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SEVERAN BOOKS OF CASSIUS DIO'S "ROMAN HISTORY" (LXXIV-LXXX) AND THEIR BYZANTINE EPITOMATORS¹

The aim of this dissertation was an attempt to reconstruct the Severan books of the "Roman History" (LXXIV-LXXX) of Cassius Dio and to prove that the question of their survival in the form of Byzantine sources is of fundamental importance for the interpretation of the account of Dio about

¹ Authorial synopsis of the doctoral dissertation, written at the Department of Humanities, Institute of History and International Relations, University of Szczecin. The dissertation was supervised by Professor Danuta Okoń (auxiliary supervisor: Dr. Małgorzata Cieśluk). The defence took place on 18th October, 2018 before Scientific Council of the Institute of History and International Relations, USz, Szczecin.

the events contemporary to him, i.e., the reign of the Severi. They were the last ruling dynasty of the Roman Empire before the period of its crisis, which resulted in the disappearance of the system of Principate, replaced by a more authoritarian Dominate. Thus, the reigns of the Severi are crucial for our understanding of the crisis of the 3rd century and of the later period as well. Work of Dio is also recognized as the most valuable narrative source for the history of the Severan dynasty and is valued far more than the contemporary account of Herodian and composed much later “*Historia Augusta*”².

The biggest problem associated with the interpretation and use of the “*Roman History*”, however, is its fragmentary state of preservation, especially in the case of those already mentioned parts of Dion’s work. The only original testimony for the Severan books is Codex Vaticanus 1288 from the 5th or 6th century, written in the uncivil, containing the majority of the book LXXIX and the beginning of LXXX. However, this manuscript is preserved in bad condition – contains numerous lacunas which were created mainly as a result of cutting of the margins of its pages³. The remainder of the Severan books were preserved in much later Byzantine sources. The most important of them are the “*Epitome*” of Ioannes Xiphilinus⁴, composed in the second half of 11th century and “*Excerpta Constantiniana*”, a collection of extracts from the “*Roman History*” prepared under the auspices of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus⁵. Less important is the “*Epitome Historiōn*” of Ioannes Zonaras who, although in describing the earlier periods of the history of Rome used the original books of Dio’s work, in the case of the Severan books it seems that he rather used the “*Epitome*” of Xiphilinus. The above-mentioned remarks lead to the conclusion that by using the “*Roman History*” of Cassius Dio for the study of Severan period, we must mostly rely not on the original, but on much later Byzantine works, first of all the “*Epitome*” of Xiphilinus.

This statement is of utmost importance for the proper understanding of the Severan books and what remained of Dion’s work in general. Despite the obviousness of this fact, this problem did not yet attract particular scholarly attention, among both historians of Ancient Rome and Byzantinists alike.

² Okoń 2009, 9, p. 17-8.

³ Mazzucchi 1979, p. 94.

⁴ Standard edition see: Boissevain 1901, p. 479-730; new critical edition is currently under preparation by Kai Juntunen in Helsinki.

⁵ Fragments of the “*Roman History*” survived only in two collections of the “*Excerpta*”: “*Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis*” (Roos 1910) and “*Excerpta de legationibus*” (de Boor 1903).

The reason for this is the view that Xiphilinus was just an ordinary copyist, not an independent author who intended to present his own interpretation of the past⁶. "Epitome" is therefore treated only as a series of extracts from Dio's work. In this context "Excerpta Constantiniana" is considered in a similar way, same can be said about the chronicle of Zonaras.

According to the theory put forward in this dissertation – it was quite the opposite. Epitomators were not just ordinary copyists, but active authors who were driven by their own writing agenda. Thus, I would like to prove that the contemporary opinions about Dio's account contained in the books LXXIV-LXXX were based on epitomized accounts whose authors followed their own literary purposes, different methodology and whose works were influenced by different literary trends and tastes of readers. In order to verify this theory, I have analysed the way in which the "Roman History" was re-worked by its epitomisers, i.e. Ioannes Xiphilinus, Ioannes Zonaras and by the authors of the "Excerpta Constantiniana"

This issue faces serious methodological difficulties posed by an investigation of the relationship between Severan books of the "Roman History" and its epitomisers. This is due to the fact that it is impossible to compare Byzantine sources with the original, except for the part of Dio's work preserved in Cod. Vat. 1288. Consequently, in the case of "Epitome" of Xiphilinus and "Excerpta Constantiniana", it is necessary to analyse those parts which are based on the parts of the "Roman History" preserved in original. Thus, a lot of space in this dissertation is devoted to the analyses of other parts of the "Excerpta Constantiniana" than Severan Books.

To the analysis conducted in this thesis I have applied a classical comparative methodology which allowed me to distinguish the characteristic methods of writing of epitomators and to specify all the differences between them and Dio's original narrative. After this I have used the results of this study as a starting point for the analysis of the epitomator's account based on Dio's Severan books supporting it with the analysis of Dio's work preserved in Cod. Vat. 1288.

Methodology described above – i.e. the analysis of the author's methodology through comparison of his work with his originally preserved source, and then adaptation of these results to those parts of the text of which original source did not survive – has already been used by Catherine Holmes. The subject of her study was "Epitome Historiōn" of Ioannes Skylitzes, and

⁶ On this issue see: Juntunen 2015, p. 123.

above all his account of the rule of Basileios II Boulgaroktonos (976-1025)⁷. Scholars dealing with the period of this emperor's rule are facing the same problem as researchers of Severan period. Skylitzes is the most important source for the reconstruction of Byzantine history at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. His chronicle, however, was created almost a hundred years after the events which it describes (at the beginning of the 12th century) and no contemporary source (including those which Skylitzes used) dealing with the reign of Basileios II survived. For this reason, Holmes conducted an analysis of Skylitzes' methodology in order to better understand and assess his account of the reign of Basileios II. She conducted it by comparing chapter of the "Synopsis Historiōn" dedicated to Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944) with the "Continuation of Theophanes", the source used by Skylitzes. Then the results of this analysis were used by her to reinterpret Skylitzes' account of the reign of Basileios II and then to revise the opinions prevailing in Byzantine scholarship about Basileios II himself and his government.

In this thesis I have applied methodology similar to that of Holmes, except for its last part. The main subject of Holmes' monograph was a new interpretation of Basileios' reign, so the analysis of Skylitzes' methodology served only as one of the tools to achieve this goal. The application of the same goal in regard of the history of Rome described in the Severan books, that is, the period of the emperors from Pertinax to the beginning of the reign of Severus Alexander (from 193 to about 223) would require the creation of another, if not several separate works devoted to the various aspects of Rome's history. Therefore, I have limited myself to the basic question of verifying the results of the analysis of the methodology of epitomators on the basis of Severan books. I have highlighted how much perception and interpretation of the account of Dio was influenced by the fact of looking at the work of Dio through his medieval Byzantine studies.

The issues raised in this dissertation so far has not met with much scholarly attention. As a result, the literature devoted to this subject is very modest, if not negligible. Scholars of ancient Rome rarely speak about the state of preservation of the "Roman History", not to mention the importance of this fact and the influence of indirect, Byzantine sources on its interpretation. Those who do this while speaking about Xiphilinus most often refer to the opinion expressed by Fergus Millar in his monograph entitled: *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Researcher values Xiphilinus' "Epitome" as a passive and

⁷ Holmes 2005.

incompetent work of simple copyist. He even considers this characteristic as a positive aspect of Xiphilinus work because thanks to that "Epitome" can be seen as a reliable source for the reconstruction of the missing parts of the "Roman History"⁸. These opinions stem from a slight degree of interdisciplinary contacts between historians of Ancient Rome and Byzantinists. They are based on already obsolete state of research on Byzantine sources of derivative nature.

Only since the 1980s historians started to look at these types of sources in more favourable eye, seeing in them something more than only a derivative, second-hand works⁹. A proper discussion on this subject began with the article by Christopher Mallan: "The Style, Method, and Program of Xiphilinus' Epitome of Cassius Dio's Roman History". He made a selective comparative analysis of the fragments of the "Epitome" and the "Roman History" highlighting many characteristics of Xiphilinus writing style¹⁰. Some of the observations made by Mallan can be seen as debatable, but this results rather from the presentation of his research in the form of short article. Nevertheless, his text constitutes a starting point and reference to all future studies on Xiphilinus. It further proves that the problem of the relationship of Dio with his epitomators requires a fuller, monographic approach.

Issues addressed in this dissertation are placed in five chapters. The first one is dedicated to the circumstances of the composition of the "Epitome" (paying special attention to the origins and social position of Xiphilinus), to reconstruct the "programme" of his work and the influence of the intellectual climate of the era in which he lived. Finally, to identify goals and purposes of his writing – which were shaped by the contemporary literary culture of the court of the Doukai. "Epitome" was probably composed under the reign of Michael VII Doukas and dedicated to him. Thus, one should perceive the work of Xiphilinus as a textbook for the history of Rome, written for or ordered by Michael VII Doukas. With that in mind Xiphilinus task can be seen as part of the general tendencies of the Byzantine court, initiated probably by the emperor's educator, Michael Psellos, one of the greatest intellectuals of the era¹¹. Xiphilinus' aim was to to write down the history of ancient

⁸ Millar 1964; for similar opinions see: Brunt 1980, 489-491 for the change in direction see: Wilson 1983, 179;

⁹ See for example: Ioannes Malalas: Jeffreys, Croke 1990, Georgios Synkellos: Huxley 1981, p. 207-217, Adler 1990; Georgios Kedrenos: Maisano 1983, p. 237-258; for the general overview see: Ljubarskij 1993, p. 131-138.

¹⁰ Mallan 2013.

¹¹ Markopoulos 2006, p. 297.

Rome from the end of the Roman Republic through the formation of the principate and the period of its gradual erosion witnessed by Cassius Dio.

Although Xiphilinus did not include in his work a classical *prooimion*, however, from one of his interpolations we can learn more about his writing goals. He states that he will describe everything that in his opinion is important for the contemporary *politeuma* (Byzantine state, government or constitution) and the way of life, which in turn should be broadly understood as all the components of Byzantine statehood, political customs and the social and political situation of his time. This declaration was also created as a result of the intellectual climate of the era, a time in which economic, cultural and intellectual development was combined with simultaneous political decay and the collapse of the Byzantine Asia Minor. The intellectuals of this era were looking to the past for solutions to the current problems of the Byzantine state. On the one hand, it was a priority for Xiphilinus to show what was useful for the situation of the contemporary Byzantine Empire and what could be a good lesson for the emperor Michael VII, and on the other, to adapt the “Roman History” of Dio to requirements and literary trends of the 11th century Byzantium.

The second chapter constitutes an analysis of the writing techniques of Xiphilinus based on a comparison of the two chapters of the “Epitome” devoted to Pompey and Tiberius with the preserved, original books of the “Roman History”. I carried out the analysis in diachronic way, i.e. comparing all, even the smallest differences between Cassius Dio and Xiphilinus present in the “Epitome”, in the order dictated by the structure of the books of “Roman History”. This analysis showed that Xiphilinus was an author who actively shaped his work. In re-working Dio’s material, he was guided by predefined criteria, and what he drew from the “Roman History” was dictated by his narrative structure implemented in the “Epitome”. In this chapter I focused only on highlighting all the differences between Xiphilinus and Cassius Dio, without attempting to interpret the changes made by the author of the Epitome.

In the third chapter I have presented the results of these analyses in more synthetic approach, focusing to the most characteristic features of Xiphilinus writing technique, both at the level of narrative structure, which dictated the criteria of the selection of the material and on the level of copying and paraphrasing the source material. Xiphilinus goal was, in the first place, to adapt Dio’s annalistic structure describing the events from the perspective of many different personas, to the requirements of the Byzantine “historical biography”,

model which dominated historical writings in the time of Xiphilinus¹². This decided that the narrative of Xiphilinus focused on the main heroes of the chapters of the "Epitome" and on the events in which they participated. The summarizing or shortening of Dio's original was dictated not only by the desire to relate the "Roman History" in a more concise and epitomised manner but to adapt Dio's work to Xiphilinus' writing goals, which in turn were dictated by contemporary requirements, standards and preferences of readers. Xiphilinus usually cut off all material that was not directly related to the main character of the chapter, regardless of the type of that material. The exception to that rule constitutes a material of ethnographic or geographical character, but also, though to a lesser extent, anecdotal. In most cases Xiphilinus skips uninteresting parts of the text without trace.

Careful analysis of the chapters of the "Epitome" and the "Roman History" has also shown that some observations made by other researchers regarding the selection of material made by Xiphilinus were not entirely accurate. The analysis confirmed that the historian was interested in a wide range of topics, provided, that they concerned the main character of the narrative. Regardless whether they were of military nature, anecdotal, showing positive and negative results of protagonists' actions, rebellions, upheavals or scandals. An exception to this rule was a strictly political material picturing the nuances of the Roman political system. Due to above mentioned features it can be said that the opinion that Xiphilinus was not interested in military material is not true, because he recapitulates many armed conflicts in which Pompey was involved. The narrative structure of Dio differs significantly from that adopted in the republican books, which itself was dictated by the different character of the history of both periods. In the imperial books, Dio's story is more focused on the person of the emperor, and thus is naturally closer to the modes of composition adopted by Xiphilinus. Nevertheless, in this case, the author of "Epitome" tried to further epitomise Dio's account and focus even more on the figure of the emperor.

In the fourth chapter I have discussed the importance of the other important sources useful for the reconstruction of the "Roman History". The first part of the chapter was devoted to the "Excerpta Constantiniana" and to the analysis of the programme of the excerptors and to their methodology¹³.

¹² Markopoulos 2009, p. 713.

¹³ Discussion on this topic is based mostly on the analyses of the proemium to the *Excerpta*, see: Lemerle 1971, p. 281-282; Roberto 2009, p. 74-78; Flusin 2002, p. 538-539; for general overview see: Wilson 1996, p. 143-145.

Then I carried out a comparative analysis of selected excerpts with the originally preserved fragments of the “Roman History”. The results of the analysis showed that excerptors worked according to strictly defined and rigorous criteria. Their goal was to preserve the originality of used pieces of Dio’s work. They did only minor modifications to the material, mainly at the beginning of the excerpt with the aim to give it individual character. However, this is also the main field in which various errors occurred. Excerptors also tried to maintain the internal structure of the original work and did not change the sequence of events. However, they omitted entire parts of Dio’s work in situations when they were not associated with the main topic of the collection, such as “On Virtues and Vices, or “On Embassies”. Sometimes excerptors also paraphrased the source rather than excerpted it.

Second part of the chapter was dedicated to the “Epitome Historiōn” of Ioannes Zonaras. In it I have outlined the circumstances of the chronicle’s creation, its ideological purpose and the issue of the degree of originality of Zonaras account in Severan material and its relationship and dependence on the “Epitome” of Xiphilinus. Zonaras, unlike Xiphilinus, included *prooimion* at the beginning of his work, in which he presented his goals which guided him while writing. In his chronicle, describing the events from the Creation to the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1080-1118), Zonaras made use of a wide range of written sources, and Dio’s “Roman History” is only one of them. What interested him are primarily issues related to the history of the Roman system of government and its political institutions, including phases of its transformation. Therefore, he shows interest in different topics than Xiphilinus who rather focused on moral aspects of the actions of the protagonists of his narrative. Therefore, the “Epitome Historiōn” could be seen as an interesting alternative to the “Epitome” of Xiphilinus. However, this is not the case due to the fact that Zonaras did not use in Severan material original work of Dio, but only the version contained in Xiphilinus¹⁴. As a result, his work can be considered as the important source for the reconstruction of the lost parts of the “Roman History”, but only for the books I-XXXVI.

The aim of fifth chapter was to adapt the results of the analyses conducted in previous chapters on the grounds of the Severan books. The results show that the observations made in the chapters of “Epitome” devoted to Pompey and Tiberius are also visible in the Severan books. Xiphilinus focuses in them primarily on the events related to not only the main character of the chapter

¹⁴ Boissevain 1891, p. 442.

of the "Epitome", but also to those persons who have had a decisive influence on the fate of the main protagonist. The consequence of this assumption, e.g. in the case of the war material, is the fact that there is a clear preference for describing internal wars resulting in the change of power. The description of the external wars on the other hand, mainly campaigns against the Parthians (of Severus, Caracalla and Macrinus) are similar to those present in the first chapter of the "Epitome" devoted to Pompey. Xiphilinus also focuses mainly on those parts of the "Roman History", which he values because of their moralistic or sensational nature. He also applies this criterion to the material related to matters which take place in Rome. As in the chapters devoted to Pompey and Tiberius, Xiphilinus concentrates on the examples showing good or ill behaviour of the main protagonists, omitting almost all of the information concerned with the administrative and political measures. The last phenomenon is also further confirmed by the comparative analysis of Cod. Vat. 1288 with the chapter of the "Epitome" devoted to the emperor Macrinus and parts of the chapters relating to Caracalla and Elagabalus.

In case of Caracalla, important role in the interpretation of his reign constitutes the "Excerpta Constantiniana". The fact that the largest number of excerpts from the "Roman History" comes from one of the few surviving collections: "On Virtues and Vices" has a decisive influence on our reception of Dio's account of Caracalla. Fragments which this collection contains constitute a series of unconnected sensational anecdotes showing the positive or negative behaviour of various characters from Dio's narrative. This is also the type of material in which Xiphilinus took special interest. In this way, Xiphilinus' "Epitome" combined with "Excerpta Constantiniana" provides us a very disproportionate narrative made of a series of unconnected, mainly sensational anecdotes. This fact negatively influenced the way in which we can today interpret Dio's account about the emperor.

This thesis constitutes only a starting point for further research on Dio's work and for the reinterpretation of the current opinions regarding the manner in which Dio presented the history of rulers of his own time. Due to the magnitude of the undertaking, it was impossible to make a thorough analysis of all the research problems connected with the use of Severan books of "Roman History" preserved in the form of Byzantine sources, as well as an attempt to reinterpret Dio's narrative about contemporary events. These issues therefore constitute only a postulate and the direction in which the future research should go in case of Cassius Dio and his narrative of the crucial period of the history of the Roman Empire.

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