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VII

ADAM M. KEMEZIS

LIVING RULERS AND THE END DATES OF ROMAN IMPERIAL HISTORIANS

ABSTRACT

Historians in the Roman imperial period who narrated events of their own lifetimes encountered a quandary regarding the emperor or dynasty on the throne at the time their histories came out. Authors often claim that it is necessary to end before the current reign, or in some way rationalize their continuing into it. This article examines how authors discuss their own choices of end point, and in particular the political implications of describing or avoiding the current reign. After a brief survey of common practices and tropes from the 1st to 4th centuries CE, I consider three particularly notable examples: Tacitus, Velleius and Cassius Dio. Tacitus in the preface to the *Histories* defers writing about the current dynasty in a way that, while expressing support for Trajan, still rejects his claim to have created open political discourse. Velleius, in devoting considerable space and adulation to Tiberius, appears to be doing the opposite of Tacitus. However, he remains reluctant to give a full narrative of Tiberius' actual reign, preferring to stress his role as heir apparent, and thus by implication the absence of such a figure at the time of writing. Dio's massive work, on the other hand, includes several statements about its ever-changing end point, which can be read as a narrative of the historian's response to the disintegration of the political culture within which he originally conceived his project.

An anecdote is told of how the Marquis de Bièvre, a noted eighteenth-century practicioner and theorist of the pun, was once put on the spot by Louis XV, who called on the courtier to make a spontaneous *calembour* about him. Bièvre supposedly

responded in protest "Sire, vous n'êtes pas un sujet !"[1] The line, which was adapted in the 1996 film *Ridicule,* is apocryphal and perhaps not even a pun, but it does seem to express the situation of Roman historical authors when it came to writing about the current emperor. As T.D. Barnes has put it apropos of Cassius Dio, "history was written about dead emperors: the living deserved panegyric".[2] Barnes' dictum is not meant as an absolute rule, and one can immediately think of historians who do in some way deal with living emperors, but it still expresses an important truth. Historians in Antiquity do often claim or imply that history, at least what they consider "proper history", cannot take as its subject the emperor who is ruling when the work goes into circulation.[3] Authors often bring this up in discussions of the end points of their histories, because they are breaking off at a point just before the current reign begins. For modern scholars, this often serves as an informal principle in estimating the end dates of incomplete historical works or the publication dates of complete ones.

In this piece, however, I want to look less at the practices authors refer to in their statements than at the statements themselves, and in particular at what one could say by explicitly declining to write about the current emperor, or writing about him differently. My thesis, briefly, is that the various ways in which historians approach this question are in themselves forms of political commentary, just as the Bièvre anecdote demonstrates

[1] The anecdote is recounted in the edition of Bièvre-related material by BAECQUE (2000) 7-8, 139.

[2] BARNES (1984) 252. For a full and recent consideration of the issue, see KALDELLIS (2017), who supplies important qualifications to the idea that the current emperor was off-limits.

[3] I have not been able in this essay to properly take into account the complexities of 'publishing' in the Roman world and above all the question of partial dissemination through readings, draft-sharing and so on. For a provocative overview of these issues as they apply to Roman historiography, see MASON (2005). My concern here is mainly with authors' rhetorical self-presentation, and most (though not all) of the relevant authors take a quasi-Thucydidean stance that privileges anonymous readers encountering a fixed text, possibly in remote posterity, over an immediate audience dealing with a dynamic text.

how a *recusatio* can be a way of performing the speech-act one affects to decline. Thus, I will begin with a brief and un-systematic survey of our evidence for writing about living emperors from the 1st to 4th centuries CE, but mainly I will be looking at three key examples of how the "living emperor" question is handled, specifically (in order): Tacitus, Velleius Paterculus and Cassius Dio. Each of these authors turns the literary question of how to write or not write about a living emperor into a comment on current political events.

1. Overview

The "living emperor" question is in part only a special case of an issue common to the reportage of contemporary political events in Antiquity. Writing about the contemporary scene gives one the opportunity to please or offend powerful people. This in turn falls under the issues of impartiality and bias that go back through all of ancient historiography to Herodotus and Thucydides.[4] Roman imperial authors often speak of histories as causing inconvenient offense to figures portrayed (or not portrayed) therein, and they speak of other authors inappropriately seeking to flatter and please.[5] Such passages may be read as applying in part to the emperor, even if he is not named or implicitly singled out.

There are aspects of Roman political culture that make emperors unique as subjects for historical narrative. One is the central place that expressions of consensus played in Roman monarchical ideology.[6] A Roman emperor, more than most monarchs, needed all his subjects to affirm, actively and constantly, that

[4] For overviews taking in both Greek and Roman discourses of historiographical bias, see LUCE (1989) and MARINCOLA (1997) 158-174.

[5] E.g., HOR. *Carm.* 2, 1; PLIN. *Ep.* 5, 8, 12; AMM. MARC. 26, 1.

[6] Important explorations of the role of consensus in the Roman monarchy include ANDO (2000) and (with reference to historiography particularly) LOBUR (2008).

he was their desired ruler. This required universal acceptance of the emperor's chosen narrative of himself and made it difficult for a regime to tolerate alternative versions of the recent past, including the current emperor but also dynastic predecessors if he was using them as a major ideological prop. Thus, a tension emerges in literary and political culture: high-status literature was an important resource for emperors to disseminate their preferred narrative, but for many genres, including historiography, the rhetorical authority that made them valuable to those in power came precisely from an author's claim to have access to a truth independent of power.

This is a circle that many authors did not try to square, and thus there is a common pattern in which historical works stop at a point within living memory but before the current reign or dynasty. The paradigmatic cases here are Tacitus and Suetonius, who write under Trajan and Hadrian but end their historical coverage with Domitian's death and seemingly minimal references to the new dynasty.[7] The same pattern is harder to discern in Severan or Constantinian contemporary history, though it perhaps applies to Marius Maximus.[8] The Eusebian *Life of Constantine*, written immediately after that ruler's death, is a very different case given its affinities with encomium. The most explicit examples, however, are found in the late fourth century. The short-form histories of Eutropius and Festus and the preface to Jerome's *Chronici canones* all end with brief notes that the author will not continue into the reign of the current emperor, at any rate in this work.[9] They all indicate, with similar

[7] See SUET. *Dom.* 23, 2.

[8] Maximus ended his emperor-biographies likely with Elagabalus, for which see BIRLEY (1997), though Levick and Cornell (*FRHist* 101) raise the possibility of Caracalla. While we have no solid information for when they were first circulated, the reign of Alexander seems intuitively probable. Herodian, who ends with Gordian III's accession in 238, is more of an open case, and I must accept the arguments of KALDELLIS (2017) 51-52, with n. that I and other scholars have not made an adequate case for excluding circulation during Gordian's reign. See KEMEZIS (2014) 302-304, with further refs.

[9] EUTR. 10, 18, 3; FESTUS *Brev.* 30; HIERONYM. *Chron. can.*, *Praef.* p. 7, 3-9 HELM.

vocabulary, that the current emperor's deeds require a grander style, which is usually taken to mean panegyric. This self-conscious *topos* then finds its way into both Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta*.[10] What is interesting about the latter two authors, however, is that they both use markedly Tacitean language in framing a *recusatio* about a current emperor.[11] Since Ammianus and the *HA* both likely position themselves as continuing from where Tacitus and Suetonius left off, it seems as if the Domitian-Nerva break has become a key *locus* for considering this problem.

Tacitus and Suetonius, however, were continuing a discourse that had gone on in Latin historiography since Augustus' time. This much is clear from Tacitus' own writings, in particular the prefaces to the *Histories* and *Annals*. The former of these will be examined in detail below, but the latter has often been the starting point for discussions of Julio-Claudian historiography (*Ann.* 1, 1, 2). Tacitus posits a pattern of mendacity (*res falsae … compositae sunt*) in which reigns of living emperors are recounted out of fear (i.e., one assumes, in positive terms, though adulation is only mentioned in a slightly different context), whereas then after their death one gets negative accounts by people who have stored-up grievances (*recentibus odiis*). All contemporary history under emperors has a built-in credibility deficit, because both positive and negative statements about rulers are open to charges of bias.

Naturally, Tacitus makes it sound as if this is a problem his predecessors had failed to solve or even really recognize. However,

[10] In Ammianus' case, as the last words of the *Res gestae* (31, 16, 9), and in the *HA* at *Quadr.* 15, 10, referring to Diocletian and his successors. On these passages, see PASCHOUD (2005) and KELLY (2007).

[11] For Ammianus, see the same passage cited above (31, 16, 9) with KELLY (2007) 223. In the *HA*, the key Tacitean reference is to the phrase *si uita suppeditet* (TAC. *Hist.* 1, 1, 4), which is repeated in different forms four times in the *HA* (*Alex.* 64, 2, *Arln.* 24, 9 and *Prob.* 1, 5 and 24, 8). All the instances refer to projected literary work and two (*Alex.* 64, 2 and *Prob.* 1, 5) describe works that, depending on ambiguous wording, might include emperors who are current as of the *HA*'s fictive composition period and whom the *HA* does not in fact cover.

we have enough evidence for Julio-Claudian and Flavian historiography to see that earlier authors were conscious of the pattern Tacitus identifies, and in some instances tried to position themselves as exceptions to it. We are somewhat handicapped in this by a lack of data about end points or composition dates for the authors in question, but we can see several lost authors who probably fall into the pattern of publishing after an emperor's death. In the Tiberian era, this applies probably to Aufidius Bassus and Servilius Nonianus, and almost certainly to Seneca the Elder.[12] It seems likely that a similar pattern and similar complications affected the Neronian-to-Flavian-era historians Cluvius Rufus and Fabius Rusticus, who recounted Nero's reign and likely ended their narratives at some point during the subsequent civil wars without covering Vespasian or Titus in any detail.[13] Their coeval Pliny the Elder, by contrast, wrote a history going from Nero (if not earlier) down to some point after the Flavian victory in the civil wars. It was presumably favorable to the new dynasty, but (as he tells Titus and the readers of the *Natural History*) he withheld it from circulation until after his own death "lest it be supposed that in life I made any concession to the desire to ingratiate myself" (*NH praef.* 20 = *FRHist* 80 T5 *ne quid ambitioni dedisse uita iudicaretur*).[14] Pliny is certainly aware of the credibility problems referred to by Tacitus, and we can assume the same was true for the other Julio-Claudian and Flavian authors

[12] For a survey of non-Velleian historiography under Tiberius, see now CORNELL (2020) and other essays in the same volume for Seneca. For specifics on the other two authors, see introductions in *FRHist* (78 and 79, both by Levick), with references, as well as NOÈ (1984) 78-93 and DEVILLERS (2003) 10-34. The case is weakest for Bassus, who is sometimes seen as finishing with Sejanus's death in 31 and circulating his work not long after (see Levick in *FRHist*, p. 1, 520).

[13] MURISON (1999) 12-20 is a convenient and well-informed survey of bibliography on these authors with some speculation regarding the later Flavian period. See also relevant sections of NOÈ (1984), Levick's various introductions in *FRHist* and TOWNEND (1964).

[14] For the end date, see Levick's *FRHist* introduction. The *NH* preface, which dates itself to 77 or 78 (*praef.* 3), refers to the history as *iam pridem peracta.*

just cited.[15] The writing and circulation of many historical works would have involved sometimes complicated calculations about the respective ages of the author and the ruler, as well as prospects for the succession.

Having established that Tacitus is part of a larger discourse, however, we also need to define the limits of that discourse, which turn out to be substantial. All of the authors mentioned above write in Latin. All of them write either lives of emperors or political history that covers internal as well as external events in a continuous narrative. Many of them are senators, and even figures like Livy and Seneca identify as full members of a self-consciously "Roman" political community. This combination of factors heavily determines how they approach the "living emperor" question, i.e., how they can maintain their authority as truth-tellers and their role as members of the political community in the face of a massive power imbalance relative to the subject of their narrative. These factors are going to work differently for those less fully implicated in the political community, such as Nicolaus writing about Augustus or Josephus writing about Titus.[16] They will work differently for authors writing more limited monographs about external wars, such as the historians of the 160s that Lucian envisions in the *How to Write History*, or even Pliny the Elder in his *Bella Germaniae* as opposed to the full-scale history. Perhaps the strangest case is that of Aurelius Victor, who, unlike fellow breviarists Eutropius and Festus, ended his work with praise for a living emperor, Constantius II (*Caes.* 42), just as he found himself suddenly having to pay court to Constantius' rival Julian.[17]

[15] This may well include Livy, if we take as accurate the note on *Per.* 121 that that (and subsequent?) books *editus post excessum Augusti dicitur*. It is also possible, however, that the note represents the inference of later readers.

[16] Josephus, in fact, makes a virtue of having sent drafts of his *Judaean War* to Titus and to King Agrippa II, and criticizes a rival for only circulating his history after both those men were dead. See *Vit.* 361-366, cf. *CAp.* 1, 50-52.

[17] On the situation of composition, see now ANTIQUEIRA (2021), who questions the extent of Victor's praise for Constantius.

As this example illustrates, the entire viability of contemporary history not including the reigning emperor depends on the contingencies of succession. Julio-Claudian historians could write as they did because each emperor after Augustus had his memory either repudiated or neglected by his successor. Civil wars, including those of 69, broke dynastic continuity and generated their own kinds of historiography, either propagandistic, as with Aelius Antipater's work on Severus, or dissenting and even dangerous, as with the works of Labienus and Cremutius Cordus in the late Augustan period. Long stretches of dynastic continuity, above all under the Antonines, give no scope for such a model, or indeed seemingly any other. The three studies that will make up the rest of the article were chosen as the most extensive examples in surviving imperial historiography, down to the Severans at least, of someone trying to write about a living emperor from within the Roman political community. All three authors are senators, all three write at least to some degree about internal political events. Dio does write in Greek, but has unusually strong affinities with the Latin historiographical tradition. By the arguments given above, they ought to find it difficult to write about a living emperor, and indeed, as we will see, none of them really succeeds. Their reasons, however, turn out to be interestingly different, as do the statements that their failures succeed in making.

2. Tacitus and the Post-Flavian moment

Tacitus is, as noted, the paradigmatic case for not writing about a living emperor, and the previous section has considered in particular the *Annals* preface. In this section I will be looking in detail at the opening to the *Histories*. This preface is critical for the overall picture it presents of emperors and historians, but especially for Tacitus' reference to a future account of the reigns of Nerva and Trajan. The *Histories* preface begins, after its consular date, with a summary history of Roman

historiography.[18] Those who wrote the history of the *populus Romanus* did so "with eloquence and freedom in the same measure" (*pari eloquentia ac libertate*) until Actium. After that, truth (*ueritas*) was weakened principally by "indulgence in flattery, or conversely by hatred of those in power" (*libidine assentandi aut rursus odio aduersus dominantes*). Tacitus explains that both these constitute neglect of future generations (*neutris cura posteritatis*), but that while readers intuitively detect and reject an ingratiating author (*ambitionem scriptoris*), spleen can be mistaken for courageous free speech (*malignitati falsa species libertatis inest*). Unlike in the *Annals*, Tacitus does not explicitly say the flattery will be directed at living emperors or dynasties, and the abuse at recently dead or defunct ones, but the logic does still seem to correspond to the moves we have seen from Pliny, Seneca and others.

As Tacitus then turns to his own work, readers naturally ask how he will position himself as an exception. He first acknowledges (*non abnuerim*) that his career was neither helped nor harmed by Galba, Otho or Vitellius, and advanced by all three Flavians (1, 1, 3). Still, he adds, "one who is committed to unswerving honesty must not speak of anyone with love or from hatred" (*sed incorruptam fidem professis neque amore quisquam et sine odio dicendus est*). If one maps this sequence of thought back on to Tacitus' earlier logic, the implication is that he is concerned, based on the content of his work, that readers will suspect he is writing from *amor* towards the Flavians especially, and he wants to make clear there are no grounds for such suspicion. Readers who are aware of the situation under Trajan, or of Tacitus' earlier writings, can guess why *odium* might be expected as well. It is now, however, that Tacitus makes the statement we are most concerned with:

> *quod si uita suppeditet, principatum diui Neruae et imperium Traiani, uberiorem securioremque materiam, senectuti seposui, rara*

[18] Bibliography on this preface is extensive, see LEEMAN (1973); CHRISTES (1995); MARINCOLA (1999); SAILOR (2008) 119-163.

> *temporum felicitate ubi sentire quae uelis et quae sentias dicere licet.*
>
> "And then, if life enough be left me, I have laid aside for my old age the reign of the deified Nerva and the rule of Trajan, ampler and safer material, it being a rare blessing of such times that one may hold the views one wishes and express the views one holds."

Not unnaturally, the major question about this passage has always been "does Tacitus mean what he says?" either about the history or the Trajanic regime in general. The answer has most often been "yes", that Tacitus sees, or claims to see, the era of Nerva and Trajan as an exception to the logic of monarchical historiography as he has just laid it down.[19] I want to read the passage more ambiguously, as Tacitus introducing the ideology of the new regime only to re-emphasize realities persisting from before.

The first thing to consider about the passage is its immediate function in the *Histories* preface. The first words of the *Histories* declare the work's starting date, but its end point is not mentioned until the passage just quoted. Immediately before the quote, Tacitus has named all the emperors he will cover, from Galba to Domitian, which leads readers to ask "what about Nerva and Trajan"?[20] Tacitus' here saying "I will write about them later" is his indirect way of saying "I am not going to write about them now", and the reasons he gives for writing later also serve as reasons he is not writing now. The reasons he gives in fact raise more questions than they answer. What makes the reigns of Nerva and Trajan *uberior* and *securior* as historical material, and why is that a reason to defer writing about them until one's

[19] Most recently O'GORMAN (2020) 12-13 sees this passage as announcing a new "truth regime" under Trajan, in which previously impossible forms of political speech will be valid.

[20] Readers will be more inclined to ask this if they remember Tacitus' own words from the *Agricola*, where he promised to compose "a memorial to our former servitude and a witness of our present happiness" (3, 3 *memoriam prioris seruitutis ac testimonium praesentium bonorum*). SAILOR (2008) 153-160 gives an important reading of the future promise in the *Histories* as a *recusatio* relative to the present.

old age? We have plenty of examples, starting with Seneca and Livy and going back through Polybius, of historians who wrote of recent and controversial events in their old age, when one might suppose they had less to gain or to lose. Furthermore, the introduction of *senectus* and Tacitus' earlier qualification *si uita suppeditet* raise the question of longevity, and not just the speaker's. Tacitus' words imply that as of the dramatic date of the preface, *senectus* is not yet upon him, and that he does not mean to begin work on the Nerva-Trajan work immediately. If the prologue is read as being uttered at the time of the *Histories*' completion around 108-109, then readers may ask "what is Tacitus waiting for", and one possible answer is "Trajan's death". Tacitus is only a few years younger than Trajan, but if he does enjoy an old age after the latter's death, that might then be the time when one "may hold the views one wishes and express the views one holds".[21]

I am not proposing this reading of the passage as the obvious or only possible one. On the contrary: the meanings that O'Gorman and others have seen are certainly there. *Felicitas temporum* is a catch-phrase of the Nerva-to-early-Trajan regime, and we are meant to read it as such.[22] Earlier in the preface, Tacitus has explained why historians typically fail to write truthfully about a living emperor or a recently dead one. He has explained how he can do so about the Flavians, and he is now suggesting that in the new times under Trajan, one can write history about a living ruler because the old restraints on free speech no longer apply. But he's also undercutting that suggestion, in the first instance simply by not including Nerva and Trajan in the current work. At a minimum, Tacitus' logic implies that one cannot write the same sort of history about living emperors that

[21] Assuming a birth date of 53 for Trajan and 56-58 for Tacitus. The idea that Tacitus' statements here about free speech refer to age is broached by PELLING (2009) 150, while SAILOR (2008) 174-176 suggests Tacitus is hinting at publication after his own death.

[22] PENWILL (2015) makes important observations on several authors' changing responses to Nerva and Trajan's declarations of free speech and *felicitas temporum.*

one writes about dead ones. The further inference, picking up on the earlier distinction between *amor* and *odium*, is that the reasons that previously made truthful historiography of living rulers impossible are still there.

It is notable that in explaining untrustworthy positive histories earlier in the preface, Tacitus consistently avoided mentioning fear or compulsion as motives: rather he listed voluntary factors based on self-interest: *libidine assentandi … obnoxios … ambitio … adulatio … amore*.[23] Here is where the evocation of Trajanic slogans about *felicitas* and freedom of speech comes into question. The rhetoric of this passage takes it for granted that Trajan is a benevolent and beloved ruler. Such a ruler can remove the compulsions to praise that existed under Domitian, but he cannot prevent people from wanting to say good things out of gratitude or other benignly self-interested motives, nor can he prevent readers from inferring those motives when they read those good things.[24] This is basically the problem the Elder Pliny faced relative to Titus. In the current circumstances, with both Tacitus and Trajan alive, the *sentire quae uelis et quae sentias dicere licet* does not properly apply because Tacitus' views (*sentire*) will always be affected by *amor*, and his words (*dicere*) will be interpreted by others through that lens.

Thus, we are seeing here a *recusatio*, but with a political edge. Tacitus has markedly evoked claims the Nerva-Trajan regime had made about how public speech was now going to work differently than it had under the Flavians, and he is then implicitly gainsaying those claims. This is not exactly the model of "figured speech" proposed by Ahl, or the "doublespeak" seen by Bartsch, because it's not about hiding meanings or making them uncertain through ambiguity: the meanings I have suggested are all open to be generated by readers including Trajan himself.[25] This is after all not a critique of the regime: Tacitus

[23] In the *Annals* preface, Tacitus will speak more straightforwardly of accounts *ob metum falsae* (1, 1, 2).

[24] See the analysis of SAILOR (2008) 156-158.

[25] Most influentially in AHL (1984) and BARTSCH (1994).

is not saying "there are bad things about you I can only say after you're dead". Rather he is denying that even a good emperor can unilaterally change the realities of power and their effect on political speech. In doing so, he is paradoxically vindicating the autonomy of historiography as written by the status elite against Trajan's attempt to co-opt key discursive space. Tacitus claims that in the *Histories* he has solved the problem of writing truthfully about recently dead emperors. He has done this through his own devotion to truth (*incorruptam fidem professis*), not because an emperor permitted it.[26] If his integrity as a historian requires him to refrain from writing about Trajan during his lifetime, it is not for the emperor to overrule him. The king cannot declare himself a subject.

3. Velleius on the reign of Tiberius

Tacitus was dealt with first as the "classic case" that establishes a quasi-rule about not writing on a living emperor. In a sense, the exception that proves that rule is an earlier author, Velleius Paterculus, author of a mostly extant two-book work that begins as a compendium of universal history and ends as a political-military narrative of the Augustan and Tiberian era down to 30 CE, two-thirds of the way through Tiberius' reign, which is also its approximate date of publication. From the point where Tiberius enters the narrative in 23 BCE (Vell. 2, 94), he is its principal focus, and he consistently receives a level of praise that is at odds with the rest of the tradition on Tiberius and unusual for historiography in general.[27] Standard historiographical tropes about impartiality and bias are notably absent.

[26] Thus, the *Histories* preface evokes the changed conditions under the new regime in the context of the future work on Nerva and Trajan, but not of the *Histories* itself.

[27] Important studies of Velleius' Tiberius include WOODMAN (1977) esp. 46-53; KUNTZE (1985); SCHMITZER (2000) 287-306; LOBUR (2008) 99-111; BALMACEDA (2014); GALIMBERTI (2015).

Scholars have traditionally characterized this as a genre deviation into overt panegyric that compromises the author's credibility in precisely the way Pliny or Tacitus were trying to avoid.[28] This is often associated with Velleius' condensed work being outside the grand tradition of full-scale historiography as represented especially by Tacitus' parallel narrative. I want to suggest, however, that Velleius' account of Tiberius, and in particular its last phase after the emperor's actual accession in 14 CE, is not as alien to Tacitus' discourse as the characterization of it as "a panegyric" might suggest.

The first crucial aspect of Velleius' post-14 CE narrative is simply how short it is, relatively speaking. Only about 20 percent of what Woodman refers to as the "Tiberian narrative" is concerned with Tiberius' actual reign.[29] The rest is a selective but often detailed narrative of events from 12 BCE to 14 CE, with generous attention to the northern campaigns of Tiberius. It is a story of military triumphs, but also of crises from which Tiberius and others rescue the *res publica*. The last of these crises is the death of Augustus himself, which removes the focal point for *consensus* that has assured Roman *concordia* since the end of the Civil Wars.[30] Tiberius solves the problem by taking on Augustus' role as *princeps*, but in doing so he ends the detailed narrative of his own actions. The remaining few pages consist of: brief description of the army mutinies of 14 (2, 125); a burst of encomiastic rhetoric on the restoration of order and prosperity after Tiberius' accession (§126); a digression on the virtues of Sejanus (§127-128); a one-page summary of highlights from Tiberius' reign, mostly external (§129-130, 2) and finally a complaint to the gods regarding the conspiracies and family

[28] The most detailed reading of VELL. 2, 126 in terms of panegyric is WOODMAN (1975) 290-296, though he characterizes it as a legitimate literary choice rather than an act of political sycophancy.

[29] In WOODMAN (1977), sections 124-131 take up 6 of a total 30 pages of text.

[30] For general fear at Augustus' death and relief at Tiberius' emergence, see VELL. 2, 124, 1. LOBUR (2008) 107-111 notes the stress Velleius lays on the preservation of *concordia* through Tiberius' succession.

woes Tiberius has endured in the years immediately up to 30, followed by a prayer that they guard the *status,* the *pax* and the *princeps*, and give Tiberius worthy successors at a distant future time (§130, 3-131).

This clearly represents a reduction of scale and narrative coherence even relative to Velleius' previous account. Velleius cannot describe the current emperor's reign in the same way he did the previous reign, even though the current emperor was in fact the main character of that earlier narrative. Given Velleius' obvious willingness to write a pro-Tiberian account and his seeming indifference to questions of bias towards that emperor, this cannot be the same sort of move we have seen from Tacitus or Pliny. Velleius does at one point ask "who would tell one by one the events of the last sixteen years, when all together they linger on the eyes and in the minds of all" (2, 126, 1 *horum XVI annorum opera quis, cum uniuersa inhaereant oculis animisque omnium, partibus eloquatur*?). This, however, reads more as a conventional expression of praise for the *opera* in question than a methodological rationale.[31] Two pages later, Velleius will in fact announce his intention to "go through the individual events" (2, 129, 1 *singula recenseamus*) of Tiberius' reign, albeit all this entails is the one-page summary mentioned above.

The obvious change of scale receives no overt explanation. The previous shape of Velleius' history does, however, point us to an understanding of the "Tiberian non-narrative". Tiberius' very prominence in the account of the previous quarter-century had left Augustus somewhat obscured.[32] In Velleius' version of imperial history, there seems to be little for an emperor to do beyond to be the guarantor of internal peace through his universally recognized virtues, to be the target of threats to that peace

[31] See on this point WOODMAN (1977) *ad loc*. Velleius has already made a similar claim at the start of his much fuller narrative of Augustus' reign (2, 89, 6).

[32] The narrative from 2, 94 to 2, 124 is dominated by military campaigns, mostly by Tiberius. Exceptions include 2, 100, 2-5; 2, 103-104, 2; 2, 111, 1-2; 2, 112, 7; and 2, 123. In only the last of these (his own death scene) can Augustus be said to take a leading role.

and to hand active external duties over to a favored subordinate and presumed successor. Tiberius' stepping into Augustus' role after 14 CE thus actually makes him a very different character.[33] The transition is emphasized by the encomiastic description of restored universal felicity that comes at Tiberius' accession (2, 126), which is meant to recall a similar flourish after Octavian's return from Actium (2, 89). Velleius has earlier anticipated the shift in roles when, in describing Tiberius' campaigns, he calls on his younger dedicatee Vinicius to "behold a general equal in war to the *princeps* that you now see in peace".[34] The virtues he refers to are not only complementary but sequential.[35]

Evidently Velleius' narrative here reflects historical facts: Tiberius never campaigned in person after triumphing in 12 CE, when Vinicius was an adolescent. Still, Velleius' description of Augustus' reign and Tiberius' succession leads us to normalize the pattern of an emperor in a supervisory role, less visible than his subordinates. Tiberius does not, however, retreat as far into the background as Augustus did: a curious pattern emerges in the post-14 CE narrative, whereby Tiberius is the ostensible object of praise, and often the grammatical subject of sentences, but the actions described are mostly someone else's.[36] There is, however, no individual who can replicate the role Tiberius had under Augustus, and thus become the new center of the narrative.

[33] This is not to say, however, that Tiberius simply continues or replicates the Augustan era without distinctive virtues of his own, for which see RAMAGE (1982) and COWAN (2009) 477-479.

[34] VELL. 2, 113, 1 (*Accipe nunc, M. Vinici, tantum in bello ducem quantum in pace uides principem*), cf. 2, 124, 4.

[35] WOODMAN (1977) *ad loc.* notes the panegyrical conventions in play, and the way the "military" narrative still anticipates Tiberius' "civil" virtues.

[36] Thus, the Sejanus section (2, 127-128) includes a monstrous sentence (2, 127, 3-4) that begins with Tiberius as subject (of verbs that come several lines later) but consists almost wholly of accusatives agreeing with Sejanus, and the pattern is repeated in several sentences of 2,129. Things Tiberius actually does himself include *congiaria* and subsidies to senators (2, 129, 3), building works in Rome (2, 130, 1) and the trial of Drusus Libo (2, 129, 2), which last is specifically said to be *ut senator et iudex, non ut princeps.*

This is a function of familial and succession politics: by 30, both Drusus and Germanicus are dead, and their sons are either in disgrace or too young for the role.[37] Velleius gives the impression that if he were writing ten years earlier, he could have filled more pages by putting Drusus into his father's former role. As it stands, Velleius' work ends on a very pessimistic note, with a septuagenarian emperor watching his family disintegrate.[38] We are reminded of how Velleius began his narrative of Augustus' death by emphasizing the general apprehension at the time (2, 123, 1 *uenitur ad tempus in quo fuit plurimum metus*). At that time there had been an obvious successor, and the only question was whether he would be willing to take up the burden. Sixteen years later, Velleius can only pray that the gods grant Tiberius *successores quam serissimos*. The vague plural and the wish for delay are demanded by panegyrical convention, but readers will recognize the circumstances that give rise to that rhetorical necessity.[39] Velleius cannot explicitly decry the lack of a successor, but he could scarcely do more to draw attention to it.

Velleius is unable to write a full (even by his standards) historical narrative of Tiberius' reign during Tiberius' lifetime, but his reasons appear very different from Tacitus'.[40] In Velleius'

[37] Velleius mentions only Nero, the elder son of Germanicus, who was imprisoned in 29 at the same time as his mother (2, 130, 4). Nothing is said of his soon-to-be disgraced brother Drusus, the future emperor Caligula or the eleven-year-old Tiberius Gemellus. For a reading of the Tiberian narrative in terms of succession politics, see SUMNER (1970) 288-297, who sees Velleius as promoting Vinicius' eventual claims, and PISTELLATO (2013), who tentatively revives the idea of Sejanus in that role.

[38] On the ambivalence of the ending, see DOMAINKO (2018) 125-130. For a more 'optimistic' reading, see BALMACEDA (2014), for whom the description of Tiberius in 2, 126-129 represents a culmination of restored Roman *uirtus*.

[39] NOÈ (1983) points especially to PLIN. *Pan.* 94, 5, addressing Trajan's succession. Pliny, however, is speaking to an emperor in his late forties.

[40] What is true of Velleius' extant work may not be true of his planned more formal history (*opus iustum*). Velleius' many references to that work make clear that it would have discussed Tiberius' earlier career, but given Tiberius' age, Velleius may well have imagined it coming out after his death, and in that sense his generic self-positioning in that work might be closer to that of Pliny or Tacitus.

case, he has developed a way of writing about emperors that emphasizes the role of an active subordinate successor. This method conspicuously fails in the circumstances of 30 CE. Given that the work was likely written only during the previous year, Velleius was presumably aware of those circumstances, and thus the 'failure' is deliberate.[41] Velleius devised a historical method ideally suited to praising the man Tiberius was under Augustus, but in doing so he gave himself a way to comment on the absence of such a man on the contemporary scene.

4. Cassius Dio and the unfolding Severan era

Whereas Velleius' work seems to have been written in a few months and tailored to the needs of a particular political moment, any reader of Cassius Dio's massive history can guess it was the work of years. As it happens, however, guessing is not our only resource. Dio tells us a great deal about the composition of his work in his later books, and this includes information about the changing end point of his history as the Severan dynasty and his own career progressed. For the rest of this paper, I want to look at how he presents his own decisions about the extent of his narrative, and how he integrates them thematically into his portrait of the Severan dynasty.[42] Dio portrays himself not just as a chronicler of his own times, but as writing progressively different kinds of contemporary history in response to the chaotically unpredictable development of dynastic politics.

Dio's history, in its final form, was 80 books long and covered events from the foundation of Rome to 229 CE, the year of Dio's second consulship and forced retirement from public

[41] The idea of Velleius writing over a few months in 29 has been cogently reasserted by RICH (2011).

[42] This question is related to but by no means the same as that of the actual chronology of Dio's work. A summary of existing views on this can be found at KEMEZIS (2014) 282-293, and important subsequent contributions include LETTA (2019) and LINDHOLMER (2021).

life. Most of the history is lost, including nearly all its preface, but substantial fragments, epitomes and a partial manuscript tell us much about the later books (73-80) in which Dio often talks about himself both as eyewitness and as author.[43] There are three places in particular where he mentions projected end points for his work, progressively later ones as the work advances. I propose to read them here as a developing narrative. This narrative does not necessarily correspond to the work practices of the historical Dio, but it is key to his presentation of himself and his writings. Dio is composing these passages seemingly at different times, but always with some degree of hindsight about how Fortune has caused him to change the plan of his work. Fortune, in Dio's telling, communicates through dreams (73 [72], 23, 3) but these dreams are connected with events, rulers and dynastic change, all of which we can see as concrete motivations for Dio to change the kind of story he writes.

The first relevant passage is the most commented-on of all Dio's self-references. In Book 73, after narrating Commodus' final actions, he stops to explain the genesis of his current work (73 [72], 23, from Xiphilinus). This includes the startling information that during the wars of the 190s, Dio, after being commanded in a dream by a divine power (τὸ δαιμόνιον), wrote an account of Severus' wars that was much approved of by that emperor, for whom Dio had by then already written one propaganda work.[44] Remarkably, Dio not only acknowledges this highly partisan aspect of his writing, but claims that the praise inspired him to begin a larger-scale history, the work we have now. His first characterization of that larger work's scope is that it will include "all events from the beginning, right up to whenever Fortune decides" (§23, 3 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα, μέχρις ἂν καὶ τῇ Τύχῃ δόξῃ). A few lines later, however, he is a bit more

[43] For Dio's self-reflection, see esp. SCOTT (2017).

[44] DIO CASS. 73[72], 23, 2. On the "first historical work" of Dio see particularly SLAVICH (2001), with references to earlier works.

precise, saying that in twenty-two years, he researched and wrote all events "from the origins of the Romans down to the death of Severus" (§23, 5 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις μέχρι τῆς Σεουήρου μεταλλαγῆς) and that "the rest will also be written, to whatever point it may reach" (τὰ γὰρ λοιπά, ὅπου ἂν καὶ προχωρήσῃ, γεγράψεται).

Dio appears to mean that the twenty-two years constituted a discrete project, at the end of which he had what he then saw as a completed history ending with Severus' death.[45] No precise dates are given, but the most straightforward reading of the context is that Dio began the project in the mid-190s and so completed it in the late 210s.[46] Thus when he began, Dio did not know when Severus would die, but given their various ages, the most likely scenario was that Dio would outlive Severus and complete his history under Caracalla or Geta: thus Severus' death seemed the natural end point.[47] Given how Dio has linked his earlier historical projects to the Severan dynasty, readers may infer that he originally anticipated giving Severus favorable coverage and possibly making Caracalla's accession a sort of culmination. His contemporary narrative would have centered on civil war, restored peace and external triumphs, perhaps not unlike Livy's.

Already in this passage, though, Dio makes it clear that is not how Fortune subsequently decided it, and here we have a

[45] I do not, however, follow SCHMIDT (1997) 2621-2622 or SWAN (2004) 34-36 in supposing that Dio, after the 22-year period, thus in the late 210s, actually put out for wide circulation a complete edition of Books 1-77, and that his words at 73 [72], 23, 5 about continuation come unrevised from that work and refer to a promised "continued edition" which we have now. This model does not adequately explain why the "second dream" is needed to explain how Dio learned he would continue. None of this is to say Dio did not circulate or perform excerpts and drafts according to standard literary practices. I am grateful to Valérie Fromentin for her insightful discussions of this question with me in the course of the *Entretiens*.

[46] For an entirely different reading of the chronology relative to the various dreams, see BARNES (1984) and LETTA (2019), who see Severus' death and the "second dream" as marking the start of the 22-year composition period.

[47] Severus was born in 145, Dio in the early 160s and Caracalla in 188.

complicated question about what is the moment of utterance for these words. The narrator already knows that he will go beyond his originally projected end at Severus' death, but he is not writing with full hindsight about the end point we now have. For reasons that will become clear, I think the narrator in Book 73 is speaking from a point after Caracalla's death, and assumes readers are aware of that event. As those readers then move on into the account of Severus in Books 74-77, they will receive confirmation that the narrative they are reading was never meant to be public during Caracalla's reign, since it is often critical of Severus and uniformly hostile to Caracalla as heir apparent, including Dio's claim that he tried to murder his father (77 [76], 14).[48]

The full explanation of the situation then comes in the second of the passages dealing with the work's end-point, which comes after Dio's description of Caracalla's death in 217. Dio says that "even before [Caracalla] became sole ruler, it was made clear to me by his father in a dream that I would write these events too" (79 [78], 10, 1, fully transmitted in manuscript: ἐμοὶ δὲ δή, καὶ πρὶν ἐς τὴν μοναρχίαν καταστῆναι, προεδηλώθη τρόπον τινὰ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα γράψοιμι). In context, "these events" evidently means Caracalla's death and the reign leading up to it, and Dio goes on to describe the dream in which Severus calls on him to learn and write of further events. This "second dream" is mentioned in the narrative of 217, but it appears to have come to Dio in 211, in the ten-month interval between Severus' death and Caracalla's assumption of sole rule after his murder of Geta. Concretely, Severus is telling Dio that Caracalla will predecease him, allowing his reign to appear in Dio's history.[49] But as we have seen,

[48] For detailed analysis of Dio's version of Severus, see MILLAR (1964) 138-150.

[49] A further consideration is that Dio describes early in his Severan narrative (76 [75], 7, 4) how he and his peers took a sharply more negative view of Severus after 197 CE, due to his vindictive behavior following the defeat of Albinus. We are perhaps meant to read this as Dio rejecting his initial "pro-Severan" plan without having a clear alternative until the "second dream".

it is not simply a question of adding extra "Caracalla" books on to the end of an otherwise unchanged narrative, but also of revising the account of Severus. This actuallly seems to be what the content of the dream indicates: Severus tells Dio to "come here, close up so that you can learn properly everything that is said and done, and can write of it" (ἐνταῦθα πλησίον πρόσελθε, ἵνα πάντα καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα καὶ τὰ γιγνόμενα καὶ μάθῃς ἀκριβῶς καὶ συγγράψῃς). Severus is not just talking about Caracalla's reign, but about his own, which Dio will one day be able to learn and write about in a way that is impossible under Severus' son.

How then do we square this with the idea from earlier of a history down to the reign of Severus, researched and composed over 22 years starting in the mid-190s? Dio seems to say that from 211 on, he had a premonition he would write a history right up to Caracalla's death, even though he was still within the twenty-two-year period.[50] The earliest possible end point for that period is in fact right around Caracalla's death in 217. Dio apparently portrays himself as completing his history down to Severus' death very shortly before Caracalla's death, and that event confirms to him that he really will have the chance to write further. If we read the "second dream" from Book 79 in the way I suggest, then readers can now understand the Dio of Book 73 as rejecting the plan of writing a narrative tailored to what the Severan regime, or any other, will find acceptable. Dio claims in Book 73 to be placing himself in the hands of Fortune: this may mean writing a narrative that rejects the foundation story of the Severan dynasty, and circulating it whenever circumstances permit. Dio's open-ended "whatever point it may reach" refers not only to his own longevity but to the fortunes of the ruling dynasty.

[50] On any interpretation of 73[72], 23, the 22 years cannot begin until Dio has written a history of some part of Severus' civil and foreign wars, which in turn cannot happen until 195 at the earliest.

The last reference to the end of Dio is in fact at the end, where he brings his work to a close after the death of Elagabalus and accession of Alexander Severus in 222. As the text is preserved by Xiphilinus, Dio begins this coda by explaining that, due to his being almost continuously absent from Rome ever since 218, "I will thus not be able to set down the remaining events in the same fashion as those before, still I will narrate in brief what went on up to my second consulship [i.e. 229]" (80 [80], 2, 1 διὰ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα οὐκ ἠδυνήθην ὁμοίως τοῖς πρόσθεν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ συνθεῖναι, κεφαλαιώσας μέντοι ταῦτα, ὅσα γε καὶ μέχρι τῆς δευτέρας μου ὑπατείας ἐπράχθη, διηγήσομαι). His description of the first half of Alexander's reign is indeed briefer in scope (even allowing for Xiphilinus' compression) than those of previous emperors, and ends by describing the historian's second consulship followed by his "retiring" to his home town of Nicaea in the face of threats of violence from the Praetorian Guard and equivocal support from Alexander (80 [80], 4-5). He concludes by relating a last dream in which he was told that he would never again leave Nicaea, and should conclude his history with a Homeric quotation that he proceeds to set down as his final seal.

At this point Dio's narrator has full hindsight about what his final product will look like. We can tell from a few proleptic references in much earlier books of Dio that he has continued to do at least some level of revision through the late 220s and probably after 229.[51] Alexander Severus is on the throne, and thus Dio is at last confronting the issue that is at the center of this paper. On the one hand, he gives the disclaimer I quoted earlier about being absent from Rome. That rationale, however, makes little sense, because Dio's absence dates back to 218 and would thus take in the reign of Elagabalus, which he has nonetheless managed to describe in detail. One might read the *recusatio* as a polite excuse, with the real reason being the traditional reluctance to write about a still reigning emperor. However, the

[51] For details, see BARNES (1984) and KEMEZIS (2014) 288-293.

narrative Dio does append tells against this, since it in fact describes the events of 222-229, but with scarcely any reference to the emperor. The character summary that Dio typically gives for emperors is nowhere to be found, and all Alexander does is fail to prevent the praetorians from murdering Ulpian (80 [80], 2, 2) and humiliating Dio (80 [80], 5, 1), whom he has tried to honor with a consulship.[52]

This lack of coverage can be explained by Alexander's age (13 at the start of his reign in 222) but this is perhaps the point. When Dio began his history, what one could write depended on who the reigning emperor was, as it had for Tacitus and even Livy. By the time he finishes it, the emperor is a non-factor. It is significant that Dio marks a formal ending not relative to the emperor, but to his own career, and its abrupt end in the face of military insubordination. Instead of describing Alexander, the final pages tell of Roman armies mutinying against their commanders and refusing to fight the enemy (80 [80], 4). Alexander's coming to the throne as an adolescent and still not being an effective adult ruler at age 20 are symptoms of this disorder, and it has disrupted the traditional calculus of contemporary imperial history as Dio himself knew it under Septimius Severus. Back then historiography was a delicate and potentially dangerous business. In his last phase, Dio never makes clear whether he believes his account of Alexander's reign can circulate while both Alexander and Dio are alive. He may well intend posthumous publication, but even if we do not want to be that explicit, the impression he gives is that his age and his distance from the centers of power and literary exchange make him less worried about immediate audiences than he was when he began his project.

[52] It is highly unlikely that the lack of emphasis on Alexander is due to Xiphilinus' excerpting, given that elsewhere the epitomator consistently does the opposite, disproportionately preserving details about an emperor's behavior (see BERBESSOU-BROUSTET [2016] 88), and the same is true for the Constantinian *Excerpta*.

5. Conclusion

As I hope to have demonstrated, the possibilities for contemporary history in imperial Rome cannot be fully explained by constant political factors or generic rules. Certain parameters apply: invective against the current regime was never safe, while the line between encomium and historiography never wholly lost its salience. For the most part, however, including a living emperor in a history remained a situational decision, and the three authors I have been looking at faced very different situations. One can, however posit in closing a significant, albeit superficially banal, commonality. All these authors believe contemporary historiography exists and should exist in imperial Rome. It is easy to take this for granted, but in a political culture as authoritarian and ideologically unitary as imperial Rome, it might easily have been otherwise. All these authors take it as a cultural norm that literate elites have the privilege of writing narratives of recent political events that are spoken in their own voice and claim to be factual. They express different views on how truthfulness and free speech work in such narratives, but none of them posits the act of writing as in itself transgressive or counter-cultural. Furthermore, they all assume their rulers subscribe to this norm, and in fact want historiography to exist.

It is only this premise that allows the "living emperor" question to emerge: contemporary historiography is an accepted part of political discourse, and thus the emperor's role in it is up for discussion in a way that most aspects of his office are not. Even when, as in all these examples, authors are at best ambivalent about the answer, simply having raised the topic gives them space to engage with their ruler's claims about current politics. Tacitus is most attentive to the traditional truth-and-credibility claims of history, and is asserting his and his readers' right to evaluate those claims independently of even a benevolent monarch. Velleius is less concerned with truth than narrative continuity: he sets down as normative a certain kind of story

about crisis and triumph, and he challenges the current regime's claim to be acting out that story. Dio is the most self-conscious of all about norms, and by repeatedly changing his own authorial expectations relative to his monarch, he questions the Severan dynasty's claim to be a proper form of monarchy. These were not things that imperial political culture allowed authors to say explicitly through the narrative of their works. In this case it is precisely the self-consciously literary nature of historiography, the fact it has norms that exist independent of Roman monarchical ideology, and are historically prior to it, that makes it a distinctive instrument of political commentary.

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DISCUSSION

E.-M. Becker: Thank you for a thoughtful and a thought-provoking paper. I have two (smaller) comments and one follow-up question. Your presentation made me think about the problem of flattery regarding the Gospel narratives in a new way. Normally when thinking about flattery and the Gospel writers as historiographical writers, I would discuss how the authors relate their stories to the contemporary politics (Flavian times). However, since the Gospel writers actually consider Christ as their *kyrios* the situation might be different. The Gospel writers relate to a *kyrios* who has died, but they are presupposing at the same time that he – as the cosmocrator – is alive. What would you make of this idea? Second, how would you see the role of dreams (in Dio) as a time-transcending tool of merging diverse temporal periods? Finally, and related to the latter: your comparison of Velleius, Tacitus and Dio and your findings about how differently these historians related to their Emperors: would you trace those differences back to their personal style of writing (literary individuality) and to literary techniques (such as dreams) they applied, and literary conventions of their time, and/or to the political time conditions under which they are writing, and/or do such differences simply derive from historical contingencies?

A.M. Kemezis: Thank you, the point about flattery in the Gospels is a very intriguing one, and I would be curious to know whether this is a line of attack that anti-Christian apologists pursue. As to dreams and merging temporal periods, it does seem that dreams are, at least in our surviving text, restricted to Dio's contemporary narrative, and they're actually a distinctive feature of that narrative. Any sequential reader getting to Book 73

and seeing the dream passage would have been I think a bit shocked and realized they were in a different, much more unpredictable, sort of story. I think readers are meant to notice the difference and consider how one is to make the link between a somewhat fixed distant past that one knows through tradition and a more fluid recent past whose boundaries and trajectory are contingent on *tychê*, who communicates through the dreams.

To the last question, my own approach has started from immediate political circumstances, to which I then position authors' literary techniques as a response. That's not by any means the whole picture or the only viable explanation, in particular because I rely for my interpretation on only the contemporary portions of larger narratives. One could certainly imagine productively reading the same passages of Velleius in relation to his non-contemporary narrative and the overall literary objectives that displays. Where have similar ideas of narrating parts of military leaders' careers come up before and so forth? Inevitably Velleius is responding both to internal rhetorical imperatives and to immediate political circumstances.

G. Schepens: I would like to pick up on Dio Cassius' dreams about which E.-M. Becker just asked a question. The "dreams" appear several times, in combination with "Fortune", when Dio discusses the changes he made or had to make to his plans while writing the history of his own time. For writers of contemporary history, it is not unusual to make changes to their original plans, since they report about events the end and the importance of which are often not yet known at the moment when they conceive their plans. Thucydides made so to say a new start – introduced by a second preface (Thuc. 5, 26) – when he realised that the war he was "writing down" continued after the peace of Nicias in 421 BC. Polybius deferred his *telos* from 168 BC to 145 BC and added ten more books to the "organic whole" covered in books 1-30. These are perfect illustrations of what John Dewey (*Logic. The Theory of Inquiry* [New York, 1938])

calls the indeterminate situation which constitutes the antecedent conditions of inquiry. What for Dewey is part of the "logic" of inquiry, is explained by Dio by motives such as "dreams" and "Fortune". Why did he think along such irrational lines?

A.M. Kemezis: Both your question and Eve-Marie's place an important emphasis on just how strange Dio's use of dreams is for the historiographical genre. He surely is aware of this strangeness, and means it to emphasize something distinctive about his narrative content and the role of *tychê* in contemporary events. One thing dreams allow him to do is move his knowledge a bit outside of linear time more than a Thucydides- or Polybius-style response to public events. So perhaps he's signalling that "advance warning" of Caracalla's death influences the way he writes about Severus (which he's by implication doing during Caracalla's lifetime). Another factor that I'm not yet sure what to make of is that lots of other people in Dio have dreams as well. He talks about writing a book about Severus' prophetic dreams about his own becoming emperor, and he has a lot about Caesar and Octavian's dreams as well. Marie-Laure Freyburger-Galland pointed out a few years ago ("Les rêves chez Dion Cassius", *REA* 101 [1999], 533-545) that these dreams are often associated with civil war and changes of regime, which are always the realm of *tychê*. By having *tychê* send him dreams, Dio is I think consciously putting himself in an unusual position for a historian relative to the actors in his story. The implications of that are certainly something to be explored further.

R. Nicolai: I would like to return briefly to a key passage: the proem of Tacitus' *Histories*. I agree with your doubts about the hypotheses regarding Tacitus's use of 'figured speech' or 'doublespeak', which clash with the rarity of *amphibolia* in ancient literary practice: ambiguity is practiced by Plato and the most Platonic of Isocrates's writings, the *Panathenaicus*, in dialogic-paideutic contexts, but in general it is considered a serious defect. Only in the dialogical context, and in a particular kind

of dialogue between a master and his interlocutors and pupils, can ambiguity be admitted. The proposed solution is the following: "the meanings I have suggested are all meant to be generated by readers including Trajan himself". What I wonder is whether it is possible not only to detect the author's intentions, but also to ascribe such a complex interpretation to the audience. It is a problem of audience response.

A.M. Kemezis: Yes, probably I was a bit imprecise on this point, thank you for bringing that up. I am not trying to reconstruct actual audience response from Trajan or anyone else, but only to highlight the rhetorical possibilities of the text. Ahl's and Bartsch's approaches, in different ways, posit that there are meanings that the ruler either cannot generate or (more often) cannot for ideological reasons publicly acknowledge or respond to, and readers are supposed to be aware of that. That's what I think isn't going on in the *Histories* preface, though I am more receptive to it in reading Statius or Lucan. As far as Tacitus' *Histories* goes, the idea that one can't write about even a good emperor during his lifetime is something that can be included in the public transcript, at least by an unambiguous implication. I do think we can be sure Roman imperial audiences thought a lot about what one could and couldn't say about a living emperor, so that one can assume texts contain the possibilities for quite complex responses, whether or not particular audiences follow through on those possibilities.

B. Bleckmann: Sie weisen darauf hin, dass die Zeitgeschichte des Velleius Paterculus großenteils gar nicht die Regierung des Tiberius als Augustus behandelt, sondern vor allem dessen militärischen Erfolge in der Regierung des Augustus. Einen analogen Fall bietet die Geschichte des Menandros Protektor, der unter dem Kaiser Maurikios schreibt, aber nicht dessen Zeit als Kaiser behandelt, sondern ausschließlich diejenige, in der dieser unter Tiberios Konstantinos als General im Osten tätig war. Die Überhöhung des Maurikios war bei Menandros

verbunden mit der heftigen Kritik an Justin II., dem die Schuld für die missliche Situation im Osten zugewiesen wurde. Dieser Aspekt der Kritik unmittelbarer Vorgänger, die mit dem regierenden Kaiser durchaus in einen dynastischen Zusammenhang gebracht werden können, findet man auch bei Cassius Dio, der ja Severus deutlich, die anderen Kaiser (Caracalla und Elagabal) der gleichen Dynastie sogar in extremer Form kritisiert. Einen ähnlichen Fall kann für die theodosianische Dynastie beobachtet werden, wo das relativ schonungslose Bild, das Olympiodor zur Regierung des Honorius bietet, sich damit erklärt, dass er im Interesse Theodosius II. agiert. Vielleicht regen also gerade die innerdynastischen Verwerfungen, die nicht mit einem kompletten Austausch der Eliten verbunden sind, in hohem Maße die Schaffung einerseits informierter, andererseits kritischer Zeitgeschichtsschreibung an.

A.M. Kemezis: Yes, I certainly agree that some amount of ideological discontinuity is a precondition, or at any rate a major contributing factor, to critical contemporary history throughout the imperial period, and I am grateful for the examples of Olympiodorus and Menander. But your comment does make me think more about the important complementary factor of continuity of personnel. All of the authors I'm looking at rely heavily on their audience's shared experience or second-hand knowledge of key transitional events, whether it's the death of Augustus, the overthrow of Domitian or the various regime changes from 193 on. There's a sense of collective memory-processing that is perhaps different from how Thucydides or Polybius position themselves relative to audiences who also know a lot of the facts.

J. Marincola: Thank you for a very stimulating paper. I find your interpretation of Tacitus' preface to the *Histories* very persuasive, and in this regard I wonder if you think it's worthwhile to bring in the preface to the *Agricola*, not as a way of 'explaining' the *Histories* preface but perhaps of contextualizing

it? Does the portrait in the *Agricola*, where an entire generation which has been traumatized and is slow to mend (for the latter, esp. 3, 1: *tardiora sunt remedia quam mala*), perhaps bolster your interpretation by suggesting that the ability to return to a functioning state does not come about merely by the presence of a 'good' emperor?

A.M. Kemezis: Absolutely, I didn't have time to go into the *Agricola*, but they both speak to Tacitus' wanting to problematize simple narratives of dynastic change as flipping a switch and making everything the opposite. This is where the question I mentioned of the "moment of utterance" comes up, though. It makes a lot of difference whether the *Histories* preface is spoken three years after the *Agricola* or thirteen years. Are we still in a post-Domitianic moment waiting to see what difference Trajan will make, or is it 109 and we are just as likely to be thinking of Trajan's unclear successor as his predecessor? Basically I am inclined to the latter view, so that there's a thought progression (that I think readers of the *Histories* are meant to pick up on) from slow-healing trauma to insurmountable systemic problems, but then one starts to get into the larger issue of Tacitean optimism or pessimism.

H. Inglebert: Dans le cas de la transition des Antonins et des Sévères, ces derniers vont idéologiquement se définir comme des Antonins, par la fiction de l'adoption de Septime Sévère par Marc Aurèle, la divinisation de son "frère" Commode, et l'adoption des noms de Marcus Antoninus Aurelius par Caracalla et Elagabal, ou de Marcus Aurelius par Sévère Alexandre. Septime Sévère et Caracalla sont de plus ensevelis dans le mausolée d'Hadrien. On a donc en théorie une seule dynastie antonine de Nerva à Sévère Alexandre. Néanmoins, certains historiens comme Hérodien ont pu considérer que la mort de Marc Aurèle marquait la fin d'une époque (ce qui inspira Gibbon) ou que l'assassinat de Commode ouvrait une nouvelle ère. Comment Cassius Dion se situe-t-il dans ce champ des possibles chronologiques,

et avec quels arguments biographiques et méthodologiques, alors qu'il écrit une histoire continue ?

A.M. Kemezis: One one hand, Dio certainly rejects the dynastic fiction about Severus being adopted, he's quite explicit about that and he seems to think his audience feels the same way. He also does posit a key transition in his own narrative at some point in the 180s/190s, but he's self-consciously vague about exactly when it happens, in part because of Commodus' ambiguous status as the bad member of a good dynasty. Dio has the famous line about the "Age of Iron and Rust" after Marcus' death (72 [71], 36, 4) but then also goes out of his way to say at Commodus' death that with him the rule of the "true Aurelii" ended (73 [72], 22, 6). And in between, near the end of Commodus' reign, he marks a watershed when he becomes an adult eyewitness of events (73 [72], 18, 3-4). This is again part of the memory processing I mentioned in response to Bruno's question, but it can be paralleled in Dio's various remarks throughout the Caesarean and Augustan narratives about when the Republic-Monarchy transition occurs. All of these are a deliberate technique rather than just confusion: Dio likes to start debates about periodization and the relationship of internal narrative flow to actual events. But he doesn't seem to feel a need to resolve those debates.