

INTRODUCTION

In Book 52 as we know, Dio stages the famous discourse of Maecenas, exhorting Octavian to assume the imperial power and instructing him on how to exercise it. It's not generally been recognised that the speech serves in part as a coda to Dio's Late Republican narrative and as the historian's final summary on why the *res publica* collapsed, as I've argued elsewhere. But evidently its chief function is to set out concrete suggestions for reform which Octavian will later go on to follow in the narrative, and to pass comment on the historian's contemporary political world.

Within Maecenas' advice on the ideal Imperial government there comes a long list of suggestions on how best to manage the relationship between centre and periphery. Although framed as advice to Octavian these suggestions clearly relate exclusively to the Roman Empire of the second and third centuries CE. In short what it amounts to is an attack on the independence and local identities of peripheral communities within the *imperium Romanum* and especially against the *poleis* of the Greek East. This is Lucius Cassius Dio at his most drab and puritanical. As shown in **section 1 on the handout**, virtually no aspect of the cultural life of the Greek cities is to be left untouched in the historian's grey new world. Their populations should never be permitted to assemble at all. Their cities should have few grand buildings. Public games and contests should be restricted so that the *poleis* do not waste their time squabbling in foolish rivalries, and there should be no more life-long pensions for victorious athletes and orators. Foreign dignitaries and wealthy visitors should not be pressured into donating money for these kinds of purpose, either—perhaps Dio had himself in mind. And the list goes on. Systems of local coinage and weights of measures ought to be scrapped, embassies from the *poleis* to the emperor should cease, and action must be taken to prevent cities from rivalling and competing with one another, especially in competition for honorific titles.

All these activities are recognisably those described as characteristic of the Greek *poleis* in the period known as the Second Sophistic. Dio himself surely had extensive first-hand experience of such communities. In his youth he travelled to Cilicia with his father: the region produced a string of sophists, ranging from the well-known Alexander Peloplaton to the comparatively

obscure Antiochus of Cilica. At a later time Dio was made *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna by the short-lived emperor Macrinus. These were among the first rank of intellectual centres in the Greek East of their day: Aelius Aristides himself was active in Pergamum—the city of Galen—and along with Smyrna it produced many sophists named in Philostratus' *Lives*. Then finally there was Dio's time in Nicomedia as a *comes* of Caracalla from 215 to 217, on which I will have more to say shortly. So Dio was evidently familiar with the *poleis* of the Greek East, but the words of Maecenas prove the old adage that familiarity breeds contempt.

In this paper I want to explore Cassius Dio's response to the intellectual and cultural context of his time and the effect of that response upon the way in which he wrote history. Dio is frequently described as an exponent of the Second Sophistic, a 'sophistic author', or even in one extreme example from the 80s as literally a sophist as such. But if that were the case then his attitude to the Greek *poleis* of the East would be very surprising and out of character. Brandon Jones has recently shown in an excellent paper that Dio's *παιδεία* is undeniable. But his self-promotion is hardly exceptional for any Greek historian and not just of this period either. In what follows I'd like to suggest that Dio was in fact remarkably suspicious of sophistry and sophists. Using concepts borrowed from the Classical tradition and drawing from his own first-hand experience, Dio criticised the sophists of the 2nd and 3rd centuries on three bases: firstly, their ambiguous relationship with philosophy and the tension between philosophy and rhetoric; secondly, their artificial and superficial self-presentation; and thirdly, their unorthodox behaviour, including accusations of effeminacy and irrelegious practices.

What I hope ultimately to show is that to be a Greek intellectual in this period does not necessarily imply an identification with sophistic tastes or practices. Dio was not seeking to write what has been termed a piece of 'sophistic historiography'. In fact his *Roman History* shows a sceptical and distinctive perspective on his own time which challenges any assumption that what we are dealing with is straightforwardly a product of the Second Sophistic. More broadly, in my concluding remarks I'm going to wrap up by discussing the significance of Dio's view in our understanding of the period. The *Roman History* cautions us to not be too all-encompassing in our definition of 'the Second Sophistic', a label which has become excessively broad and vague.

PHILOSOPHY & RHETORIC

So let's start with the tension between philosophy and rhetoric and the way in which Dio uses that conflict as a basis for critique of the sophists. Jeroen Lauwers has recently argued in his book that many Imperial Greek intellectuals sought to integrate philosophy with rhetoric and to resolve the traditional conflict between the two by giving to wisdom a more flexible definition. By this point the attempt to reconcile philosophical education and rhetorical education was an established one, tried by Isocrates for example in his discourse *Against the Sophists*. The logical end-point of Lauwers' argument is that in the Imperial period one can be both a sophist and a philosopher and those distinctions have started to lose some of their potency. That is not of course to say that self-professed philosophers such as Maximus of Tyre or Dio of Prusa did not themselves criticise sophists. There are numerous such examples in **section 3a on the handout**. But it is telling that many of these individuals figure themselves in Philostratus *Lives of the Sophists*. 'Sophist' and 'philosopher' had become flexible terms.

On the other hand Dio seems to have found the reconciliation between philosophy and sophistry difficult to accept. In particular, he returns to some time-honoured criticisms of sophists, especially the critique of them as sham philosophers or false philosophers. This attack has a pedigree reaching back to Classical antiquity—and especially Plato, who evidently influenced Dio. These attacks on false philosophers occur both in the Republican narrative and in the contemporary history. We can return to the speech of Maecenas for one example. Significantly, just after his recommendations to curtail the *poleis* that were the lifeblood of the sophists, Maecenas is made to warn Octavian about the danger posed by false philosophers. I won't quote the passage in full but the relevant material is underlined in **section 3 on the handout**. To pick out just a few details, Maecenas admonishes that "men who speak the occasional truth but really speak falsehoods for the greater part often encourage many to make trouble, and indeed, not a few of those who pretend to be philosophers do the same thing". Dio's paranoia seems amusing, but he closes the thought with a warning that those who falsely use philosophy as a screen pose a genuine risk to communities and individuals alike.

Dio's concern with genuine philosophy and its susceptibility to corruption returns in his comments on Marcus Aurelius' education. These can be found just beneath the Maecenas passage on the handout. Dio writes that, since the young Marcus took an interest in philosophy and was schooled to it by Junius Rusticus and Apollonius, "great numbers of people presented to pursue philosophy, hoping that they might be enriched by the emperor". Fergus Millar has suggested on the basis of this that Cassius Dio *disliked* philosophers and approved of sophists. But this is a misinterpretation of the text. The historian is not criticising philosophers at all. Indeed, he writes that Marcus nature was virtuous 'even before' he associated with teachers of philosophy. The implication here is that his innate virtue was only increased through these studies. The disapproval expressed here is toward those who pretended to be philosophers, not philosophers as such. It's clear in this passage that Dio viewed philosophy as a genuine pathway to virtue, which could be corroded by those who affected to follow it out of personal ambition for wealth or distinction.

For a more ambiguous example of Dio's distaste for false philosophers, we can take the case of Antiochus of Aegeae. Antiochus is described by Philostratus as a sophist from a distinguished Cilician family and there is every possibility that our historian met him. Antiochus appears to have been attached to Caracalla's court during the latter's campaign against Parthia around 216–217 CE, around the time that Dio himself was in Nicomedia with the emperor as his *comes*. Dio initially writes approvingly of Antiochus: though surely an old man by this time, he would roll about in the snow to lift the morale of Caracalla's freezing troops. However, he faked it as a Cynic philosopher, too, and grew rich from Septimius Severus and Caracalla's generosity: as a result he grew haughty and defected to Parthia, Rome's great enemy in the historian's day. Dio's concern, again, is not that all philosophers were fraudulent, but that there were sophists masquerading wrongly as such. In my view this excerpt also helps us to confirm that references to 'false philosophers' or 'those who pretend to be philosophers' in the *Roman History* are indeed about sophists such as Antiochus. In Dio the two are unsurprisingly synonymous.

Our historian might also be playing with some of these ideas in his Republican narrative. I'll have more to say on this in the final part of this paper but one excerpt in particular stands out. It's taken from Caesar's speech to the Senate in Book 43 after his victorious return from the civil war against Pompey. The purpose of this short speech is to reassure the Senate that he

will not be a tyrant like Marius or Sulla and to disavow any accusation of deliberately seeking power. Obviously the statements made by Caesar are loaded with irony. For example, he assures the audience that he has never disguised his true nature (43.15.5). I doubt Ariovistus in Book 38 would agree. Caesar claims that his only objective in rising to power has been to punish the enemies of the Republic (43.15.7). This is a barefaced lie and Dio wants us to know it. He also elaborates at some length on his track record of clemency, treating as preposterous any suspicion that he will put individuals to death (43.15.2–5). This would be more convincing were it not for the fact that immediately before this speech Dio gives a list of the various underhanded ways in which Caesar killed off his enemies, some of his friends, and even in one case a member of his own family. Dio doesn't want us to trust Caesar here. So in that context I take as significant Caesar's closing remarks, which you'll find at the **bottom of section 3 on the handout**. They have to be quoted in full to be *enjoyed* as Dio intended:

These statements that I have made are *no mere sophistries* (ταῦτα δὲ οὐκ ἄλλως ἐφιλοσόφησα), but are intended to convince you that what I think and say is *not merely for effect* (οὐκ ἐς ἐπίδειξιν) nor yet thoughts that have just chanced to occur to me on the spur of the moment...Consequently you may not only be of good courage in the present, but also hopeful for the future, when you reflect that, if I had really been using any pretence, I should not now be deferring my projects, but would have made them known *this very day*.

This oration makes even Dio's Pompey look honest. But that's not the pertinent issue here. Somewhat bizarrely the historian is making his Caesar into a false philosopher. We know that his words are dishonest because of the contradiction between the account he gives of his actions and intentions and their actual performance in the narrative immediately prior. The dismissive tone in the Greek, ταῦτα δὲ οὐκ ἄλλως ἐφιλοσόφησα, indicates Dio's awareness of the distinction between genuine wisdom on the one hand and banal or superficial philosophy on the other. The immediate association of philosophising with mere display or mere effect may also be significant—that is, ἐφιλοσόφησα and ἐπίδειξιν in the Greek. Epideictic or 'display' oratory is usually described as a characteristic feature of the Second Sophistic. I may be reading too much into this. But given what we have seen before in Maecenas' speech and the account of Marcus Aurelius' education and Antiochus the sophist, this seems to me at the

very least to suggest that Dio did recognise a tension between philosophical thought, or *sophia*, and rhetoric as performance, or *epideixis*.

So what can we say in summary at this point before we move on. On the one hand, Dio endorsed traditional critiques of the sophists as false philosophers. I am hard pressed to think who else he has in mind when attacking *hoi prospoioumenoi philosophhein*. On the other hand, Dio seems to maintain a distinction between the realms of philosophy and rhetoric and does not work to reconcile the traditional conflict between the two. To my mind, then, what begins to emerge here is evidence of Dio's scepticism toward the Second Sophistic rather than wholesale endorsement of it.

SOPHISTIC SELF-PRESENTATION

But to expand that picture let's turn to some other passages in the *Roman History*, and especially to those from Dio's time with the Imperial Court in Nicomedia between 215 and 217. One of the especially interesting aspects of this section of the narrative is the focus on the way in which members of the court act and dress. Here too I think Dio may be reflecting certain common critiques of the sophists, especially their self-presentation. One well-recognised component of sophistic self-presentation in this period is the guise of philosophical poverty and humble simplicity. There are numerous examples, but I've put only a few on **section 4a on the handout**. Take the sophist Apuleius as a case in point. We know that Apuleius wore modest garb, employed few servants, and carried a wooden staff in order to enhance his self-fashioning as a Platonist. Aristocles of Pergamum is described in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* as doing the same. These practices also appear to have been sufficiently common to become the subject of satire. So Maximus of Tyre quips in the *Dialexeis* that "a purse and staff do not constitute emulation of Diogenes", critiquing sophistic masquerades of philosophical penury. Even Apuleius himself wasn't above this kind of satire. In the opening sections of his *Golden Ass*, Apuleius has his chief protagonist accidentally encounter an acquaintance of his, emaciated and sitting on the ground dressed in the scraps of a shabby Greek *pallium*. Of course the name of this enlightened beggar is—you guessed it—Socrates. For many Greek sophists of the Roman Empire, the affectation of humble simplicity was thus a way to enhance their philosophical credentials.

Dio may be playing with these ideas in his own account of courtly life at Nicomedia. This is most arresting in the contrast he sets up between of Julia Domna and her rather disappointing son Caracalla. I've put the relevant passage **at the bottom of page 2 on the handout**. Dio notes that Julia, on the one hand, hosted public gatherings and kept active with her alleged circle of intellectuals, maintaining her interest and engagement in philosophical discussion. But Caracalla, on the other hand, assumed a false guise a poverty. While *she* engaged in philosophy, *he* preened and plumed on his ability to live on nothing more than the necessities of life and the cheapest food. Of course Dio notes that this was nothing more than an affectation; in reality there was nothing on heaven and earth that he did not desire from Dio and other aristocrats, including gifts of money. This contrast between mother and son is conscious and deliberate. As in the case of Caesar's speech to the Senate, Dio sets up an antithesis between philosophy on the one hand and display on the other, Julia *versus* Caracalla. This antithesis reflects contemporary critiques of the artifice of sophistic self-presentation and Dio is tapping into that discourse here.

Another component of that discourse is feminine and un-manly behaviour, or *malakia*. This charge seems a little absurd but we know from Philostratus of a number of sophists whose allegedly affected and feminine behaviour such as elaborate dress, theatrical *gestus* and a high-pitched voice brought them into suspicion. We find similar testimony in Gellius' *Attic Nights*. Like the guise of poverty, histrionic behaviour was also sufficiently well-recognised to become the object of derision in satirical texts such as Lucian's *Teacher of Rhetoric*. Dio himself seems to have found *malakia* quite unpalatable and the speech of Maecenas is again where the historian gives air to those views. Maecenas is made to advise Octavian not to allow anyone, regardless of birth or wealth, to put on a show of affected or effeminate behaviour, *malakia*; the quote is on **section 4b on the handout**.

We certainly know of one sophist active at court in Dio's time who fell foul of this injunction: Philiscus of Thessaly. In the *Lives of the Sophists*, Philostratus records that the people of the *polis* of Heordaea filed a suit against Philiscus to force him to fulfil civic functions at his own expense. The case was referred to Rome and accordingly Philiscus travelled to the capital to protect his interests. It seems that Philiscus did not impress the emperor, as we can see in the first extended passage in **section 4b on the handout**. His eccentric gestures and inappropriate dress were offensive; his voice was effeminate; and the way he stood and deported himself

was irritating, leading Caracalla to call out, “even his *hair* shows what sort of man he is! His voice shows what sort of orator too!”

Now it’s entirely possible that Dio was present at court to see Philiscus’ wacky hairdo for himself. According to Fergus Millar’s calculations, the approximate date of Philiscus’ performance in front of the emperor was some time in 213 CE before the latter’s expedition to Gaul. The highly anecdotal and personalised account Dio gives of events at court in this year suggest that the historian may have been at court himself and evidently at least he was not away on some appointment or official post within the empire. Perhaps Dio even had Philiscus in mind when writing his speech of Maecenas and the criticisms of effeminate behaviour contained therein.

At any rate, we *do* know that sophists were certainly active at the Imperial Court during periods where Dio was attached to it and can even name some of them. Philiscus and Philostratus are two, and Julia Domna’s so-called ‘circle’ of intellectuals has been much discussed. These are the more obvious examples. But there were also embassies to Caracalla which would be lost to us were it not for the epigraphic record. These embassies came to Caracalla during his time in Nicomedia between 215 and 217 when we know Dio himself was in attendance at the Imperial Court. There are examples in **section 4c on the handout**. So we know from the *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* of a petition to the emperor from an anonymous Ephesian, arguing that the major intellectual centre of Ephesus ought to be pre-eminent in Asia Minor and be selected as the seat of the proconsular *conventus*. Another in the *IGRR* dated to 215 records an embassy to Caracalla by the sophist Prusias of Hypium, who appealed to the emperor for the right to wear the *latus clavus*. It is entirely possible that Dio saw these petitions first-hand during his time attending the emperor in Nicomedia. We should remember that these kinds of direct appeal to the emperor for frivolous and trivial matters are precisely the sort of thing that Cassius Dio wished to see abolished, as he makes his Maecenas argue in the passage displayed in **section 4c on the handout**. Fergus Millar suggests that Dio in fact wrote this oration of Maecenas *in Nicomedia itself* some time around 215. If so, then Maecenas’ speech takes on extra potency as an attempt to restrict the privileges of the *poleis* of the Greek East and the sophists that represented them. It reflects Dio’s first-hand experience in Nicomedia!

RELIGIOUS IRREGULARITY

Thus far we've seen our historian returning to the fairly traditional critique of the sophists as false philosophers and maintaining the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy. We've also seen Dio responding negatively to the *habitus* of sophistic performance, including for example the artifice of assumed poverty and the affectation of effeminacy. It's possible that Dio's attitude to these traits emerged as much from his own personal experiences at court, especially in Nicomedia, as from anything else. But third and finally I'd like to make a few brief comments regarding some peculiar notices in the *Roman History* on religious irregularity and sorcery.

Oddly, where Dio mentions magic and charlatanism in his history this often seems to be in connection with sophists. The connection seems preposterous to us, but it was by no means one that the historian himself invented and it in fact long predates him. In antiquity certain displays of rhetoric and superhuman feats of *memoria* were so dazzling that an accusation of witchcraft was never far behind. The classic treatment of this is Jacqueline de Romilly's 1975 *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*. The equation between magic and brilliant rhetoric goes back at least as far as Philostratus' first sophist, Gorgias of Leontini. Closer to Dio's own time we know of several sophists whose displays were so dazzling that their audiences accused them of irrelegious or supernatural practices. A few are listed in **section 5 on the handout**. The sophist Hadrian of Tyre was so brilliant that he was called a sorcerer or γόης. Similarly, Dionysius of Miletus' skill at *memoria* was so exceptional that Philostratus in the *Lives of the Sophists* insists that the sophist did not use magic to teach it. Most famously of all, Apollonius of Tyana experienced similar accusations of witchcraft. In his *Life of Apollonius*, Philostratus devotes a long passage to a direct speech of Apollonius allegedly defending himself against the charge of using magic.

One of Apollonius' accusers was in fact Cassius Dio himself. Let's return to his comparison of Julia Domna and her son Caracalla in winter-quarters at Nicomedia. I've put an expanded version in **section 5 on the handout**. Immediately after comparing Julia and the emperor in language which I have argued reflects his discomfort with sophistic artificiality and pretensions for philosophical poverty, Dio goes on to mention Apollonius of Tyana. He writes (and I quote) that "Caracalla's delight in magicians and tricksters was so great that he praised

an honoured Apollonius of Cappadocia, who had flourished under Domitian and really was a magician and trickster” (καὶ γόης καὶ μάγος ἀκριβῆς ἐγένετο). Note the use of ἀκριβῆς in the Greek: Dio is asserting what he believes to be a fact and rejecting Philostratus’ defence of Apollonius against the charge of witchcraft.

The formulation καὶ γόης καὶ μάγος, or “magician and trickster”, and variations of it recur several times in the *Roman History*. Take for example Sempronius Rufus, again in **section 5 on the handout**. Dio’s criticism of Rufus as a magician and trickster occurs just before his attack against Apollonius as a charlatan and Antiochus as a false Cynic philosopher. There is a sophist called Rufus in Philostratus whose chronology overlaps with this Sempronius Rufus, but the two are almost certainly not the same individual. At the very least, the case of Sempronius Rufus gives evidence to Dio’s severe hostility toward and mistrust of sorcery and witchcraft, so throwing his criticism of the sophist Apollonius of Tyana as a γόης καὶ μάγος into sharper relief.

Besides, in Dio’s view the risk posed to communities by magicians and tricksters is much the same as that posed by sophists—that is, by false philosophers. Both were to Cassius Dio a menace who disguised their falsehoods under a veneer of truth. For this thought we can return to Maecenas one last time, in the passage at the **top of page 4 on the handout**. Dio’s Maecenas warns Octavian to allow no one to be an atheist or magician, nor indeed to practice magic tricks of any kind. I think it significant that this admonishment of Dio’s against magic feeds immediately into his warning against the danger posed by false philosophers. The historian places false philosophy, sophistry, and trickery and charlatanism into the same thought. To him, supposedly respectable and reputed sophists such as Apollonius of Tyana were really little better than the street mountebank inviting the peoples of the *poleis* of the Greek East to roll up, roll up.

CONCLUSION

I’d best wrap up. In this paper I’ve argued that Cassius Dio viewed the sophists of his own day with some hesitation and scepticism. On the one hand our historian seems to me to endorse some conventional criticisms of the sophists which have a Classical pedigree, and resists the Imperial trend for integrating philosophy with rhetoric or resolving the tension

between the two. On the other, he also appears to draw from his personal experiences at the Imperial Court, especially from his time in Nicomedia, when embassies of sophists were not infrequent and when Dio came into contact with sophists such as Antiochus, Philiscus, and of course Philostratus himself. I'd suggest that these experiences informed much of his centralising stance in the speech of Maecenas and perhaps also his repeated attacks upon false philosophers and effeminate or histrionic individuals.

In short, I am not sure that Dio's *Roman History* is the example of 'sophistic historiography' it is so often held to be. There are of course many possible objections to my view. Dio chose to write in the archaising prestige-dialect of Attic. Fine, but using Attic as a literary language took deliberate training and time. This choice is as much a reflection and advertisement of the historian's *otium* as a marker of his 'sophistic' tendencies. Besides, Sallust and Thucydides regularly used archaic forms. It's also possible that Dio's critique of the sophists is in fact evidence that he was himself a sophist. After all, Dio of Prusa and Apuleius and Aristides and Maximus of Tyre and umpteen others attested in Philostratus' biography attacked the sophists. But there's a critical difference here. These individuals were self-professed philosophers advocating their views from the speaker's platform. Attacking the sophists was thus a necessary way to negotiate the tension between philosophy and rhetoric and assert the truth of one's philosophical views. Dio was not an orator. We only have hard evidence of him speaking publicly once, and that was a forensic speech against Didius Julianus. In this connection it is worthy of note that Philostratus directly contrasts juridical speech with sophistic speech and none of his sophists is ever recorded speaking in court. And if Dio really did declaim his Agrippa–Maecenas debate publicly at the Imperial Court, then its function seems to me rather to attack sophistic culture than to demonstrate his dependence upon it.

A final thought. Dio believed passionately in the power of oratory, and says so in his own words in his fragmentary account of the conversation between Fabricius and Pyrrhus. In his attack on false philosophers and magicians and tricksters in his speech of Maecenas, the historian writes emphatically of the danger posed to communities by a persuasive tongue. What better example could there be of the truth of Maecenas' warning than Dio's account of the Late Republic? In Books 36 to 52 oratory is a force for evil, not for good. In this respect, then, Dio's *Roman History* certainly was a product of his view of the Second Sophistic: Beware the dazzling orator skilled at persuasive speech.