

Bilingualism in Cassius Dio and the Second Sophistic

Introduction

Thank you to Adam and Colin and Beatrice for this amazing event, and to the entire Cassius Dio Network for this “ultimate Dio-experience” and for making me feel extremely welcome as a still very new Dio person. I guess technically I’m an “Alexander/Macedonians” person and a “Second Sophistic” person, and as you can tell from my title, I am approaching Dio today with a Second Sophistic type of question. Before anyone starts throwing rotten tomatoes at me, I assure you that I am not going to claim that Dio is a “sophistic historiographer.” I think we’re all pretty much agreed that Dio doesn’t fit the stereotype of a Second Sophistic author (the question of how useful the label is to begin with is for another day), but I also think that when you’re faced with this gigantic corpus of Greek imperial writing you’re bound to come across some vaguely destabilizing observations that make you want to keep asking questions about Greekness and literary production.

So I start with a simple observation, which is that Dio occasionally comments on the Greek and Latin bilingualism of emperors. Marcus Aurelius is the one that originally caught my eye, and I think it’s interesting to chew on because although I admit that I have not read every single piece of imperial Greek literature, I did not associate interest in bilingualism with the Hellenocentrism that characterizes so much of this literature. But I did see in Dio’s comment on bilingualism a version of the sort of self-reflexive literary pride found in those other Hellenocentric authors: if they pride themselves on Hellenic purity and judge their subject matter in terms of degree of Hellenicity, as a Greek writer of Roman history, it is only natural that Dio pride himself on being bilingual. So naturally he appreciates this quality in emperors. When I started looking further at

these passages, however, I started noticing that not all references to Greek and Latin bilingualism are positive. So first, I'll talk about why I think Dio is a particularly interesting case to consider for responses to bilingualism and then we'll look at some passages.

Groundwork for discussion

In the world *circa* 2018, it is no surprise the bilingualism and multilingualism are hot topics for specialists in a multitude of disciplines, and there's been a huge burst of energy in this direction among Classicists, especially Romanists, in the last few decades. Some recent work on Rome has emphasized that Rome had a multilingual, not bilingual, history, and have gone beyond the reflections of the literary elite on such matters to take into account all sorts of other evidence: archaeological, epigraphical, and papyrological. J. N. Adams's massive 2003 Cambridge volume *Bilingualism and the Latin language* deals with Latin and all the languages it came into contact with, including Greek but also Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian, etc., and edited volumes like those of Mullen and James have begun to broaden the field of Greco-Roman multilingualism even further to include Coptic, Neo-Punic, Iberian languages, etc. My focus is admittedly rather narrow, as I'm interested primarily in Greek and Latin bilingualism in an elite author, the relevance of which to Cassius Dio, "Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician", to quote the name of another famous edited volume, should be obvious. There is, however, an interesting reference to Greek and *Punic* bilingualism—you guessed it—Hannibal's, which we'll discuss at the end.

First, groundwork for discussion, and why Dio.

As the wonderful papers delivered by our two Christophers on the question of Dio's identity show, he does not make the Greek angle especially easy to pin down. He stands out in such obvious ways

from the writers we tend to characterize as Second Sophistic: for one thing, his immediate subject matter is Rome and not ancient Greece. He also speaks from a senatorial viewpoint, as most recently Adam in his book and Jesper in his article from his *Double Vision* volume have discussed. So it is pretty easy to say that Dio ain't that Greek, and I generally agree. But there is no fully escaping the fact that he's writing in this Atticizing Greek. Yes, as it has been pointed out, this is a product of his education, but Dio must be fully aware that he's writing in a Greek historiographical tradition which includes both the hard-headed Athenian realist Thucydides, and universal history, which is all written in Greek and, after Ephorus, is all about Rome. That is to say, Roman history is a longstanding part of the Greek literary tradition.

But to start at a very basic level, Dio shows a desire to differentiate Greek and Latin words for the same thing, and I'm not primary worrying about who his audience is, but just pointing to what this represents, which is a kind of bilingual authority. Bruno Rochette has categorized the three ways in which Latin has come into Greek (and this is number 1 on your handout): first, as transcription—or what we call transliteration of a Latin word into Greek letter-for-letter; second, a calque, which is a new word Greek made by translating the separate root forms involved in the original Latin word; and third, equivalence, which is “this Latin word is the same as this old Greek word”. In his 2010 article he gives two examples: *consul* and *quaestor*. For *consul*: the transcription (*per transcriptionem*) is *consul* to *kwnsoul*; the calque (*per translationem*) is *consul* to *sumboulos*; and the equivalence (*per comparationem*) is *consul* to *hupatos*). For *quaestor* you have for *transcriptio* *quaestor* to *k(o)uaistor*, for *translatio* you have *quaestor* to *tamias*; for *comparatio* you have *quaestor* to *zhthths*. For both *consul* and *quaestor*, Cassius Dio regularly uses *transcriptio* and *comparatio* (that is, *sumboulos* and *hupatos* for *consul*, and *tamias* and *zhthths*

for quaestor). There are also a couple of examples in which he gives a transcription and an equivalence, and actually discusses them (this is 1b on the handout).

For example, he says in Fragment 4.15: “The men were called in the tongue of the Latins **tribuni**, — the same name that was given to the commanders of a thousand, — but were styled **dêmarchoi** [leaders of the people] in the Greek language.

And in Fragment 6.19 he says: “There was, however, one man, styled **princeps** of the senate (he would be called **protikos** by the Greeks), who was superior to all for the time that he was thus honored (a person was not chosen to this position for life) and surpassed the rest in rank, without, however, wielding any power.”)

I think these kinds of comments allow Dio not only the “look” of authority over Roman politics, but as a *bilingual* authority. We can distinguish him here from Greek writers who may use Greek terms for Latin words, that is “equivalences”, but are not in the business of showing open awareness of Latin vs. Greek terms. Note that this also sets him apart from the kind of Latin speaker like Cicero who was fluent in Greek and code-switched between Latin and Greek. This is part of the fabric of Cicero’s literary style that pretends not to call attention to itself. But Dio is overtly telling us knows what’s what in both Greek and Latin.

The real question, though, is whether the assertion of such authority amounts to defensiveness on behalf of the Greek language specifically. In terms of the historical picture, by the time Dio was writing Romans had known Greek in either Atticizing or koine form (depending on their social class) for a very long time and the emperors were generous about letting Greeks be Greek-speakers, but they seemed to draw the line at official business. Adam in his book mentions a scene in the *Apollonius* where Apollonius rebukes Ionian dignitaries for using their Roman rather than Greek nomenclature, which I think reflects this reality that Greeks were expected to know enough

Latin to communicate with The State. I think the difficulty for us in determining whether Dio would have felt defensive over the dominance of Latin is illustrated by a passage that has a textual problem. It involves Lycians and not Greeks, but I still think it's interesting. In Book 60 on the ascension of Claudius, we are told a story (this is 2a on the handout) in which Claudius asks a Lycian who had been made a Roman citizen a question. The man didn't understand him, so Claudius took away his citizenship (and here I'm quoting the translation) "saying that it was not proper for a man to be a Roman who had no knowledge of the Romans' language." The Loeb translation goes on to say "A great many other persons unworthy⁸ of citizenship were also deprived of it, whereas he granted citizenship to others quite indiscriminately, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to whole groups." That translation seems to imply that Dio thinks that those who could not understand Latin did not deserve to have citizenship. Van Herwerden proposes an alternative reading <ὡς> καὶ ἀναξίους ("on the ground that they were unworthy"), which means that the opinion of unworthiness belongs to the Roman officials rather than to Cassius Dio himself. The question that's raised by this textual problem is: does Dio think that those who don't understand Latin really do not deserve citizenship? Or does he think that Claudius's regime is being a bit bullyish about Latin, especially considering how promiscuously it is otherwise handing out citizenship? I don't have an answer to this question, but again, the variant reading does suggest some difficulty in interpreting what the authors' attitude is to the dominance of Latin over Greek at Rome.

The texts

So now let's look at some passages about bilingual Romans. The *paideia* of Romans was of great interest to Plutarch, who wrote under Trajan and is exceptional among writers of his time for

his level of his interest in—or at least his literary exploitation of—the Romans. Simon Swain has noted that Plutarch shows little interest in the influence of Greek culture on Rome as a whole, but he’s nevertheless obsessed with the *paideia*, or Greek learning, of his heroes. A case in point is Titus Flamininus (2b on the handout). Plutarch describes him as humane in aspect (*philanthropos*, a typical “Greek” asset in Plutarch). And he describes him as a Greek (“Ἕλληνα) in voice (φωνή) and language (διάλεκτον). Plutarch also describes Flamininus as a lover of **genuine honor** (τιμῆς ἁληθοῦς). We see similar comments about Roman statesmen in Dio, but his interest is specifically in *bilingual* education. But when Cassius Dio is pointing out the bilingualism in individuals, what exactly is he trying to emphasize?

So let’s look at 2c, 2d, and 2e on your handout. In Book 45, Dio tells us that Augustus “was practised in oratory, not only in the Latin language but Greek [lit. “in this language] as well, was vigorously trained in military service, and thoroughly instructed in politics and the art of government.” About Marcus we hear that his education was of great assistance to him, for he had been trained both in rhetoric and in philosophical disputation and that his natural disposition... was greatly aided by his education. He was always steeping himself in Greek and Latin rhetorical and philosophical learning.” Of Hadrian we hear: “by nature he was fond of literary study in both the Greek and Latin languages. So if you just take those parts of the passages, it looks like a sort of update to Hellenocentric ideas of *paideia*. So instead of *paideia* being equated with Hellenicity, it’s now, appropriately, about expertise in both languages, which would reflect Dio’s own expertise. But when you look at the rest of what Dio is saying in these passages, things don’t look all that rosy. Now, with the revered Augustus, his bilingualism seems pretty straightforwardly positive. But with Marcus Aurelius and Hadrian there’s a negativity that seems to go along with praise of their bilingualism. So we already heard from Christopher about the phony philosophers that were

encouraged by Marcus Aurelius's studies—and note that Herodian in Book 1.2.4 says something quite different (and apologies for not putting this on the handout): “Alone of the emperors, he gave proof of his learning not by mere words or knowledge of philosophical doctrines but by his blameless character and temperate way of life. His reign thus produced a very large number of intelligent men, for subjects like to imitate the example set by their ruler.” But at the end of the passage, Dio says that “As a result of [Marcus's] close application and study he was extremely frail in body, though in the beginning he had been so vigorous that he used to fight in armor, and on the chase would strike down wild boars while on horseback; and not only in his early youth but even later he wrote most of his letters to his intimate friends with his own hand.” So the message seems to be that Marcus's education, which includes Greek and Latin rhetorical and philosophical learning is a good thing for **his** character, it makes his praiseworthy, but his education in general, impressive as it is, ends up having bad effects. It encourages people to claim to be philosophers just for the sake of making money from Marcus's favor. And it makes him physically weak. The causal idea is absolutely clear from the preposition ἐκ: “As a result of his close application and study he was extremely frail in body”. And then there's Hadrian with his incredible ambition: “By nature he was fond of literary study in both the Greek and Latin languages, and has left behind a variety of prose writings as well as compositions in verse. For his ambition was insatiable, and hence he practised all conceivable pursuits, even the most trivial; for example, he modelled and painted, and declared that there was nothing pertaining to peace or war, to imperial or private life, of which he was not cognizant. All this, of course, did people no harm; but his jealousy of all who excelled in any respect was most terrible and caused the downfall of many, besides utterly destroying several. For, inasmuch as he wished to surpass everybody in everything, he hated those who attained eminence in any direction. It was this feeling that led him to undertake to overthrow

two sophists, Favorinus the Gaul, and Dionysius of Miletus, by various methods, but chiefly by elevating their antagonists, who were of little or no worth at all.” So this is very interesting from the point of view of the sophists—if we accept Christopher’s Burden-Strevens’s thesis, and don’t read this at particularly pro-sophist, then perhaps the message is that what’s even worse than a *sophist* is an *emperor* who is so preoccupied with **sophistic competition** that he’d go out of way to make these silly men miserable.

Interestingly, the one person besides Augustus for whom bilingualism is fully positive is Hannibal: so I’ll try to quickly read this wonderful passage: “[Hannibal] was most resourceful in the suddenest emergency, and most steadfast to the point of utter trustworthiness [skipping a bit here]. Consequently he, above all other men, met each occasion with suitable words and acts, because **he viewed the expected and the actual in the same light**. He was able to manage matters thus for the reason that in addition to his natural capacity he was versed in much Phoenician learning common to his country, and likewise in much Greek learning, and furthermore he understood divination by the inspection of entrails. In addition to such mental qualities he was also equipped with a physique that had been brought to a state of equal perfection, partly by nature and partly by his manner of life, so that he could carry out easily everything that he undertook. [more on his physique: He kept his body agile and at the same time as compact as possible; and he could with safety, therefore, run, or stand his ground, or ride at furious speed. He never burdened himself with overmuch food, nor suffered through lack of it, but took more or less with equal readiness, feeling that either was satisfactory.] (To the end:) “Hardship made him rugged, and on loss of sleep he grew strong. Possessing these advantages of mind and body, he managed affairs in general as follows.”

So how might we put all this together? (And here I'll conclude.) We saw that Plutarch considered a Roman who knew the Greek language to be "Hellene"—that is, he was the embodiment of cultural, moral and political goodness. To put it a different way, for Plutarch, Hellenic *paideia* actually **explains** why a Roman would be politically successful. For Dio, on the other hand, too much intellectual activity may ultimately be detrimental to running the state, **even for someone who is a good emperor**: in other words, it is good for Roman emperors to immerse themselves in Greek as well as Latin learning, but it does not result in or go hand-in-hand with good policy. (And here one can draw a clear contrast with Dio Chrysostom who, in his *Kingship Orations*, tries to persuade Trajan that he can **only** be a good emperor if he has Greek *paideia*.) That said, for Cassius Dio, Greek **does** seem to have the ability to ennoble a barbarian like Hannibal. I have to admit that I still see in this collection of responses to bilingualism a self-reflexivity and literary pride on Dio's part that is inseparable from the fact that he is writing in Greek, even if he is not in any other way Hellenocentric. As an individual who proudly represents a Roman senatorial viewpoint **by means of** a huge Greek text that calls on long-standing Greek historiographical traditions, Dio puts himself in the position not only to judge the intellectual qualities of emperors, but to show how bilingualism **like his own**—which gives him access, for one thing, to an entire world of political philosophy in both Greek and Latin—can be correctly marshalled towards good Roman politics. It's worth recalling Dio's reference to Hadrian's literary output, which in that context comes across as a sort wrong-headed ambition. And maybe here we're coming back to Konstantin's senatorial utopia: maybe Dio is the best example of what he'd like to see running the state.