Herodian and Cassius Dio: A Study of Herodian’s Compositional Devices

Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou

HERODIAN around the middle of the third century wrote a history of the fifty-eight years from the death of Marcus Aurelius to the accession of Gordian III (180–238). This article addresses the narrative devices he used in composing his History: the ways and purposes whereby he adapts and manipulates his source material, more precisely Cassius Dio’s Roman History.

Herodian’s reworking of Dio’s story has been noticed by scholars, who have stressed that he frequently suppresses, ex-


2 Translations here are those of the Loeb editions, slightly adapted at some points. Texts: Herodian, C. M. Lucarini, Herodianus: Regnum post Marcum (Berlin 2005); Dio, U. P. Boissévain, Cassii Dionis Coecelian historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt (Berlin 1895–1931), here with the ‘reformed’ numeration of Boissévain, which E. Cary, Dio’s Roman History (Loeb), also uses, followed by the traditional numeration in brackets.

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pands, alters, or even distorts details in Dio’s text. In this article, a close study of Herodian’s compositional techniques will advance the argument that his writing involves a substantial reshaping of Dio’s work. The first part offers an overview of Herodian’s sources; the following parts examine individual compositional devices, especially ‘displacements’, ‘omissions’, and ‘modifications of context’, which Herordan employs to rework Dio’s History and bring out themes and ideas that are essential to his own reading and understanding of the post-Marcus world. Throughout, I show that Herodian’s revision of his source material reveals crucial differences of both literary presentation and historical interpretation between the two historians. This suggests some wider conclusions concerning Herodian’s historiographical method and literary motivations.

**Herodian’s sources**

The only source to which Herodian refers explicitly is Septimius Severus’ autobiography (2.9.4). He also mentions Marcus Aurelius’ writings and speeches (1.2.3), as well as the histories of Marcus’ principate (1.2.5), but nowhere does he indicate whether or not he uses these works as sources. He also refers to pictorial accounts and visual representations (e.g. 1.15.4, 2.9.4, 4.8.2, 5.3.5, 7.2.8), which might have served as source material as well. Moreover, both in the prologue (1.1–

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and in the course of his narrative Herodian reports unspecified historians (and poets) who wrote about contemporary history (2.15.6–7, 3.7.3, 6). He refers to these authors, without naming them, in order to show how and to what extent his own account follows or deviates from theirs. As a result, he demarcates his own historiographical enterprise and emphasizes his principles, especially his focus on truth and his aversion to bias and flattery.

In addition, other anonymous sources are mentioned in the form of “it is said” or “they say” or “something/someone was alleged to (ἐλέγετο). Hidber notes that, through these unspecified and anonymous sources, Herodian exculpates himself from “the responsibility for a particular report.” But there might be another possibility: these unspecified reports, which can refer to both oral and written traditions, may be intended to reconstruct the atmosphere of the times, and to highlight


6 It has been thought that at 1.1.1 Herodian makes a covert attack on Cassius Dio and Asinius Quadratus, while at 1.1.2 he criticizes, besides Dio, Aelius Antipater and Claudius Aelianus: see Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 82–92. Whittaker, Herodian I 246–247 n.2, mentions some plausible authors whom Herodian might criticize at 2.15.6–7: Marius Maximus, Cassius Dio, Aelius Antipater, Gordian I, and more generally the literary circle around the empress Julia Domna.

7 See Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 92–93.

8 E.g. 1.11.1–5, 1.14.4, 1.16.1, 2.1.6, 3.4.3, 3.4.7, 3.7.4, 4.8.8, 5.6.4, 6.5.2, 7.1.5, 7.1.7, 8.3.7, with Whittaker, Herodian I 63; Hidber, in Narrators 206 n.17.

9 Hidber, in Narrators 206. On such phrases as “authenticating device” see Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 319 with n.199.
what contemporaries may have thought or said. Herodian’s references to eyewitnesses contribute to this end too.\(^\text{10}\)

While it should be kept in mind that study of Herodian’s sources is more or less a matter of speculation, given his silence on the subject and the fact that most of the sources for this period, known to have existed in various literary forms,\(^\text{11}\) are non-extant or preserved in fragmentary or epitomated form, scholars have argued that Herodian has effectively drawn on or (at least) was familiar with several Greek and Roman historians and biographers.\(^\text{12}\) In that regard, what appears most noticeably in Herodian’s work is his complex intertextual relationship with the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio.

Herodian’s use of Dio has been a vexed question,\(^\text{13}\) and one of the difficulties is the lack (for the most part) of Dio’s original text.\(^\text{14}\) It is now generally accepted that Herodian knew Dio’s

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10 1.15.4, 3.8.10, 4.8.2. See Hidber, in *Narrators* 206–207 with n.21.


12 On the Greek side, especially Thucydides, Polybius, Xenophon, and plausibly Herodotus, Asinius Quadratus, and Aelius Antipater. See Sidebottom, *ANRW II* 34.4 (1998) 2787; Hidber, *Herodians Darstellung* 60–62, 73–74, 77–117, 113, 120–121, 196. On possible interaction with Josephus and Appian see Hidber 79 n.24, 120 n.188. On Herodian’s familiarity with Latin literature, Hidber 196–201, esp. 196 n.31, citing further bibliography. On Herodian’s use of Sallust’s *Bellum Jugurthinum*, Hidber 199–200, noting important verbal parallels. Other Latin authors who have been suggested as Herodian’s plausible sources include Ovid (Whittaker, *Herodian* I 62, who comments on Baaz’s argument about Herodian’s use of Verrius Flaccus), Tacitus (Hidber 70 with n.348), and the biographer Marius Maximus (Whittaker 64–65, 69–70; Hidber 60 with n.308).

13 Scholars have entertained the possibility either that Herodian does not know Dio, or that Herodian and Dio have a common source, or that Herodian knows and uses Dio. For a range of opinions see e.g. Whittaker, *Herodian* I 64–68; Gascó, *Emerita* 52 (1984) 357–360; Sidebottom, *ANRW II* 34.4 (1998) 2780–2792; and most usefully Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 438–439 n.12.

14 On the reconstruction of Dio’s text see A. G. Scott, *Emperors and...*
text well and that he used and remolded it to suit his own historiographical approach.\textsuperscript{15} Most recently, Scott has acutely examined Herodian’s development of a specific “prefect plot” type, showing that there are considerable similarities between Dio and Herod in the first five books of Herodian’s work. “A reasonable conclusion,” Scott suggests, “is that Herod has used Dio’s history as his main source, and that deviations from Dio’s account are attributable to Herod’s narrative preferences” rather than his use of differing source material.\textsuperscript{16}

I accept the view that Herodian used Dio as his main source in the first five books of the History and that divergences from him should be explained by his own narrative method and literary programme. I build upon Scott’s argument to investigate Herodian’s compositional devices, which, as will be shown, reveal significant differences of interpretation and emphasis in the historical works of Dio and Herodian. Their analysis sheds fascinating light on Herodian’s degree of dependence on Dio, his compositional and thematic preferences, as well as his individual narrative design and historical methodology. Although this article is not concerned with the historical credentials of Herodian’s account itself, its findings have significant implications for the historical veracity of Herodian’s narrative, for they illuminate aspects of his own particular approach to, and articulation of, imperial history.


Displacements

One form of displacement concerns the transfer of an action, thought, motivation, etc., from one character in Dio’s work to another in Herodian’s History. For example, while in Herodian the initiative for the conspiracy against Commodus is given to Marcia, Commodus’ favourite mistress (1.16.4), in Dio (73[72].22.4) it is Laetus and Eclectus who contrive the plot and make Marcia their confidante.17 This alteration brings into focus Marcia’s central role in Herodian’s work, a role that recalls that of Fadilla, Commodus’ sister, who warns the emperor about Cleander’s plans.18 There is clearly a thematic continuity between the two scenes in Herodian’s History. In both, Commodus fails to understand the dangers lurking for the Empire either because of his own or because of others’ behaviour. But there is an important variation as well. Commodus, as soon as he learns about Cleander, proceeds to kill him and stifle the ongoing internal conflict in Rome (1.13.4–6), while “Marcia,” Herodian says, “achieved nothing by her many entreaties and left in tears” (1.16.4, ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὰ ἱκετεύουσα οὐκ ἐτύγχανεν αὐτοῦ, ἡ µὲν δακρύουσα ἀπέστη). It is Commodus’ sheer stubbornness not to follow Marcia’s (and others’) wise advice that, according to Herodian, brings about his catastrophe (1.16.5–1.17.12). A narrative parallelism between the two scenes thereby reveals recurring and variant patterns of imperial behaviour in Herodian’s History and advances the reader’s understanding of Commodus’ character, reign, and eventual downfall.

Marcia’s central role in Herodian’s account of the conspiracy against Commodus highlights another form of displacement employed in Herodian’s work: the transfer of an item from one context in Dio to a different one in Herodian.19 Scholars have

18 In Dio 73[72].13.5 it is Marcia who tells Commodus of Cleander’s scheme. See Whittaker, Herodian I 83 n.1; Scott, Mnemosyne 71 (2018) 446. Herodian presents both Fadilla and Marcia in highly dramatic terms (1.13.1 ~ 1.16.3).
19 Cf. Scheithauer, Hermes 118 (1990) 351–352, who focuses on Herod-
noted the way in which Herodian’s description of Commodus’ lethal plot and Marcia’s revelation of it constitutes a doublet of the story about Domitian’s murder at Dio 67.15.3–4. Specifically, Herodian’s Marcia resembles Dio’s Domitia in that both women accidentally discover a tablet, which a naked young boy kept without knowing its content, on which the cruel emperor (Commodus ~ Domitian) wrote the names of those he meant to kill. After reading it, the women inform the individuals concerned and set in motion the conspiracy against the emperor (1.17.3–6 ~ Dio 67.15.3–4). It is notable that such a startling accumulation of echoes of Domitian’s murder in Herodian’s narrative of Commodus serves to liken Commodus to Domitian and thereby aligns his character with that of other bad emperors, exactly as his father Marcus Aurelius worried about him in his deathbed scene (1.3.4). Herodian’s technique of transferring the details about Domitian’s death to the context of Commodus’ murder alerts the readers to a pattern of tyrannical behaviour that is present in the narrative, encouraging them to contemplate the consequences of this behaviour in the careers of both autocratic emperors. Herodian thereby makes the same insinuation as Cassius Dio did at the same point of his narrative.

The same applies to Herodian’s account of Caracalla’s attempt to assassinate his father, which recalls a tradition about Commodus’ patricide that is mentioned in the epitomized version of Elagabalus.


21 The alignment between Commodus and Domitian is also found in Dio 73[72].14.4. See Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 139–142, on the connection between the two emperors.

22 Cf. the description of the last days of Vitellius in Dio 64[65].16.2–17.1 and those of Didius Julianus in Hdn. 2.12.1–2.13.1, with Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 170.
sion of Dio’s *History* (72[71].33.4.2, 77[76].14.7). In particular, there is a strong analogy between Caracalla’s attempt to persuade his doctors and attendants to kill his father in Herodian (3.15.2) and the detail we find about Commodus in Dio 72[71].33.4.2: “Marcus passed away ... not as a result of the disease from which he still suffered, but by the act of his physicians ... who wished to do Commodus a favour” (μετήλλαξεν, ούχ ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου ἤν καὶ τὸτε ἐνόσησεν, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν ... τῷ Κομμόδῳ χαριζομένων). In Dio 77[76].14 there is mention of two attempts by Caracalla to kill his father, but neither is made through doctors and attendants. It is possible that Herodian transferred the detail about Commodus’ patricide in Dio to his own account of Caracalla. The connection between the two incidents, after all, is present in Dio 77[76].14.7, where Severus is said to have “blamed Marcus for not putting Commodus quietly out of the way and had himself often threatened to act thus toward his son” (καίπερ πολλάκις μὲν τὸν Μάρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξεῖλε, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ γιοίς ἐπιλήσας τὸτο ποιήσειν). Herodian’s implicit association of Caracalla with Commodus adds depth to the characterization of Caracalla, who is here understood as the further exemplar of

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24 Cf. Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 201, who accepts the possibility of Herodian’s transferring Dio’s details about Commodus’ patricide to that of Caracalla and suggests that this serves to illuminate Severus’ inferiority to Marcus in his role as parent-educator. For other examples of this technique see Herodian’s description of Severus Alexander’s death (6.9.6) ~ the account of Geta’s death in Dio 78[77].2.3–4, with G. Alfoldy, “Herodian über den Tod Mark Aurels,” *Latomus* 32 (1973) 345–353, at 350–351.
a bad emperor, being portrayed specifically as a second Commodus. This association activates prior historical knowledge and triggers a host of corresponding expectations about Caracalla’s tyranny in the readers who are aware of the tradition about Commodus’ patricide.

A more elaborate kind of displacement which Herodian uses is the transfer of information from the perspective of the narrator in Dio’s work to that of historical agents in his History. While in Dio 72[71].34–36 Marcus’ virtues and leadership qualities are posthumously recapitulated through explicit narratorial commentary, in Herodian it is the point of view of his contemporaries that is foregrounded to drive home the same point: “There was not a single subject throughout the Roman Empire that did not grieve at the news and join together with one voice to proclaim his praise. Some praised his kindness as a father, some his goodness as an emperor, others his noble qualities as a general, still others his moderation and discipline as a ruler. And everyone was telling the truth.”

Herodian thus portrays a striking and exceptional reality in which the different groups of Roman society are united in their lavish praise of an emperor. This post-mortem consensus universorum clearly shows the eunōia and pothos which Marcus inspired in his subjects, thus exemplifying in a concrete manner his death-bed statement that a successful leader is one who has the ability to instil goodwill in his subjects (1.4.4–5). That Herodian prefers to convey the perspective of his contemporaries also carries a message, for it allows him to illuminate not only the individual personality and virtuous leadership of the emperor but also his distinctive interaction with (potentially destructive) social groups. This is a crucial theme in Herodian’s analysis of

25 1.4.8: οὐδὲ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχήν ὡς ἀδακρυτι τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέχετο. πάντες δ’ ὡσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς φωνῆς, οἱ μὲν πατέρα χρηστόν, οἱ δ’ ἁγαθὸν βασιλέα, γενναῖον δὲ ἔτεροι στρατηγών, οἱ δὲ σώφρονα καὶ κόσμιον ἄρχοντα ἀνεκάλουν, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐψεύδετο.

the post-Marcus history, and one that he employs throughout his narrative to judge subsequent emperors.

Finally, Herodian is keen not only to move details from a specific character and context—or even from the narrator in Dio’s work—to different characters and contexts in his History, but also to order his material differently from Dio. A notable example is Severus’ instruction to his sons about the importance of fraternal love and mutual support, which Herodian places after Plautianus’ death and before Severus’ departure on the British expedition (3.13.3–5). In Dio (77[76].15.2) a similar piece of advice given by Severus is mentioned, but in less elaborated terms, and just before his death: “Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men” (Ἑομονεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλούτιζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε”). Herodian’s version evokes Marcus’ dying words in the first book of the History (1.3–4), and thus highlights a crucial aspect of the way in which Severus is seen to abide by the admirable model set by Marcus at the outset of the work. Moreover, both Marcus’ and Severus’ speeches recall intertextually Cyrus’ dying speech in the Cyropaedia (8.7) and that of Micipsa in Sallust’s Bellum Iugurthinum (10). This correspondence serves in Herodian as a forewarning of Severus’ death, which follows in the British campaign, and the continuation of the conflict between his two sons.

What is most important for our purposes, however, is Herodian’s decision to place Severus’ words before this campaign rather than in his narrative of the emperor’s death. This might be explained by the fact that Herodian, unlike Dio, goes to

27 Kemezis, Greek Narratives 235.
28 On Herodian’s use of Marcus as a standard against which subsequent emperors are judged see e.g. Marasco, ANRW II 34.4 (1998) 2840–2842; Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 35; Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 157, 188, 190–191, 201, 232–243, 274.
30 Whittaker, Herodian I 16 n.2; Alföldy, Latomus 32 (1973) 349–350; Sidebottom, ANRW II 34.4 (1998) 2806; Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 195–201.
some lengths to stress Severus’ role as an educator of his two sons (3.10.2–5, 13.1–6, 14.2).\textsuperscript{31} In fact the complexities of teaching and learning in the post-Marcus world are a recurrent theme in Herodian’s \textit{History} that brings out the extent to which individuals and collective forces prove successful or heedless in both receiving and giving proper teaching and advice.\textsuperscript{32} Accordingly, Herodian’s reference to Severus’ instruction before the British campaign adds to his role as pedagogue of his two sons.\textsuperscript{33} It also features in his attempt to reconcile them and put an end to their squabbling. Remarkably, an important reason for Severus’ British expedition itself, according to Herodian, was his anxiety “to get his sons out of Rome in order that they could return to their senses, spending their youth in a sober military life away from the luxurious delicacies of Rome.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} On this point see Zimmermann, \textit{Kaiser und Ereignis} 195, 197, 199. In Dio 77[76].7.1–3 Plautianus is a “kind of pedagogue” (οἷον παιδαγωγοῦ τινός) of Geta and Caracalla; after his death the brothers went to all lengths in their outrageous behaviour. See also Zimmermann 199 n.243, who mentions Herodian’s omission of Euodus, the τροφεύς of Caracalla (77[76].3.2), which in turn lays special emphasis on Severus’ role as ‘instructor’.

\textsuperscript{32} On the importance of \textit{paideia} for Herodian see e.g. Sidebottom, \textit{ANRW II} 34.4 (1998) 2776, 2779, 2805–2812; Zimmermann, \textit{Kaiser und Ereignis} 29–31, 36, 37, 45, 62, 233–237.

\textsuperscript{33} A similar effect is achieved by Herodian’s displacement of the details about the rivalry of the two brothers. While in Dio 77[76].7.1–2 the information is placed directly after Plautianus’ death, who is mentioned as their “pedagogue” and whose death led to the deterioration of their conduct, in Herodian it is put in the introduction of Geta and Caracalla into the narrative. This introduction (3.10.2–5) dwells on Severus’ role as educator of the two. See Zimmermann, \textit{Kaiser und Ereignis} 195, 197.

\textsuperscript{34} 3.14.2: ἐτί δὲ καὶ τοὺς υἱῶν ὑπαγαγεῖν τῆς Ρώμης θέλων, ὡς ἐν νεαρότειν ἐν στρατιωτικῷ βίῳ καὶ σώφρονι ὑπάρχοντες τῆς ἐν Ρώμῃ τρυφῆς καὶ διαίτης. Cf. Dio 77[76].11.1: “Severus, seeing that his sons were changing their mode of life and that the legions were becoming enervated by idleness, made a campaign against Britain,” ο δὲ δὴ Σεουῆρος ἔπι Βρεττανίαν ἐστράτευσε τοὺς τε παιδὸς ἐκδιαιτωμένους ὄρων καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα ὑπὸ ἀργίας ἐκλύομενα. For Severus’ ambition as another reason for the invasion see 77[76].13.1: “Severus, accordingly, desiring to subjugate the whole of it [Britain], invaded Caledonia,” ο δὲ Σεουῆρος πᾶσαν αὐτὴν καταστρέψα-
Similar concerns can be seen in Herodian’s displacement of the death of Severus’ wife, Julia Domna. While Dio reports this in his narrative of Macrinus’ reign, including more information about her attempt to gain sole power and her breast cancer (79[78].23–24), Herodian transfers it to several years earlier, directly after Caracalla’s death. As a result the two events are linked chronologically, causally, and thematically: “With both of her sons dead under similar circumstances she committed suicide, perhaps without any prompting or perhaps she was ordered to do so. And hence, after living as has been described above, Antoninus and his mother Julia died in this way.”

Herodian’s change serves to abridge the narrative and organize it in an elegant manner, ordering it under the reigns of each emperor in turn. What follows is concerned with the reign of Macrinus (especially his wars against the Parthians and Elagabalus), and Herodian does not want to include an event that would detract from its momentum. Concomitantly, his account of the death of Julia Domna might be designed to be associated *inratextually* with two other death scenes in his work, those of Elagabalus (5.8.8–9) and Severus Alexander (6.9.6–8). In all three instances, the death is caused by the soldiers whom each emperor alienates by his bad temper, while most importantly Herodian reports the deaths of the mothers alongside those of their sons. This encourages a thematic triangle for comparison and reflection on Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander, which helps to clarify why their reigns progressed as they did. The position and influence of imperial women over the principate in Herodian call for special note

35 4.13.8: ἐκείνη δὲ ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν παιδῶν ὡμοίας συμφοραῖς ἐτέκεκούσα ἐτέκεκελευσθεὶσα ἐπεκαρτέρησε. τοιούτῳ μὲν δὴ τέλει ἐχρήσατο ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος καὶ ἡ μήτηρ Ἰουλία, βιώσαντες ὡς προείρηται.

36 On the death of Elagabalus and his mother cf. Dio 80[79].20.2, though the mother appears to play a more active role in Dio than in Herodian’s text. We are told that she was at variance with Alexander’s mother and that both were rousing the soldiers to anger (80[79].20.1). Herodian’s *History* downplays the role of Elagabalus’ mother.

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In the case of Caracalla and Geta, Julia Domna fails to educate and reconcile her two sons (3.15.6–7), with the result that Caracalla eventually kills his brother (4.4.1–3). Julia Maesa, conversely, plays a prominent role in the course of Elagabalus’ reign (5.3.2–12, 5.5.1, 5.5.5, 5.7.1–4), and she manages to block all machinations of Elagabalus against Severus Alexander (5.8.3–4). In addition, Herodian’s narrative of the rule of Alexander takes a special interest in the dominant presence of the Severan women, particularly his mother Julia Mamaea (6.1.1–6.9.8), and the detrimental consequences for the emperor and the principate.

That Herodian’s displacements serve to streamline his narrative so as to keep its focus on the main player(s) and themes in an uninterrupted manner is also visible in the way he varies the treatment of Macrinus’ flight. Dio’s description of Macrinus’ masquerade is placed after his escape from Antioch. There, according to Dio, the emperor had returned in his flight from the battle against Elagabalus, and pretended victory; as soon as news of his defeat circulated, he assumed the appearance of an ordinary citizen in order to flee from Antioch (79[78].39.1–2). Herodian, however, prefers to place the description of Macrinus’ disguise during the battle with Elagabalus: afraid of being

37 Herodian’s description of Severus Alexander’s death evokes that of Elagabalus in Dio 80[79].20.2: “His mother, who embraced him and clung tightly to him (περιπλακεῖσα γὰρ ἀπρὶξ εἴχετο), perished with him.” Cf. Hdn. 6.9.6 where Alexander “clings to his mother (ἡ τὴν μητρὶ περιπλακείς.” See A. Timonen, Cruelty and Death: Roman Historians’ Scenes of Imperial Violence (Turku 2000) 200. Alföldy, Latomus 32 (1973) 350–351, notes a similarity between Herodian’s account of Severus Alexander’s end and the narrative of Geta’s death in Dio 78[77].2.3–4. Moreover, in Dio 80[79].20.2 Elagabalus dies while seeking protection in his mother’s arms, a detail highly reminiscent of the account of Geta’s death in both Dio (78[77].2.3–4) and Herodian (4.4.3). See Scott, Emperors and Usurpers 146.

abandoned by all his soldiers, he changed his appearance while the battle still continued and ran away (5.4.7). Herodian shows at this point a more elaborate reworking of Dio’s History, and this brings us to another technique that Herodian frequently employs to abridge and tidy his narrative; this is the suppression of themes and actions that he seems to find unnecessary to the cohesion of his composition and his interpretative agenda.\footnote{39}

\textit{Omissions}

First, it will be helpful to distinguish two kinds of omissions in Herodian’s History: those that do not affect his meaning (in which Herodian reports the same story as Dio, but with fewer details), and those in which his account diverges from Dio’s.

The function of the first kind of omission is simply to abridge the narrative and make it less tedious by avoiding extra and unnecessary (at least in Herodian’s eyes) material. For example, he leaves out many of Dio’s details about Commodus’ megalomania deeds, such as the names of his victims (1.13.7 ~ Dio 73[72].14.1–3),\footnote{40} the names of the months called after him (1.14.9 ~ Dio 73[72].15.3), the titles and names assumed by the emperor (1.14.8 ~ Dio 73[72].15.4–5), and most of the particulars of Commodus’ shows and exhibitions (1.13.8, 1.15.1–9


\footnote{40} Compare also 3.15.4 ~ Dio 78[77].1.1–2, the latter providing more details about Caracalla’s victims; cf. Zimmermann, \textit{Kaiser und Ereignis} 208. See Scheithauer, \textit{Hermes} 118 (1990) 346–347, on similar “Kürzungen” in Herodian’s account of Elagabalus’ reign. In general, Herodian tends to simplify his plot by eschewing references to unnecessary names and minor characters. So e.g. the report of the murder of Elagabalus and his retinue in Hdn. 5.8.8 ~ Dio 80[79].21.1–3; the mention of Julius Martialis and other accomplices of the murder of Caracalla in Dio 79[78].5.2–3—Herodian names only Julius Martialis (4.13.2). On these and other instances see Kolb, \textit{Literarische Beziehungen} 118–120, 130–133; Sidebottom, \textit{ANRW} II 34.4 (1998) 2815; Zimmermann, \textit{Kaiser und Ereignis} 201; Kemezis, \textit{Greek Narratives} 236–237; Scott, \textit{Mnemosyne} 71 (2018) 435, 449–450 with n.54, 455.
~ Dio 73[72].16–22). Naturally, there is much less in Herodian’s *History* of the specific events relating to the senators, which dominate Dio’s senatorial work (1.15.5 ~ Dio 73[72].21.1–2). Herodian is not silent about Commodus’ atrocities, but simply mentions as much material as is useful for understanding the emperor’s transgressions without overburdening his reader.

The same is true of Herodian’s abbreviation of topographical and geographical excursuses, such as that on Byzantium (3.1.5–6 ~ Dio 75[74].10–13). Herodian mentions only those details that are primarily intended to explain Niger’s desire to capture the city. He also avoids detailed reports of omens and divine signs. He is satisfied to highlight the presence and working of the divine but in a very selective manner that does not distract the reader from his primary focus on human motivation and action. One might consider, for example, the detailed treatment of portents of Macrinus’ death in Dio 79[78].25.1–

41 Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 130–132, stresses Herodian’s selectivity as well.

42 Herodian prefers to elaborate on the popular displeasure with Commodus’ appearance as a gladiator (1.15.7). In general, Dio offers many more details than Herodian about senators and events in the senate: e.g. Dio 74[73].12.1–13.1, with Whittaker, *Herodian* I 179 n.1; 77[76].5.1–6.1, with Whittaker 348 n.1; cf. 74[73].14.4–5, 76[75].4.2, 77[76].8.1–7. See further Whittaker 20, 47; Kemezis, *Greek Narratives* 236–237; Galimberti, *Erodiano e Commodo* 16–17. On Herodian’s narratorial persona see esp. Hidber, in *Narrators* 201–207, 210: “In many respects Herodian’s primary narrator is the counterpart of his immediate predecessor, the very overt, self-assured and class-conscious narrator in Dio Cassius’ *Roman History* … Thus, a coherent analysis of the quick succession of reigns seems to be presented not from a specific, individual viewpoint (such as that of a senator in Dio), but rather from a very general and seemingly unrestricted point of view.” Cf. Kemezis 260–272.


44 For Herodian’s skepticism about divine signs see 2.9.3, 8.3.9. On his attitude towards the divine see Marasco, *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998) 2897–2903; B. Kuhn-Chen, *Geschichtskonzeptionen griechischer Historiker im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main 2002) 309–311.

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which Herodian strips down to a single sentence: “After only one year of softness as emperor it was obviously inevitable that Macrinus would lose the empire, and his life too, whenever chance provided a small, trivial excuse for the soldiers to have their way” (5.3.1). Similar choices can be seen in Herodian’s tendency to leave out specific data concerning the positioning and movements of combatants in his battle descriptions, which are mainly confined to a general reference, often given in formulaic language, to the clashes and skirmishes.

Examples of the same technique can easily be multiplied. Although Herodian does not suppress the theme of Caracalla’s identification with Alexander (4.8.1–2), he gives far fewer details than Dio (78[77].7.1–8.3). He also omits all the details about Plautianus’ actions and his relationship with Severus, which are spaced out in the abridged version of Dio’s work. He simply makes a handful of generalizing comments, perhaps drawn from or inspired by Dio, on Plautianus’ severity and violence (3.10.7) and Severus’ empowering of him (3.10.6). In line with his general practice of maintaining focus on the main actions and players of the History, Herodian also resorts to conflation of similar items. His treatment of Severus’ trap of the Praetorians is a fine example of this. Whereas Dio (75[74].1.1) distinguishes between those soldiers who took part in Pertinax’s

45 Cf. Dio 79[78].30.1, 37.4–6, 40.4.
46 ἐχρῆν δὲ ἀρα Μακρίνον ἔνιαυτόν μόνον τῇ βασιλείᾳ ἐντρυφήσαντα ἅμα τῷ βίῳ καὶ τῇ ἀρχῇ καταλύσαι, μικράν καὶ εὐτελῆ πρόφασιν τοῖς στρατι-ώτασις εἷς ἀ ἐβούλοντο τῆς τύχης παρασχούσης. Cf. Herodian’s report of the signs pointing to Severus’ supremacy: 2.9.3–4 ~ Dio 75[74].3.1–3.
47 E.g. the battle of Nicaea: Dio 75[74].6.4–6 ~ Hdn. 3.2.10; Issus: Dio 75[74].7.2–5 ~ Hdn. 3.4.2–6; Lugdunum: Dio 76[75].6.3–8 ~ Hdn. 3.7.2–6. For formulaic language in Herodian’s battle descriptions compare the battle of Cyzicus (3.2.2) ~ Nicaea (3.2.10) ~ Lugdunum (3.7.2) ~ Maximinus’ German expedition (7.2.6, 8) ~ the civil war between the soldiers and the people in Rome during the reign of Maximus and Balbinus (7.12.4). Cf. K. Fuchs, “Beiträge zur Kritik der ersten drei Bücher Herodians,” WS 17 (1895) 222–252, at 251 with n.166.
48 Dio 76[75].14.1–7, 15.1–7, 16.3–4; 77[76].2.2–3.
murder, on whom Severus inflicts the death penalty, and the rest whom he summons and traps, Herodian makes no attempt to draw such distinctions and simply refers to Severus’ deception of Pertinax’s murders (2.13.1).

In all these instances of omission, Herodian’s process of selection has the effect of keeping things simple and orderly, removing distracting details and avoiding side-tracks and tedious specifics. It thus smoothes the narrative flow and helps him bring out more pointedly those items that he thinks important to a proper estimate of post-Marcus history. It is also noticeable that, regardless of the material omitted, the general line of thought and the overall meaning in Herodian’s work are consistent with Dio.

In spite of this, however, there are many occasions on which Herodian’s omissions affect not only literary presentation but also historical interpretation, especially in the way in which he draws the reader to appreciate and (often) evaluate the character, actions, and motivation of individuals. For instance, he avoids any explicit reference to the corrupt successor(s) of Marcus. Contrast Dio 72[71].36.4: “Just one thing prevented him from being completely happy, namely, that after rearing and educating his son in the best possible way he was vastly disappointed in him. This matter must be our next topic; for our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day.”

Herodian also omits any reference to Commodus’ attempt to murder his father Marcus, which is found in the abridged account of Dio’s History (72[71].33.42, 77[76].14.7). Overall, Herodian decides to suppress any material that would stigmatize Marcus’ ideal standing in the History. We may contrast his mention of Caracalla’s

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49 ἐν δ’ οὖν τούτῳ ἐς τὴν οὖκ εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτοῦ συνηνέχθη, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν καὶ θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ός οὖν τε ἦν υἱός, πλείστον αὐτοῦ ὅσον διήμαρτε. περὶ οὗ ἦδη ῥητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ καταπεσούσην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ρωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας.

50 See Alföldy, Latomus 32 (1973) 347 n.12.

51 See Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 270–271.
patricide (3.15.2, 4), which has the effect of fostering a more negative reading of Caracalla and his father Severus, whose policy of teaching his sons restraint and moderation is consequently called into doubt.52

In the rest of the narrative, Herodian depicts Commodus in a less glamorous light, placing great stress on the emperor’s lack of moral integrity and his devotion to a corrupt lifestyle. The omission of Commodus’ war against the barbarians beyond Dacia or the Britons under the command of Ulpius Marcellus, which is mentioned in Dio 73[72].8, powerfully adds to Herodian’s presentation of Commodus as a less competent and respectable commander. The same can be seen in his omission of some of the actions taken by Julianus against Severus’ approach (2.11.7–9), which are related in some detail in Dio (74[73].16.1–17.1). This serves to put in sharp relief Julianus’ cowardice and inactivity, which are his purported characteristics throughout Herodian’s narrative.53

On the other hand, Herodian is warmly disposed towards Pertinax. He thus conveniently ignores the detail, found in Dio 74[73].1.2, about Pertinax’s promise of a donative to the soldiers.54 As a result, Herodian paints a positive picture of Pertinax as emperor, who has no interest in money (2.1.4). Given Herodian’s overall sympathy with him, it comes as no surprise that he prefers to eschew references to the cruel

52 Cf. 3.10.2–5, 3.13.3–5, 3.14.2. Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 201, thinks that, by omitting this information about Commodus in his account of Marcus’ death, Herodian wants “die mangelnden Qualitäten des Erziehers Severus im Vergleich zu Marc Aurel vorführen.” He also underlines Herodian’s attempt to present Marcus’ prōnoia in a wholly positive manner (37).

53 Compare also Herodian’s omission of Macrinus’ active response to the news of Elagabalus’ threat, which is described in Dio 79[78].34.1–6, and his focus on Macrinus’ indolence (5.4.2). See Whittaker, Herodian II 27: “A good example of the way in which the stereotype of the unsuccessful emperor distorts the truth.”

treatment of his corpse, described by Dio (74[73].10.2): “The soldiers cut off the head of Pertinax and fastened it on a spear, glorying in the deed” (ἀποτεκμόντες δὲ οἱ στρατιῶται τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Περτίνακος περὶ τὸ δόρον περίστεραν, τῷ ἐγρῳ ἐλλαμπρυνό-μενοι). Herodian is elsewhere not shy of such descriptions of execution and mutilation, especially when they concern less ideal emperors (such as Niger, 3.4.6; Albinus, 3.7.7, 3.8.1–2; Elagabalus, 5.8.9; Maximinus, 8.5.9). Altogether, Cassius Dio seems prepared to be more critical than Herodian of Pertinax. One might consider in particular Pertinax’s obituary at Dio 74[73].10.3: “He failed to comprehend, though a man of wide practical experience, that one cannot with safety reform everything at once, and that the restoration of a state, in particular, requires both time and wisdom.”55 This does not mean that Herodian’s narrative is completely silent about the fact that Pertinax’s character and style of leadership were ill-suited to the reality of political life. We may think, in particular, of Herodian’s reference to Pertinax’s last attempt to discover why the soldiers made the attack on him and to persuade them to restrain their passions (2.5.5–8). Herodian’s Pertinax is deluded in believing in the fruitful role of advice-giving to the Praetorians who have come to kill him.56 Herodian, however, offers no explicit conclusion or critical judgement on Pertinax. Readers are left to consider Pertinax and his leadership for themselves.57

The same applies to Herodian’s account of Severus’ treatment of the dead Niger and Albinus. In Dio 75[74].8.3, it is


56 See Kemezis, Greek Narratives 257–258.

57 See also Dio 74[73].9.3 on Pertinax’s steadfastness in the face of death: “Pertinax behaved in a manner that one will call noble, or senseless, or whatever one pleases,” πράγμα εἰτ᾿ ὅπως τις αὐτὸ ὄνομασία ἐθέλει, ἔπραξε. Herodian eschews such reservations that would have left a shadow over Pertinax.
mentioned that Niger is caught while trying to flee from Antioch toward the Euphrates to escape to the barbarians. He is beheaded, and Severus has the head sent to Byzantium and affixed to a pole, so that the Byzantines, at the sight of it, should go over to him. Herodian omits such unfavourable information about Severus, saying only that Niger “was found in one of the outlying areas of the city … and was caught and beheaded” (ἐν τινὶ προαστείῳ … εὑρεθείς … καὶ συλληφθεὶς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπετεμῆθη, 3.4.6). As to Albinus, the epitomated account of Dio says that he committed suicide, and continues: “Severus, after viewing the body of Albinus and feasting his eyes upon it to the full, while giving free rein to his tongue as well, ordered all but the head to be cast away, but sent the head to Rome to be exposed on a pole” (76[75].7.3).58 Herodian, who seems to follow Severus’ own propaganda here (cf. Dio 76[75].7.3), does not suppress the fact that “Albinus was taken prisoner and beheaded” (τὸν τὴν Ἀλβίνον συλλαβόντες καὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀφελόντες, 3.7.7), that his head was carried to Severus and then “sent to Rome with orders that it should publicly be displayed on a pole” (καὶ πέμψας τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Ἀλβίνου δημοσίᾳ ἀνασταυρωθῆναι κελεύει, 3.8.1).59 But he bypasses all details about Severus’ humiliating treatment of Albinus’ corpse.60 He simply says that Severus’ intention in sending Albinus’ head to be displayed publicly was to show the Roman people the measure of his temper as well as his anger with the friends of Albinus (3.8.1). This statement clearly portrays Severus’ cruel and fierce character; but while the narrator in Dio 76[75].7.4 openly points a censorial finger at Severus—“As this action showed … he possessed none of the qualities of a good ruler” (ἐφ᾿ οἷς δὴ δῆλος γενόμενος ὡς οὐδὲν εἰς αὐτοκράτορος

58 ἰδὼν δ᾿ οὖν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλὰ μὲν τοῖς όφθαλμοῖς πολλὰ δὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ χαρισάμενος, τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ῥήηναι ἐκέλευσε, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην πέμψας ἀνεσταύρωσεν.

59 Whittaker, Herodian I 304 n.1: “Very similar to the language used by Dio (Xiph.) 75.7.3, presumably the text of the letter to the senate.”

60 Timonen, Cruelty and Death 82–83.
ἀγαθοῦ—Herodian omits explicit condemnation of his subject. At the same time, he is intent upon praising Severus for his incomparable military achievements (3.7.7–8). Nor is this the only place where Herodian suppresses defamatory material about Severus, in order to foster a more positive reading of the emperor.61

Herodian’s omissions may also result in considerable differences of interpretation concerning the motivation of individual actions. An illustrative example is Plautianus’ plot. In Dio 77[76].3.1 it is stated that Caracalla was disgusted with his wife because “she was a most shameless creature” (τῇ τε γυναικὶ ἀναιδεστάτῃ οὖσῃ), and hated Plautianus because of his meddlersome criticisms. Herodian says nothing of Caracalla’s aversion to Plautianus’ growing influence; he insists only upon Caracalla’s hostility towards Plautianus and his daughter because of being forced to marry her against his will (3.10.8). It is not hard to see why each narrative takes the line it does. In Dio 77[76].3.1–3 Caracalla’s active role in contriving the plot against Plautianus is given considerable emphasis, while in Herodian it is Plautianus who takes action, as though in self-defence, because he is afraid of Caracalla’s threats (3.11.1).62 Herodian’s choice to ignore entirely Caracalla’s discontent with

61 E.g. Severus’ brief stay in Rome in 193: 2.14.5 ~ Dio 75[74].2.2–6; siege of Byzantium: 3.1.6–7 ~ 75[74].14.4–5, with Whittaker, Herodian I 257 n.4; battle of Nicaea: 3.2.10 ~ 75[74].6.4–6, with Whittaker 266–267 n.1; siege of Hatra: 3.9.3–8 ~ Dio 76[75].10–12, with Whittaker 320–321 n.1; battle of Lugdunum: 3.7.2–6 ~ 76[75].6.1–8, with Whittaker 298 n.1, 298–299 n.4. See also Dio 77[76].7.3–10.7 on murders committed by Severus that are omitted by Herodian. I am not suggesting that Herodian’s portrait is a pure encomium of Severus (cf. e.g. 3.8.5–7), but that at certain points he constructs his narrative in a more favourable manner. Moreover, throughout this article, I consider Herodian’s more or less favourable treatment of Severus as reflective of his overall literary and historiographical method rather than his use of (now lost) ‘biased’ sources, pace Z. Rubin, Civil-war Propaganda and Historiography (Brussels 1980) 92–129.

Plautianus’ overbearingness is in accord with the overall emphasis he places on Plautianus, rather than Caracalla, as instigator of the plot. This is consistent with Herodian’s wider thematic interest in exploring the threat that the praetorian prefect posed to imperial power.63

Omissions function in the same way in Herodian’s narrative of Elagabalus’ reign. For example, he leaves out the ludicrous material about Elagabalus’ transgressive sexual behaviour, which was detailed in Dio 80[79].13–17. Rather, he gives pride of place to the detrimental effects of Elagabalus’ barbaric appearance and its close connection to his religious performances.64 Herodian’s account is quite individual to the emperor: Elagabalus naturally bears a foreign identity which he strenuously refuses to abandon, thus activating through his appearance a dynamic of ideological polarity of Roman and barbarian.65 In general, Herodian, unlike Dio, resists using an emperor’s sexuality to reveal aspects of his moral character and to assess his adequacy to rule the Empire.66 On the contrary, an emperor’s appearance, including external features (both physiognomic and material) as well as self-staging and performance, is given narrative elaboration throughout Herodian’s History.67 It is used as both a reliable and an unreliable indicator of character

65 On this point see Kemezis, Greek Narratives 239–252.
66 There are some references here and there: 1.14.8; 1.17.3 on Commodus; 3.10.6 on Severus; and 5.5.5, 5.6.2, 5.6.10, 5.8.1 on Elagabalus. On Elagabalus’ sexuality in Dio see C. S. Chrysanthou, “Sex and Power in Cassius Dio’s Roman History: The Case of Elagabalus,” Mnemosyne (forthcoming).
67 So Commodus (1.7.5–6, 1.14.8–9, 1.15.1–9, 1.16.2–3, 1.17.12); Pertinax (2.1.6, 3.5.5); Severus (3.7.7, 3.9.1); Caracalla (3.10.3, 4.5.7, 4.7.3, 4.7.7, 4.8.1–9, 4.9.1, 4.9.3); Macrinus (4.12.2, 5.2.3–5, 5.4.7); Maximinus (6.8.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.6, 7.1.12, 7.8.9). Cf. J. S. Ward, Watching History Unfold (diss. New York Univ. 2011) 126–185; Gleason, ClAnt 30 (2011) 62–80; L. Pitcher, “Herodian,” in K. De Temmerman et al. (eds.), Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature (Leiden 2018) 236–250, at 240–241.
and (often) morality, and plays a significant role in the plot's evolution and historical causation, especially in explicating the consequences of an emperor's public posture. In this regard, Herodian's omission of the spicy anecdotes about Elagabalus' sexuality reflects his characteristic interest in visual (re)presentation, political reality, and the image of imperial identity, as well as the complex web of cause and effect that is implicit in the interplay of the three.

Modification of context

It is often the case, as already seen in the examples of Elagabalus and Caracalla, that Herodian offers depictions of characters and historical events that sit awkwardly with Cassius Dio's parallel versions as (mainly) preserved by Xiphilinus. In these instances, Herodian uses information which might come from his own imagination or another independent source, in order to diverge from the main flow of Dio's account and imbue it with new meaning. The result is that considerable differences of interpretation and emphasis are created between the two historians. For example, while in Dio 72[71].34.1 Marcus Aurelius, at the point of death, commends his son to the protection of the soldiers, in Herodian he entrusts Commodus' upbringing and guidance to his amici and relatives (1.4.1–6). As a result, Marcus' death-bed scene in Herodian highlights the importance of imperial advisers, which dominates the following narrative, and gives a good sense of Herodian's understanding of an ideal imperial court, in which the emperor worked in concert with his amici.\(^68\)

Moreover, in Dio 73[72].9.1–2 Perennis does not appear as a misleading companion, as in Herodian (1.8.1–1.9.1), but as one who was compelled (ἠναγκάζετο) to manage everything in the Empire because of Commodus' neglect of imperial duties. This generous presentation accords with Dio's positive picture of

\(^{68}\) See J. Crook, Consilium Principis (Cambridge 1955) 76–91.

\(^{69}\) Scott, Mnemosyne 71 (2018) 456.
Perennis more generally.⁷⁰ Herodian seems to manipulate his source material here in order to align Perennis’ character “to the general depiction of a greedy and power-hungry prefect, in the same mode as Cleander and Plautianus” and thus to “emphasize,” as noticed above, “the danger that the emperor faced from the praetorian prefect.”⁷¹ One can compare the more positive presentation of Asellius Aemilianus, Niger’s commander, in Dio 75[74].6.2 as a man “who by remaining neutral and watching events in order to take advantage of them seemed to surpass all the senators of that day in understanding and in experience of affairs.”⁷² In contrast, Herodian presents him negatively: “Some sources suggest that from the very start Niger’s cause was lost because it had been betrayed by Aemilianus” (φασὶ δὲ τινὲς προδοθέντα τὰ τοῦ Νίγρου πράγματα ὑπὸ Αἰμιλιανοῦ εὐθέως ἐν ἄρχῃ διαφθαρῆναι, 3.2.3). Herodian’s more negative depiction of him as a traitor to Niger serves to illuminate Severus’ earlier stratagem of pressing Aemilianus to abandon Niger’s cause by imprisoning his children (3.2.3–5).

A substantial difference in characterization is also visible in the depiction of Didius Julianus. Consider, for example, the death narratives in the two works. In Herodian the main emphasis is on Julianus’ cowardice, wretchedness, and demoralization (2.12.6–2.13.1), while in Dio (74[73].17.5) there is a glimpse of Julianus’ deficient mindset, as shown by a vivid citation of his last words.⁷³ This is in keeping with the recurrent emphasis in Dio on Julianus’ mental inadequacy (74[73].12.5, 14.2a), rather than on his cowardice and inactivity. Herodian seems deliberately to reject Dio’s portrait and to choose to focus on other

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⁷² ὁτι τε μεσεύων καὶ ἐφεδρεύων τοὺς πράγματα πάντων τῶν τότε βουλευόντων καὶ συνέσει καὶ ἐμπειρίᾳ πραγμάτων προφέρειν ἐδόκει.


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aspects of Julianus’ personality for two reasons: first, in order to draw a sharper contrast between Julianus and Severus, who appears most courageous and energetic throughout the *History*, overpowering all his opponents; and second, in order to show through Julianus’ example a pattern of imperial behaviour that is later to emerge strongly, the shattering consequences of cowardice and inactivity in the career of an emperor (Niger, Albinus, Macrinus, Severus Alexander, Gordian I).

Herodian is also at pains to put a colouring on Severus’ career different from its presentation in Dio. At Dio 76[75].6.1 it is explicit that, during the battle of Lugdunum between Severus and Albinus, “there were a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers on each side, and both leaders were present in the conflict” (πεντεκάδεκα μὲν μυριάδες στρατιωτῶν συναμφότερος ὑπῆρχον, παρῆσαν δὲ καὶ ἀμφότεροι τῷ πολέμῳ). By contrast, Herodian seems to favour a more positive reading of Severus, stating that Albinus took refuge in the city and sent his army out to fight (3.7.2).74 Herodian, however, is prepared to tilt the scales and find material to moderate his flattering account of Severus’ military conduct. An example is his narrative of Severus’ serious misfortune in the battle of Lugdunum, which, Herodian notes, is mentioned by those historians who prioritize truth over flattery (3.7.3): “In the sector where Severus and his personal troop were stationed, Albinus’ battle-line was far stronger. The emperor turned tail and was knocked off his horse, but escaped detection by tearing off his imperial cloak.”75 In Dio 76[75].6.6–7, on the other hand, Severus loses his horse, then tears off his cloak, and joins his fleeing soldiers

74 For similar examples of Herodian’s more favourable presentation of Severus see Dio 76[75].8.1 ~ Hdn 3.7.8, with Whittaker, *Herodian I* 303 n.3; also Dio 77[76].63 ~ Hdn. 3.13.3, with Zimmermann, *Herodian und Ereignis* 196 n.221, where Herodian, unlike Dio, highlights Severus’ philanthropic treatment of Plautianus’ children.

75 πολύ τι ύπερέσχεν ἡ φάλαγξ τοῦ Ἀλβίνου στρατοῦ, καθ’ ὁ μέρος τέτακτο ὁ Σεβήρος καὶ ὁ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατός, ὡς φυγεῖν τε αὐτὸν καὶ τοῦ ὕππου ἐκπεσεῖν, ἀπορρίσαντα δὲ τὴν χλαμύδα τὴν βασιλικὴν λαθεῖν.
in the hope of either making them feel ashamed and turn back or dying with them: “some of the fugitives did stop when they saw him in this attitude, and turned back” (ἔστησαν γοῦν τινες τωμῶν εὗτον ἰδόντες καὶ ὑπέστρεψαν). Dio’s version shows Severus’ heroic stature and concern for others, rather than his inferior act of flight stressed by Herodian.\(^{76}\) It must be for this reason that Herodian emphasizes his report of an unbiased and truthful account, while it is likely that his reference to those historians who disrespect truth (3.7.3) might be hinting at Cassius Dio, from whom he considerably departs at this point.

Comparison with Dio’s account shows that thematic and characterizing considerations have led Herodian to alter his treatment in suggestive ways. In Dio 79[78].1.1 the Parthian king does not fall victim to Caracalla’s guile, in contrast with Herodian (4.10–11), who cares to underline that the king is outwitted by Caracalla’s duplicity\(^{77}\)—a prominent characteristic of the emperor in Herodian’s History (4.4.6, 4.5.1–6, 4.9.4–8).\(^{78}\) Additionally, in Dio we read that Julius Martialis, the murderer of Caracalla, was annoyed with Caracalla because he did not give him the post of centurion when he asked for it (79[78].5.3). In Herodian, a private grudge of Martialis against Caracalla is mentioned too, but for executing his brother on an unproven charge and hurling insults at Martialis (4.13.2). Herodian prefers motives that let us focus more on Caracalla’s tyranny and flawed character, which eventually place on him responsibility for his failure.\(^{79}\)

\(^{76}\) Cf. Rubin, Civil-war Propaganda, 22, 125, who acknowledges too that Dio’s account “is slightly less hostile in tone” than that of Herodian (22).

\(^{77}\) On this see Scott, Emperors and Usurpers 29–30.

\(^{78}\) Herodian’s different focus on the emperor’s ‘guile’ might also be explained by his desire to fit Caracalla’s story to the formulaic pattern of his ‘trap-narratives’ (cf. Severus and the Praetorians at 2.13.1–12). See Sidebottom, ANRW II 34.4 (1998) 2816.

\(^{79}\) Cf. 4.14.1–2 on Macrinus’ reasons for plotting against Caracalla. A. G. Scott, “Dio and Herodian on the Assassination of Caracalla,” CW 106 (2012) 15–28, at 28, notes that “the same charges that Caracalla had made against Macrinus are later made against Julius Martialis, the eventual mur-
Similar things are found in Herodian’s account of Macrinus’ death, where he chooses to present a strain of story different from that in Dio. First, Dio reports that Macrinus is seized in Chalcedon and then brought to Cappadocia. There he learns of his son’s capture and throws himself from the carriage and suffers a shoulder fracture. A little later he is slain by Marcius Taurus, and his body remains unburied until Elagabalus views it exultingly (79[78].39.5–40.2). Dio includes an obituary where he comments that Macrinus, though an old man, distinguished for his practical experience, virtue, and military command, was destroyed by a mere boy; he also stresses the reversal of fortune of the emperor (79[78].40.3–5), and concludes in a rather tragic tone with a commentary on the uncertainty of power and instability of human prosperity. Dio gives Macrinus a bad press for making a bid for the principate, instead of selecting someone from the senate and trusting him with the supreme power; in this way, Macrinus would have avoided blame for the plot against Caracalla, for he would have shown that he did the deed in order to secure his own safety and not out of desire to possess the imperial power (79[78].41.1–4).

Macrinus receives no such attention in the text of Herodian, where it is Macrinus’ desire for safety rather than for power that appears to motivate his scheme against Caracalla. Herodian’s presentation of Macrinus’ motives here serves both to illuminate Caracalla’s despotic character as well as align

80 For the same charge see Elagabalus’ letter to the senate in Dio 80[79].1.2. On Dio’s complaints against Macrinus’ low origins see Scott, CW 106 (2012) 20–21.

81 See Sidebottom, ANRW II 34.4 (1998) 2810; Timonen, Cruelty and Death 179, 182. The fear explanation is not completely absent from Dio’s narrative: e.g. 79[78].4.4, 5.1. Cf. Timonen 177; Scott, CW 106 (2012) 22.
Macrinus with other prefects in the *History*, such as Laetus and Plautianus, who contrived plots against emperors because of their fear and hatred of them—a recurrent theme in Herodian.82 On the other hand, Dio, as a senator, has naturally a more sustained interest than Herodian in social divides and transgressions of status and power.83 This is a point noticed above in our discussion of Martialis’ motives. Moreover, if we compare the parallel account of Macrinus’ killing in Herodian’s work, it becomes clear that, in the death scene itself and his concluding judgement, he adds flourishes that are uniquely his own in order to draw several connections in his *History* between Macrinus’ and Niger’s death narratives.

Niger, like Macrinus, escapes with a few of his men from a battle against his enemy (3.4.6, cf. 5.4.7–8), and he dies in a way that is very similar to that of Macrinus: “In one of the outlying areas of the city [Antioch] he [Niger] was found hiding by the pursuing cavalry and caught and beheaded” (3.4.6). The verbal correspondences between the two accounts are especially suggestive.84 Moreover, Herodian’s concluding verdicts on the two emperors expose and criticize similar errors: Macrinus met an unhappy end “after he later decided to do what he should have done in the first place by returning to Rome” (ὑστερον θελήσας εἰς τὴν Ῥώµην ἀνελθεῖν, δέον ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι, 5.4.12). In a similar vein, Niger paid the penalty (δοὺς δίκας)—we may remember the “punishment” (τιµωρία) that was due to Macrinus (5.4.11)—for sloth and procrastination (3.4.7). Earlier in his narrative of Niger’s reign, Herodian explicitly

84 3.4.6 Niger: καὶ ἐν τινὶ προοστεῖῳ κρυπτόμενος, εὐρεθεὶς τε ὑπὸ τῶν διώκοντων ἱππεῶν καὶ συλληθεὶς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπετέθη ~ 5.4.11 Macrinus: ἐνθα αὐτὸν εὑρόντες ἐν τινὶ κρυπτόμενον προοστείῳ οἱ διώκοντες τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέτεθον.

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blamed him for having “neglected his departure for Rome, to which he ought to have been putting all his energies” (τῆς δὲ εἰς Ῥώμην ἀφόδου, ἡμεῖς ἂν μᾶλιστα ἐχρΗμὴν σπεύδειν, ἠμέλει, 2.8.9–10). The connections drawn intratextually between Macrinus’ and Niger’s death narratives have the effect of presenting Macrinus as an emperor who conforms to and continues a pattern of behaviour that was to Niger’s disadvantage and now brings Macrinus inexorably to his fall.

Conclusion

This article has offered a comparative examination of Herodian’s account and the epitomated version of Cassius Dio’s History. Its findings deepen our understanding of Herodian’s own literary motivations and historiographical method by revealing how he remolds and manipulates his material, as well as what considerations led him to alter his treatment in these ways.

Herodian is keen to omit or reorder his source material in order to abridge and simplify his narrative, thus restoring to his reader an uninterrupted sequence of events that aids focusing on the main historical players and themes. The narrative is accordingly organized more elegantly and smoothly, while on many occasions his compositional technique has a considerable impact on historical interpretation as well. More often, he tackles the same events as Cassius Dio but gives them a com-

85 See Fuchs, WS 18 (1986) 213 n.168, 214 n.170. Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 184–185 n.181, rightly notes the verbal and thematic parallels between 2.8.9–10 and 5.2.3–4. See also Kemezis, Greek Narratives 250–251.

86 A similar example of Herodian’s technique is found in his narrative of Pertinax’s death, which diverges at several points from that in Dio in order to construct Pertinax’s end as a parallel to his accession, thus pointing to recurring themes and characteristics: esp. 2.1.5 ~ 2.5.3 on the similar reactions of the watchman and the attendants; 2.1.5 ~ 2.5.2 on the unexpected arrival; 2.1.6–7 ~ 2.5.4–8 on Pertinax’s steadfastness, with Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 162; 2.1.9 ~ 2.5.8 on Pertinax’s respectful old age. See Whittaker, Herodian II 307 n.1; Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 162, 261–262; Hidber, Herodians Darstellung 256–257, on close connections between Pertinax’s death scene and that of Maximus and Balbinus.
pletely different spin, either by transferring or delaying items to different contexts, where they are productively linked causally, thematically, or chronologically with other events and characters, or even by suppressing themes and emphases that do not suit his interpretative agenda. At other times, he preserves a rather different version of events, which is the result of a more substantial process of differentiation from Cassius Dio. These observations resonate with and expand on the insights of earlier scholars concerning Herodian’s elaborate reworking of Dio’s text (n.3 above), by illuminating various aspects of his composition that impinge on characterization, literariness, and historical interpretation.

In all these instances of displacements and transpositions, omissions, and modifications, it has been shown that the process of selection and arrangement of events in the History is guided by several criteria. Herodian may revise his material in order to bring out points important to the construction of a particular imperial portrait or to favour a more positive or negative reading of an emperor.87 The revision of his material also arises from his penchant for marking parallelisms between different characters and events, which in turn adds depth to characterization and tacitly reveals a set of compelling behavioural patterns. The result is to create a unified web of history for the reader to consider and examine, providing at the same time more overarching themes and explanatory frames.88

In general, Herodian’s compositional choices are complex and meaningful, revealing not only the historian’s artistic ability and deliberate authorial design, but also his own particular way of historical analysis and comprehension. Sometimes the

87 On the importance of character-sketch for the selection and arrangement of historical material in Herodian’s work cf. Zimmermann, Kaiser und Ereignis 7, 150, 316, 322–324.

choices correspond to his theory of unbiased historiography, as expressed in his programmatic statements (1.1–2, 2.15.6–7), and at other times they do not (so his more flattering reading of Marcus, Pertinax, or Septimius Severus). In both cases, they clearly demonstrate how Herodian reworked Dio’s History and synthesized his material into a unique presentation of the post-Marcus world, which serves to uncover important lessons of the past. It is true that the relative merits of Herodian as historian are still open to debate, but his compositional methods are a precious guide to what in Herodian’s eyes is “worthy of account” and “worthy of remembering” (ἐἰ τι λόγου καὶ μνήμης ἀξίων, 2.15.7) in the history of the Roman Empire from Commodus to Gordian III. 89

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Seminar für Klassische Philologie, Heidelberg
chrysanthou@uni-heidelberg.de

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