

Review

MARTINA BONO, *ALLA RICERCA DELLA CIVILITAS. LE RELAZIONI TRA PRINCEPS E ARISTOCRAZIA NELLA STORIA ROMANA DI CASSIO DIONE* (Institut des sciences et techniques de l'antiquité (ISTA) 1574). Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2022. Pp. 450. ISBN 9782848679228. €45.00.

Cassius Dio and his *Roman History* have benefited from a variety of studies in recent years, which have significantly improved our understanding of Dio's historiography. Bono's book is the latest in the series, and is the sum of her research efforts on Dio's imperial books since 2018.

B.'s purpose is to investigate how Dio elaborates the notion of *civilitas* from the beginning of the Principate to the time of Severus Alexander, when his narration ends — a challenging endeavour, given the fragmentary and epitomised condition of the imperial books. B. assumes *civilitas* as the gauge against which Dio measures the relationship between the emperors and a body that B. labels as 'aristocracy' — understood as the senators as a social body, and the Senate as an institution reflecting that body. For B., Dio's interpretation of the Principate pivots on the quality of that relationship along the line of *civilitas*.

The concept of *civilitas*, however, is a little slippery, especially if one explores it through a Greek source. To identify how this notion is rendered in Greek, B. first reviews Dio's vocabulary. The words that correspond to the notion of *civilitas* are those already known from Freyburger Galland's studies on Dio's political vocabulary: the adj. δημοτικός (and its derived forms, including the adv. δημοτικῶς); the adj. δημοκρατικός (and its derived forms, including the adv. δημοκρατικῶς); phrases, such as ὡς ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ and the like. B. briefly explores how the notion applies (or does not apply) to leaders of the late Republic like Cato, Pompey, Caesar and Antony, then reviews how *civilitas* is first depicted in the principates of Augustus and Tiberius (29–66). The result is summarised in a table (65), where B. enumerates a set of criteria that concur in identifying evidence of *civilitas* or its lack: relations with the senators, justice and freedom of speech, conduct toward the magistrates, defence of traditional institutions, refusal of honours, financial policies, feasts and games, relations with the army.

As B. argues (67–103), Dio uses the Agrippa–Maecenas debate in Book 52 as a theoretical framework to assess the role of *civilitas* in the Principate throughout the three centuries he investigates. B. speaks of 'principato civile', a civil principate as a model proposed by Dio that envisages a leading role for the Senate in the government of the State beside the emperor: thus, the *auctoritas* of the Senate cooperates with the *imperium* of the princeps to safeguard the State. A mixed πολιτεία, made of δημοκρατία and μοναρχία (101).

The review of the Roman emperors' conduct according to the touchstone of *civilitas* is a bit flat and perhaps too long (111–419, divided in two segments: the past, from Caligula to Marcus Aurelius, and the present, from Commodus to Severus Alexander). B. necessarily focuses on a recurring set of elements that do not really say anything we did not already know about how a good or a bad emperor behaves in his relationship with the senators. Scholars have written plenty about this at least since 2016 (notably in the two-volume set edited by Fromentin *et al.*, *Dion Cassius: Nouvelles lectures* and in Brill's 'Historiography of Rome and its Empire' series).

As B. concludes (421–45), Dio's assessment is directed against one enemy: the army and its devastating influence on the accession to the throne — a factor well known in Dio's times. A shared front is needed in order to face a common threat.

Against this backdrop, a few remarks are due. B.'s book gives the impression that Dio's vision is based on the theoretical framework provided by the Agrippa–Maecenas debate in Book 52. I would rather put it the other way round: without Dio's vision there would be no Agrippa–Maecenas debate, and Dio's vision clearly depends on Dio's political experience and expectations — those of a distinguished senator who witnessed the Antonines, the rise of Pertinax, Didius Julianus, the civil war and the rise of Septimius Severus, and the collapse of Severan rule. I would venture to say that it would have been nice to discuss the debate in the final segment of the book: provocative, but helpful.

In addition, the criteria that for B. underpin Dio's *civilitas*-oriented narration are themselves elements that feature in the evaluation of any political order in antiquity — i.e. even in the Greek world by a Greek source. For this reason, I am not entirely sure that these elements tell us

anything new about *civilitas* as a political attitude in Dio, simply because these elements characterise any good princeps in any imperial historian — be he a Greek or Latin writer. That *civilitas* is central for Dio is obvious, as is obvious for any senatorial historian — which means almost all the historians of the Principate we have.

Finally, B.'s book offers some fresh and detailed insights — notably those concerning Dio's political position under Macrinus, Elagabalus and Severus Alexander, and the dating of Dio's work, which are strictly intertwined things. B.'s style is elegant, but likely a little hard for non-Italian readers: long phrasing might look convoluted. Some misprints give the impression that the book has not been sufficiently checked before printing — but this unfortunately happens with very many books. Highly appreciated, on the other hand, are the final indexes (index locorum, non-literary sources, names) and a rich bibliography (though occasionally missing some works mentioned in the footnotes).

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