

DFP Project Description

Cassius Dio: Between History and Politics

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It is of course far from certain that Roman history should be entirely rewritten due to a new approach to Cassius Dio. But by gathering a large part of the world's Cassius Dio specialists, and by emphasising his overall importance, we hope to influence scholars' understanding of Roman history and historiography in general. Previous work on Cassius Dio has focused on providing translations and critical commentaries of the Cassius Dio's *Roman History*.¹ This groundwork is essential, but it is time to take Cassius Dio scholarship further. The main purpose will be to pursue a combined historiographic, literary and rhetorical analysis of Cassius Dio's work and of its political and intellectual agendas. The principal aim of the network is to change how Cassius Dio – one of the key historians of ancient Rome – is perceived: from a historian sometimes judged mediocre to a politician and intellectual steeped in Roman history and historiography. This reassessment will rest on deeper study of his narrative technique, his relationship with traditions of universal and more Rome-based historiography, and his structural approach to Roman history. The network will be the first interdisciplinary collaboration on Cassius Dio – with members from Denmark, Canada, England, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Scotland, and the USA – including both early-career and more established scholars.

The network (1 August 2016 – 31 July 2018) is a joint venture between SDU, AU and AAU, in cooperation with University of Alberta and Georgetown University. It includes leading male and female scholars specialising in Cassius Dio, the age in which he lived, and his 80-book *Roman History* narrating events from the foundation of Rome to roughly 229 AD.² The interdisciplinary team includes specialists in Roman history, literature and rhetoric. The idea for this network comes from the conference *Cassius Dio – Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, 2014, organised by Jesper M. Madsen and Carsten H. Lange, funded by the FKK. The proceedings are under contract with Brill, Leiden and will be submitted early in 2016. Moreover, Jesper M. Madsen and Carsten H. Lange are the editors of a forthcoming Cassius Dio Brill companion, to be published in 2017.

¹ Rich 1990; Murison 1999; Swan 2004; Lachenaud & Coudry 2011; 2014.

² Some parts no longer survive, but what does fills nine Loeb editions and four Boissevain editions, roughly covering 2000 pages of ancient Greek text.

Cassius Dio is the only historian who follows the developments of Rome's political institutions during a more than thousand year period.³ This makes him an indispensable source for Rome's history, particularly in the Late Republic, the reign of Augustus, and the second and third centuries AD. Traditionally, work on Cassius Dio has focused on one or several contiguous books. The aim of this network, correspondingly, is to take on the whole work and reposition it as a central achievement of Greco-Roman historiography. In his classic and still influential book – *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964) – the British historian Fergus Millar denies that Cassius Dio had a political agenda and at the same time claims that he simply wrote history through the lens of his own contemporary world. This network sets out to challenge this approach. While there is a growing interest in Cassius Dio in international scholarship, focusing on rhetorical and literary aspects, there is still little attention devoted to historiographical questions.⁴

Most frequently Cassius Dio is used as a handy resource, with scholars looking at isolated sections of his annalistic structure.⁵ This fragmentary use of the *Roman History* makes us forget to reflect on his work in its textual and contextual entirety. Contrary to this approach, the network will put emphasis on Cassius Dio and his *Roman History* in its historiographical setting, thus allowing us to link and understand the different parts of his work. We propose that Cassius Dio did have a political agenda: the entire *Roman History* is centred on his vision of an idealised form of Roman monarchical government. This is already highly perceptible in the books on the Republic, where free political competition is criticised as destabilising the state. In the later, imperial books, Cassius Dio focuses on individual emperors and dynasties to develop a theory of the best kind of monarchy and monarchy's typical problems. A result is that his work does not present itself as exclusively annalistic in nature, but also as a series of imperial biographies, beginning with the dynasts of the Republic. This introduces a tension into his narrative structure, which creates a unique sense of the past and allows us to see Roman history through a specific lens.

The whole text should accordingly be considered in order to understand Cassius Dio's approaches to and assessments of different time-periods; he is not just simply a writer of narrative history. Of course we also need to reflect on some of the deficiencies of Cassius Dio – even what appear to be sloppy errors – but this is only possible if we accept that Cassius Dio was a figure in his own right, as a politician, a historian and an intellectual who added philosophic reflection (especially through

³ See Urso 2005 and Simons 2009.

⁴ Gleason 2011; Kemezis 2014.

⁵ Outside the specialised Cassius Dio scholarship: Steel 2013, 6-7.

self-authored speeches assigned to historical protagonists) to create a narrative that suited his overall political objectives and structural understanding. Cassius Dio sometimes seems to change his attitudes to certain subjects in his narrative (political institutions, as well as emperors): this may partly be due to his source material, but also down to his working method. Cassius Dio spent ten years in gathering his material, followed by twelve years composing his work (book 72(73).23.5). This long period of research and composition – which witnessed great political turmoil in the Roman Empire – can help to account for some of the shifts in his work. Crucially, it appears that Cassius Dio was simply writing contemporary history into the past; he also wanted to understand Roman history on its own terms and also lay out examples for future rulers to follow, in the light of long-term experience. He makes it possible for us to view a large part of Roman history through a distinctive interpretation, focusing on the underlying structural elements of imperial society, the individuality of emperors, and the relationship between institutions and individuals.

It seems impractical to get a large group of scholars coming from different countries and educational backgrounds – historians and classical philologists – to commit to a single method and theory. However, we take inspiration from a recent restatement of the great value of long-term history, which seeks to understand multiple pasts.⁶ Cassius Dio's text can be the starting point for a more structural approach to Roman History that spans the usually sharp divide made between "Republic" and "Empire." As with the Greek historian Thucydides – who famously describes the impact of the internal strife at Corfu in 427 BC (book 3.81-85) – Cassius Dio's emphasis on civil war provides us with an opportunity to view such conflicts as part of *la longue durée*, even providing insight into issues relevant for present conflicts, for example the extreme use of violence. Cassius Dio wrote in the realist tradition of Thucydides and sought to confirm empirically Thucydides' analysis of civil war by citing comparable episodes in Roman history. Similarly, Cassius Dio's universal history contains many analyses of "good" and "bad" emperors that take on more meaning when treated structurally, as building blocks for his political theory. His approach to the Republican dynasts should be considered much the same way. This seems partly the product of his idea that a republican form of government is inadequate. The question arises how this fits his wider political and structural views on Roman history, including his realist view of the world.

The network consists of an organising committee: Jesper M. Madsen (SDU), whose work focuses on Greek intellectuals' view of Roman rule; George Hinge (AU) who has specialised in Greek and Roman rhetoric and literature; Carsten H. Lange (AAU), who is an expert on the Late Republic and

⁶ Guldi & Armitage 2014.

Augustus, as well as Roman civil wars; Josiah Osgood (Georgetown), a world-leading scholar on both republican and imperial history; and Adam Kemezis (Alberta), who specialises in Roman imperial literature. All five members have previously organised conferences, edited collected volumes and have published with well-established presses and journals. Other confirmed members of the network include Joel Allen, Queens College, New York; Clifford Ando, Chicago; Sulochana Asirvatham, Montclair; Christopher Baron, Notre Dame; Christopher Burden-Stevens, Glasgow; Jesper Carlsen, SDU; Marianne Coudry, Université de Haute-Alsace; Alain Gowing, University of Washington; Brandon Jones, Puget Sound; Annika Kuhn, München; Christina Kuhn, Oxford; Julie Langford, South Florida; Christopher Mallan, Oxford; Konstantin Markov, Nizhny-Novgorod; Ida Gilda Mastroso, Firenze; Benjamin Pedersen, SDU; John Rich, Nottingham; Andrew Scott, Villanova; Verena Schulz, München; Gianpaolo Urso, Université Bordeaux 3; Jyri Vaahtera, Turku.

The objective of this network is therefore to understand Cassius Dio, but at the same time we will inevitably reshape scholars' understanding of Roman history in its entirety, with all its structural elements and transformations. Cassius Dio is the perfect starting point for a new Roman history that uses developments over hundreds of years to unearth larger patterns of change and continuity. The network proposes three international conferences and two seminars which will include mostly the network members and a few invitees whose work is particularly relevant to themes in question:

- Conference: *Cassius Dio the Historian: Methods and Approaches*, SDU, October 2016: this gathering will inaugurate the network and help to define its main approaches, including how we as scholars use Cassius Dio as evidence. What were his historical methods and why was he at times seemingly careless, at times very precise, and did he follow a specific political agenda? An open call will be made on the Liverpool Classical list.
- Seminar: *Cassius Dio and Republican History*, Georgetown University, June 2017: the focus will be on the different trends in Cassius Dio's Republican narrative and will focus on the issue of whether or not he wrote contemporary history into the past. This event will be co-funded by Georgetown University, estimated around \$10,000. The seminar will be held at Villa Le Balze, Italy, and some of the funding will go towards food, lodging etc.
- Conference: *Cassius Dio and Civil War*, AAU, October 2017: this conference, which will cover both the republican and imperial period, will focus on periodical transitions and structural approaches to civil war in Cassius Dio. Simply put, what role does internal violence play in his narrative? There will be an open call for papers. A workshop for Ph.D. and Master's students will follow the conference, which will give talented students and early

career academics an opportunity to benefit from the network. Furthermore, Cassius Dio will be central to teaching over the coming years at the joint venture institutions.

- Seminar: *Cassius Dio and the Principate*, Aarhus, January 2018: this will address the political institutions and the government of the early imperial period, as well as the different ruling family dynasties and focus on how these institutions make Cassius Dio reflect on periods of prosperity and decline.
- Conference: *Cassius Dio and the Long Second Century: Rhetoric in the Second Sophistic*, University of Alberta, Edmonton, June 2018: the focus will be devoted on the literary tradition Cassius Dio in the context of Roman-era Greek literature in both Latin and Greek. There will be an open call for papers. University of Alberta will apply to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada research council to cover 2/3 of the costs. The Canadian application requires co-funding of 1/3.

In addition to these events members of the network will participate or organise sessions at *Dansk historikermøde*, Odense, August 2016, *Nordisk Historikermøde*, Aalborg, August 2017, *The Classical Association Conference* in 2017, Canterbury, as well as the *Society for Classical Studies* (North America) 2018, Boston. To benefit as much as possible from the international milieu of the network, we have included expenses that allow Danish network members to visit the partner institutions in order to present papers and work in progress, and at the same time allow us to invite our international partners to Denmark.

It is our firm intention to publish both conferences and seminar proceedings. These will be published with Brill (BFI, authorisation lists, level 2), and we are currently in dialogue with them regarding a high-impact series on Cassius Dio, including related contributions and monographs on Greco-Roman imperial historiography. Open-access editions of conference papers will be published on the network website. An international network on Cassius Dio organised by Danish universities will offer Danish scholarship a leading role in what potentially will become a ground-breaking analysis of the historiographic, structural, political and literary potential of one of the most indispensable sources for Roman history. It will allow Master and PhD students in Denmark an opportunity to make contacts with scholars and foreign students and it will provide mid-career scholars at Danish universities with a diversified geographical and interdisciplinary international network from which future projects and partnerships will grow. It is our intention to apply for a research project on ancient historiography after the network has finished.