

THE COMPOSITION OF CASSIUS DIO'S *ROMAN HISTORY*

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“I SPENT TEN YEARS in collecting all the achievements of the Romans from the beginning to the death of Severus, and another twelve in writing my history: subsequent events will be recorded to wherever it may be possible.” So Cassius Dio, in the summary by Xiphilinus, describes the composition of his *Roman History* (72.23.5). To what period of twenty-two years does he refer? Until very recently, modern scholars who wrote about Dio adopted chronologies which exhibited an unusually high degree of unanimity. Eduard Schwartz, in what long remained the authoritative study of the historian (published in 1899), dated the beginning of Dio's enterprise to 194, the year after the accession of Septimius Severus, the completion of Book LXXVII, which ended with Severus' death, to 216. Schwartz, however, also believed that Dio subsequently made substantial additions, including the whole of Book LII, in the reign of Severus Alexander.¹ Emilio Gabba in 1955 and Fergus Millar in 1964 adopted a chronology very close to that of Schwartz, but without the concession that Dio revised his *History* systematically: Gabba and Millar identified the twenty-two years as 196–218 and 197–219 respectively, and allowed no later revision to Books I–LXXVII beyond the addition of a very few brief sentences or clauses.² Even G. Vrind, who wished to bring the decade during which Dio collected material down to the death of Severus to an end after 4 February 211, made the minimum modification necessary to Schwartz's chronology

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References to individual passages of Dio are given by the conventional numbering of books, chapters, and sections, to be found in the margins and at the top of the right-hand pages of U. P. Boissevain's edition (Berlin 1898–1905), while references to whole books correspond to Dio's original numbering, stated by Boissevain at the beginning of each book and at the top of the left-hand pages. The following modern works are cited by author's name only: E. Schwartz, “Cassius Dio,” *RE* 3 (1899) 1684–1722, reprinted in his *Griechische Geschichtschreiber* (Leipzig 1959) 394–450; E. Gabba, “Sulla Storia Romana di Cassio Dione,” *RSI* 67 (1955) 289–333; F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964); C. Letta, “La composizione dell' opera di Cassio Dione: cronologia e sfondo storico-politico,” *Ricerche di Storiografia greca di età romana* (Pisa 1979) 117–189.

¹Schwartz 1686, 1720.

²Gabba 295 ff.; Millar 28 ff., 193 f. Observe, however, that Millar now considers his chronology “probably too early” (*Britannia* 13 [1982] 1 n. 2).

in order to secure that result: he held that Dio collected his material between 201 and 211, and composed the *History* between 212 and 224.³

The scholarly consensus that Dio collected his material during the reign of Septimius Severus and wrote almost all of his *History* before the accession of Severus Alexander in 222 has recently been challenged. M. M. Eisman has urged that many passages in Dio's account of the Severan dynasty (Books LXXIII–LXXX) express such violent and open hostility to close relatives of Severus Alexander, whose mother was the niece of Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus and mother of Caracalla, that they cannot have been published before Alexander's death in March 235: he infers, therefore, that Dio revised the final eight books of his *History* ca 230 with an eye to posthumous publication.⁴ More radically, Cesare Letta, in a long study of Dio's career and the composition of his *History*, argues that Dio first decided to undertake his vast enterprise only after Septimius Severus died, and that the ten years of research are 212–222, the twelve years of composition 222–234. More precisely still, Letta argues that Dio wrote Books XXXVIII and XL in 229, and had already reached Book LV in the following year, so that he wrote Books I–XXXVII between spring 222 and the end of 228, XXXVIII–LV in 229/230, LVI–LXXVI between spring 231 and spring 234, and the final four books between spring 234 and summer 235.⁵

The present essay attempts to establish a chronology close to that proposed by Letta, but by a very different route. Letta's date for Dio's *History* rests very heavily on his prior argument that Dio was consul in 222 and on a novel exegesis of what Dio explicitly states about the composition of his work. He fails to exploit other passages of Dio which appear to be relevant to the date of composition. The argument presented here will review the evidence for Dio's career (I), Dio's account of how he came to be a historian (II), and explicit contemporary allusions in his narrative of events before the death of Septimius Severus (III). It will then propound a partially new hypothesis about how Dio composed his *Roman History* (IV), and adumbrate its corollaries (V).

I

The historian Cassius Dio belonged to one of the leading families of Nicaea, one of the two Greek cities which vied for primacy in the Roman province of Bithynia.⁶ Cassii had been prominent in Nicaea at least since the days of Nero,⁷ and the name may indicate that an ancestor of Dio was

³*De Cassii Dionis vocabulis quae ad ius publicum pertinent* (diss. Amsterdam, publ. The Hague 1923) 166.

⁴"Dio and Josephus: Parallel Analyses," *Latomus* 36 (1977) 657–673.

⁵Letta 183 ff.

⁶On the rivalry of Nicaea and Nicomedia, L. Robert, *HSCP* 81 (1977) 1 ff.

⁷Millar 8 f.

granted Roman citizenship by Brutus and Cassius before the battle of Philippi. Cassius Dio bore the additional *cognomen* Cocceianus,⁸ like Dio the sophist and philosopher of Prusa: the two shared names must betoken kinship between the two men, and it seems likely that the historian derived the *nomen* Claudius, which he also possessed (*AE* 1971.430), from the marriage of his father to a descendant of Dio Cocceianus of Prusa.⁹

Dio's father, M. Cassius Apronianus, is attested as proconsul of Lycia and Pamphylia (*IGRR* 3.654), as legate of Cilicia (69.1.6, 72.7.2), and as legate of Dalmatia (49.36.4). Since at the relevant date governors of Cilicia normally proceeded immediately to their consulate, while Dalmatia was a consular post,¹⁰ Apronianus must have been suffect consul, and a remark by his son indicates a date early in the reign of Commodus. For Dio accompanied his father to Cilicia, presumably as a *comes* (72.7.2), and while in the province, he not only discovered the truth about the death of Trajan at Selinus in 117 and the accession of Hadrian (69.1.3), but also, unless Xiphilinus has seriously distorted the sense of the passage in abbreviating it, learnt of Commodus' execution of the brothers Quintilii—an event which appears to belong to 182 or 183.¹¹

Cassius Dio himself was probably born ca 165: the approximate date can be deduced from his appointment as praetor by Pertinax (73.12.2).¹² Since Pertinax ruled only from 1 January to 27 March 193, Dio must have become praetor in 194 or 195: although designation in early 193 would most naturally imply office in 194, in his account of the funeral of Pertinax in June 193, Dio uses the first person plural for the senators who escorted the bier, but a third-person verb for the "magistrates, both those then in office and those designated for the following year," who carried it during the ceremony (74.5.2–3). The date of 195 is, therefore, preferable for his praetorship. Birth ca 165 and praetorship in 195 suit perfectly everything else that Dio reveals about his movements as a young man: from 180 onwards he professedly describes events at Rome, not from the report of others, but as an eye-witness (72.4.2), and about a decade later he begins to use "we" to designate the Roman Senate in contrast to non-senators in Rome. Moreover, Dio's narrative of the last months of Commodus (killed on 31 December 192), of the complicated events of 193, of the ensuing

⁸*PIR*² C 492.

⁹See C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978) 7, 132.

¹⁰G. Alföldy, *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen* (Bonn 1977) 224 ff.

¹¹F. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo* (Turin 1964) 158 ff. E. Groag and A. Stein, *PIR*² C 485, 492, argued that Dio was with his father in Cilicia before 180.

¹²Millar (13) prefers "about 163 or 164." Some latitude must be allowed: although the official minimum age at which a man like Dio could become praetor was his thirtieth year, either the birth of children or the *ius trium liberorum* brought a lowering of the minimum age by one year for each child, either real or putative; cf. J. Morris, *Listy filologické* 87 (1964) 316 ff.

civil wars, and of the reign of Septimius Severus, frequently alludes to his presence in Rome.¹³

After his praetorship, Dio will have governed at least one province, almost certainly an eastern one: a rescript of Septimius Severus to one Dio was quoted in the first book of Paulus' *De officio proconsulis* (Dig. 50.12.7), and it may serve as proof of what could be postulated with confidence. Dio then became consul (43.46.5, 60.2.3, 76.16.4). According to the normal rules governing senatorial careers, Dio could have expected a suffect consulate shortly after 205, and his summing up of Severus' reign appears to allude to his experiences as consul under Severus:

He reprimanded those who were not chaste, even going so far as to legislate about adultery. As a result, there were immense numbers of indictments for the offence (for example, as consul I found three thousand entered in the register), but, since very few people prosecuted these cases, he too ceased to concern himself with them. (76.16.4)

Dio's words have been interpreted in two significantly different ways. Some scholars date Dio's consulate ca 222 and argue that the three thousand cases comprise the total numbers of accusations for adultery in the reign of Severus which Dio discovered long after 211, using his position as consul to do archival research.¹⁴ It seems more probable, however, even on purely linguistic grounds, that Dio's *pinax* designates a list of cases where a formal accusation had been made, but which had not yet come to trial.¹⁵ Three thousand is a large but by no means incredible total for such cases: the legislation belongs, at least in part, to the early years of Severus, since Tertullian mocks it in a speech written in 196 or 197.¹⁶ Dio alleges that Caracalla, though himself the most adulterous of men, had a policy of killing other adulterers in violation of precedent (77.16.4).

Under Severus, Dio was not only consul but also an *amicus* of the emperor: he took part in the trial of Raecius Constans, a former proconsul of Sardinia, in 204 (75.16.2–4), and he implies that he served on the imperial *consilium* with some frequency (76.17.1–2).¹⁷ Under Caracalla

¹³Millar 13 ff., 122 ff.

¹⁴Gabba 289 ff.; Letta 117 ff.

¹⁵T. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig 1899) 220 n. 5, 696 n. 2, cf. 381 ff.; Millar 204 f. Dio uses the word *πίναξ* in 72.7.1 to mean "writing tablet," while in fragment 109.12 *λελευκωμένον πίνακα* renders the Latin *album*.

On the question of what court tried such cases, see P. Garnsey, *JRS* 57 (1967) 56 ff.; Letta 118 ff.

¹⁶*Apol.* 4.8: *nonne vanissimas Papias leges . . . heri Severus constantissimus principum exclusit?*

¹⁷Letta 122 f. takes the words *πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς συνδικάζοντας αὐτῷ* and *ἡμῖν τοῖς συνδικάζουσιν αὐτῷ* to refer to a senatorial trial with Dio present and Severus presiding—which is implausible; cf. W. Kunkel, *Kleine Schriften* (Weimar 1974) 244, 334 f.

(211–217), Dio remained an *amicus principis*, though some of the treatment which he received from Severus' son was far from friendly.¹⁸ He records that, while he was in attendance at the imperial court during part of the winter of 214/5, which Caracalla spent in Nicomedia, Caracalla would summon senators at dawn, then keep them waiting till evening, while he drank with the common soldiers of his bodyguard (77.17.3–4).

Dio left the court between December 214 and April 215 (78.8.5, 77.19.3–4). He appears to have returned to Rome in 215 (77.20, 78.1.4–5), and was certainly in Rome when news came of Caracalla's murder in Mesopotamia on 8 April 217 and the subsequent proclamation of Macrinus as his successor (78.37.5, 16.2–17.4). Dio remained in Rome for most of the reign of Macrinus (78.20.1, 25.2), and was still there when Macrinus wrote to the Senate about the proclamation of Elagabalus, which occurred on 16 May 218 (78.36.1, 38.2). Before his death, however, and probably before the revolt of Elagabalus began, Macrinus appointed Dio *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna (79.7.4).

Such a curatorship was an unusual appointment for a man so senior as Dio, now an ex-consul of more than ten years' standing.¹⁹ It may be relevant that Macrinus appointed Anicius Faustus to replace the proconsul chosen by lot for 217/8, then bade him continue in office for a second year (78.22.2–4). Dio was in Pergamum in the winter of 218/9 (79.7.4). He then retired to Bithynia, where he fell ill, and from where he went directly to Africa as proconsul. From Africa Dio went to govern Dalmatia, then Pannonia Superior, where he incurred the wrath of the soldiers under his command for being too strict a disciplinarian. Finally, Dio returned to Italy, and in 229 became consul for the second time with the emperor Severus Alexander (80.1.2–2.1). The precise chronology of the proconsulate and the two Illyrian commands is not altogether certain. Dio writes as if all three posts belong to the reign of Severus Alexander: hence it is normally inferred that he was proconsul of Africa in 223/4, *legatus Augusti* in Dalmatia in 224–226, and in Pannonia Superior in 226–228.²⁰ These are the latest possible dates, since Dio had returned to Italy before he entered on his second consulate on 1 January 229. It is conceivable that Dio's silence about any advancement under Elagabalus, who reigned from 218 to 13 March 222, is misleading, and hence that the correct dates for these three posts are somewhat earlier: the proconsulate of Africa, for example,

¹⁸Millar 18 ff.

¹⁹On *curatores* in Asia, see now G. P. Burton, *Chiron* 9 (1979) 467 ff., 482 f.

²⁰W. Reidinger, *Die Statthalter des ungeteilten Pannoniens und Oberpannoniens von Augustus bis Diokletian* (Bonn 1956) 106 f.; W. Jagenteufel, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinz Dalmatien von Augustus bis Diokletian* (Vienna 1958) 94; B. E. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas von Augustus bis Diokletian* 2 (Lund 1960) 119; A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African Emperor* (London 1971) 277.

could theoretically go as early as 220/1, and Dio need not have served a full triennium in either Dalmatia or Pannonia Superior.²¹ Be that as it may, Dio's consulate in 229 marked the end of his political career: as soon as he laid down the *fascēs*, he returned to Bithynia to pass the rest of his life in his *patria* (80.5.3).

II

In two passages towards the end of his vast work Dio writes about how and why he wrote a history of Rome. In the first, which occurs between the death of Commodus on 31 December 192 and the proclamation of Pertinax on 1 January 193, Dio explains that his narrative of the next few years is heavily indebted to two earlier works: a pamphlet describing the dreams and portents which led Septimius Severus to aspire to the imperial throne, and an account of the wars and disorders which followed the murder of Commodus. The pamphlet was in effect an apologia for Severus' seizure of power, and Dio sent it to the emperor, who acknowledged its receipt with lengthy praise. The emperor's letter was delivered to Dio toward evening: that very night, as he slept, his guardian spirit bade him write a history of Severus' wars. Since this work too was favourably received, especially by the emperor, Dio embarked on a complete history of Rome down to his own day: he spent ten years in collecting material from the beginnings of Rome to the death of Severus, then another twelve years in turning his raw material into a properly written history (72.23). Subsequently, after he has recorded the death of Caracalla, Dio reports a dream in which Septimius Severus, after his death, but before the murder of Geta on 26 December 211, appeared to him and bade him "learn accurately and write an account of all that is said and done" (78.10.1–2).

These two passages have normally been construed as proving that Dio originally intended his *History* to end with the death of Severus, and that he subsequently decided to add a continuation beyond 4 February 211.²² Moreover, the second passage has even been adduced to prove that Dio

²¹For discussion of Dio's last three provincial posts, see R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography: Studies in the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1971) 144 f.

A caution must be entered. Dio 80.4.2 is often translated as "the praetorians complained of me to Ulpian, because I ruled the soldiers in Pannonia with a strong hand" (E. Cary, in the Loeb edition, 9 [Cambridge, Mass. and London 1927] 485). Hence F. Grosso, *Rendiconti Lincei*⁸ 23 (1968) 205 ff., followed by Letta 130 f., deduces that Dio became legate of Pannonia Superior before the end of 223 and remained there until 227 or 228. In fact, the text says "the praetorians complained of me in addition to Ulpian (πρὸς Οὐλπιανῶ), because I had ruled the soldiers in Pannonia with a strong hand." Dio is speaking of his treatment by the praetorian guard when he returned to Rome after governing Pannonia. The emperor prudently advised Dio to spend his consulate outside Rome (80.5.1).

²²Schwartz 1686; Millar 28 ff.

completed the collection of material down to 211 before 212.²³ On the other hand, Letta argues with equal confidence that the dream of 211 provided the motivation for the inception of Dio's *History* and hence a firm *terminus post quem* for his beginning the collection of material.²⁴ The argument is highly attractive, but cannot be held decisive in itself. Even though Xiphilinus normally renders the exact words of Dio faithfully, he may have omitted something which would give the first passage a significantly different colouring.²⁵ It might be more prudent, moreover, to waive any peremptory inference from Dio's dream of the dead Severus.

The other works to which Dio refers have also been employed to establish the dates of his *Roman History*. Most scholars who have written about Dio have dated the pamphlet on the dreams and omens which portended and encouraged Severus' proclamation as Augustus to 193, and his work on Severus' wars to 193 or 196/7, and have argued or assumed that Dio began the collection of material for his *History* virtually at once.²⁶ All three steps in the chain of inference are vulnerable. Dio neither says nor implies that he embarked on his *History* immediately after publishing his work on Severus' wars, nor can the dates of the two minor works be established with certainty. Admittedly, it seems hard to avoid placing in 193 the pamphlet on the dreams and omens: in 193 Severus sorely needed such supernatural justification to show why he should be emperor rather than his rivals Clodius Albinus and Pescennius Niger. Even though Dio considered Didius Julianus a personal enemy (73.12.2), he had been in Rome while Julianus ruled and resisted Severus: Julianus' defeat and Severus' entry into Rome provided Dio with a perfect opportunity to gain favour and ensure that he would be allowed to hold the praetorship which Pertinax had bestowed on him. Nevertheless, a doubt must be permitted.²⁷ Dio implies that he both published his pamphlet and sent a copy to Severus at the same time (72.23.1–2). Had the two both been in Rome, it would have been polite, and politic, to send Severus a copy privately before making the work public. Since a work of this nature was still appropriate while Severus' rivals remained undefeated, Dio may well have composed it after Severus left Rome in the summer of 193. The date, therefore, could be as late as 195.

Dio describes the subject-matter of his second work in a way which probably implies a date later than 197. For he writes as if the work included both wars against the enemies of Rome and civil wars (72.23.1). The civil wars to which Dio alludes ended with the defeat and death of Clodius

²³Gabba 295 ff.

²⁴Letta 148 ff.

²⁵Millar 2, cf. 195 ff.

²⁶Schwartz 1686; Vrind (above, n. 3) 166; Gabba 295 ff.; Millar 28 ff.

²⁷G. W. Bowersock, *Gnomon* 37 (1965) 471.

Albinus at Lugdunum on 19 February 196 or 197. (The latter is the traditional date, assumed by virtually all modern writers on the Severan period, but the former is arguably the correct year.)²⁸ But what of the wars against foreign enemies? Severus conducted two expeditions into Mesopotamia, the first in 194/5 after he defeated Pescennius Niger, but before he turned against Clodius Albinus, the second in 197/8. The natural implication of Dio's words is that his work included both Mesopotamian campaigns.²⁹ Moreover, Dio's account in the *History* of the later campaign in Mesopotamia, like his account of the earlier campaign and of the civil wars, contains, even in its fragmentary state, some features which appear to reflect the propaganda of Severus:³⁰ given Dio's generally critical assessment of Severus, the obvious explanation is that his account of Severus' second Parthian War, like his account of the first, is based on the earlier work. Further, if the work included events of 198, it may not have been completed and published until Severus returned from the East to celebrate his *decennalia* in April 202.³¹

III

When Dio comes to the Illyrian campaigns of Octavian shortly before the battle of Actium, he gives a brief ethnographical sketch of the Pannonians, whom he characterizes as anger-prone, bloodthirsty wretches leading a miserable existence. Dio appeals to his own knowledge of the region:

This I know not merely from hearsay or reading, but from actual experience as their governor; for, after my governorship in Africa, I was appointed to Dalmatia (which my father also once governed for a time) and to Upper Pannonia, as it is called, and hence I write with exact knowledge of everything relating to them. (49.36.4)

It is not plausible to suggest that Dio's reference to himself is a later insertion—and hence that “Dio is not being entirely candid” in claiming to write about the Pannonians from personal acquaintance.³² For a page later, writing about the confluence of the Rivers Sarus and Colops at Siscia, Dio observes that the Colops “now encircles the whole city,” but that it did not do

²⁸T. D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels 1978) 87. In favour of 197, however, see now Z. Rubin, *Civil-War Propaganda and Historiography* (Brussels 1980) 201 ff.

²⁹Bowersock (above, n. 27) 471 (where “Mauretania” is a misprint for “Mesopotamia”).

³⁰E.g., the statement that Severus failed to take Hatra at the second attempt because a god willed otherwise (75.12.4). For the role of the supernatural in explaining Severus' successes and failures in the war of 194/5, see Rubin (above, n. 28) 41 ff.

³¹Allowed as a possibility, though rejected, by Millar 29.

³²Millar 209. Schwartz 1684 had branded the sentence as “spätere Einlage.”

so in 35 B.C. (49.37.3). It is preferable—indeed it is the natural reading—to infer that Dio wrote the whole passage on the basis of personal knowledge gained as imperial legate in the region, and hence that he probably wrote it after he left Pannonia Superior.³³ On the earliest possible chronology for Dio's career, therefore, part of Book XLIX was written no earlier than ca 225.

Dio's reference to Africa is even more significant. The "governorship in Africa" must be the proconsulate: Numidia had existed as a separate province for at least fifteen years when this passage was written,³⁴ and Dio is normally careful to avoid ambiguity in referring to Roman provinces, using "Africa" for the proconsular province and "Numidia" for the province in which the legion *III Augusta* was stationed (55.23.2, 59.20.7).³⁵ But why does Dio say that he was appointed to Dalmatia and to Upper Pannonia "after my governorship in Africa"? Surely the reference to Africa indicates that Dio had recorded his post there before Book XLIX. The Pannonians first come into Dio's narrative in Book XLIX, so that it is appropriate for Dio here to refer to his governorship in Pannonia. But the way in which Dio introduces this post presupposes that his readers already knew that he had been in Africa: therefore, he had already told them, and told them before he came to Book XXXVI, since the complete text of Books XXXVI–XLIX is preserved. Where Dio did so can be divined. He presumably described the country and inhabitants of Africa when he came to the First Punic War (in Book XI).

If this reasoning is correct, it follows not only that Book XLIX received its final form no earlier than 225, but also that Dio cannot have put the finishing touches to even the early books of his *History* before 220. That may seem a bold and far-reaching conclusion to build upon a single passage, but it receives confirmation from what Dio says about the site of the African town of Thapsus:

Thapsus is situated on a sort of peninsula, with the sea stretching along one side and a lagoon on the other; it has an isthmus between them so narrow and marshy that one approaches by two roads a very little way apart on either side of the marsh along the shore itself. (43.7.2)

³³Millar 209 suggests that the description of Siscia may also be a later insertion.

³⁴The argument advanced by Vrind (above, n. 3) 158 ff., and accepted by Gabba 291 f. and Letta 131 ff., that Dio was legate of *III Augusta* depends on two erroneous premisses, viz., that Numidia did not formally become a separate province until the last years of Severus Alexander, and that by ἡ ἐν τῇ Ἀφρική ἡγεμονία Dio means something different from ἡ τῆς Ἀφρικής ἡγεμονία. That lexical distinction is oversubtle and unreal: a separate province of Numidia came into existence between ca 198 and ca 209 (*AE* 1957.122, as interpreted by M. P. Speidel, *Historia* 22 [1973] 125 ff.; *ILS* 9488).

³⁵For the relevant passages, see the *Index Historicus* to Boissvain's edition, 4 (Berlin 1926) 20, 464. Unfortunately, the compiler (H. Smilda) takes 49.36.4 and 80.1.2 to refer to Numidia.

Despite the absence of an explicit claim, that is surely the report of an eye-witness who has visited the site of Thapsus—precise, detailed, accurate.³⁶ But Dio visited Africa only during his proconsular year, which cannot be earlier than 220/1. Furthermore, all Dio's other detectable references to his career and his references in Books I–LXXVII to events later than 211 are compatible with a late date for the completion of his *History*, and thus provide support for the chronological inferences so far drawn.³⁷

1. The Parthian empire. Dio prefaces his account of M. Crassus' ill-fated expedition against Parthia in Book XL with a passage which not only alludes to recent warfare but was also clearly written by one who knew nothing of the downfall of the Arsacid dynasty. Dio gives a survey of Parthian history from the time when "the Persian empire had been overthrown and the Macedonians were supreme" down to the time of writing: although they have lost territory to the Romans, they have not been subjugated and "to this day they hold their own in wars against us, every time they become involved in one" (40.14.2–4). Dio could not have written thus after he had heard that the Sassanian Ardashir had defeated the Parthian Arsacids and become ruler of Mesopotamia (ca 226).³⁸ There is a clear allusion to Severus' annexation of the provinces of Mesopotamia and Osrhoene. Yet the stress on Parthia's ability to resist Rome suggests that Dio also has in mind the less successful campaigns of Caracalla and Macrinus, in which the Parthians did hold their own.³⁹ A passage from Book LXXV alludes to these later wars more openly still. Dio ridicules Severus' claim that adding territory in Mesopotamia created a bulwark for Syria:

[The new territory] is proved by the facts themselves to be the cause of constant wars and great expense for us; for it yields very little, but consumes vast sums; and since our territory has become contiguous with neighbours of the Medes and Parthians, we are always in some way fighting their battles. (75.3.3)

So far as is known, there were no wars on the eastern frontier between 199 and 215. What of fighting other people's battles? The first known campaign which could possibly fit this description is the expedition into Armenia, which Caracalla's general Theocritus led in 215 (77.21.1).

2. *Ornamenta consularia* as equivalent to a consulate. Book XLVI commends Octavian for regarding the consulate which he assumed in 43 B.C.

³⁶As assumed (though without appreciation of its implications for Dio) by C. J. Tissot and S. Reinach, *Exploration scientifique de Tunisie. Géographie comparée de la province romaine d'Afrique* 2 (Paris 1891) 755 ff., with Planche XI.

³⁷For discussion of most of these passages, see Millar 208 ff., Letta 166 ff.

³⁸The exact date of Artabanus' death and Ardashir's capture of Ctesiphon are hard to establish: in favour of 226, see W. Lewy, *Orientalia* 16 (1941) 45 ff.; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*² (Copenhagen 1944) 85 ff.

³⁹N. C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago 1938) 213 ff.; K. H. Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich* (Wiesbaden 1964) 132 ff.

with Q. Pedius as his first consulate: he thus did not consider the *ornamenta consularia* which he had been voted in January 43 (*Res Gestae* 1.2) as equivalent to a first consulate (46.46.3). Dio notes that this practice continued until Septimius Severus styled Plautianus consul for the second time (in 203), even though he had before only held *ornamenta consularia*, not a proper consulate. Dio then continues with the observation that "since that occasion it has happened in the case of others too" (46.46.4). The first case after Plautianus is Q. Maecius Laetus in 215, the next the emperor Macrinus in 218, and then Valerius Comazon in 220.⁴⁰ Dio's plural inescapably implies that this clause at least was written no earlier than 218.

3. Alexandrian senators. Book LI notes that the disabilities which Octavian imposed on Alexandria in 30 B.C. were only removed in his own day, when Severus allowed the city to have a local senate and Caracalla allowed Alexandrians into the Roman Senate (51.17.3). The first known case appears to be Aelius Coeranus, *a libellis* of Severus, exiled in 205, recalled and made a senator in 212 (76.5.3–5).⁴¹

4. Ulpian as praetorian prefect. The speech of Maecenas in Book LII recommends that there always be two praetorian prefects, neither fewer nor more:

The senators should, in my view, perform these duties in this way. Of the *equites*, the two best should command the bodyguard around you; for it is dangerous to entrust it to one man, disruptive to entrust it to a larger number. (52.24.1)

It might be supposed that Dio's objections to having one or three prefects have no precise historical reference. Yet an allusion to the powerful sole prefects Sejanus and Plautianus is obvious and generally recognized.⁴² It should also be asked why Maecenas predicts that to have more than two praetorian prefects will produce disturbances. In 222 Ulpian installed himself briefly as the colleague of the two existing prefects, Flavianus and Chrestus (Zosimus 1.11.2–3, cf. *CJ* 4.65.4). The result was intrigue, rioting and murder, first of Flavianus and Chrestus, then of Ulpian himself (Dio 80.2.2–4). Maecenas' warning foreshadows the unusual and unpredictable events of 222/3 so well that Dio may be presumed to have had them in mind when composing the speech.⁴³

⁴⁰G. Barbieri, *L'Albo senatorio da Settimio Severo a Carino (193–285)* (Rome 1952), nos. 341, 1120, 1174. Macrinus' colleague, M. Oclatinus Adventus, is styled as *cos. II* after Macrinus' death, also for the same reason (*CIL* 3.6161: Troesmis), although Macrinus had prohibited the iteration (Dio 78.13.2, cf. *ILS* 466, 4322: Rome).

⁴¹Barbieri (above, n. 40) no. 6. It is not legitimate to infer that Dio wrote Book LI before Macrinus removed Augustus' prohibition on senators entering Egypt (78.35.1).

⁴²Millar 115.

⁴³P. Meyer, *De Maecenatis oratione a Dione ficta* (diss. Berlin 1891) 25 n. 127; F. Grosso (above, n. 21) 211.

5. *Legio I Adiutrix*. The survey of the legions from Augustus' reign down to Dio's own day in Book LV notes that Galba created the legion *I Adiutrix* "in Pannonia Inferior." Now *I Adiutrix* had long been stationed at Brigetio, but it was only in 214 that Brigetio was transferred from Pannonia Superior to Pannonia Inferior.⁴⁴

6. Dio at Hierapolis. Dio compares an opening in the ground with poisonous exhalations which Trajan inspected near Ctesiphon to a similar opening which he himself had seen at Hierapolis in Asia (68.27.2–3). This passage has encouraged the hypothesis that Dio may have served his quaestorship in Asia.⁴⁵ A more natural inference is that Dio wrote the passage after he had been curator of Pergamum and Smyrna, i.e., that Book LXVIII was completed after 218/9.⁴⁶

IV

What general conclusions about the date at which Dio composed the eighty books of his *Roman History* can be drawn from these individually datable passages? Conclusions need to be inferred in the light of how Dio describes his method of composition and of a general hypothesis about the way in which he worked. Dio divides the composition into two stages. The first was the collection of material: unfortunately, the fragment, apparently from the preface to the *History*, which describes Dio's procedure, lacks a vital verb, but it seems to say that Dio read practically everything relevant to his subject and made extracts, which he subsequently used as the basis for composing his *History* (frag. 1.2).⁴⁷ Dio spent ten years reading and collecting material for the period from Rome's foundation down to 211 (72.23.4). The second stage was to turn his notes into a work of literature, a history in the ancient sense of the word. It took Dio twelve years to write his *History*, but its extant portions reveal nothing whatever about how Dio published his work. That is a highly uncertain matter, and very relevant to its date.

Modern scholars who have written about Dio have tended to assume that he composed the eighty books of the *History* seriatim, at the rate of six or seven books a year for twelve years.⁴⁸ Hence Book X, for example, was finished a full ten years before Book LXXV. That model of the way Dio

⁴⁴E. Ritterling, *RE* 12 (1925) 1309 f., 1393; A. Betz, *Carnuntina* (Graz and Cologne 1956) 23.

⁴⁵Millar 15.

⁴⁶Bowersock (above, n. 27) 474.

⁴⁷G. Vrind, *Mnemosyne*² 54 (1926) 321 ff. Observe that Dio does not necessarily claim to have "read pretty nearly everything about them that has been written by anybody" (E. Cary, in the Loeb translation, 1 [Cambridge, Mass. and London 1914] 3) but rather to have read all the facts about the Romans which anyone has written down (cf. frag. 1.1).

⁴⁸So, most explicitly, Millar 38 f., 193 f.; Letta 172 ff.

worked is a possible one, and can appeal to the precedent of Livy: he commenced his one hundred and forty-two books before the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., and published his work in instalments over many years, so that Books CXXI–CXLII were given to the world after the death of Augustus in A.D. 14.⁴⁹ But an alternative model of composition is available, according to which Dio wrote a rough draft of the whole of his *History* before he put the finishing touches to any of it.⁵⁰ On this hypothesis, which appears to fit the ascertainable facts better, Dio could revise and add to even the earliest books until close to the end of the twelve years which he spent in composition. Hence, for example, Book x may have been revised for the last time only a few months before Book LXXV was revised for the last time—indeed, Book x could contain passages which Dio actually wrote after his latest revision of Book LXXV.

The date of composition may be inferred from the individually dated allusions on the basis of this second hypothesis about how Dio wrote his *History*. Only one passage offers a secure *terminus ante quem*, viz. Dio's survey of the history of Parthia, written in ignorance of Ardashir's conquest of Mesopotamia ca 226. But that passage does not suffice to prove that Book XL was finished and published before ca 226, only that Book XL never received a thorough revision after that date. Other allusions, and presumed allusions, in Dio's text appear to show that Books XI and XLIII received their present form after 220, Book LII its present form in or after 223, Book XLIX its in or after 225, and Book LXVIII its after 218/9. Dio, therefore, was still at work on the first seventy books of his *History* well into the 220s.

When did Dio begin? Analogy and convention imply that he cannot have contemplated a history down to 211 (72.23) while Septimius Severus lived: history was written about dead emperors, for the living deserved panegyric—which Dio had already provided in his two quasi-historical *opuscula*.⁵¹ On the earliest and shortest chronology, therefore, the decade which Dio spent collecting material will have begun in 211 and ended in 220, while the twelve years of composition will have stretched from 220 to 231. The actual dates, however, may be slightly later.

V

If Cassius Dio wrote, rewrote, and revised most of his *Roman History* in the 220s, it was in the reign of Severus Alexander, not in the reign of

⁴⁹T. J. Luce, *TAPA* 96 (1965) 209 ff.; R. Helm, *Philologus*, Supp. 21.2 (1929) 52 f.

⁵⁰G. Avenarius, *Lukians Schrift zur Geschichtsschreibung* (Meisenheim am Glan 1956) 71 ff.

⁵¹For this *topos*, Eutropius *Brev.* 10.18.3, Festus *Brev.* 30, Ammianus 31.16.9, *HA Quad. Tyr.* 15.10.

Septimius Severus, nor in the reigns of Caracalla, Macrinus, and Elagabalus, that he gave the work its definitive shape, tone, and attitudes. That fact has significant implications. Throughout the work, the possibility must be allowed that Dio has contributed more than has been thought from his own reflection and experience. For example, it has been asserted that Dio "does not use personal knowledge of the terrain to clarify his account of any military operations in his *History*."⁵² Dio's remarks about the topography of Thapsus and Siscia suggest otherwise: although he does not obtrude a first-person remark, he makes precise statements about topography which are intended to clarify his narrative and which, on the chronology advocated here, may derive from personal inspection of the terrain. Similarly, Dio's description of the *testudo* as used by the Roman army (49.30): on the chronology argued above, Dio will have penned this description after he had commanded an army in Pannonia, and therefore after he had seen Roman soldiers form a *testudo*, at least in practice drill.⁵³ Again, Dio describes Trajan's bridge across the Danube (68.13): he could have seen the bridge and may write at least partly as an eye-witness.

Much more important is the nature of Dio's account of the emperors of his own day. On the traditional chronology, Dio's account is close to the events, especially when he writes about Caracalla, Macrinus, and Elagabalus. Hence Dio's *History* can be taken as an immediate reaction, as a contemporary record in a strong sense of the word. Hence too the use of formal written sources for the Severan period can be excluded.⁵⁴ On the hypothesis that Dio did not give his *History* its final shape until after 230, a different interpretation is enjoined. Dio becomes a more detached witness. He is by no means impartial, but his opinions are more considered, and therefore more weighty. Dio's ambivalent attitude to Septimius Severus now becomes more readily understandable: the *History* combines material taken over from Dio's early panegyric and propagandistic *opuscula* with a fundamentally hostile, though measured, assessment of twenty-five years later. The Dio who retired to Bithynia in 229 to escape dust, killing, blood, and combat (80.5.3, quoting *Iliad* 11.163–164) did not like what had happened to the Roman Empire in the last fifty years, an age of iron and rust after the golden age of Antonines (71.36.4), and he attributed a large portion of the blame to Septimius Severus. Similarly, if Dio was still at work on his account of the Severan dynasty after 230, then it is hard to imagine that he was completely unaware of the biographies of emperors from Nerva to Elagabalus which his fellow senator Marius Maximus,

⁵²Millar 36.

⁵³Eisman (above, n. 4) 664—but assuming a later insertion.

⁵⁴Millar 194, 150 ff., 122.

consul for the second time in 223, wrote in Latin not long after 222.⁵⁵ If Dio knew of Maximus' work, then he may surely be presumed capable of consulting it for information on episodes about which Maximus knew more than he did, such as the campaigns of Septimius Severus in which Maximus took part.⁵⁶

The debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Book LII not only occupies a pivotal point in the overall scheme of the *History* at the transition from Republic to Principate,⁵⁷ but it is also the most original part of Dio's whole work. The debate falls into two parts: the first is a conventional discussion of the merits of monarchy and a republican constitution, with Agrippa urging Octavian to lay down his extraordinary powers, Maecenas arguing the necessity of autocracy (52.2–18); in the second part, however, Maecenas gives Octavian precise and detailed advice on how to rule—advice which has an obvious relevance to Dio's own day, and which is obviously the product of Dio's own reflections on contemporary conditions (52.19–40).⁵⁸ Gabba and Millar have rightly emphasized the deeply conservative, even counter-revolutionary effect of Maecenas' proposals when contrasted with the real situation in Dio's own day.⁵⁹ The fact that Dio wrote Book LII after 223 enhances its historical significance. The speech of Maecenas confirms that under Severus Alexander the Senate did not regain the political and social predominance which it had long lost.⁶⁰

If Dio wrote most of his *History* in the 220s, then it is possible that the full text of Books XXXVI–LIV and the surviving fragments of I–XXXV and LV–LXXVII contain implicit reflections of and implicit allusions to events in the reign of Severus Alexander. It was suggested thirty years ago that Julius Caesar's speech at Vesontio (38.36–46) and Dio's introductory comments (38.35.3) reflect the historian's unfortunate experiences with insubordinate soldiers in Pannonia, and that the dialogue in which Livia persuades

⁵⁵For Maximus' biographies and their character, see especially Syme (above, n. 21) 113 ff.

⁵⁶Maximus commanded the army of Moesia at the siege of Byzantium and at the battle of Lugdunum (*ILS* 2935: Rome).

⁵⁷On Dio's conflicting statements about when precisely the Principate began (31, 29, or 27), see now B. Manuwald, *Cassius Dio und Augustus: Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Büchern 45–56 des dionischen Geschichtswerkes* (Wiesbaden 1979) 77 ff.

⁵⁸Meyer (above, n. 43) 73 ff. The point is unconvincingly disputed by M. Hammond, *TAPA* 63 (1932) 88 ff.

⁵⁹E. Gabba, *Studi in onore di A. Fanfani* 1 (Milan (1962) 39 ff.; Millar 102 ff.; cf. A. Jardé, *Etudes critiques sur la vie et le règne de Sévère Alexandre* (Paris 1925) 26 ff.; U. Espinoza Ruiz, *Debate Agrippa-Mecenas en Dion Cassio: Respuesta senatorial a la crisis del Impero Romano en época Severiana* (Madrid 1982) 273 ff.

⁶⁰J. Bleicken, *Hermes* 90 (1962) 444 ff. For the true nature of Alexander's régime, Syme (above, n. 21) 146 ff.

Augustus, apparently in A.D. 4, to pardon L. Cornelius Cinna Magnus for conspiring against him (55.14–21) belongs to the reign of Severus Alexander.⁶¹ More recently, the same colouring has been detected in Dio's account of Ulpius Marcellus in Britain under Commodus (72.8),⁶² and in other passages concerning Caesar, Galba, and Hadrian (41.26–36, 63.3.2, 69.19.4).⁶³ Moreover, the long speech in which the otherwise unknown Philiscus consoles the exiled Cicero (38.18–29) has been interpreted as Dio's covert justification for spending his own second consulate in 229 outside Rome.⁶⁴ Dio's *Roman History* could contain many more contemporary allusions than have yet been recognized.

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⁶¹H. R. W. Smith, "Problems Historical and Numismatic in the Reign of Augustus," *University of California Publications in Classical Archaeology* 2.4 (1951) 133–230, at 188 ff. On the episode (which Seneca, *Clem.* 1.9, dates to the period 16–13 B.C.), see now M. A. Giua, *Athenaeum* n.s. 59 (1981) 317 ff.

⁶²Eisman (above, n. 4) 665 ff.

⁶³D. Flach, *Antike und Abendland* 18 (1973) 134 f.; Letta 166 ff.

⁶⁴Letta 157 ff. Millar (49 ff., cf. *Museum Helveticum* 18 [1961] 15 ff.) interpreted the speech as reflecting events and personalities ca 214. His proposal that Dio invented Philiscus is not plausible.