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Jesper Majbom Madsen, *Cassius Dio* (*Ancients in Action*), Bloomsbury Academic, London–New York–Oxford–New Delhi–Sydney 2020, 133 pp.; ISBN 978-1-350-03337-5

To a lesser or greater extent, every scholar of Roman history in the early Empire period had to deal with the figure of Cassius Dio and his *Roman History*. For a long time, historians were only interested in certain fragments of the work. The first scholar to make a comprehensive analysis of Cassius Dio's life and work was Fergus Millar, whose *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964) led to a debate that continues, with varying degrees of intensity, to this day. In the last few years, interest in the *Roman History* and its author has grown, as expressed by the large number of articles and monographs published on the subject.[1] Among the researchers to have devoted a great deal of attention to probing Cassius Dio's writing as well as his political and historiosophical views is Jesper Majbom Madsen, whose studies have produced a book published in the popular *Ancients in Action* series. Several dozen books have already been published in this series, presenting profiles of well-known writers and historical figures in a popular-scientific form.

The nature of the series imposes certain limitations in terms not only of the way the subject is presented, but also length. The book in question is therefore not a thick volume with pages crammed with analyses and interpretations and conclusions supported by numerous bibliographical references, but rather an extended essay. It comprises four chapters. The first is a lengthy "Introduction" (pp. 1–23), in which the author presents his objective and outlines the work, presenting the state of research on Cassius Dio and the issues he will examine in the subsequent chapters. One of his main aims is "to offer an introduction to the historian and politician Cassius Dio, how he worked and wrote his history of Rome" (p. 15). But this is not his only objective, as he also hopes to convince the reader that "Dio is a useful and capable historian whose analysis of Rome's political history has much to offer . . ." (p. 15), as well as to suggest how best to use Dio's work to understand the ideological message contained in the picture he paints of the history of republican and imperial Rome. According to Madsen, the Roman historian was motivated neither by joining the debate on evaluation of the times in which he lived, nor advising the rulers on the best way to run the state (cf. pp. 13–14), but rather by the desire to use pictures from the past to illustrate the virtues of the monarchical system, of which he was an advocate.[2]

[1] A full list of which can be found in the bibliography of the work reviewed here (pp. 125–129).

[2] Cf. p. 118: "Dio maintains that democracy was an inferior form of government because political competition between members of the elite and the people's ability to pressurize those in power to promote short-

In Chapter 1 ("In Search of the Ideal Form of Government," pp. 26–56), analysing books on the history of republican Rome, Madsen points to Cassius Dio's characteristic presentation of the social and political conflicts that dogged the state. In describing them, the historian demonstrated the inability of republican institutions to effectively check the political ambitions of representatives of the aristocratic elite, attributing it to the weakness of these institutions. Meanwhile, he praises the monarchical system, in which all power is focused in the hands of the ruler. This view of Cassius Dio's is expressed most fully in his attitude to Augustus, who not only brought about the end of the civil wars, but whose systemic changes also removed their causes and guaranteed Rome an auspicious future. The Roman historian included the main aspects of his vision of a monarchical system in a fictitious discussion between Maecenas and Agrippa, held in the presence of Octavian, which can be found in the 52nd book of the *Roman History*. This makes it clear that only the strong leadership of an individual, even at the cost of political limitation of the position of the Senate to the role of an advisory body, is a guarantee of political stability in the state and of social order.

In Chapter 2 ("Roman Narratives," pp. 57–92), the author analyses the way in which Cassius Dio presents various episodes and events from the history of Rome and their main protagonists over the course of its whole history, from the beginning of the Republic until his own time. Describing them gives the historian the opportunity to express his views on the monarchy and to identify the attributes that a good ruler ought to possess. Not every emperor possessed them to the same degree. According to Cassius Dio, only a few emperors deserved to be called good rulers. He included among them Vespasian and Nerva—but there is no doubt that his ideal ruler was Augustus.

In Chapter 3 ("Cassius Dio and His History of Rome," pp. 93–114), Madsen describes the era in which Cassius Dio was politically active and shows its influence on his perception of the past, which is so different from the version that appears in the works of other Roman historians. He not only cites examples of the resulting differences in descriptions of the same events by different historians, but also attempts to explain their causes.

The author summarises his reflections on Cassius Dio's political and historiosophical views in a concise "Conclusion" (pp. 115–120). His arguments make it clear that to understand Cassius Dio's political views it is not enough to make another attempt to interpret Maecenas' discussion with Agrippa, or also to treat its contents as a picture of the political disputes going on at his time. Madsen is quite right to note that in order to understand the political views of the author of the *Roman History* and his way of looking at Rome's past, a knowledge of the entire work is essential.[3]

sighted interests failed to offer stability. Only Augustus, or emperors like him who took it upon themselves to lead with modesty and in respect of members of the elite, was able to reduce the threat of civil war . . . Dio offers a series of examples of how, in the age of the republic, Rome was in the hands of a political elite with no real interest in the Commonwealth."

[3] "Dio's preference for monarchical rule and his deployment of highly selective examples are both a strength and a weakness of his work" (p. 118). ". . . the *Roman History* may convincingly be read as an attempt to show that an oligarchical elite would always be unable to fulfil the complicated task of governing in a fair and stable fashion. Based on years of experience in Roman politics and a profound historical knowledge, Dio dismisses democracy and questions the sense of political liberty by arguing in favour of monarchy no matter how unfit the emperor turned out to be" (p. 120).

Despite its popular nature, Madsen's slim work merits a careful reading by any scholar dealing with the history of Rome, whether their intention in using Cassius Dio's work is only to cite it or they are more interested in learning about the historian himself and his book. The remarks on the political views of the author of the *Roman History* contained in this volume are not only original and fresh, but also without any doubt provide a key to understanding and interpreting his vision of Rome's past.

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