

## Cassius Dio and the Principate

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# Δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι, That is the Question: Cassius Dio and the Senatorial Principate

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**Abstract** Cassius Dio's account of Caligula's principate pivots on the divide between Caligula's 'democratic' debut and his later decline into despotism. As Dio reports, the murder of the emperor in 41 CE polarised the Senate on the question of whether to abolish the Principate or to confirm it. It is likely that Dio's interest in such a crucial passage depends on his own experience of the end of Commodus and the accession of Pertinax in 192-193 CE. The underpinning of his political thought is Stoic: when the relationship between the princeps and the Senate collapses, the solution is not so much 'republicanism' as a 'republican spirit', to be intended as a fruitful cooperation between the two.

**Keywords** Cassius Dio. Roman History. Caligula and Claudius. Commodus and Pertinax. Cicero. Stoicism.

**Summary** 1 Viewing Caligula and Claudius from the Severan Perspective. – 2 Dio's Factual Models: Commodus and Pertinax. – 3 Conclusion: Stoicism in Action.

As has been convincingly shown in recent years, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* deserves special attention in many respects – and this is true even when what we have is not exactly Dio's text, but rather Dio's text epitomized, particularly when the epitomator's scissors do not change the substance of Dio's



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original writing.<sup>1</sup> Among others, Dio's account of the transition between emperors is quite revealing when we wish to focus on his view of the Principate as a system. As Marion Bellissime has argued, Dio is particularly keen on connecting his reflection upon the form of the state's government to a precise vocabulary.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Book 52 plays a key role not only in this respect, but also in the whole design of the *Roman History*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, turning to other major points of transition in Dio's *Roman History* may nuance our understanding of his interpretation of such events, both in practice and in theory. In this paper, I shall take the example of two crucial transitions to be analyzed in parallel: those from Caligula to Claudius, and from Commodus to Pertinax. The affinities between these two sets of parallels demonstrate the consistency and coherency of Dio's political thought regarding the proper government of the empire (and the Senate's role within it) across his imperial narrative, and the sophisticated ways in which he shaped his historiographical project so as to express that thought.

If one considers the principate of Caligula, some fundamental elements emerge. Caligula inspires the historian's reflection on Roman absolute power in relation to the Senate. Dio focuses on the polarization between Caligula's 'democratic' (*ciuilis*) debut and his later degeneration into despotism. The murder of the emperor (January 24, 41) polarized the very Senate itself. The unprecedented killing of the head of the Roman state called into question the constitutional problem of the *genus rei publicae*. Before the accession of Claudius the next day (January 25), in a moment when the Roman state was governed by the Senate with the consuls, opposite ideas of the *res publica* were debated, and the possibility discussed of whether to abolish or to confirm the Principate (Dio 60.1.1 = Xiph. 173.11-4). For the very first time, the legitimacy of the Augustan state was strongly called into question in the senatorial assembly. In this respect, Low has usefully offered a thorough overview of the problem, with special attention to this instance of republicanism under the Principate.<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I first wish to discuss the events of January 41 by focusing on Dio's text, or on what is left of Dio's text, in parallel with

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**1** See in general, e.g., Montecalvo 2014; Lange, Madsen 2016; Fromentin et al. 2016; Burden-Strevens, Lindholmer 2019; Osgood, Baron 2019; Burden-Strevens 2020; Lange, Scott 2020. As for Dio's epitomization, e.g. by Xiphilinus, see Mallan 2013; Berbessou-Broustet 2016; see also Zinsli 2017 and my discussion in this chapter. On other epitomators, such as Peter the Patrician and John of Antioch, see Roberto 2016a; 2016b; on Zonaras, see Bellissime, Berbessou-Broustet 2016.

**2** Bellissime 2016.

**3** Bellissime 2016, 535-8. See also Ando 2016, 570-2.

**4** Low 2013. As for the concept of 'republicanism' see, e.g., Rudich 1993; Kapust 2011; Gallia 2012; Wilkinson 2012; and again Low 2013.

the detailed account of Flavius Josephus about the senatorial debate following the death of Caligula, and with Suetonius' *Life of Caligula*. Secondly, I intend to show Dio's personal interest in such a crucial passage of the history of the Principate on the grounds of his own experience. He directly witnessed the death of Commodus on December 31, 192, and the rise to power of Pertinax on January 1, 193. This may have served as a model for Dio's analysis of the fall of Caligula and subsequent accession of Claudius. Thirdly, I shall point out the way in which Stoicism underpins – to a significant extent – Dio's attention to the relationship between the *princeps* and the Senate. When such relationship is at stake, the solution is not so much 'republicanism' as, rather, a 'republican spirit' true in its essence – the most fruitful cooperation between the *princeps* and the Senate for the sake of the Roman commonwealth. In this respect, the theoretical influence of Cicero's *De republica* and of Marcus Aurelius's political and philosophical model may have played a prominent role in shaping Dio's own reflection on the Principate between Commodus and Pertinax.

## 1 Viewing Caligula and Claudius from the Severan Perspective

The picture of the principate of Caligula that Dio offers from his point of view may be synthesized with Dio's own words:

Cass. Dio 59.3.1 δημοκρατικώτατός τε γὰρ εἶναι τὰ πρῶτα δόξας, ὥστε μήτε τῶ δήμῳ ἢ τῇ γε βουλῇ γράψαι τι μήτε τῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν ἀρχικῶν προσθέσθαι τι, μοναρχικώτατος ἐγένετο, ὥστε πάντα ὅσα ὁ Αὐγούστος ἐν τοσοῦτῳ τῆς ἀρχῆς χρόνῳ μόλις καὶ καθ' ἐν ἑκάστον ψηφισθέντα οἱ ἐδέξατο, ὧν ἕνια ὁ Τιβέριος οὐδ' ὄλως προσήκατο, ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ λαβεῖν.

He had seemed at first most democratic to such a degree, in fact, that he would send no letters either to the people or to the Senate nor assume any of the imperial titles; yet he became most autocratic, so that he took in one day all the honours which Augustus had with difficulty been induced to accept, and then only as they were voted to him one at a time during the long extent of his reign, some of which indeed Tiberius had refused to accept at all.<sup>5</sup>

When Caligula debuted as *princeps* (March 18, 37), he somehow repeated Tiberius' debut in 14. The highest respect of the Senate and

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<sup>5</sup> Greek text is here and elsewhere from Boissvain's edition. All translations are from Cary 1914-1927.

the people was manifest.<sup>6</sup> The Augustan spirit of the Roman Republic, relieved of the burdens of civil war, was there again.

It was, also, somewhat a Ciceronian spirit. In his *De republica* (published 51 BCE), Cicero had essentially foreshadowed the ideal of a sympathetic relationship between the Senate and an *optimus ciuis* chosen by the assembly and operating in accord with the senators to contribute to the government of the state – to an extent that may have, at least partly, influenced Augustus’ own design of the Principate.<sup>7</sup> I shall return upon this at a later point (§ 3), but it is worth anticipating that for Cicero, theoretically, the power conceded by the Senate to the *optimus ciuis* was balanced by the Senate’s control, which was founded on the Senate’s acknowledged authority (*auctoritas*).<sup>8</sup> Such a mix produced what in the 2nd century – precisely and significantly, by the age of the Antonines – would be conceptualized as *ciuilitas*, a word which, after its Suetonian first appearance – significantly again, primarily connected to Augustus –, happens to be the highest political result of Dio’s ideal of a well-balanced, *ciuilis* monarchy.<sup>9</sup> Along this line, which separates *ciuilitas* with its kin concepts from its opposite, selfish *superbia* driving into *tyrannis* (despotism), the *genus rei publicae* chosen by Augustus experienced its unresolved tensions throughout the duration of the Principate.<sup>10</sup>

This is exactly what happened under Caligula, and Dio is aware of it. At the beginning of Book 59, Dio stresses the difference between Caligula’s beginning and his end. There is an immense distance between Caligula’s debut as δημοκρατικώτατος and his end as μοναρχικώτατος. The emperor evolved from being the most democratic, that is ‘republican’ in the sense of the old fashioned senatorial-consular form of government of the Roman state (the Roman state

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**6** See Brunt 2013, 296 on Tiberius.

**7** See Augustus’ words in the cute anecdote at Plut. *Cic.* 49.3, when the emperor paying visit to one of his daughter’s sons (Gaius or Lucius Caesar) expresses his view on the man, but also on the politician and, I believe, on the political theorist: “A learned man, my child, a learned man and a lover of his country” (λόγιος ἀνὴρ, ὃ παῖ, λόγιος καὶ φιλόπατρις) (transl. from Perrin’s Loeb edition).

**8** See e.g. *Cic. Rep.* 1.39, 41, 43, 48, 49, 50, 55; 2.14-5, 43, 47, 51, 52, 56. Cf. Lepore 1954, 56-76, 201-18; Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 43; Ferrary 1995, 51-3. On the immediate impact of the *De republica* on its audience see e.g. Bréguet 1980, 162-5.

**9** The first attestation of *ciuilitas* is Suet. *Aug.* 51 (cf. *ThL*, III, 1219.39-1220.8, s.v. «*ciuilitas*»); on this development and on its reception by Dio, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 43-4, and fn. 90. On Dio’s elaboration of the concepts of δημοκρατία and μοναρχία, see Urso in this volume.

**10** On *superbia* as opposed to *ciuilitas* in the relationship between the *optimus ciuis* (and later the *princeps*) and the Senate, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 33, 41, 46, and cf. *Cic. Rep.* 1.51 where *ciuitas* – the ensemble of the citizens of Rome – is opposed to the *superbia* of the rich men pretending to be the best. Of course, *ciuitas* is very much within the semantic sphere of the *ciuilitas*. See *ThL*, III, 1229.40-1240.29, s.v. «*ciuitas*».

being *res publica*), to being the most monarchic, that is ‘despotic’. His original ‘republican’ mood entirely inspired his deference toward the senatorial assembly. As Dio remarks, Caligula “promised to share his power with them and to do whatever would please them, calling himself their son and ward” (τὴν τε γὰρ ἀρχὴν κοινώσκειν σφίσι καὶ πάνθ’ ὅσα ἂν καὶ ἐκείνοις ἀρέσῃ ποιήσκειν ὑπέσχετο, καὶ υἱὸς καὶ τρόφιμος αὐτῶν λέγων εἶναι, 59.6.1) – a phrasing very much in line with Marcus Aurelius’ later reverence in addressing the Senate.<sup>11</sup>

In Dio’s opinion, however, this was pure rhetoric: “the democracy was preserved in appearance, but there was no democracy in fact” (τὸ μὲν σχῆμα τῆς δημοκρατίας ἐσώζετο, ἔργον δ’ οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἐγίγνετο, 59.20.4). With Caligula’s decline into tyrannical autocracy, the relationship between the emperor and the Senate deteriorated correspondingly. The outcome is nicely summarized by Seneca (*ben.* 2.12), who comments on Caligula allowing the distinguished senator Pompeius Pennus (consul suffectus in 39 or 40) to kiss his foot: “Is not this a trampling upon the commonwealth?” (*non hoc est rem publicam calcare?*), and by Suetonius (*Cal.* 49.1), who reports Caligula proclaiming, upon return from his extravagant German expedition of 39-40, that “to the Senate he would never more be fellow-citizen nor prince” (*se neque ciuem neque principem senatui amplius fore*). As for Dio, he focuses his attention on some symbolic issues. In 39, Caligula removed two consuls-elect from their office, and in parallel did something unheard-of: in order to emphasize the impact of his decision, he ordered that the consular fasces be broken in public.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, he exiled the orator Carrinas Secundus for delivering a speech that explicitly addressed the problem of tyranny – obviously alluding to him.<sup>13</sup> His degeneration was accelerated by his acquaintance with such eastern dynasts as Agrippa and Antiochus, whom Dio styles as Caligula’s τυραννοδιδάσκαλοι, ‘tyrant-trainers’ – though this label may well derive from the language of contemporary polemics against Caligula rather than Dio’s own imagination.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Dio comments on the erratic behaviour of the emperor whenever the Senate proposed to bestow honours upon him. Caligula refused, Dio maintains, only because he wished to avoid seeming inferior to the senators by dignifying them with his acceptance.<sup>15</sup>

**11** Cass. Dio 72[71].33.2 οὕτως οὐδὲν ἴδιον ἔχομεν ὥστε καὶ ἐν τῇ ὑμέτερᾳ οἰκίᾳ οἰκοῦμεν (we are so far from possessing anything of our own that even the house where we live is yours).

**12** Cass. Dio 59.20.1-3.

**13** Cass. Dio 59.20.6.

**14** Cass. Dio 59.24.1 καὶ μάλισθ’ ὅτι ἐπυθάνοντο τόν τε Ἀγρίππαν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν Ἀντίοχον τοὺς βασιλέας ὥσπερ τινὰς τυραννοδιδασκάλους συνεῖναι (And they were particularly troubled on ascertaining that King Agrippa and King Antiochus were with him, like two tyrant-trainers).

**15** Cass. Dio 59.23.3.

The murder of Caligula in 41 left Rome without a *princeps*.<sup>16</sup> As well as the tyrannicide, the hiatus itself was unparalleled in the young history of the Principate. But, of course, the Roman state remained with the Senate, and with the two consuls: Cn. Sentius Saturninus and Q. Pomponius Secundus. That is, the *res publica* was intact, as always. Nonetheless, this historic event raised the ‘constitutional’ problem of the *genus rei publicae*: after gathering on the Capitol in emergency conditions – and with the practical intention to watch over the public treasury –, the senators took opposing views on the way in which the Roman state ought to be governed. The ostensible dilemma was whether to abolish or to confirm the Principate. Claudius’ election was still yet to come. Dio informs us about the situation:

Cass. Dio 60.1.1 = Xiph. 173.11-4 καὶ πολλὰ καὶ ποικίλα γνῶμαι ἐλέχθησαν· τοῖς μὲν γὰρ δημοκρατεῖσθαι τοῖς δὲ μοναρχεῖσθαι ἐδόκει, καὶ οἱ μὲν τὸν οἱ δὲ τὸν ἤροῦντο.<sup>17</sup>

Many and diverse opinions were expressed; for some favored a democracy, some a monarchy, and some were for choosing one man, and some another.

The parallel in Suetonius has been conveniently underlined by Low.<sup>18</sup> Two passages add elements to our discussion, as they show how seriously the idea of getting rid of the Caesars had been taken into consideration by sectors of the Senate (respectively *Cal.* 60.1 and *Claud.* 10.3):

Suet. *Cal.* 60.1 *neque coniurati cuiquam imperium destinauerunt; et senatus in asserenda libertate adeo consensit, ut consules primo non in curiam, quia Iulia uocabatur, sed in Capitolium conuocarent, quidam uero sententiae loco abolendam Caesarum memoriam ac diruenda templa censuerint.*

The conspirators too had not agreed on a successor, and the senate was so unanimously in favour of re-establishing the republic that the consuls called the first meeting, not in the senate house, because it had the name Julia, but in the Capitol; while some in expressing their views proposed that the memory of the Caesars be done away with and their temples destroyed.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 59.29.1<sup>a</sup> = Joann. Antioch. fr. 84 M (vv. 6-7): the conjurers acted ὑπὲρ τε σφῶν καὶ τῶν κοινῶν ἐκινήθησαν (both on their own account and for the common good). On the circumstances of the assassination see Osgood 2016, 221-3.

<sup>17</sup> Same wording in Zonaras 459.12-460.9.

<sup>18</sup> Low 2013, 204.

Suet. *Claud.* 10.3 *Consules cum senatu et cohortibus urbanis forum Capitoliumque occupauerant asserturi communem libertatem.*

The consuls with the senate and the city cohorts had taken possession of the Forum and the Capitol, resolved on maintaining the public liberty.<sup>19</sup>

As Dio puts it, the question was whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι: that is, to go back to the old republican system or to persist with the new model conceived by Augustus. These are actually Xiphilinus' words, but despite skepticism on Xiphilinus' method of abridging Dio, I cannot see any particular reason to doubt that he is using Dio's original wording here.<sup>20</sup> The importance of this crucial passage in the history of the Principate is proven later on: Dio insists on the polarization within the Senate as he focuses on the first measures taken by Claudius to secure his position.<sup>21</sup> As noted, before the accession of Claudius the transition was entirely upon the shoulders of the senators and of their most typical republican expression, the consuls. In this emergency the institutional role of the latter neatly emerges, and Mommsen did not miss the momentousness of the situation in his *Staatsrecht*.<sup>22</sup>

Nothing changed, we know. The *res publica* was there, and so was the Principate. But in the *Jewish Antiquities* Flavius Josephus records the whole speech delivered by the consul Sentius Saturninus on that occasion.<sup>23</sup> He provides us with a valuable insight into what was going on after the death of Caligula. The oration apparently follows the Thucydidean precept of historical credibility of reported speeches:<sup>24</sup>

Cass. Dio 19.172-4 ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ παλαιὰ οἶδα ἀκοῆ παραλαβὼν, οἷς δὲ ὄψει ὁμιλήσας ἡσθόμην, οἷων κακῶν τὰς πολιτείας ἀναπιμπλάσιν αἱ τυραννίδες, κωλύουσαι μὲν πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν καὶ τοῦ μεγαλόφρονος ἀφαιρούμεναι τὸ ἐλεύθερον, κολακείας δὲ καὶ φόβου διδάσκαλοι καθιστάμεναι διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ τῶν νόμων, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῇ ὀργῇ τῶν ἐφεσθηκότων καταλιπεῖν τὰ πράγματα. ἀφ' οὗ γὰρ Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ

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**19** Latin text is from Ihm's Teubner edition. Translations are from Rolfe's Loeb edition.

**20** On skepticism on Xiphilinus' accuracy in the treatment of Dio's *Roman History* see esp. Millar 1964, 1-2; Mallan 2013 and Zinsli 2017, who highlight his omissions, (rare) additions and shortcuts. Yet, neither Mallan nor Zinsli do really call into question Xiphilinus' essential adherence to Dio's wording. A more positive assessment of Xiphilinus' method is offered by Berbessou-Broustet 2016, 82-7, 94.

**21** Cass. Dio 60.3.5.

**22** Mommsen 1887, 1143-4; see also Roda 1998, 206-7.

**23** *AJ* 19.167-80.

**24** Thuc. 1.22.1. See Galimberti 2001, 189; Wiseman 2013, xvi, 75-6; Pistellato 2015, 185 fn. 186.

φρονήσας ἐπὶ καταλύσει τῆς δημοκρατίας καὶ διαβιασάμενος τὸν κόσμον τῶν νόμων τὴν πολιτείαν συνετάραξεν, κρείσσων μὲν τοῦ δικαίου γενόμενος, ἥσσων δὲ τοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν ἡδονὴν αὐτῷ κομιοῦντος, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅ τι τῶν κακῶν οὐ διέτριπεν τὴν πόλιν, φιλοτιμηθέντων πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀπάντων, οἱ ἐκείνῳ διάδοχοι τῆς ἀρχῆς κατέστησαν, ἐπ' ἀφανισμῷ τοῦ πατρίου καὶ ὡς ἂν μάλιστα τῶν πολιτῶν ἐρημίαν τοῦ γενναίου καταλείποιεν.

Past history I know from tradition, but from the evidence of my own eyes I have learned with what evils tyranny infects a state. For it frustrates all the virtues, robs freedom of its lofty mood, and opens a school of fawning and terror, inasmuch as it leaves matters not to the wisdom of the laws, but to the angry whim of those who are in authority. For ever since Julius Caesar was minded to destroy the democracy and caused an upheaval of the state by doing violence to law and order, setting himself above justice but really a slave to what would bring him private gratification, there is not a single evil that has not afflicted the city. All who succeeded him in the government vied with one another in abolishing our heritage and in allowing no nobility to remain among our citizens.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the undoubtful rhetorical style and literary reworking, the speech is theoretically powerful.<sup>26</sup> Saturninus explicitly castigates Caligula as a Roman tyrant. At the same time, he exalts the Senate as the authentic repository of the imperial power. The concept of *libertas* (freedom) is central.<sup>27</sup> In Saturninus' words, imperial despotism has been deeply rooted in Rome since the time of Julius Caesar, recognized as the first tyrant of Rome. Caligula is only the last and worst of Caesar's διάδοχοι (successors), who have overwhelmed the state and alienated the senatorial *nobilitas* from the possibility of the shared government of Rome. Saturninus depicts the Senate as the true heart of the *res publica*. This is a vital aspect.

We are obviously far from any realistic possibility of a return to the old Republic. Some senators may well have truly believed in it, but Sentius Saturninus is programmatically addressing the need to lay new foundations for the relationship between the Senate and the emperor.<sup>28</sup> The new deal must pivot on an equitable balance, and unsur-

<sup>25</sup> Greek quote from Niese's edition, translation from Feldman's Loeb edition.

<sup>26</sup> See also Low 2013, 202, 204-6; Bellissime 2016, 533-4.

<sup>27</sup> See Cogitore 2011 for a comprehensive analysis of *libertas* at Rome.

<sup>28</sup> Saturninus' speech may be historically plausible in its essence. A least two aspects deserve a little emphasis here: 1) the context of Josephus' narrative is extremely detailed, and most likely depending on a Roman (better, Latin and eyewitness) source (see e.g. Wiseman 2013); 2) the arguments provided by Saturninus are organized in exquisitely Roman oratory terms. Formally Saturninus' speech is indeed Roman, and its



prisingly Claudius did his best to cope with such a crucial instance.<sup>29</sup> In the *Roman History*, Dio stresses this point by recalling the polarization between ‘republicans’ and ‘monarchists’ in the Senate, an issue still outstanding after the accession of Claudius:

Cass. Dio 60.3.5 τοῖς γε μὴν ἄλλοις, οἱ τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἐκφανῶς ἐσπούδασαν ἢ καὶ ἐπίδοξοι λήψεσθαι τὸ κράτος ἐγένοντο, οὐχ ὅσον οὐκ ἐμνησικάκησεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τιμὰς καὶ ἀρχὰς ἔδωκεν.

As for the others, however, who had openly shown their eagerness for a democracy or had been regarded as eligible for the throne, Claudius, far from hearing malice toward them, actually gave them honours and offices.

The emperor proved to be moderate. He needed to grant an amnesty after the crisis, in order to secure his position.<sup>30</sup> His enthronement was disputed by a minority of senators, but strongly supported by the Praetorian Guard.<sup>31</sup> In actuality, it was the very first time that an emperor was created with the substantial influence of the praetorians. This situation is very similar to Dio’s personal experience. He witnessed the praetorian influence, especially in March 193, with the death of Pertinax and the accession of Didius Julianus.

Such was the state of affairs. Although nothing really changed for the Roman state between 24 and 25 January 41, the old-fashioned republican spirit was adamantly in the air. The night before the accession of Claudius, an obsolete but truly republican practice was restored to its former glory. On the Palatine, in lieu of the emperor, the consuls gave the watchword to the praetorian tribune Cassius Chaerea, the killer of Caligula. And Josephus comments as follows:

Joseph. AJ 19.186-7 προεληλύθει δὲ ἡ νύξ ἐπὶ μέγα, καὶ Χαίρεας δὲ σημεῖον ἦτει τοὺς ὑπάτους, οἱ δὲ ἐλευθερίαν ἔδοσαν. ἐν θαύματι δὲ ἦν αὐτοῖς καὶ ὅμοια ἀπιστία τὰ δρώμενα· ἔτει γὰρ ἑκατοστῷ, μεθ’ ὃ τὴν δημοκρατίαν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφηρέθησαν, ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑπάτους σημεῖον ἢ παράδοσις· οὗτοι γὰρ πρότερον ἢ τυραννηθῆναι τὴν πόλιν κύριοι τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἦσαν.

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contents are well known in Roman political oratory (cf. esp. Sallust’s speech of Lepidus, on which see La Penna, Funari 2015, 71-4, 170-223). More on the speech delivered by Saturninus in Pistellato 2015, 152-8, and 182-95 for a textual analysis.

**29** Osgood 2011; Buongiorno 2013.

**30** Buongiorno 2013, 66.

**31** *RIC* 1<sup>2</sup> Claudius 97. On Claudius’ cautiousness, see Cass. Dio 60.3.2. See also Dio’s comment on the praetorian favour: 60.1.3<sup>a</sup>. Further analyses in Osgood 2011, 30-1; Buongiorno 2013, 63-7.

And now, with the night far advanced, Chaerea asked the consuls for the watchword, and they gave 'Liberty'. This ritual filled them with wonder, and they were almost unable to believe their ears, for it was the hundredth year since they had first been robbed of the democracy to the time when the giving of the watchword reverted to the consuls. For before the city came under a tyranny, it was they who had commanded the armies.

Mommsen ranked this gesture among the very few exquisitely old republican elements to persist in the imperial period.<sup>32</sup> The word chosen was *libertas*, which significantly stands out as the keyword of Saturninus' speech before the Senate. This projects us (as it projected them, indeed) one hundred years back: in 59 BCE Julius Caesar became consul for the first time. That moment was a turning point, as Josephus acknowledges. Caesar's first consulship not only marked the end of senatorial freedom, but put a full stop to the history of the old Republic.<sup>33</sup>

The information we get from the *Jewish Antiquities* is extremely detailed, and most probably dependent on contemporary, and possibly eye-witness, source material.<sup>34</sup> We may rightly wonder whether Dio's full account would have been as detailed as that of Josephus, but from the epitomized section of Dio's Book 59 a well-focused accent emerges.<sup>35</sup> Themes are recurrent, such as that of the senatorial humiliation committed by the despot.<sup>36</sup> The question of whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι ἢ μοναρχεῖσθαι which the death of Caligula raised within the Senate seems to be part of Dio's interest in the institutional (dis)order of the Principate. In his time, the problem remained unsolved, as the facts proved. Of these facts he was a privileged observer.

## 2 Dio's Factual Models: Commodus and Pertinax

A situation that paralleled the transition from Caligula to Claudius occurred between December 31, 192 and January 1, 193, with the death of Commodus and the rise to power of Pertinax. Dio witnessed the troublesome principate of Commodus as a member of the Senate,

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**32** Mommsen 1887, 1086-7, and fn. 4. See also Eaton 2011, 59-61; Pistellato 2015, 159-60. On Caligula's funny but provocative watchwords, see *Sen. const.* 18.3; *Joseph. AJ* 19.29, 54, 105; *Suet. Cal.* 56.2; *Dio* 59.29.2.

**33** Pistellato 2015, 159.

**34** See Wiseman 2013, ix-xvi for a general discussion.

**35** Again, on Josephus' see Wiseman 2013.

**36** Pistellato forthcoming on Nero and the Senate.

and had a special deference to Pertinax, who designated him praetor for the following year.<sup>37</sup>

Yet, one may argue, there had been another truculent transition in-between, similar to the events of both 41 and 192-193. On September 18, 96, Domitian was assassinated and Nerva took power. With the transition from Commodus to Pertinax a dynasty had come to an end, at least in terms of pure bloodline. Like Claudius, Nerva marked the impact of his enthronement as a restoration of freedom after years of despotism under Domitian.<sup>38</sup> Like Nerva, Pertinax was an old senator, although he was of decidedly less distinguished stock than the former. Nonetheless, like both his predecessors, Pertinax celebrated himself as the one who restored Roman citizens to freedom after Commodus' tyranny.<sup>39</sup> It is therefore especially disappointing that all we have of Book 68.1-4 on the principate of Nerva is epitomized, and that no direct quotes from Dio's original text were selected for the so-called *Excerpta historica Constantiniana*, one of the major collections of historical quotes at our disposal (mid-10th century).<sup>40</sup> More information from Dio on the principate of Nerva would have been of particular interest to the perspective of the present study.

Nonetheless, Dio's direct testimony of the events of 192-193 and the first assassination of a Roman emperor in 41 seem to be connected closely. Strong affinities between Caligula and Commodus were very clear to imperial historians and readers. These affinities were stimulated by the coincident birthday of both emperors, born on August 31.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, with the passage from Commodus to Pertinax the need to reaffirm the Senate's centrality in the Roman state reached a new peak. The events to follow demonstrated that such an instance was part of a much bigger issue, which included the relationship between the Senate and the military forces – in Rome and in the provinces. This remained the unsolved problem of the autocratic *res publica*, as Dio knew perfectly well.

<sup>37</sup> Dio 74.1.5 = Xiph. 283.10-13; 3.4 = Xiph. 284.7-12; 12.2 = Xiph. 289.17-23.

<sup>38</sup> CIL 6.472: *Libertati ab imp(eratore) Nerva Ca[es]ar[is] Aug(usto), anno ab urbe condita DCCCXXXIII XIII [kal(endas)] Oct(obris)] restitu[tae] S(enatus) P(opulus)q(ue) R(omanus)*. See also Gallia 2012, 217-9. As for Claudius' initiatives celebrating *libertas*, see e.g. Low 2013, 208-10.

<sup>39</sup> Coins with the reverse legend *liberatis ciuibus* were issued, though they are rare as most of Pertinax' coins are: RIC 4.1, Pertinax, nos. 5-6. See Garzón Blanco 1990, 55-6, 59-61, but his discussion is insufficient. See also Manders 2012, 188 fn. 4.

<sup>40</sup> The circumstance is weird, since direct quotes from Dio in the *Excerpta* cover the principates of the Flavians, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius (as sole ruler) and Commodus. While Dio's text on Antoninus Pius and on the joint rule of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus had perished at an early stage (possibly late 5th century), the question raises: why is Nerva not included? No direct quotes from 68.1-4 were of particular interest at the time? See Juntunen 2013, 460-6.

<sup>41</sup> Suet. *Cal.* 8; HA *Comm.* 1.2.

In this respect, some passages from Xiphilinus' epitome are quite telling. In 182 Commodus was the object of an unfortunate plot by Claudius Pompeianus, a prominent senator. As the emperor was entering the hunting-theatre, Pompeianus thrust out a sword in the narrow entrance, and famously said: 'See! This is what the Senate has sent you' ('ἰδοῦ, [...] τοῦτό σοι ἡ βουλὴ πέπομφεν', 73[72].4.4 = Xiph. 269.31-2). This is a little less explicit than the Latin version reported by the *Historia Augusta*: *hunc tibi pugionem senatus mittit* (*Comm.* 4.3).<sup>42</sup> In spite of its failure, the development of this initiative was undoubtedly similar to the successful one against Caligula.

Ten years later, in 192, Commodus felt so secure in his position that he dared to give the epithet *Commodianus* to the Senate.<sup>43</sup> This may be a polemical exaggeration by Dio, who claims to report the exact opening words of an official letter sent by the emperor to the senators. Alternatively, it might be based on the model of municipal practices, which we know from epigraphic evidence.<sup>44</sup> As far as I know, no parallel evidence is known from Rome. Of course, the name of Commodus was erased from official inscriptions as part of the *damnatio* that followed his death.<sup>45</sup> Dio may simply be aiming here to emphasize Commodus' despotic eccentricity, and the passage proves to be effective. Nonetheless, a further passage where Dio offers his direct experience is even more persuasive. Commodus ordered senatorial families – including Dio's – to contribute money every year on his birthday for his odd expenditures.<sup>46</sup> "Of this, too, he saved nothing, but spent it all disgracefully on his wild beasts and his gladiators"

<sup>42</sup> Latin text of the *HA* is (here and whenever quoted henceforth) from Hohl's Teubner edition.

<sup>43</sup> Cass. Dio 73[72].15.5 = Xiph. 276.22-9: αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ Λούκιος Αἴλιος Αὐρήλιος Κόμμοδος Αὐγουστος εὐσεβῆς εὐτυχῆς, Σαρματικὸς Γερμανικὸς μέγιστος Βρεττανικὸς, εἰρηνοποιὸς τῆς οἰκουμένης [εὐτυχῆς] ἀνίκητος, Ῥωμαῖος Ἡρακλῆς, ἀρχιερεὺς, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὸ ὀκτωκαίδεκατον, αὐτοκράτωρ τὸ ὄγδοον, ὕπατος τὸ ἔβδομον, πατὴρ πατρίδος, ὕπατος στρατηγοῖς δημάρχους, γερούσια Κομμοδιανῆ εὐτυχεῖ χαίρειν (The Emperor Caesar Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus Augustus Pius Felix Sarmaticus Germanicus Maximus Britannicus. Pacifier of the Whole Earth, Invincible, the Roman Hercules, Pontifex Maximus, Holder of the Tribunician Authority for the eighteenth time, Imperator for the eighth time. Consul for the seventh time. Father of his Country, to consuls, praetors, tribunes, and the fortunate Commodian senate, Greeting). Cf. *HA Comm.* 8.9: *senatus ... se ipsum Commodianum uocauit*.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. *CIL* 14.3449 = *ILS* 400 referring to an *ordo decurionum Commodianorum* (l. 7).

<sup>45</sup> See Calomino 2016, 98-113.

<sup>46</sup> Cass. Dio 73[72].16.3 = Xiph. 277.8-11 + *Exc. Val.* 322 καὶ τέλος ἐν τοῖς γενεθλίοις τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας δύο χρυσοὺς ἕκαστον, ὥσπερ τινὰ ἀπαρχὴν, κατ' ἔτος ἐκέλευσέν οἱ ἀποφέρειν, τοὺς τε ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀπάσαις πόλεσι βουλευτὰς κατὰ πέντε δραχμάς. καὶ οὐδὲν ἐκ τούτων περιποιεῖτο, ἀλλὰ πάντα κακῶς ἐς τὰ θηρία καὶ τοὺς μονομάχους ἀνήλισκε (And finally he ordered us, our wives, and our children each to contribute two gold pieces every year on his birthday as a kind of first-fruits, and commanded the senators in all the other cities to give five denarii

(καὶ οὐδὲν ἐκ τούτων περιποιεῖτο, ἀλλὰ πάντα κακῶς ἐς τὰ θηρία καὶ τοὺς μονομάχους ἀνίλισκε, 73[72].16.3 = *Exc. Val.* 322), Dio comments bitterly. This is exactly how Caligula behaved.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, some narrative patterns suggest similarities between the behaviour of Commodus on the one hand and that of Nero and Domitian on the other.<sup>48</sup> Later on, and quite tellingly, the *HA* will offer a canonical view of such identifications.<sup>49</sup>

Shortly before his assassination, Commodus allegedly wished to kill both the consuls elected for 193.<sup>50</sup> This may well have prompted the conspiracy against him. It is also something that resembles what Caligula had done in 39, when he removed the consuls-elect. Caligula had done so because they had not proclaimed a thanksgiving on his birthday. The analogy with Dio's own testimony of Commodus ordering senatorial families to contribute gold pieces every year on his birthday may not be coincidental.

As Pertinax took power on January 1, 193, things changed radically – as with Claudius in 41. Pertinax immediately remedied the vexations suffered by the Senate. This was not only an obvious consequence of the death of Commodus. As a senior senator as well as a new man, Pertinax was particularly proud of his senatorial rank. Dio underlines one special aspect:

Cass. Dio 74.5.1 = *Xiph.* 284.30-32 καὶ ἔλαβε τὰς τε ἄλλας ἐπικλήσεις τὰς προσηκούσας καὶ ἑτέραν ἐπὶ τῷ δημοτικῷ εἶναι βούλεσθαι· πρόκριτος γὰρ τῆς γερουσίας κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐπωνομάσθη.

And he obtained all the customary titles pertaining to the office, and also a new one to indicate his wish to be democratic; for he was styled Chief of the Senate in accordance with the ancient practice.

The passage deserves proper attention. The title of πρόκριτος τῆς γερουσίας (*princeps senatus*, 'Chief of the Senate') was not new. It

apiece. Of this, too, he saved nothing, but spent it all disgracefully on his wild beasts and his gladiators).

<sup>47</sup> See e.g. Cass. Dio 59.21.4-6, 22.1.

<sup>48</sup> As for Nero, see Cass. Dio 73[72].17.3 = *Xiph.* 277.19-23; as for Domitian, see 73[72].14.4 = *Xiph.* 276.1-5; 21.1-2 = *Xiph.* 279.26-280.6.

<sup>49</sup> *HA Marcus* 28.10; *Comm.* 19.2.

<sup>50</sup> 73[72].22.2 = *Xiph.* 280.16-20 ὁ γὰρ Κόμμοδος ἀμφοτέρους ἀνελεῖν ἐβούλετο τοὺς ὑπάτους, Ἐρύκιον τε Κλαῖρον καὶ Σόσιον Φάλκωνα, καὶ ὑπατὸς τε ἅμα καὶ σεκούτωρ ἐν τῇ νομηνίᾳ ἐκ τοῦ χωρίου ἐν ᾧ οἱ μονομάχοι τρέφονται προελθεῖν· καὶ γὰρ τὸν οἶκον τὸν πρῶτον παρ' αὐτοῖς, ὡς καὶ εἰς ἕξ αὐτῶν ὧν, εἶχε (It seems that Commodus wished to slay both the consuls, Erucius Clarus and Sosius Falco, and on New Year's Day to issue forth both as consul and *secutor* from the quarters of the gladiators; in fact, he had the first cell there, as if he were one of them).

was an old republican title. Instead of ‘new’, as Cary misleadingly translated the Greek word ἕτερον, ‘another’ is thus preferable.<sup>51</sup> Augustus and Tiberius – perhaps even Claudius, but evidence is very uncertain – had been styled as Chiefs of the Senate.<sup>52</sup> In Dio’s words, the addition of the title was due to the wish Pertinax had to be recognized as ‘democratic’ (δημοτικός). The word δημοτικός is used once more by Dio with respect to Pertinax, in its superlative form δημοτικώτατος and in order to show the marked respect of the emperor toward his fellow senators.<sup>53</sup> It may be understood as an equivalent of the Latin word *ciuilis*, which as already shown indicates the virtue of the statesman, or, more exactly, of the senatorial statesman.<sup>54</sup> This is what Suetonius recognizes Claudius had proven to be during his principate, notably on the grounds of his relationship with the Senate.<sup>55</sup> δημοτικός may also be ‘republican’ in the sense of δημοκρατικός, which Dio uses as well and which is obviously related to Dio’s δημοκρατία, the old senatorial-consular form of government of Rome.<sup>56</sup> The first meaning is understood by Noè (1994, 110, referring to Cass. Dio 53.12.1), the second by Freyburger-Galland (1997, 122-3). However, δημοτικός is typically a classical Greek word used for ‘democrat’, and Dio employs it significantly when speaking of both Catos, well-established champions of nostalgic republicanism in imperial Rome.<sup>57</sup>

In effect, the specification κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον [...] ἐπωνομάσθη – further emphasized by the use of γάρ – stresses that the full title of *prin-*

**51** See *LSJ*<sup>3</sup>, s.v. «ἕτερος», no. 3, esp. with ἄλλος in the same clause (with the example of A.R. 1.250).

**52** See *RGDA* 7.2, both Greek and Latin versions (ed. Scheid 2007): πρῶτον ἀξιώματος τόπον ἔσχον τῆς συνκλήτου ~ [*princeps senatus*---. See Cass. Dio 53.1.3 πρόκριτος τῆς γερουσίας ἐπεκλήθη, ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ ἀκριβεῖ δημοκρατίᾳ ἐνενόμιστο (his [*scil.* Augustus] title was *princeps senatus*, as had been the practice when Rome was truly a republic). Suolahti 1972, 210, maintained the absence of the title between Augustus and Pertinax. Cass. Dio 57.8.2 πρόκριτός τε τῆς γερουσίας κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον καὶ ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ <κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον> ὠνομάζετο ([Tiberius] was called [...] Chief of the Senate, – the last in accordance with ancient usage and even by himself). As for its uncertain attestation under Claudius, see *CIL* 6.31545.11; Buongiorno 2013, 256-61. No comparable frequency is attested on inscriptions under Augustus or Claudius anyway. Tiberius was occasionally styled as *princeps senatus* by the Senate (Cass. Dio 57.8.2).

**53** Cass. Dio 74.3.4 = Xiph. 284.7 ἐχρήτο δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν δημοτικώτατα (he conducted himself in a very democratic manner toward us). See Ando 2016, 569 on this passage.

**54** *ThL*, III, 1213.58-1219.38, s.v. «*ciuilis*»; see esp. *OLD* s.v. «*ciuilis*», no. 5. On the synonymy of *ciuilis* and *senatorius* see Plin. *Pan.* 2.7, and Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 46.

**55** Suet. *Claud.* 12.1 *At in semet augendo parcus atque ciuilis praenomine imperatoris abstinuit, nimios honores recusavit, sponsalia filiae natalemque geniti nepotis silentio ac tantum domestica religione transegit. Neminem exulum nisi ex senatus auctoritate restituit.*

**56** Cf. Dio 57.11.3, and see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44.

**57** Freyburger-Galland 1997, 110. See esp. Cass. Dio 43.11.6 on Cato the Younger. On earlier Greek use of the word, from Aristotle to Diodorus, see again Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44.

*ceps senatus* had been disused for a long time.<sup>58</sup> With Pertinax, *princeps senatus* is attested on inscriptions to an impressive extent.<sup>59</sup> What Dio witnessed was indeed a special, unprecedented kind of restoration. By renewing a glorious, exquisitely senatorial title, both the Senate and its beneficiary marked an ideological statement. Even more importantly, *princeps senatus* marked a juridically established statement, as Pertinax was decreed, and thus juridically acknowledged, as the leader of the Senate.<sup>60</sup> In its turn the Senate, with its leader, seemed in a sense to have truly returned to power, as if the old Republic itself had resurged. The operation was audacious, and short-lived. It was entirely political, and frankly utopian, but under Pertinax the role of the *princeps senatus* gained new prominence and recovered its proper republican dignity.

Overall, the theoretical and political scope of the initiative of 193 was remarkable. With Augustus, the use of the title of *princeps senatus* had envisaged a thorough recovery of the stately order upset by the civil wars. The Senate had been its central element. Caligula was the first emperor who harshly offended the Augustan order. Later on Nero, then Domitian, and finally Commodus replicated the offence, and each and every time things went from bad to worse for the Senate. Of course, this overview may sound a little simplistic. Nevertheless, Dio's text allows us to believe that such sentiments were indeed current, especially after the tyranny suffered under Commodus. Hence the urgency of the action of the Senate in accordance with Pertinax. With the rehabilitation of the title of *princeps senatus*, the *statio principis* was firmly re-established beside the assembly that was strenuously believed to be the heart of the Roman state. This did not amount simply to a restoration of what, a century ago, Maurice Platnauer charmingly defined as "the Augustan dyarchy".<sup>61</sup> The coupling of *princeps* and *senatus* signified a special kind of *Doppelprinzipat* within which the Senate shared power with the emperor, and the emperor shared power with the Senate.

There can be no doubt that this has nothing to do with any 'republican' landscape. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the experiment of 193 is anomalous in the history of the Principate. The question here is not so much whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι ἢ μοναρχεῖσθαι. It is, rather, how to make the Principate, that is an autocratic *res publica*, as truly 'republican' in essence as possible – first and foremost

<sup>58</sup> See Bonnefond-Coudry 1993, 130-1.

<sup>59</sup> *CIL* 2.5128.3, 3.14149.35.3, 14149.38.3-4, 14150.6.3, 14168a.3-4; *Samra* 34.3-4, 35.3, 36.3-4, 37.3-4, 38.2-3, 39.3, 40.1-2, 43.3-4, 50.1-2, 53.3-4; *CIL* 6.2102=32387=Schheid 1998, no. 97, fr. a-b, 6, 13, fr. c, 2), 9.3873.5; *AE* 1904.65.3; 1969/70.618.3.

<sup>60</sup> Suolahti 1972, 210.

<sup>61</sup> Platnauer 1918, 57 fn. 4.

for the Senate's sake, of course. What emerges is a long-lasting political tendency throughout the Principate, pivoting on the well-balanced relationship between the Senate and the emperor – the key-issue of imperial Rome. This tendency had been especially promoted by Stoic philosophers and politicians, for whom the emperor Marcus Aurelius had been a *maître-à-penser*.<sup>62</sup> During his principate, Marcus had missed no occasion to present his deference to the Senate, even in his own writings, and Dio does not fail to note such deference with admiration.<sup>63</sup>

Nonetheless, Dio's endorsement of Pertinax does not imply mere approval.<sup>64</sup> There is also room for some critical assessment. This criticism orbits around the hope of a senator for a new deal which is completely frustrated by subsequent events. When elaborating the rapid end of Pertinax, killed by the praetorians on March 28, 193, Dio explicitly tells us of the emperor's ambitious plans to restore the state, and of their unsurprising failure:

Cass. Dio 74.10.3 = Xiph. 287.29-288.3 οὕτω μὲν ὁ Περτίναξ ἐπιχειρήσας ἐν ὀλίγῳ πάντα ἀνακαλέσασθαι ἐτελεύτησεν, οὐδὲ ἔγνω, καίπερ ἐμπειρότατος πραγμάτων ὢν, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἀθρόα τιὰ ἀσφαλῶς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, ἀλλ' εἶπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ πολιτικὴ κατάστασις καὶ χρόνου καὶ σοφίας χρῆζει.

Thus did Pertinax, who undertook to restore everything in a moment, come to his end. 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.<sup>65</sup>

The phrase “restoration of a state” is rendered in Greek as πολιτικὴ κατάστασις. This is a noteworthy expression. Κατάστασις appears in the Greek version of Augustus' *Res Gestae* to define the title of

<sup>62</sup> For the basics: Brunt 2013.

<sup>63</sup> A useful selection: M. Aur. *Med.* 2.1, 3.5, 4.12, 4.31, 5.30, 5.35-6, 6.7, 6.30, 6.44, 7.5, 7.31, 7.54, 8.12, 10.6, 10.8, 11.4, 11.18, 12.20. See Cass. Dio 72[71].33.2 = Xiph. 266.29-31 ‘ἡμεῖς γάρ’ ἔφη πρὸς τὴν βουλήν λέγων ‘οὕτως οὐδὲν ἴδιον ἔχομεν ὥστε καὶ ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ οἰκίᾳ οἰκοῦμεν’ (‘As for us’, he [*scil.* Marcus Aurelius] said, in addressing the senate, ‘we are so far from possessing anything of our own that even the house in which we live is yours’). See also Cass. Dio 72[71].35.1 = Xiph. 267.27-32.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 74[73].8.5 = Xiph. 287.3-4 μὴ γένοιτο [...] μηδένα βουλευτὴν ἐμοῦ ἄρχοντος μηδὲ δικαίως θανατωθῆναι (Heaven forbid that any senator should be put to death while I am ruler, even for just cause).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. HA *Pert.* 12.8: *expectans urbis natalem ... eum diem rerum principium uolebat esse*; 14.6: *populus ... uidebat omnia per eum antiqua posse restitui*.



the *triumviri rei publicae constituendae*.<sup>66</sup> In its turn, the adjective πολιτική stems from πολίτης and πολιτεία (Latin *ciuitas*, to be intended as synonym of *res publica*).<sup>67</sup> It reminds us once more of the Latin word *ciuilis* implied by Dio's description of Pertinax as δημοτικός, as we have already seen. Therefore, the meaning of Dio's phrase must not be too distant from that found in the *Res Gestae*: in a state of emergency, Pertinax aimed to safeguard the *res publica* after the political disaster caused by Commodus. That is to say, a πολιτική κατάσταση was needed.

Nonetheless, when Didius Julianus came to power (March 28, 193), he was supported by the Praetorian Guard, and there was nothing for the Senate to do but to accept him as emperor. Ironically, the dream of a senatorial Principate was broken by a member of the Senate, as Didius was indeed – and a wealthy one, a virtue that the praetorians particularly appreciated. Renewed civil war was to follow his short reign (ended on June 1, 193).<sup>68</sup>

### 3 Conclusion: Stoicism in Action

The parallel analysis of Dio's text offered above has intended to show the way in which Dio's attention to the transition from Caligula to Claudius between January 24 and 25, 41 may have drawn inspiration from his own personal experience of the events which occurred between December 31, 192 and January 1, 193. The fall of Caligula had something to tell Dio as well as his distinguished readers, both of which will have witnessed the civil war of 193 and the difficulties of the Severan age. The debate surrounding whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι, that animated the senatorial assembly in 41, had been the very first attempt to reset the Roman state and its components on different grounds. Claudius tried to restart the *res publica* by acknowledging the Senate's pivotal role in the government of the state, a role to be played alongside the Augustan family.

No doubt in Dio's time it was striking in many ways that the possibility to restore the old Republic could be still seriously and openly taken into consideration by sectors of the Senate. Dio does not fail to put the accent on that crucial question – δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι? With the assassination of Commodus, the republican option was certainly not on the table. Instead, the point was rather *how* the republican essence of the Senate could really cope with the inescapably monarchical essence of the Principate. The crisis be-

<sup>66</sup> *RGDA* 1.4, and cf. Sherk 1969, 57.

<sup>67</sup> Freyburger-Galland 1997, 44-5.

<sup>68</sup> For Didius' chronology see Kienast; Eck, Heil 2017, 147.

tween the *res publica* and its form of government was temporarily resolved with the accession of a senatorial *princeps*. Pertinax was not only an old and distinguished senator. He was more than a new Nerva. He was a special kind of senator, indeed, since when he took power he was the urban prefect in office. He represented the civic counterpart to all the prevarications of the Praetorian Guard. After all, he was the only man from the Senate who could legitimately have a military force at his disposal in Rome. Although it did not suffice, as proved by the events that followed, it did count at that specific point when the Senate had just eliminated a tyrant.

In a rather different manner to Pertinax, in 41 Claudius had become emperor first and foremost at the wish and behest of the praetorians. The republican option outlined during the senatorial debate after the killing of Caligula had been an extreme and ultimately impotent counterpart to that wish. That was more ideology than politics. In 193 the Senate ideologically and politically acted on its own, chose the most suitable of its members for the imperial office, and hoped to hold the reins of the *res publica* from a prominent position. It was a failure. Nonetheless, it was a philosophically justified attempt. It was, I believe, a briefly effective Stoic action, with a basic Ciceronian texture, as the murder of Caligula itself had probably been.

As anticipated (§ 1), Caligula's debut had been somewhat in line with the theoretical precepts of Cicero's *De republica*. But in Cicero's view, given its own essence, a pure monarchy could easily decline into tyranny, and the solution he envisaged was indeed the cooperation between an excellent man chosen by the Senate and the Senate itself - which by no means must be taken as a prospect of monarchic settlement, nor was the façade of Augustus' design of the Principate meant to suggest it. That of Cicero was however a pragmatic view of the ideal statesman, supported by the awareness that a leading man under specific conditions - as were those of the late Republic - could serve the Roman state more effectively. We may indeed assume with Zarecki (2014, 4) that Cicero's general ideal of statesman in the *De republica* was "a practical template for public life in an increasingly violent and fractured political community", as Rome was in the 50s BCE. As Zarecki maintains (2014, 5), it entails "a greater sympathy towards individual power than is generally allowed" - a view upon which Brunt (1988, 507) and Narducci (2009, 340) would probably agree. Nevertheless, this was also a view that many adherents to Stoicism would have shared at the time of Cicero, as well as beyond.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> An early assessment of Cicero's *optimus civis/princeps* is given by Lepore 1954; cf. Brunt 1988, 508; Narducci 2009, 342-5; Zarecki 2014, 80-91. Nonetheless, I am aware that to assume that Cicero *directly* influenced Augustus' political design can be disputed. The nature of Cicero's statesman is however unclear to many, but it is clear that there is a strongly practical side in it, related to individual wisdom, which has distinc-

Of course, this does not mean that there had ever been any structured Stoic political programme, nor that Stoics preferred a state governed as a monarchy rather than as a republic.<sup>70</sup> They preferred, and indeed strived for, a state governed under the guidance of a rigorously conscious leadership – rigorous and conscious especially for the supreme sake of the commonwealth.<sup>71</sup> There is a patent ambiguity in this, as in any unstructured programme or thought or tendency. Nevertheless, we may quite safely maintain that Stoic philosophers and politicians did not think or act against monarchy. Instead, they did think or act against tyranny, and in this respect there was certainly a Stoic influence among sectors of the Senate under the Principate, as well as there had been in the late Republic. Examples from Cato the Younger to Thrasea Paetus to Helvidius Priscus are all too well known.<sup>72</sup> Marcus Aurelius, whose education depended upon Stoic masters to a decisive measure, represented by far the most distinguished political product of that influence. I should therefore prefer to go farther than Sandbach's generic contention that "Stoicism must have had some undefinable general influence that favoured conscientious administration for the benefit of the ordinary man and a humanitarianism that resulted in a little legislation and some charitable foundations" (1975, 148).

From the Stoic point of view, what mattered under the Principate was the Senate's role in relation to the emperor, which is the key factor regulating the relationship between the Senate and the *optimus civis* in Cicero's *De republica*. This parallel seems to me essential irrespective of whether or not the *De republica* anticipated, directly or indirectly, elements of the Augustan arrangement of the Roman state. Cicero was not himself a Stoic. But it is worth noting that through a Stoic lens he seems to explore questions of political thought such as the limits of autocracy, with a special attention to the risk of autocracy turning into absolutism.<sup>73</sup> This he would directly experience after finishing the *De republica*, with the outbreak of

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tively Stoic – rather than Platonic, as one may expect given that Platos' *Republic* was Cicero's model for *De republica* – traits: see Ferrary 1995, 54; Powell 2012, 15, 31; Brunt 2013, 237-8, 240, and cf. Niegorski 2012, 250. After all, Cicero's education was partly Stoic, as was partly Platonic, as was partly Aristotelian etc. He was eclectic, and what cannot be disputed is that Stoicism played an important role in shaping his (political as well as moral) thought: see Cic. *Div.* 2.3; Sandbach 1975, 142; Ferrary 1988, 363-81; Niegorski 2012, 246-7, 252, 254, 270, 272, 274, 277. On the Stoic theoretical approach to absolute autocracy see Brunt 2013, 286-91. More on Cicero's *De republica* in Stroh 2008, 58-64, and especially Zarecki 2014.

**70** Sandbach 1975, 145, 147; Brunt 2013, 304.

**71** Cf. Michel 1969, 47.

**72** Sandbach 1975, 142-6; Brunt 2013, 310-28. On Thrasea Paetus in particular, as a Stoic and as an influent senator-model, see Brunt 2013, 297-301, 303-4, 316-22.

**73** Narducci 2009, 391.

civil war between Pompey and Caesar, and subsequently with Caesar sole ruler in Rome. And indeed his later *De officiis* (published 44 BCE) shares many views of the *De republica*, with a more recognisable Stoic allure.<sup>74</sup>

So it is time to conclude with Dio's place in this discourse about absolute autocracy. We must start from his approach to Cicero. If it is known that under the Principate there was a widespread interest in Cicero among Greek authors, Gowing and Montecalvo have argued that this is particularly evident in the case of Dio.<sup>75</sup> In this respect, despite Dio's somewhat ambivalent opinion on Cicero - notably in the light of the famous dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus (Cass. Dio 38.18-29)<sup>76</sup> -, the ambivalence must not be taken at all as a negative assessment in itself.<sup>77</sup> Cicero and his works seem indeed to be quite extensively present in the *Roman History*, especially in the republican books.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Dio's ambivalence leaves room to a significant appreciation of Cicero's struggle for the sake of the *res publica*, especially when he operated as consul.<sup>79</sup>

If we then focus on Dio's narration of the history of the Principate, and take into account his treatment of the transition situations I discussed in this chapter, we easily find that elements of Dio's discourse align with elements of Cicero's discourse - the more so, if we look at the *De republica*. Of course, this may just depend on a common ground pertaining to the political discourse about autocracy, which embraced a long span from Cicero to Dio - and most likely a lot of lost literature in between. Nonetheless, I tried to show that the attention Dio pays in the imperial books of the *Roman History* to absolutism in relation to 'senatorialism', which seems to me one of the most distinguished features of his historiographical effort, shares that Ciceronian ground. Contrary to Zarecki, thus, I would argue that the Ciceronian ideal of *optimus ciuis/princeps* did not fail to exist "since the *res publica*, the *sine qua non* of the *rector*-ideal, had ceased to exist" (2014, 162). It continued to exist, and Dio's work may prove that it did.

After all, Dio could rely on the political model of Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic and *ciuilis princeps*, and ideal(ized) monarch under the Sev-

<sup>74</sup> Zarecki 2014, 94-104 on Pompey and Caesar, 105-31 on Caesar alone, 142-3 on *De officiis* where a list of Stoic virtues (1.12), Zarecki maintains, "would be equally at home in *De Re Publica*".

<sup>75</sup> See Gowing 1998; Montecalvo 2014.

<sup>76</sup> On which see Burden-Strevens 2020, 53-60.

<sup>77</sup> On the dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus see Montecalvo 2014, 231-82.

<sup>78</sup> See Montecalvo 2014, 8-18 and *passim*.

<sup>79</sup> Montecalvo 2014, 360, but I cannot agree when she argues that "la parabola politica da lui [i.e. Cicero] compiuta rappresentava, agli occhi dello storico severiano [i.e. Dio], la decadenza della *res publica*" (361).

erans, whose legacy could not be stained by the misfortune of a degenerate son.<sup>80</sup> As a senator, Dio watched the events of 192/193 with his hopes still intact. Later on, as an historian, he wrote about those events without concealing his disillusionment, and as said Xiphili- nus' epitome could hardly have changed the substance. Dio as senator knew that the Senate he himself belonged to had a responsibility in the despotic degeneration of monarchy; as historian he does not fail to criticize the assembly whenever needed especially in the contemporary books of his work.<sup>81</sup> The principle of a balanced government of the Roman state during the Principate, strongly promoted by Stoic politicians, had left too many victims in its wake. Pertinax was not just one more of those politicians; he was the most illustrious at the time of the senator-historian. As *princeps (senatus)*, Pertinax tried to fully embody the ideal of a senatorial Principate. Once this ideal had been established, though only temporarily and defectively, the question of whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι ἢ μοναρχεῖσθαι was overcome by a spectacular *synkrisis*: δημοκρατεῖσθαι *and* μοναρχεῖσθαι.

## List of Abbreviations

*AE* = *L'Année Épigraphique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1888-  
*CIL* = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1863-  
*ILS* = Dessau, H. (1892-1916). *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*. Berlin: Weidmann.  
*LSJ* = Liddell, H.G.; Scott, R.; Jones, S. (1996). *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
*OLD* = *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
*RIC* = *Roman Imperial Coinage*. London: Spink, 1923-  
*Samra* = Bauzou, T. et al. (1998). *Fouilles de Khirbet Es-Samra en Jordanie*. Turnhout: Brepols.

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**80** On Marcus Aurelius as a model, cf. Hadot 1998, cxlii, cxlv. On Stoic influence on Dio's imperial books see Noe in this volume.

**81** Cf. Lindholmer and Scott in this volume.

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