

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

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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).¹ 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*.²

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

¹ The date of composition is still a matter of dispute. Many argue that it was written during the reign of Philip the Arab or Decius, e.g. C. R. Whittaker, *Herodian I* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1969) 12–19; G. Marasco, "Erodiano e la crisi dell'impero," *ANRW II* 34.4 (1998) 2837–2927, at 2839; A. Polley, "The Date of Herodian's *History*," *AntCl* 72 (2003) 203–208. See A. Kemezis, *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans* (Cambridge 2014) 300–304, for a detailed discussion. H. Sidebottom, "The Date of the Composition of Herodian's *History*," *AntCl* 66 (1997) 271–276, suggests the reign of Gallienus, while A. Kaldellis, "How Perilous was it to Write Political History in Late Antiquity?" *Studies in Late Antiquity* 1 (2017) 38–63, at 51–52, thoughtfully proposes Gordian III. Detailed bibliography: C. Davenport and C. Mallan, "Herodian and the Crisis of Emperors, 235–238 AD," *Mnemosyne* 73 (2020) 419–440, at 420 n.1.

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. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* (Berlin 1895–1931), here with the 'reformed' numeration of Boissevain, which E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (Loeb), also uses, followed by the traditional numeration in brackets.

pands, alters, or even distorts details in Dio's text.³ 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 Herodian 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.⁴ Moreover, both in the prologue (1.1–

³ E.g. G. Alföldy, "Zeitgeschichte und Krisenempfindung bei Herodian," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 429–449, at 431–432; F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta* (Bonn 1972) 29–30, 43–44, 47, 160–161; A. Scheithauer, "Die Regierungszeit des Kaisers Elagabal in der Darstellung von Cassius Dio und Herodian," *Hermes* 118 (1990) 335–356; M. Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis: Studien zum Geschichtswerk Herodians* (Munich 1999) 43–251; A. G. Scott, "Conspiracy as Plot Type in Herodian's Roman History," *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 434–459, at 438 with n.14, 442–445, 449–450, 451–452.

⁴ See H. Sidebottom, "Herodian's Historical Methods and Understanding of History," *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998) 2775–2836, at 2786–2787; M. Gleason, "Identity Theft: Doubles and Masquerades in Cassius Dio's Contemporary History," *CLAnt* 30 (2011) 33–86, at 74. Cf. Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 437–438 n.12.

2) 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).⁵ He refers to these authors, without naming them,⁶ 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.⁷

In addition, other anonymous sources are mentioned in the form of “it is said” or “they say” or “something/someone was alleged to (ἐλέγετο).⁸ Hidber notes that, through these unspecified and anonymous sources, Herodian exculpates himself from “the responsibility for a particular report.”⁹ 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

⁵ See T. Hidber, “Herodian,” in I. de Jong et al. (eds.), *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature* (Leiden 2004) 201–210, at 205 with n.15. Cf. Whittaker, *Herodian* I 246–247 n.2 on 2.15.6–7; and on Herodian’s prologue, T. Hidber, *Herodians Darstellung der Kaisergeschichte nach Marc Aurel* (Basel 2006) 82–92. On Herodian’s sources in general see Whittaker 61–71; F. Gascó, “Las fuentes de la historia de Herodiano,” *Emerita* 52 (1984) 355–360.

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.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,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.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,¹³ and one of the difficulties is the lack (for the most part) of Dio's original text.¹⁴ It is now generally accepted that Herodian knew Dio's

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

¹¹ See H. Sidebottom, "Severan Historiography: Evidence, Patterns, and Arguments," in S. Swain et al. (eds.), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge 2007) 52–82. On the historiographical tendencies in the period see also E. Bowie, "Greeks and their Past in the Second Sophistic," *P&P* 46 (1970) 10–28.

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 Iugurthinum*, 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.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 Herodian in the first five books of Herodian's work. "A reasonable conclusion," Scott suggests, "is that Herodian has used Dio's history as his main source, and that deviations from Dio's account are attributable to Herodian's narrative preferences" rather than his use of differing source material.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.

Usurpers: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 79(78)–80(80) (Oxford 2018) 2–3.

¹⁵ See e.g. Sidebottom, *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998) 2781–2782, who adduces significant thematic and verbal parallels between Herodian's and Dio's texts; similarly, Scheithauer, *Hermes* 118 (1990) 337–343. Cf. Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 324: "Immerhin gibt es aber ausreichend Hinweise dafür, daß Herodian bis zum sechsten Buch Material und Anregungen in erster Linie seinem älteren Zeitgenossen Cassius Dio verdankt"; Hidber, *Herodians Darstellung* 63, 68–70, who sees Herodian using Dio's text as a kind of *hypomnema*; A. Galimberti, *Erodiano e Commodo* (Göttingen 2014) 15, 18; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 438 with n.14, with further bibliography.

¹⁶ Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 455.

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 ἰκετεύουσα οὐκ ἐτύγχανεν αὐτοῦ, ἢ 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

¹⁷ Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 446–447.

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 67.15.3–4.²⁰ 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).²¹ 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.²²

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 ver-

ian's narrative of Elagabalus.

²⁰ E.g. A. G. Roos, "Herodian's Method of Composition," *JRS* 5 (1915) 191–201, at 192–195; Whittaker, *Herodian* I 109–110 n.4, 112 n.1, 134–135 n.1; Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen* 38–47; Sidebottom, *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998) 2783 with n.48; Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 140–142; Galimberti, *Erodiano e Commodo* 165–166 with bibliography.

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, οὐχ ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου ἦν καὶ τότε 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.²³ 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 Μᾶρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξείλε, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ υἱεὶ ἀπειλήσας τοῦτο ποιήσειν).²⁴ Herodian's implicit association of Caracalla with Commodus adds depth to the characterization of Caracalla, who is here understood as the further exemplar of

²³ Whittaker, *Herodian* I 363 n.3. For a comparison of the death scenes of Marcus and Severus in Herodian see O. Hekster, "Potestà imperiale: l'imperatore al comando nel terzo libro di Erodiano," in A. Galimberti (ed.), *Erodiano: Tra crisi e trasformazione* (Milan 2017) 111–129, at 112–115. F. L. Müller, *Herodian: Geschichte des Kaisertums nach Marc Aurel* (Stuttgart 1996) 322–323, identifies parallels between Herodian's narrative of Severus' death (3.15.2) and that of Marcus (1.3.1) and stresses: "Vielleicht will Herodian, auch wenn sich Marc Aurel und Septimius Severus schwerlich auf eine Stufe stellen lassen, damit noch die Parallelität in der bedauerlichen Nachfolge eines Commodus wie eines Caracalla andeuten."

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. Alföldy, "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."²⁵

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 universonum* clearly shows the *eunoia* 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).²⁶ 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: οὐδέ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέχετο. πάντες δ' ὡσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς φωνῆς, οἱ μὲν πατέρα χρηστόν, οἱ δ' ἀγαθὸν βασιλέα, γενναῖον δὲ ἕτεροι στρατηγόν, οἱ δὲ σώφρονα καὶ κόσμιον ἄρχοντα ἀνεκάλουν, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐψεύδετο.

²⁶ See Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 30–31; Hidber, *Herodians Darstellung* 192; Kemezis, *Greek Narratives* 234–235.

the post-Marcus history,²⁷ and one that he employs throughout his narrative to judge subsequent emperors.²⁸

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” (“ὁμονοεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλουτίζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε”). Herodian’s version evokes Marcus’ dying words in the first book of the *History* (1.3–4),²⁹ 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).³⁰ 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.

²⁹ See Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 199–200.

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).³¹ In fact the complexities of teaching and learning in the post-Marcus world are a recurrent theme in Herodian's *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.³² Accordingly, Herodian's reference to Severus' instruction before the British campaign adds to his role as pedagogue of his two sons.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."³⁴

³¹ On this point see Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 195, 197, 199. In Dio 77[76].7.1–3 Plautianus is a "kind of pedagogue" (οἷον παιδαγωγῶ τυνός) 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'.

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

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, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 195, 197.

³⁴ 3.14.2: ἔτι δὲ καὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς ἀπαγαγεῖν τῆς Ῥώμης θέλων, ὡς ἂν νεάζοιεν ἐν στρατιωτικῷ βίῳ καὶ σώφρονι ἀπαχθέντες τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ 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," ὁ δὲ δὴ Σεουήρος ἐπὶ Βρεττανίαν ἐστράτευσε τοὺς τε παῖδας ἐκδιαιτωμένους ὀρών καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα ὑπὸ ἀργίας ἐκλυόμενα. 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," ὁ δ' οὖν Σεουήρος 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."³⁵

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 *intratextually* 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.³⁶ 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

σθαι ἐθελήσας ἐσέβαλεν ἐς τὴν Καληδονίαν.

³⁵ 4.13.8: ἐκείνη δὲ ἐπὶ ταῖς τῶν παίδων ὁμοίαις συμφοραῖς εἴτε ἐκούσα εἴτε κελευσθεῖσα ἀπεκαρτέρησε. τοιοῦτόν μὲν δὴ τέλει ἐχρήσατο ὁ Ἀντωνίνος 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.

here.³⁷ 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.³⁸

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 (περιπλακείσα γὰρ ἀπριξ εἶχετο), perished with him." Cf. Hdn. 6.9.6 where Alexander "clings to his mother (τῇ τε μητρὶ περιπλακείζ)." 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.

³⁸ Far more underplayed is the role of Maesa and her daughters in Dio's text. See Scheithauer, *Hermes* 118 (1990) 348–350; A. Kemezis, "The Fall of Elagabalus as Literary Narrative and Political Reality," *Historia* 65 (2016) 348–390, at 364, 368, 378 n.114.

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.³⁹

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' megalomaniac deeds, such as the names of his victims (1.13.7 ~ Dio 73[72].14.1–3),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

³⁹ On this point see also Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen* 118; Sidebottom, *ANRW II* 34.4 (1998) 2783, 2815–2816; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 435, 449–450, 454–455.

⁴⁰ Compare also 3.15.4 ~ Dio 78[77].1.1–2, the latter providing more details about Caracalla's victims; cf. Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 208. See Scheithauer, *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, *Literarische Beziehungen* 118–120, 130–133; Sidebottom, *ANRW II* 34.4 (1998) 2815; Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 201; Kemezis, *Greek Narratives* 236–237; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 435, 449–450 with n.54, 455.

~ Dio 73[72].16–22).⁴¹ 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).⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.

⁴³ See L. Pitcher, "Herodian," in I. de Jong (ed.), *Space in Ancient Greek Literature* (Leiden 2012) 269–282, at 270–271.

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.

5,⁴⁵ 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).⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸ 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 ἄρα Μακρίνον ἐνιαυτοῦ μόνου τῆ βασιλείᾳ ἐντροφήσαντα ἅμα τῷ βίῳ καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν καταλῦσαι, μικρὰν καὶ εὐτελῆ πρόφασιν τοῖς στρατιώταις εἰς ἃ 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) ~ Maximus’ 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."⁴⁹ 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).⁵⁰ Overall, Herodian decides to suppress any material that would stigmatize Marcus' ideal standing in the *History*.⁵¹ We may contrast his mention of Caracalla's

⁴⁹ ἐν δ' οὖν τοῦτο ἐς τὴν οὐκ εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτοῦ συνηρέχθη, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν καὶ θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ὡς οἶόν τε ἦν ἄριστα, πλείστον αὐτοῦ ὅσον διήμαρτε. περὶ οὗ ἤδη ῥητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρῶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσοῦσης 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 Ulpian 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' *pronoia* 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].34.1²–6, 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.”

⁵⁴ See K. Fuchs, “Beiträge zur Kritik Herodians (IV.–VIII. Buch),” *WS* 18 (1896) 180–234, at 229 with n.31, 247 with n.144; Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 154–156 with n.31.

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” (ἀποτεμόντες δὲ οἱ στρατιῶται τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Περτίνιακος περί τε δόρυ περιέπειραν, τῷ ἔργῳ ἐλλαμπρυνόμενοι). 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

⁵⁵ οὐδὲ ἔγνω, καίπερ ἐμπειρότατος πραγμάτων ὢν, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἀθρόα τινὰ ἀσφαλῶς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, ἀλλ’ εἴπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ πολιτικὴ κατὰστασις καὶ χρόνου καὶ σοφίας χρῆζει. On Dio’s more critical treatment of Pertinax see Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 152–153, 163–164; Timonen, *Cruelty and Death* 144–145, 148.

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,” πρῶγμα εἶτ’ οὖν γενναῖον εἶτε ἀνόητον, εἴθ’ ὅπως τις αὐτὸ ὀνομάσαι 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 τινι προαστείῳ ... εὑρεθεὶς ... καὶ συλληφθεὶς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπετμήθη, 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” (τόν τε 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 δῆλος γενόμενος ὡς οὐδὲν εἶη αὐτοκράτορος

⁵⁸ ἰδὼν δ’ οὖν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλὰ μὲν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς πολλὰ δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ χαρισάμενος, τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ῥιφήναι ἐκέλευσε, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἐς τὴν Ρώμην 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.

ἀγαθῶ)—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 ἀναιδεστότη ὄσση), and hated Plautianus because of his meddling 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.

⁶² See Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 196; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 452–453.

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

⁶³ See Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 434–459.

⁶⁴ See esp. Scheithauer, *Hermes* 118 (1990) 345, 347–348, 352–354; Kemezis, *Greek Narratives* 246.

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,⁶⁸ “and gives a good sense of Herodian's understanding of an ideal imperial court, in which the emperor worked in concert with his *amici*.”⁶⁹

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 τινες προδοθέντα τὰ τοῦ Νίγρου πράγματα ὑπὸ Αἰμιλιανοῦ εὐθέως ἐν ἀρχῇ διαφθαρήναι, 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, 14.2^a), rather than on his cowardice and inactivity. Herodian seems deliberately to reject Dio's portrait and to choose to focus on other

⁷⁰ Dio 73[72].9.2–10.1. See Galimberti, *Erodiano e Commodo* 83–84; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 442–443.

⁷¹ Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 434–459 (quotes 443, 445). Cf. Timonen, *Cruelty and Death* 55–58. The whole story of Perennis' plot is different in Herodian and Dio; see Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 86–88.

⁷² ὅτι τε μεσεύων καὶ ἐφεδρεύων τοῖς πράγμασι πάντων τῶν τότε βουλευόντων καὶ συνέσει καὶ ἐμπειρίᾳ πραγμάτων προφέρειν ἐδόκει.

⁷³ Cf. Timonen, *Cruelty and Death* 210.

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" (πεντεκαίδεκα μὲν μυριάδες στρατιωτῶν συναμφοτέροις ὑπῆρχον, παρήσαν δὲ καὶ ἀμφοτέροι 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 Ereignisse* 196 n.221, where Herodian, unlike Dio, highlights Severus' philanthropic treatment of Plautianus' children.

⁷⁵ πολὺ τι ὑπερέσχεν ἡ φάλαγξ τοῦ Ἀλβίνου στρατοῦ, καθ' ὃ μέρος τέτακτο ὁ Σεβῆρος καὶ ὁ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατός, ὡς φυγεῖν τε αὐτὸν καὶ τοῦ ἵππου ἐκπεσεῖν, ἀπορρίψαντα δὲ τὴν γλαμύδα 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 τοιοῦτον αὐτὸν 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 duplicity⁷⁷—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 Marcianus 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).⁸⁰

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.⁸¹ Herodian's presentation of Macrinus' motives here serves both to illuminate Caracalla's despotic character as well as align

derer of Caracalla." The explanation lies, according to Scott, in the fact that "Macrinus did not actually slay Caracalla," and so "Herodian has transferred Macrinus' motives to Martialis in order to explain how the latter might have been inclined to kill the emperor."

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, δεόν ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι, 5.4.12). In a similar vein, Niger paid the penalty (δοῦς 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

⁸² Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 448–451.

⁸³ Scott, *Emperors and Usurpers* 100–101. On Dio’s narratorial persona as Roman officer see T. Hidber, “Cassius Dio,” in *Narrators* 187–199, at 187–190. On his dual identity as senator and senatorial historian see A. G. Scott, “Cassius Dio’s Contemporary History as Memoir and its Implications for Authorial Identity,” *PLLS* 17 (2018) 229–251.

⁸⁴ 3.4.6 Niger: καὶ ἐν τινι προαστείῳ κρυπτόμενος, εὐρεθεῖς τε ὑπὸ τῶν διωκόντων ἰπέων καὶ συλληφθεὶς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπετιμήθη ~ 5.4.11 Macrinus: ἔνθα αὐτὸν εὐρόντες ἐν τινι κρυπτόμενον προαστείῳ οἱ διώκοντες τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέτεμον.

blamed him for having “neglected his departure for Rome, to which he ought to have been putting all his energies” (τῆς δὲ εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ἀφόδου, ἐφ’ ἣν μάλιστα ἐχρῆν σπεύδειν, ἡμέλει, 2.8.9–10).⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

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.

⁸⁸ On Herodian's preference for patterning, repeated themes, and type-scenes see esp. Fuchs, *WS* 17 (1895) 222–252, *WS* 18 (1896) 180–234; Sidebottom, *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998) 2815–2817; Zimmermann, *Kaiser und Ereignis* 7, 64, 144, 151, 171, 255, 259–261; Scott, *Mnemosyne* 71 (2018) 434–459.

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" (εἶ τι λόγου καὶ μνήμης ἄξιον, 2.15.7) in the history of the Roman Empire from Commodus to Gordian III.⁸⁹

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