

THE SPECTRE OF ALEXANDER: CASSIUS DIO AND THE ALEXANDER- MOTIF*

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In the opinion of Cassius Dio, Septimius Severus' capture of Nisibis and annexation of the province of Mesopotamia were not among the emperor's more worthwhile ventures.¹ The costs were great and the yields slight. Our knowledge of the campaign is sketchy, although we do have a narrative outline supplied by Dio's eleventh century epitomator, John Xiphilinus.² Xiphilinus preserves the following anecdote which takes place after Severus and his army had crossed the Euphrates and were starting to feel the effects of thirst and heat. The epitomator says (Dio Cass. 75[75].2.2 (Xiph.)):

κεκμηκόσι γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῆς πορείας καὶ τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ κονιορτὸς ἐμπίπτων
ἰσχυρῶς ἐλύπησεν, ὥστε μήτε βαδίζειν μήτε λαλεῖν ἔτι δύνασθαι, τοῦτο δὲ
μόνον φθέγγεσθαι, “ὔδωρ ὔδωρ”. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνεφάνη μὲν ἰκμάς, ἐξ ἴσου δὲ τῷ
μὴ εὐρεθέντι ἀρχὴν ὑπὸ ἀτοπίας ἦν, ὁ Σεουήρος κύλικά τε ἤτησε καὶ τοῦ

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¹ Dio Cass. 75[75].3.3 (Xiph.). All translations from Dio are from the Loeb edition of E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (London 1914-1927), sometimes adapted. For all references to Dio where the book divisions of U.P. Boissevain conflict with the traditional book divisions, the traditional divisions are placed in []. If a quoted passage of Dio derives from one of the epitomes, the identity of the source will be placed in () following the citation and the following abbreviations will be used: (EVV) = *Excerpta de Virtutibus et Vitiis*; (Xiph.) = *Xiphilinus Epitome*.

² For Xiphilinus and his methods of work, note F.G.B. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964), 195-203; P.A. Brunt, 'On Historical Fragments and Epitomes', *CQ* 30.2 (1980), 489-492; C.T. Mallan, 'The Style, Method, and Programme of Xiphilinus' *Epitome of Cassius Dio's Roman History*', *GRBS* 53.3 (2013), 617-32.

ὕδατος πληρώσας ἀπάντων ὁρώντων ἐξέπιε.

For when they were already wearied by their march and the hot sun, they encountered a dust-storm that caused them great distress, so that they could no longer march or even talk, but only cry, “Water, Water”. And when some little vapor did appear, on account of its strangeness it meant no more to them than if it had not been found at all, until Severus called for a cup, and filling it with the water, drank it in full view of all.

The story, with perhaps one significant difference (which we shall discuss below) is a riff on an anecdote told by Arrian, Curtius Rufus, and other authors about Alexander the Great.³ As with other episodes in the Alexander tradition, the story was something of a ‘floating’ anecdote and appeared in different contexts in different accounts of Alexander’s campaigns.⁴ But for the purposes of this article, the story of Severus and his thirsty soldiers is illustrative of Dio’s allusive employment of what may be termed the ‘Alexander-motif.’

As we shall explore in this article, the figure of Alexander looms large in Dio’s imperial narrative. There are twenty-five direct references to Alexander the Great in the

³ Arr. *Anab.* 6.26.1-3; cf. Curt. 7.5.10-12; Front. *Strat.* 1.7.7; Polyaeus 4.3.25; Plut. *Alex.* 42.

⁴ E.g. Arrian places the anecdote in the context of Alexander’s ill-conceived march through the Gedrosian desert, but knew of other traditions (Arr. *Anab.* 6.26.1). Curtius places the story in the territory of the Sogdians (Curt. 7.5.1). For some general comments on these sorts of ‘floating’ anecdotes see R. Saller, ‘Anecdotes as Historical Evidence for the Principate’, *G&R* 27.1 (1980), 69-83, especially 74.

surviving portions of Dio's history.⁵ The number is surprisingly high, especially for a historian not writing about Alexander. For comparison, Tacitus has four, Ammianus fifteen, and the pseudonymous author of the *Historia Augusta* nineteen references, of which fourteen are in the *Life of Severus Alexander*. Only Appian has more, yet the bulk of these fall in his *Syrian Wars*. If we exclude the *Syrian Wars* and the Caesar-Alexander comparison in the second book of the *Civil Wars*, there are fifteen.⁶

The question of how should we approach these references and allusions is one worth asking. The recent studies of Brian Bosworth, Cynthia Damon, David Levene, and Chris Pelling (amongst others) have suggested nuanced ways in which such historical as well as literary allusions functioned within historical narratives.⁷ Now, rather than seeing the identification of the parallel or allusion as an end in itself, we should perhaps regard these as points of departure from which the reader is invited to perform further acts of interpretation. Using these ideas as a starting point, I shall address the possible ways in which the Alexander-motif functions in Dio's *Roman History*. As such, my focus is primarily historiographical rather than historical. In other words, I shall not be exploring whether or not certain Late Republican generals or Roman

⁵ H. Smilda (ed.), *Index historicus* (Berlin 1926), 24-5 s.v. Alexander (6) [= U.P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt, Volumen IV* (Berlin 1926)].

⁶ According to the index of J.E. van Niejenhuis (ed.), *Appianus Historia Romana, Vol. III Index nominum* (Leipzig 1992), 541 (s.v. Alexander Magnus).

⁷ E.g. A.B. Bosworth, 'Mountain and Molehill? Cornelius Tacitus and Curtius Rufus', *CQ* 54.2 (2004), 551-567; C. Damon, 'Déjà vu or déjà lu? History as Intertext', *PLLS* 14 (2010), 375-88; D.S. Levine, *Livy and the Hannibalic War* (Oxford 2010), 82-163; C. Pelling, "'Learning from that Violent Schoolmaster": Thucydidean Intertextuality and Some Greek Versions of the Roman Civil War', in B.W. Breed, C. Damon, and A. Rossi (eds.), *Citizens of Discord: Rome and its Civil Wars* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 105-18; C. Pelling, 'Intertextuality, Plausibility, and Interpretation', *Histos* 7 (2013), 1-20.

Emperors actually attempted to fashion themselves after Alexander.⁸ Rather, my focus is on instances where Dio places historical figures in situations which function so as to recall the life or history of Alexander, how these fit into Dio's authorial agenda, and furthermore, what these tell us about Dio's own compositional techniques and his historical vision. As we shall see, Dio's use of the Alexander-motif across the imperial narrative represents a distinct and sophisticated narrative strategy, which reveals something not only about Dio as an author, but also about the reception of Alexander in the early third century A.D.

I. Contemporary Contexts and Pseudo-Alexanders

Dio's contemporary narrative provides an appropriate starting point for this inquiry. It is in Dio's treatment of Caracalla that we get the clearest and most sustained treatment of the Alexander-motif in Dio's history. To appreciate the extent of what Dio is doing, it is worth noting how this aspect of Caracalla is treated in the other historical accounts. The Latin tradition is relatively threadbare. The *Life of Antoninus* in the *Historia Augusta* has only one significant passage.⁹ In Herodian's *History*, Caracalla's enthusiasm for Alexander is mentioned, and may derive in part from Herodian's

⁸ Following the useful definitions of P. Green, 'Caesar and Alexander: aemulatio, imitatio, comparatio,' *AJAH* 3 (1978), 2: *comparatio* is an apparent act of *imitatio*, described or interpreted by a third party. For the distinction between *aemulatio*, *imitatio*, and *comparatio Alexandri* note Green (above) and the critique in K. Welch and H. Mitchell, 'Revisiting the Roman Alexander', *Antichthon* 47 (2013), 81-2. For this other approach (i.e. the question of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*), see the thorough treatment of A. Kühnen, *Die Imitatio Alexandri in der römischen Politik: 1. Jh. v. Chr.-3. Jh. n. Chr.* (Münster 2008); and for a more historiographical approach, D. Spencer, *The Roman Alexander: Reading a Cultural Myth* (Exeter 2002), 165-203.

⁹ *SHA M. Ant.* 2.1-2.

familiarity with Dio's narrative, but it is not developed to the same extent as it is in Dio.¹⁰ Why was this so?

There was certainly a historical basis to Dio's decision. It was presumably the image of Alexander as a military victor that the historical Caracalla had sought to emulate and mimic. The formation of the Macedonian phalanx and the emperor's collection of relics such as Alexander's sword were all ostentatious displays of his imitation and idolization of Alexander.¹¹ Even Caracalla's actions were self-consciously framed in the context of the Alexander tradition. As noted by Millar and others, Caracalla's crossing of the Hellespont and decision to visit Ilium at the outset of his eastern peregrinations is described in terms that recall the visit of Alexander at the start of his great campaign.¹²

Our three main authorities provide differing but complementary accounts of this moment. If we look at Dio's narrative alone, we get the following description:¹³

καὶ τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον οὐκ ἀκινδύνως διαβαλὼν τὸν τε Ἀχιλλεῖα καὶ
ἐναγίσμασι καὶ περιδρομαῖς ἐνοπλίοις καὶ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν στρατιωτῶν
ἐτίμησε, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἐκείνοις τε, ὥς καὶ μέγα τι κατωρθώκοσι καὶ τὸ
Ἰλίον ὥς ἀληθῶς αὐτὸ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἡρῆκόσι, χρήματα ἔδωκε, καὶ αὐτὸν

¹⁰ Hdn. 4.8.1-6, 4.9.3-4.

¹¹ NB the miscellany of anecdotes collected at Dio Cass. 78[77].7.1-8.3. For the most thorough discussion of this, see Kühnen (n.8), 176-86; D. Baharal, 'Caracalla and Alexander the Great: a reappraisal', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History VII* (Brussels 1994), 524-567. Cf. P. Ceașescu, 'La double image d'Alexandre le grand à Rome: essai d'une explication politique,' *Studii Clasice* 14 (1974), 166-7, on the possibility that *Constitutio Antoniniana* may have been inspired by Alexander supposed desire for a universal empire à la Tarn's 'brotherhood and unity of mankind', but this seems to be more an anachronistic fantasy.

¹² Millar (n.2), 215; Baharal (n.11), 528; Kühnen (n.8), 181.

¹³ Dio Cass. 78[77].16.7 (EVV); cf. *SHA M. Ant.* 5.8; Hdn. 4.8.3-4.

τὸν Ἀχιλλέα χαλκοῦν ἔστησεν.

After crossing the Hellespont, not without danger, he honoured Achilles with sacrifices and with races in armour about his tomb, in which he as well as the soldiers took part; and in honour of this occasion he gave them money, just as if they had gained some great success and had in truth captured the very Troy of old, and he set up a bronze statue of Achilles himself.

Dio, whose account of these activities is the fullest we have, does not make the comparison with Alexander explicit. He did not need to. By Dio's day, the city of Ilium was famous not only for its association with the Trojan war, but also because of its association with Alexander, where a local cult to Alexander is attested epigraphically.¹⁴ Indeed, it is this double association that Dio seems to be playing with – Caracalla was no Alexander nor yet Achilles.

It is worth noting how in the hands of a sympathetic historian these stories could have been presented in a radically different fashion – just as the stories of Alexander's visit to Ilium were interpreted in the tradition as examples of Alexander's heroic ideals and piety. But for Dio, whose agenda was to denigrate systematically and absolutely the reputation of the scion of Severus and Domna, these acts of piety are turned into acts of folly.¹⁵ For our historian, the meagre deeds of Caracalla and his soldiers were

¹⁴ For the connection between Alexander and Ilium, and the cult to Alexander at Ilium, see *IK* 3 (Ilion) no. 122 with C. Habicht, *Gottmenschen und griechische Städte* (Munich 1956), 21-2; B. Dreyer, 'Heroes, Cults, and Divinity,' in W. Heckel and L.A. Tritle (eds), *Alexander the Great: a new history* (Malden 2009), 223-4.

¹⁵ For Dio's attitudes toward Caracalla, see C. Davenport, 'Cassius Dio and Caracalla,' *CQ* 62.2 (2012), 796-815. Cf. A.G. Scott, 'Cassius Dio, Caracalla, and the Senate,' *Klio*

unworthy of the memory of Achilles whom Caracalla sought to honour, just as, by implication, they were unworthy of the memory of Alexander, whose actions Caracalla had sought to emulate.¹⁶ The episode encapsulated for Dio just the sort of play-acting that characterized Caracalla's regime.¹⁷

Play-acting at Alexander is a recurring motif in the Severan books – not just in the reign of Caracalla. Let us turn back to the example of Severus and his thirsty soldiers with which we began. As we have seen, the story parallels that told in Arrian's *Anabasis* and elsewhere. In Arrian's version, Alexander reveals his exemplary generalship and endurance by emptying the helmet filled with water on to the ground 'in view of everybody' (ἐν ὄψει πάντων ἐκχέαι). In Dio/Xiphilinus' version, Severus drank (ἐξέπιε) the water instead of pouring it out on the ground. This reading seems to be endorsed by the following line, when Xiphilinus adds (75[75].2.3), 'and then after acting in this way, some others also drank and were refreshed' (καὶ τότε μὲν οὕτω καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς προσπιόντες ἀνερρώσθησαν). If the transmitted text is an accurate reproduction of Dio's original, then the force of the anecdote is disappointingly flat. It may be that Dio is simply playing with his readers' expectations; who, by the evocative set-up expect the emperor to perform some exemplary action like Alexander. But instead, we have an emperor who acted in a manner which was at best unexceptional, at worst selfish.

97.1 (2015), 157-75, for a restatement of the traditional view that Dio's portrayal of Caracalla is generally representative of those of the Senate as a whole.

¹⁶ Note Arr. *Anab.* 1.11.7-12.1; Diod. Sic. 17.17.2-3, for Alexander's desire to honour Achilles and the other Greek heroes at Troy.

¹⁷ See further, M. Gleason, 'Identity Theft: Doubles and Masquerades in Cassius Dio's Contemporary History', *ClAnt* 30.1 (2011), 62-5.

The apparent failure to match Alexander is a theme present from the start of Dio's contemporary narrative. According to Dio, Pescennius Niger, one of the pretenders of A.D. 193, became 'exceedingly conceited' (μᾶλλον ὠγκώθη) when his troops in Syria hailed him as a new Alexander.¹⁸ The historicity of the claim need not bother us here. What matters is the ludicrousness of this suggestion in the context of Dio's narrative. Dio had characterized Niger as a nonentity, conspicuous for neither good nor bad qualities.¹⁹ Here was a man who manifestly lacked the characteristics desirable in new emperor, let alone a new Alexander. The parallel with the Macedonian did not stop there. The sluggish Niger was defeated near Issus, the site of Alexander's first great victory against Darius; the irony would not have been lost on Dio, nor on any of his attentive readers.²⁰ It was Niger's fate to play Darius, not Alexander.

Thus we see in these three examples from Dio's contemporary history the Alexander-motif employed as a means of criticizing rather than supporting the military and personal aspirations of the post-Antonine dynasts. Whether this pattern or similar patterns appear in Dio's earlier imperial narrative, is a question to which we now turn.

II. The Alexander-motif and historical 'parallelism'

By the time Dio came to write his history the exemplary status of Alexander was well-established in Greco-Roman literature and rhetoric. Indeed, a third century rhetorical handbook explicitly regarded Alexander as being a standard point of comparison to be

¹⁸ Dio Cass. 75[74].6.2^a (EVV).

¹⁹ Dio Cass. 75[74].6.1-2 (Xiph, EVV).

²⁰ Defeat of Pescennius Niger: Dio Cass. 75[75].7.1-8 (Xiph.). Cf. Hdn. 3.4; Amm. Marc. 26.8.15. For the source connection between Herodian and Ammianus, note G. Kelly, *Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian* (Cambridge 2008), 236.

used in any kingship speech.²¹ The cultural phenomena of *imitatio*, *aemulatio*, and *comparatio Alexandri* in Roman art and letters are topics which have received sustained attention over the past fifty years.²² On the surface, the great world-conqueror was an appropriate model for the politically alert representatives of an ambitious ruling caste, who subscribed to the notion of ‘empire without end’ (*imperium sine fine*).²³ But the exemplary status of Alexander was not straight-forward. That the career and person of Alexander came to represent positive as well as negative models of kingship has been recognized by successive studies.²⁴

It is telling that all but two of the references to Alexander in Dio’s history occur in the in the context of Caesarian and Imperial narratives.²⁵ The first of these falls in Book 37. The story tells of how Julius Caesar came upon a statue of Alexander in a temple to Heracles in Cádiz and lamented the fact that he had not yet achieved any great deeds.²⁶

²¹ Men. Rhet. 2.377.9-10; cf. Men. Rhet. 2.426.23-4. T.S. Duncan, ‘The “Alexander Theme” in Rhetoric,’ in *Washington University Studies* 9.2, *Humanistic Series* (1922), 319-20.

²² For examples, see studies noted below in n.24.

²³ Virg. *Aen.* 1.279.

²⁴ E.g. Ceaușescu (n. 11); R. Stoneman, *Legends of Alexander the Great* (London 1994), xxv-xxxiii; Spencer (n.8); T. Whitmarsh, ‘Alexander’s Hellenism and Plutarch’s Textualism’, *CQ* 52.1 (2002), 175-6. Baynham, ‘Barbarians 1: Quintus Curtius’ and other Roman historian’s reception of Alexander’, in A. Feldherr (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians* (Cambridge 2009), 290-1.

²⁵ Two references to Alexander the Great appear in Zonaras’ narrative of the middle Republic, fall outside of the scope of this paper. The first describes the ambitions of Perseus who desired (foolishly) to surpass the deeds of Alexander (Zonar. 9.22), yet ended up losing his kingdom (Zonar. 9.24). The second is applied to the newly developed conceit of the Roman *populus* following Paullus’ victory over Perseus, who begin act as though they had defeated Alexander himself. We may note that tenor of these references is consistent with Dio’s application of the Alexander-motif in the Imperial books.

²⁶ The setting for the story is Caesar’s quaestorship in Lusitania. Dio Cass. 37.52.2; cf. Suet. *Iul.* 7.1. Plut. *Caes.* 11.5-6 provides a variation on the same theme, but has Caesar reading about Alexander. For comments, see C. Pelling, *Plutarch. Caesar* (Oxford 2011), 3-4, 183-4.

In Dio's narrative, as it is in those of Suetonius and Plutarch, the story is illustrative of Caesar's ambition or *philotimia* (φιλοτιμία) – a key concept to which we will return later. At this stage it is sufficient to note how Dio frames the story, presenting Alexander as a figure Caesar desired to emulate, a model for Caesar and perhaps, by extension, for the Caesars. It might well be that it was for this reason that Dio does not invoke the Alexander-motif in what survives of his account of Pompey – a man who did actively strive to imitate and emulate the deeds of Alexander.²⁷

The reign of Augustus provides more examples of both the explicit and allusive deployment of the Alexander-motif. In the Tiberian funeral oration for Augustus in Book 56, Tiberius makes a point of stating that he will not be comparing the deeds of Augustus and Alexander – and, of course, by doing so actually invites such a comparison.²⁸ After all, such a comparison is not unexpected. References and allusions to Alexander punctuate Dio's Augustan narrative. Right from the start, amongst the various *omina imperii* listed at the beginning of Book 45 we may find connections between the two rulers. Dio reports the story that Octavian's mother, Attia, believed that her son was the offspring of Apollo, having been impregnated by a snake while she slept in a temple of Apollo.²⁹ The story seems to be a variation on a common folkloric *topos*, for almost identical stories are told of Scipio Africanus and Seleucus Nicator; nevertheless, the connection with Olympias and Alexander is patent.³⁰ There are other

²⁷ For Pompey's *imitatio Alexandri*, see Welch and Mitchell (n.8), 83-9; cf. D. Kienast, 'Augustus und Alexander,' *Gymnasium* 76 (1969), 437-8; Green (n.8) 4-6; P. Zanker (trans. A. Shapiro), *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor 1988), 10.

²⁸ Dio Cass. 56.36.3.

²⁹ Dio Cass. 45.1.2.

³⁰ Scipio: Liv. 26.19.6; Dio Cass. F 57.38; Seleucus: Justin. 15.4.2-9; Alexander: Plut. *Alex.* 2. For discussion note D. Ogden, 'Alexander, Scipio and Octavian: Serpent-siring in Macedon and Rome,' *SyllCass* 20 (2009), 31-52; Kienast (n.27), 434; Zanker (n.27), 50-1.

more explicit parallels that tie Alexander to Augustus; for example, Dio tells us that following the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian desired to visit to the tomb of Alexander, a man deemed by Octavian to be the only true (Macedonian) king of Egypt.³¹

In a different and certainly more allusive vein we have Dio's set-piece treatment of Augustus' near fatal illness in 23 B.C. As observed by John Rich, Dio has the scene play out almost exactly as that of Alexander's death-scene in the vulgate tradition of Alexander's life – the only difference being that Augustus does not die.³² In the story, Augustus gives his signet ring to Agrippa, just as Alexander gave his ring to Perdiccas as described in Diodorus, Justin, Curtius, and the *Metz Epitome*.³³ Yet why Dio should choose to frame the story in such a way is not easily explained.

We can take the story in two ways. The first way is to acknowledge the parallel and leave it at that. The allusive game played by Dio and his readers may be nothing more than that of spotting the parallel. Indeed, this seems to be the objective of the author of the so-called *Parallela Minora* found amongst the *Moralia* of Plutarch. In that work, similar stories are paired so as to render unbelievable stories of the past more believable by presenting a more recent parallel.³⁴ The tacit assumption behind such stories is that history is repetitive: that human nature determines that people will continue to act in similar ways when placed in similar situations.

³¹ Hence Octavian's witticism about wishing to see 'a king, not a row of corpses' (Dio Cass. 51.16.5).

³² Dio Cass. 53.30.1-2; J.W. Rich, *The Roman Settlement: Roman History 53-55.9* (Warminster 1990), 165-6.

³³ Cf. Curt. 10.5.4; Diod. Sic. 17.117.3; Justin. 12.15; *Metz Epit.* 112.

³⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 305A-B. An almost identical rationale is given by Josephus (*AJ* 1.348).

The second way, not necessarily exclusive from the former, is to take the allusion further and to use it as the mental starting point for a more detailed comparison. Had Augustus died without leaving a clear indication of his successor, then what may the allusion reveal about the fate of the Roman state? The parallel with Alexander would suggest the commencement of a struggle for imperial power resulting in the fragmentation of the empire. Dio's off-hand comments at 40.14 reveal that he was well aware of the factionalism between the *diadochi* which tore apart Alexander's empire. Thus, as a counterfactual, Dio's treatment of Augustus' near death experience is not only provocative for the parallel with Alexander, but we may regard it as being based on a sound reading of the political conditions at Rome in the late 20s B.C.³⁵

III. Thinking with Alexander (and Dio)

Before we can come to any firm conclusion on how we should read these stories, we should ask what Dio actually knew of Alexander and his career. Certainly we may assume from the various parallels already described that Dio knew some of the more famous anecdotes concerning Alexander. Such tales were undoubtedly circulated in both the literary and rhetorical traditions of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Dio, for example, knew of the story of Aristotle's complicity in Alexander's death.³⁶ However, there are some clues in the text which suggest that Dio's knowledge and interest in Alexander was more substantial. Dio ties two geographical comments to the history of

³⁵ For the late 20s, note the treatment of E.S. Gruen, 'Augustus and the Making of the Principate', in K. Galinsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge 2005), 38-40.

³⁶ Dio Cass. 78[77].8.3 (Xiph., EVV); cf. Arr. *Anab.* 7.27.1; Plut. *Alex.* 77.

the Macedonian king's campaigns. In Book 40, Dio notes that the town of Zeugma on the Euphrates got its name from being the point at which Alexander had crossed the river.³⁷ Later in Book 68, Dio links the district of the Adiabene (and the city of Arbela) with the site of Alexander's final battle against Darius.³⁸

Such explicit geographical references have added significance beyond conscious expressions of the historian's *recherché* knowledge. In the case of the former, the reference appears in the context of Dio's description of the various portents concerning Crassus' ill-fated venture of 54-3 B.C.³⁹ In the case of the latter, the connection with the site of Alexander's battle seems even more superfluous than the reference to Zeugma, as no battle was actually fought on that particular site by Trajan. What the reference does do, however, is draw out an extended comparison between Trajan's campaigns and those of Alexander. The fact that no decisive battle was fought at Gaugamela/Arbela by Trajan serves as a subtle critique on the efficacy of his campaign. Indeed, the territory was soon lost.⁴⁰

A more significant, and perhaps enlightening question would be to ask how Dio might have regarded the figure and reputation of Alexander? The son of Philip was the embodiment of the military monarch – the conquering hero *par excellence*. But for a senator who was notably cool on imperial adventures beyond the establish boundaries

³⁷ Dio Cass. 40.17.3-18.3. That Zeugma was the crossing point for Alexander the Great and his army, see Plin. *HN* 34.43.150.

³⁸ Dio Cass. 68.26.4¹ (Xiph.). That the site of the battle was conventionally associated with Arbela is noted (and corrected) by Arrian (*Anab.* 6.11.4-6).

³⁹ Cf. Florus 1.11.3; Plut. *Crass.* 19.3, who, like Dio, include a similar series of portents at Zeugma during Crassus' crossing, but does not mention the connection of the site with Alexander the Great.

⁴⁰ Dio Cass. 68.29.4 (Xiph.).

of the Empire, we may well question how positively Dio regarded this aspect of the Alexander myth.⁴¹ As we saw in the example quoted at the beginning, Severus' annexation of Mesopotamia was condemned as a costly folly – a view which would be justified by later events which saw the province change hands between the Romans and the Sassanians repeatedly throughout the course of the third century.⁴²

In a more abstract sense, Alexander was regarded as a model for *philotimia* – love of honour or ambition.⁴³ While such an impulse may lead an individual to the ends of the earth, it was also something that was commonly regarded as being highly problematic, as it is certainly in Dio's narrative.⁴⁴ It was *philotimia* that drove Caesar and Pompey to civil war, just as it drove Trajan to an ill-fated expedition against the Parthians.

It has been suggested elsewhere that Alexander was 'the stick by which "conquered Greece" could unsettle her Roman overlords'.⁴⁵ Whatever the value of such an assessment when considering Imperial Greek authors in general, it seems jarring when we apply it to our consular historian. Clearly, a more nuanced view is required. The point for Dio seems to be not so much that the emperors of his own day and those from

⁴¹ For Dio's attitudes on imperial expansion, see 52.37.1 (speech of Maecenas); J. Ober, 'Tiberius and the Political Testament of Augustus', *Historia* 31.3 (1982), 320-1; P.M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55 and 56* (Oxford 2004), 12-13, 379-80.

⁴² Dio Cass. 75[75].3.3 (Xiph.).

⁴³ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 4.4; App. *BC* 2.149. The problematic nature of *philotimia*, see Pelling (n.26), 434-5 on Plut. *Caes.* 58.4. For Plutarch's use of Alexander as a standard point of comparison for many of his Greek and Roman *Lives*, see P.A. Stadter, 'Parallelism in Three Dimensions', in N. Humble (ed.), *Plutarch's Lives: Parallelism and Purpose* (Swansea 2010), 200-8.

⁴⁴ B. Kuhn-Chen, *Geschichtskonzeptionen griechischer Historiker im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.: Untersuchungen zu den Werken von Appian, Cassius Dio und Herodian* (Frankfurt am Main 2002), 168-9.

⁴⁵ Welch and Mitchell (n.8), 98.

the past failed to emulate or surpass Alexander's own achievements, but that they chose to emulate the wrong sorts of achievements. Alexander was famed as much for his humanity (φιλανθρωπία), his self-control (ἐγκράτεια), and his soundness of mind (σωφροσύνη) as he was for his military prowess. It was these 'soft' virtues that Plutarch extolled in his treatises *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander* as being the virtues demonstrated most readily during his military campaigns.⁴⁶ Diodorus also believed that Alexander's benevolent treatment of Darius' kinswomen, and especially Darius' mother Sisyngambris was his greatest achievement.⁴⁷ Similarly, Cornelius Tacitus, in his comparison of Alexander and Germanicus in the second book of the *Annals* singles out these qualities, of which Germanicus apparently excelled his exemplar.⁴⁸ Dio Chrysostom too, in the second and fourth of his so-called *Kingship Orations* delivered to Trajan, chose to emphasize these non-martial qualities over the martial ones.⁴⁹

Dio himself endorsed such pacific characteristics in an emperor. His ideal was closer to the *civilis princeps* than the *princeps invictus*. If the speech of Hadrian in Book 69, the Livia-Augustus dialogue in Book 55, or even the speech of Marcus Aurelius in Book 72 are anything to go by, it was a mild, peaceable, emperor, who exercised

⁴⁶ Plut. *De Alex. fort.* 1.11 [= *Mor.* 332C-E]. For further, nuanced discussion on this theme and the programmatic differences between Plutarch's *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander* and the *Life of Alexander*, note Whitmarsh (n.24).

⁴⁷ Diod. Sic. 17.38.4-6.

⁴⁸ Tac. Ann. 2.73. For this passage note, Bosworth (n.7), 559-63; cf. Syme *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958), 492; F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus, Books 1-6, Volume II: Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2* (Cambridge 1981), 416-7.

⁴⁹ For the figure of Alexander in Dio Chrysostom's *Kingship Orations*, see C.P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, MA 1978), 117-121; J.L. Moles, 'The Kingship Orations of Dio Chrysostom', *PLLS* 6 (1990), 299-300, 337-50.

clemency as a matter of policy that Dio most favoured.⁵⁰ We may assume that if there were a version of the Alexander story that Dio endorsed, it would have been the story of Alexander sparing the conquered Indian king Porus, or the kinswomen of Darius – not the Alexander who demanded personal worship, or the one who slew Cleitus (son of Dropides) in a drunken, black rage.

Conclusions

The final portent recorded in Dio's history is the appearance of a spirit (δαίμων) resembling Alexander the Great, who supposedly passed through Thrace before crossing the Hellespont into Asia Minor.⁵¹ The meaning of the story is obscure. But in a way it is appropriate that a phantasmagorical Alexander should effectively close Dio's *Roman History*. As I have argued, Alexander the Great is a constant, if often spectral presence in Dio's imperial narrative.

How should we account for these references? Certainly some of these would have already been in place in Dio's sources. The Caesar-Alexander pairing had been long established in the literary/historiographical tradition and is found in Lucan, Plutarch, and Appian.⁵² We may go further and (speculatively) ascribe the appearances of the Alexander-motif in Dio's Trajan narrative to Arrian's lost *Parthica*.⁵³ But such forays

⁵⁰ Note the discussion of this ideal in C. Davenport and C. Mallan, 'Hadrian's Adoption Speech in Cassius Dio's *Roman History* and the Problems of Imperial Succession', *AJPh* 135.4 (2014), 645-50.

⁵¹ 80[79].18.1-3 (Xiph.). For discussion of this episode, note Millar (n.2), 214-8.

⁵² *Luc. Phar.* 10.18-48; with the stimulating discussion of J. Tracy, *Lucan's Egyptian Civil War* (Cambridge 2014), 90-6.

⁵³ Cf. Dio Cass. 68.26.4¹ (Xiph.), 68.29.1-30.1 (Xiph.). For the source connection, note P.A. Stadter, *Arrian of Nicomedia* (Chapel Hill 1980), 139-41; cf. G. Wirth, 'Arrian und Traian – Versuch einer Gegenwartsdeutung', *Studii Clasice* 16 (1974), 203-6.

into *Quellenforschung* soon turn into interpretative dead-ends; what is important is that Dio chose to retain these allusions and weave them into his history. Given the frequency and consistency of the references to Alexander across his whole imperial narrative, we may assume that the employment of the Alexander-motif was a conscious authorial strategy employed by our historian.

In sum, the figure of Alexander provided Dio with a convenient yet potent cultural reference point which he employed to augment or nuance his characterization of individuals within his narrative, or to provoke thought or criticism about their actions, thus feeding into Dio's broader evaluative agenda. The multi-faceted reputation of the Macedonian conqueror provided an appropriate *exemplum* for a range of themes in imperial history – from succession (Augustus), to ambition (Caesar), to imperial expansion (Trajan), and misguided emulation (Caracalla, Pescennius Niger). Dio's handling of the Alexander-motif can be admittedly at times clumsy, but it is often subtle, and as I hope to have demonstrated, frequently provocative.

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