

BOOK REVIEW

Emperors and Usurpers: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 79(78)-80(80) (A.D. 217-229). By ANDREW G. SCOTT. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xviii + 191. Hardback. \$99.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-087959-4.

Cassius Dio, Roman senator and Greek historiographer from Bithynia, has been the recipient of booming scholarly attention in recent years, benefiting from Dio research consortia centered in France and Denmark. More than a hundred chapters and articles in just the past five years have shed light on not only the historical, but the literary, philosophical and cultural richness that Dio offers in his *Roman History*.

What we had not seen amidst this boom, however, was a commentary in English on Dio's *History*. Less than a quarter of the 80 books of Dio's work have received commentary in English, the last being Michael Swan's 2004 masterpiece on books 55-56. Andrew Scott, who has undertaken to direct the Society for Classical Studies' Dio Project—begun in the 1980s by Michael Swan and J.W. Humphrey with the aim of providing English commentary to the whole of the *Roman History*—, begins to fill that gap.

Scott tackles the difficult final three books of Dio's *History*, persuasively arguing for their value and, thus, a commentary on them. As he points out in his preface and introduction, the period covered by these final books (217-229 CE) marked several watershed moments in Roman history, including the fall of Caracalla, the accession of the equestrian Macrinus and the controversial reign of Elagabalus. Furthermore, survival of the *Codex Vaticanus Graecus* 1288 allows us to view Macrinus' reign as Dio had written it—a rare opportunity in a history that survives largely thanks to reconstruction from epitomes and excerpts.

The commentary proper follows the preface, introduction and a map of the Severan Roman Empire. Logically divided by book, each of the three commentary sections includes a brief introduction. The first two are harder and include handy outlines of book structure. The bibliography and general index are well-rounded and up-to-date and an *index locorum* not only helps navigate, but is a summative

illustration of Scott's attention to a rich variety of sources from the literary to the numismatic, epigraphic and papyrological.

In many ways, Scott provides a fine template for future commentaries in this series. As advertised, his commentary is primarily historical, nicely clarifying several murky periods in Severan history—the identification and analysis of the role of Eutychianus/Gannys in Macrinus' downfall is one such instance (86-87). The historical and prosopographical work comes not at the expense of historiographic analysis. From beginning to end, Scott makes a strong case for the unity of Dio's composition—a unity that is suggestive of authorial process and purpose particularly within the final books: "Dio himself moves more to the center of affairs and the work functions as the response of a senatorial eyewitness, written with the hindsight and distance of retirement and removal from the political life at Rome" (14). In addition, Scott appropriately reflects on translation and textual criticism and provides a comprehensible introduction to the sources from which Dio's text has been reconstructed and numbered (e.g., 2; 39; 85). In short, any reader of the final books of Dio's *Roman History* will be rewarded for consultation with Scott's commentary. Those interested more broadly in the history or historiography and biography of the third century CE will also find this work both accessible and enriching.

Aside from several typographical infelicities, most readers will find few shortcomings within Scott's fine work. *Desiderata* lie mostly in the series' presentation. While Scott has nicely implemented lengthier translations than his predecessors in the series, brief *lemmata* in Greek introduce each note such that those concerned with the original language will need an additional text at hand. Therefore, the inclusion of either a full Greek text of each commentary's books or significantly bolstered *lemmata* will be a boon to users of these otherwise nicely arranged commentaries.

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