zweifellos zeugen seine Grundsatzerklärungen von einer tiefgreifenden und unabhängigen Reflexion über das Thema, genährt wahrscheinlich durch die oben erwähnte Debatte über die βασιλεία. Gekennzeichnet ist seine Erzählung ja durch den Versuch, den Verlauf der Ereignisse durch die dichte Abfolge der zahlreichen Thronanwärter und der verschiedenen hegemonialen Persönlichkeiten, die von Mal zu Mal in Aktion treten, zu schildern; der Autor bemüht sich, die politische Unordnung in ein Schema zu fassen, das nicht nur die Geschichte der Sieger beinhaltet, sondern auch jene der Besiegten (seien es nun Usurpatoren oder Mitglieder des Hofes). Bei diesem Bemühen um Synthese strebt Herodian weder nach chronologischer Genauigkeit noch nach einem Gleichgewicht bei der Darstellung der Themen. Seine Angaben über Jahre, Monate und Tage sind immer äußert ungenau und manchmal widersprüchlich, und der Zeitverlauf folgt keiner regelmäßigen Kadenz (wie etwa den eponymen Magistraturen oder der Abfolge der Jahreszeiten). Der Verlauf ist, im Gegenteil, dehnbar wie eine

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[46] S. Kemezis (2022) 32 – 36, bes. 33.

[47] Die sorgfältige lexikalische Analyse von Arbo (2022) bestätigt diese Interpretation: Sie stellt heraus, dass bei Herodian der kaiserliche Sitz in der Kurie, „which in Roman tradition was meant to symbolize his position as *primus inter pares*, is matter-of-factly referred to as a βασίλειος θρόνος (‚royal throne‘)“ (ebd. 113).

[48] Die Literatur zu Dios politischen Gedanken ist in den letzten Jahrzehnten sprichwörtlich explodiert: Da es nicht möglich ist, hier eine detaillierte und umfassende Liste zu präsentieren, erwähne ich nur die (unterschiedlichen) Interpretationen von Espinosa Ruiz (1982), Carsana (1990) 83 – 94, Kemezis (2014) 126 – 139, Gangloff (2019) 302 – 304, 326 – 353, Madsen (2022), Burden-Strevens (2023).

[49] Pelling (1997); zur Erzählstruktur der Bücher Dios über die Kaiserzeit – die jedenfalls niemals ganz die annalistische Strukturierung fallen lassen – s. auch Devillers (2016), Coltelloni-Trannoy (2016), Bono (2020) 41 – 55, Madsen (2020). Die Aufmerksamkeit seitens Dio für die einzelnen kaiserlichen Persönlichkeiten und für die „Psychologie der Macht“ der anderen an der Staatsführung beteiligten Persönlichkeiten wird auch in vielen Beiträgen, die bei Davenport/Mallan (2021) gesammelt sind, betont. Insgesamt stellt diese neuere Literatur heraus, dass Dios Interesse für die charakterlichen oder psychologischen Züge der *principes* im Verhältnis zur Analyse ihres politischen Handelns ausgesprochen gering ist.

Ziehharmonika, die die unsteten Rhythmen der politischen Umbrüche begleitet:[50] Wird einerseits ein Ereignis von wenigen Stunden – wie das Attentat auf Commodus – in voller Länge erzählt, so werden andererseits ganze Jahre manchmal in einem Satz zusammengepresst.

Das Ergebnis ist eine hybride Erzählstruktur: Diese stellt eine Art Zwischenstufe zwischen einer im annalistischen Sinne geordneten pragmatischen Geschichte (an die Dio noch auf eine gewisse Weise gebunden ist) und der neuen Form der Kaisergeschichte dar, die sich dann in der konstantinischen Zeit durchgesetzt hat.[51]

3 Der Anbruch der Spätantike: Herodian und ein neues Zeitmaß

Der „Schiffbruch“ der Geschichtsschreibung des 3. Jahrhunderts lässt keine genaue Rekonstruktion der Phasen dieser Evolution zu: In den mittleren Jahrzehnten der „Krise“ sind sowohl die Universalgeschichte (wie die Χιλιετηρίς von Asinius Quadratus und die Χρονικὴ Ἱστορία von Dexippos) als auch die monographischen Werke (wie die Σκυθικά, auch von Dexippos, oder die Werke von Ephoros von Kyme, Nikostratos von Trapezunt oder Philostratos von Athen) noch stark vertreten. Wir wissen aber zu wenig über die Schrift von Eusebios (die den Zeitraum von Augustus bis zum Jahr 283 behandelte), um Schlüsse über ihre Erzählstruktur ziehen zu können.[52] Mittels einer anschaulichen Metapher aus den Geowissenschaften hat Tommaso Gnoli das Jahrzehnt von 270 bis 280 als eine Art historiographische „Verwerfungslinie“ bezeichnet. Diese teile die Geschichtsschreibung – wie zwei deutlich voneinander getrennte Kontinente – in die Historiographie der Kaiserzeit und jene der Spätantike. In diesem Abschnitt des 3. Jahrhunderts waren wohl Autoren von geringerer Substanz tätig, die kein dauerhaftes Erbe hinterlassen haben; zu Beginn einer neuen Ära öffnete sich hingegen das 4. Jahrhundert mit einer Reihe von Schriften, die zwar einen bedeutsamen dokumentarischen Wert aufweisen, dabei jedoch auf eine vollkommen veränderte Atmosphäre in einem mühsamen Prozess der Neudefinition der historiographischen Maßstäbe schließen lassen (denken wir nur an schwer klassifizierbare Werke wie *De mortibus persecutorum* von Laktanz, um ein Beispiel zu nennen). Wie schwierig sich die Rekonstruktion dieses komplizierten Mosaiks gestaltet, lässt sich schön an der *Querelle* um die sogenannte *Kaisergeschichte* von Enmann erkennen. Der Name leitet sich von dem Philologen

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[50] Zur Unausgewogenheit des Werkes in Bezug auf die Erzählzeit (weshalb ein Ereignis von wenigen Stunden ausführlich erzählt werden kann, während einige Jahre in wenigen Sätzen abgehandelt werden) s. Hidber (2006) 136–146, Castelli (2008) 106–111; wie Kemezis (2022) 27 schreibt: „Herodian narrates history not as a stretch of years whose events need to be set forth but rather a series of events that need a chronological apparatus to articulate them“.

[51] Ich würde deshalb bei Herodian nicht von einer *line of least resistance* (Swain [1997] 26) gegen „augustozentrische“ Abweichungen der Spätantike sprechen, sondern im Gegenteil von einer Wegbereitung.

[52] Für eine Übersicht über diese Werke s. Mecella (2009).

Alexander Enmann ab, der am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts ihre Existenz vermutete. Als Erklärung für einige Ähnlichkeiten mit der späteren westlichen Produktion ging Enmann vom Bestehen einer Kaisergeschichte aus – einzuordnen in die konstantinische Zeit –, die die gemeinsame Quelle der Epitomatoren des 4. Jahrhunderts und der *Historia Augusta* darstelle. Hier kann nicht auf die Debatte eingegangen werden, die diese Hypothese ausgelöst hat und die noch nicht beigelegt ist; doch unabhängig von ihrer Gültigkeit kann gesagt werden, dass sich (wahrscheinlich) in den ersten Jahrzehnten des 4. Jahrhunderts eine historiographische Tradition entwickelte, die so dominant wurde, dass sie die alternativen Versionen fast vollständig verdrängte: In ihr wurde die Zeit der „Soldatenkaiser" des vorhergehenden Jahrhunderts im Lichte der Themen neu interpretiert, die mit der Machtübernahme Konstantins aktuell geworden waren.[53] Natürlich ist es nicht möglich, den Umfang und die innere Struktur dieser „Urquelle" zu bestimmen, aber einige Elemente lassen den Schluss zu, dass sie um die Regierungszeiten der einzelnen Kaiser herum arrangiert war.

Das ist also das neue Zeitmaß, das sich als Alternative zur christlichen Weltchronik durchsetzt und das man sowohl in den *breviaria* als auch in der Geschichte von Eunapios von Sardes wiederfindet. Letzterer stellt diese Form neben der annalistischen Erzählung und der rein biographischen Struktur als „dritten Weg" der historischen Erzählung vor: Indem er eine Darstellung κατὰ χρόνους καὶ κατὰ ἄνδρας (F73 Müller) aufgab, hatte er die Möglichkeit „durch die notwendigen Dinge hindurch voranzuschreiten" (F8 Müller: ὡς ἐνῆν μάλιστα διὰ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐπιτρέχουσιν), wobei man nur Erwähnenswertes erzählte. In Wirklichkeit konzentrierte sich sein Werk auf Julians Herrschaft und auf die späteren Ereignisse, während er den vorhergehenden Herrschern deutlich weniger Platz widmete; was für uns aber zählt, ist die entschiedene Bevorzugung eines Erzählmodus, den er selbst mit der wirksamen Formel κατὰ χρόνους, οἳ τοῖς βασιλεοῦσι περιγράφονται (F1 Müller) definierte.[54] Zu Beginn des 5. Jahrhunderts wird diese Darstellungsweise immer stärker, und sogar Sokrates Scholastikos wählt sie als Grundlage für seine Kirchengeschichte (in einer signifikanten Verbindung von Profan- und Kirchengeschichte).

In seiner Polemik um die „Jahr für Jahr-Geschichte" tritt Eunapios also in Herodians Fußstapfen und verfolgt das Projekt mit noch größerer Kohärenz weiter.[55] Während bei Eunapios die bevorzugte Zeiteinheit unmissverständlich die Regierungsperiode der einzelnen Herrscher ist (der βασιλεῖς, wie Eunapios sie nennt), bildet bei Herodian das Paar „χρόνοι ~ δυναστεῖαι" eine Art noch nicht gut harmonisiertes Hendyadion. Die „χρόνοι" sind gewiss jene der Kaiser, aber diese vermischen sich mit den Zeiten der anderen „δυναστεῖαι", die sich von Mal zu Mal ihre Vorrangstellung streitig machen. Im Abstand zwischen „δυναστεία" und „βασιλεία" verdeutlicht sich die Schwierigkeit, die Komplexität der historischen Realität in einer Zeit starker politischer Instabilität und tiefer sozialer Risse auf die Figur eines einzigen Augustus zurückzuführen. Die autoritäre Wende militärischer Prägung eines Teils der Severerdynastie und von Maximinus Thrax regte zweifellos eine tiefere Reflexion über das Gewicht der kaiserlichen *potestas* an; und dennoch hinderte eine umfassendere Vision der Politik Herodian daran, alles auf das begrenzte Umfeld des einzelnen *princeps* zurückzuführen. Seine Erzählung ist von einer steten Spannung in Richtung Freiheit durchzogen, und gerade die Fähigkeit beziehungsweise Unfähigkeit, die ἐλευθερία zu garantieren, stellt einen der wichtigsten Parameter bei der Unterscheidung zwischen guten und bösen Herrschern dar. Dabei handelt es sich natürlich nicht um anachronistische republikanische Nostalgien: Caracallas absolutistische Neigung, für die die brutale Ermordung seines Bruders ein gutes Beispiel ist, und das erbärmliche Ende der zwei Kaiser des Senats (Pupienus Maximus und Balbinus) – das unter anderem ihrer Rivalität zuzuschreiben ist – hatten deutlich die Unmöglichkeit einer Diarchie in den Linien des konsularischen Modells gezeigt. Aber es besteht kein Zweifel daran, dass der Historiker eine Regierungsform für erstrebenswert hält, die die Exzesse der Autokratie lindern kann: Er preist mehrmals die Güte einer „aristokratischen" Regierung, in der die einzelnen Staatselemente bei der Verwaltung des Staates zusammenarbeiten (man denke nur an die Antrittsrede von Macrinus);[56] und das Volk selbst nimmt – obwohl es wegen seiner Neigung zu Revolutionen getadelt wird – eine wichtige Rolle in der Erzählung ein, indem es als Subjekt handelt, das auf den Verlauf der Ereignisse Einfluss nehmen kann.[57] Durch die Preisung eines „aristokratischen" Ideals trägt Herodian nicht nur zur Aufwertung jener aufstrebenden Schichten (vor allem aus der Provinz und aus dem Rittertum) bei, die die severischen Reformen mitgefördert hatten, sondern erhofft sich ein System, das den Druck von unten ohne despotische Deformationen ausgleichen kann und das in Form einer gemäßigten Volksbeteiligung und Einbindung der besten Elemente der Gesellschaft realisiert werden soll.

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[53] Für diese Überlegungen verweise ich auf die prägnanten Ausführungen von Gnoli (2019) bes. 34 – 43 (mit Diskussion über die vorhergehende Literatur).

[54] Vgl. auch F26 Müller. Vor allem F1 Müller enthält eine lebhafte Polemik gegen die Option, die Geschichte Jahr für Jahr zu erzählen: Mecella (2013) 209 – 221, Gnoli (2019) 53 – 54. Allgemein sind zu Eunapios Werk die Studien von Antonio Baldini weiterhin wichtig: Da ich nicht alle einzeln aufzählen kann, erwähne ich nur seine Monographie (Baldini [1984]) und den Beitrag in Zusammenarbeit mit François Paschoud, mit dem Baldini während seiner gesamten Tätigkeitsperiode einen intensiven Austausch über ihre oft gegensätzlichen Meinungen und Ideen pflegte: Baldini/Paschoud (2014).

[55] Einen Hinweis auf Eunapios findet man bereits bei Hidber (2006) 152 Anm. 93, wobei der Ansatz jedoch nicht weiterverfolgt wird.

Die schwierige Zeit des „langen" 3. Jahrhunderts – mit seinen Kontrasten und Widersprüchen – eignete sich noch nicht für ein monolithisches, ganz auf die Figur des amtierenden Herrschers zugeschnittenes Verständnis; erst die nachfolgenden Entwicklungen der tetrarchischen und konstantinischen Zeit setzten eine neue Weltanschauung durch, in der das kaiserliche Charisma eine gesamte Epoche prägte. Am Ende des Prozesses setzte die *Novella* 47 (vom August 537) fest, dass in den offiziellen Dokumenten die Jahre vorrangig mit dem Regierungsjahr und dem *nomen* des Kaisers anzugeben seien; die Erwähnung des Konsulpaares (gemeinsam mit der Indiktion) verschwand nicht, aber sie hatte eine völlig nebensächliche Funktion. So wurde *de facto* eines der letzten Fossile der republikanischen Ordnung ausgelöscht.[58] Die Geschichtsschreibung – in der Form der Kaisergeschichte – war der justinianischen Neuerung um vieles zuvorgekommen, auf einem Weg, der, wie diese Untersuchung gezeigt hat, seinen Ursprung in der Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts hat: Mit seinem charakteristischen Zeitverständnis hat Herodian Tendenzen vorweggenommen, die sich noch als sehr erfolgreich erweisen sollten.

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[56] Galimberti (2014) 25–29. Ich stimme also nicht mit Arbo (2022) 125–129 überein, die die von Herodian erhoffte aristokratische Staatsform als eine Diarchie zwischen dem Kaiser und dem Senat identifizierte. Das Verhalten des Historikers gegenüber dem *amplissimus ordo* ist in Wirklichkeit viel nuancierter: Zwar erkennt er dessen Bedeutung als Organ der Legitimierung der Macht (Buongiorno [2022]) an, er verschweigt aber nicht die Grenzen eines Standes, dessen Fähigkeit zur politischen Einflussnahme immer schwächer wird, wie zumal die Fälle der Kaiser Pupienus Maximus und Balbinus zeigen.

[57] Arbo (2022) 121, Motta (2022).

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[58] Zu dieser wichtigen Reform s. Fichtenau (1973) 467– 472, Feissel (2010) 503 – 524, bes. 504 – 507.

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Panagiotis Androulakis

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

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[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 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.

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[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'.

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

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[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.

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 narrative 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]

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[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.

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 destroyed 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]

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[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 ἐκείνου 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 τοσαὐτην τύχην ἤλασε; 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.

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 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]

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[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 ήδη 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.

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 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 τὰὰπροειρημένα 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]

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[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.

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 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.

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[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.

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 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]

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[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.

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 καιροῦ̀to 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

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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-

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

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[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).

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]

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[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** ἀπεχθῶς 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 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).

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[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.

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 arrest and execution (συλληφθῆναι […] πυρὶ παραδοθῆναι). The analogies between the 'philosopher' and the mutineers, who defy their superior to support their desired emperor, 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.* Commodus' soldiers wanted to protect their emperor and are presented with a *kairos*, an opportunity arising without their contribution (ἔχοντες), while Elagabalus' soldiers, pushed to their limit, perceived (νομίζοντες) their fellow soldiers' arrest as an opportunity to defend them and bring an end to Elagabalus.[99]

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[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.

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 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.

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[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.

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 conspiracies 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.

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[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.

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.

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[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 δὲὸκαὶ 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 κατηκόντιζεν).[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

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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 δὲ αὐτοῦ ⟨ἐμ⟩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]

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[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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Konstantin V. Markov

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: ἐκεῖὸτε ἡ Ῥώμη, ὅπου ποτ᾽ ἂν ὁὸβασιλεὺς 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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[1] Translations in this chapter are all taken from Whittaker (1969–1970), unless otherwise specified.

[2] For Herodian's focus on the fall of various rulers and power struggles, see Hidber (2006) 180; Davenport/Mallan (2020) 420.

[3] Pitcher (2012).

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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 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.

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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.

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 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.

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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.

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 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]

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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.

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].4.1^{a}, 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 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).

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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).

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 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.

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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".

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 reserved 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.

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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.

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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IV Greek Tradition in Herodian

Sulochana R. Asirvatham

Herodian's History and the Distant Past

1 Introduction

Given the scope of Herodian's *History*, which covers a period of less than 60 years, beginning with Marcus Aurelius's death in 180 CE and ending with the ascension of Gordian III in 238 CE, it is not surprising that the historian has little to say about the Greek past. A bit more surprising that he has little to say about the Roman past. So little, in fact, that the evidence for both the Greek and Roman past can be gathered (if not definitively analyzed) within a single article.

As for Greek history: Herodian is writing of events taking place centuries after the Macedonian Wars, which would have been included in a universal history but are not necessary in a Severan one. Nevertheless, one might expect some attention to be paid to the Greek past based on larger trends we see in imperial literature, which often uses the distant classical or Homeric past as touchstones (hence its frequent characterization as "classicizing"). This is especially true because, as Harry Sidebottom has emphasized in his discussion of Herodian's *proemium*, the historian clearly views himself as a *pepaideumenos*[1] – indicated by the very fact of having composed a large-scale work in classical Attic and in his periodic anecdotal references to what we might call "insider knowledge".[2]

It does not seem, however, that Herodian thinks of *paideia* as definitively Greek. He is in fact so reticent about his ethnic loyalties that we cannot be sure that he self-identifies as Greek at all. Like other imperial Greek authors, Herodian self-reflexively evaluates the quality of the individuals who populate his writings by their level of *paideia*, which in normal circumstances would include having useful knowledge of the past. Because of the subject matter of this work, those whose *paideia* is of interest are mostly Romans. But, unusually – and ironically, in the hands of a writer steeped in the classical tradition – the person for whom the past is most useful (at least in the short run) turns out to be neither Greek nor Roman, but Persian: this is Ardashir (Artaxerxes), the founder of the Sassanid dynasty. When the Romans encounter Ardashir, we do not see the former using historical knowledge in a way that would help them. Conversely, certain decisions made in the past – even by someone like Augustus – will turn out to have been blinkered. What is missing from Herodian's *History*, it seems, is the typical Roman historian's belief in the importance and power of *exempla* from the past as a guide to the future. As Matthew Roller defines the term in the introduction to his

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[1] Sidebottom (1998) 2779.

[2] These include *aitiai* for statues of Magna Mater (Hdn. 1.11.1–3), Vesta (Hdn. 1.14.4–5) and Severus (Hdn. 2.9.5), as well as the false Greek etymology of Latium's name, based on Herodian's story about Janus hiding (λαθεῖν) Saturn from his son Jupiter on this site (Hdn. 1.16.1).

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book on Roman exemplarity, these are "examples set by figures from the past who were famed for performing great deeds for the benefit of the community". These *exempla* had moral authority: "they provided norms for others to accept as their own and models for them to imitate." But their ability to persuade depended on "the belief that the past is accessible, understandable, and relevant to present concerns".[3] I will suggest here that Herodian replaces exemplarity with ironic references that highlight the impossibility of relying on the past to move positively into the future.

I begin (Section 2) by linking Herodian's one major and highly negative statement on Greek history to his positive presentation of Ardashir's actions and historical memory, and its inversion of the classical relationship between Greek and barbarian. Herodian is showing off his sophistic chops, but the inversion ultimately serves a more contemporary purpose: to undermine the efforts of emperors who dare to interact with Greeks and Persians – in this case, Niger and Alexander Severus – without understanding Greek and Persian history. A second set of passages (Section 3) involves Marcus' and Caracalla's understandings of ancient history both Greek and Roman – that is to say, their own versions of paideutic display – which are, alternatively, futile and damaging. While Herodian's audience will expect little good from the cruel Caracalla, they will also notice how Marcus' careful application of *paideia* to his understanding of Commodus' capacity to rule stands in ironic contrast to Commodus' failure as a ruler. A final section (4) discusses how Herodian appears to exalt Augustus while nevertheless emphasizing his responsibility for causing the Aquileians – who the historian presents as unambiguously heroic against Maximinus – to lose the military strength they would now need to prevail against the enemy. The vague reference to a time before Augustus that was better for the Aquileians raises the possibility that Herodian pines for the Republic. And yet he stages no real authorial intervention on the matter. In this respect he is even more cynical than his (plenty cynical) contemporary Cassius Dio, who famously considers the periods after Marcus Aurelius to be those of iron and rust falling away from Marcus' golden reign (72[71].36.4), but who also saw value in the Republic that fought against Hannibal.

2 Herodian the Classicist: Petty Greeks, A Heroic Persian, and Myopic Emperors

2.1 "The Ancient Failing of the Greeks"

One of Herodian's few truly memorable references to the Greeks characterizes them as, throughout their history, addicted to fighting one another (3.2.7–8):

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[3] Roller (2018) 1.

> ὡς δὲ διέδραμε<ν ἡ> φήμη τῆς Σεβήρου νίκης, εὐθὺς ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐκείνοις στάσις καὶ διάφορος γνώμη ἐνέπεσε ταῖς πόλεσιν, οὐχ οὕτως τῇ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμοῦντας βασιλέας ἀπεχθείᾳ τινὶ ἢ εὐνοίᾳ ὡς ζήλῳ καὶ ἔριδι τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλας φθόνῳ τε καὶ καθαιρέσει τῶν ὁμοφύλων. ἀρχαῖον τοῦτο πάθος Ἑλλήνων, οἳ πρὸς ἀλλήλους στασιάζοντες ἀεὶ καὶ τοὺς ὑπερέχειν δοκοῦντας καθαιρεῖν θέλοντες ἐτρύχωσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα. ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐκείνων γηράσαντα καὶ περὶ ἀλλήλοις συντριβέντα Μακεδόσιν εὐάλωτα καὶ Ῥωμαίοις δοῦλα γεγένηται· τὸ δὲ πάθος τοῦτο τοῦ ζήλου καὶ φθόνου μετῆλθεν ἐς τὰς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἀκμαζούσας πόλεις.
>
> When reports of Severus’s victory spread, civil strife and factional conflict fell upon the cities of all the eastern provinces, resulting not so much from hatred or goodwill towards either of the warring emperors as from jealousy and rivalry towards one another, and due to the butchery and annihilation of their kinsfolk. This is a long-standing failing of the Greeks: existing in a state of constant inter-city strife and desiring to destroy any city that seemed too successful, they wore Greece out. But as their organizations aged and ground each other down, they become easy to capture by the Macedonians and enslaved to the Romans. This calamitous state of jealousy and envy has been passed onto cities that are in their prime, right into the present day.

The history of Greek “self-destruction” is not a directly classicizing *topos*, as it is a product of future hindsight. Herodian’s claim that internecine struggle “is” – i.e, still today – the Greeks’ “long-standing weakness” also appears to be an imperial product. But this was not, of course, the only view of the past available to imperial Greeks. In his *Panathenaic Oration*, for example, Aelius Aristides celebrates the Athens of his own day as the natural successor to ancient Athens at its most glorious. According to Aristides, the Athenians deserve to be praised eternally as panhellenic heroes because of the important role they played during the Persian Wars, which seem to have been fought between Persia and Athens alone (*Panath.* 79). Aristides is not concerned with the behavior of cities during and after the Peloponnesian War – that most infamous moment of inter-*polis* strife Herodian is alluding to.[4] Pausanias, on the other hand, is less idealizing of the ancient Greeks than Aristides, and like Herodian he laments the inter-*poleis* strife that led to the rise of Macedon and the disaster at Chaeronea. But like Aristides, he privileges Athens (a city that was beautified by Hadrian, for whom Pausanias shows much admiration) and emphasizes the city’s role in leading panhellenic charges against both the Persians and the Macedonians.[5] Herodian, by contrast, does not find a place for the Greek triumph against the Persians, whom he will paint in Book 6 (as we shall see below) as longtime underdogs now fighting valiantly against a Roman incursion.

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[4] The view that one should ignore the 4th century inter-*poleis* warfare was earlier implied by the Augustan writer Dionysius of Halicarnassus who in his *Letter to Pompeius Geminus* 3.3 complains that Thucydides should have focused on the same subject Herodotus did, bringing together into a single history the deeds accomplished by Greeks and barbarians.

[5] On Hadrian and Athens, see, e.g. Kouremenos (2022). See Asirvatham (2022) 75 – 77 for a brief survey of pro-Athenian sentiments in Pausanias. Paus. 8.52.3 makes a strong inverse statement that critiques the Peloponnesians for their attacks on Athens, which the author equates with Greece: “Someone might call the Peloponnesians, as attackers of Athens, virtual murderers and destroyers of Greece” (φαίη τις ἂν αὐτόχειρας καὶ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα καταποντιστὰς εἶναι σφᾶς τῆς Ἑλλάδος).

There may also be a more specific connection between Herodian's words and those of the Trajanic author Dio Chrysostom. Herodian's generalized historical criticism of the Greeks, as we have seen, comes after we learn of the aftermath of Severus' defeat of Niger at Cyzicus in the provinces: dissension based on their "jealous inter-city rivalry and because of the slaughter and destruction of their compatriots." (Hdn. 3.2.7) After his critique of the Greeks at 3.2.8, Herodian resumes the narrative from immediately after Cyzicus, in 193, when Nicomedia allies with Severus, and Nicaea, "out of hatred for the Nicomedians (τῷ πρὸς Νικομηδέας μίσει)", sides with Niger. Herodian goes as far as to characterize the two armies as "clashing as from two camps rather than from two cities" (ἑκατέρωθεν οὖν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων ὡς ἀπὸ στρατοπέδων ὁρμώμενοι: Hdn. 3.2.10), and Severus wins another victory against Niger. The mention of Nicomedia and Nicaea is brief, but its proximity to the comment about Greece is worth noting. The high status of both cities is well attested – in the Julio-Claudian period, Nicaea, alongside Nicomedia, had been declared "the first city" of Bithynia – as is Nicaea's fate after Niger's defeat, when Severus would strip the city of her titles "first", "metropolis", and *neokoros* (which designated a city's acquisition and guardianship of imperial cult).[6] The rivalry between Nicaea and Nicomedia went back to the 3rd century BCE but was most famously addressed by Dio Chrysostom in his Oration 38, entitled "To the Nicomedians on Concord with the Nicaeans", in which he urges the cities not to draw the attention of the Romans by fighting over minor honors. Herodian uses the same word Dio does for the inter-*poleis* rivalry: "φθόνος" (Hdn. 3.2.7; D.Chr. *Or.* 38.43).[7] Whether or not Herodian is echoing Dio Chrysostom, we should note that the rivalry between Nicomedia and Nicaea does not appear in the *HA* or surviving portions of Cassius Dio (the latter of which many scholars see as Herodian's main source).[8]

It seems possible that Herodian is here taking advantage of two tropes simultaneously: one pertaining to warring Greeks in general and a more specific one concerning the long-standing Roman-era rivalry between Nicomedia and Nicaea, whose importance he inflates to make a point about the Greek lack of focus on (and therefore loyalty to) their Roman allies and the self-deluded nature of certain Romans who rely on Greeks despite their historic unreliability. Soon after the battle of Nicaea and Nicomedia, we hear that Niger's allies in Laodicea in Syria have left him out of hatred for the people of Antioch and that the people of Tyre have rebelled out of hatred for the people of Berytus. (This is nothing personal against Niger, who is somewhat be-side the point.) Hearing that Niger was in flight, these cities stripped him of his honors and came out with public support for Severus (Hdn. 3.3.3). Niger does not remain entirely without help – in March 194, he collects a huge army of enthusiastic youths from Antioch – but we learn immediately that these soldiers are "much inferior to Severus' Illyrians in both 'experience and bravery'" (τοῦ […] ἐμπείρου καὶ γενναίου πολὺ τῶν Ἰλλυριῶν ἀπέλειπον: Hdn. 3.4.1) and that his army is routed in Issus. After his final defeat, Niger returns to Antioch, sees the anguish of the survivors of the rout, flees, and is caught and beheaded by the horsemen in pursuit (Hdn. 3.4.6). While Herodian says that Niger was not known to be hateful as either an emperor or a man, "he paid the penalty for his delaying and indecisiveness" (μελλήσεως καὶ βραδυτῆτος δοὺς δίκας: Hdn. 3.4.7). One might add – for his choice of allies as well. As Herodian notes, Issus is where the original great defeat of East by West – that of Darius by Alexander – had already been accomplished (Hdn. 3.4.3). Herodian remarks that this new Battle of Issus had "the same outcome" (τὴν τύχην ὁμοίαν: 3.4.4) as the original. That is to say: the conflict between Severus and Niger is one of West vs. East – a formulation that, ironically, makes the Greeks the Eastern barbarians and the Illyrians (Philip and Alexander of Macedon's first "barbarian" enemies) the representatives of Severus' West (even still as barbarians).

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[6] For a history of the use of these titles, see Heller (2006) 241 – 341. On the effects of Severus and Niger's war on Nicomedia and Nicaea, see Robert (1977); also Burrell (2004) 164 – 165.

[7] There is also evidence from Dio's speech to the people of Alexandria (*Or.* 32) that Herodian read Dio's work. In Book 4.9.3, Herodian mentions that Caracalla massacred the people of Alexandria for their habit of joking around at others' expense (παίζειν). Dio similarly uses the word in *Or.* 32.1, 13, etc.), in which he chastises the Alexandrians for their frivolity. On Caracalla, see below.

[8] It is possible that Cassius Dio's original text includes something about this rivalry, especially given that Dio was from Nicaea (see Kemezis [2020] 274 – 275). In the extant text, at any rate, Dio only mentions Nicaea as the site of battle (75[74].6.4).

2.2 Ardashir the Pepaideumenos

What is missing in Herodian's version of Greek history is, again, significant. When writers like Aelius Aristides and Pausanias refer to the late-5th-and-4th-century conflicts between *poleis*, they make an implied contrast between this moment and the glorious 5th-century "panhellenic" defeat of the Persians. Herodian, on the other hand, replaces the praise of 5th-century Greece with what amounts to the rather stunning "heroization" (even if momentary) in Book 6 of Ardashir I, who founded the Sassanid dynasty and was the new champion of Persian independence. It is worth reading the bulk of this passage (6.2.1–7), as it contains the longest description of any ancient history – including Roman – in Herodian's work, and the repetitions from beginning to end enforce the reader's attention to the historical details.

Hdn. 6.2.1–2 begins with the author describing a report, from the Roman governors of Mesopotamia and Syria, of how Ardashir took over the Parthian empire by killing the Arsacid king Artabanus and now wished to reclaim control of the lands which the Romans now ruled. At the end of this section, we learn of Ardashir's view that these lands were his birthright.

> τῷ δὲ τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει αἰφνιδίως ἐκομίσθη γράμματα τῶν κατὰ Συρίαν τε καὶ Μεσοποταμίαν ἡγεμόνων, δηλοῦντα ὅτι Ἀρταξάρης ὁ Περσῶν βασιλεὺς μετὰ τὸ Παρθυαίους καθελεῖν καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν ἀρχῆς παραλῦσαι, Ἀρτάβανόν τε τὸν πρότερον καλούμενον [τὸν] μέγαν βασιλέα καὶ δυσὶ διαδήμασι χρώμενον ἀποκτεῖναι, πάντα τε τὰ περίοικα βάρβαρα χειρώσασθαι καὶ ἐς φόρου συντέλειαν ὑπαγαγέσθαι, οὐχ ἡσυχάζει οὐδ' ἐντὸς Τίγριδος ποταμοῦ μένει, ἀλλὰ τὰς ὄχθας ὑπερβαίνων καὶ τοὺς τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς ὅρους Μεσοποταμίαν τε κατατρέχει καὶ Σύροις ἀπειλεῖ,

> **πᾶσάν τε τὴν ἀντικειμένην ἤπειρον Εὐρώπῃ καὶ διαιρουμένην Αἰγαίῳ τε καὶ τῷ πορθμῷ τῆς Προποντίδος, Ἀσίαν τετπᾶσαν καλουμένην προγονικὸν κτῆμα ἡγούμενος τῇ Περσῶν ἀρχῇ ἀνακτήσασθαι βούλεται, φάσκων ἀπὸ Κύρου τοῦ πρώτου τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκ Μήδων ἐς Πέρσας μεταστήσαντος μέχρι Δαρείου τοῦ τελευταίου Περσῶν βασιλέως, οὗ τὴν ἀρχὴν Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδὼν καθεῖλε, πάντα μέχρις Ἰωνίας καὶ Καρίας ὑπὸ σατράπαις Περσικοῖς διῳκῆσθαι· προσήκειν οὖν αὐτῷ Πέρσαις ἀνανεώσασθαι πᾶσαν ὁλόκληρον, ἣν πρότερον ἔσχον, ἀρχήν.**
>
> But in the tenth year,[9] Severus Alexander unexpectedly received letters from the governors of Syria and Mesopotamia. They revealed that Ardashir, the king of the Persians, having conquered the Parthians and detached their Eastern empire, killed Artabanus, who was formerly called the Great King and wore the double diadem, and conquered all the neighboring barbarians, forcing them to pay tribute. And he did not stay quiet nor keep to his side of the Tigris River, but climbing its banks and crossing the borders of the Roman empire, he ravaged Mesopotamia and menaced Syria. **The entire continent lying opposite Europe and separated from it by the Aegean Sea and the Propontic Gulf, and the region called Asia, Ardashir wanted to regain for the Persian Empire, believing them to be his inheritance, and declared that everything as far as Ionia and Caria had been ruled by Persian satraps from the time of Cyrus, who changed the empire from Median to Persian, up until the reign of Darius, the last of the Persian kings, whose empire Alexander the Macedonian conquered. And that therefore it was fitting for him to conquer for the Persians the whole entire empire that they had previously had.**

This passage describes, through the Roman governors' reports, Ardashir's fast and unexpected conquest of the Parthian lands and the king's desire to win back what remained of the Persian empire from the Romans. The vivid description of the landscape indicates the scale of Ardashir's ambitions. Alexander[10] and the Macedonians appear here as the conquerors of Persia, but not (as we might expect from the point of view of classicism) in the name of Greek freedom, but rather as part of Ardashir's call for Persian freedom.

In the sections that follow (6.2.3–4), we can contrast Ardashir's understanding of the history of the Persian empire and its lands with Severus Alexander's limited perspective on both the nature of the enemy and the geographical scope of his own empire. Herodian blames the young emperor's ignorance on the fact that he grew up in Rome, and in a time of peace:

> τοιαῦτα τοίνυν δηλωσάντων καὶ ἐπιστειλάντων τῶν ὑπὸ ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς ἡγεμόνων, πρὸς τὴν αἰφνίδιον καὶ παρ' ἐλπίδα κομισθεῖσαν ἀγγελίαν οὐ μετρίως ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐταράχθη, καὶ μάλιστα εἰρήνῃ ἐκ παίδων ἐντραφεὶς καὶ τῇ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ἀεὶ σχολάσας τρυφῇ. τὰ μὲν οὖν πρῶτα ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ κοινωσαμένῳ τοῖς φίλοις πρεσβείαν πέμψαι καὶ διὰ γραμμάτων κωλῦσαι τὴν ὁρμὴν καὶ ἐλπίδα τοῦ βαρβάρου. **ἔλεγε δὲ τὰ γράμματα δεῖν μένειν τε αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἰδίων ὅροις καὶ μὴ καινοτομεῖν μηδὲ ματαίαις αἰωρούμενον ἐλπίσι μέγαν ἐγείρειν πόλεμον, ἀγαπητῶς τε ἔχειν ἕκαστον τὰ αὑτοῦ·** μηδὲ γὰρ ὁμοίαν ἔσεσθαι μάχην αὐτῷ πρὸς Ῥωμαίους οἵαν σχεῖν πρὸς τοὺς γειτνιῶντας καὶ ὁμοφύλους βαρβάρους. **ὑπεμίμνησκε δὲ τὰ γράμματα τῶν τε τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ καὶ τῶν Τραϊανοῦ Λουκίου τε καὶ Σεβήρου κατ' αὐτῶν τροπαίων.** τοιαῦτα μὲν δή τινα ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐπιστείλας ᾤετο πείσειν ἢ φοβήσειν ἐς τὸ ἡσυχάζειν τὸν βάρβαρον.

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[9] The main manuscripts have τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει (fourteenth year) but this is emended by Cassola (1963) and accepted by Whittaker in his Loeb edition (1970).

[10] For Alexander the Great in Herodian, see Baron in this volume.

> When the Eastern governors revealed these developments in their dispatches, Alexander was greatly shaken by the suddenness of the announcement, which defied his expectations, especially since he had been raised from childhood in a state of peace, living in Rome and in continual luxury. So he thought it was best, first of all, having consulted his councilors, to send an embassy and, by means of his letters, stave off the inrush and foil the barbarian's hopes. **The letters conveyed that Ardashir should stay within his own borders and not try anything new, and that he should not get carried away with vain hopes and stir up a great war. Instead, each of them should be happy with what he had.** For he would not find fighting against the Romans to be the same as fighting against neighbors and barbarian kinsmen. **The letters also reminded Ardashir of the victories won over them by Augustus, Trajan, Verus, and Severus.** Having sent such a letter, Alexander believed he would either persuade the barbarian into keeping quiet or frighten him into it.

Severus Alexander's list of emperors who won victories in the East – Augustus, Trajan, Verus, and Severus – certainly shows a partial knowledge of the past (although we shall see below the perils of the Augustan peace). But his words also demonstrate that he does not really know his "Persians" and cannot distinguish properly among peoples beyond the Eastern border – a particularly interesting choice of presentation on Herodian's part given that Alexander was from Syria. While Alexander is vaguely aware of the conflict between Ardashir and his "barbarian kinsmen and neighbors", he lumps Ardashir together with the Parthians against whom earlier Romans had fought and who (unbeknownst to Alexander) are the enemy of both himself and the Sassanid king. Ardashir's perspective naturally differs. After describing Ardashir's overrunning of Roman territory in the most extreme terms possible (6.2.5), Herodian resumes his discussion of the king's motivation and recaps the history of rule over former Persian territories, from Alexander's defeat of Darius III to the narrative present (6.2.6 – 7). In doing so, he reinforces the distinction between the Parthians and the newly revived Persians:

> ἦν δὲ αὐτὸν τὰ ἀναπείθοντα οὐ μικρὰ ἐς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀρχῆς μείζονος. πρῶτος γὰρ Περσῶν ἐτόλμησε τῇ Παρθυαίων ἀρχῇ ἐπιθέσθαι Πέρσαις τε τὴν βασιλείαν ἀνανεώσασθαι. **μετὰ** γὰρ **Δαρεῖον** τὸν ὑπ' Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνος τῆς ἀρχῆς παραλυθέντα, παμπλείστοις ἐν ἔτεσι **Μακεδόνες μὲν καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου διάδοχοι** τῶν ὑπὸ ταῖς ἀνατολαῖς ἐθνῶν καὶ κατ' Ἀσίαν ἅπασαν, νειμάμενοι κατὰ χώρας, ἐβασίλευσαν. ἐκείνων δὲ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφερομένων, πολέμοις τε συνεχέσι τῆς Μακεδόνων δυνάμεως ἐξασθενούσης, πρῶτος Ἀ**ρσάκης** λέγεται, **τὸ γένος Παρθυαῖος**, ἀναπεῖσαι τοὺς ἐπέκεινα βαρβάρους ἀποστῆναι Μακεδόνων· περιθέμενός τε τὸ διάδημα ἑκόντων Παρθυαίων καὶ τῶν προσχώρων βαρβάρων αὐτός τε ἐβασίλευσε, καὶ τοῖς ἐξ ἐκείνου τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ πλεῖστον παρέμενεν ἡ ἀρχή, **μέχρις Ἀρταβάνου** τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς γενομένου, **ὃν Ἀρταξάρης ἀποκτείνας** Πέρσαις τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀνεκτήσατο, τά τε γειτνιῶντα ἔθνη βάρβαρα χειρωσάμενος ῥᾳδίως ἤδη καὶ τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ ἐπεβούλευσεν.
>
> The deliberations that fostered in Ardashir a desire for a greater empire were hardly trivial. He was the first Persian who dared attack the Parthian Empire, and the first to revive the empire for the Persians. **After Darius** (the one who had been deprived of his kingdom by Alexander of Macedon), for many years **the Macedonians and Alexander's Successors** ruled over the nations of the East and all of Asia, having divided up the territory. But these men fought with each other; with the power of the Macedonians exhausted by constant warring, **Arsaces the Parthian**, they say, was the first to persuade the barbarians in those areas to revolt against the Macedonians. As-

> suming the crown, he himself ruled over whoever was willing of the Parthians and neighboring barbarians, and the empire for a long time stayed in his family – up **until Artabanus**, who lived in our time. **Ardashir killed Artabanus** and took hold of the kingdom for the Persians. Having already easily subdued the neighboring barbarian tribes, he began to plot against the Roman empire.

It is hard not to take Herodian's description of Ardashir's accomplishments as at least somewhat flattering to the Persian king – even if Herodian describes him as "rash by nature" (φύσει […] ὢν ἀλαζών: 6.2.5), and even if the historian's positive characterization of the Ardashir's mission seems motivated by a desire to undermine the image of Severus Alexander. The historical importance of Ardashir 's task – Herodian highlights that he is the "first Persian" to attack the Parthians since their ancestor Arsaces won Iranian territory back from the Macedonians, creating an empire that persisted over generations until Ardashir killed Artabanus – is driven home by the repetition between 6.2.1–2 and sections 6.2.6–7. These history lessons, which are presented from Ardashir's (and Herodian's own) perspective, are given to the audience, but remain unknown to Severus Alexander. Finally, I note that Herodian and Cassius Dio are the only extant contemporary sources for this episode, but even in epitome form, Cassius Dio's presentation of this moment in Severan history (80[80].3.1–4 [Xiph./*Exc. Val.*]) comes across quite differently. Far from taking either the Sassanid king or Roman emperor's point of view, Dio articulates, from his own (senatorial) viewpoint, a general fear of Ardashir when he was threatening to win back the ancient Persian empire: "The situation in Mesopotamia felt even more dangerous and more truly frightening, not only for those living in Rome but for the rest of humanity as well" (τὰ δὲ ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ καὶ φοβερώτερα, καὶ ἀληθέστερον δέος σύμπασιν, οὐχ ὅτι τοῖς ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις D.C. 80[80].3.1); Ardashir became "fearsome to us" (φοβερὸς ἡμῖν) due to the hugeness of his army encamped in Mesopotamia as well as the sorry state of the Roman armies in the east, who in fact went over to the Persian king to fight – but "not because he seemed particularly consequential" (οὐχ ὅτι αὐτὸς λόγου τινὸς ἄξιος δοκεῖ: D.C. 80 [80].4.1).[11] Herodian's presentation of Ardashir as a figure of some consequence, by contrast, should be taken as a manifestation of his own art and an ironic commentary on Severus Alexander's ignorance.

3 Lessons of the Past, Useless or Badly Learned

It is not certain, however, that Herodian thinks historical knowledge would have benefited Severus Alexander. Consider the cases of Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla. Herodian's first references to the distant past appear in 1.3.2–5, when Marcus is on his deathbed fretting over the prospect of Commodus' youthful ascension, "for the minds of the young, as they glide off towards pleasures, are very easily diverted from the virtues of education” (ῥᾷστα γὰρ αἱ τῶν νέων ψυχαὶ ἐς ἡδονὰς ἐξολισθαίνουσαι ἀπὸ τῶν παιδείας καλῶν μετοχετεύονται).[12] His mind turns to those whose ascents to power as youths had disastrous results:

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[11] For this passage see Scott (2018) 150–151.

> οἷα δὴ ἄνδρα πολυίστορα μάλιστα ἐτάραττε μνήμη τῶν ἐν νεότητι βασιλείαν παραλαβόντων, τοῦτο μὲν **Διονυσίου τοῦ Σικελιώτου τυράννου**, ὃς ὑπὸ τῆς ἄγαν ἀκρασίας καινὰς ἡδονὰς ἐπὶ μεγίστοις μισθοῖς ἐθηρᾶτο, τοῦτο δὲ αἱ **τῶν Ἀλεξάνδρου διαδόχων**_ἐς τοὺς ὑπηκόους ὕβρεις τε καὶ βίαι, δι’ ὧν τὴν ἐκείνου ἀρχὴν κατῄσχυναν, **Πτολεμαῖος** μὲν καὶ μέχρις ἀδελφῆς γνησίας ἔρωτος προχωρήσας παρὰδ[τε] τοὺς Μακεδόνων καὶ Ἑλλήνων νόμους, **Ἀντίγονος** δὲ Διόνυσον πάντα μιμούμενος καὶ κισσὸν μὲν περιτιθεὶς τῇ κεφαλῇ ἀντὶ καυσίας καὶ διαδήματος Μακεδονικοῦ, θύρσον δὲ ἀντὶ σκήπτρου φέρων· ἔτι δὲ καὶ μᾶλλον αὐτὸν ἐλύπει τὰ μὴ πρὸ πολλοῦ <γενόμενα> ἀλλ’ ὑπόγυον ἔχοντα τὴν μνήμην, τά τε **Νέρωνι** πεπραγμένα ὃς ἐχώρησε μέχρι μητρῴου φόνου παρεῖχέ τε τοῖς δήμοις ἑαυτὸν καταγέλαστον θέαμα, τά τε **Δομετιανῷ** τετολμημένα, τῆς ἐσχάτης ὠμότητος οὐδὲν ἀπολείποντα. τοιαύτας δὴ τυραννίδος εἰκόνας ὑποτυπούμενος ἐδεδίει.
>
> Being the well-read man that he was, Marcus fretted over the recollection of rulers of the past who ruled as young men. He thought about **Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrant**, for example, who out of a lack of moderation paid lots of money for novel pleasures. And then there were the excesses and violent acts perpetrated by **Alexander’s successors** against their subjects, through which they brought dishonor onto Alexander’s rule. **Ptolemy** went as far as having sex with his own sister, acting in defiance of Macedonian and Greek laws, and **Antigonus** mimicked Dionysus in every way, wearing ivy on his head instead of the Macedonian *kausia* and diadem, and wielding a *thyrsus* instead of a scepter. Gnawing at him still more were events of the not-too-distant past but of recent memory – like the things **Nero** did, going as far as plotting his mother’s death and making himself a ridiculous spectacle in front of the people, and the things **Domitian** dared to do, leaving behind not the cruelest of acts. Having formed such images of tyrants in his mind, he was alarmed.

The examples that spring to Marcus’ mind come from Greek, Macedonian, and Roman history, and include Dionysius of Syracuse, Alexander’s successors, Nero and Domitian. Herodian uses the “thought-bubble” technique (or, more formally, free indirect discourse)[13] in order to demonstrate, in a quite literal way, the emperor’s *paideia*, and he is explicit on the link between *paideia* and Marcus’ thought: Marcus’ worries over Commodus’s youthful ascension to power are a result of his being a well-read, literally “much-historied” (πολυίστορα) man. Marcus thinks about Dionysius’s lack of self-control; the successors’ excesses and violence, including Ptolemy’s incest and Antigonus’ imitation of Dionysus; Nero’s matricide and buffoonery; and Domitian’s outrageous cruelty. In this way, Herodian makes this ruler-*pepaideumenos* look like a Roman historian with a penchant for exemplarity. The idea of Antigonus imitating Dionysus, however, is curiously incongruous. Plutarch, for one, attributes this behavior to

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[12] In his preface, Herodian notes as a general pattern among the rulers of his chosen period that older rulers were better than younger ones (Hdn. 1.1.6).

[13] See Chrysanthou (2022) 99. Free indirect discourse (FID) is what Laird (2008) 202 describes as the “*merging* of the voices of narrator and character”.

Antigonus' son Demetrius Poliorcetes rather than to Antigonus;[14] even stranger, in context, is the fact that Antigonus was in his mid-70s when he ruled, so he is hardly an example of youthful folly. Is this Herodian's mistake?[15] Or is he signaling to the audience that, for all his *paideia*, Marcus cannot keep his history straight? Whatever the case may be, the fact that Marcus is the first and last person in Herodian's text to offer a set of cautionary examples, and that they fail in their intended effect, is a sign that Herodian does not find historical *exempla* to be very valuable. Specifically: the most arduous learner cannot implant good moral character in someone like Commodus. To the degree that a *pepaideumenos*'s presentation of the *paideia* of others must be at least partly self-reflexive, the fact that Marcus' historical knowledge fails to prevent disaster does not say much for Herodian's chosen pursuit. But we are also reminded that Herodian does not claim that his work puts forth historical lessons. His limited aim, as he puts it, is to tell the truth to present-day readers and provide pleasure for future audiences (1.1.3).

A clearer indication that historical knowledge does not automatically lead to good outcomes is found in Caracalla's actions in Book 4.8.1 – 4.9.8, where the emperor finds himself in the provinces, having guiltily escaped the bloodbath that he himself perpetrated on his brother Geta and Geta's allies in Rome. Unlike in Marcus's case, it is not that knowledge is *insufficient* for Caracalla's purposes. The problem is that Caracalla's purposes are immoral: self-aggrandizing at best, murderous at worst. Upon entering Thrace, Herodian tells us that Caracalla "immediately became Alexander the Great" (εὐθὺς Ἀλέξανδρος ἦν), and – in the style of that early master self-publicist – ordered statues and paintings of Alexander to be put on public display in all cities, including the Capitol and the entirety of Rome, which would emphasize his connection to the Macedonian king (Hdn. 4.8.1). Herodian claims to have seen ridiculous (χλεύης […] ἀξίας) statues with one body and two faces: Caracalla's on one side of the head and Alexander's on the other. Caracalla also dresses like a Macedonian and creates a "Macedonian phalanx" with officers named after Alexander's generals (Hdn. 4.8.2), and forms from chosen Spartan youths what he calls a "Laconian and Pitanetan battalion" (Hdn. 4.8.3). He seeks healing from Asclepius in Pergamum and visits the ruins of Troy and the tomb of Achilles, where he imitates Achilles and finds his Patroclus in the form of a freedman Festus, who, when he dies (either by poison, so as to serve as a new Patroclus, or from illness) is buried in a huge sacrificial ceremony (Hdn. 4.8.4).[16] Caracalla also sets up statues and paintings of "Roman Sulla" and the "Carthaginian Hannibal," whom he also admires (Hdn. 4.8.5). He leaves Troy and travels through the rest of Asia. He stays at Antioch, where he is welcomed warmly and stays a while (without event).

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[14] Plu. *Demetr.* 2.3. Müller (2009) 43 suggests that there may have been a grain of historical truth here. The association with Dionysus was related to his relationship with the prostitutes Lamia and Leaina, which she suggests were a positive part of Demetrius' political representation at Athens.

[15] As Hohl (1954) 35 n. 37 believed, followed by Galimberti (2014) 56.

[16] See Pownall (2022) 259 – 265 on the Roman tradition of associating Alexander with Achilles, starting with Plutarch.

The situation is different at Alexandria. Caracalla sends letters to the Alexandrians pretending to be eager to worship their god and honor Alexander's memory, and is received with great fanfare (Hdn. 4.8.6 – 9). His ruse is motivated by a report that the Alexandrians made fun of him for murdering his brother and sleeping with his mother (Herodian says they referred to her as "Jocasta"),[17] and for styling himself as a new Alexander and Achilles, who were taller and stronger than he was (Hdn. 4.9.1 – 3). As revenge, Caracalla tells the Alexandrians that he wants to organize an Alexandrian phalanx to honor Alexander, similar to his Macedonian and Spartan phalanxes. The Alexandrians accordingly send youths to Caracalla, who has his soldiers encircle and massacre them (Hdn. 4.9.4 – 6). The dead are thrown into a huge trench, as well as some who are still alive, who dragged some of Caracalla's soldiers in with them (Hdn. 4.9.7– 8).

Herodian's emphasis appears to be less on Caracalla's cruelty than on his ridiculousness and the way that he perverts the legacies of great warriors like Alexander, Achilles, and the Spartans: after narrating the slaughter at Alexandria, Herodian simply notes that Caracalla left Alexander for Antioch, "having done such things" (τοιαῦτα δὴ ἐργασάμενος: Hdn. 4.9.8). There are two other important figures from the past who also appear here as potential models of cruelty for Caracalla: Sulla and Hannibal, whom Herodian labels "Roman Sulla" and "Carthaginian Hannibal" – the first epithet perhaps ironically hinting to Caracalla's own non-Romanness by contrast (his mother Julia Domna was Syrian).

Herodian does not comment further on these two figures, who are simply two more "tough guys" whom Caracalla admires.[18] The mention of Sulla is interesting, however, because he is associated by writers from Lucan to Cassius Dio with a brutal moment in pre-Augustan Roman history: the Republican civil wars.[19] Herodian, however, in his one mention of Republican Rome shows a completely novel attitude towards those who engaged in civil war. If there is a criticism to be leveled at those men, it is that their warring is nothing compared to what Severus has accomplished (3.7.7– 8):

> μηδὲν ταῖς Σεβήρου μάχαις ἢ νίκαις παραβάλλεσθαι μήτε πλήθει δυνάμεως μήτε ἐθνῶν κινήσεσιν ἀριθμῷ τε παρατάξεων ὁδοιπορίας τε μήκει καὶ τάχει. μεγάλαι μὲν γὰρ καὶ αἱ Καίσαρος πρὸς Πομ-

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[17] On the two very different traditions about Caracalla's sexuality, (1) that he slept with Julia Domna and (2) that he was impotent and took on a passive homosexual role, see Davenport (2017) 78 – 79, who supports the contention of Marasco (1996) (see also Levick [2007] 101 – 102) that the Alexandrian rumor about Domna is historical (but not the incest).

[18] Manfredi Zanin (2020) has argued that Caracalla's emulations of Alexander and of Sulla are historical (and not simply slander) and are inspired by his desire to court two different audiences (the eastern provinces, and the Senate); he was also inspired by Septimius Severus' presentation of Sulla as a model for (cruel) rule.

[19] Cassius Dio's entire work can be seen as a commentary on civil war as endemic to Roman history. He sees the war against Hannibal as the only true moment of *concordia* (ὁνόμοια ἀκριβῶς: D.C. 13.52.1) in Roman history (that is to say: the Roman equivalent of the panhellenic moment for the Greeks against the Persians).

> πήιον ἑκατέρωθεν στρατοπέδων Ῥωμαϊκῶν μάχαι, καὶ αὖ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ πρὸς Ἀντώνιον ἢ τοὺς Πομπηίου παῖδας, εἴ τέ τι πρότερον Σύλλᾳ ἢ Μαρίῳ ἐν ἐμφυλίοις καὶ Ῥωμαϊκαῖς μάχαις ἢ ἄλλοις πέπρακται· ἕνα δὲ ἄνδρα τρεῖς καθελόντα βασιλέας ἤδη κρατοῦντας […] χειρωσάμενον ἀνδρείᾳ, οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλον ῥᾳδίως εἰπεῖν.
>
> Nothing can be compared to the battles and victories of Severus, neither in the size of the forces nor in the revolutions of nations, nor in the number of battles and the distance and speed of the marches. Massive were the battles of Caesar against Pompey, of Roman armies on both sides, as were those of Augustus against Antony and the sons of Pompey. Even before that there were the civil wars at Rome of Sulla and Marius and others. But this one man destroyed three emperors who were already reigning [Didius Julianus, Pescennius Niger and Albinus] […], overpowering them with courage. One would look far to find another like him.

The value Herodian places on Severus' warring does not square easily with his complaints about the Greeks. It does, however, bring us back to the original claim of his history, that we would not find at any other time such "unexpected careers of tyrants or emperors" (τυράννων τε καὶ βασιλέων βίους παραδόξους: Hdn. 1.1.4.). The larger historical (negative) consequences of Severus' warring do not emerge as an explicit concern.

4 Augustus: The Real Beginning of the End?

Perhaps of a piece with his unusual attitude towards the Roman Republic is Herodian's treatment of Augustus, who he suggests brought peace to the world at the expense of the kind of warriorhood – specifically that of the Italians – that was necessary to survive in today's world. In what a reader might experience as "bookending",Herodian emphasizes in Book 2 and again in Book 8 that the Italians were world-conquering warriors before Augustus gave them peace and replaced them with what the historian calls "mercenaries" (μισθόφροι) to guard the boundary walls of the Roman empire.[20] This first reference arises in 2.11.4 – 5, when Severus passes through Italy:

> ἐς ὅσον μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ δημοκρατίας τὰ Ῥωμαίων διῳκεῖτο καὶ ἡ σύγκλητος ἐξέπεμπε τοὺς τὰ πολεμικὰ στρατηγήσοντας, ἐν ὅπλοις Ἰταλιῶται πάντες ἦσαν καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν ἐκτήσαντο, Ἕλλησι πολεμήσαντες καὶ βαρβάροις· οὐδέ τι ἦν γῆς μέρος ἢ κλίμα οὐρανοῦ ὅπου μὴ Ῥωμαῖοι τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐξέτειναν. ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἐς τὸν Σεβαστὸν περιῆλθεν ἡ μοναρχία, Ἰταλιώτας μὲν πόνων ἀπέπαυσε καὶ τῶν ὅπλων ἐγύμνωσε, φρούρια δὲ καὶ στρατόπεδα τῆς ἀρχῆς προυβάλετο, μισθοφόρους ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς σιτηρεσίοις στρατιώτας καταστησάμενος ἀντὶ τείχους τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς.
>
> For as long as Roman affairs were administered by the Republic and the senate was in charge of sending out army commanders, all Italians used to bear arms and obtained control of land and sea by fighting against Greeks and barbarians. There was no part of the earth or region in the world

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20 It is not entirely clear what Herodian means by μισθόφροι, since by Augustus' time mercenaries would have been formalized within the auxiliary troops that served alongside the legions. In the immediate context, at any rate, Herodian's word choice emphasizes that they are a foreign presence of some sort in an Italian city.

> where the Romans did not extend their rule. But when sole rule came into Augustus' hands, he made the Italians cease their duties, and denuded them of their arms, and exchanged those for garrisons and camps for the empire, stationing mercenary troops on specified rates of pay to defend the walls of the Roman empire.

Herodian's use of γυμνάω to describe Augustus's action – he "denuded" the Italians of arms – offers the reader a strong visual that bodes ill for these formerly well-protected men.

We revisit Augustus' transformation of the Italians at the battle of Aquileia in 8.2.3 – 6. This episode is a rare "happy story" in Herodian. For one thing, as Daniela Motta points out, it is the only place in Herodian's work in which the *demos* is seen in a positive light.[21] But the situation is a bit strange. While the prosperity and self-sufficiency of the Aquileians is the result of their bustling commerce, they are forced to rebuild their walls in order to battle Maximinus' soldiers, a necessity that is directly due to Augustus' innovations. That is to say: in order to survive, the Italians have to go back to a pre-Augustan past:

> ἔνθεν πολύ τι πλῆθος ἐπεδήμει οὐ πολιτῶν μόνον ἀλλὰ ξένων τε καὶ ἐμπόρων. τότε δὲ μᾶλλον ἐπολυπλασιάσθη τὸ πλῆθος, τῶν ὄχλων πάντων ἐξ ἀγρῶν ἐκεῖσε συρρυέντων, πολίχνας τε καὶ κώμας τὰς περικειμένας καταλιπόντων, πιστευσάντων δὲ αὐτοὺς τῷ τε μεγέθει τῆς πόλεως καὶ τῷ προβεβλημένῳ τείχει, ὃ παλαιότατον <ὂν> ἐκ τοῦ πλείστου μέρους πρότερον μὲν κατερήριπτο, ἅτε μετὰ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν μηκέτι τῶν ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ πόλεων ἢ τειχῶν ἢ ὅπλων δεηθεισῶν, μετειληφυιῶν δὲ ἀντὶ πολέμων εἰρήνην βαθεῖαν καὶ τῆς παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις πολιτείας κοινωνίαν·πλὴν τότε ἡ χρεία ἤπειξε τὸ τεῖχος ἀνανεώσασθαι τά τ' ἐρείπια ἀνοικοδομῆσαι, πύργους τε καὶ ἐπάλξεις ἐγεῖραι. τάχιστα οὖν φράξαντες τῷ τείχει τὴν πόλιν, τάς τε πύλας κλείσαντες, πανδημεὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τειχῶν νύκτωρ τε καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν ἱδρυμένοι τοῖς προσιοῦσιν ἀπεμάχοντο.
>
> There was a huge number of people living permanently there, not only citizens but also foreigners and merchants. At that time [when Maximinus invaded] the number multiplied significantly, as all the crowds from the country streamed into the place, having left behind their small towns and neighboring villages and entrusting themselves to the magnitude of the city and its defensive wall, although the wall was very old and had for the most part fallen into ruins. Under the Roman empire, the cities in Italy no longer needed walls or weaponry, enjoying complete peace instead of wars and partaking in Roman citizenship. But now necessity urged the Aquileians to renew their wall and rebuild the broken parts and erect towers and battlements. After very rapidly fencing in their city with a wall, they closed the gates, and, with the entire population standing on the walls all night and day, they fought back their attackers.

The Aquileians are assigned two competent consulars to be their generals, and these men show great forethought in supplying the city for a siege (Hdn. 8.2.5 – 6). When the Aquileians are tempted into believing Maximinus' false promises of friendship upon surrender, one of the consulars, Crispinus, dramatically runs along the parapets, urging them not to break faith with the Senate and the Roman people. This harks back to the rhetoric of an earlier age that, again, reminds us of Augustus' early actions at

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[21] Motta (2022) 193 – 194.

Aquileia: his "peace" was not simply an ideal moment in time that imprinted itself positively on the future, but one in which a well-meaning policy could have unintended consequences. Again, we have a contrast with Cassius Dio, whose Augustus (if not Octavian) is an idealized figure,[22] representing one of two high points, alongside Marcus, of the empire. While Herodian criticizes neither Marcus nor Augustus, it seems significant that their greatest narrative significance is not their success but their failure, and specifically their failure to understand the trajectory of history.

5 Conclusion

Herodian's limited references to the ancient past do not make it easy for his readers to see what he thought the "best part" of it was. The Aquileian episode suggests a nostalgia for the Republic, but this is tempered by the historian's admiration for Severus' civil warring as superior to that of the Republic. Marcus is clearly a benchmark, as Herodian praises him at the beginning of the work (1.2.1–4). But the almost singular emphasis on the emperor's *paideia* automatically limits our vision of Marcus' good works. It is also inevitably ironic considering the insufficiency of Marcus' reliance on *exempla* to ensure Commodus' good rule.

Again, Herodian does not claim utility as a reason to read his work; and yet, as we have mentioned, Roman readers were long accustomed to the presence in historiography of *exempla.* Herodian not only undervalues them but shows throughout his history that the past (and knowing about it) can be useless or even damaging, as with Caracalla. Both Herodian and Cassius Dio tell the story of decline, but in the latter we detect some exemplary figures: the Republican Romans unified against Hannibal; Augustus; and Marcus. By contrast, references to the Roman past are so vague it is often hard to tell what period is being referred to. Most of the remaining references to the Roman past are put in the mouths of various emperors, all of whom attempt to rouse their audiences with talk of the good old days. But when were those days? Severus' words seem to best reflect Herodian's idea that Marcus was the last of the good emperors (2.10.3). But when Pompeianus encourages Commodus to continue his German campaign by appealing to earlier Romans who became famous and gained renown by conquering barbarians and extending the boundaries of the empire (Hdn. 1.6.6), he could well be speaking of Julius Caesar. Niger's reference in Hdn. 2.8.2 to his soldiers to the "empire made famous by our ancestors from the earliest times" which he fears will lie in ruins, is also non-revealing. Caracalla's sense of history, on the other hand, goes all the way back to the founder of Rome, but for dubious reasons: he defends his murder of Geta to the Senate on the grounds that Romulus, Tiberius, Nero, Domitian, and even Marcus Aurelius himself had all committed fratricide (Hdn. 4.5.5–7). Macrinus' and Pupienus' view of history is notably class-conscious, with Macrinus seeing Marcus and Pertinax as representatives of those born of common cloth who tried to restore to the Romans the rights they had previously had (Hdn. 5.1.8); Pupienus (who will soon die) calls the empire the common possession of the Roman people, whose fate is in the hands of the city of Rome (Hdn. 8.7.5). The final reference to the past, in Hdn. 8.8.2, exists in the collective thought-bubble of the praetorians, who murder Pupienus and elevate Gordian III: “The example of how Severus disarmed the murderers of Pertinax served as a reminder to them.” (τό τε Σεβήρου ὑπόδειγμα, ὃς τοὺς Περτίνακα ἀποκτείναντας ἀπέζωσεν, εἰσῄει αὐτούς).

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[22] Reinhold and Swan (1990).

We are left, then, with an extremely narrow vision of the past. In the end, no matter how any of these men see Roman history and their place in it, those who come to power in this period are doomed to fail. Beyond that: Herodian’s few references to Rome’s Trojan origins imply that they are worthy of respect.[23] But Herodian is not embarking on the same project as Vergil. Ultimately, his references to the deep past do not really edify the reader. The Ancient Greeks may offer a superior literary canon, but their eternal defects make them unreliable allies, and the Romans who rely on them show their lack of historical understanding. Herodian’s unexpected elevation of Ardashir as the most reliable knower of history in the work has a negative effect on our image of Severus Alexander, who is hampered by his lack of knowledge of Persian history and geography. Even the putative best of the Roman emperors, Marcus, fails to provide a positive historical model for Commodus. Caracalla uses his knowledge of the past for bad ends. Augustus sits ambiguously at the head of “the tradition”, as both bringer of peace and damager of Italian warriorhood, and Herodian appears to tout Severus’ decidedly unpeaceful civil war victories more vigorously as any other moment in Roman history. Herodian’s attitude towards the past – and his doubts that knowledge of it can help make a better future – may be best summed up as one of knowing irony in the face of a total societal crisis and decline.

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[23] Herodian said his generation was the first to see a statue of Pallas Athena since it had come from Troy (Hdn. 1.14.4 – 5). In Hdn. 5.6.3 – 4 we discover why: Herodian writes that the statue was revered by the Romans but kept hidden and never moved after coming from Troy, except for when the temple caught fire and it was moved by Elagabalus to the royal palace for marriage to his namesake god.

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Alexander V. Makhlaiuk

Herodian’s Roman Empire: “An Alien Monarchy”?

1 Introduction

Recent decades have seen ever growing scholarly interest in and extensive literature on Herodian and his *History of the Roman Empire from the Death of Marcus Aurelius*[1] that has substantially advanced our understanding of many aspects of this previously underestimated work, mostly of its narrative specifics and literary technique, and the author’s historiographical thought, as well as his characterization of individual rulers and attitudes towards the main political players and moving forces of history.[2] Nevertheless, there are continuing debates on some important issues of more general nature, among which are the questions of how Herodian, as a Greek author of provincial origin, treated the Roman empire as a whole and the domination of the Romans, and what was his attitude to things Roman. These questions immediately concern not only the key problem of the historian’s intentions in writing contemporary history, his political preferences and biases, but also the cultural politics of Herodian’s text as a reflection of what it meant to be a Greek under Roman imperial rule, or, more broadly, the correlation between “Greekness” and “Romanness” in the person of a Greek intellectual who experienced imperial service, witnessed and described the times of “iron and rust,” or the story of τυράννων τε καὶ βασιλέων βίοι (“the lives of tyrants and kings”), as he himself defines his subject in the very first lines of his *opus* (1.1.4).

My point of departure for considering these questions is one of the most provocative statements on Herodian’s attitude to the Roman power, which was made by Harry Sidebottom in his seminal 1998 article on “Herodian’s Historical Methods and Understanding of History”. As Sidebottom claims, “Herodian does not easily fit into the modern orthodoxy that under the principate Greeks were reconciled to, or even identified with, Rome. Herodian does not identify with the Romans. For Herodian the Roman empire was an alien monarchy […]”.[3] This means that his outlook on Rome was that of an

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Funding note: This research has been conducted with the financial support of the Russian Science Foundation, project No. 20–18–00374-П.

[1] To name only the most important works of the last ten years, one should refer to Kemezis (2014), Galimberti (2017), Andrews (2019), Chrysanthou (2022), Galimberti (2022a).

[2] For general trends in the study of Herodian see Sidebottom (2007) 79 – 81; Galimberti (2022b).

[3] Sidebottom (1998) 2824 – 2826. Cf. Sidebottom (2007) 81: “[Herodian’s] frequent explanations of very obvious Roman things […] should be seen as a collusive game offered by the text to its elite Greek readers; ‘let us pretend we know nothing about the Roman empire’. Rome is ‘defamiliarised’ and presented as if it were an ‘alien monarchy’”.

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unsympathetic Greek who lived under a foreign rule, represented the values and views of the Greek elite and judged each emperor on the basis of his παιδεία which is central to Herodianic text. Consequently, his contemporary history was a history of an alien monarchy and should be seen as a kind of Greek resistance to Roman power, that is "political literature" aimed at legitimating the Greeks' position in relation to the Romans – "the foreigners who had enslaved the Greek"[4].

A similar viewpoint, although in less peremptory form, is expressed in some other works. Thus, Denis Roques, who had studied the political vocabulary of Herodian, came to the conclusion that by refusing Latinate terminology and the technicality that it conveys, Herodian defends not only his own identity, but more generally – to the same extent as the universality of his narrative which tells the history of the Graeco-Roman *oikoumenē* – that of Hellenism, to illustrate the culture of which the latter is a bearer. The Greek historian was more interested in pinpointing enduring traces of the Hellenic political and cultural world under Roman rule and despite that rule, and was therefore at the beginning of a broad movement of protest which will find its completion in the 6th century in the "Roman" but Greek-speaking Empire of the East, because his reactionary attitude prefigures the new times of the growing divorce between culture and power, that is to say between Hellenism and Romanness.[5] Similarly, according to Graham Andrews, "Herodian presents an external view of Rome," although he was free from the social biases which are common in the elite world of literature.[6]

Nevertheless, most other scholars reject the assumption that Herodian as a Greek historian takes an anti-Roman point of view. For example, Martin Zimmermann argues that Herodian regarded himself and his audience as residents of the common polity: he did not view Rome's empire as an "alien monarchy", but rather constructed the Roman imperial state against the backdrop of Greek rhetorical traditions.[7] Lukas de Blois considers Herodian, like Cassius Dio, although less explicitly, to be an advocate of a strong monarchical government in a fixed hierarchical socio-political system. At the same time, he finds in Herodian's work "a kind of double perception of the Roman imperial system," and notes: "Harsh reality comes to light in passages on the fickleness of the Roman mob and in chapters on incompetent emperors, military tyranny, and military misbehavior, but in spite of that the influence of the *exemplum Marci* and of the organic model of an imperial polity that Herodian implicitly advocates is manifestly present".[8] In Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen's opinion, Herodian was not only Greek, but also Roman[9] in the sense of being a citizen of the Roman Empire, pursuing a career in what he calls the "imperial and public service"; whatever the precise nature of his Greek roots was, he was an author who "takes the point of view attributed to the Romans and makes it his own".[10]

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[4] Sidebottom (1998) 2776, 2804, 2805.

[5] Roques (1990) esp. 71.

[6] Andrews (2019) 137.

[7] Zimmermann (1999b) 142 n. 129; Zimmermann (1999c) 31–34.

[8] De Blois (2003) 149–150.

[9] Cf. Alföldy (1971b) 220, who highlighted that Herodian clearly felt personally involved in Roman state affairs and considered the Empire his native land (*seine Heimat*).

Also Adam Kemezis does not find in Herodian any accentuation of Hellenic identity and explains this by saying that the diverse urban and elite populations of the empire developed a "shared discursive space" within which Easterners and Westerners "could communicate meaningfully (in Latin or in Greek) about what it meant to be an inhabitant of the Roman *oikoumenē.*"[11] He points out that "Herodian's text is, in its way, just as remarkably un-Greek as Dio's,"[12] and it does not reveal "anything that would promote a closer identification with Hellas, does not in itself constitute a claim of Hellenic identity," so that "the Roman-Greek cultural divide is not a defining factor in how Herodian portrays the empire."[13]

Most recently, Laura Mecella has suggested that even though Herodian's geographic and social origins remain unknown, the "provincial" perspective of his work is an established fact, but this does not mean that he expressed exclusively and specifically Greek attitudes: rather, Herodian was "the spokesman of the opinions and petitions of local notables (especially in the eastern part of the Empire), i.e., of the political and economic middle class, which constituted the mainstay of municipal life."[14] Finally, Agnès Arbo, having thoroughly studied Herodianic political vocabulary, goes further and comes to conclusion that "Herodian was not the Graeco-Oriental writer, far removed from the realities of a Roman power that mattered little to him, as he is often described; he was, indeed, inspired by an extremely traditional Roman political ideology. […] Perhaps Herodian's ideas were even closer than is generally assumed to those of senators like Pliny and Cassius Dio, who defended an openly senatorial ideology."[15] Furthermore, Arbo has hypothesized – against the canonical representation of Herodian as having obscure origins – that our historian may have been a newly appointed senator.[16] Such a bold guess, were it right, would radically change the general assessment of historian's attitude to the Roman empire, but this conclusion, being based primarily on the similarities in views of Herodian and some Roman authors, does not seem fully convincing. Rather we have to speak about shared cluster of political concepts and ideas, which by the time of Herodian long ago were common for Greek and Roman elites.

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[10] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 224, 225. Thus, among other things, "he sometimes underscores his own *Romanitas* with a pedantic-didactic excursus on some aspect of Italian geography, customs or religion". This statement is directly opposite to that of Sidebottom cited above (n. 3).

[11] Kemezis (2014) 28.

[12] Kemezis (2014) 267.

[13] Kemezis (2014) 269.

[14] Mecella (2022) 280.

[15] Arbo (2022) 125–126.

[16] Molinier Arbo (2021) 216–219.

In any event, the image of Herodian, as follows from our brief overview of scholarship, is far from unambiguous, precisely in his authorial persona's attitudes to the Roman empire as a whole, with its Graeco-Roman duality. On the one hand, he appears to be a person alien to the empire of Romans, a latent Greek oppositionist criticizing Roman power and providing Greek vision of imperial realities (Sidebottom), or the spokesman for the views and agendas of local notables (Mecella). But, on the other hand, he is also a Roman, a loyal citizen of the world empire, who was pursuing a career in the "imperial and public service" (ἐν βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις) (1.2.4), or, at least, was a provincial eager to be a Roman (Bekker-Nielsen). His *History* does not in itself constitute a claim of Hellenic identity (Kemezis). Moreover, he is not a Graeco-Oriental writer, but a Roman Greek "inspired by an extremely traditional Roman political ideology" and, supposedly, a newly made Roman senator (Arbo).

Thus, there are great discrepancies, and even contradictions, in current scholarly assessments of Herodian's specific vision of the Roman empire, the nature and extent of his "Greekness" and "Romanness". Of course, this state of affairs is conditioned primarily by the fact that the evidence of his personality is provided only by his text itself,[17] and the scarcity of the historian's explicit observations and judgements does not permit satisfactory answers to many important questions (although his own opinions, perhaps, can be implied in the numerous fictitious speeches he inserts in the mouths of his characters, but there are no universally recognized criteria for distinguishing in these speeches the authorial voice from judgments corresponding to the situation and the nature of those persons to whom these speeches were attributed[18]). My contribution aims to evaluate the arguments in favor of or against the noted points of view and, by clarifying some nuances of Herodian's narrative, to accentuate the author's specific "Greek Romanness" (*une romanité grecque*, as Denis Roques defines it[19]) in his perception and representation of the Rome's empire – ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχή. So, in the next sections, three pivotal points will be elucidated: firstly, Herodian's view of the Roman world as a kind of common fatherland and ecumenical empire in its spatial and ethnic dimensions; secondly, his "constitutional" vision of the Empire in its social and political constraints and driving contradictions; and thirdly, the historian's positive ideal of the imperial statehood.

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[17] Whittaker (1969) xxv–xxvi; Alföldy (1971b) 219 – 225.

[18] Cf. Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 235: these speeches are "[…] consciously or unconsciously voicing the concerns and hopes of their author. They may thus provide some important clues to Herodian's view of the imperial office and of those who held it during his time."

[19] Roques (1990).

2 The Empire as γῆ ἡμετέρα and an Ecumenical Entity

To unravel the general and personal attitude of Herodian to the Roman empire, first of all, it should be emphasized that in some of his remarks concerning imperial geographical and political realities he uses the first person, in fact identifying the Greeks (and himself) with the Romans and designating the Roman empire as "our country." This is the case in passage 1.1.4 where he itemizes the principal subject matters of his work:

> εἰ γοῦν τις παραβάλοι πάντα τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ χρόνον, ἐξ οὗπερ ἡ Ῥωμαίων δυναστεία μετέπεσεν ἐς μοναρχίαν, οὐκ ἂν εὕροι ἐν ἔτεσι περί που διακοσίοις μέχρι τῶν Μάρκου καιρῶν οὔτε βασιλειῶν οὕτως ἐπαλλήλους διαδοχὰς οὔτε πολέμων ἐμφυλίων τε καὶ ξένων τύχας ποικίλας ἐθνῶν τε κινήσεις καὶ πόλεων ἁλώσεις τῶν τε ἐν τῇ ἡμεδαπῇ καὶ ἐν πολλοῖς βαρβάροις, γῆς τε σεισμοὺς καὶ ἀέρων φθορὰς τυράννων τε καὶ βασιλέων βίους παραδόξους πρότερον ἢ σπανίως ἢ μηδ' ὅλως μνημονευθέντας.
>
> A comparative survey of the period of about two hundred years from Augustus (the point at which the regime became a monarchy) to the age of Marcus would reveal no such similar succession of reigns, variety of fortunes in both civil and foreign wars, disturbances among the provincial populations, and destruction of cities in both Roman territory and many barbarian countries. There have never been such earthquakes and plagues, or tyrants and emperors with such unexpected careers, which were rarely if ever recorded before.[20]

The first part of the phrase "in both Roman territory and many barbarian countries" (ἐν τῇ **ἡμεδαπῇ** καὶ ἐν πολλοῖς βαρβάροις) should be more precisely translated as "in our country," since here ἡμεδαπῇ is an adjective synonymous with the first person possessive pronoun "our" (sc. γῆ – "country, empire, territory, land"). The context of the phrase undoubtedly implies the territory under the Roman rule, in opposition to barbarian lands (this opposition is one of constant motifs in Herodianic narrative), and this territory for Herodian is his own.[21] Besides, the word *ethnoi* in the expression ἐθνῶν τε κινήσεις seems to mean not only "the provincial populations," but barbarian tribes outside the Roman borders as well.

As another instance of such word usage we can consider the passage 2.11.8 where Herodian mentions the Alps, which he calls "a very high range of mountains, far bigger than any other **in our part of the world"** (μέγιστα ἐκεῖνα ὄρη, καὶ οἷα οὐκ ἄλλα **ἐν τῇ καθ' ἡμᾶς γῇ**). Whittaker saw in this phrasing the only indication Herodian gives that he is living in the East in his retirement,[22] although he omitted in his translation the word ἄλλα and overlooked that Herodian means that the Alps also belong to "our part of the world."[23] Sidebottom also presumes that the historian probably refers here not to the whole Roman empire, but to the Greek world, and the cities mentioned at 1.1.4 are "our", that is Greek.[24] But Géza Alföldy seems nevertheless to be closer to the truth in interpreting this expression as an indication of the Roman empire as a whole.[25] Given Herodian's contradistinction between the imperial and barbarian territories at 1.1.4, the wording καθ' ἡμᾶς γῇ may have implied the common Graeco-Roman world. Similarly, at 3.8.9, in his note on spectacles staged by Septimius Severus in Rome, Herodian writes about hundreds of wild animals collected "from all over the world, from the Roman empire and from foreign countries" in Whittaker's translation, or "from all parts of the empire and from foreign lands as well", as Edward Echols translated.[26] But the Greek text literally runs: ἀπὸ πάσης **γῆς ἡμετέρας** τε καὶ βαρβάρου – "from all our land and from barbarian territory." What is significant here is that in both translations Herodian's γῆ ἡμετέρα is identified with the empire, and this is a correct interpretation that means that the Greek historian saw the Roman imperial polity at least as a territorial entity to which he himself belonged too,[27] and it was the world opposed to that of barbarians. Here, as in the above cited passages, we again see the clear distinction between two parts of the global world: γῆ ἡμετέρα, "our land" (= empire), and γῆ βάρβαρος, "barbarian land." The former belongs not only to the Romans (residents of the capital, Italians, or Roman citizens in the provinces), but also to the Greeks whom Herodian through his narrative clearly distinguishes from the Romans. However, it is noticeable that both peoples are not infrequently mentioned alongside each other, as an inseparable pair, sometimes in direct opposition to other ethnic groups, first and foremost the barbarians, but the Eastern peoples too. To give only a few examples, one can cite Herodian's account of Elagabalus, where the historian points out that the Syrians in Emesa had "no actual man-made statue of the god, the sort Greeks and Romans put up [...]" (5.3.5). And in another passage he observes that Heliogabalus loathed any Roman or Greek dress (Ῥωμαϊκὴν δὲ ἢ Ἑλληνικὴν πᾶσαν ἐσθῆτα ἐμυσάττετο), preferring "something between the sacred garb of the Phoenicians and the luxurious apparel of the Medes" (5.5.4).

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[20] All translations from Herodian, unless otherwise specified, are by Whittaker (1969–1970) in the Loeb Classical Library.

[21] Cf. Hidber (2006) 107 who, contrary to Sidebottom (cited in note 133), puts that Herodian identified himself and his intended readers with residents of the Roman empire.

[22] Whittaker (1969) 220 n. 1.

More importantly, in the characterization of Marcus Aurelius Herodian highlights that "in his love of ancient literature [he] was second to none, whether Greek or Roman" – λόγων τε ἀρχαιότητος ἦν ἐραστής, ὡς μηδενὸς μήτε Ῥωμαίων μήτε Ἑλλήνων ἀπολείπεσθαι (1.2.3). He also notes that Mamaea gave Severus Alexander "both a Latin and a Greek education" (παιδείαν τε τὴν Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἐπαίδευεν). Given the undeniable centrality of *paideia* in Herodian's treatment of the imperial throne-holders and pretenders,[28] it is reasonable to agree with Zimmermann's conclusion that for our historian *paideia* ideally was a combination of Roman and Greek traditions.[29] This dual cultural unity can be seen as a recognition of the fundamental political unity of the empire.[30]

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[23] I am grateful to Adam Kemezis for pointing out this omission of Whittaker's and the possible implication of the Greek text.

[24] Sidebottom (1998) 2824 n. 229.

[25] Alföldy (1971b) 220 n. 62.

[26] Echols (1961). Cf. Cassola (2017): "catturate in tutto l'impero e fra i barbari".

[27] Cf. Herodian "hat nicht die römische und griechische Welt voneinander getrennt [...] Herodian hielt das ganze römischen Reich für seine Heimat" (Alföldy [1971b] 220 and n. 62 with reference to Palm [1959] 83).

No less important and demonstrative is that Herodian, as Agnès Arbo argues, may have inserted in his narrative the excursus on the origins of the cult of Cybele in Rome (Hdn. 1.11), not so much to satisfy the curiosity of his Greek readers (διὰ τὴν παρ᾽ Ἑλλή-νων τισὶν ἀγνωσίαν, as he announces in 1.11.1). But this story allows to show a great affinity between Hellenes – or, more generally, Greek-speaking easterners – and Romans, to affirm, beyond cultural differences, the unity of the Graeco-Roman world, reminding Romans that the distant roots of their greatness lay in Asia. Thus the etiological myth about the cult of the Great Mother in Rome reveals the position of Herodian in relation to the Romans' civilization and their Empire: far from alienation from one and subordination to the other, he saw the fates of the Greeks and Romans as closely connected in a single world. Therefore, the stability of the Empire was of primary importance to him and determined his perception of imperial power and rulers.[31] Furthermore, Herodian's attachment to the Empire explains his interest in the emperors, whether they are young *porphyrogenitoi*, objects of first admiration and then ridicule, and his desire to see in power only those good *principes* who deserve their subjects' real admiration, that serves as the best proof of their merits as rulers.[32] All this by no means fits in with the alleged explicit or implicit anti-Roman position of Herodian.

Meanwhile, Herodian is quite critical of his Greek compatriots and highlights the implacable jealousy between Hellenic cities, their mutual hatred and rivalry, which, in a frequently cited passage at 3.2.7–8, are treated as their innate characteristics and the main cause of their enslavement by the Romans:

> ὡς δὲ διέδραμε<ν ἡ> φήμη τῆς Σεβήρου νίκης, εὐθὺς ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐκείνοις στάσις καὶ διάφορος γνώμη ἐνέπεσε ταῖς πόλεσιν, οὐχ οὕτως τῇ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμοῦντας βασιλέας ἀπεχθείᾳ τινὶ ἢ εὐνοίᾳ ὡς ζήλῳ καὶ ἔριδι τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλας φθορᾷ τε καὶ καθαιρέσει τῶν ὁμοφύλων. ἀρχαῖον τοῦτο πάθος Ἑλλήνων, οἷ πρὸς ἀλλήλους στασιάζοντες ἀεὶ καὶ τοὺς ὑπερέχειν δοκοῦντας καθαιρεῖν θέλοντες ἐτρύχωσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα. ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐκείνων γηράσαντα καὶ περὶ ἀλλήλοις συντριβέντα Μακεδόσιν εὐάλωτα καὶ Ῥωμαίοις δοῦλα γεγένηται· τὸ δὲ πάθος τοῦτο τοῦ ζήλου καὶ φθόνου μετῆλθεν ἐς τὰς καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀκμαζούσας πόλεις.

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[28] The central importance of Greek *paideia* as the ideological underpinning of Herodian's *History* is universally recognized in scholarship. See Zimmermann (1999a) 17–41; Sidebottom (1998) 2803–2812; 2825–2826; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 273–277. For the role of *paideia* in Herodian, see in particular Roberto (2017) and (2022).

[29] Zimmermann (1999c) 34.

[30] Cf. Marasco (1998) 2874.

[31] Arbo (2017) 212, 214.

[32] Arbo (2017) 216.

> When news of Severus' victory spread, its immediate effect was to cause an outbreak of civil strife and factional politics in the cities of all the eastern provinces, not really because of partisanship for or against one of the warring emperors so much as jealous inter-city rivalry and because of the slaughter and destruction of their compatriots. This continual inter-city struggle and the desire to ruin a rival who seems to have grown too powerful is a long-standing weakness of the Greeks and sapped the strength of Greece. But as their organizations grew feebler and were mutually destructive, they fell easy victims to Macedonian domination and Roman enslavement. This same disease of jealous envy has been transmitted to the cities that have prospered right up to the present day.

It is of principal importance here that the "Roman enslavement" (Ῥωμαίοις δοῦλα γεγένηται) obviously refers to the past,[33] on the same level as the reference to Macedonian domination, while the prosperity of Greek cities belongs to the times of the author (καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς), even if the Greeks continue to compete jealously with each other. Of course, as Sidebottom asserts, "it cannot be said that Herodian's text was particularly in favor of the foreigners who had enslaved the Greek",[34] but the text equally and foremost implies the idea that, in spite of the innate and irreducible vice of the Greeks, it is Roman rule that ensures their well-being within the imperial order. It is worth noticing that this mutual envy and inter-city rivalry of the Greeks,[35] as well as the peacekeeping role of Rome, had been completely recognized both by Greek intellectuals and by Roman authority long before Herodian's times. Indications in this regard are the considerations in one of Dio Chrysostom's "Nicomedian" orations, where the speaker coins the expression "Greek failings" (Ἑλληνικὰ ἁμαρτήματα) in the sense of a fault or inability of Greeks to avoid mutual dissensions (D. Chr. 38.37–38). The destructiveness of rivalry and mutual enmity among the Greeks was also the subject of Plutarch's treatises where he underscored the beneficence of Roman rule, which ensured internal and external peace, granting the Hellenes as great a share of liberty as their Roman masters admitted (*Praec. ger. reip.* 32 = *Mor.* 824C; cf. *De Pyth. or.* 15 = *Mor.* 401C). The subjection of Greeks either to external power or to each other is mentioned in emperor Nero's speech on the occasion of his so called "liberation of Greece" (*SIG*^{3} 814 = *ILS* 879, v. 15). Thus, in stating this malady (τὸ δὲ πάθος τοῦτο τοῦ ζήλου καὶ φθόνου) inherent in the Greeks, Herodian hardly intended to reproach the Romans in any way; rather, he, like Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom, well understood the inevitability and necessity of imperial governance over so culturally different a world as the Roman empire was.

Some judgements and statements of Herodian, perhaps, give reason to consider him as an Eastern Greek patriot,[36] but this patriotism, as Bettie Forte noted, did not make him blind to the faults of the Greeks, and his loyalty to Rome did not make him less an eastern Greek.[37] By and large, it is understandable that, based only on the incidental remarks of the author, it is impossible to speak with certainty about any kind of eastern Greek cultural identity in Herodian. Rather, Agnès Bérenger is absolutely right in claiming that the eastern provinces are not particularly valued by Herodian, even though he is said to have originated from this part of the empire and destined his work for the Greek aristocracy.[38] Nowhere in his work does he give any hint that the Romans as a whole are malign, injurious or inimical to their Greek subjects. However, Herodian writes with apparent condemnation of the fickleness and vices of the urban mob of Rome (*plebs urbana*), which not unfrequently took active part in political disturbances and other events as a significant political force, along with the soldiers who frequently played a crucial role in emperor-making,[39] but these troops are mostly depicted as (semi-)barbarians (see below), while the urban crowd of Rome is portrayed in a negative way, as ὄχλος, not as δῆμος.[40] Given all this evidence, it is hardly possible to recognize him as an unambiguously pro-Greek or pro-Roman author.

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[33] Cf. Zimmermann (1999c) 33.

[34] Sidebottom (1998) 2825.

[35] On this topic in general see Heller (2006). For a collation of Dio's and Herodian's attitudes see Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 232–233, and the important suggestions in Luke Pitcher's contribution in this volume, especially pp. 291–294 with a comparative analysis of Herodian's and Dio's views.

[36] For instance, Herodian is impressed by the size, wealth and festivals of Antioch (2.7.9), as well as the bravery of its youth in battle (3.4.1).

It is important, further, to pay attention to Herodian's view of the Roman empire as a specific imperial space embracing the whole *oikoumenē.* As recent scholarship has demonstrated,[41] Herodian was fully aware of the complicated character of Roman imperial space and constructed his narrative in such a way as to present this world space as a stage on which the events that were the main subject of his history unfolded – "succession of reigns, variety of fortunes in both civil and foreign wars, disturbances among the provincial populations, and destruction of cities in both Roman territory and many barbarian countries" (1.1.4). These thoughtful studies of the spatial aspects of the Herodianic narrative technique and worldview allow me to highlight just the salient points, without going into detail.

In Herodian's eyes, the Empire as a whole is a very complicated space with considerable ethnic diversity. He essentially identifies the empire with the *oikoumenē*, which, according to common tradition, has, or must have, the Ocean as its boundaries (1.5.6; 1.6.6).[42] This world empire arose back in the days of the Republic, when "the Italians […] gained control of lands and seas in wars against Greeks and barbarians. There was no corner of the earth or region in the world where the Romans did not extend

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37 Forte (1972) 457.

38 Bérenger (2022) 237.

39 Motta (2022) 174. For a more nuanced picture and the interest of Herodian in the political role of the plebs in Rome see Roques (1990) 49 – 50; Zimmermann (1999b); Mecella (2017) 189 – 191; Motta (2017) and especially (2022).

40 Motta (2022) 191.

41 See Pitcher (2012); Markov (2018); Molinier Arbo (2018); Bérenger (2022); Mecella (2017) and (2022); Ruiz del Árbol Moro (2022).

42 For this topos see, e. g., Verg. *A.* 1.286; 7.100 – 101; D. H. *Ant. Rom.* 1.3.3; Liv. 36.17.14 – 15; Plu. *Pomp.* 38.2; App. *Praef.* 9; Aristid. *Or.* 26.10; 28; *Anth. Lat*. 424. At the same time, Herodian acknowledges that there is a powerful Parthian kingdom in the East and that without subjecting it or uniting it with the Roman empire Rome's domination would not embrace the whole *oikoumenē* (4.10.1).

their sway."[43] With the establishment of the Principate, this *oikoumenē*, as the historian points out, was providently transformed by Augustus, so that the Italians were stripped of arms and enjoined to peace, while in the frontier provinces, there was organized "a defensive system of camps for the empire, and in which were stationed mercenary troops on fixed rates of pay to act as a barricade for the Roman empire." Augustus also fortified the empire by natural and artificial obstacles: "rivers and trenches and mountains and deserted areas which were difficult to traverse".[44] Although the whole of this passage serves as an antithesis to the warlike character of the Pannonians, marked in a chapter above (2.9.11),[45] its rhetoric directly echoes the well-known claims of Aelius Aristides' *Roman Oration* (*Or.* 26.28; 61; 75; 78; 80 – 84 Keil) and also can be understood as "unequivocal legitimization of Rome's supremacy," as Aldo Schiavone defined Aristides' famous speech.[46]

There is the absolute centrality of Rome in Herodian's image of the Empire,[47] and the city of the Romans is inseparable from the *oikoumenē* subjected to Rome: "Rome itself and nearly the whole of the Roman empire[48] (ἡ τε Ῥωμαίων πόλις καὶὸσχεδὸν πᾶσα ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίους οἰκουμένη) […] lived in security and the semblance of freedom for that single year while Macrinus was emperor", as the historian claims in Book 5 (5.2.2). Severus in one of his speeches calls Rome "the very seat of the Empire" (ἔνθα ἡ βασίλειος ἔστιν ἑστία, 2.10.9). At the same time, Rome is a ἡ κοινὴ πατρίς – "common fatherland", at least for those who serve the Empire in the provinces (7.7.5).[49] On the other hand, "Rome is where the emperor is" (ἐκεῖ τε ἡ Ῥώμη, ὅπου ποτ᾽ ἂν ὁ βασιλεὺς ᾖ), as Claudius Pompeianus enunciates to Commodus (1.6.5), but this sentence rather relates to idealized times of Marcus Aurelius, as it is evident from the subsequent account on failings of such emperors as Niger, Albinus, Macrinus or Maximinus.

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[43] Hdn. 2.11.4: […] Ιταλιῶται […] καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν ἐκτήσαντο, Ἕλλησι πολεμήσαντες καὶ βαρβάροις˙ οὐδέ τι ἦν γῆς μέρος ἢ κλίμα οὐρανοῦ ὅπου μὴ Ῥωμαῖοι τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐξέτειναν.

[44] Hdn. 2.11.5: ἐξ οὗ δὲ ἐς τὸν Σεβαστὸν περιῆλθέν ἡ μοναρχία, Ἰταλιώτας μὲν πόνων ἀπέπαυσε καὶ τῶν ὅπλων ἐγύμνωσε, φρούρια δὲ καὶ στρατόπεδα τῆς ἀρχῆς προυβάλετο, μισθοφόρους ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς σιτηρεσίοις στρατιώτας καταστησάμενος ἀντὶ τείχους τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς˙ ποταμῶν τε μεγέθεσι καὶ τάφρων ἢ ὀρῶν προβλήμασιν ἐρήμῳ τε γῇ καὶ ὃ δυσβάτῳ φράξας τὴν ἀρχὴν ὠχυρώσατο.

[45] Whittaker (1969) 216 n. 1.

[46] Schiavone (2000) 15.

[47] See Mecella (2017) 188 – 192 (with bibliography) and Mecella (2022) 281. This centrality of Rome, according to Buongiorno (2017), is connected with the role of the Senate and the people of Rome for the legal attainment of imperial power.

[48] Here Whittaker's translation is imprecise identifying "empire" and οἰκουμένη, so the expression κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν οἰκουμένην would be better interpreted as "almost all the world under the Romans." Remarkably, a similar wording is used in the Greek version of Caracalla's edict of 212 AD (*Constitutio Antoniniana*) extending the Roman citizenship: in *P. Giss.* 40, v. 8, we find an expression which is usually read [κατὰ τὴν Ῥωμαϊκ]ὴν οἰκουμένην.

[49] This phrasing (strikingly reminiscent of Latin *communis patria* in the well-known phrase of Modestinus' "Roma communis nostra patria est" in *Dig.* 50.1.33) occurs in the letters the Senate sent to provincial governors after Pupienus and Balbinus had become emperors, in order "to urge governors to join sides with those who were planning for their common state and its senate." Seemingly, the word "state" in Whittaker's translation should be replaced by the word "fatherland" "or "homeland," which more accurately conveys the Greek term πατρίς and its Latin equivalent *patria.*

The Empire depicted by Herodian is a commonwealth of nations, as Lukas de Blois puts it.[50] Its provinces are populated by many nations, tribes and city populations, such as Greeks, Syrians, Libyans, Alexandrians, Pannonians, Carthaginians, dwellers of Berytus and Tyre, most of which are given specific ethnic characteristics based on commonplaces frequent in the literature of the period, as for example, passionate, fickle Egyptians (1.17.6), Syrians, witty, prone to unrest, fond of entertainments (2.7.9; 2.10.7), strong, brave but slow-witted Illyrians (2.9.11), and Greeks who are inclined to quarrel with one another (3.2.8).[51] This fascination is reminiscent of Herodotus.[52] However, except for this last characterization and above mentioned references to Greek *paideia* and the necessity to explain some Roman customs to Greek readers, Hellenes as such are quite rarely present on the pages of Herodian's *History* as active participants in events, in contrast to barbarians who often appear as enemies or essential opposite to true Greeks and Romans and, in turn, are divided into external (Britons, Germans, as well as undefined "eastern barbarian tribes", οἱ ὑπὸ τὴν ἀνατολὴν βάρβαροι, i. e. Parthians and later Persians, in 2.1.5; cf. 3.4.7–9; 4.10.1, etc.) and internal (Mauretanians, Thracians,[53] Illyrians, Pannonians), to whom Herodian repeatedly refers as barbarians, notwithstanding that they were part of the auxiliary troops and, by his times, had long ago become Roman citizens, like all free inhabitants of the Empire since the Antonine constitution.[54] Noticeably, in his eyes, the mass of soldiers appear to be barbarians.[55] So, it is true that Herodian "was completely alienated from Rome's soldiers, for they were barbarian mercenaries", as Sidebottom stressed.[56] But this bias does not imply that this alienation did expand on the Roman imperial system as a whole. Negative stereotypes of "barbarians" in arms were a characteristic for the Roman elite's vision of the imperial army's rank and file long before Herodian wrote his *History*, as for instance in Tacitus' depiction of Vitellian German legionaries at the streets of Rome (*Hist.* 2.88; cf. also 1.69, 2.20, 2.93, 2.99, 3.71–72), or in Cassius Dio's characterization of Pannonian soldiers who entered the City with Septimius Severus (74[73].2.6; cf. *HA Did. Iul.* 6.5: *barbaros milites*).[57]

However, in the narration of principal internal political events, the ethnic differences mostly fade into the background, because major actors such as the army and, sometimes, the civilian population and the Senate are moved into the forefront. It is a game of opposition between civilians and soldiers that, as Bérenger rightly points out, the Roman world of Herodian is based on.[58] Several times the historian explicitly connects soldiers with *tyrannis* (2.5.1; 2.6.2; 4.13.7; 7.1.3).[59] According to him, the soldiers were a dangerous, greedy group, which was difficult to keep under control and more readily supported a tyrant who gave them everything they wanted than a good but strict emperor (2.5 – 6; 5.2.3; 6.7– 8; 7.1; 7.3; 8.8.1 ff.). Herodian regarded the greed and lack of discipline of the soldiers as the root of much evil, and in his opinion these vices were growing stronger (2.6.14).[60] This perversity of the military is engendered by the connivance of individual emperors, such as Septimius Severus, who, in Herodian's obviously exaggerated assertion, "was certainly the first to undermine the tough austerity of their diet, their obedience in face of hardship and their disciplined respect for commanders, by teaching the men to be greedy for riches and seducing them into a life of luxury" (3.8.5).

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[50] De Blois (1998) 3420.

[51] See Pitcher (2018) 237–238; for more details: Markov (2018) 41–43 (and his contribution in this volume); Sánchez Sánchez (2020); Bérenger (2022).

[52] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 227.

[53] Some Thracian tribes are called semi-barbarous – Maximinus Thrax was from one of them: τὸ μὲν γένος τῶν ἐνδοτάτω Θρᾳκῶν καὶ μιξοβαρβάρων (6.8.1).

[54] Bérenger (2022) 235.

[55] Marasco (1998) 2877–2880.

[56] Sidebottom (1998) 2824. Cf. especially Herodian's remark that no power could equal the Ἰλλυρικὴ δύναμις (2.10.8). For Herodian's treatment of Illyrians see Mecella (2019).

[57] See Makhlaiuk (2002); Phang (2008) 79–80.

In any event, it is convincingly noted that Herodian's narrative is built around three monolithic social groups: the army, the Roman people and the Senate, who act as independent, homogenous entities, and that tripartite structure is closely linked to imperial characterization.[61]

As for the Empire in general terms, in its spatial and ethnic dimensions, one more point worth stressing – that Roman power is confronting the new enemy in the East, the Sassanid Persian empire, wars against which were, in Herodian's view, no longer struggles to secure the frontiers but to save the very existence of the Empire.[62] In this respect, the Roman empire of his times substantially differs from that of the Augustan age when the strong defense system had been built to protect imperial frontiers and Italy itself (2.11.5, cited above).[63]

3 The "Constitutional" Parameters of the Empire

For Herodian, the emperors were the backbone of the state and the polity,[64] and the very nature of the Roman empire with its one-man rule established by Augustus, in general could only be either tyranny, or kingship which could take the form of, or be combined with, aristocracy. Accordingly, Roman monarchy, from Herodian's point of view, changed from *aristokratia* and *basileia* (kingship) to *tyrannis / despoteia.* In point of fact, this is proclaimed at the very beginning of his Book 1 in the list of the subject-matter of the whole work: "incredible lives of tyrants and kings" – τυράννων τε καὶ βασιλέων βίους παραδόξους (1.1.4). And it is this opposition between *basileia / aristokratia* and *tyrannis* that serves as one of the principal leitmotifs of Herodian's history. By the same token, he repeatedly contrasts the enlightened behavior of good rulers based on *paideia* and experience to the tyrannical *habitus* and misbehavior of vicious or unexperienced young holders of the throne. However, in some cases, as Agnès Arbo notes, the term δεσποτεία ("absolute power", "despotism") "becomes a synonym of the unconditional and absolute hegemony of the Roman people, placed above the βασιλεύς ('king') himself, being the only master of a βασιλεία ('kingship') that it can bestow or take back at its own initiative".[65]

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[58] Bérenger (2022) 222.

[59] De Blois (2018) 178.

[60] De Blois (1998) 3421.

[61] See Andrews (2019) 194.

[62] Hdn. 4.14.6: οὐ γὰρ περὶ ὅρων γῆς οὐδὲ ῥείθρων ποταμῶν ἡ φιλονεικία, περὶ τοῦ παντὸς δέἀ[…] ("This is not a territorial dispute about frontiers and rivers, but about everything in general […]"). See Alföldy (1974) 102 – 103.

[63] Cf. Hdn. 8.2.4: "[…] after the extension of the Roman empire, the cities of Italy did not need walls or weapons anymore, and in place of war enjoyed complete peace and a share of Roman citizenship."

[64] De Blois (1998) 3419.

Most scholars agree that the key concept that characterizes the political ideal of Herodian is "aristocracy".[66] But there are some differences and nuances in the understanding of this category in current scholarship. Thus, Bekker-Nielsen supposes that, although Herodian never clearly defines *aristokratia*, in his eyes, it is not the co-rule of the Senate and *princeps*, as in Pliny the Younger, but rather the vision of the good *basileus* advised by his wise and loyal *philoi*, as described by Dio Chrysostom.[67] On the contrary, Arbo considers Herodian's ideas to be even closer than is generally assumed to those of senators like Pliny or Cassius Dio,[68] so that the *aristokratia* he aspired to was rather "a kind of participatory kingship, a joint rule by the Senate and the prince(s) – what he saw as the most accomplished form of βασιλεία ('kingship')," and this aristocracy is compatible with "kingship", when the emperor is also ἄριστος / *optimus* himself, like Marcus Aurelius. What is more, in Herodian's view, a good βασιλεύς is the equivalent of *optimus princeps.*[69] Accordingly, the historian, using the language borrowed from Greek political thought on kingship, from Plato to the Second Sophistic, advocated "a return to a more balanced principate, more respectful of traditional state institutions", and such understanding of an aristocracy is certainly "an unlikely stance from an author that is now routinely described as hostile to senatorial aristocracy".[70]

Pointedly, Herodian's vision of aristocracy mostly finds its expression not in his own explicit judgment, but in the speeches he puts into mouths of pretenders and emperors. For example, Pertinax's speech to the senators after his acclamation (2.3.10) contrasts *aristokratia* with tyranny:

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[65] Arbo (2022) 121.

[66] See, e.g., de Blois (1998) 3417, 3423; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 303–305; Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 244–245; and most recently Gangloff (2019) 321–322; Arbo (2022) 128–129.

[67] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 245; cf. Alföldy (1971a) 435–436; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 303–304.

[68] Arbo (2022) 126, with reference to Gangloff (2019) 174–208, 342–396.

[69] Cf. Marasco (1998) 2857.

[70] Arbo (2022) 128–129.

> […] χρὴ συναίρεσθαι καὶ κοινὴν τῆς ἀρχῆς τὴν διοίκησιν νομίζοντας, ἀριστοκρατίαν τε ἀλλʼ οὐ τυραννίδα ὑπομενοῦντας αὐτούς τε ἀγαθὰς ἔχειν ἐλπίδας καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀρχομένοις ταῦτα ὑπισχνεῖσθαι.
>
> But now you must join me in the administration of the empire under an aristocracy and not allow a tyranny to exist. You must be optimistic and hold out the same hope to all the subject people of the empire.

A similar intention is proclaimed by Septimius Severus in his speech to the Senate after entering Rome when he announces that "his rule would also mark the beginning of an aristocracy (τὴν ἀρχὴν παρέξειν καὶ εἴσοδον ἀριστοκρατίας)". And further Severus claims that following Marcus' and Pertinax's ideas of rule will be a model for him: καὶ πάντα πράξειν ἐς ζῆλον τῆς Μάρκου ἀρχῆς, ἕξειν δὲ τοῦ Περτίνακος οὐ μόνον τοὔνομα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γνώμην ("making the reign of Marcus a model for all his actions and adopting both the name and outlook of Pertinax") (2.14.3). A letter sent to the Senate by Macrinus also provides a case in point. He contrasts aristocracy with kingship (βασιλεία): "As long as I hold power, everyone shall live free from fear and bloodshed, and this shall be a rule of the aristocracy rather than a **tyranny**" (5.1.4).[71] Whittaker in his translation seemingly goes too far when interpreting βασιλεία as "tyranny," since such an understanding of the term loses sight of a distinctively Roman idea of *res publica* (or *principatus*) as opposed to *regnum*, that is the contraposition of aristocracy and kingship.[72] Macrinus also assures the senators that he will do nothing without their approval and will make them his partners and advisers in the administration of the state, and promises to restore their security, freedom and rights, as Marcus and Pertinax had tried to assure them (5.1.8).

Such an exemplary aristocracy, according to Herodian, was most closely embodied not only in the rule of Marcus Aurelius,[73] but also in the reign of young Severus Alexander,[74] who ruled together with a council of sixteen respectable and experienced senators whose approval was required for every action. Our historian does not hesitate to stress that this institution found recognition from three main political actors: "this form of the principate, which changed from a high-handed tyranny to an aristocratic type of government, was approved by the people and the soldiers as well as the senate" (6.1.2).[75] So, in Herodian's view, the ideal emperor, being reliant on the support of skillful advisers, has to be successful in gaining the consent (εὔνοια) of all his subjects: Senate, people, soldiers.[76]

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[71] ἐμοῦ δὲ κρατοῦντος ἐν ἀδείᾳ τε καὶ ἀναιμωτὶ πάντες βιώσονται, ἀριστοκρατία τε μᾶλλον **ἢ βασιλεία** νομισθήσεται.

[72] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 240.

[73] Alföldy (1971a) 435.

[74] On Herodian's view of Alexander see Roberto (2017).

[75] Ἤρεσκέ τε τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τοῖς στρατοπέδοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ συγκλήτῳ βουλῇ, τὸ σχῆμα τῆς βασιλείας ἐκ τυραννίδος ἐφυβρίστου εἰς ἀριστοκρατίας τύπον μεταχθείσης. On this passage see Roques (1990) 44–45.

Even more, within such relationships, the *princeps* is thought to be "not so much an emperor (βασιλεύς) as a mild and pious ruler and father" (σεμνὸν καὶ ἤπιον ἄρχοντα καὶ πατέρα) (2.2.1), or, in other words, "benevolent father and revered protector" – πατέρα τε ἤπιον καὶ χρηστὸν προστάτην (2.6.2).[77] Thus, it is fair to say that Herodian clearly distinguishes such a supreme *archon*, a kind of prince-magistrate, from the βασιλεύς and sees the embodiment of this ideal ruler in Marcus and Pertinax.[78] Such statements confirm that Herodian in general follows a classical model of ruler, which is ultimately rooted in the Hellenistic and Roman kingship literature.[79] In this respect, he could by no means be an opponent, overt or covert, of the Roman monarchy as such, the more so as he had been an eyewitness of the reign of emperors who embodied this ideal or were close to it. The image of the prince-magistrate, portrayed by Herodian, is a far cry from Hellenistic kingship, but eminently compatible with traditional meritocratic principles of the *res publica*,[80] which could revive and function, though ephemerally, even in the most extreme situations, such as the uprising against Maximinus Thrax, when the elder Gordian was proclaimed the emperor in Carthage "as the crowning achievement of his eventful career" (ὥσπερ κορυφαῖον τέλος τῶν προγενομένων πράξεων) and on the basis that "the senate and people of Rome would welcome a man who was nobly born and had held many commands in a sort of regular promotion" (7.5.2). The same considerations underlie the choice of Pupienus and Balbinus as co-emperors whose rule may be treated as the most accomplished form of *aristokratia*, since they were the eminent members of the Senate who had made a successful career and were going to rule collegially under the supervision of the *curia*. That being said, one cannot but agree with the general conclusions of Arbo: "the picture of the emperor Herodian sketches is not that of an absolute monarch through birthright or army support – instead he describes him as the City's first magistrate, having reached the highest level of the state following a long civilian and military career, ultimately embodying the προστάτης / *princeps*."[81] Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that for Herodian the imperial state remains a genuine monarchy, as demonstrated by his use of accustomed monarchical language, inherited from Hellenic thought on kingship, in referring to the emperor's Senate seat as a βασίλειος θρόνος ("royal throne") and designating his mother and his spouse as βασίλισσαι ("queens"), but in general his βασιλεία ("kingship") is not only absolute monarchy, it is also an ideal concerning qualities and behavior of a monarch.[82] It should be added that, within such vision of the supreme power, the emperors' inadequacy is the primary reason for the imminent crisis of the imperial system, in which the Senate, despite its institutional role, is marginalized and can do nothing in the long run to stem this tendency.[83] In Herodian's opinion, the Senate was not capable of ruling the state alone, precisely because the dominance of the Senate presupposes the assertion of private interests, the violation of the *concordia ordinum.*[84] Also, it merits notice that Herodian, in contrast to Cassius Dio, "evidently does not turn the social crisis of the time into a trauma of his own",[85] that may be explained by the social status of Herodian who most likely did not belong to the senatorial class and could perceive the process of its political emasculation and decline with more detachment, albeit this does not make him a "populist" of any sort.[86]

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[76] Roberto (2022) 148. See also Davenport/Mallan (2019) who convincingly demonstrate that, for Herodian, the lack a deep and broad consensus among these key constituencies leads to the fail of potential candidates for the imperial throne.

[77] For these passages as reflection of Herodian's ideals see Molinier Arbo (2021) and Arbo (2022) 122 n. 118.

[78] Arbo (2022) 122. Cf. Molinier Arbo (2021).

[79] Herodian's dependence on the Hellenic *peri basileias* tradition is universally recognized in scholarship. See Stein (1957) 76 – 90; Roques (1990) 42 – 46; Sidebottom (1998) 2776 – 2780; de Blois (1998) 3443; Zimmermann (1999c) 19 – 21; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 253 – 260; Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 233 – 245; Galimberti (2014) 33 – 45; Kemezis (2014) 229 – 234.

[80] Arbo (2022) 123.

[81] Arbo (2022) 122.

Nevertheless, ideally, for Herodian the primary source of the supreme power in the Empire is the Roman people (ὁ Ῥωμαίων δῆμος), which in some cases includes not only lower classes, but also knights and senators, and represents all Romans without social differentiation,[87] as in the narrative of acclaiming Pertinax.[88] It is this people "into whose hands the gods have given the sovereignty over all things including the office of emperor" (ᾧὸτὴν δεσποτείαν τὴν πάντων ἔνειμαν θεοὶ καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν)," as Pescennius Niger claims in his speech (2.8.4). And Herodian provides this theory of popular sovereignty elsewhere.[89] At 4.15.7, in the letter addressed to the Parthian King, he makes Macrinus assert that "the Romans, to whom the power belonged, had entrusted the principate to him […]" (Ῥωμαίους δέ, ὧν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρχή, ἑαυτῷὰ{τε} τὰ τῆς βασιλείας ἐγκεχειρικέναι). The newly proclaimed emperor Pupienus in his address to the army that has besieged Aquileia, uses similar expressions: "The empire is not the private property of a single man but by tradition the common possession of the Roman people. It is in the hands of the city of Rome that the fate of the principate is placed" (8.7.5).[90]

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[82] Arbo (2022) 113, 114.

[83] Buongiorno (2022) 217–218.

[84] Marasco (1998) 2862.

[85] Madsen (2023) 185.

[86] Bekker-Nielsen reconstructs Herodian's social ideal as a petit-bourgeois one – a society "where able men, irrespective of their geographical or family background, can make a career for themselves […] mind their business and do not let themselves be led astray by excessive ambition […] that would naturally be attractive to new men from the provinces […] but it is also a very Roman idea, echoing the advice of Horace, himself an equestrian: enjoy the quiet life and be content in your social position" (Bekker-Nielsen [2014] 235).

[87] Zimmermann (1999b) 133.

[88] Motta (2022) 182.

[89] Whittaker (1969) 191 n. 1. Cf. Arbo (2022) 121.

[90] Οὐ γὰρ ἑνὸς ἀνδρὸς ἴδιον κτῆμα ἡ ἀρχή, ἀλλὰ κοινὸν τοῦ Ῥωμαίων δήμου ἄνωθεν, καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ πόλει ἡ τῆς βασιλείας ἵδρυται τύχη.

Whittaker discerns here “republican sentiments about *consensus omnium* and *libertas*,” which were “part of the theory of the principate” but “implied no limitation on the absolute power of the emperor”. Thus, this rhetoric allows Herodian to highlight the contrast between this “republican” type of *princeps* and military tyranny.[91] Certainly, such sentences are no more than a tribute to tradition, “only lip service to a political ideal because […] in Herodian’s work the emperor is the central element of the state.”[92] In any event, these passages suggest that Herodian was by no means alien to Roman political theories and considered the mechanisms of empire along the same lines as Roman authors like Pliny and Tacitus. In another place (7.7.5), he emphasizes that this power of the Romans, from ancient times on, was exercised over the provincials, who, in their turn, “had been friendly subjects from the time of their forefathers” ([…] Ῥωμαίοις, ὧν δημόσιον ἄνωθεν τὸ κράτος ἐστίν, αὐτά τε φίλα καὶ ὑπήκοα ἐκ προγόνων). Regarding this passage, it is important that the phrase is addressed by the Senate to the provinces, after the imperial acclamation of Gordianus, encouraging them to rebel against Maximinus, which the provincials do “unhesitatingly because they hated his tyranny” (7.7.6). Thus, on the one hand, Herodian’s wording reveals the typically Roman conception of the popular sovereignty that remained vital in the principate; on the other hand, in his eyes, the Roman imperial power over subject peoples and cities was a very ancient (even primordial) and natural institution, accepted and approved by the subjects themselves who were essential in maintaining loyalty to the emperors.

It is also noteworthy that Herodian shows a strong sense of the empire’s unity, so strong that in an age that was disturbed by numerous local rebellions, his history seems to record no trace of separatist ambitions or anti-Roman uprisings in the provinces.[93] This sense of the unity should be kept in mind when assessing the reasons for Herodian’s silence on the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, which extended Roman citizenship to almost all free inhabitants throughout the empire. In Marasco’s opinion, this silence reflects the insufficient importance of Roman citizenship by Herodian’s time, but, above all, the feeling of the unity of the empire made the Constitution unimportant for Herodian, since it did not change the real relations between Rome and its subjects in the times of Caracalla, characterized by imperial absolutism, and did not provide a greater possibility of political influence for new citizens.[94] Besides, in his representation of Caracalla, Herodian focuses on portraying the imperator as a violent and bloody tyrant only interested in military affairs, and intentionally excludes all the civil measures of his reign.[95] Accordingly, it is difficult to agree with Pierangelo Buongiorno who finds in Herodian’s statement at 7.7.5 “the difficulty for an imperial functionary, active before the *constitutio Antoniniana*, to think according to new categories, of a now ecumenical empire, and especially to justify why it was the *populus* in Rome to decide – albeit formally – the fate of the entire empire."[96] Herodian noticeably fails to mention Roman citizens as a political body at all;[97] provincials are always "subjects," ὑπήκοοι or ἀρχόμενοι,[98] in spite of the fact that the inhabitants of provinces had been romanized long before; and most of their territories, long ago included in the Roman empire, are still considered by him to be conquered lands.[99] Nevertheless, the term Ῥωμαίων δῆμος does not always imply the metropolitan *plebs* or the inhabitants of Rome; in some cases, as noted, it can mean the Roman people as a whole (2.8.4; cf. 2.2.2–5)[100], including cases closely adhering to the traditional formulaic combination with the Senate, that is *SPQR* (e.g., 4.11.8; 5.1.1; 8.3.4; cf. 7.11.5).

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[91] Whittaker (1969) 191 n. 1.

[92] De Blois (1998) 3423.

[93] Marasco (1998) 2870.

[94] Marasco (1998) 2874–2875.

[95] Galimberti (2016).

So, it is perhaps not wrong to suppose that Herodian had a well-defined – and positive – political ideal: it lay in enlightened monarchy with a good ruler and a state that could be strong and beneficial when based on aristocracy. And this model of monarchy was not an utopia, but was embodied in the figure of Marcus Aurelius[101] and, to some extent, in such emperors as Pertinax and Severus Alexander (although the latter's political failure in 235 AD might have confirmed Herodian's deeply pessimistic view of an irreversible decline of the Roman empire[102]).

4 Conclusion

Assessments of Herodian's attitudes to the Romans and their Empire, as we have noted, remain controversial in current scholarship. Recent works, however, incline to see in Herodian a cosmopolitan "Roman Greek" from the cadres of the imperial bureaucracy, and such a status, characterized with a mixture of Greekness and Romanness, fits well with his authorial persona and thought-world as sketched above. In many respects his view of the imperial space, ethnic and social structures are stereotypical. He constructs his Roman empire as political entity through traditionally Greek political concepts, which by his epoch had long since been adopted by the Romans. Nevertheless, one should stress that Herodian – unlike Cassius Dio – used such a category as *basileia* (kingship) for the principate in opposition to *tyrannis*, or *regnum* in Latin terms, and prefers *basileus* instead of *autocrator.* In his statements, there are no any anti-

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[96] Buongiorno (2022) 214–215.

[97] Term *politai* is used only in 7.2.4 and 8.3.2 for the citizens of Aquileia; also the Aquileians are specially mentioned as those who owned Roman citizenship (8.2.4).

[98] Arbo (2022) 113–114.

[99] Bérenger (2022) 237–238.

[100] Cf. Zimmermann (1999b) 133.

[101] As Whittaker underlined, "Dominating the History is the absent figure of Marcus Aurelius" (Whittaker [1969] lxxii). For the crucial significance of the figure of Marcus in Herodian's narrative and thought, see Widmer (1967) 16–27; Alföldy (1973); Zimmermann (1999b) 123–125; Kuhn-Chen (2002) 324; Hidber (2006) 188–195; Laporte (2015).

[102] Roberto (2022) 133.

Roman biases, nor any unequivocally and purely Greek-oriented stance towards the realities of Rome's world empire or any explicit feeling of Hellenic (cultural) superiority (even when he focuses on *paideia* as a determinant feature of a good ruler: in his eyes, the *paideia* could equally be Greek and Roman). Surely, Herodian's vision of the Roman empire was conditioned by the harsh realities of his age and his own historical experience as well, although he may be defined as a *reiner Stubengelehrter*,[103] and the term "'Political philosophy' may be putting the ideals of Herodian on too high a plane, since there is nothing very profound about what is said".[104]

His "sense of crisis" (if it is correct to speak of a *Krisenbewusstsein* at all[105]) concerns not so much the dysfunctions of the imperial system as such, but mostly the vices of individual rulers with tyrannical proclivities or young inexperienced emperors, who are unable to obtain the loyalty and consent of all constituent parts of the state: Senate, Roman people (mostly *plebs urbana*) and the army;[106] so that frequent changes of power holders led to "eine Labilität der Macht," that was for Herodian the main symptom of the crisis.[107] Ultimately, it was the self-seeking, undisciplined military and marginalized, powerless senate that made Herodian's view of the principate from Commodus to Severus Alexander negative and pessimistic.[108] However, this does not necessarily imply that the monarchy of those emperors was an alien one. One can admit that Herodian could have hopes for renewal of the empire under the government of an educated ruler who would be able to achieve stability and peace in the Roman world. In any event, it was not Herodian who branded the post-Marcus empire as "kingdom of iron and rust," but Cassius Dio who felt this turn as a personal trauma and was far more pessimistic than his younger contemporary. On the whole, it must be acknowledged that Herodian not only was reconciled to, but even identified himself with Rome and saw its Empire as his own world, that is the Graeco-Roman *oikoumenē* where the power was Roman and the culture was Greek.[109]

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[103] Zimmermann (1999a) 327.

[104] Whittaker (1969) lxxii. Cf. Marasco (1998) 2840.

[105] Some scholars deny that Herodian shows a *Krisenbewusstsein* on the basis that there is the general trend in scholarship to doubt contemporary awareness of a "total crisis" or even the very existence of the crisis. See Sidebottom (2007) 80. For Herodian's "sense of crisis," see Buongiorno (2015) and (2017).

[106] Cf. Marasco (1998) 2856. However, as Alföldy noted, Herodian saw the reason for the transformation of the monarchy into a tyranny not only in the personality of the "tyrannical" rulers. In his thought, Commodus, the first tyrant, was much more a victim of the historical development of his time than its driver. He initially ruled according to his father's intentions, but was driven to the point of frenzied tyranny by a chain of unfortunate and inevitable events. See Alföldy (1971a) 436. This suggestion seems to be correct in the case of Commodus, but obviously does not fit to Herodian's characterization of other emperors (Caracalla, Elagabalus, Maximinus Thrax).

[107] Alföldy (1971a) 437.

[108] Roberto (2022) 149.

[109] Veyne (2005) 11.

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Christopher Baron

Longing for a Good Ruler: *pothos* and Echoes of Alexander the Great in Herodian

The first event narrated in Herodian's *History* is the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Herodian first describes how Marcus lived a model life of virtue and responsibility, and the lengths to which he went in order to provide a proper education for his son and heir, Commodus. Nonetheless, as he senses his own death approaching, Herodian's Marcus worries that his still-young son will reject a life of discipline, and that he will behave and rule like a tyrant instead.[1] Thus, the dying emperor assembles the advisors and family members who are with him at the Roman legionary camp on the northern frontier and offers some advice with his final words, represented in direct speech by Herodian. Essentially, Marcus urges his listeners to serve as fathers to the young man and to continue to advise him on the proper way to rule an empire. Marcus offers a general historical evaluation: neither money nor a strong bodyguard can protect a bad ruler; he must instead obtain the goodwill of his subjects. He says:

> μάλιστα δὲ ἐκεῖνοι ἐς ἀρχῆς μῆκος ἀκινδύνως ἤλασαν, ὅσοι μὴ φόβον ἐξ ὠμότητος, πόθον δὲ⟨ἐκ⟩ τῆς αὑτῶν χρηστότητος ταῖς τῶν ἀρχομένων ψυχαῖς ἐνέσταξαν.
>
> Those (rulers) especially went on to a long reign without danger, however many of them instilled in the hearts of their subjects not fear arising from cruelty, but longing arising from their own goodness.[2]

The word *pothos* here – its first appearance in Herodian's work – tends to be translated as "love" or "affection" in English. That is one possible meaning of the word, and it would work in this context: good rulers are loved by their subjects. That usage would also match what we find in many imperial-era Greek prose authors. In archaic and classical Greek (prose and poetry), the usual meaning of *pothos* and the verb *pothein* (ποθεῖν) involves "longing for", a desire for something or someone which is now lost or absent. But a shift seems to have occurred in Greek prose at least by the end of the Hellenistic period; these terms become more common and can be used to express a simple "desire" or "love" for someone or something, whether absent or not.[3]

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[1] 1.2–3. On this passage, see Grosso (1964) 37–38; Zimmerman (1999) 24–41; Hidber (2006) 153–157; Galimberti (2014) 45–60; Chrysanthou (2022) 30–33.

[2] 1.4.5. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The Greek text is taken from Lucarini (2005).

[3] See Appendix 1 for a tabulation based on a TLG search. The basic, primary definition provided by LSJ and by Montanari (2015), for the verb ποθέω and the noun πόθος, is a desire for something or someone which is now lost or absent; this applies to authors of the archaic and classical eras. Montanari (2015) 1692, s. v. ποθέω, offers two further definitions which do not require the notion of absence or regret: "to long for, desire ardently, be impatient for" and "to be gripped with amorous desire, love". For each of these definitions, post-classical authors are cited (Theocritus, Philo, Arrian/Epictetus, Lucian).

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However, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, Herodian's usage of *pothos*-terms – the noun, the verb, and the adjective *potheinos* (ποθεινός) – operates within a fairly restricted range as compared to other post-classical authors. Out of 17 instances of these words in his *History*, six require the more classical meaning of "longing for", while another nine occurrences could also be read in this way, that is, as expressing something beyond "love" (Herodian tends to use *epithumia* (ἐπιθυμία) to express "desire").[4] Furthermore, these *pothos*-terms in Herodian's work recur in a striking pattern. Of those 15 occasions on which the words indicate a definite or possible "longing for", all but one has an emperor as the object (11) or subject (4) of that longing. This pattern includes a clustering of *pothos*-terminology in the opening scenes of Book 1: the death of Marcus Aurelius, the attempt by Commodus' advisors to dissuade him from returning to Rome, and the young emperor's journey back to the imperial capital. These first seven chapters alone contain seven instances of *pothos*-related terms.

These elements on their own would call for further investigation of the concept of *pothos* in Herodian's *History.* But there is more. The noun *pothos,* and the conceptual realm to which it refers, already held a marked status in ancient Greek historical texts thanks to its association with the most famous figure in ancient Greek history: Alexander III of Macedon. The most visible extant instantiation of this is provided by the *Anabasis* of Arrian – a text in which *pothos* also operates within a restricted range and undoubtedly contains heavy significance. Scholars agree not only that *pothos* constitutes an essential trait of Arrian's Alexander (though they differ on how exactly it does so), but also that when Arrian uses the term in connection with Alexander – that is, whenever a *pothos* "takes hold of" the Macedonian king – its connotation varies slightly from its classical usage. That is, Arrian's Alexander does not feel a longing for something which he previously experienced and which is now absent. Rather, the longing he feels is for *new* things, whether that might involve conquest, exploration, or knowledge.[5]

Herodian, for his part, never uses *pothos* in quite that same way, nor does he employ Arrian's formula, "a *pothos* seized (him)" (πόθος ἔλαβεν). And, given the prevalence of the word in imperial Greek prose, it is unlikely that the mere mention of *pothos* was enough to evoke Alexander the Great in the mind of Herodian's contemporary audience.[6] Nevertheless, I will argue that *pothos* does have thematic significance for Herodian's *History*, in several ways. In the first section, I will examine the clustering of *pothos*-terms in the opening scenes of Book 1 of the *History* and show how the frequency with which this motif is employed serves to highlight the contrast between Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. The following section will then show how this *pot-*

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[4] See Appendix 2 for a full list of *pothos* passages; I discuss each of them in the text of this chapter. On *epithumia* in Herodian, see Section 3 below.

[5] Important studies of *pothos* and Alexander include Ehrenberg (1938), Montgomery (1965) 191–217, Kraft (1971) 81–118, Guzman Guerra (1984), and Molina Marín (2017).

[6] I will refer hereafter to the Macedonian conqueror as "Alexander the Great" in order to avoid any confusion when one of the subjects of Herodian's history, Alexander Severus, enters the picture.

hos-motif works together with other aspects of both the historical situation and Herodian's narrative choices in order to produce echoes of Alexander the Great in the story of Commodus' accession to the throne. Finally, I will examine the remaining occurrences of *pothos*-words in Herodian's *History*, beyond the opening chapters. In nearly half of these instances, a group of people feels a longing for an emperor. The objects of this *pothos* include past, present, and future rulers (or claimants to the throne); six of the emperors in Herodian's *History* appear as the object of *pothos*, and a seventh emperor is associated with *pothos.*[7] This means that, depending on how one counts, roughly half of the rulers of the Roman empire who appear in Herodian's work are "longed for" by their subjects. I will conclude that, given the resonance of the term in the opening chapters and its association with Alexander the Great in Greek historiographical literature, this pattern is unlikely to be a coincidence, and it should be seen as another aspect of the careful attention Herodian paid to the crafting of his historical narrative.[8]

1 From Marcus to Commodus, From the Danube to Rome

We have already seen the first occurrence of *pothos*, in Marcus Aurelius' deathbed speech. The sentiment he expresses about the effect of a good ruler on his subjects is confirmed almost immediately, in the narrator's evaluation of Marcus:

> ὁ μὲν οὖν νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐπιβιώσας μιᾶς ἀνεπαύσατο, πόθον τε τοῖς καθ' αὑτὸν ἀνθρώποις ἐγκαταλιπὼν ἀρετῆς τε ἀίδιον μνήμην ἐς τὸν ἐσόμενον αἰῶνα.
>
> And so he (Marcus) lived through the night and another day before he passed away, having left behind a longing in the people of his own time and an eternal memory of his virtue in the ages to come.[9]

This instance of *pothos* – paired, as it is, with "eternal memory" – brings us closer to the classical meaning of "longing for someone who is now absent" than Marcus' own use of the word in his speech. There, it meant something like love or affection for a living ruler, produced by the quality of his rule. What is noteworthy in this second passage is that no object is stated for this *pothos* which Marcus left behind. The sense requires us to understand Marcus (or his rule) as the object, but the resulting phrase is a striking one.[10]

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[7] The six emperors who are direct objects of *pothos* are Marcus, Commodus, Pertinax, Niger, Macrinus, and Alexander Severus; the seventh, associated with the notion, is Gordian I.

[8] As recent work on Herodian has clearly shown: Hidber (2006), Kemezis (2014), Pitcher (2018), Davenport/Mallan (2020), and Chrysanthou (2020) and (2022).

[9] 1.4.7; Chrysanthou (2020) 629.

The next occurrence of a *pothos*-term, two chapters later, has Commodus as the subject rather than the object, and what he longs for is home:

> αἰφνιδίως δὲ καλέσας τοὺς φίλους ποθεῖν ἔλεγε τὴν πατρίδα
>
> He suddenly summoned his advisors and said that he longed for home.[11]

Herodian could have just written something like, "Commodus announced that he had decided to return to Rome". Instead, the author's description of the young emperor as "longing for" home creates a noticeable contrast with his father and the advice he offered before his death. So far in Herodian's work the reader has seen imperial subjects feeling *pothos* for a ruler as a result of his virtues; now, quite soon after his accession to the throne, the new emperor has reversed that situation. In the abstract, a longing for one's home is not necessarily a bad thing. But Commodus' desire is stoked by his vile and devious courtiers, who disparage the living conditions at the frontier. Nor does his longing for home sit comfortably next to the bold speech he has just made to the legions about continuing to fight the barbarians across the Danube (1.5.3–8). Moreover, Commodus is ashamed to admit the real reason for his longing, which is the warm climate and the pleasures to be found in the city; therefore, he claims that he is concerned about someone from the nobility attempting to seize power at Rome (1.6.3).

Alarmed at this sudden change of direction, the most senior of his father's advisors, Claudius Pompeianus, attempts to dissuade Commodus from leaving the frontier. In the short direct speech Herodian gives him, Pompeianus uses *pothos* twice: first he repeats Commodus' phrase verbatim (ποθεῖν τὴν πατρίδα), and later he points out that their barbarian foes will interpret such an action not as a "longing to return home", but as a sign of fear on the Romans' part.[12] These repeated occurrences of *pothos*-terms could be explained, at one level, as simple verbal echoes between one character's direct speech and the motive ascribed by the narrator to another character. But in fact, Pompeianus makes longing and desire (*pothos* and *epithumia*) the centerpiece of the first part of his speech. It is natural to have such desires, he says (and, indeed, we all want to return home); but the responsibility to remain on the frontier and finish the war against the barbarians is more pressing. In this way the speaking character manages to imply that Commodus' *pothos* is not appropriate in this context, just as the narrator has already done by means of the contrast with Marcus. Pompeianus' prediction of how the enemy will interpret this *pothos* as fear further reinforces this message.[13]

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[10] The only other instance of the noun or verb used absolutely like this in Herodian's *History* is 5.2.3, where the city of Rome feels longing. In that passage as well, there is a strongly implied object (Macrinus – see Section 3 below).

[11] 1.6.3. Whittaker's translation ("a longing to return home") diminishes the force of the phrase. The direct nature of Commodus' longing can be seen by comparing the different construction employed by Pompeianus later in his speech, where he refers to ἐπανόδου πόθον (1.6.5).

[12] 1.6.4–5. See Appendix 2 for full text.

At first, it appears Pompeianus is successful, since Commodus initially withdraws his proposal out of shame. But he ultimately gets his way and sates his longing for Rome. In Herodian's depiction of the young emperor's journey back to the imperial capital, we find two more instances of *pothos.* First, as Commodus sped along the route from the Danube to Italy, Herodian records that festive crowds in each city greeted him with a royal reception, and all found the sight of him "welcome and longed-for" (ἀσπαστός τε καὶ ποθεινὸς, 1.7.2). Meanwhile, when the news of Commodus' visit had reached the city of Rome itself, the people were overjoyed, thinking that the young emperor would take after his father. As Commodus approached the city, the entire senate and the populace traveled quite far in order to be the first to greet him, since "they longed for him with true, heart-felt affection".[14] Here, Herodian reinforces the basis of this longing – Commodus' upbringing and nobility – by including information on his father's and mother's lineage.

Thus, in the wake of the already numerous references to *pothos* in the opening scenes on the Danube frontier, Herodian twice describes Commodus as "longed-for" by his subjects as he makes his first journey to Rome as emperor. Of course, the contemporary reader knows that this honeymoon will not last long – if not from their own knowledge of the current state of the empire, then from the allusions the narrator has made in the preface and in the characterization of the young emperor as succumbing to the very desires his father had feared. That failure of expectation matches the ironic or disconcerting tone of Herodian's history which has been argued for in recent years.[15] The irony here is reinforced in two ways. First, although Commodus in these initial giddy days appears to fit the mold of the ideal ruler as defined by his father – his subjects do, at this point, long for him – he has done absolutely nothing to deserve that sentiment. It is simply a matter of his having been "born into the purple", a trait which Herodian's Commodus himself has already made quite a big deal of in his speech to the soldiers on the frontier (1.5.5). Second, the only thing that Commodus has longed for, as reported by Herodian so far, is to leave the harsh climate of the frontier and the hard work of fighting barbarians in order to return to the soft and luxurious living which awaits him in the city of Rome. Again, that desire to reach Rome is not in itself a bad thing, but Herodian's account portrays the motives behind Commodus' desire to do so in a clearly negative light. Thus, Herodian's use of *pothos* to describe the young emperor's decision to leave the frontier creates a strong and unflattering contrast with his father: rather than thinking about or doing anything that would actually produce goodwill in his subjects, Commodus simply longs for the city and its pleasures. Overall, Herodian's decision to employ *pothos*-terminology seven times in seven chapters – only one of which could take a less-marked meaning of "love" or "affection" – creates an intratextual web which enhances this stark difference between the only natural father and son to rule the empire in succession.[16]

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[13] It is also interesting that Herodian's Pompeianus mentions "enjoyment of things there" (i.e. at Rome), even though the narrator has told us that Commodus kept this real reason for his longing to return home hidden from his advisors: Pompeianus' ἀπολαύσεις (1.6.5) picks up on the phrase used, in brief direct speech, by Commodus' court servants (ἄλλοι δὲ ἀπολαύσουσι […], 1.6.2).

[14] 1.7.4: ἐπόθουν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἀληθεῖ ψυχῆς διαθέσει. Note that here too, as with Commodus' desire at 1.6.3 (and later Caracalla's for Alexandria), it is not "a longing to X + Y" (see someone/something, go somewhere), but simply "a longing for Y". Whittaker, as before, adds a supplementary verb which is not present in the Greek ("Their desire to see him"); this is understandable as an effort to produce smoother English, but again reduces the direct impact of the Greek verb ποθέω.

[15] E.g. Sidebottom (1998) 2817–2819; Kemezis (2014) 227–272; Davenport/Mallan (2020) 428–436.

2 Commodus and Alexander the Great

We have seen how *pothos* works intratextually in Herodian's *History* to set up, and deflate, expectations about Commodus' rule. But, as I noted in the introduction, *pothos* was already a significant term in Greek historical writing. Is there any way, then, in which this cluster of *pothos*-terms surrounding the accession of Commodus might have led the ancient reader to think about Alexander the Great?

For those who knew their Greek history, perhaps the general setting contained some echoes. Consider this scenario: a successful ruler dies just as he sits on the cusp of a military campaign which could lead to a great conquest over barbarian enemies. He leaves behind an 18-year-old son who has already accompanied his father in the field, and who retains experienced advisors from the previous reign. One of the first choices awaiting the young ruler is whether to continue the pursuit of his father's plans. Such a comparison of Marcus and Commodus with the fourth-century BCE Macedonian kings Philip II and Alexander the Great is impressionistic, of course, and differs in numerous details.[17] But the heavy presence of *pothos* in Herodian's opening chapters may have helped to nudge the reader in that direction. In this section, I will suggest a couple other details which might have tipped the scales further: the motif of imperial conquest reaching the ocean, and Commodus' physical appearance.

When Herodian's Commodus addresses the legions for the first time after his father's death, he suggests that they have two goals: to continue prosecuting the war in which they are engaged, and to advance Roman rule up to the ocean.[18] This reference to the ocean could be designed as a boastful, throw-away line on Commodus' part, given that the wise and brave words he speaks to the soldiers bear little relation to the course his reign will actually take. On the other hand, Pompeianus echoes the sentiment soon thereafter (1.6.6) in his attempt to keep Commodus from returning to Rome; this could indicate that the idea was meant to be taken seriously (at least within the story Herodian tells, whether or not the same was true historically). Other explanations have been put forward, and Alessandro Galimberti has pointed out that the theme of extending Roman power to the ocean goes back at least as far as Augustus (as Pompeianus himself implies).[19] But – in a similar fashion to the presence of the *pothos* motif examined in the previous section – if one were to ask an ancient reader of historical works for the names of conquerors who reached the ocean, Alexander the Great would almost certainly be at or near the top of the list. Diana Spencer has shown how, in the *suasoriae* of the early empire, the *topos* of attempting to reach the edge of the world was associated with Alexander – and usually evaluated negatively.[20] Thus, Commodus' claim operates on multiple levels for Herodian's reader: it associates him, intentionally or unintentionally, with great conquerors and imperial powers; it also raises the specter of overly ambitious or tyrannical rulers; and, for those who are already familiar with, or lived through, the history Herodian is about to recount, it may produce an ironic effect – not just for Commodus' reign but for the empire as a whole, which now (in the author's time) struggles to maintain its frontiers in east and west. Finally, I would suggest a possible intertextual allusion created by Commodus' mention of the ocean. In Herodian's subsequent narrative, Commodus must retreat from the Ister (Danube) River in order to return home. This represents a reversal of Alexander's first daring exploit, when he crosses the Ister in order to attack the barbarians, narrated near the beginning of Arrian's *Anabasis* (1.3–4). Granted, this is more subtle and speculative, but if a reader notices the contrast it is instructive: Herodian's *History* will not be one of glorious imperial conquest across rivers at the edge of the world, but of retreat into the luxuries and decadence of Rome.

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[16] On the importance and usefulness of an intratextual analysis of Herodian's work, see Chrysanthou (2022) 22–27.

[17] Rubin (1980) 221–222 points out that *HA Marc.* 27.11 presents just such an inapt comparison of these pairs in its version of Marcus' death-bed scene. Nonetheless, I believe this strengthens my point that an ancient reader of Herodian might have been led to recall the situation with Philip and Alexander. Laporte (2021) 371 notes echoes of several other "morts connues" in the opening scene of Herodian's work.

[18] 1.5.6: κατορθοῦν δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ βεβαιοῦν ὑμέτερον ἔργον, εἰ τά τε τοῦ πολέμου λείψανα μετὰ πάσης ἀνδρείας ἀπαλείψαιτε καὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν μέχρις ὠκεανοῦ προαγάγοιτε. "Your task is to set our affairs

The second potential factor linking Commodus with Alexander the Great is Herodian's depiction of the young emperor's physical attributes. As we saw earlier, Herodian uses *pothos*-terminology twice in his account of Commodus' return to Rome. The positive image of Commodus carries through the rest of that chapter (1.7), especially in the rather elaborate picture Herodian paints of his appearance:

> γένους μὲν οὖν ὁ Κόμοδος οὕτως εἶχε, πρὸς δὲ τῇ τῆς ἡλικίας ἀκμῇ καὶ τὴν ὄψιν ἦν ἀξιοθέατος σώματός τε συμμετρίᾳ καὶ κάλλει προσώπου μετ' ἀνδρείας. ὀφθαλμῶν τε γὰρ †ἀρθμίαι† καὶ **πυρώδεις** βολαί, κόμη τε φύσει **ξανθὴ** καὶ οὔλη, ὡς, εἴποτε φοιτῴη δι' ἡλίου, τοσοῦτον

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in order and strengthen our position if you want to finish off the rest of this war most bravely and advance the rule of Rome as far as the ocean" (trans. Whittaker [1969–1970] I.27).

[19] Galimberti (2014) 68–69.

[20] Spencer (2002) 138–147, esp. at 143. Note that Herodian also credits Maximinus with such a plan (7.2.9).

> **ἐκλάμπειν** αὐτῷ πυροειδές τι, ὡς τοὺς μὲν οἴεσθαι ῥίνημα χρυσοῦ προιόντι ἐπιπάσσεσθαι, τοὺς δὲ ἐκθειάζειν, λέγοντας αἴγλην τινὰ οὐράνιον περὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ συγγεγενῆσθαι αὐτῷ· ἴουλοί τε αὐτοῦ κατιόντες ταῖς παρειαῖς ἐπήνθουν.
>
> Besides this ancestry and the fact that he was in the prime of his youth, Commodus was of a striking appearance, with a shapely body and a handsome, manly face; the glances of his eyes were ***? and fiery; his hair was naturally fair and curly, and if he was ever out in the sunlight, it flashed so brightly off him that some thought gold dust was sprinkled on him beforehand, while others regarded it as supernatural, saying that he had a heavenly halo around his head. On his cheeks the first growth of hair was beginning to appear as well.[21]

Herodian reports that Commodus' striking appearance (he is ἀξιοθέατος, "worth seeing") included his body, his face, his eyes, and his hair. The last two features present some intriguing connections with Alexander the Great.[22] For Commodus' eyes, it is unfortunate that we cannot be certain of one of their two qualities, besides "fiery" (πυρώδεις); the manuscript reading ἀρθμίαι ("united", "peaceful") does not make sense, and none of the numerous suggested emendations has gained a consensus.[23] Descriptions of "fiery eyes" may not have been uncommon in antiquity.[24] But Herodian's ascription of a similar quality – Commodus' brightly shining fair hair – shortly thereafter produces a constellation of characteristics which could bring to mind another young ruler in antiquity. The hotness of Alexander's temperament was much remarked upon; Plutarch describes the mix of elements in Alexander's body as πολύθερμος […] καὶ πυρώδης (*Alex.* 4.1). His eyes were famously "melting" (ὑγρός) rather than fiery, but a manual on physiognomy also includes Alexander among those with shining (λαμπρός) eyes. And in one of the few surviving mentions of the color of Alexander's hair, the imperi-

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21 1.7.5, translation adapted from Whittaker (1969–1970) I.41. Zimmerman (1999) 60 comments on how Herodian's depiction of Commodus' *adventus* focuses on "the external effect and reception" (i.e. the expectations of people based on the emperor's origin and outward appearance); he notes a potential comparison with Suetonius' depiction of Caligula (*Cal.* 13).

22 Grosso (1964) 560 notes a coin of Nicaea with Commodus on one side and Alexander on the other, showing that they were linked visually at the time: description at *BMC Pontus* p. 159, no. 46. See also Hekster (2002) 126–128 on the use of copies of statues sculpted by Lysippus for depictions of Hercules in this period; Lysippus was Alexander's "official" portrait sculptor, and Heracles was perhaps the key divine model for Alexander's self-representation.

23 LSJ s.v. ἀρθμίος assigns the meaning "calm" to the usage in this passage, but it is difficult to see how this could be paired with "fiery" by means of a simple καί; the same holds true for the other definitions of the word, *pace* Letta (2012) 696. The suggestion of Giangrande (1957) 263–264, θερμαί (printed by Whittaker, though accompanied by reservations in his notes), would work well for my suggested comparison with Alexander.

24 Answering that question would require sifting through the nearly 200 instances produced by a TLG search of πυρωδ-/πυροειδ- plus οφθαλμ-/ομμα-. Quite a few of these are late (and Christian); those from earlier periods often seem to be philosophical or scientific in some way. There is an early martyrology which refers to "fiery eyes", but Herodian's description may be unique in extant ancient *historical* prose, at least.

al-era author Aelian describes it as ξανθή, the same word Herodian uses for Commodus' hair.[25]

Herodian's depiction of Commodus' appearance could represent a set of stock characteristics, or (as some have suggested) it could be based on Herodian's viewing of a portrait bust or painting of Commodus. But the emphasis on "fieriness", a fundamental quality of the great Macedonian conqueror, remains interesting, especially since it is undercut in two ways. Immediately, Herodian undermines it by reporting (see above) that some people at the time believed the brightness of Commodus' hair was artificial, produced by sprinkling gold dust on it.[26] In the long term, of course, any comparison fails since Commodus turns out to be nothing like Alexander the Great – in fact, he has already given up the opportunity to follow in the Macedonian's footsteps by abandoning the war against the barbarians.[27] If I am correct in identifying these echoes, Herodian's usage of *pothos* in Book 1 performs double duty: it distances Commodus from both Marcus Aurelius and Alexander the Great, the ideal ruler of the Roman empire and the most successful conqueror in Greek history.

3 An Unfulfilled Longing

Beyond the opening chapters of Book 1 which have been my focus so far, there are ten further occurrences of *pothos, pothein*, or *potheinos* in Herodian's *History.* It is noteworthy that in five of these instances, the object of that *pothos* is an emperor (in one case indirectly), while the subject is either the Roman people or some subset of them. The five passages are these (see Appendix 2 for full texts):

- 2.1.9. After the murder of Commodus, Laetus and Eclectus visit Pertinax, who thinks they have come to execute him. Instead, Laetus declares that they have arrived in order to offer him the empire; he explains that, as a result of Pertinax's dignity and age, he is "longed for and honored by the people" (ποθούμενόν τε καὶ τιμώμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου).
- 2.5.1. Unfortunately for Pertinax, it turns out that there is one important group of people who are not pleased with his efforts to restore good order to the government of the empire: the praetorian guard.[28] Upset at the current state of affairs, and "longing for the violence of the previous tyranny" (ποθοῦντες δὲ τὰς ἐπὶ τῆς

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[25] Ael. *VH* 12.14. Eyes: Adamantius, *Physiognomonika* 1.14 (fourth century CE = Stewart [1993] T20). On Alexander's hair color, see also Julius Valerius, *Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis* 1.7 Kübler (fourth century CE = Stewart [1993] T19).

[26] Cf. *HA Comm.* 17.3, where it is stated as fact that Commodus' "hair was always dyed and made lustrous by the use of gold dust […]" (*capillo semper fucato et auri ramentis inluminato*, trans. Magie/Rohrbacher).

[27] Even Herodian's note about the first growth of a beard on Commodus' cheeks could contribute to this effect, since Alexander had famously set a new trend in being clean-shaven as an adult.

[28] Kuhn-Chen (2002) 279–280.

προγεγενημένης τυραννίδος ἁρπαγάς τε καὶ βίας), they form a plot to do away with Pertinax. This is the loosest connection among my examples, since what is longed for is not an emperor (Commodus) but the way of life his cruel and neglectful rule allowed to those around him.
- 2.7.9. As unrest in the empire spreads due to Julianus' dissolute living and unkept promises, the governor of Syria, Pescennius Niger, decides to make a bid for the throne. The people of his province readily support him, Herodian writes, both because of their characteristic Syrian fickleness, but also because they had "a certain longing for Niger" (ἐνῆν δέ τις αὐτοῖς καὶ πόθος τοῦ Νίγρου) as a result of his mild rule and his willingness to celebrate their festivals with them.
- 5.2.3. As with Pertinax, according to Herodian, the empire enjoyed a brief period of happiness and stability during the reign of Macrinus. However, he made two mistakes: he did not immediately disband his army, and he himself did not hurry "to Rome which was longing" (εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ποθοῦσαν). This is another striking absolute use of *pothein*, similar to that at 1.4.7 where the empire after the death of Marcus Aurelius is described as "longing" with no object explicitly stated.
- 6.4.2. When news of events from the east forces Alexander Severus to lead an army to the Persian frontier, he delivers a speech to the soldiers, conducts the appropriate sacrifices, and sets out from Rome. His procession is accompanied, Herodian says, by the senate and the entire populace, and everyone among the people (as well as Alexander Severus) has tears in their eyes, "for he had implanted in the masses a longing for himself" (πόθον γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ τῷ πλήθει ἐμπεποιήκει) through his mild rule as he grew up amongst them.[29]

There is one further instance which could be placed in this group, where the subject is unstated and the object of the longing is to be rid of the current ruler, Maximinus.[30] Thus, we could say that after 1.7, the effect of *pothos* in Herodian's work is produced not by the frequency of the term, but by this striking pattern of its occurrence, in the company of the emperor or a claimant to the throne.

None of the emperors in Herodian's *History* manage to live up to the ideal established by Marcus Aurelius.[31] But if one did try to arrange a balance sheet of sorts – with the truly wretched rulers on one side, and on the other those whom Herodian portrays as having at least had a chance to be a good ruler – it is notable that the objects of *pothos* all find themselves on the positive side of that ledger. Pertinax ruled in an orderly and mild fashion; Niger had a similar reputation and record, before succumbing to the luxuries of Antioch; the empire enjoyed "great security and a semblance of freedom" during Macrinus' reign; and finally, the reign of Alexander Severus rescues Rome from the exotic excesses of Elagabalus.[32] Maximinus' tyranny is something which people long to be rid of. The only exception is Commodus; however, the *pothos* expressed for him by the people occurs before he has installed himself at Rome, while that felt by the praetorians under Pertinax arises from their longing for the former tyranny which allowed them to plunder to their hearts' content. This latter instance of *pothos* – found in a bad group of people (greedy soldiers) and longing for the rule of a bad emperor – thus creates a double-negative, as it were, leaving a net positive.

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[29] This creates an interesting inversion from the scene of Commodus returning to Rome (1.7.4, see Section 1 above), where the senate and people go out from the city to greet him. They too feel *pothos* for Commodus, who had grown up amongst them.

[30] 7.5.5. The manuscripts read πάθος (*pathos*, "feeling, emotion"); Reiske's emendation to πόθος is accepted by Whittaker and Lucarini (the neuter article at the beginning of the period, and the lack of them thereafter, could easily explain the mistake). But cf. also 5.4.2, where the Aldine edition reads ἡ Ἀντωνίνου μνήμη καὶ ὁ πόθος, others τὸ […] Ἀντωνίνου τῆς μνήμης πάθος (the subject is the soldiers rejoicing at the acclamation of Elagabalus; "Antoninus" here is Caracalla).

[31] Hidber (2006) 188–272.

In any case, rather than interpreting this pattern as one which marks "bad" versus "not as bad" emperors, I suggest that Herodian's use of *pothos* terminology is a way of emphasizing the failed expectations which accompanied every ruler of the empire during this period. This is, as we have seen, one interpretation of the cluster of *pothos* terms in the opening chapters: there, Commodus' failure to live up to his father is further highlighted by reminders of how he chose not to follow in the footsteps of a young conqueror like Alexander the Great. Herodian is not mechanical in the application of the theme, but we might see the lack of an expressed longing for certain emperors – Julianus, Caracalla, Elagabalus, Maximinus – as a sign that there was never really any hope for them to begin with.[33]

One of the remaining uses of *pothos* in Herodian, I would argue, reinforces this theme of failed expectations. It involves an emperor as the subject rather than the object of longing. In Book 4, Herodian narrates Caracalla's blood-soaked visit to Alexandria in Egypt. While still in Antioch, Caracalla writes to the Alexandrians announcing his intention to travel there; Herodian claims that he pretended that he "longed for" the city (πρόφασιν ποιούμενος ποθεῖν τὴν ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ κτισθεῖσαν πόλιν, 4.8.6).[34] This is another striking use of *pothos* – not "a longing to see", but simply the city as object of his desire – and again (as with Commodus) the term occurs in the midst of a passage where Alexander the Great stands in the background, here even more directly and obviously than in Book 1. In addition to the fact that what Caracalla longs for is Alexander the Great's city, the statement occurs not long after a passage in which Herodian discusses Caracalla's overall Alexander-*imitatio* during his eastern sojourn

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[32] Pertinax, 2.4.4; Niger, 2.7.5 and 2.8.9; Macrinus, 5.2.2. Compare Cassius Dio's report (75[74].6.2a [Exc. Val. 341]) that Niger was pleased with those who called him "a new Alexander".

[33] Septimius Severus would remain the only – admittedly notable – exception to this pattern.

[34] On Caracalla's pretense and its importance for Herodian's narrative, see Baumann (2022).

(4.8.1 – 2).[35] Caracalla’s “misdirected” longing is made even starker by the fact that he is one of the emperors who is *not* longed for by anyone in Herodian’s work.

This passage raises the question of whether Herodian’s employment of *pothos*-terminology was influenced by one of his sources, namely, Cassius Dio.[36] Xiphilinus’ epitome of Dio’s *Roman History* reports, in very similar language, that Caracalla pretended to “long for” the Alexandrians (ποθεῖν αὐτοὺς προσποιούμενος, 78[77].22.1). More broadly, the surviving material from Dio’s last ten books reveals five instances of the verb *pothein*, in all of which the object of the longing is an emperor. However, there is an important difference: in four of the five cases, the emperor being longed for is already dead.[37] In Herodian, on the other hand, the emperor as object of *pothos* is always still living, and in most cases early in his reign or not even emperor yet. The one instance of *pothos* for a living emperor in Cassius Dio concerns Septimius Severus, but here too there is a slight difference, in that the crowd at Rome “longs to see and hear” the new ruler (supplementary infinitives, rather than Severus as the direct object of the verb).[38] Finally, Cassius Dio does not use the noun *pothos* with emperors as Herodian does.[39] Thus, while it seems likely that Herodian borrowed the particular phrase concerning Caracalla and Alexandria from Cassius Dio, he created his own framework for the notion of longing for an emperor, one which does not resemble Dio’s in the details.

As I alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, imperial-era Greek prose authors use *pothos* and *pothein* to mean simply “desire” or “love” much more often than their classical predecessors. As we have seen, some instances of the word in Herodian’s *History* could be understood to operate in this way: Marcus, Commodus, Pertinax, Niger, and Alexander Severus are all objects of *pothos* on the part of the Roman people, and this could mean simply that they “loved” these rulers. But I would argue that the consistency of Herodian’s use of *pothos* and *pothein* in connection specifically with the emperors lends these terms a greater and more marked significance. Only in two situations does Herodian use *pothos*-terminology to indicate “desire” either for an object other than the emperor, or with someone other than the emperor as its subject. In the first case, the context is the imperial freedman Cleander’s plot to gain power while Commodus was outside the city. Cleander’s plan was to create a famine, by buying up and hoarding the grain supply, and then by means of bountiful distributions to win over the populace and the soldiers who, as Herodian puts it, will have “been captured by a desire for necessities” (ἁλόντας πόθῳ τοῦ χρειώδους).[40] One wonders if the main purpose of Herodian’s somewhat tortured phrasing here is to create a vehicle for clever wordplay, since the idea of *pothos* re-appears a chapter later in the denouement of Cleander’s story. His machinations lead to serious civil unrest, including fighting between the imperial cavalry and the urban cohorts. When Commodus is finally informed of what is happening in the city, he summons Cleander and has him executed; Cleander’s head is stuck on the end of a long spike and sent out to be viewed, “a pleasing and longed-for spectacle to the people” (τερπνὸν καὶ ποθεινὸν τῷ δήμῳ θέαμα, 1.13.4). Thus Cleander, hoping to produce a certain *pothos* in the people, in the end provides what they really long for – his demise. The attentive reader of Herodian may also recall an earlier “longed-for spectacle”, when the senate and people of Rome greeted the young Commodus on his first journey to the city as emperor (1.7.2).

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[35] For Caracalla’s “cultivation of an alignment with Alexander the Great”, see Rowan (2012) 152 – 157; Shayegan (2004) 294 – 296, both with further references.

[36] On Herodian’s use of Cassius Dio, see most recently Chrysanthou (2020).

[37] 74(73).13.4 (the people abuse Julianus and long for Pertinax); 79(78).9.2 (the soldiers, disappointed at Macrinus’ failure to distribute money, long for Caracalla); 79(78).15.2 (the masses long for Macrinus, since – Dio adds – he was not emperor long enough to lose their support); 79(78).23.1 (even though she hated him while he lived, Julia Domna longs for Caracalla after his death – according to Dio, because she was vexed at having to return to being a private citizen). The last three of these passages are preserved directly in Cod. Vat. 1288; the first, on Julianus and Pertinax, is cited from Dio by the work *On Syntax* (Petrova [2006] 46).

[38] 75(74).1.5. This passage, like the Caracalla story, appears in Xiphilinus’ epitome.

[39] The only preserved instance of the noun *pothos* in Dio’s work occurs in fr. 109.12, describing Sulla’s introduction of the proscriptions: “a certain longing came over him [ἀλλά τις αὐτῷ πόθος ἐσῄει] to go far beyond all others in the variety also of his murders […]” (trans. Cary). At 59.29.2, it is recorded that Caligula would sometimes mockingly issue the watchword “Pothos” or “Venus” (thus with the meaning “desire”).

The final occurrence of *pothos* to be accounted for involves a fairly straightforward use of the term in connection with the one successful emperor who does not appear as the object of longing in Herodian’s *History.* When Septimius Severus arrived in Rome, he adopted a technique which Commodus had utilized: he seized the children of all the men who occupied any sort of office in the eastern part of the empire, in order to hold them as hostages for good behavior. His aim was that, “out of desire for the safety of their children” (πόθῳ τῆς τῶν παίδων σωτηρίας), their fathers would betray Niger, who had been proclaimed emperor and relied on the East for support.[41] Perhaps it is too much to press this point, but this instance of *pothos* does occur in connection with imperial rule, or the hope of it. What we can conclude, overall, is that it is quite rare for Herodian to use *pothos* as a basic term meaning “desire” in a context which does not involve an emperor as object. Herodian’s unmarked term for “desire” is *epithumia* (23 times, plus the verb three more times). In fact, that sort of desire is almost universally negative – for power, riches, or pleasures – and motivates men to take action in their own self-interest.[42]

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[40] 1.12.4. On Herodian’s treatment of this episode, see Scott (2018) 441–445.

[41] 3.2.5 (see Appendix 2 for full text). Herodian delays his report on this action of Severus until the beginning of his campaign against Niger.

[42] 1.4.6, 1.6.2, 1.6.4, 1.6.5, 1.8.2, 1.9.10, 1.12.3, 1.12.5, 2.6.14, 2.8.2, 2.15.2, 2.15.3, 3.6.3, 3.8.5 (verb), 3.11.2, 3.11.9, 3.12.12, 3.13.6, 4.4.2, 4.10.1 (verb), 6.1.5, 6.2.6, 6.3.5, 6.3.6 (verb), 8.8.4 (2×). The only potential exceptions to the negative connotation of *epithumia* are 6.3.6, where Alexander Severus encourages his soldiers by noting their desire for fame and glory, and 1.6.4 and 5, where Pompeianus refers to the desire to return to Rome (see Section 1 above).

Alexander the Great was obviously still relevant and “in the air” in Herodian’s day – Caracalla’s own obsession with the Macedonian conqueror is proof enough of that.[43] It is also not necessary for my argument to show that Herodian had any detailed knowledge of Alexander’s campaigns.[44] His references to the Successors of Alexander (1.3) and to the Battle of Issus (3.4) certainly do not reveal accurate information about the Macedonian conquest of Asia.[45] The more important question for my purposes is whether Herodian was familiar with the *pothos*-theme which runs through Arrian’s *Anabasis.* It is hard to imagine that an author who can weave allusions to Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon throughout his own text was not aware of one of the most well-known Greek historical works of the previous century, on the topic of the most famous man in Greek history.[46] Even if the echoes of Alexander I have argued for were not part of Herodian’s design, it remains likely that his employment of *pothos*-terminology almost exclusively in contexts involving the emperor serves to reinforce the sense of loss felt by the inhabitants of the Roman empire after the death of Marcus Aurelius.[47]

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[43] See Shayegan (2004) 293 – 302, who opens his discussion by citing Alfred Heuss’ description of Alexander as “von einer erregenden Gegenwärtigkeit” during the Severan era.

[44] Nevertheless, I find unconvincing the argument of Rubin (1980) 215 – 234, that Herodian shows little to no familiarity with the tradition about Alexander the Great. Essentially, Rubin argues that someone who loved rhetorical comparisons as much as Herodian would have made more use of Alexander-related themes at certain places. This assumes a Herodian incapable of subtlety.

[45] In addition to these passages and the material on Caracalla (4.8.1 – 3), there are also passing references to Alexander the Great at 5.7.3 (Elagabalus adopts his cousin, who adopts the name “Alexander” after the Macedonian conqueror), 6.2.2 (the Sasanian ruler Ardashir lays claim to the Persian Empire which Alexander destroyed), and 7.6.1 (Herodian refers to Alexandria as “the city of Alexander in Egypt”, cf. 4.8.6).

[46] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) shows Herodian’s familiarity with Dio of Prusa, at least, among post-classical authors; see also Chrysanthou (2020) 624.

[47] I would like to express my appreciation to the editors for their invitation to participate in the Dresden conference and to contribute to this volume; thanks as well to Sulo Asirvatham, Jessica Baron, and Andrew Scott for their input on this paper.

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Appendix 1: *pothos*-related terms in selected Greek prose authors

These numbers are based on a TLG search conducted in 2022. I have included the extant historians as well as a number of prose authors in other genres for comparison.

For Dionysius (*Antiquitates Romanae*), Josephus (*Bellum Judaicum*), and Plutarch (*Lives*), the first number is the result for that specific work/portion of the corpus alone; the numbers in parentheses refer to their entire corpus, if different.

	pothos	***pothein***	***potheinos***
Herodotus	2	4	0
Thucydides	1	0	1
Xenophon	2	4	0
Plato	18	21	2
Polybius	0	0	1
Diodorus Siculus	2	2	3
Dionysius	25 (26)	10 (17)	1
Josephus	7 (18)	4 (24)	1 (5)
Plutarch	28 (49)	65 (130)	9 (17)
Dio of Prusa	5	4	0
Arrian	17	6	0
Appian	8	4	0
Aelius Aristides	1	22	3
Lucian	4	23	7
Cassius Dio	2	20	0
Herodian	8	7	2

Further Notes:

- Xenophon: historical works and *Cyropaedia* (*potheinos* occurs 4 × in other works)
- Arrian: *Anabasis* and *Indica*
- Appian and Cassius Dio report on events involving a eunuch by the name of Potheinos; those results are not included in this table.

Appendix 2: *pothos* in Herodian

Translations are those of the author; the text is taken from Lucarini (2005), with diacritical marks corrected as necessary (on which see Letta [2012]).

1. 1.4.5 (Marcus Aurelius speaking)

μάλιστα δὲ ἐκεῖνοι ἐς ἀρχῆς μῆκος ἀκινδύνως ἤλασαν, ὅσοι μὴ φόβον ἐξ ὠμότητος, **πόθον** δὲ <ἐκ> τῆς αὐτῶν χρηστότητος ταῖς τῶν ἀρχομένων ψυχαῖς ἐνέσταξαν.

Those (rulers) especially went on to a long reign without danger, however many of them instilled in the hearts of their subjects not fear arising from cruelty, but longing arising from their own goodness.

2. 1.4.7 (death of Marcus Aurelius)

ὁ μὲν οὖν νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐπιβιώσας μιᾶς ἀνεπαύσατο, **πόθον** τε τοῖς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀνθρώποις ἐγκαταλιπὼν ἀρετῆς τε ἀίδιον μνήμην εἰς τὸν ἐσόμενον αἰῶνα.

And so he lived through the night and another day before he passed away, having left behind a longing in the people of his own time and an eternal memory of his virtue in the ages to come.

3. 1.6.3 (Commodus corrupted by the imperial servants)

αἰφνιδίως δὲ καλέσας τοὺς φίλους **ποθεῖν** ἔλεγε τὴν πατρίδα·

He suddenly summoned his advisors and said that he longed for home.

4. 1.6.4 (Pompeianus speaking to Commodus)

ποθεῖν μέν σε, ἔφη, τέκνον καὶ δέσποτα, τὴν πατρίδα εἰκός· καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ τῶν οἴκοι ὁμοίᾳ ἐπιθυμίᾳ ἑαλώκαμεν. ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐνταῦθα προυργιαίτερα ὄντα καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπείγοντα ἐπέχει τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν.

“It is reasonable for you,” he said, “my child and master, to long for your homeland; for we, too (οἱ φίλοι) have been gripped by a similar desire for those back home. However, our business here, being more important and more pressing, checks our desire.”

5. 1.6.5 (Pompeianus speaking)

θάρσος γὰρ ἐμβαλοῦμεν τοῖς βαρβάροις, οὐκ ἐπανόδου **πόθον** ἀλλὰ φυγὴν καὶ δέος ἡμῶν καταγνοῦσι.

For we will instill courage in the barbarians, who will accuse us not of a longing to return (home), but rather of flight and fear.

6. 1.7.2 (Commodus' return to Rome)

ἀνύσας δὲ τὴν ὁδοιπορίαν ὁ Κόμοδος μετὰ νεανικῆς σπουδῆς καὶ διαδραμὼν τὰς ἐν μέσῳ πόλεις, ὑποδεχθείς τε πανταχοῦ βασιλικῶς καὶ δήμοις ἑορτάζουσιν ἐπιφανείς, ἀσπαστός τε καὶ **ποθεινὸς** πᾶσιν ὤφθη.

Completing the journey with youthful eagerness and passing through the cities along the way, Commodus was received everywhere with royal fanfare and appeared before festive crowds; all found the sight of him welcome and longed-for.

7. 1.7.4 (Commodus' return to Rome)

ἐπόθουν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἀληθεῖ ψυχῆς διαθέσει ἅτε παρ’ αὐτοῖς γεννηθέντα τε καὶ τραφέντα καὶ ἄνωθεν ἐκ τριγονίας βασιλέα τε καὶ εὐπατρίδην ὄντα Ῥωμαίων.

(The senate and the people of Rome) longed for him with true, heart-felt affection, because he had been born and raised in their midst and was an emperor of the fourth generation and a Roman patrician.

8. 1.12.4 (Cleander, plotting to gain power)

ἀθροίζων δὲ χρήματα καὶ πλεῖστον σῖτον συνωνούμενος καὶ ἀποκλείων, ἤλπιζε προσάξεσθαι τόν τε δῆμον καὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον, εἰ πρῶτον ἐν σπάνει τῶν ἐπιτηδείων καταστήσας ἐπιδόσεσι λαμπραῖς ἁλόντας **πόθῳ** τοῦ χρειώδους προσαγάγοιτο.

He gathered money, bought a large amount of grain, and cut off the supply; he hoped that he would bring under his power the people and the soldiers, if first having created a shortage of supplies he could win over with bountiful distributions those who had been captured by a desire for necessities.

9. 1.13.4 (Commodus summons Cleander)

ἐλθόντα δ’ αὐτὸν συλληφθῆναι κελεύει καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμὼν δόρατί τε ἐπιμήκει ἐγκαταπήξας ἐκπέμπει τερπνὸν καὶὸ**ποθεινὸν** τῷ δήμῳ θέαμα.

When he arrived, he [Commodus] ordered that he be arrested, and having cut off his head and affixed it upon a long spear he sent it out as a pleasing and long-desired spectacle for the people.

10. 2.1.9 (Laetus speaking to Pertinax)

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἥκομέν σοι τὴν βασιλείαν ἐγχειριοῦντες, ὃν ἴσμεν προύχοντα ἐν τῇ συγκλήτῳ βουλῇ σωφροσύνῃ βίου μεγέθει τε ἀξιώματος καὶ ἡλικίας σεμνότητι **ποθούμενόν** τε καὶ τιμώμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου·

We have come in order to entrust the empire to you, whom we know to be foremost in the Senate due to the moderation of your life and, on account of the greatness of your dignity and reverence for your age, longed for and honored by the people.

11. 2.5.1 (praetorians under Pertinax long for Commodus)

τοιαύτης δὲ εὐμοιρίας καὶ εὐταξίας κατεχούσης τὸν βίον μόνοι οἱ δορυφόροι, ἀσχάλλοντες μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς παροῦσι, **ποθοῦντες** δὲ τὰς ἐπὶ τῆς προγεγενημένης τυραννίδος ἁρπαγάς τε καὶ βίας ἔν τε ἀσωτίαις καὶ κραιπάλαις, ἐβουλεύσαντο ἀποσκευάσασθαι τὸν Περτίνακα […]

Although the life (of the empire) held such a state of happiness and good order, the praetorians alone – vexed at the current situation and longing for the plundering and violence of the previous tyranny amidst riotous, drunken behavior – plotted to rid themselves of Pertinax […]

12. 2.7.9 (Niger)

φύσει δὲ κοῦφον τὸ Σύρων ἔθνος, ἐς καινοτομίαν τε τῶν καθεστηκότων ἐπιτήδειον. ἐνῆν δέ τις αὐτοῖς καὶὸ**πόθος** τοῦ Νίγρου, ἠπίως τε ἄρχοντος ἅπασι, τὰ πλεῖστά τε αὐτοῖς συμπανηγυρίζοντος.

The Syrian race is fickle by nature and ready to overturn established rule. But they also had a certain longing for Niger, who had been a mild governor for everyone, and who had attended most of their festivals with them.

13. 3.2.5 (Septimius Severus)

αὐτὸς δ' ἅμα τῷ τῆς Ῥώμης ἐπιβῆναι συλλαβὼν πάντας τοὺς τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἢ τῶν ὁτιδὴ πραττόντων κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἀσίαν, φρουρᾷ δοὺς εἶχε σὺν αὐτῷ, ὅπως ἢ **πόθῳ** τῆς τῶν παίδων σωτηρίας οἱ ἡγεμόνες τὰ Νίγρου προδιδοῖεν, ἢ μένοντες ἐπὶ τῆς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον εὐνοίας φθάσωσί τι κακὸν παθεῖν διὰ τῆς τῶν παίδων ἀναιρέσεως ἢ δράσωσιν αὐτοί.

Upon his arrival at Rome, he seized all the (children) of the governors and office-holders in the East and throughout Asia, and held them under guard with him, so that either Niger's generals might betray his cause out of desire for the safety of their children, or, if they remained loyal to Niger, they might suffer some harm through the destruction of their children before they themselves might do him (Severus) any harm.

14. 4.8.6 (Caracalla)

ἐκεῖ τε ὑποδεχθεὶς πολυτελῶς καὶ διατρίψας χρόνου τινὸς ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἐστέλλετο, πρόφασιν ποιούμενος **ποθεῖν** τὴν ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ κτισθεῖσαν πόλιν, καὶ τῷ θεῷ χρήσασθαι ὃν ἐκεῖνοι σέβουσιν ἐξαιρέτως·

After he had been lavishly received and spent some time there (Antioch), he set out for Alexandria, pretending that he longed for the city founded by Alexander, and to consult the god whom they especially revered.

15. 5.2.3 (Macrinus)

τοσοῦτον δὲ ἥμαρτεν ὅσον μὴ διέλυσεν εὐθέως τὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ ἑκάστους εἰς τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἀπέπεμψεν, αὐτός τε εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην **ποθοῦσαν** ἠπείχθη, τοῦ δήμου ἑκάστοτε καλοῦντος μεγάλαις βοαῖς […]

He erred only in this – that he did not immediately disband his army and send every man to his own home, and that he himself did not make haste for Rome which was longing (for him), the people continually calling with great shouts […]

16. 6.4.2 (Alexander Severus leaves Rome for the East)

[…] παραπεμφθείς τε ὑπὸ τῆς συγκλήτου καὶ πάντος τοῦ δήμου, τῆς Ῥώμης ἀπῆρεν, ἐπιστρεφόμενος ἀεὶ πρὸς τὴν πόλιν καὶ δακρύων. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τῶν δημοτῶν ἦν τις ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ παρέπεμπεν αὐτόν· **πόθον** γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ τῷ πλήθει ἐμπεποιήκει ἀνατραφείς τε ὑπ' αὐτῶν καὶ μετρίως ἄρξας τοσούτων ἐτῶν.

[…] and being escorted by the senate and the entire populace, he set out from Rome, constantly turning back toward the city and crying. Nor was there anyone among the people who escorted him without tears; for he had implanted in the masses a longing for himself, having been brought up under them and having ruled mildly for so many years.

17. 7.5.5 (a young man urges Gordian to claim the throne)

εἰ μὲν οὖν τὰ παρόντα ἕλοιο, πολλὰ τὰ ἐφοδία ἐς ἀγαθὰς ἐλπίδας, τό τε Μαξιμίνου παρὰ πᾶσι μῖσος, **πόθος** τε τυραννίδος ὠμῆς ἀπαλλάξεως, καὶ ἐν ταῖς προγενομέναις πράξεσιν εὐδοκίμησις, ἔν τε συγκλήτῳ καὶ τῷ Ῥωμαίων δήμῳ γνῶσις οὐκ ἄσημος καὶ τιμὴ ἔνδοξος ἀεί.

If you choose the current (danger), there are many means of providing good hopes: the universal hatred of Maximinus and desire to be rid of a cruel tyranny; your repute in previous offices, your not unmarked recognition among the senate and people of Rome, and your consistently high level of honor.

Luke Pitcher

Herodian on *Stasis*

> ὡς δὲ διέδραμε ⟨ν ἡ⟩ φήμη τῆς Σεβήρου νίκης, εὐθὺς ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐκείνοις στάσις καὶ διάφορος γνώμη ἐνέπεσε ταῖς πόλεσιν, οὐχ οὕτως τῇ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμοῦντας βασιλέας ἀπεχθείᾳ τινὶ ἢ εὐνοίᾳ ὡς ζήλῳ καὶ ἔριδι τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλας φθόνῳ τε καὶ καθαιρέσει τῶν ὁμοφύλων. ἀρχαῖον τοῦτο πάθος Ἑλλήνων, οἳ πρὸς ἀλλήλους στασιάζοντες ἀεὶ καὶ τοὺς ὑπερέχειν δοκοῦντας καθαιρεῖν θέλοντες ἐτρύχωσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα. ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἐκείνων γηράσαντα καὶ περὶ ἀλλήλοις συντριβέντα Μακεδόσιν εὐάλωτα καὶ Ῥωμαίοις δοῦλα γεγένηται· τὸ δὲ πάθος τοῦτο τοῦ ζήλου καὶ φθόνου μετῆλθεν ἐς τὰς καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀκμαζούσας πόλεις.
>
> When news of Severus' victory spread, its immediate effect was to cause an outbreak of civil strife and factional politics in the cities of all the eastern provinces, not really because of partisanship for or against one of the warring emperors so much as jealous inter-city rivalry and because of envy towards and a desire to destroy their compatriots. This continual inter-city struggle and the desire to ruin a rival who seems to have grown too powerful is a long-standing weakness of the Greeks and sapped the strength of Greece. But as their organizations grew feebler and were mutually destructive, they fell easy victims to Macedonian domination and Roman enslavement. This same disease of jealous envy has been transmitted to the cities that have prospered right up to the present day. (Hdn. 3.2.7–8)[1]

Towards the end of the Fifth Century BCE, or at the very beginning of the Fourth, Thucydides of Athens interrupts the third book of his eight-book history for a disquisition upon *stasis*, or civic unrest. This analysis is founded on a concrete example: the behaviour of the small polity Corcyra (Th. 3.70.1–81.5). The behaviour is a reaction to the armed conflict between more powerful entities: the Athenians, the Spartans, and their respective allies (Th. 3.70.1–2, 70.6, 72.1–3, 75.1–3). Thucydides generalizes upon *stasis* as a destructive phenomenon that will continue to appear across the board, albeit with local variation, so long (the historian asserts) as "the human situation is unchanged" (Th. 3.82.2).

Towards the middle of the Third Century CE, Herodian interrupts the third book of his eight-book history for a disquisition upon *stasis*, or civic unrest. This analysis is founded upon concrete examples: the behaviour of cities in Asia – principally Nicomedia and Nicaea (Hdn. 3.2.9), but also Laodicea and Tyre (Hdn. 3.3.3).[2] The behaviour is a reaction to the armed conflict between more powerful entities: Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, pretenders alike to the imperial purple of the Roman Empire (Hdn. 3.2.7, 3.2.9, 3.3.3–4). Herodian generalizes upon *stasis* as a destructive phenomenon, which has been a constant (the historian asserts) in inter-relations between the Greeks (Hdn. 3.2.7–8).

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[1] Text and translation based on Whittaker (1969), except with φθόνῲ(“jealousy”) rather than φθορᾷ ("destruction"); see the discussion at n. 24 below. The author is grateful to the editors for several corrections and suggestions of further illustrative material.

[2] For a difference in how Herodian handles the individual cases here, see below, 289.

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One or two of the similarities between these passages are, perhaps, fortuitous. A certain sense of continuity and conscious emulation, however, seems likely.[3] It may be accidental that both Thucydides and Herodian wrote eight-book histories, with *stasis* occupying a position of particular thematic prominence in the third. Other historians wrote eight-book histories (Procopius being the most famous extant one);[4] alternate, if apparently less authoritative,[5] book divisions for Thucydides are attested from antiquity.[6] But there are certainly other likely instances where the book numbering, at least, devised by a Greek historian writing under the Roman Empire seems to allude to the book numbering of an admired paradigm and predecessor. Arrian may have carried emulation of Xenophon to the point of taking on his name;[7] certainly, his *Anabasis Alexandri* is in seven books, as Xenophon's *Anabasis Cyri* was.[8] Cephalion, a lost historian of Assyria in the time of Hadrian, elaborated Herodotean allusion to the extent not merely of writing in literary Ionic, but also of composing his history in nine books.[9] Cassius Dio *may* (though this is very much a conjecture) have alluded, by writing the final version of his history in eighty books, to the eighty-book edition of the *Annales Maximi.*[10]

Even without the weight of structural parallels elsewhere in Greek imperial historiography, Herodian's general debt to Thucydides remains difficult to ignore. Herodian's claims at the outset of his history concerning the exciting events in the period he proposes to cover in the body of his work consciously evoke (while slyly expanding)[11] the similar assertions that Thucydides makes at the outset of his (Hdn. 1.1.4, Th. 1.23.3). Herodian's vocabulary is saturated with reminiscences of the older historian's; recent scholarship has been increasingly receptive to the idea that this may include instances of studied allusion, rather than simply mechanical reiteration of a lexical model popular under the Empire.[12]

In this instance, one notes in particular that both historians use compounds of πίπτειν to express the idea of *stasis*-related evils besetting multiple polities. Thucydides asserts that many dreadful things fell upon cities through *stasis:* καὶ *ἐπέπεσε* πολλὰ καὶ χαλεπὰ̀*κατὰ στάσιν ταῖς πόλεσι* (Th. 3.82.2); Herodian that *στάσις* καὶ διάφορος γνώμη *ἐνέπεσε ταῖς πόλεσιν* (Hdn. 3.2.7). Indeed, Herodian seems not to be echoing merely a single sentence of Thucydides here, but condensing vocabulary from across the whole of the earlier writer's analysis. Herodian's use of the adjective διάφορος echoes the vocabulary of Thucydides' opening contention that a division opened up across the Greek world between those elements that favoured the Athenians, and those that preferred to court the Spartans: *διαφορῶν* οὐσῶν ἑκασταχοῦ̀τοῖς τε τῶν δήμων προστάταις τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐπάγεσθαι καὶ τοῖς ὀλίγοις τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους (Th. 3.82.1).[13] γνώμη (admittedly a very common and obvious word) is Thucydides' locution later in his passage for the attitudes of both cities and private individuals, which he sees as generally being healthier in conditions of peace, but prone to deteriorating under the press of circumstance: ἐν μὲν γὰρ εἰρήνῃ καὶ ἀγαθοῖς πράγμασιν αἵ τε πόλεις καὶ οἱ ἰδιῶται ἀμείνους τὰς γνώμας ἔχουσι (Th. 3.82.2).

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[3] Galimberti (2022) 1 n. 4; Kemezis (2022) 26.

[4] The lost Bithynian history of Arrian was also in eight books (Phot. *Bibl.* 93 p. 73 a 32 = *BNJ* 156 F14), as was the Emperor Claudius' Greek history of Carthage (Suet. *Cl.* 42.2 = *FRHist* 75 T2).

[5] Marcellinus *Life of Thucydides* 58 notes that the eight-book version was more usual. For Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Siege of Plataea and Mytilene were in Book Three (D.H. *Th.* 9), as they are for us. No alternative division appears in the extant manuscript tradition. It seems reasonable to assume that for Herodian, as for us, Thucydides was an eight-book wonder.

[6] Pelling (2022a) 14 n. 45. Diodorus knew a nine-book division (D.S. 12.37.2, 13.42.5); Marcellinus one of thirteen (*Life of Thucydides* 58, but see previous note).

[7] Stadter (1967); Leon (2021) 33–34; cf. Bowie (1974) 191 n. 69.

[8] On the intertextual relationship between the two *Anabases*, see now Miltsios (2022) especially 330–333.

[9] *Suda* s.v. Kephalion κ 1449 Adler = *BNJ* 93 T1.

[10] Pitcher (2023) 81.

[11] Pitcher (2018) 236; Chrysanthou (2022) 10; Kemezis (2022) 23.

[12] Kemezis (2014) 230–233; Mallan (2022) 53.

It seems reasonable, then, to see Herodian's disposition to hold forth upon *stasis* as, at least in part, a reaction to the celebrated passage in Thucydides. The later historian, it might be thought, bears out the bold claim of the earlier. *Stasis* stayed an evil in the centuries between them; it never went away.

Yet the emulation here is not, in fact, a simple one. Once we compare the disquisitions on *stasis* in Thucydides and Herodian, it becomes clear that the two historians are not analysing the same phenomenon under that name. Herodian has, perhaps consciously, staged a moment of reflexion on *stasis* which formally (and, to an extent, thematically) evokes that of his great predecessor. However, the concept of *stasis* with which he is working in his reflective passages has telling differences from its Thucydidean analogue.

Thucydides' account of *stasis* has been extensively studied, alike in antiquity and in the modern world;[14] Herodian's has seen much less attention – and reasonably so.[15] We are now, thankfully, beyond the stage where one must apologize for an interest in Herodian.[16] It will nevertheless be uncontroversial to say that his account of *stasis* is sketchier, less influential, and much shorter, than Thucydides' one. There is nothing in Herodian's remarks on *stasis* that approximates to Thucydides' meditations on the corruptions of how language is used (Th. 3.82.4),[17] or how individual intellect and prudence are evaluated (Th. 3.82.5), as soon as *stasis* takes hold.

All the same, Herodian's passage on *stasis* turns out, on closer inspection, to be illuminating, even more so for its divergence from Thucydides than for its similarity.

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[13] Compare also the use of τὸ διάφορον at Th. 7.55.2, discussed below.

[14] Antiquity: D.H. *Dem.* 1, *Th.* 29 – 33. Modern treatments include Edmunds (1975), Macleod (1979), and Palmer (2017) 410 – 414.

[15] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 230 – 233 is an honourable exception. *Stasis* in Cassius Dio, by contrast, has seen more recent attention: Lange (2018); Lange and Scott (2020) 4 – 6; Asirvatham (2020) 302 – 303.

[16] La Porte and Hekster (2022) 88 notes the historian's recent vogue.

[17] Spielberg (2017) 332 notes cases from antiquity where authors *do* pick up this theme.

Herodian's differing use of *stasis* has its own logic. This logic sheds light upon a number of topics: the evolution of notions of *stasis* in Greek prose literature across the centuries; the differing accounts of "Greekness" that obtain throughout a similar period; and Herodian's own larger strategy for figuring the relationship between power units within a larger political system, both in the Greek cities and (more signally) at Rome.

1 Thucydides and Classical Athenian Conceptions of *stasis*

As we have already seen, the accounts of *stasis* offered by Thucydides and Herodian do share some key similarities, beyond the formal one of the positions they occupy within their respective works. Thucydides and Herodian alike bring out the fact that a background of war can cause *stasis* to erupt. Thucydides is more explicit about this than Herodian, with his characterization of war as a βίαιος διδάσκαλος which permits the expression of tendencies that the more favourable conditions of peacetime tend to keep under wraps (Th. 3.82.2). All the same, Herodian, too, leaves no doubt about the connexion he sees between the eruption of *stasis* amongst the Greek cities in 193 CE and news of the struggle between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger: "Once news of Severus' victory circulated, *stasis* immediately fell upon all those people and contrary opinion upon the cities, not so much from some antipathy or favour towards the warring emperors as from jealousy and strife towards each other and because of envy towards and a desire to destroy their compatriots". Herodian's vision of *stasis*, like Thucydides', makes much of the essential opportunism of those involved in it.

Even the very beginning of Herodian's *stasis*-narrative, however, shows a crucial difference between his conception of *stasis* in this passage, and the one that informs its Thucydidean predecessor. Thucydides' test-case for *stasis* is the polity of Corcyra. Other polities are significant in how the account of the Corcyrean *stasis* plays out: the part played by prisoners suborned and released by the Corinthians (Th. 3.70.1), which Thucydides sees as marking the beginning of the troubles; the refuge offered, at one point, by an Athenian galley (Th. 3.70.6); the arrival of a Corinthian ship carrying Spartan envoys (Th. 3.71.2); an attempted settlement by the Athenian general Nicostratus (Th. 3.75.1); a stand-off between Peloponnesian and Athenian ships (Th. 3.77.3); seven days of carnage which coincide with the presence of Eurymedon of Athens and his sixty ships (Th. 3.81.4). Aid (or the expectation of aid) from one side or another in the greater Peloponnesian War repeatedly plays a key role in emboldening or strengthening one or another of Corcyra's internally dissenting factions. This accords with Thucydides' opening statements, once he moves from the particular case of *stasis* at Corcyra to generalizations about the phenomenon in the greater Greek world. From the beginning, Thucydides frames the characteristic dissension of *stasis* in terms of an opposition, in the affected polity, between the leaders of the *dēmos*¸ who characteristically call upon the Athenians, and the *oligoi*, who call upon the Spartans (Th. 3.82.1). Appeal to outside powers is seen as a consistent part of the script of *stasis*; outside powers are aware of this, and the Athenians receive a nasty shock in a case where there is no opportunity for them to exploit τὸ διάφορον in a city to their own advantage (Th. 7.55.2).[18] For all that, however, Thucydides' focus, in his account of the troubles at Corcyra, remains on how elements *within* the city turn upon each other. Forces from outside the *polis* may impinge upon this intra-civic struggle, but their intervention merely influences the *stasis*; they are not the players that Thucydides sees as principally contending with each other. Foreign agents such as Nicostratus and Eurymedon (on the Athenian side) and Alcidas (on the Spartan) have their role, but the focus is on what the Corcyreans themselves – largely unnamed, apart from the volunteer *proxenos* Peithias, who is murdered near the start (Th. 3.70.6) – are doing to each other.

Throughout the text of Thucydides, the usage is consistent: *stasis*, present or feared, refers to dissension *within* a city. Corcyra, to be sure, is where he explores the phenomenon in the greatest depth. But the *intra*-civic nature of *stasis* is a constant throughout Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. *stasis*, whether at Rhegium (Th. 4.1.3), Thurii (Th. 7.33.5–6), Acragas (Th. 7.46), Metapontum (Th. 7.57.11),[19] or, ultimately, at Athens itself, with the oligarchic revolution near the very end of the text (Th. 8.78), is focussed upon the destructive actions perpetrated by citizens of a given polity against each other.[20]

This usage is essentially in line with that of most texts about *stasis* written around Thucydides' period. These texts, to be sure, do not necessarily embrace Thucydides' tendency to see contention between the *dēmos* and the *oligoi* as its principal manifestation. Xenophon, at one point, figures *stasis* as part and parcel with the struggle between distinguished citizens for pre-eminence: οἱ ἀρετὴν ἀσκοῦντες στασιάζουσίὸτε περὶ τοῦὸπρωτεύειν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι καὶὸφθονοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς μισοῦσιν ἀλλήλους (X. *Mem.* 2.6.20).[21] A recent treatment of *stasis* in the fragments of Old Comedy suggests that the term might there be more broadly applied to the misbehaviour of politicians, without overt reference to the quarrelling of power-blocs within the state.[22] Herodotus' Darius, warning about the characteristic flaws of oligarchy in the Debate of the Constitutions, observes that *stasis* tends to arise when powerful men have private enmities

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[18] Pelling (2022a) 33.

[19] On how the behaviour of the Sicilian Greek cities in this respect mirrors those of the mainland, see Pelling (2022a) 34.

[20] For a register of historical instances of *stasis* in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE, with inscriptional evidence, see Gehrke (1985).

[21] Christodoulou (2013) 246; Tamiolaki (2018) 451–453.

[22] Christodoulou (2013) 239 [on Cratinus fr. 258, K.-A.], where *stasis* is seen as a parent of the tyrant Pericles: "[…] for Cratinus *stasis* is not only associated with civil conflict or armed conflict between the rich and the dēmos. *Stasis* in the city may be caused by the behaviour of statesmen and, most of all, by their inability to serve the public interest".

(Hdt. 3.82.3). All the same, the focus in these texts remains squarely on the internal dysfunction of a particular polity, and that dysfunction's ramifications for how life is led there. Plato's Athenian stranger, speaking at the beginning of the *Laws*, addresses this intra-civic character to *stasis* directly, when he asks against what sort of threat a city should ideally be girding itself: "Should it rather organize itself with an eye towards opposing war from without, or with an eye towards *war that from time to time comes about in the city itself, which is called* 'stasis'?" (πρὸς πόλεμον αὐτῆς ἂν τὸν ἔξωθεν βλέπων τὸν βίον κοσμοῖ μᾶλλον, ἢ πρὸς πόλεμον τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ γιγνόμενον ἑκάστοτε, ἣ δὴ καλεῖται στάσις; Pl. *Lg.* 628a–b).[23]

2 Herodian on *inter*-civic *stasis*

Herodian speaks of the 193 CE *stasis* as motivated οὐχ οὕτως τῇ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμοῦντας βασιλέας ἀπεχθείᾳ τινὶ ἢ εὐνοίᾳ ὡς ζήλῳ καὶ ἔριδι τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλας φθόνῳ τε καὶ καθαιρέσει τῶν ὁμοφύλων "not really because of partisanship for or against one of the warring emperors so much as jealous inter-city rivalry and because of envy towards and a desire to destroy their compatriots." There is a textual issue here, since the second pair of causal datives in the sentence (φθόνῳ "envy" and καθαιρέσει "destruction") sit oddly together. It is likely that one or other of them is corrupt, although no proposed solution is altogether compelling.[24]

Whatever the exact wording, we can be sure that the ideas of jealousy and desired destruction as motives for *stasis* are both in Herodian's mind for this passage, since he uses καθαιρεῖν θέλοντες and ζήλου καὶ φθόνου in the following sentence (which might explain the corruption of one or both of the datives at the end of this one). In itself, the notion that *stasis* is driven by *phthonos* is, once again, in line with much older Greek thinking. We have already seen that Xenophon views those involved in *stasis* as φθονοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς, "begrudging each other".[25] Democritus asserts that *phthonos* makes the beginning of *stasis.*[26]

The similarity of vocabulary between Herodian and these much earlier treatments of *stasis* risks obscuring a crucial difference: Herodian's notion of *stasis*, by contrast with that of Thucydides and Thucydides' Athenian more-or-less contemporaries, is focussed upon rivalry not *within* cities, but *between* them. The narrative that follows bears this out. We do not hear about the internal tensions of Nicomedia or Nicaea. Citizens of Nicomedia do not imprison or murder other citizens of Nicomedia; the Nicaeans do not prosecute each other. Rather, Herodian tells the story of how the two cities end up on different sides in the war between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger because of mutual animosity. Nicomedia throws in its lot with Septimius Severus after his success at the Battle of Cyzicus (μετὰ τὰ ἐν ΚυζίκῳὸΝικομηδεῖς μὲν Σεβήρῳ προσέθεντο, Hdn. 3.2.9). Herodian's vocabulary does not entail the supposition that Nicomedia had *switched* allegiance,[27] although, in historical reality, it is unlikely that Nicomedia could have got away down to that point without having made at least a show of support for Niger, who would have sent his forces through Nicomedia and Nicaea on their way from Syria to Byzantium.[28] The Nicaeans, through their hatred towards the Nicomedians, τῷὸπρὸς Νικομηδέας μίσει, adopt the other cause, and welcome in Pescennius Niger's army. Again, Herodian makes no suggestion at this point that Nicaea had declared for Niger before Nicomedia declared for Septimius Severus: τἀναντία ἐφρόνουν, where the imperfect is probably inceptive, suggests that Nicaea started following Niger's cause after Nicomedia attached itself to Severus, even though (as we have just seen) the idea that Nicaea could have got away without at least a show of support for Niger in historical reality before that point is quite unlikely.[29] In any event, Herodian presents the decision as proceeding from animosity between the two polities.

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[23] Price (2015) 58; see also Lange (2018) 171.

[24] Whittaker proposes φθορᾷ for φθόνῳ, which would make more sense as a pair for καθαιρέσει. Stroth proposes μίσει for καθαιρέσει, which would make more sense as a pair for φθόνῳ; μῖσος is paired with envy amongst those involved in *stasis* by Xenophon, at X. *Mem.* 2.6.20, and is used by Herodian later to characterize the *stasis* between Laodicea and Antioch (Hdn. 3.3.3; see below) and also that between Geta and Caracalla (Hdn. 4.4.1, on which, again, see below). Lucarini (2005) obelizes καθαιρέσει.

[25] This is a case of the reflexive pronoun being used in place of the reciprocal (Goodwin [1879] 996; see the discussion at Arnold [1848] 1009 – 1010).

[26] φθόνος γὰρ στάσιος ἀρχὴν ἀπεργάζεται (Stob. 3.38.53 = Democritus DK 68 B 245; aptly quoted at Christodoulou [2013] 246 n. 114).

The pattern set out with Nicomedia vs. Nicaea repeats itself with Laodicea vs. Antioch and Tyre vs. Berytus (Hdn. 3.3.3). In these cases, Herodian chooses to focus upon the animosity of one side in the equation. He speaks of the Laodiceans and the Tyrians making decisions "against" (*kata*) Antioch and Berytus, respectively, without according as much narrative agency to the other two cities as he has just done with Nicomedia and Nicaea. We may speculate that this decision arises because Herodian wishes his readers to be left with an unmixed vision as to the folly of *stasis.* Laodicea and Tyre pay for their opportunism. They are both slapped down for acting as they do, even though both chose the side (that of Severus) which will ultimately win.[30] In none of these cases, however, does Herodian remark upon struggles *within* the relevant polities. His vision of *stasis* is based upon polities as single (and, for this purpose, monolithic) entities.

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27 *Pace* Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 231 ("If Nicomedia indeed 'went over' to Severus 'immediately after' the battle of Cyzicus, they must obviously have been on the side of Niger until then […]"). προσέθεντο lacks the necessary implication of *changing* sides that "went over" suggests. Cf. Tissaphernes' strategy of keeping the Athenians and Spartans balanced at Th. 8.87.4, applying this verb to the (rejected) idea of siding with either.

28 Hdn. 3.1.5 and D.C. [Xiph.] 75[74].6.3, as Adam Kemezis points out to me.

29 Bekker-Nielsen (2008) 149. Note, too, that in Book Two, Herodian has claimed that support for Niger amongst the peoples of Asia was universal (Hdn. 2.8.7).

30 In fact, Severus *will* ultimately make Antioch subservient to Laodicea (Hdn. 3.6.9), but it does not suit Herodian's moralizing implications in the present passage to mention this.

Herodian is able to see conflict between cities as a species of *internal* dissension, and so still meriting the name of *stasis*, because his sense of what is the most important level for thinking about Greeks is different from the one we usually find in Thucydides. Thucydides is, of course, capable of thinking about Greeks *qua* Greeks. This is often, but not always, in contradistinction to the Persians; he does so, for example, at the very beginning of his history, which claims that the Peloponnesian War was the greatest upheaval to have beset "the Greeks and some part of the barbarians – one might say over most of mankind" (Th. 1.1.2). "The rest of the Greek world", τὸ ἄλλο Ἑλληνικὸν, is, from the beginning, a "favourite expression"[31] of his (Th. 1.1.1, 1.15.3 [of the Lelantine War], and 4.20.4 [from Spartan ambassadors after Pylos]). For the most part, however, the important functional unit in Thucydides is the individual polity.

Herodian's different stance is, once again, evident from the opening sentence of his *stasis*-narrative: the foolish cities act "because of envy towards and a desire to destroy *their compatriots* (*homophulōn*)".[32] In themselves, elements of the vocabulary and the concepts behind it are, again, originally Thucydidean. Thucydides' very first remarks on *stasis*, long before Corcyra becomes a consideration, present two complementary and contrasting threats that emerge from having good land. *stasis* is concurrent with, but in contrast to, being schemed against by *allophulōn*, "those who are of a different kindred": διὰ γὰρ ἀρετὴν γῆς αἵ τε δυνάμεις τισὶ μείζους ἐγγιγνόμεναι στάσεις ἐνεποίουν ἐξ ὧν ἐφθείροντο, καὶ ἅμα ὑπὸ ἀλλοφύλων μᾶλλον ἐπεβουλεύοντο (Th. 1.2.4). Thucydides does not use the actual word *homophuloi* here, although he does later in the history (e.g., Th. 1.141.6). All the same, the mirroring of the expressions makes the implication clear: *stasis* occurs, implicitly, between *homophuloi*, whereas external conspiracies are the work of *allophuloi.* Certainly, the hint that *stasis* occurs between *homophuloi* is spelt out in other post-Thucydidean treatments of the theme.[33]

Herodian's sense of *homophuloi* here is different from that implied at the beginning of Thucydides: *homophuloi*, for Herodian, refers to Greeks as a cultural totality. The sentences that follow make this clear: *stasis* is the "ancient woe of *Greeks*, who incessantly engaging in *stasis* against each other and wanting to destroy those who are pre-eminent have worn out *Greece*". For Herodian, in this passage, at least, the functional unit for thinking about Greeks is "Greece" (in the extended cultural usage, rather than simply the inhabitants of the Greek mainland, which was now the Roman province of Achaia).[34] In this sense, dissension between individual Greek cities *can* be figured as the sort of *internal* division that one might characterise as *stasis.*

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[31] Hornblower (1991) 6, on Th. 1.1.1.

[32] Cf. the use of this term at Aristid. *Or.* 26.63 – 64, dissolving the distinction of Roman and non-Roman.

[33] E.g., J. *BJ* 4.134, with Mader (2000) 73.

[34] For a perception of such a distinction earlier in the Empire, cf. Juv. 3.61 – 65; Umbricius, Juvenal's secondary narrator, disapproves of all Greeks, but nevertheless makes a point of observing that it is only a tiny proportion of the "Greeks" in Rome who actually hail from Achaea ("quamvis quota portio

Such a sense is foreign to Thucydidean thinking. Thucydides, *ceteris paribus*, prioritizes the individual city as the autonomous unit. Notably, Thucydides has Pericles make the argument, at the end of book one of his history, that the Greeks of the Peloponnesian League are *not homophuloi* with each other, and that this impairs their ability to make decisions fast and effectively as a collective (Th. 1.141.6). Of course, Pericles has a clear rhetorical aim here, to make the Peloponnesians look ineffectual and buoy up Athens for the coming war, but the point remains that his argument hangs on the proposition that Greeks can be not-*homophuloi* with other Greeks.

3 Dio of Prusa, Herodian, and the Refiguring of *stasis*

This un-Thucydidean mode of figuring *stasis* – between, rather than within, city-states – does not originate with Herodian. The most acute students of the passage in which Herodian discourses thus on civil strife have observed that it is very reminiscent, and possibly making use, of Dio of Prusa's Thirty-Eighth Oration.[35] This speech also concerns an instance of destructive tension between Nicaea and Nicomedia, whose historical rivalry long preceded, and long survived,[36] the events of 193 CE.

Dio, addressing the Nicomedians towards the end of the First or the beginning of the Second Century CE, urges the city to abstain from unprofitable rivalry with Nicaea.[37] Dio frames the issue as a struggle to be top dog amongst the local cities: the justification he imagines the proponents of strife as giving is simply Ὑπὲρ πρωτείων ἀγωνιζόμεθα "we contend for the primacy" (D. Chr. 38.24). Dio is at pains to paint this fixation on primacy as empty. Success (according to Dio) will bring no economic, territorial, or moral benefits (D. Chr. 38.22, 39).

For our purposes, the key thing to note in this speech is that Dio talks about the issue of contention between two *cities* explicitly in the vocabulary of *stasis.* When he announces that he is buckling down to consideration of the issue at hand, *stasis* is the word he uses: "first of all, men of Nicomedia, let us look at the reasons for the *stasis*" (Τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον, ἄνδρες Νικομηδεῖς, τὰς αἰτίας τῆς στάσεως ἴδωμεν, D. Chr. 38.21). References to the disagreement between Nicomedia and Nicaea as a *stasis* continue to pepper the speech (e. g., D. Chr. 38.24, 43, 48, 50). True enough, Dio, unlike Herodian, does hint at the presence of sinister individuals *within* the polity of Nicomedia itself agitating to foment this discontent, whose motives for doing so he ostenta-

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faecis Achaei?"), while the rest have effectively brought the Syrian Orontes to the Tiber. See also Bérenger (2022) 223, quoting this passage.

[35] Above all, Bekker-Nielsen (2014) 232 – 233. See also Makhlaiuk in this volume, 248.

[36] The rivalry was still a going concern in 451 CE, when Nicaea, originally a suffragan bishopric of Nicomedia, used preferment under Valentinian and Valens to assert its own status as an ecclesiastical metropolis (Levick [2000] 616, citing *Act. Conc. Oec.* 11.1.416 – 421).

[37] Asirvatham (2020) 301.

tiously declines to discuss (δι᾽ ἃς δὲ αἰτίας οὐκ ἐμὸν ἴσως ἐξελέγχειν, D.Chr. 38.24). But the fact remains that the entities Dio sees as engaging in *stasis* against each other are cities, rather than fellow-citizens; the notion we saw in Xenophon of *stasis* arising from individuals contending περὶ τοῦ πρωτεύειν has been transferred to polities.

Dio's warning against inter-civic *stasis* engages in some of the same rhetorical moves as Herodian's, although with a more overt demonstration of particularity as regards earlier Greek history. Herodian says rather vaguely that "their affairs" (viz., the affairs of the earlier Greeks) "having grown weak and old and worn out against each other became ripe for conquest and slavery by the Macedonians and the Romans". Dio fastens more precisely upon the case of the Athenians and the Spartans: "I am told that this same thing has caused Greek *stasis* before, and that the Athenians and the Spartans contended for primacy" (καὶ πρότερον γὰρ δήποτε ἀκούω τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο γενέσθαι στάσεως Ἑλληνικῆς αἴτιον, καὶ πολεμῆσαι περὶ τῶν πρωτείων τοὺς Ἀθηναίους καὶ τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους, D.Chr. 38.24–25).[38]

Both Dio and Herodian are drawing upon an established notion of the Succession of Empires, for a more detailed version of which one has to look elsewhere – such as the general preface to the *Roman History* of Appian, whose work we shall later find useful as a comparator in a different sense. Appian sees what he calls the "hegemony" of the Greeks as being succeeded in turn by that of the Macedonians and the Romans (App. *Praef.* 8.29); he subdivides this Greek hegemony into those of the Athenians, the Spartans, and the Thebans. (The Fourth Century BCE political heyday of Thebes is mentioned neither by Dio nor by Herodian. Dio, as we shall see shortly, has an interest in figuring the Greek politics of this period as a two-horse race, although this does not stop him from comparing himself to the Theban Epaminondas in another speech.[39] The Medism of Thebes during the Persian Wars also contributed, perhaps, to a lasting unpopularity as an *exemplum*, and it does not seem to have had the success in leveraging its pre-Roman past to become a "museum city" in Imperial times as Athens and Sparta did,[40] although its history, unsurprisingly, retains a high profile in the works of the Chaeronean Plutarch.)[41] Dionysius of Halicarnassus follows a similar schema, with the addition of precise, and rather problematic, lengths for the respective periods of dominance enjoyed by the three Greek cities (D.H. 1.3.2).

Whereas Dionysius and Appian plot these Greek hegemonies within a longer succession, with each one yielding place to another, Dio openly recasts the Peloponnesian War as an incident of *stasis* between Athens and Sparta. Herodian does not do so quite as conspicuously. We may note, however, an intertextual echo in his claim that *stasis* has continued to beset Greece "even down to the cities prospering in our own day", ἐς τὰς καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀκμαζούσας πόλεις (Hdn. 3.2.8). Thucydides, in the opening sentences of his work, claims that he realized from the outset how worthy of note the Peloponnesian War was going to be on the grounds that both sides were prospering as to every resource: ὅτι ἀκμάζοντές τε ᾖσαν ἐς αὐτὸν ἀμφότεροι παρασκευῇὸτῇ πάσῃὸ(Th. 1.1.1). ἀκμάζω, to be sure, is not an especially unusual verb, and Thucydidean vocabulary in Herodian, despite the clear results we have already seen, does not necessarily *always* have a particular allusive force.[42] It is still a little tempting to see Herodian as doing implicitly in this passage what Dio does in his oration: making the contention of the Athenians and the Spartans (the implied “prospering” states of long ago which are the counterpart to those “in our own day”) an earlier link in the chain of *stasis* that stretches down to the historian’s own present. (Thucydides himself, of course, foresees the possibility that the dominant cities of his own day may ultimately cease to be so (Th. 1.10.2), and that it would then be hard to guess that Sparta had been so pre-eminent.)

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[38] Cf. also Aristid. *Or.* 26.53. For Athens as a negative *exemplum* elsewhere in Dio's speeches, see Jazdzewska (2015) especially 263–264 (on Athens and Sparta at D. Chr. 34.49–50).

[39] D. Chr. 43.4–6, as Adam Kemezis points out to me.

[40] For Sparta and Athens as "museum cities" under the Empire, see Swain (1996) 40, 74–76.

[41] E.g., Plu. *De gen.* and, more humorously, *De garr.* 22 (= *BNJ* 70 F213).

Herodian’s notion of inter-civic *stasis* in his disquisition upon it is, then, essentially un-Thucydidean, but represents an expansion of the notion of “internal discord” to Greece as a corporate entity in its own right which is already established in other Greek historiographical (or historiography-adjacent) texts written under the dominion of Rome. We have seen that this shift has knock-on effects for how Herodian deploys other items of Thucydidean vocabulary. For Herodian, all Greeks can be considered *homophuloi*, in a way that would not have occurred to Thucydides’ Pericles. This urge to recast Thucydides into a way of thinking that privileges “Greece” and “Greeks” as a structural unit rather than the autonomous city-state can be discerned beyond Herodian and Dio Chrysostom. One notes, for example, the dismay shown by Dionysius of Halicarnassus at what he perceives as the cold-bloodedness of Greeks towards other Greeks shown by Thucydides in the Melian Dialogue: “no Athenian should have spoken thus to Greeks whom they had liberated from the Persians” (D.H. *Th.* 39).[43] The expansion is, of course, part of a larger tendency in Imperial Greek literature to figure “Greece” primarily as a *cultural* unity.

In any event, Herodian, like Dio before him, is living in a world where the failure of earlier Greeks to match Macedon or Rome, for whatever reason, means that the possibilities of independent power for individual Greek polities are seriously curtailed. Dio is forthright is calling attention to this, as he reminds the Nicomedians that their envisioned struggle for “primacy” with the Nicaeans can never be what the contest between Athens and Sparta was during the Fifth Century BCE:

> τὰ δὲ ἐκείνων εἶπον ἤδη που καὶ πρότερον ὅτι μὴ κενόδοξα ἦν, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ ἀρχῆς ἀληθοῦς ἀγών· εἰ μή τι νῦν δοκεῖτε αὐτοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς προπομπείας καλῶς ἀγωνίζεσθαι, καθάπερ ἐν μυστηρίῳ τινὶ παίζοντας ὑπὲρ ἀλλοτρίου πράγματος.

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[42] On the larger question of where precise verbal intertextuality with Thucydides is (or is not) significant in Greek imperial texts, see Pelling (2010) 106.

[43] See also Wiater (2018) 58.

> I have already noted perhaps earlier that *their* deeds [viz., those of the Fifth Century Athenians and Spartans] were not matters of empty repute, but a contest over authentic dominion – unless you think that they were contending valiantly over the right to lead a procession, like people sporting in some mystery celebration over something which actually belongs to someone else. (D. Chr. 38.38 – 39)[44]

Herodian presents this truth rather differently from how Dio does,[45] but the underlying perception of the shift in the true locus of political power is the same. As far as struggles for true power on the global stage, the ἀρχῆς ἀληθοῦς ἀγών, are concerned, Thucydides' favoured unit of attention, the individual Greek city-state, has become, under the Roman Empire, essentially obsolete.

4 Herodian and the Absence of Thucydidean *stasis*

If we continue this comparison of Herodian to other Greek imperial historiography, however, we find that there is a further complication. The idea of *stasis* as occurring between polities expands Thucydides' concept of the phenomenon. All the same, *stasis* can usually still refer, in Greek texts written under the Roman Empire, to discord within an individual polity. The idea of inter-civic *stasis* expands the Thucydidean use of the concept, but does not replace it.

In the historical works by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing under Augustus, and the *Roman History* of Appian, written around the middle of the Second Century CE, *stasis* as the *mot juste* for dissension within an individual polity is a usage that is still alive and kicking. In Dionysius, the most straightforward example of this is probably his handling, in Book Six of the *Roman Antiquities*, of the run-up to the first Secession of the Plebs, in the wake of Roman success at the Battle of Lake Regillus: "discord within the city once again arose for the Romans after they had put an end to the foreign wars, when the Senate had decreed that the law-courts should sit, and that the suits which had been put off on account of the war should be decided according to the laws" (Ῥωμαίοις δὲ καταλυσαμένοις τοὺς ὑπαίθρους πολέμους *ἡ πολιτικὴ στάσις* αὖθις ἐπανίστατο τῆς μὲν βουλῆς ψηφισαμένης καθίζειν τὰ δικαστήρια καὶ τὰς ἀμφισβητήσεις, ἃς διὰὸτὸν πόλεμον ἀνεβάλλοντο, κρίνεσθαι κατὰὸτοὺς νόμους, D. H. 6.22.1). In this passage, the contrast between *internal stasis* and threats from without which we saw as assumed in Thucydides's account of early Greek history appears again: once the wars with others, τοὺς ὑπαίθρους πολέμους, are put to bed, the Romans face the recrudescence of a challenge from within the city itself. In the following book, Dionysius explicitly draws on an analogy with the Corcyrean *stasis* to illustrate his argument that Roman *stasis* (at least in the period he is discussing) had a happier outcome, because of the Roman talent for resolving disagreement with *logos* (D. H. 7.66.5).[46]

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[44] Dio revisits the theme that political power no longer resides with the Greek cities, and once again presses into service the examples of Sparta and Athens, in an address to the people of Tarsus (D. Chr. 34.48 – 51). Cassius Dio, too, is notably sceptical in an aside about the emptiness of some manifestations of civic self-aggrandisement under the High Empire (D. C. 54.23.8, cited by Millar [1964] 8 with n. 7).

[45] Bekker-Nielsen (2014) acutely notes that, while Dio frames inter-civic rivalries in terms of what he claims to be the Roman perception of them as Ἑλληνικὰ ἁμαρτήματα ("Greek failings/mistakes", D. Chr. 38.38); Herodian straightforwardly calls then a πάθος Ἑλλήνων (a "malady of Greeks"). This both elides the Roman perspective, and takes some agency from those who are afflicted by them.

Appian's usage is still more interesting than that of Dionysius. Intra-civic discord is explicitly the subject for five full books of Appian's (originally) twenty-four book history. This preoccupation is advertised from the start. Appian notes in his general preface that "the deeds which the Romans committed in *stasis* and civil war against each other (which things above all were more fearful to them) have been divided up according to the leaders of the *stasis*" (ὅσα δ' αὐτοὶ Ῥωμαῖοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐστασίασάν τε καὶ ἐπολέμησαν ἐμφύλια, φοβερώτερα σφίσι ταῦτα μάλιστα γενόμενα, ἐς τοὺς στρατηγοὺς τῶν στάσεων διῄρηται, App. *Praef.* 14.59).

In some ways, Appian's outlook aligns with that of Dio Chrysostom and Herodian. Appian's general preface plots the transfer of global hegemony from the Greeks (subdivided, as we have already seen, into the Athenians, the Spartans, and the Thebans) to Macedonia and then to Rome. At the conclusion of this passage, Appian seems to assert that *stasis* is the *only* thing that brings down great empires, ᾧ μόνως ἀρχαὶ μεγάλαι καταλύονται (App. *Praef.* 10.42). The corruptness of the text here is unfortunate,[47] but Appian seems to be deploying the later, somewhat expanded sense of *stasis* which we have detected in other Imperial Greek texts. For Appian, the Successor Kings eventually undo Alexander's legacy not because of issues within their own discrete realms, but because they insist on vying with *each other*, a tendency of which Herodian, too, is critical (Hdn. 6.2.7).[48] This *stasis* between the Successors can still be regarded as happening "within" an empire so long as the discussion is framed in terms of Alexander's original legacy, as Appian does (App. *Praef.* 10.38). In similar vein, it is hard to see how such a *stasis*-driven explanation could apply to Appian's account of the earlier fall of the "Greek" hegemony if Appian were not entertaining here an inter-polity model of *stasis* like (if more detailed than) the one in Dio and Herodian.[49] Greece falls before Philip of Macedon because the Greek city-states contend with each other, not because of issues internal to the polity of Thebes, who are, according to the strict succession, the actual top dogs when power is lost to Macedonia. In any event, *stasis* is of ongoing thematic significance for Appian. A recent reading argues that Appian's decision to devote five books of his history to Rome suffering *and emerging* from *stasis* makes the point that Rome has now defeated the one force that might conceivably have threatened the continuance of its hegemony.[50]

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[46] Pelling (2010) 113–114.

[47] The text here is uncertain (Viereck *et al.* [1962] 8). McGing (2019) 19 n. 19 notes: "This is a highly problematic sentence in the manuscripts, although its general meaning seems to be reasonably clear."

[48] Goukowsky (2020) 192 n. 320 notes similar sentiments at Liv. 45.9 and D. H. 1.2.3, as well.

[49] Interestingly, both Appian (App. *Praef.* 10.42) and Herodian (Hdn. 3.2.8) deploy the unexpected verb συντρίβω to evoke the pointless grinding down of resources which unprofitable *stasis* entails; this may be a (very unusual) evocation of the former by the latter.

Once Appian’s narrative is underway, however, he typically continues the Thucydidean usage of having *stasis* refer to dissension *within* an individual polity. Such a conception, to take only the most obvious example, informs the opening sentence of Appian’s whole narrative of the Roman Civil Wars. “The Senate and the people of Rome often engaged in *stasis* against each other, over legislation and the forgiveness of debts, or over land distribution or high offices (Ῥωμαίοις ὁ δῆμος καὶ ἡ βουλὴ πολλάκις ἐς ἀλλήλους περί τε νόμων θέσεως καὶ χρεῶν ἀποκοπῆς ἢ γῆς διαδατουμένης ἢ ἐν ἀρχαιρεσίαις ἐστασίασαν, App. *BC* 1.1.1).

Herodian, by contrast to Dionysius and Appian, barely uses *stasis* in the more Thucydidean sense. Dissension within a polity certainly appears in his history. That polity is usually Rome; not without justice does a recent study of Severan historiography subtitle its chapter on Herodian “a dysfunctional Rome”.[51] Herodian seems, however, very reluctant to label contemporary Roman dysfunction as *stasis*.

Herodian tends to categorize Rome’s internal problems during the period with which he is concerned as *emphulios polemos*, “civil war”, instead. This, to be sure, is a usage we find in Appian, as well. We have already seen that Appian’s opening description for his *Civil War* books in the general preface to his work is ὅσα δ’ αὐτοὶ Ῥωμαῖοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐστασίασάν τε καὶ ἐπολέμησαν ἐμφύλια. For Appian, however, *emphulios polemos* is usually presented as the terminal stage to which particularly violent and pernicious *staseis* ultimately progress. In Book One of the *Civil Wars*, for example, the use of *polemos* at a key moment denotes how the contention between Marius and Sulla represents an escalation from what has been described before: “Thus far the murders and *staseis* had still been *emphulioi* in a piecemeal fashion, κατὰ μέρη, but thereafter the faction leaders engaged each other with great armies, as if they were at war” (τάδε μὲν δὴ φόνοι καὶ στάσεις ἔτι ἦσαν ἐμφύλιοι κατὰ μέρη: μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο στρατοῖς μεγάλοις οἱ στασίαρχοι πολέμου νόμῳ συνεπλέκοντο ἀλλήλοις, App. *BC* 1.55.240).[52]

Herodian’s customary usage, by contrast with Appian’s, jumps straight to *emphulios polemos*, without any intermediary stage of *stasis*.[53] When Cleander sets the imperial cavalry upon the Roman people as they gather *en masse* to demand his death, the narrator’s comment after the ensuing massacre is that “no one else wanted to report to Commodus what was being done for fear of Cleander’s power, even though there was a civil war in progress (ὄντος δὲ πολέμου ἐμφυλίου)” (Hdn. 1.13.1). In similar vein, Herodian says of Gallicanus’ attempt to mobilize and arm the people of Rome against the soldiery that he “began to stir up civil war (ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον) and great destruction for the city” (Hdn. 7.11.6, and cf. the narrator’s closural comment at 7.12.9). The rumour that Maximinus is dead brings about wide-spread slaughter and the authorial comment that “Ostensibly in conditions of freedom and the security of peacetime, acts of civil war (ἔργα πολέμου ἐμφυλίου) took place” (Hdn. 7.7.3).[54]

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[50] Price (2015) 59–60.

[51] Kemezis (2014) 227–272.

[52] On Appian’s vision of a development from *stasis* to *polemos emphulios*, see Lange (2018) 167, who also has some remarks on the knotty issue of the difference (if any) between the two at 169–171.

[53] Herodian *does* use *apostasis* at various points (e.g., Hdn. 7.4.1, 7.12.9), but the sense of this, as in other Greek usage, is rather different from *stasis*.

Outside of inter-civic rivalry in the eastern provinces, Herodian’s main example of using *stasis*-vocabulary is one applied not to groups within a polity, but to two particular individuals. These are the warring emperors Geta and Caracalla.[55] Herodian describes the two brothers as “engaging in *stasis* (στασιάζοντας δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς) with regard to every single thing they did” (Hdn. 4.3.4). The growth of their enmity brings the authorial comment that “the hatred and the *stasis* grew” (τὸ δὲ μῖσος καὶ ἡ στάσις ηὔξετο, Hdn. 4.4.1). The terminology of *stasis*, in fact, haunts the relations of the brothers with each other, even before the demise of their father Septimius Severus (Hdn. 3.10.3, 3.13.5).

This deviation from Herodian’s more standard practice is striking. It is tempting to see this anomaly as part of the historian’s larger strategy of playing up how this one instance of ruinous kin-strife comes close to tearing the empire apart; familial division and larger division, whether of the influential men within the polity (Hdn 4.3.2) or of the royal palace itself (Hdn. 4.1.5), mirror each other. Familial *stasis* as a concomitant of civic *stasis*, after all, is a trope that goes back to Thucydides. One of the horrors of the *stasis* in Corcyra is that father killed son (Th. 3.81.5); Appian, too, gathers instances of how familial bonds are perverted under the *stasis* of the Triumviral proscriptions (App. *BC* 4.18.70–72).

The studied and anomalous case of Geta and Caracalla aside, the comparative dearth of *stasis* vocabulary in Herodian where one might perhaps expect it is accompanied, perhaps, by a more subtle quirk of his narrative strategy: a tendency to avoid or downplay at key points the more conventional tropes of *stasis* in places where one might have expected to see them.[56] Greek historiography (and Greco-Roman historical reality) had developed, by the time of Herodian, a repertoire of factors and strategies which tended to produce or strengthen instances of *stasis* within a polity. In Herodian, these classic factors do sometimes appear – but they have a tendency not subsequently to amount to much. For example, grain-hoarding (or the rumour of such hoarding) so as to gain an economic or political advantage when dearth ensues is an established feature in accounts of civil disruption from the Greco-Roman world. Dio Chrysostom, during a speech delivered in his native city of Prusa, has to defend himself against the charge that he has done so (D.Chr. 46.8 – 10). Cleander attempts such a strategy in the first book of Herodian (Hdn. 1.12.4). Its only result is that everyone except Commodus works out what he is doing (Hdn. 1.12.5).[57] There is a united front of disapprobation. Even Cleander's subsequent attempt to quell this censure by use of the imperial cavalry, to which we have already alluded, proves successful only in the short term. The cavalry swiftly realize the error of their ways, in the wake of Cleander's almost immediate bloody demise (Hdn. 1.13.5). In similar vein, a classic trope of disunity within a polity, from Thucydides downwards, is one faction within a city selling out to a besieging force at the expense of another; we have already seen how the unexpected absence of this usually tried and tested strategy catches Thucydides' Athenians on the hop (Th. 7.55.2, above). In Herodian, the possibility that such a selling-out might happen preys upon the mind of Crispinus at the siege of Aquileia; he fears that the populace might open the gates of the city to the investing troops of Maximinus (Hdn. 8.3.4). Even here, though, this possibility is figured in terms of a preference for peace on the part of the people, rather than of class-struggle against the local elite. In any event, the fears turn out to be groundless. Aquileia goes on presenting a united civic front.

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[54] For other instances of *polemos emphulios* in Herodian – some within the period of his narrative, some looking back at the struggles of the Republic – compare Hdn. 1.1.4, 1.13.3, 3.7.8 (“battles”, rather than wars), 3.9.1, 3.15.3.

[55] Chrysanthou (2022) 44–45, 98–99. Asirvatham (2020) 307 notes the tendency for *stasis* vocabulary in Herodian to cluster around Geta and Caracalla.

[56] There is an interesting comparison and contrast here with Cassius Dio, who seems to avoid some classic civil war tropes, but only in the particular context of 193–197 CE; see Kemezis (2020) especially 170–173.

On the other hand, it would be prudent not to push this observation about the comparative dearth of conventional *stasis* tropes in Herodian too far. Some classic manifestations of *stasis*, hallowed by Thucydidean usage, *do* appear in their wonted colours when the polity of Rome is undergoing upheaval. This happens even when Herodian is studiously analogizing the situation to *emphulios polemos* rather than calling it *stasis.* Chaotic times lead to the murder of creditors by their debtors, as much in Herodian's Rome as in Thucydides' Corcyra (Hdn. 7.7.3; cf. Th. 3.81.4). Setting light to the troubled polity in the midst of internal strife is likewise a feature that appears in both narratives (Th. 3.74.2, Hdn. 7.12.5).

In any event, it is interesting to speculate why the older concept of *intra*-civic *stasis*, below a state of what is asserted to be full-on *emphulios polemos*, sees so little explicit use in Herodian, when it is still clearly available to other imperial Greek historians, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian. Part of the answer to this question lies in the passage from which we started, where Herodian discourses upon the proneness to *stasis* (in the *inter*-civic sense) of the Greek cities. Herodian's disposition to figure *stasis* as a persistent *Greek* problem carries with it a clear, if unspoken corollary. *Stasis* has not continued to be an issue amongst the Romans.

The issue of temporality is key here. The historians whom we have noted to expatiate upon the topic of *stasis* at Rome, Appian and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, are both writers whose extant works on that subject are about the distant past. The *Roman Antiquities* of Dionysius, even when they were complete, did not extend beyond the outbreak of the First Punic War in the Third Century BCE (D.H. 1.8.1). With regard to Appian, we may note his insistence, at the end of Book Four of his *Civil Wars*, that the

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[57] Motta (2022) 176 – 177.

stasis between Octavian and Marcus Antonius was the *last* that ever afflicted Rome (App. *BC* 4.138.580). An accident of transmission conceals quite how provocative such a claim would have been, had Appian's entire text remained intact. The exact disposition of the lost books of the *Roman History* is hard to determine, but the work as a whole seems to have taken Roman history down to Trajan's Dacian campaigns and annexation of Arabia Petraea (Phot. *Bibl.* 57). How Appian would therefore have figured the two turbulent changes of imperial dynasty in the course of the First Century CE in a way that did not make them look like an instance of another *stasis* is an intriguing question. It may have helped that Book Twenty-Two, "the hundred years", ended, on the most likely showing, with the death of Nero, and that Appian may not have handled the Flavians substantially at all, although he does seem to have included a prophecy about the ascendancy of Vespasian (App. F. 17).

Herodian takes as his theme more contemporary history. He does not have to cope with the potential awkwardness that Appian's comprehensive chronological sweep and avowed preoccupation with *stasis* as a unifying theme creates for the earlier historian. Herodian is able to keep substantial *stasis* a problem of Rome's distant past. Where something that *looks* like *stasis* at Rome might be happening in his text, even to the extent of showing, as with the torching of the city or the murder of the creditors, some of its characteristic tropes, Herodian tends to reclassify it as *polemos emphulios* (*without* Appian's tendency to think of that as often a logical development of *stasis*) instead.

There is, however, more than verbal legerdemain at play in Herodian's avoidance of the category of intra-civic *stasis* within his work. Herodian's conceptualization of how power articulates itself in the Rome of his lifetime, and the historical reality behind that conceptualization, genuinely do not leave much space for some of the classic manifestations of intra-civic *stasis* that throng the pages of the earlier historians. In Thucydides' Corcyra, the main axis of confrontation to the emergent *stasis* is rivalry between the *dēmos* (or those purporting to represent it, like the unlucky Peithias) and the *oligoi* (Th. 3.82.1). In Dionysius on the early Roman republic, as we have seen, one possible such axis is between the plebeians and the patricians. Appian's *Civil Wars* embraces several (particularly in Book One), but begins its survey of *stasis* at Rome with contention between the people and the senate (in his terms, the *dēmos* and the *boulē*).

In Herodian's text, by contrast with the interrelations of social units within the Roman polity that we find mapped out in his predecessors, the dominant theme tends to be not discord, but unity. In Appian, the *dēmos* and *boulē* are initially presented as fractious towards each other. In Herodian, they more often than not agree – often in approbation or censure of someone else. Both senate and people are happy to see Commodus return to Rome (Hdn. 1.7.3)[58] and, likewise, Geta and Caracalla (Hdn. 4.1.3); senate and people alike approve of Severus Alexander's opening behaviour

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[58] Motta (2022) 175 notes the "backdrop of full political consensus" here.

(Hdn. 6.1.2). Examples of such concord may be multiplied.[59] Herodian, to be sure, does indulge in some traditional vilification of (elements within) the *dēmos*. The *dēmos* is supposedly fickle, and easily whipped up to destructiveness and irrationality (7.7.1); some amongst it envy the rich, and delight in their perdition (7.3.5).[60] Neither of these observations, however, leads to immediate contention with the senate; they just contribute to the unpopularity of Maximinus. It is only towards the end of Herodian's narrative, with the people's disapproval of Maximus and Balbinus, and espousal of the cause of Gordian, that tension between the people and the senate really becomes palpable and destructive (Hdn. 7.10.5 – 6, and cf. 8.8.7); we may perhaps see this as symptomatic of the gathering darkness at the close of the history, which Whittaker rightly reads as ending on a gloomy note,[61] with the succession of the boy emperor Gordian III.

The general accord between senate and people in Herodian often plays out in a combined hostility to a unit which (for obvious historical reasons) tends not to be presented as a discrete entity in much earlier historiography: the soldiery (as, for example, in Gallicanus' uprising, which we have discussed above).[62] For Herodian, the process which we can see taking place in the course of Appian's five books of *Civil Wars*, where the initial contention between senate and people is ultimately joined by a third term, the soldiers, whose power and interests at first countervail, and ultimately usually overcome,[63] the others, has now been completed. As with the autonomous Greek city-state of Thucydides, one traditional figuring of intra-civic *stasis* in historiography, that between the *dēmos* and the *boulē*, has had its day by the time of Herodian's writing. We may recall that Tacitus, listing all the exciting themes from the history of the Republic which are no longer available to one who writes imperial history, notes "plebis et optimatium certamina" amongst them (Tac. *Ann.* 4.32.2).

For Herodian, then, the shift in the balance of power between different constituencies under the Empire, as opposed to the state that obtained under the Republic, means that the classic polarities of intra-civic *stasis* at Rome which we see in Dionysius of Halicarnassus – above all, the epic and enduring struggles between *boulē* and *dēmos* – rarely, if ever, have much force. It is tempting to hypothesize that a similar perception may have underlain Appian's reluctance to identify civic turbulence under the Empire as *stasis*, so enabling Appian to claim, as we have seen, that the contention between Marcus Antonius and Augustus was the last instance of *stasis* that afflicted Rome. The disappearance of Appian's later books, especially "The Hundred Years", means that this must remain a conjecture. On the other hand, it is perhaps pertinent that Cassius Dio, who talks a great deal about *stasis* at Rome in his books about the history of the Republic,[64] seems to fight shy of characterizing the chaos after the fall of the Julio-Claudians as such in his (admittedly very fragmentary) books on that period as an example of it. Dio's narrator appears to call the state of affairs after the death of Nero a *tarakhē* (D.C. 63[63].29.4; cf. also 63[64].15.1a),[65] a word for unrest which Herodian, too, deploys;[66] both Dio's Otho and the narrator speak of *polemos emphulios* (D.C. 63[64].13.1, 64[65].10.4).[67] *Stasis*, however, seems to be avoided in Dio's account of this period. It may be, then (though the evidence is scanty), that Herodian's apparent reluctance – except in the memorably bizarre case of the warring brothers Geta and Caracalla – to characterize civic disturbance at Rome under the Empire as *stasis* is not just a strategy for polishing an alleged contrast with the behaviour of contemporary Greeks, but also symptomatic of a more general such tendency amongst the Greek historians of the High Empire.

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[59] E. g., Hdn. 2.6.1 – 2 (the reception of Pertinax's murder), 2.14.1 and 3.8.3 (celebration, but trepidation, at the arrival of Septimius Severus), 5.5.2 (gloom at the death of Macrinus), 7.10.1 (reception of the death of Gordian I), and 7.12.1 (joint anger against the soldiers).

[60] Motta (2022) 190 – 192; Buongiorno (2022) 214. Elsewhere, the *dēmos* shows lack of restraint at Hdn. 2.2.9, and is criticized for flightiness by Maximinus (who is, however, hardly a reliable witness) at Hdn. 7.8.6.

[61] Whittaker (1970) 310 – 311 n. 1.

[62] Motta (2022) 181: "the contrast between civilians and soldiers, a contrast which appears throughout Herodian's entire body of work".

[63] On the comparative power of senate, people, and soldiery in the period covered by Herodian, see Sidebottom (2022) 159 – 164.

5 Conclusion

Our study of *stasis* in Herodian has been illuminating, not just for the passage in Book Three where he openly discusses his conception of it, but also for other areas of his history. We have seen that Thucydides' examination of *stasis* in Corcyra may, indeed, have nudged Herodian in the direction of fashioning his own generalizing account of *stasis.* However, as in Herodian's other cases of programmatic Thucydidean intertextuality, what we find is more complex than simple and unthinking emulation. Herodian redeploys Thucydidean vocabulary, and not just from the Corcyra passage (note the possible glance at Thucydides' own opening in the use of *akmazein*), to develop a vision of *stasis*, inter- rather than intra-civic, which is at some distance from Thucydides, even as it proclaims a kinship to that earlier work.

Herodian's *stasis* has turned out to be in line with some expansions in the sense of that term which we find in other historiographical and para-historiographical texts of the Roman Empire – prompted, at least in part, by historical contingency, which has left the days of autonomous political power for the individual Greek city-state behind.[68] We have also seen, however, that Herodian's usage reflects the particular interests and interpretations that inform his unique work, as well as the terminology he has inherited from other imperial authors. By shying away from Thucydides' earlier sense of *stasis*, in a way imperial Greek authors such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian do not when talking about the Roman Republic, Herodian cements his own vision of how power works in the Rome of his lifetime. Contention between senate and people, or the other axes available to older treatments of intra-civic discord, are not altogether impossible in Herodian; we can see tension building in the history's grim closing stretch.[69] But the settled power of the Emperor and the armies makes such contention a lot less relevant than it was. The world has changed since the early Republic, and Thucydides' Corcyra.

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[64] Lange (2018).

[65] Itself a word used by Polybius to characterize the Mercenary War and its attendant problems at Carthage (e.g., Plb. 3.9.9), which Polybius also sees as an instance of *stasis* (Plb. 1.66.10). See also Lange (2018) 171.

[66] Hdn. 1.12.6, 2.6.1, 2.12.2, 4.4.4. In Herodian, *tarakhē* is almost always used to describe disturbance of the *dēmos* alone; it is perhaps symptomatic of the darkness towards the end of the narrative that its last appearance, at 7.10.1, sees it spreading to the Senate, as well.

[67] On *polemos emphulios* in Dio, see also Lange and Scott (2020) 5 and Asirvatham (2020) 302–303, with n. 54.

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[68] For another way of refiguring Thucydidean *stasis* in Greek under the Empire, rather different from those explored above, compare the polemical use of the term in Josephus (Davies [2017] 187).

[69] Davenport and Mallan (2020) especially 437– 438, is insightful on the difficulty imperial claimants have in juggling various political constituencies in Herodian, and on the particular challenges they face in the last two books.

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