

## CASSIUS DIO AND CARACALLA\*

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary books of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* shed invaluable light on the politics of the late second and early third century A.D.<sup>1</sup> The text of Dio for this period depends primarily on excerpts preserved by the Byzantine epitomator Xiphilinus,<sup>2</sup> but these fragments contain evocative details of court rivalries, treason trials and the personalities of individual rulers. As a senator whose public career encompassed the reigns of Commodus and the Severan emperors, Dio was well placed to record the vicissitudes of political life. The historian's portrait of Caracalla, who ruled from 211–17, is particularly memorable: Septimius Severus' eldest son and successor is portrayed as a paranoid *princeps* who was hostile and homicidal towards the senate and its members. Dio himself was treated with disdain by Caracalla, and his experiences are commonly regarded by scholars as emblematic of the emperor's relationship with his closest senatorial advisers.<sup>3</sup> Caracalla was certainly a fickle man who, like many of his predecessors, could revoke official appointments or personal friendships without warning. His approach to government was unashamedly autocratic, more in the style of Domitian than

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<sup>1</sup> All dates are A.D. unless otherwise noted. References in brackets without further qualification are to Cassius Dio, using the edition of U.P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* (Berlin, 1895–1931). Translations are those of the Loeb edition of E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (London and Cambridge, MA, 1914–27), with modifications where appropriate. It should be noted that the Loeb does not always reproduce Boissevain's numbering accurately.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from Xiphilinus constitute the majority of Books 72–80, supplemented by passages from writers such as Zonaras and Peter the Patrician. A single manuscript preserves Dio's original account of the death of Caracalla, the reign of Macrinus, and the rise of Elagabalus. Our conception of Dio's history is therefore necessarily dictated by this fragmentary material, but Xiphilinus' tendency to quote directly, or at least closely paraphrase, Dio's own words means that we can reconstruct the text of the history with some confidence. See F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964), 1–4.

<sup>3</sup> Numerous scholars have followed Dio's testimony: Millar (n. 2), 21, 156; R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, 1984), 70; B. Campbell, 'The Severan dynasty', *CAH* 12<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge, 2005), 1–27, at 16; J. Crook, *Consilium Principis* (Cambridge, 1955), 82; D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, A.D. 180–395* (London, 2004), 141–2; B. Levick, *Julia Domna: Syrian Empress* (London, 2007), 87. For M. Hose, *Erneuerung der Vergangenheit: Die Historiker im Imperium Romanum von Florus bis Cassius Dio* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1994), 406–9, 431, Dio represents an authentic senatorial viewpoint of life under Commodus and the Severan emperors.

some of the conciliatory rulers of the second century.<sup>4</sup> But this does not mean that we should wholeheartedly accept Dio's claims that senators were routinely ignored by the emperor in favour of soldiers and freedmen (77.13.1, 17.1, 18.4), as has often been the case.<sup>5</sup>

In an article primarily focussing on Caracalla's educational background, Meckler broke with the scholarly consensus that Dio's relationship with the emperor was typical of all senators. He noted that Dio was biased against Caracalla precisely because he was not favoured by the emperor.<sup>6</sup> This argument deserves greater attention than it has hitherto received, because Dio stakes the authenticity of his account of the Severan period on his status as a trustworthy eyewitness.<sup>7</sup> In a programmatic statement that occurs in his narrative of Commodus' reign, Dio (72.18.4) proclaimed that he would henceforth record events in greater detail, because no other competent writer possessed 'so accurate a knowledge of them as I' (*διηκριβωκότα αὐτὰ ὁμοίως ἐμοί*). The claim is somewhat disingenuous, since at least one other historian could rival Dio in this regard: Marius Maximus, one of Septimius Severus' leading generals, who wrote a series of imperial biographies.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, we should be wary of wholeheartedly accepting Dio's version of events, particularly when they concern his relationship with the emperors. As a politically active senator, he was concerned to present his own actions in the best possible light and to justify any estrangement from the imperial court.<sup>9</sup> This fact seems to have escaped the notice of scholars, because Dio's testimony as it stands fits in with the theory that the Severan period witnessed the growth of the power of equestrians at the expense of the senators.<sup>10</sup> However, this interpretative paradigm,

<sup>4</sup> For Domitian's relationship with his courtiers, see B.W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London, 1992), 22–33.

<sup>5</sup> Imperial whim was an integral part of the political life of the Roman empire, as demonstrated by K. Hopkins, 'Elite mobility in the Roman Empire', *P&P* 32 (1965), 12–26, at 23.

<sup>6</sup> M.L. Meckler, 'Caracalla the intellectual', in E. dal Covolo and G. Rinaldi (edd.), *Gli imperatori Severi: storia, archeologia, religione* (Rome, 1999), 39–46, at 40. In an earlier attempt to re-evaluate Dio's political standing, C. Letta, 'La composizione dell'opera di Cassio Dione: cronologia e sfondo storiopolitico', in *Ricerche di storiografia greca di età romana* (Pisa, 1979), 117–89, at 127 argued that Dio had fallen 'in disgrazia' under both Severus and Caracalla. This interpretation is too extreme, as there is a difference between a senator being on the periphery of court circles and outright disgrace.

<sup>7</sup> On Dio's profession of accuracy, see M.G. Schmidt, 'Die "zeitgeschichtlichen" Bücher im Werke des Cassius Dio – von Commodus zu Severus Alexander', *ANRW* 2.34.3 (Berlin 1997), 2591–649, at 2596–7. Hose (n. 3), 406 places great emphasis on Dio's status as a 'Zeitzeuge'.

<sup>8</sup> See the important analysis of A.R. Birley, 'Marius Maximus: the consular biographer', *ANRW* 2.34.3 (Berlin, 1997), 2678–757. Dio did not personally witness all of the events that he recounts in the Severan sections of his history. He also relied on a written source, which may have actually been Marius Maximus, as argued by T.D. Barnes, 'The composition of Cassius Dio's "Roman History"', *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 240–55, at 253–4 and M. Meckler, 'Caracalla's sense of humor and Cassius Dio's Latinity', in G. Bonamente and M. Mayer (edd.), *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Barcinonense* (Bari, 2005), 221–32, at 230–1. Dio's claims to be an eyewitness are also somewhat undermined by his own statements in 53.19.1–6, where he writes that his narrative of the imperial period will be dependent on the reports he received from his sources.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, not all senators were politically ambitious, but Dio's concern for his official standing shows that he was anxious to climb the *cursus honorum*. K. Hopkins and G. Burton, 'Ambition and withdrawal: the senatorial aristocracy under the emperors', in K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983), 120–200, at 166–9 discuss senators who eschewed political life.

<sup>10</sup> For acceptance of this change in political power structures in the Severan period, see Millar (n. 2), 161; L. de Blois, 'The third century crisis and the Greek elite in the Roman empire',

conventionally known as the ‘rise of the *equites*’, has recently been subjected to challenges which cast doubt on its validity as a model for assessing social and political change.<sup>11</sup>

The object of this article is to re-evaluate the nature of Caracalla’s relationship with members of the senate, as scholars have failed to take sufficient account of the fact that Dio had a vested interest in presenting his own political career in the best possible light. In the first part of the article, I will demonstrate that Dio was not particularly close to Caracalla or his father Septimius Severus. However, the historian sought to characterize his experience of their regimes as representative of that of the senatorial order as a whole. Sections two and three will examine Caracalla’s relationship with individual senators. As Sillar has shown, Caracalla was not explicitly anti-senatorial, and the emperor’s purge following the murder of his brother and co-emperor Geta in 211 was not directed at the *amplissimus ordo*.<sup>12</sup> It will be argued that the emperor in fact possessed a number of senatorial associates whom he favoured, rewarded and promoted. The lives and careers of these men are often overlooked in modern scholarship, in part because of the tendency to relate accounts of third-century politics to the ‘rise of the *equites*’. Dio himself criticized many of these men because he disapproved of the methods by which they gained the emperor’s favour, and his bitterness is indicative of the resentment felt by senators excluded from the emperor’s inner circle.<sup>13</sup> In the final part of the paper, I will explore how Dio’s account can be used to construct a more realistic picture of life at Caracalla’s court as an environment dominated by rivalries between senators, *equites*, freedmen and slaves, who all competed for the emperor’s favour. That a Roman emperor had a variety of friends and advisers, including senators, is hardly surprising in and of itself. But historians have been so concerned to portray the Severan period as an age of growing estrangement between emperors and senators that it is necessary to redress the balance. Dio’s history remains immensely valuable as a contemporary source, but it should not be

*Historia* 33 (1984), 358–77, at 368; A. Chastagnol, *Le sénat romain à l’époque impériale* (Paris, 1992), 203–8. With particular reference to Caracalla, see Potter (n. 3), 144, 147; R.W.B. Salway, ‘Equestrian prefects and the award of senatorial honours from the Severans to Constantine’, in A. Kolb (ed.), *Herrschaftsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis: Konzepte, Prinzipien und Strategien der Administration im römischen Kaiserreich* (Berlin, 2006), 115–35, at 120, 124.

<sup>11</sup> The theory of the ‘rise of the *equites*’ was outlined by C.W. Keyes, ‘The rise of the *equites* in the third century of the Roman empire’ (Diss., Princeton University, 1915) and developed further by J.F. Osier, ‘The rise of the *ordo equester* in the third century of the Roman empire’ (Diss., University of Michigan, 1974). It has been restated in several recent works, such as R.W.B. Salway, ‘The Roman empire from Augustus to Diocletian’, in E. Bispham (ed.), *Roman Europe* (Oxford, 2008), 69–108, at 102; I. Piso, ‘Les chevaliers romains dans l’armée impériale et les implications de l’*imperium*’, in S. Demougin, H. Devijver and M.-T. Raepsaet-Charlier (edd.), *L’Ordre équestre: histoire d’une aristocratie (IIe siècle av. J.-C. – IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.)* (Rome, 1999), 321–50, at 336. Aspects of the theory have been challenged by B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford, 1984), 404–8 and M. Christol, ‘L’ascension de l’ordre équestre. Un thème historiographique et sa réalité’, in Demougin, Devijver and Raepsaet-Charlier (this note), 613–28, at 614–5.

<sup>12</sup> S. Sillar, ‘Caracalla and the senate: the aftermath of Geta’s assassination’, *Athenaeum* 89 (2001), 407–23.

<sup>13</sup> A.J. Graham, ‘The limitations of prosopography in Roman imperial history (with special reference to the Severan period)’, *ANRW* 2.1 (Berlin, 1974), 136–57, at 137–8, rightly argues that the results of prosopography should always be weighed against the extant literary sources. In the case of Caracalla’s senatorial friends, much of the prosopographical information comes from Dio himself.

used as evidence for Caracalla's exclusion or maltreatment of senators. Instead, it stands as a revealing account of how one senator viewed the imperial court from the periphery of power.

### I. DIO AND THE EMPERORS

Cassius Dio, like many Roman senators, was preoccupied with his social status and personal standing with the emperor. His eighty-book work ends not with a summation of Rome's achievements over the previous millennium, but with his elevation to a second, ordinary consulship in 229, an office shared with the emperor Severus Alexander.<sup>14</sup> Dio's attitude is boastful, as he recounts how the emperor personally paid for his consular games (80.5.1). The portrayal of Severus Alexander is typical of Dio's tendency to judge the Severans by how they treated him personally. Moreover, Dio portrays his own relationship with these emperors as indicative of their attitude to their *amici*, or to the senatorial order in general. In the books dealing with events from the 190s onwards, Dio uses the first person plural in order to indicate that he is writing on behalf of the senate.<sup>15</sup> While describing Septimius Severus' first visit to Rome in 193 (74.2.2–3), he criticizes the new emperor for doing many things that were displeasing 'to us' (*ἡμῖν*). Later, in the same passage, the emperor is censured for relying more on the army than on 'the goodwill of his associates' (*ἐν τῇ τῶν συνόντων οἱ εὐνοίᾳ*). The implication is that Severus was neglecting his closest senatorial advisers, with Dio indicating, through his use of *ἡμῖν*, that he was among those the emperor should have been consulting. However, the notion that Severus eschewed the support of senators is misleading. He is known to have relied on a number of leading senators, such as P. Cornelius Anullinus, L. Fabius Cilo, L. Marius Maximus, and Ti. Claudius Candidus, who commanded armies during the civil wars that swept him to power.<sup>16</sup> These men formed the heart of a trusted coterie of senatorial favourites which prospered during Severus' reign, in contrast to those who supported his opponents, Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus, who had their property confiscated and, in many cases, lost their lives.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to the aforementioned senators, Cassius Dio did not actively support Severus' claim to the throne. Although he made a sycophantic approach to Severus by sending him an account of the dreams and portents that presaged his accession (72.23.1–2), Dio counted himself among those senators who preferred not to choose sides in the civil war (75.4.2). The account of Severus' final victory over Clodius Albinus is written from the same perspective: the emperor is said

<sup>14</sup> Schmidt (n. 7), 2597.

<sup>15</sup> Schmidt (n. 7), 2594; Barnes (n. 8), 242.

<sup>16</sup> Anullinus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1322. Cilo: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 27. Maximus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 308. Candidus: *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 823. Severus is known to have bestowed riches on Anullinus and Cilo (*Epit. de Caes.* 20.6). A.J. Graham (n. 13), 148–9, is right to emphasize the importance of these men in Severus' regime.

<sup>17</sup> The literary sources are agreed on this fact: Dio 74.8.4; *SHA Sev.* 12.1–4; Herodian 3.8.2–4, 6–7. Many of the senators who appear in the *Historia Augusta's* famous list of Severus' victims have been identified as genuine historical figures. See G. Alföldy, 'Eine Proskriptionsliste in der *Historia Augusta*', in id., *Die Krise des römischen Reiches: Geschichte, Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbetrachtung* (Stuttgart, 1989), 164–78, and F. Jacques, 'Les nobles exécutés par Septime Sévère selon l'*Historia Augusta*: liste de proscription ou énumération fantaisiste?', *Latomus* 51 (1992), 119–44.

to have frightened ‘both us and the populace’ (ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὸν δῆμον) by the commands he sent to Rome, and he ‘caused us especial dismay’ (μάλιστα δ’ ἡμᾶς ἐξέπληξεν) by his decision to deify Commodus and engineer his own adoption as the son of Marcus Aurelius (75.7.4). Dio’s actions may appear to be contradictory: he evidently wished to be seen as one of Severus’ associates, and even sent him a flattering work, but declined to support him openly and criticized his acts as emperor. This may be, as Millar has argued, the result of Dio combining the account of the dreams and portents with his later historical account of Severus’ reign.<sup>18</sup> Yet it is also symptomatic of Dio’s attitudes towards the emperors he lived under, praising them when it suited his purposes, but censuring them, in the guise of representing the senate, when he was displeased with their actions. This tendency can be seen in Dio’s positive appraisal of Severus’ conduct in judicial proceedings, which gave him the opportunity to portray himself as an important adviser in the imperial *consilium*. The emperor, says Dio (76.17.1), ‘gave us, his fellow judges, the complete ability to speak openly’ (ἡμῖν τοῖς συνδικάζουσιν αὐτῷ παρρησίαν πολλήν ἐδίδου).<sup>19</sup> Dio is known to have acted in this advisory capacity as a judge (ἡμᾶς τοὺς συνδικάζοντας) during the trial of Raecius Constans, governor of Sardinia (75.16.2–4), but other instances are lacking. The point of these anecdotes is to portray Dio as an intimate adviser of the emperor, but in actual fact, many senators were called to serve on the *consilium* on specific occasions, such as judicial proceedings.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, there is no evidence that Dio was particularly close to Severus, and his relationship with the emperor might best be compared with Pliny the Younger’s association with Trajan. Pliny records three occasions on which he was summoned by the emperor to provide advice, but it is clear from his account that he participated in the *consilium* in these instances only.<sup>21</sup> Dio was not a close associate: he did not accompany Severus on his campaigns against Parthia or in Britain, in contrast to those senators who are known to have been the emperor’s companions.<sup>22</sup> The best-documented period of Severus’ reign in Dio’s account is therefore the years 202/3–208, when both he and the emperor were present in

<sup>18</sup> Millar (n. 2), 139–40. Z. Rubin, *Civil-War Propaganda and Historiography*, Collection Latomus 173 (Brussels, 1980), 41–84, suggests Dio attempted to ‘correct’ aspects of Severus’ propaganda.

<sup>19</sup> I have modified the Loeb translation slightly.

<sup>20</sup> Scholars sometimes state that Dio was a member of the *consilium*, as if it was a permanent body without a constantly fluctuating membership: Hose (n. 3), 358; M. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio’s Roman History Books 49–522 (36–29 B.C.)* (Atlanta, 1988), 1; L. de Blois, ‘Volk und Soldaten bei Cassius Dio’, *ANRW* 2.34.3 (Berlin, 1997), 2650–76, at 2651. On occasion, this has been interpreted as indicating a special intimacy with Septimius Severus: See Crook (n. 3), 82 (‘close companion’); M. Hose, ‘Cassius Dio: a senator and historian in the age of anxiety’, in J. Marincola (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford, 2007), 461–7, at 462 (‘inner circle of Severan confidants’). The exception is Letta (n. 6), 122–4, who rightly points out that membership of the *consilium* was quite broad, though I disagree with his assertion (125–8) that Dio was disgraced under Severus and Caracalla.

<sup>21</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.1 (in *consilium adsumptus*), 6.22.2 (fui in *consilio*), 6.31.1 (evocatus in *consilium a Caesare nostro*). For this interpretation, see W. Williams, ‘Formal and historical aspects of two new documents of Marcus Aurelius’, *ZPE* 17 (1975), 37–78, at 75 n. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Senators who are epigraphically attested as Severus’ *comites* include Q. Hadius Rufus Lollianus Gentianus (*CIL* 2.4121 = *ILS* 1145), L. Fabius Cilo (*CIL* 6.1408 = *ILS* 1141) and perhaps C. Iunius Faustinus Placidus Postumianus (*CIL* 8.597), though the date is controversial. For Britain, see M.J. Moscovich, ‘Cassius Dio’s palace sources for the reign of Septimius Severus’, *Historia* 53 (2004), 356–68, at 361.

Rome.<sup>23</sup> It is presumed that Dio held his suffect consulship during this period, but this was hardly a guarantee of a close relationship with the emperor. Scheidel has estimated that between 70 and 75 per cent of all senators who survived to the requisite age became consul in the early third century.<sup>24</sup> Despite Dio's occasional presence on the *consilium*, and his own attempts to characterize himself as one of the emperor's associates, he was not particularly favoured by Severus, especially in comparison with those senators who were showered with honours.

It is therefore surprising that Dio has sometimes been assumed to be a close associate of both Septimius Severus and Caracalla. Since he was called to appear on the *consilium* on occasion, Dio could be called an *amicus*.<sup>25</sup> But it is important to remember that the status of *amicus Caesaris* was not synonymous with an intimate relationship with the emperor.<sup>26</sup> The word was used to indicate that a particular senator or equestrian was acting as the emperor's representative. This can be seen in the case of C. Ovinus Tertullus, governor of Moesia Inferior, who is styled *legatus et amicus noster* in a letter from Severus and Caracalla.<sup>27</sup> More broadly, the term *amici* appears in the *Codex Iustinianus* to indicate all the members of the court who were in attendance on the emperor at a particular time.<sup>28</sup> Dio's occasional participation in the *consilium* meant that he could be included in this larger group, but does not suggest that he was a member of the inner circle. Even the fact that he seems to know something of Severus' practices at the morning *salutatio* is not evidence of intimacy (76.17.1). Such was the competition for access to the emperor that senators and equestrians sometimes noted such privileges on inscriptions. L. Plotius Sabinus proudly recorded that he had the right of *salutatio* in the second group admitted to the emperor's presence: (*habenti quoq(ue) | salutatio(em) secundam | Imp(eratoris) Antonini Aug(usti) Pii*).<sup>29</sup> A vow for the health and safety of Q. Baebius Modestus, prefect of Sardinia, records that he was 'chosen among the *amici consiliiarii* by the emperors Antoninus and Geta' (*allecti | inter amicos consiliiarios | ab Imp(eratoribus) Antonino et G[[eta]] / Augg(ustis)*).<sup>30</sup> But this does not necessarily mean that Modestus became an *amicus* as part of a formal process of adlection.<sup>31</sup> As Eck has demonstrated, the context in which the term *amicus* occurs is crucial: the inscription is not an administrative document, but a vow by a freedman procurator for his patron's health. The freedman probably used such grandiose terminology to magnify Modestus' standing at court, and thus

<sup>23</sup> Millar (n. 2), 17. It should be noted, however, that Dio often spent time at his residence in Capua when he was in Italy (76.2.1).

<sup>24</sup> W. Scheidel, 'Emperors, aristocrats and the grim reaper: towards a demographic profile of the Roman élite', *CQ* 49 (1999), 254–81, at 261.

<sup>25</sup> Millar (n. 2), 17–18.

<sup>26</sup> *Amicus* did not denote 'friend' in the modern sense, but expressed a social relationship between aristocrats, as noted by R. Saller, 'Patronage and friendship in early Imperial Rome: drawing the distinction', in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London, 1989), 49–62, at 57. For the political implications of friendship at Rome, concentrating on the Republican period, see D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997), 122–48.

<sup>27</sup> *CIL* 3.781 = *ILS* 423, with Crook (n. 3), 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Cod. Iust.* 9.51.1.

<sup>29</sup> *CIL* 6.41111 = *ILS* 1078.

<sup>30</sup> *AE* 1998, 671.

<sup>31</sup> As suggested by C. Bruun, 'Adlectus amicus consiliiarius and a freedman *proc. metallorum et praediorum*: news on Roman imperial administration', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 343–68, at 348–52.

to link himself, however tangentially, to the imperial centre.<sup>32</sup> This is the same process that we see at work in Dio's history: a man who tried to portray himself as close to the centre of power.

Caracalla did not hold the historian in greater regard than Severus had done. Dio did not accompany the emperor on his German campaign, but he was present in Nicomedia, in his home province of Bithynia, when Caracalla spent the winter there in 214/15.<sup>33</sup> His experience at court in Nicomedia was not a happy one: he complained that Caracalla would force 'us' (ἡμᾶς), the implication being 'senators', to wait from dawn until midday or even until the evening, while the emperor drank heavily with the soldiers or indulged his sporting passions (77.17.3–4). He also protested because Caracalla did not bestow gifts on 'his friends accompanying him' (τοῖς φίλοις τοῖς συνοῦσίν) and lamented the fact that 'he did not choose to eat together with us' (οὐδὲ γὰρ συσσιτεῖν ἔθ' ἡμῖν ἤθελεν), but preferred the company of freedmen instead (77.18.4). This is in fact contradicted by Dio's own account, which includes a description of a banquet in Nicomedia at which both he and Caracalla were present (78.8.4). Scholars have often cited these passages as evidence that Caracalla neglected members of the senatorial order.<sup>34</sup> However, there are two important considerations to bear in mind before we accept Dio's treatment as symptomatic of all senators. The first is that the sojourn at Nicomedia represents the only time at which Dio joined Caracalla's court in the period from 213 to 217.<sup>35</sup> Since Dio was a senator from the region, he would have been compelled to welcome and attend to the emperor. He may well have had petitions to present to the emperor on behalf of his Bithynian clients.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Caracalla subjected local notables to constant requests for goods for the imperial party (77.18.3), but otherwise ignored them, must have been quite humiliating.<sup>37</sup> But the incident cannot function as an example of the treatment of senators at all times during the emperor's reign. The second point worth emphasizing is that the anecdotes are unique to Dio, with no comparable passages regarding the emperor's attitude towards senatorial *amici* in either Herodian or the *Historia Augusta*. Both these sources emphasize Caracalla's fondness for keeping company with soldiers, but neither suggests that it was at the expense of senatorial associates.<sup>38</sup> Millar has argued that Dio's account is supported by documentary evidence of Caracalla's legal hearings in which the praetorian prefects are listed before the imperial *amici*.<sup>39</sup> This, however, does not

<sup>32</sup> W. Eck, 'Der Kaiser und seine Ratgeber: Überlegungen zum inneren Zusammenhang von *amici, comites* und *consilarii* am römischen Kaiserhof', in Kolb (n. 11), 67–77, at 69–71.

<sup>33</sup> For Dio's movements in this period, see Millar (n. 2), 16–19 and Barnes (n. 8), 243–4. The historian's use of a letter sent by Caracalla to the senate as a source for events in Germany implies that he was not himself present (77.13.6).

<sup>34</sup> The Loeb translations have been slightly adapted here. For scholarly acceptance, see Millar (n. 2), 20–1, 156; Talbert (n. 3), 70; Campbell (n. 3), 16; Crook (n. 3), 82; Potter (n. 3), 141–2.

<sup>35</sup> Millar (n. 2), 21, followed by S. Sillar, '*Quinquennium in provinciis*: Caracalla and imperial administration, A.D. 212–217' (Diss., University of Queensland, 2001), 157–9. Cf. Reinhold (n. 20), 4, who argues that Caracalla held Dio in high regard.

<sup>36</sup> I am grateful to the journal's anonymous referee for this point.

<sup>37</sup> For the burdens of provincial visits, see S. Mitchell, 'Requisitioned transport in the Roman empire: a new inscription from Pisidia', *JRS* 66 (1976), 106–31, at 114–16, and J.J. Wilkes, 'Provinces and frontiers', *CAH* 12<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge, 2005), 212–68, at 244–9.

<sup>38</sup> Herodian 4.7.1–7, 8.2–3; *SHA M. Ant.* 6.1, 9.3.

<sup>39</sup> Millar (n. 2), 21, citing *Cod. Iust.* 9.51.1 and *AE* 1947, 182 = *SEG* 17 (1961), 759.

prove that Caracalla neglected his advisers, but only highlights the importance of the judicial role of the praetorian prefects.<sup>40</sup>

Meckler's suggestion that the treatment of Dio and his compatriots – the enigmatic 'us' – in fact reflects Caracalla's attitude towards senators whom he did not hold in especial regard is more believable.<sup>41</sup> Dio's account of Septimius Severus' reign shows that he was a man who wanted to be included in an emperor's circle of friends, and portrayed himself to his readers as a close associate. The experience at Nicomedia must have been especially galling since he was kept waiting while soldiers had access to the emperor. Dio's hatred for the military is evident throughout his work, no doubt partly provoked by his experience as governor of Pannonia Superior, when the troops complained about his harsh system of discipline (80.4.2).<sup>42</sup> This breakdown in the chain of command is usually blamed on the unruly soldiers, rather than on Dio, but one wonders whether he was personally ill-suited to being a military commander.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, despite his treatment by Caracalla, there is evidence that Dio engaged in a sycophantic attempt to win the emperor's favour by inserting a complimentary allusion to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in the 'Speech of Maecenas' (52.19.6).<sup>44</sup>

It is clear from his account of the reigns of Septimius Severus and Caracalla that Dio regarded his treatment by the emperors as emblematic of their attitude to all senators. He wanted to be seen as a close associate of Severus, despite his distaste for the emperor's methods, and emphasized this through his description of the imperial *consilium*. At the same time, as his portrayal of Caracalla shows, Dio resented any exclusion from the inner circle. Dio's frequent use of the first person plural in his history was designed to portray him as a bellwether of senatorial opinion, even though he did not represent all members of the *amplissimus ordo*, especially not those who were in the emperor's confidence. This gives a misleading impression of Caracalla's relationship with the senate, for there is substantial evidence that the emperor in fact possessed a number of senatorial allies who flourished under his regime, to whom we now turn.

## II. SENATORIAL FRIENDS

Historians must exercise care when using prosopographical methods to identify an emperor's associates. The award of a consulship or provincial governorship was not necessarily an indication of imperial favour in and of itself, and must be considered in context with other available sources.<sup>45</sup> The evidence for Caracalla's senatorial

<sup>40</sup> For the prefects' judicial responsibilities, see L.L. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian (A.D. 180–305)* (Chicago, 1942), 32–40.

<sup>41</sup> Meckler (n. 6), 40.

<sup>42</sup> On Dio and the military, see de Blois (n. 20), 2660–75.

<sup>43</sup> The tendency to criticize the soldiers is evident in L. de Blois, 'Roman jurists and the crisis of the third century A.D. in the Roman empire', in id. (ed.), *Administration, Prosopography and Appointment Policies in the Roman Empire* (Amsterdam, 2001), 136–53, at 150–1; id., 'The military factor in the onset of crises in the Roman empire in the third century A.D.', in L. de Blois and E. Lo Cascio (edd.), *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 B.C. – A.D. 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects* (Leiden, 2007), 497–507, at 506.

<sup>44</sup> As argued by Millar (n. 2), 104–5.

<sup>45</sup> Note the cautionary comments of Graham (n. 13), 137–8, 155, and J.B. Campbell, 'Who were the *viri militares?*', *JRS* 65 (1975), 11–31, at 24–8. Even the office of *consul ordinarius*



friends has often been overlooked because it has become accepted to view the Severan principate as a period that witnessed the estrangement of emperors and senators. In §§ III and IV, I will demonstrate that this is a misleading impression, based primarily on the prejudices of Cassius Dio, who exhibits a negative attitude towards those senators who had a closer relationship with the emperor than he did.

One of the foremost members of Caracalla's court was C. Octavius Appius Suetrius Sabinus, who served as *praepositus* and *comes Augusti* during the German campaign of 213, before being appointed *consul ordinarius* for 214.<sup>46</sup> When Caracalla was absent in the east, Sabinus was entrusted with two exceptional posts: the right to judge in the emperor's place, perhaps in the city of Rome itself, and the position of *corrector* throughout Italy.<sup>47</sup> Further honours included appointment as both a *pontifex* and *augur* by either Severus or Caracalla, even though it was exceptionally rare for a senator to be co-opted into more than one of the four most prestigious priestly colleges.<sup>48</sup> Dio provides further confirmation of Sabinus' close relationship with Caracalla. When the emperor was murdered in 217, Sabinus was serving as *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Pannonia Inferior. The new emperor, Macrinus, had him removed from this post because he was afraid of Sabinus' 'proud spirit' (*πάνυ φρόνημα*) and his 'friendship' (*φιλίαν*) with Caracalla (78.13.2).<sup>49</sup> Sabinus was not the only adherent of Caracalla to suffer under Macrinus: the governor of Dacia, C. Iulius Septimius Castinus, was also deprived of his command. Castinus, who may have been a distant relative of the imperial family, had received an important commission from Septimius Severus to hunt down opponents of his regime.<sup>50</sup> On account of Castinus' continuing association with Caracalla, Macrinus had him exiled from Rome. Macrinus' successor, Elagabalus, initially intended to restore Castinus to favour, but then changed his mind and had

does not necessarily provide conclusive evidence for intimacy with the emperor in all cases. The majority of ordinary consuls were themselves sons of consuls (sometimes going back several generations) so heritage and pedigree may have been the decisive factor. In the case of C. Bruttius Praesens, *cos. ord.* 217, six members of his family held the ordinary consulship in the second and third centuries, reducing the likelihood that his appointment was the result of a close relationship with Caracalla. However, new men who held the consulship as *ordinarius* were almost certainly favoured, because they did not have the advantages of senators from more established families.

<sup>46</sup> Sabinus' career is recorded on a number of inscriptions: *CIL* 6.41193; *CIL* 9.2848 = *AE* 1985, 332; *CIL* 10.5178; *CIL* 10.5398 = *ILS* 1159.

<sup>47</sup> M. Peachin, *Iudex vice Caesaris: Deputy Emperors and the Administration of Justice during the Principate* (Stuttgart, 1996), 104 argues that Sabinus was a judge *vice sacra* in Rome, though the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia Inferior are other possibilities.

<sup>48</sup> R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford, 1971), 143, notes the second-century senator P. Cluvius Maximus Paullinus as a precedent (*AE* 1940, 99), as well as an unknown senator (*AE* 1904, 109). The date of Sabinus' appointments to these colleges is unknown, but it was certainly by 217: J. Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 B.C. to A.D. 499* (Oxford, 2008), 818.

<sup>49</sup> The Greek word *φιλία* encompasses a wider, more intense emotional range, including love, than the Latin term *amicitia*, on which see D. Konstan, 'Greek friendship', *AJPh* 117 (1996), 71–94, at 78–9. The use of the word *φιλία* may thus serve to underscore the close relationship the senator had with the emperor, especially since Dio was known for his Atticizing tendencies. See H.J. Mason, 'The Roman government in Greek sources', *Phoenix* 24 (1970), 150–9, at 153; M.-L. Freyburger-Galland, *Aspects du vocabulaire politique et institutionnel de Dion Cassius* (Paris, 1997), 221–3.

<sup>50</sup> *CIL* 3.10473 = *ILS* 1153. For the hypothesis that Castinus was related to Septimius Severus, see G. Alföldy, 'Septimius Severus und der Senat', *BJ* 168 (1968), 112–60, at 145; A.R. Birley, *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor* (London, 1999), 215.

him executed. The new emperor perceived Castinus as a threat since he had held many military commands, and was known to be an 'intimate associate' (*συννοσίας*) of Caracalla (79.4.3–4). These examples demonstrate that Caracalla was able to build strong relationships with leading members of the senatorial order, whom he trusted with key provincial appointments.<sup>51</sup>

Sabinus and Castinus had both begun their official careers in the reign of Septimius Severus, but they were of a younger generation than Severus' closest allies, such as Fabius Cilo, Cornelius Anullinus and Marius Maximus.<sup>52</sup> Is this indicative of a complete generational change at the imperial court? Early in his reign, Caracalla dismissed Cilo from the urban prefecture (77.4.2–5.2),<sup>53</sup> and executed Aemilius Papinianus, *praefectus praetorio* since 205 (77.1.1, 4.1).<sup>54</sup> Both these men had acted as authority figures in Caracalla's life: Cilo had been his boyhood tutor and Severus had commended both his sons to Papinianus' care on his death.<sup>55</sup> As a young man in his twenties, Caracalla may have wished to distance himself from the previous regime and its elder statesmen in order to establish his independence. For instance, C. Iulius Asper, the original choice to replace Cilo as *praefectus urbi*, also suffered political eclipse early in the reign. Caracalla had appointed Asper ordinary consul for the second time in 212, sharing the *fascēs* with his son.<sup>56</sup> The elder Asper had become a senator of some standing under Septimius Severus, serving as a patron of six provinces, including Britain and the Spanish regions, and his son was enrolled among the ranks of the patricians.<sup>57</sup> Dio (77.5.3) records that Asper rejoiced in his new honours, strutting around with his many lictors, but was soon dismissed from his post and exiled from Rome. The reason for this sudden change of fortune is unknown, but it may have formed part of the wider political upheaval that took place in 211/12 as a result of Geta's downfall.<sup>58</sup>

However, we should be wary of assuming that Caracalla removed all older senators who supported his father, for there is evidence that some of these men were retained and honoured by Caracalla. The Severan general Marius Maximus was selected for the proconsulship of Africa *c.* 213, followed by a two-year term as proconsul of Asia, an unprecedented combination of these two prestigious positions.<sup>59</sup> The latter post was held while Caracalla himself travelled through Asia on his way

<sup>51</sup> Caracalla allegedly consulted senators' horoscopes or tortured their slaves and freedmen to determine whether they were well disposed towards him. Great honours awaited those for whom the answer was affirmative (Cass. Dio 78.2) – surely an indication that Caracalla favoured senators he felt he could trust.

<sup>52</sup> Since Sabinus was ordinary consul in 214, and Castinus probably held the office *c.* 212/3, they would have been in their late thirties or early forties at the start of Caracalla's reign. For the dates, see P.M.M. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander (180–235 n. Chr.)* (Amsterdam, 1989), 135, 174.

<sup>53</sup> Cilo's dismissal may well have been precipitated by a revolt of the urban cohorts, as argued by K. Dietz, 'Caracalla, Fabius Cilo und die Urbaniciani', *Chiron* 13 (1983), 382–404.

<sup>54</sup> Papinianus is first attested in office on May 28, 205 (*CIL* 6.228 = *ILS* 2187).

<sup>55</sup> Cilo: 77.4.2, 4. Papinianus: *SHA M. Ant.* 8.2–3.

<sup>56</sup> The authoritative study of their careers is K. Dietz, 'Iulius Asper, Verteidiger der Provinzen unter Septimius Severus', *Chiron* 27 (1997), 483–523.

<sup>57</sup> *AE* 1997, 261; *CIL* 14.2508; *CIL* 14.2509 = *ILS* 1156. For discussion, see Dietz (n. 56), 514–22 and A.R. Birley, *The Roman Government of Britain* (Oxford, 2005), 182–3.

<sup>58</sup> On which see further § IV below.

<sup>59</sup> The exact dates of the proconsular appointments are debated, but the posts were certainly held under Caracalla: Birley (n. 8), 2694; Leunissen (n. 52), 217, 224–5; T. D. Barnes, 'Proconsuls of Asia under Caracalla', *Phoenix* 40 (1986), 202–5.

to the eastern frontier.<sup>60</sup> Marius Maximus stood at the heart of a prominent senatorial family that flourished during the Severan period.<sup>61</sup> Caracalla's uncle, C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus, likewise remained in favour during the years 211–17.<sup>62</sup> Initially of equestrian rank, Alexianus had been adlected into the senate by Septimius Severus, and not only served as *comes* during Severus' British campaign, but also accompanied Caracalla on his German expedition.<sup>63</sup> Governorships in Dalmatia and Asia were followed by a third stint as *comes*, this time in Caracalla's retinue in Mesopotamia (78.30.4).<sup>64</sup> A more junior relative from the Syrian branch of the family likewise flourished under Caracalla, Varius Marcellus, the husband of the emperor's cousin, Iulia Soemias. After a rapid rise through equestrian procuratorial grades under Severus, Marcellus acted as a temporary replacement for both the urban and praetorian prefects, an exceptional appointment that Halfmann has plausibly related to the events of 211/12.<sup>65</sup> Marcellus was then adlected into the senate with the rank of ex-praetor and served as prefect of the military treasury and governor of Numidia. His death soon after prevented him from reaching consular rank,<sup>66</sup> but the prosopographical evidence shows that Marcellus prospered under Caracalla. Therefore, the new emperor did not reject all prominent officials who had flourished in Severus' reign, but he certainly initiated an overhaul of the imperial coterie, removing those senators by whom he felt threatened or overshadowed, and retaining the men he could trust.<sup>67</sup>

Caracalla spent the majority of his reign outside Rome, either campaigning or touring the provinces, and his selection of senators to form part of his retinue provides further confirmation that he did not deliberately eschew the company of the *amplissimus ordo*. In addition to C. Octavius Appius Suetrius Sabinus (*comes* in Germany) and C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus (*comes* in Germany and the east), discussed above, these companions included the consular Aurelianus, who was in

<sup>60</sup> IGRR 4.1287.

<sup>61</sup> Marius' Maximus' brother, L. Marius Perpetuus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 311) was governor of Dacia in 214, and thus the immediate predecessor of Caracalla's favourite, C. Iulius Septimius Castinus: Leunissen (n. 51), 239. The sons of both Marii became ordinary consuls, with L. Marius Maximus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 307) holding the *fasces* in 232, and L. Marius Perpetuus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 312) in 237. They were also linked with a relative by adoption, Q. Venidius Rufus Marius Maximus Calvinianus (*PIR*<sup>1</sup> V 245), legate of Germania Inferior under Severus. For the full list of these and other possible connections, see Birley (n. 8), 2700–3.

<sup>62</sup> Alexianus was married to Caracalla's aunt, Julia Maesa (Cass. Dio 78.30.2).

<sup>63</sup> *AE* 1921, 64 = 1963, 42. The best account of his career is provided by H. Halfmann, 'Zwei syrische Verwandte des severischen Kaiserhauses', *Chiron* 12 (1982), 217–35.

<sup>64</sup> See Halfmann (n. 63), 223.

<sup>65</sup> *CIL* 10.6569 = *ILS* 478. See Halfmann (n. 63), 229–34, and Birley (n. 57), 313–14.

<sup>66</sup> Dio (78.2.3) notes that Marcellus died before his son Elagabalus ascended the throne.

<sup>67</sup> Some attention should also be paid to the senators who received iterated consulships in Caracalla's reign. In addition to Iulius Asper, discussed above, they were D. Caelius Calvinus Balbinus, *cos. II ord.* 213 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 126) and P. Cadius Sabinus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 571), *cos. II ord.* 216 (this excludes Q. Maecius Laetus and T. Messius Extricatus, who only bore the title of *cos. II* in 215 and 217 on the basis of a previous award of *ornamenta consularia*). Balbinus had been a provincial governor (Herodian 7.10.4), and came from a family that had obtained patrician status in the early second century: K. Dietz, *Senatus contra principem: Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Opposition gegen Kaiser Maximinus Thrax* (Munich, 1980), 99. Little is known about Sabinus' family, but he had been a military tribune, governor of Noricum and *curator aedium sacrarum operumque publicorum* (see Leunissen [n. 52], 314). Their second consulships were undoubtedly signs of imperial favour, but it is difficult to draw any more specific conclusion from their appointments. For this methodological point, see C. Davenport, 'Iterated consulships and the government of Severus Alexander', *ZPE* 177 (2011), 281–8.

the camp at Edessa at the time of Caracalla's death in 217. Although little is known about him, Aurelianus was evidently a long-time associate of the emperor, and perhaps of his father, having served 'on many campaigns' (*ἐν πολλαῖς στρατείαις*), according to Dio (78.12.2).<sup>68</sup> The historian also states that Aurelianus was the only senator 'then present' (*τότε παρόντα*) at Edessa (78.12.4), but this does not mean that Caracalla shunned senatorial company as a rule.<sup>69</sup> The main base of the imperial retinue was at Antioch, since that was where all imperial correspondence was directed (78.4.3), and the emperor's other *comites* may have decided not to make the journey further east, in contrast to Aurelianus, who evidently had some military experience. We know of two senators who were certainly present at Antioch in 216: L. Egnatius Victor Lollianus and C. Sallius Aristaenetus, who acted as advocates in the case of the Goharieni.<sup>70</sup> Lollianus, a man of praetorian rank during Caracalla's reign, went on to earn an impressive reputation for his rhetorical prowess, being attested on numerous inscriptions from the Greek provinces as an orator of the highest abilities.<sup>71</sup> His counterpart, Aristaenetus, was no less impressive in this capacity, with two inscriptions honouring him as *orator maximus*.<sup>72</sup> Both these men must have been assigned directly from Caracalla's retinue to provide legal representation for the parties in the case: they are unlikely to have travelled from Rome or from another province for this express purpose.<sup>73</sup> The number of senators known to have been in attendance on Caracalla in the east thus compares favourably with the entourage of Septimius Severus in Britain, where two, possibly three *comites* are attested. The first two were Papinianus, the *praefectus praetorio*, and Caracalla's uncle, Alexianus; the third, C. Iunius Faustinus Placidus Postumianus, is most commonly dated to the Severan period, but there is a possibility he may have served as a *comes* of later emperors.<sup>74</sup> It is evident, therefore, that Caracalla was not isolated from senators during his military campaigns, and his retinue was certainly no smaller than that of his father.

In this section, I have argued that Caracalla did not shun senatorial favourites, but in fact had a number of loyal supporters, including the provincial governors C. Octavius Appius Suetrius Sabinus and C. Iulius Septimius Castinus. Even though he removed some of his father's grandees from positions of power, such as Fabius Cilo, Aemilius Papinianus and Iulius Asper, the emperor did not completely disas-

<sup>68</sup> The name Aurelianus is quite common, which means it is difficult to identify him with any known senator. Since this man was later put to death in Macrinus' reign (78.19.1), he cannot be L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus, who survived into the reign of Severus Alexander.

<sup>69</sup> In particular, Dio's wording cannot be used to support the eclipse of senatorial advisers in the Severan period, as suggested by Salway (n. 10), 120; id., 'A fragment of Severan history: the unusual career of ...atus, praetorian prefect of Elagabalus', *Chiron* 27 (1997), 128–53, at 142.

<sup>70</sup> In the original inscription, the advocates appear as Egnatius Iulianus and Lollianus Aristaenetus. W. Kunkel, 'Der Prozeß der Gohariener vor Caracalla', in id., *Kleine Schriften* (Weimar, 1974), 255–66, at 258–9, identified these men as L. Egnatius Victor Lollianus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> E 36) and C. Sallius Aristaenetus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 78), respectively.

<sup>71</sup> O. Salomies, 'Redner und Senatoren: Eloquenz als Standeskultur (1.–3. Jh. n. Chr)', in W. Eck and M. Heil (edd.), *Senatores populi Romani: Realität und mediale Präsentation einer Führungsschicht* (Stuttgart, 2005), 229–59, at 237–8; R. Haensch, 'L. Egnatius Victor Lollianus: la rhétorique, la religion et le pouvoir', in A. Vigourt et al. (edd.), *Pouvoir et religion dans le monde romain* (Paris, 2006), 289–302, at 294–5.

<sup>72</sup> *CIL* 6.1511 = *ILS* 2934; *CIL* 6.1512. He may be identical with the Byzantine orator Aristaenetus who appears in Philostratus (*VS* 2.11), though this is not certain.

<sup>73</sup> J. Crook, *Legal Advocacy in the Roman World* (London, 1995), 93–4.

<sup>74</sup> Birley (n. 57), 192–5, 225–6.

sociate himself from Severus' supporters. Marius Maximus received the exceptional honour of being appointed to proconsulships in Africa and Asia, while C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus accompanied Caracalla on both his German and eastern expeditions. On the latter journey he was joined by several other senators, including the consular Aurelianus, a veteran of several campaigns. These men, specially selected by the emperor for his entourage, were demonstrably more privileged than Cassius Dio, whose attendance at court in Nicomedia had more to do with his Bithynian origin than any special intimacy with the emperor.

### III. CARACALLA'S NEW MEN

Cassius Dio's scornful attitude towards Caracalla's senatorial friends who were new entrants to the *amplissimus ordo* reveals his isolation from court circles. The historian was concerned with the order and hierarchy of government, believing that promotion should only be accorded to those who had proven themselves in the requisite military and administrative posts.<sup>75</sup> Although not opposed to the equestrian order *per se*, Dio reserved particular opprobrium for some former *equites*, because he thought their advancement was unmerited or their methods to acquire higher status unbecoming. In the latter category were those senators and equestrians who attempted to earn Caracalla's favour by serving as *delatores* and informing on their peers (78.18.1–2). Indeed, Caracalla is said to have rarely assembled the *consilium* (or at least he did not invite Dio), instead relying on messages being brought to him by these *delatores* (77.17.1–2).

One such informer was L. Lucilius Priscilianus, whom Dio especially disliked because of his fondness for killing animals in the arena, though he is unlikely to have been the only prominent official with gladiatorial proclivities (78.21.3).<sup>76</sup> Caracalla rewarded Priscilianus for his services as a *delator* by adlecting him *inter praetorios* and appointing him proconsul of Achaëa, 'in violation of precedent' (*παρά τὸ καθήκον*), as Dio (78.21.5) records with evident bitterness.<sup>77</sup> Aelius Coeranus, the first Egyptian to enter the *amplissimus ordo*, also earned Dio's enmity. Coeranus had served Severus and Caracalla as a *libellis*, but had been implicated as a friend of the disgraced praetorian prefect Plautianus and exiled in 205. However, Coeranus benefited from Caracalla's blanket amnesty: he was not only restored to favour, but adlected into the senate. Dio (76.5.5) comments that Coeranus became consul, just as Pompey had done, without holding any previous senatorial magistracy. Coeranus was probably adlected *inter praetorios* and then appointed to a suffect consulship, which was hardly unprecedented.<sup>78</sup> Another

<sup>75</sup> Graham (n. 13), 142. See Dio's comments in the speech of Maecenas (52.21–25).

<sup>76</sup> At his accession, Severus lambasted those senators who criticized Commodus' actions in the arena, when in fact many of them had also partaken in gladiatorial bouts (75.8.2–3). Senators likewise participated in theatrical acts or games in the reign of Nero, as shown by E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 65–6. Therefore it was not necessarily the case that Caracalla's own penchant for chariot racing or hunting in the arena was 'a slap in the face of the senatorial aristocracy', as stated by Potter (n. 3), 140.

<sup>77</sup> H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le haut-empire romain* (Paris, 1960), 677, argues that he was appointed proconsul *extra sortem*, citing *CIL* 9.2845 = *ILS* 915 and *CIL* 11.1835 = *ILS* 969 as parallels.

<sup>78</sup> Coeranus could have been adlected *inter consulares*, but Dio states that he held the consulship (*ὀπάτευσε*), indicating that he was appointed suffect consul. When Marcius Claudius

favourite who benefited from Caracalla's patronage was the equestrian tribune Domitius Antigonus. As a Macedonian and the son of a man named Philippus, Antigonus appealed to Caracalla's fondness for Alexander the Great. The emperor advanced Antigonus into the senate by adlection *inter praetorios* (77.8.1–2), and he went on to have a respectable career, serving as a legionary legate and governor of Moesia Inferior in the 230s.<sup>79</sup>

Dio's account of the rise of these three men into the senate is unequivocally hostile. However, the promotion of Priscilianus, Coeranus and Antigonus is not symptomatic of any preference on Caracalla's part for equestrians rather than senators, as it is a truism, applicable to any period of Roman history, that the careers of new men could be transformed by imperial favour.<sup>80</sup> The senatorial order was unable to maintain its numbers in each generation owing to factors such as infertility, mortality and political withdrawal. The *ordo* was thus constantly refreshed by *equites* who were granted the *latus clavus* by the emperor, or adlected to high rank in the senate.<sup>81</sup> Dio characterizes these men as disreputable interlopers because he resented his own exclusion from the emperor's inner sanctum, not because he was opposed to *equites* entering the senate. In one such case, he complains that Gellius Maximus, the son of a physician, was elevated to senatorial rank and the command of the *legio IV Scythica*, a position from which he was later able to mount an insurrection against Elagabalus (79.7.2). Although it has often been assumed that Gellius Maximus entered the senate under Macrinus or Elagabalus, he probably owed his advancement to Caracalla.<sup>82</sup> The legate's homonymous father had served as Caracalla's personal physician, being rewarded with membership of the museum at Alexandria and the status of *ducenarius*.<sup>83</sup> When reading his diatribes concerning the advancement of Caracalla's favourites, especially those promoted from the equestrian order, one cannot help but note the fact that Dio's own official career suffered from retardation in the emperor's reign. Consular governorships in Dalmatia and Pannonia Superior were only held under Elagabalus and Severus Alexander.<sup>84</sup>

In order to justify his own alienation from court circles, Cassius Dio portrays Caracalla as an emperor who was hostile to the senatorial order. But there is another perspective that needs to be considered here, namely that of Caracalla's

Agrippa and Aelius Tricicianus were adlected *inter consulares* by Macrinus, Dio (78.13.1) specifically records that they were enrolled among the ex-consuls (τοὺς ὑπατευκότας τινας ἐνέγραψε).

<sup>79</sup> *Legatus legionis*: *AE* 1966, 262. Governor of Moesia Inferior: *AE* 1964, 180; *AE* 1985, 726; *CIL* 3.14429.

<sup>80</sup> Hopkins (n. 5), 19–23.

<sup>81</sup> Hopkins and Burton (n. 9), 120–200.

<sup>82</sup> Salway (n. 69), 142, reviews the literature in favour of Elagabalus, but proposes Macrinus himself. Chastagnol (n. 10), 120, opts for Caracalla, though without explanation.

<sup>83</sup> The career of the physician L. Gellius Maximus is recorded on *CIL* 3.6820; *AE* 1914, 127; *AE* 1927, 171; *AE* 1996, 1514 = *SEG* 46 (1996), 1680. The epigraphic evidence has been thoroughly discussed by V. Nutton, 'L. Gellius Maximus, physician and procurator', *CQ* NS 21 (1971), 262–72, and (with new readings) in M. Christol and T. Drew-Bear, 'Caracalla et son médecin L. Gellius Maximus à Antioche de Pisidie', in S. Colvin (ed.), *The Greco-Roman East: Politics, Culture, Society*. Yale Classical Studies vol. 31 (Cambridge, 2004), 85–118, at 91–2, 110–11. It is possible that Gellius was adlected *inter praetorios*, as proposed by Chastagnol (n. 10), 120, but Dio (79.7.2) merely states that he was 'enrolled in the senate' (ἐς τὴν γερουσίαν ἐσγραφέντα).

<sup>84</sup> As noted by Letta (n. 6), 125. For the chronology of Dio's career, see Schmidt (n. 7), 2634–8; Barnes (n. 8), 244–5; Syme (n. 48), 143–5.

favourites themselves, who lack a voice in Dio's history. The epigraphic evidence demonstrates that they did not want to be regarded as interlopers, but attempted to assimilate the ideals and values of their senatorial peers. L. Lucilius Priscilianus, Dio's traitorous *delator*, was the product of a marriage between an equestrian procurator, L. Lucilius Pansa Priscilianus, and Cornelia Marullina, who was the daughter and sister of ordinary consuls.<sup>85</sup> The elder Priscilianus was exceptionally proud of this match and the prestige it brought to his family: on his wife's tomb, he specifically recorded the names and consulships of her male relatives.<sup>86</sup> Another inscription from Ephesus recorded that Priscilianus was the 'father of senators' (*patri | senatorum*), a detail which indicates evident satisfaction that his sons had entered the *amplissimus ordo*.<sup>87</sup> L. Lucilius Priscilianus' method of earning senatorial status may not have been entirely savoury, but such were the lengths to which new men were prepared to go in order to establish themselves. Although he was exiled early in the reign of Macrinus, Priscilianus had been recalled by 223, when he is recorded as a senatorial patron of the town of Canusium.<sup>88</sup> Caracalla's other favourites made similar efforts at obtaining respectability. Aelius Coeranus, the Egyptian consul whose rise had so angered Dio, passed his senatorial status on to his homonymous son, who became proconsul of Macedonia under Severus Alexander.<sup>89</sup> The younger Coeranus assumed a number of Italian municipal offices, and was honoured by the *decuriones* of Tibur as their *patronus*. Reynolds suggests this was part of a strategy to disguise his provincial background, since residents of Egypt had only recently been allowed to enter the senate at Rome.<sup>90</sup> The attempt at integration was consolidated by the fact that both father and son were co-opted as *fratres Arvales* during Caracalla's reign, with the priests meeting in Coeranus' house on May 19 and 20, 213.<sup>91</sup> The Coerani serve as an excellent example of another historical phenomenon, namely that the descendants of *novi homines* became established members of the senate in subsequent generations. This continuity was achieved by another equestrian advanced by Caracalla, Domitius Antigonus, who confirmed the standing of his family in the *curia* through his two sons, both of whom gained senatorial rank.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, the emperor's promotion of *novi homines*, such as L. Lucilius Priscilianus, Aelius Coeranus and Domitius Antigonus, was received with hostility by Dio, because he resented what he perceived to be their unmerited advancement through the *cursus honorum*. The epigraphic evidence demonstrates that these men attempted to integrate with their fellow senators, and their promotions cannot serve as evidence for a perceived 'rise of the *equites*', but instead form part of the regular

<sup>85</sup> Cornelia's father was Ser. Cornelius Scipio Orfitus, *cos. ord.* 149 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1447), while her brother, also Ser. Cornelius Scipio Orfitus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1448), was *cos. ord.* in 178.

<sup>86</sup> *CIL* 9.662, 9.663.

<sup>87</sup> *AE* 1988, 1023. This inscription demonstrates that L. Lucilius Priscilianus must have had a brother who became a senator as well.

<sup>88</sup> *CIL* 9.338.

<sup>89</sup> *CIL* 14.3586 = *ILS* 1158.

<sup>90</sup> J. Reynolds, 'Senators originating in the provinces of Egypt and of Crete and Cyrene', *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio*, *Tituli* 5 (1982), 671–83, at 674.

<sup>91</sup> *CIL* 6.2086 = *ILS* 5041, with Reynolds (n. 90), 680; W. Eck, *LTUR* 2.23 s.v. 'domus: P. Aelius Coeranus'.

<sup>92</sup> *AE* 1985, 726; *CIL* 6.41221; *CIL* 6.41222. There are few concrete examples of Macedonians in the senate. See J. Oliver, 'Roman senators from Greece and Macedonia', *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio*, *Tituli* 5 (1982), 583–602, at 602, who nevertheless omits Domitius Antigonus and his sons.

promotion of equestrians into the *curia*. Saller has pointed out the problems inherent in rehabilitating emperors by regarding documentary evidence as more authoritative than negative accounts in the ancient sources.<sup>93</sup> I have not sought to whitewash Caracalla or to dismiss Dio's hostile testimony, but to demonstrate that his experiences were not necessarily common to all senators. His eyewitness account is still valuable, but not for the reason that has traditionally been supposed – he represents the voice of the dispossessed, rather than Caracalla's favoured *amici*.

#### IV. POLITICAL RIVALRIES

The foregoing re-evaluation of Cassius Dio's perspective on senatorial life enables us to construct a more nuanced picture of Caracalla's court. When Dio's testimony is combined with the evidence of other literary sources (notably Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*) and the epigraphic material, it becomes clear that Caracalla's reign was characterized by a certain degree of instability. In this final section, I will argue that Caracalla did not promote or exclude men on the basis of whether they were from specific social groups such as senators, *equites* or freedmen. His reign was marked by competition and rivalry, as members of all these groups vied for the emperor's favour, though, as we shall see, this situation was not unique to the third century.

The beginning of Caracalla's reign witnessed significant political upheaval, prompted by the rivalry between himself and his brother Geta, an impasse that was only resolved by the latter's death. As discussed earlier in § II, Caracalla dismissed several senatorial and equestrian officials, including Fabius Cilo, *praefectus urbi*, and Aemilius Papinianus, the praetorian prefect, who was later put to death along with his replacement, Valerius Patruinus. These upheavals formed only one part of a much larger conflict within the city of Rome at the time, as exemplified by the revolt of the urban cohorts that almost cost Cilo his life. Caracalla also executed those men who might have had a claim to the throne, including his own cousin C. Septimius Severus Aper, *cos. ord.* 207, whose illustrious nomenclature seems to have proved his undoing.<sup>94</sup> P. Helvius Pertinax, the son of the ephemeral emperor of 193 (SHA *M. Ant.* 4.8), and L. Aurelius Commodus Pompeianus, *cos. ord.* 209, the grandson of Marcus Aurelius (SHA *M. Ant.* 3.8, Herodian 4.6.3), were also killed because of their relationship with the emperor's predecessors.<sup>95</sup> These murders, as repugnant as they might seem, were not indiscriminate, as implied by some of the sources, notably Herodian (4.6.3), who claims that Caracalla executed all patricians in the senate. As Sillar has argued, the emperor did not embark

<sup>93</sup> R. Saller, 'Domitian and his successors: methodological traps in assessing emperors', *AJAH* 15 (1990 [2000]), 4–18.

<sup>94</sup> Caracalla's cousin is called Afer in the *Historia Augusta* (*M. Ant.* 3.6) and Severus by Herodian (4.6.3), making it all but certain that he should be identified with the consul of 207 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 489). For the full nomenclature of the consul, see B. Pferdehirt, *Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums* (Mainz, 2004), 141–4. There is a slight possibility that the sources could be referring to another cousin, L. Flavius Septimius Aper Octavianus (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 365), who probably died young after holding the office of *tribunus plebis* (*CIL* 6.1415, with the comments of G. Alföldy ad loc. in *CIL* 6.8.3).

<sup>95</sup> For the identification of the consul of 209 (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> P 569) with Caracalla's victim (merely called Pompeianus by the SHA), see J.F. Oates, 'A sailor's discharge and the consuls of A.D. 209', *Phoenix* 30 (1976), 282–7.



on an anti-senatorial purge: the murders served to remove specific men the new emperor perceived to be threats, whether they were potential rivals to the throne or the freedmen of his brother Geta.<sup>96</sup> We have already seen that other members of Caracalla's extended family, C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus and Sex. Varius Marcellus, were retained in high office and rewarded by the emperor.

Even more unsettling from Dio's perspective was the exalted position of some of Caracalla's associates whose backgrounds were less than illustrious. They included a Spanish eunuch, Sempronius Rufus, who 'had mastery over' (*κατεκράτησε*) the senators (once again denoted by Dio's use of *ἡμῶν*) (77.17.2). This statement has usually been interpreted as an indication that Rufus held a high government position, such as acting prefect of Rome,<sup>97</sup> but *κατεκράτησε* could also refer to the influence and power that the eunuch wielded at court. There is also the curious case of the freedman Theocritus, who was allegedly placed in command of an army against the Armenians, according to two condensed passages from Xiphilinus and the *Excerpta Valesiana* (77.21.1–2). However, a fuller account of Theocritus' actions, also deriving from Xiphilinus, indicates that he was serving in the position of *praefectus annonae* on the campaign (77.21.2–3).<sup>98</sup> Nor should we necessarily believe that Theocritus was still of freedman status when he held this position, as it is possible to identify some contemporaries who rose from low birth to equestrian rank.<sup>99</sup> With such strong personalities controlling access to the emperor, the competition for imperial favour at Caracalla's court must have been intense.<sup>100</sup> It is these men, eunuchs, freedmen and soldiers – outsiders who did not belong to the senatorial order – whom Dio blames for his estrangement from the emperor (77.9.1, 77.13.6, 77.18.4). Dio's hostility towards these men is surely no different from the revulsion felt by Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 8.6) at the honours accorded to the imperial freedman M. Antonius Pallas in the first century.

Yet we should not assume that all political infighting was the result of senatorial opposition to men of lower status gaining influence at court. It is evident from Dio's account that the senatorial order was itself divided into competing groups and factions, with several members of the *amplissimus ordo* acting as *delatores* for the emperor and informing on their peers in the *curia*. Some senators were especially eager to turn on their peers after Caracalla's death, when an inquisition was held to determine which of them had collaborated with the emperor.<sup>101</sup> Although Macrinus refused to release official documents, he did divulge the names of three men – Manilius, Iulius and Sulpicius Arrenianus – to quell unrest among senators

<sup>96</sup> Sillar (n. 12), 422–3. For the executions, see Herodian 4.6.2, 4.6.4; SHA *M. Ant.* 3.4–5, 4.3, 4.9.

<sup>97</sup> Millar (n. 2), 20; Campbell (n. 3), 16; W. Stevenson, 'The rise of eunuchs in Greco-Roman antiquity', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995), 495–511, at 506. No official post is allocated in *PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 365. I have altered the Loeb translation here.

<sup>98</sup> Millar (n. 2), 156. A similar position was held by Fulvius Macrianus under Valerian, as recorded by the Anonymous Continuator of Dio (*FHG* 4.193). See Pflaum (n. 77), 931–2.

<sup>99</sup> The possibility of Theocritus' equestrian status was first suggested by A. Stein, *Der römische Ritterstand* (Munich, 1927), 120–1. Marcus Claudius Agrippa (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> M 224), Aelius Triccius (*PIR*<sup>2</sup> A 271) and P. Valerius Comazon (*PIR*<sup>1</sup> V 42) all had similar career paths.

<sup>100</sup> This was not a new development: the future emperor Vespasian had benefited from the patronage of Claudius' freedmen, Narcissus (Suet. *Vesp.* 4.1).

<sup>101</sup> One might compare earlier precedents from the first century, notably the manoeuvring for power and influence after the capture of Rome by the Flavians in 69 (Tac. *Hist.* 4.1–11) and the reign of Domitian, who was known for his autocratic style and relied heavily on *delatores*: see Jones (n. 4), 180–1.

who wanted someone to blame. These men were subsequently exiled, together with L. Lucilius Priscilianus, whose career has been discussed above (78.21.1–3). Their crimes were typical of men seeking to eliminate their senatorial rivals: Arrenianus, when serving as legate in Moesia, had informed on the governor's son.<sup>102</sup> Manilius had levelled unspecified allegations against a certain Flaccus, who held the office of *curator aquarum et Miniciae*, and he subsequently obtained the post for himself (78.21.2, 22.1).<sup>103</sup> When Manilius was disgraced, Flaccus was able to return to his former position. Some senators even saw Caracalla's death and the perceived end of the Severan dynasty as a chance to revive dormant careers. Domitius Florus, who was unable to take up the post of aedile in the reign of Severus owing to the influence of Plautianus, became tribune of the plebs under Macrinus (78.22.2). These machinations demonstrate that the blame for an unpredictable political atmosphere should not be placed solely on Caracalla and his love of soldiers and freedmen: the senators themselves created a hostile climate as they vied for power, influence and access to the emperor. The reaction in 218 to the accession of Elagabalus, who claimed to be the illegitimate son of Caracalla, demonstrates the senators' ability to change allegiances when it suited their purposes. Macrinus, who had exiled many of his predecessor's closest allies, was declared a public enemy by the senate, and Caracalla was officially returned to favour as the alleged father of the new emperor (79.2.6). The changed political circumstances are effectively captured by the career inscription of C. Aemilius Berenicianus Maximus, which recorded that he had been 'adlected *inter tribunicios* by the deified Antoninus Magnus' (*allecto | inter tribunic(ios) a divo Magn(o) Anto|nino*).<sup>104</sup> This was none other than Caracalla himself, proudly cited as a senator's patron and benefactor.<sup>105</sup>

This reconstruction of Caracalla's court is more effective than simply proposing, based on the account of Cassius Dio, that the emperor excluded and alienated senators. The uncertain atmosphere that prevailed during his reign was probably little different from that which existed under some earlier emperors. But that is precisely the point: Dio's history does not depict a changed political world in which senators were progressively being alienated in favour of *equites*, as has been claimed. Indeed, if we examine Dio's accounts of earlier periods of Roman history, such as the reign of Nero, we hear of similar complaints concerning the emperors and their treatment of senators, which makes it difficult to accept that the Severan period was marked by the estrangement of the *amplissimus ordo*.<sup>106</sup> Much depended on the personality of the emperor – not every ruler could be as

<sup>102</sup> Sulpicius Arrenianus, like Priscilianus, may have been restored to favour soon after, since a L. Sulpicius Arrenianus appears on the album of Canusium (*CIL* 9.338), though this may of course refer to a son, as suggested by *PIR*<sup>2</sup> S 986.

<sup>103</sup> Flaccus' office is recorded as τῆν τῶν τροφῶν διάδοσιν (78.22.1), which may correspond to the post of *praefectus alimentorum* or, more likely, that of *curator aquarum et Miniciae*. See Leunissen (n. 52), 317.

<sup>104</sup> *CIL* 12.3163 = *ILS* 1168.

<sup>105</sup> Note also the fragmentary career inscription of a certain Messalinus, which records that he was adlected *inter patricios* by Caracalla. The emperor's nomenclature, including victory titles, appears to have been given a prominent place in the text (*CIL* 5.874 = *AE* 2000, 606). See the discussion by F. Sartori, 'Sul personaggio die *C.I.L.* V 874 = *Inscr. Aquil.* 494', in G. Paci (ed.), *Επιγραφαί. Miscellanea epigrafica in onore di Lidio Gasperini*, vol. 2 (Rome, 2000), 957–69.

<sup>106</sup> For Dio and the Julio-Claudian principate, see A.M. Gowing, 'Cassius Dio on the reign of Nero', *ANRW* 2.34.3 (Berlin, 1997), 2558–90. Cf. Hose (n. 3), 413–15, who argues that Dio's experience under the Severans was worse than that of Tacitus under Domitian, though this is difficult to ascertain with any certainty.

merciful as Marcus Aurelius, who even refused to execute any of the senators who supported the revolt of Avidius Cassius (72.28.2). The oath not to put senators to death, which may have originated during the Flavian period, was taken by the majority of emperors from Nerva onwards.<sup>107</sup> But this oath, while in keeping with the ideal of the *civilis princeps*, was not compatible with the cold, hard political reality that sometimes necessitated the removal of rivals. Cassius Dio (74.2.1) roundly criticized Septimius Severus for breaking this oath that he had initially sworn in the manner of the ‘good emperors of old’ (οἱ πρόγην ἀγαθοὶ αὐτοκράτορες). This evocation of ‘good’ emperors is nothing more than nostalgia for a past that really never existed – even Augustus and Claudius, standard fixtures on any list of ‘good’ rulers, were not shining examples of compassion. Claudius is said to have executed thirty-five senators, and several hundred *equites* (Sen. *Apocol.* 14.1; Suet. *Claud.* 29.2). He earned his status as a ‘good’ emperor through his deification by Nero, and his posthumous rehabilitation at the hands of Vespasian, who was concerned to associate his own regime with a member of the Julio-Claudian house.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, the number of ‘good’ emperors varied from ruler to ruler, depending on which predecessors a particular *princeps* wished to take as *exempla*. Such lists were therefore merely fictitious creations designed to suit contemporary political purposes.<sup>109</sup> Nor, as we have seen, did the personality of the individual emperor alter the fact that senators craved his favour and approval. We need only remember the advice that Caligula claimed to have been given by Tiberius: ‘you will also be honoured by them [the senators], whether they wish it or not’ (προσέτι καὶ τιμηθήσῃ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἂν τ’ ἐθέλωσιν ἂν τε καὶ μὴ, 59.16.6).

## CONCLUSION

This article has argued that Caracalla did not shun friendship with all senators, as has often been assumed from Cassius Dio’s evocative account of life at the imperial court. The emperor in fact had a number of close senatorial associates: they included leading generals and administrators, such as C. Octavius Suetrius Sabinus, C. Iulius Septimius Castinus and L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus, as well as members of the Syrian branch of the imperial family, notably C. Iulius Avitus Alexianus and Sex. Varius Marcellus. It is true that Caracalla dismissed some of his father’s closest advisers and executed relatives of the Antonine emperors, but these actions constituted an attempt to consolidate his hold on power, not an attack on the *amplissimus ordo* at large. Indeed, the foregoing prosopographical investigation has shown that Caracalla formed a new inner circle of confidants, which encompassed both elder statesmen and new men.

The *novi homines* were a particular source of concern to Cassius Dio. Some, such as L. Lucilius Priscilianus and Aelius Coeranus, were equestrian *delatores* rewarded for their loyalty with adlection into the senate, while the Macedonian Domitius Antigonus appeared to owe his promotion to Caracalla’s obsession with

<sup>107</sup> A.R. Birley, ‘The oath not to put senators to death’, *CR* ns 12 (1962), 197–9.

<sup>108</sup> B. Levick, *Claudius* (London, 1990), 190.

<sup>109</sup> As in the case of deified emperors noted as precedents in the *lex de imperio Vespasiani* (CIL 6.930 = *ILS* 244), on which see B. Levick, *Vespasian* (London, 1999), 85–6. See also coins of the *divi* minted by Trajan Decius, with discussion by S. Dmitriev, “‘Good emperors’ and emperors of the third century”, *Hermes* 132 (2004), 211–24.

Alexander. The competitive nature of court life meant that these men were inevitably regarded by their peers with a mixture of envy and distaste, as exemplified by Dio's own complaints concerning their rapid elevation into the senate. The historian portrayed himself as the representative of the *curia*, frequently describing how imperial decisions affected 'us', as if his experience was typical of the entire senate. In reality, this was far from the case: he was not a close associate of Caracalla, and thus his work does not serve as evidence for the experiences of all senators, but of those men who were not particularly favoured by the emperor. This perspective, although immensely valuable in its own right, means that Dio's history cannot be used to support the argument that senators were politically estranged in the Severan period. His resentment towards Caracalla's new men is not symptomatic of any perceived 'rise of the *equites*', but of the hostility felt by established senators towards parvenus who threatened their own position. Senators would continue to ingratiate themselves with the emperor in the hope of winning his approval. Dio himself evidently disliked Septimius Severus' autocratic methods, but nevertheless boasted of his service as a judge on the imperial *consilium*, because it enabled him to present himself to his readers as a man close to the centre of power. His maltreatment by Caracalla at Nicomedia affected him deeply, because it meant that he was not regarded as a valued adviser. Dio nevertheless chose to engage in court politics rather than withdraw altogether. It was the ultimate irony that senators, whether in the first century or the third, competed for influence and intimacy even with the rulers they reviled.

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