

For getting far too close to four years now, I have been working on the history of the early third century. It is a period often seen as critical in the development of the Roman Empire, which laid the foundations for the chaos of the Third Century Crisis. Recent synoptic histories paint a picture which is extremely familiar to those who have looked in any detail at Dio's description of his own lifetime: soldiers becoming increasingly prominent in politics; senators increasingly ignored by emperors; ultimately, with the accession of Maximinus Thrax in 235 and the unrest of 238, the confirmation that the whims of the army had become the most important force in the Empire's government. Today is not the place for a comprehensive reassessment of this historical model. If anyone is interested, then I will at some point have a PhD thesis which goes into considerably more detail than I have time for now. But I am going to touch on one aspect, unsurprisingly relating to Dio himself.

It is coincidental that the overall view of the early third century coincides with Dio's. In recent synoptic histories, his contemporary books are inescapable. Dio is the ideal historian for many scholars: he was a senator, and twice consul; he interacted personally with the emperors whose reigns he described; he personally lived through the narrative. Even if some of the detail is exaggerated or inaccurate, Dio is still looked to as someone who can provide an insight into how the senatorial elite responded to events. His impact extends beyond his lifetime. It is confidence in Dio which allows Herodian to be trusted, and the third century as a whole mapped out. To give a hint of a wider context, then, a historical engagement with Dio has a lot riding on it.

The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate unavoidably quickly how Dio creates a sense of a shared senatorial experience during his lifetime. If you read the work of Lukas de Blois, for example, you will find claims that he is obsessed with soldiers and their disruptive influence on Rome. As will be seen, this is not entirely the case. Dio's Senate may exist as a coherent body, but it is not always in opposition to men from military backgrounds. Nor is Dio always a supporter of senators. It is with that second group that I will begin. Dio is known for his first-person association with the Senate; 'we senators' often focalise his narrative.

But much as this body is highly inclusive in its claims to represent a senatorial whole, it is also implicitly exclusionary. Senators are not inherently good as individuals. When they become threatening, they are quickly externalised. This will form a basis for thinking about the other group, military men adlected into the Senate. Dio may portray them as complete outsiders. Much as he simplifies the positions of morally corrupt senators, we might think about men promoted above their station in the same way – political actors denied any

positive association with other senators, reduced to proxy characterisations of tyrannical rulers.

This will be brought together in something resembling a conclusion, which pivots around a man who is rather more exceptional than often observed. The emperor Pertinax is simultaneously a hero of senatorial virtue, while also being an equestrian general, adlected to high office, whose very career challenged notions of what it meant to be a senator. It is in this context that Dio's construction of a legitimate Senate becomes especially interesting. We can look at Dio not as an introduction to the perceived chaos of the third century, but as a senator trying to rationalise a rapidly changing appointment policy which was in full swing already under Marcus Aurelius. It is from that perspective that we might think about Dio's relationship with a wider intellectual atmosphere, at a time of apparent political flux.

When people write about Dio's involvement with the Senate, the overwhelming emphasis is on the creation of a sense of belonging. On your hand-out are two passages which immediately demonstrate this tendency. In the first case, there is the trial of Baebius Marcellinus, executed for treason under Septimius Severus, and identified by his bald head. In the second, you have the reaction of the senators to the news that Didius Julianus had won over the Praetorians, and was now emperor of Rome. Both episodes bear the usual hallmark of Dio's interaction presence among the Senate. Most obviously, the episode is told in the first-person; this is a collective experience.

As I have discussed before, they also represent Dio's tendency to make his own experience especially representative of what the Senate had to go through. In the trial, we are presented with a shared reaction: everyone, even those with hair, panicked. But in a shift of focalisation it is Dio himself who underwent the most ridiculous thing, to geloiotaton. We then refocalise to the group again. The Julianus example involves an extra stage of gradual narrowing. Everyone was afraid, and especially the emperor's opponents, among whom Dio represents a clear individual example. Immediately afterwards, it returns again to the plural, as 'we senators' went to greet him despite the sense of trepidation. In these respects, the two scenes are typical of Dio's involvement. He is at the centre of a group – and here, I look to Andrew Scott's article, which makes the point that Dio is not one of the examples of especially prominent individuals who resist imperial excess. Dio's personal experience may be an extreme form of what senators went through, but it is not exceptional from them.

But there is a second element to Dio's presentation of the Senate, which is much more implicit. Much as both episodes present a united senatorial position, they are also both connected to selective and actively exclusionary definitions of the 'senatorial we'. We will look at Julianus first. From a purely historical perspective, fear was felt most keenly by those who had opposed Julianus before his accession. That is to say, while he was still a senator. On a basic level, Julianus followed the standard *cursus honorum*; Dio claims that he would have been 60 years old when he became emperor. That connection to the Senate is rendered immaterial. He is introduced into the narrative as morally corrupt, as his success at buying the Empire only confirmed. He did not deserve senatorial office. And once emperor, his previous dealings are just more evidence that Julianus was the Senate's opponent throughout his public career.

The trial of Baebius Marcellinus is comparable. Baebius' conviction is not the end of the episode. Dio records that his accuser, Pollienus Sebennus (survives as Pollenius) was tried by the people of Noricum for his conduct as governor, and was only spared death by the intervention of his uncle. Both Pollieni were, like Julianus, senators. Though detail of Sebennus' career is uncertain, the governor of Noricum was at this time a senator of praetorian rank; it is worth noting that the two known governors who preceded him both held the suffect consulship shortly afterwards; his successor, Sabinus, who handed him over to the people of Noricum, became consular immediately after holding the office. It is not unlikely that Sebennus had a career in the Senate. In addition, several generations of Pollieni, including the uncle in question, are known to have held consulships themselves. In any case, his association with the Senate does not matter. Sebennus' actions make him a threat to a collective Senate. Whatever his social status, he is presented as an outsider.

There are two important points here. The first is an important consideration for the Severan period as a whole: describing the Senate as coming under attack does not immediately have to mean that soldiers were responsible. More importantly today, the second point refers to the construction of the Senate in Dio. Julianus and Sebennus are individuals. Any ties to allies or supporters in the Senate are elided completely. Even the involvement of Sebennus' uncle only occurs after the trial. Rather than representing division among the Senate, these men are externalised, becoming the enemies of the still united whole. This is true even in the case of senators. This is especially important as we move on to the next group of outsiders: men from military backgrounds, who were raised above their station.

The most celebrated group targeted by Dio as a threat to the Senate is the army. At handout 3 you will find the famous distinction between soldiers which Dio puts in the mouth of Maecenas; I have given you Cary's translation. The common soldier who carried faggots and charcoal – that is, anyone who started off doing the menial work associated with lower status military ranks – should be kept out of the Senate; equestrians who were commissioned as centurions, however, were absolutely fine. As a brief point of interest, I am reliably informed that this is the only evidence for any difference between centurions who were commissioned, and those who were promoted. Some scholars may have assumed that this was more widespread, but there is little to suggest so.

Over the page are two examples of people who broke this rule. Both are deliberately chosen from the section of the contemporary history which survives in relatively full form, rather than in Byzantine excerpts or epitome, so that they can be approached with a bit more certainty in thinking about how Dio describes political malpractice. The first is Comazon, one of the highly successful favourites of Elagabalus. Handout 4 is found in a list of senators who were executed at the start of Elagabalus' reign, and marks the conclusion of the story of Attalus. Comazon had him killed out of spite for sending him to the galleys – making Comazon himself not only a soldier, but an ill-disciplined one, who maintained his stereotypical militaristic corruption as he rose to prominence.

The second character comes from the reign of Macrinus, and is similarly attacked as an improper figure of any authority. Macrinus was censured for a variety of actions, including his promotion of Adventus. As you can see at handout 5, Dio labels him a former mercenary and spy who rose through the ranks in the less salubrious elements of imperial government. His faults are, if anything, even more extreme than Comazon's. His ἀπαιδευσία and ἀπειρία, lack of education and ability, make him especially insulting as someone appointed consul. Dio goes on to bemoan the fact that someone who had worked as a torturer, a spy and a centurion could end up holding any power at all.

These men show a general pattern which has been accepted: corrupt emperors appoint their favourites, adlecting them to consular status. For many scholars, that point is enough in itself. Both conform to an overall political model of military men being adlected to high office, to the disdain of other senators. But there is more here. Comparisons can be made with the senatorial examples looked at earlier. There are undoubtedly differences in Dio's presentation of events. He himself is much less prominent – the personal aspect is not felt in the same way. The interactions themselves, however, do follow the same model. Macrinus

and Elagabalus only support problematic individuals; in turn, their links with the wider political elite are exclusively disruptive. Dio leaves no room for suggestions that either man had support from senators, whether honest or feigned. By this stage in the contemporary history, we are trained to think in terms of a united Senate; Comazon and Adventus fit that model easily.

So far, I've offered a quick overview of an idea which is especially pertinent to the historical use of Dio's *Roman History*. We are presented with a Senate which looks extremely navigable, even as an outsider, several centuries later: there was an identifiable senatorial body, which acted as a united whole, and which reacted the same way to externalised threats. In creating unity, Dio thus somewhat paradoxically also reinforces an idea of division. Men like Julianus or Comazon have no place in his scheme of senatorial behaviour. Interactions can only be antagonistic. From the perspective of political history, that seems far too simplistic to me. But that is not where I want to finish. Instead, for the last few minutes, I want to think more explicitly in the terms of this conference, and ask what Dio's view says about the intellectual climate of his lifetime.

The final except on the handout tells a very different story. This is the surviving summary of the career of Pertinax. In a slightly roundabout phrase, we learn that he was a grammarian, who used senatorial contacts to secure a commission as a centurion, and who rose up to be emperor. Setting aside Pertinax's reputation for a minute, it is worth considering this more closely. Here we have a soldier, his reputation connected specifically to military success. Even in a literary tradition which favoured Pertinax, his rise to prominence under Marcus Aurelius is put down to his abilities as a general. We have someone adlected to praetorian status, who held two offices on the *cursus honorum*: the suffect and ordinary consulship, the latter alongside no less a tyrant than Commodus. And yet we get to 193 – Pertinax is the hero of the Senate; Didius Julianus, after his journey up the full senatorial ladder, is the militaristic tyrant.

If Dio's concern is soldiers taking over from senators, this reaction seems a little strange. It seems that he is doing something rather more complex. At no point does Dio question the idea of adlection. As Maecenas puts it, as long as the right men are chosen, then it is entirely reasonable for men of military background to become senators. Nor is there any automatic connection between a traditional senatorial career and respectability. Instead, the contemporary history – arguably the *Roman History* as a whole – can be read as an exploration of who should be in the appropriate positions of authority.

What then of the Severan elite? If it isn't enough to look for an easy social division, what can it be replaced with? Part of that answer involves changing the direction from which we look at the contemporary history. At the moment, Dio is used primarily as an introduction to the third century. In the starkly differing responses to men like Pertinax and Comazon, he is just as much responding to political changes which began in the second. In what is currently quite a crude formulation, his response seems pretty typical. He has no control over the emperor appointing favourites, and seems to accept it as imperial prerogative. But he can judge the men selected. His favoured men are imbued with education, moderation, self-control – like Pertinax, like Pompeianus, and – as someone who committed his time to writing 80 books of imperial history – like Dio himself. Those who he dislikes get the opposite, a militaristic greed characterised by ignorance and aggression.

Are Dio's views defensive? Are we looking at a time when the adlection of military men was threatening the place of education in elite Roman identity? To me, it seems strange that Pertinax would be so positively received, and Julianus attacked, if that were the case. Rather, it feels – and note the deliberate tone of conjecture here – that this is an attempt to accommodate changes within the Senate. Under this model, equestrians become entirely acceptable, provided that they conform to quite traditional expectations of their behaviour: the acceptance of moderation and *paideia*, and the understatement of their military origins. This however only raises other questions. Is Dio unique in his view? Is this an attempt to respond to a changing world which is leaving men like himself behind? Or does he reflect a wider discourse of senatorial belonging? Should we be thinking in the same terms as Rome under Nerva and Trajan, and a collusive act of excusal for any association with Comazon, as happened with Domitian?

These are not idle questions. The stronger the desire for consensus, the stronger the opportunity for adlected equestrians to be welcomed into the Senate. If we stop anticipating chaos at every turn, and think instead about how Dio might be responding to a change in the social make-up of the Senate which had been going on for decades before his career began, we can start to see a different picture of his view of Rome.