

HOW MANY BOOKS DID DIODORUS SICULUS ORIGINALLY INTEND TO WRITE?

Diodorus Siculus was notoriously inconsistent in his statements about the terminal date of his survey of history, the *Bibliotheca Historica*. In the 'table of contents' (1.4.7) which he included in the general preface to the whole work, written apparently when he was preparing his manuscript for publication (probably about 30 B.C.), he specifically names the year 60/59 ('the first year of the 180th Olympiad, when Herodes was archon at Athens') as the last year of his narrative.¹ Elsewhere, however, he not only gives a figure for the period of history encompassed by his work which would bring it down to 46/5, but he also on several occasions expresses the intention of including within his narrative some account of Julius Caesar's activities in Gaul, which implies a terminal date later than c. 52 B.C.² How can this discrepancy be explained? The most economical hypothesis would be that Diodorus set out at first to compose a work that should go down to 46/5, but at some later stage in the composition changed his mind, and set back his terminus to 60/59. His originally intended terminus was most likely the triple triumph of Julius Caesar, whom Diodorus clearly admired beyond all other contemporary leaders. The decision in favour of an earlier terminus will have been due either to simple fatigue or to disillusionment with the course followed by Caesar's heir after 44 B.C. and anxiety about the dangers of dealing with events of a too recent and controversial past.³

The *Bibliotheca* in the form that resulted from this decision comprised forty books, a tidy multiple of ten (the same, incidentally, as that produced by Polybius, a historian whom Diodorus evidently admired and by whom he was much influenced⁴). No one seems to have asked how many books Diodorus originally intended to compose, had

¹ I have discussed the probable publication date of the *Bibliotheca* in 'The organization and composition of Diodoros' *Bibliothēke*', *Classical Views* n.s. 6 (1987), 313–28, esp. 322–8, and 'The chronology of the punishment and reconstruction of Sicily by Octavian/Augustus', *AJA* 89 (1985), 521–2. The whole of 1.4 appears to look back at the process of composition of the *Bibliotheca* from the time of its completion (note especially 1.4.6: '... my undertaking is now completed, although the volumes are as yet unpublished'). It will be clear from what follows that I share the opinion expressed by R. Laqueur ('Diodorea', *Hermes* 86 [1958], 257–90, esp. 285–90) that 1.5.1 is a relic of an earlier stage in the composition of the preface.

² A terminus of 46/5 is implied by the figures at 1.5.1. Promises to discuss Julius Caesar's exploits are found at 3.38.2 (promise to describe Caesar's advancement of Roman rule into Britain—55 B.C.), 5.21.2 (promise to describe Caesar's conquest of Britain—55 B.C.), and 5.22.1 (promise to describe the customs of the Britons). In addition, 4.19.2 alludes to Caesar's sack of Alesia (52 B.C.), and 5.25.4 to his bridging of the Rhine (55 or 53 B.C.). A further complication in the use of these passages to establish a *terminus post quem* for the composition of the *Bibliotheca* is the fact that three of them (4.19.2, 5.21.2, and 5.25.4) refer to Julius Caesar with a formula that translates the title *Divus*, which was bestowed on him only late in 42 B.C. See the discussion in Rubincam, 'Organization' (above, n. 1), 322–8.

³ This is the hypothesis presented in Rubincam, 'Organization' (above, n. 1), 324–8. See also M. Sartori, 'Note sulla datazione dei primi libri della *Bibliotheca Historica* di Diodoro Siculo', *Athenaeum* 71 (1983), 545–52.

⁴ It has long been accepted that Diodorus used Polybius as a major source for the first half of the second century B.C., as well as a few episodes in the previous century: see E. Schwartz, 'Diodoros', no. 38, *RE* 5 (1903), 688–90. Stylistic influence is also documented by J. Palm, *Ueber Sprache und Stil des Diodoros von Sizilien* (Lund, 1955), esp. pp. 76–93. Imitation of Polybian sentiments by Diodorus has often been suggested: see, e.g., Schwartz, 'Diodoros', col. 663. K.S. Sacks (*Diodorus Siculus and the First Century* [Princeton, 1990], pp. 10, 37–40, 121–2, 132–40)

he carried out his intention of continuing for the extra fifteen years down to 46/5 B.C.

The first and most obvious question that needs to be asked is, of course: did ancient historians plan their works in advance to comprise a certain number of bookrolls? For historians of the earliest generations the answer appears to be that they did not. There is at least a strong tradition that the now canonical book divisions in the works of both Herodotus and Thucydides were due to Alexandrian editors rather than to their original authors.⁵ But it appears that Ephorus set the fashion for using bookrolls as units in the internal organization of his historical works: he wrote a preface to inaugurate each book—a practice that in effect canonized his book divisions as an essential element of the work. In some, at least, of these prefaces he discussed aspects of the organization and content of various parts of the work.⁶ Other ancient historians followed his example. Not all those who did, however, bothered to make their totals multiples of ten or of some other obvious unit: Theopompus, Timaeus, and Poseidonius are obvious examples of authors whose book numbers do not look like the result of a schematic division conceived in advance of its execution.⁷ But the thirty books of Ephorus and the forty of Polybius suggest deliberate planning—in the latter case we know that Polybius originally composed thirty books, ending in 168/7, and then revised the work, adding ten more books, when he decided to extend it down to 146/5.⁸ Another kind of advance numerical organization and planning is attested for Livy, who apparently wrote his work, and indeed probably brought it out, in segments consisting of five or ten books at a time, the divisions between these segments being made at points which the author regarded as of special significance in the development of the Roman state.⁹

Diodorus was, of course, an earlier contemporary of Livy, and a strong admirer of Ephorus. He followed Ephorus' example in composing a preface to each book of his *Bibliotheca*, and in several of those prefaces he discussed questions about the internal organization of specific books.¹⁰ This suggests that for him book divisions were an essential aspect of the internal organization of his long and complex work. And it is surely probable that his advance planning included some projection of how many books his whole work would encompass, as well as roughly what the contents of each book would be.¹¹ If this is correct, it is not foolish to ask how many books he originally aimed to write, to carry his narrative down to 46/5 B.C., and whether there is any evidence that he planned his work to consist, like Livy's, of intelligible segments of a certain number of books.

The first of these questions seems not to have been explicitly asked before. Three possible answers suggest themselves: (i) that when he set out to compile his work, Diodorus had no fixed idea of how many books it might run to; (ii) that forty was the

examines this question thoroughly and concludes that there were general similarities, but also significant differences, between their attitudes on many questions.

⁵ Editions of Thucydides with more than the canonical eight books were known in antiquity (Marcellinus, *Life of Thucydides* 57; Diod. 12.37.2).

⁶ See F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 70 T 10 (= Diod. 16.76.5).

⁷ Theopompus' *Philippica* had fifty-eight books (*FGrHist* 115 T 1), Timaeus apparently wrote thirty-eight (*FGrHist* 566 T 1), and Poseidonius 52 (*FGrHist* 87 T 1).

⁸ On Polybius' original plan and its revision see F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 13–27.

⁹ See T. J. Luce, *Livy: The Composition of His History* (Princeton, 1977).

¹⁰ For example, 5.1.4, 16.1.1–3, 17.1.1–2.

¹¹ The discrepancy between 1.4.7 and 1.5.1 concerning the terminus of the *Bibliotheca* can best be explained, as Laqueur pointed out (above, n. 1), by assuming that 1.5.1 is an unrevised section from an earlier version of the preface.

total he originally aimed at; (iii) that initially he expected to write something more than forty. The first is probably the assumption made unthinkingly by most students of Diodorus, since they do not as a rule credit him with much advance thought or planning for the composition of the *Bibliotheca*. In a pair of articles published a few years ago I have argued, against this assumption, that Diodorus' method of work had something in common with that of Livy (as reconstructed by T. J. Luce) and that of Cassius Dio (as reconstructed by T. D. Barnes), both of whom spent a considerable time in preliminary reading, planning, and organization before beginning to write.¹²

If the second suggestion were right, then Diodorus would have had to adjust the divisions between books in the latter part of his work (over how many books it is impossible to say) so that the average number of years included in each book was smaller than originally projected. Since individual books show considerable deviation from the mean in this respect, it is hard to deny categorically that such a readjustment took place.¹³ The average number of years included in each of the last five books (nine) is slightly smaller, to be sure, than the average for the last twenty books (twelve), but this might be due to the well-known tendency of writers of long histories to deal in more detail with events closer to their own lifetimes.¹⁴ While possibility (ii) cannot thus be ruled out, it is worth at least considering possibility (iii), namely that the originally projected length of the *Bibliotheca* was something more than the forty books of its truncated length. How many more books would have been required to carry the narrative down to 46/5? On the basis of the average figure for the last five books given above, something between one and two.

Let us turn back now to the second question: is there any evidence that Diodorus

¹² See Rubincam, 'Organization' (above, n. 1), 324–328. Luce's work on Livy is cited above (n. 9); Barnes discussed Cassius Dio's working method in 'The Composition of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*', *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 240–55.

¹³ The following list tabulates the period of history encompassed by each of the last thirty books of the *Bibliotheca*. The first six books, since they consist of a mixture of archaeology and mythology, cannot be included. For books 7–10 we lack sufficient evidence for the book boundaries. The figures for books 21–40, which survive only in fragments, are obviously no more than tentative estimates. It will be observed that the average for the last 20 books, which we know to have covered the years 301–60 B.C., is 12.1 years per book, but that some books deviate widely from that figure: the extremes are book 30, which covers only four years, and book 29, which covers twenty-two.

book 11:	480–451 (30 yrs)	book 26:	c. 218–207 (12 yrs)
book 12:	450–416 (35 yrs)	book 27:	c. 206–202 (5 yrs)
book 13:	415–405 (11 yrs)	book 28:	c. 201–194 (8 yrs)
book 14:	404–387 (18 yrs)	book 29:	c. 193–172 (22 yrs)
book 15:	386–361 (26 yrs)	book 30:	c. 171–168 (4 yrs)
book 16:	360–336 (25 yrs)	book 31:	c. 167–152 (16 yrs)
book 17:	335–324 (12 yrs)	book 32:	c. 151–146 (6 yrs)
book 18:	323–218 (6 yrs)	book 33:	c. 145–136 (10 yrs)
book 19:	317–311 (7 yrs)	book 34:	c. 135–? (31/2 yrs)
book 20:	310–302 (9 yrs)	book 35:	c. ?–105 (31/2 yrs)
book 21:	301–c. 281 (21 yrs)	book 36:	c. 104–95 (10 yrs)
book 22:	c. 280–265 (16 yrs)	book 37:	c. 94–88 (7 yrs)
book 23:	c. 264–251 (14 yrs)	book 38:	c. 87–? (16/2 yrs)
book 24:	c. 250–241 (10 yrs)	book 39:	c. ?–72 (16/2 yrs)
book 25:	c. 240–219 (22 yrs)	book 40:	c. 71–60 (12 yrs)

(Note that the fragments from books 34 and 35 and from books 38 and 39 cannot be certainly separated.)

¹⁴ See, e.g., Luce, *Livy*, p. 18.

planned his work to consist of intelligible segments of a standard number of books? We can perhaps answer this by studying the extant prefaces. Each book of the *Bibliotheca* normally begins with a few chapters of general preface, often discussing some question of historiographic principle. Between the preface proper and the commencement of the regular narrative of the book there normally stands a paragraph which reviews in outline the contents of the preceding book and summarizes the tract of history to be covered in the book just opening.¹⁵ In fact, every one of the prefaces to the largely complete books (1–5 and 11–20¹⁶) contains a summary of that book's contents, and all but those of books 5, 16, 19, and 20 contain summaries of the preceding book or books. In a few of the fully extant books, however, the review of what has gone before carries back over more than just the single preceding book, and in two of them, books 13 and 19, we get an explicit summary of 'the previous six books' and 'the previous eighteen books', respectively.¹⁷ Furthermore, the first six books, being devoted to a mixture of 'archaeology' and 'mythology' (these are Diodorus' terms) are clearly marked off as a separate division, the first half of which treats barbarian material, the second Greek.¹⁸ Did Diodorus, then, plan to build up his work as a succession of hexads—an organizational scheme sometimes suggested for Polybius?¹⁹ If so, then a total of seven such groups of six books each would add up to 42, exactly the number of books that would have been needed, according to the calculation offered above, to carry his narrative fifteen years beyond where it now finishes.

Does such a notional division into hexads produce a series of large units each beginning and ending at a point of particular historical significance? The continuing controversy about the significance of the boundaries between Livy's pentads and decades is a warning that this kind of question invites very subjective responses.²⁰ Still, the boundary points between hexads in Diodorus' scheme, so far as they can be calculated, seem likely, on the whole, to have appeared significant to a Sicilian Greek historian writing in the last days of the Roman Republic.²¹

¹⁵ The sources upon which Diodorus may have drawn for the theoretical discussions in his prefaces have been much discussed. K. S. Sacks, 'The Lesser *Prooemia* of Diodorus Siculus' (*Hermes* 110 [1982], 434–41), discusses the older literature, and argues that, whatever their ultimate inspiration, the prefaces are an integral part of Diodorus' own conceptual scheme for the *Bibliotheca*. In any case, the 'tables of contents' of the individual books are clearly Diodorus' own work.

¹⁶ The preface to book 11 is missing.

¹⁷ Sentences reminding the reader of the contents of the immediately preceding book are found at: 2.1.1, 3.1.1, 4.1.5, 11.1.1, 12.2.2, 13.1.2–3, 14.2.3–4, 15.1.6, 17.1.1, 18.1.5–6. The prefaces to books 13 (1.2–3) and 19 (1.9–10) are unique in stopping to sum up explicitly the contents of the preceding six books (namely 7–12) and the preceding 18 books (namely 1–18), respectively. The prefaces to 14 and 20 give summary descriptions of the contents of the preceding seven and nineteen books, respectively, but without specifying the number of books referred to in each case.

¹⁸ On the first six books see 1.4.6, which sets out in advance the division between 'events and myths' of the barbarians and of the Greeks, while 4.1.5 summarizes in particular detail the barbarian myths that were the subject of the preceding three books, as a prelude to embarking on the complementary topic of Greek myths.

¹⁹ Walbank, *Polybius*, pp. 97–9, discusses, without apparently endorsing, the suggestion that Polybius arranged his 'forty books roughly in groups of six' (p. 98).

²⁰ See the discussion of Luce, *Livy*, pp. 3–32.

²¹ Book 7 began with the sequel to the Trojan War, which Ephorus had chosen as the beginning of his *koine historia* (*FGrHist* 70 T 8 = Diod. 4.1.2). Book 13 began with the Athenian attack on Syracuse (415), 19 with Agathocles' rise to power in Sicily (317), 25 with the sequel to the First Punic War (240—significantly, the beginning of Roman rule in Sicily, her first province), 31 with the sequel to the Roman conquest of Perseus (167—the beginning of the first Roman take-over

To sum up, I have argued here that Diodorus originally intended to compose a work of forty-two books, subdivided into seven hexads, which would have ended in 46/5 B.C. When he made the decision to set back the terminus to 60/59, he reduced the final hexad to a group of only four books. Why then did he not spell out the details of the original organizational scheme at the end of the general preface?²² The answer must be that by the time he wrote the final version of that general preface he had realized that the changed terminal point spoiled the perfection of the hexadic scheme. He preferred, therefore, to de-emphasize that aspect of the organization of the *Bibliotheca*. Instead, he chose to concentrate solely on another organizational device, involving no regular numerical pattern: the epochal significance of Alexander's career formed the bridge between the superhuman achievement of the mythological heroes, especially Heracles, and that of Julius Caesar, Diodorus' favourite contemporary hero, who, like Heracles and Alexander, received his due reward in apotheosis.²³

University of Toronto at Mississauga

CATHERINE RUBINCAM

of a great Hellenistic kingdom, Macedonia), and 37 with the 'Marsic' or Social War (91—the war which forced the Romans to extend their citizenship to the Italian allies).

²² The 'table of contents' in the general preface (1.4.6) specifies the following large divisions: the first six books, containing 'events and myths before the Trojan War' (the first three 'those of the barbarians', the next three 'more or less the archaeologies of the Greeks'); the following eleven books, containing 'events following the Trojan War told in a common scheme . . . down to the death of Alexander'; the subsequent 23 books, containing 'all the remaining events . . . down to the beginning of the war that broke out between the Romans and the Celts . . . '.

²³ On these connections in Diodorus' thought see Sartori (art. cit.) and *id.*, 'Storia, "utopia" e mito nei primi libri della *Bibliotheca Historica* di Diodoro Siculo', *Athenaeum* 72 (1984), 492–536. Laqueur (art. cit.) also emphasizes the significant difference in the conception behind 1.4 and 1.5, which he attributes to the evolution of Diodorus' ideas during the composition of the *Bibliotheca*.

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