

Greek and Roman Pasts in the Long Second Century: The Intellectual Climate of Cassius Dio
 Banff, Alberta, 25 May 2018
 Jonathan Scott Perry, perryjs@sar.usf.edu or perryjonat@gmail.com

“Safety First”: Cassius Dio on the Augustan Senate



1. CD 55.3.1-6:

“...τόν τε ἀριθμὸν τὸν ἐς τὴν κύρωσιν τῶν δογμάτων ἀναγκαῖον καθ’ ἕκαστον εἶδος αὐτῶν, ὡς γε ἐν κεφαλαίοις εἰπεῖν, διανομοθέτησε, καὶ τὰ ζημιώματα τοῖς μὴ δι’ εὐλογόν τινα αἰτίαν τῆς συνεδρείας ἀπολειπομένοις ἐπηύξησεν.... τὰ τε ὀνόματα συμπάντων τῶν βουλευόντων ἐς λεύκωμα ἀναγράφας ἐξέθηκε· καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου καὶ νῦν κατ’ ἔτος τοῦτο ποιεῖται.”

“He also fixed by law the number of senators necessary for the passage of decrees, according to their several kinds—to state only the chief points of the matter—and he increased the fines on those who had absented themselves from a session without a good excuse.... He had the names of all the senators entered on an album and posted; and this practice, originating with him, is still observed each year.”

2. Good παρρησία: Agrippa, 52.3.3.

3. Bad παρρησία: Licinius Murena, 54.3.3-5.

4. Mixed παρρησία: The aftermath of Commodus’ assassination, 74.2.4, and Cassius Clemens speaks up to Septimius Severus, 75.9.4.

5. Maecenas’ advice: Purging the senatorial roll (52.19.1); hiding one’s anger, whether justified or not (52.31.7); showing clemency to a plotter when he is “unarmed” and you are “armed” (52.31.10, and echoed in Livia’s advice (55.18.5, #15 below)).

6. The senators’ reactions (with echoes of Tacitean “lacrimas gaudium?”), 53.11.1-3.

7. Augustus' cruelty as "the safer course", in Septimius Severus' estimation, 76[75].8.1:
 "καὶ τὴν μὲν Σύλλου καὶ Μαρίου καὶ Αὐγούστου αὐστηρίαν τε καὶ ὠμότητα ὡς ἀσφαλεστέραν ἐπαινῶν..."
8. Augustus' (or rather, Octavian's) actual cruelty, Suetonius *Div. Aug.* 27.4:
 "...et Quintum Gallium praetorem, in officio salutationis tabellas duplices veste tectas tenentem, suspicatus gladium occulere nec quicquam statim, ne aliud inveniretur, ausus inquirere, paulo post per centuriones et milites raptum e tribunali servilem in modum torsit ac fatentem nihil iussit occidi, prius oculis eius sua manu effossis..."
- "...and when Quintus Gallius, a praetor, held some folded tablets under his robe as he was paying his respects, Augustus, suspecting that he had a sword concealed there, did not dare to make a search on the spot for fear it should turn out to be something else; but a little later he had Gallius hustled from the tribunal by some centurions and soldiers, tortured him as if he were a slave, and, though the man confessed nothing, ordered his execution, first tearing out the man's eyes with his own hand..."
9. CD fears for his own safety in the new regime of Didius Julianus, 193 CE, 74.12.3:
 In spite of the favours he had been shown by Pertinax "...ὅμως δ' οὖν καὶ διὰ ταῦτα (οὐ γὰρ ἐδόκει ἡμῖν ἀσφαλὲς εἶναι οἴκοι, μὴ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τούτου ὑποπτευθῶμεν, καταμεῖναι) προήλθομεν..."
- "...nevertheless, we made our appearance, partly for this reason (since it did not seem to us to be safe to remain at home, for fear such a course might in itself arouse suspicion)..."
10. But the sword (or the breastplate?) can cut both ways: Septimius Severus' 600 hand-selected bodyguards, who did not put off their θώρακας until they had reached Rome, 74.15.3.
11. The curious incident of Augustus' breastplate in the Senate-house, CD 54.12.3 (in 19 BCE):
 "... (βραχὺ γάρ τι καὶ σμικρὸν τὸν θώρακα, ὃν ὑπὸ τῆ στολῆι πολλάκις καὶ ἐξ αὐτὸ τὸ συνέδριον εἰσιῶν εἶχεν, ἐπικουρήσειν οἱ ἐνόμιζε)..."
- "...(as for the breastplate which he often wore beneath his stola, even when he entered the Senate, he believed it would be of little or meager help to him)...."
12. But there is another view of the breastplate, and in the context of a culling of the Senators, Suetonius *D.Aug.* 35.1:
 "*Senatorum affluentem numerum deformi et incondita turba... ad modum pristinum et splendorem redegit duabus lectionibus: prima ipsorum arbitratu, quo vir virum legit, secunda suo et Agrippae; quo tempore existimatur lorica sub veste munitus ferroque cinctus praesedis decem valentissimis senatorii ordinis amicis sellam suam circumstantibus.*"
- "With the number of senators swelled to a disordered and undignified rabble... Augustus returned it to its former size and glory by means of two reviews, the first conducted by the senators themselves in which each man chose one another [as members], the second by himself and Agrippa. It was on this occasion that he is believed to have presided protected by a breastplate under his tunic and wearing a sword at his side, with ten strong men, friends from the senatorial order, standing around his seat."
13. A precedent (?) for this practice, in triumviral days, with a little help from his "friends", CD 50.2.5: convening the senate surrounded by soldiers and friends carrying concealed daggers, 32 BCE.

14. Augustus’ growing reluctance to annoy senators as he aged—in spite of taking on new titles “under protest”, CD 55.12.2-3.

15. Livia’s advice to Augustus: prefer the gentler to the harsher word, and practice clemency, even against real threats, CD 55.18.5:
 “οὐδεὶς γὰρ ῥαδίως πιστεύει ὅτι τις ἐν τε ἐξουσίᾳ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει τοσαύτη ὦν ὑπ’ιδιώτου τινὸς ἀόπλου ἐπιβουλευθῆναι δύναται...”
 “For no one finds it easy to believe that a ruler who holds such great authority and power can be the object of plotting on the part of some individual, unarmed person...”

16. A lesson learned—Augustus spoke last, in order to allow the senators to form their own opinion first, and he gradually allowed them to make judgments while absenting himself, 55.34.1-2.

17. But perhaps a lesson learned too well—given Livia and her figs..., 55.22.1-2 and 56.30.2.



A partial bibliography on senatorial absenteeism and related issues:

- Bellissime, M. and F. Hurlet (2018) *Dion Cassius Histoire romaine Livre 53*, Paris.
- Bonnefond-Coudry, M. (1989) *Le Sénat de la République romaine de la guerre d'Hannibal à Auguste: Pratiques délibératives et prise de décision*. Rome.
- Bonnefond-Coudry, M. (1995) “Princeps et Sénat sous les Julio-claudiens: des relations à inventer,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome* 107: 225-254.
- Brunt, P. A. (1984) “The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime,” *The Classical Quarterly* 34: 423-444.
- Chastagnol, A. (1980) “La crise de recrutement sénatorial des années 16-11 av. J.-C.,” in φιλίας χάριν: *Miscellanea di studi classici in onore di Eugenio Manni*, Rome, 2: 465-476.
- Chastagnol, A. (1990) “Le problème du quorum sénatorial à Rome sous l’Empire,” *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 1: 153-163.
- Chastagnol, A. (1992) *Le Sénat romain à l’époque impériale*. Paris.
- Coltelloni-Trannoy, M. (2016) “Les procédures sénatoriales à l’époque impériale: les choix de l’historien,” in *Cassius Dion: nouvelles lectures*, Bordeaux, 2:625-652.
- Evans, R. J. (1997) “The Augustan ‘Purge’ of the Senate and the Census of 86 BC,” *Acta Classica* 40: 77-86.
- Mallan, C. (2016) “Parrhêsia in Cassius Dio,” in *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, Leiden, 258-275.
- Nicolet, C. (1976) “Le Cens Sénatorial sous la République et sous Auguste,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 66: 20-38.
- Sattler, P. (1960) *Augustus und der Senat: Untersuchungen zur römischen Innenpolitik zwischen 30 und 17 v. Christus*. Göttingen.
- Stroux, J. (1938) “Die Versäumnisbuße der Senatoren,” *Philologus* 93: 85-101.
- Talbert, R. J. A. (1984a) “Augustus and the Senate,” *Greece & Rome* 31: 55-63.
- Talbert, R. J. A. (1984b) *The Senate of Imperial Rome*. Princeton.