

HERODIAN'S SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS: LITERARY PORTRAIT AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

By Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou

Summary: In this article I offer a comprehensive examination of Herodian's narrative of the emperor Septimius Severus, with a focus on his literary programme and historical methodology. First, I corroborate the view of recent scholarship as regards Herodian's complex characterization of Septimius Severus by offering new insights into Herodian's technique of progressively shaping the emperor's portrait with great richness and complexity. Second, I show that Herodian goes to some trouble to rework his source-material, mainly Cassius Dio's *History*, in order to favour a more positive reading of Severus, which best suits his themes and interests. Third, I argue that Herodian constantly employs *intratextuality* in order to develop substantial structural, thematic, and verbal associations and comparisons between Severus and other historical agents and thus draw the reader to perceive his history in a dovetailed and comparative manner. Thus, I propose that Herodian's portrait of Severus is his own innovation, and that it should be tailored to his overall narrative method of providing a cohesive, unified, and intelligible re-configuration of the fragmented and chaotic post-Marcus world. I show that Severus' portrait has been shaped by Herodian's universalising view of imperial history, and that it is used to provide a sense of continuation and repetition among separate reigns by establishing thematic oppositions (mainly between activity and cowardice, and between tyrannical and enlightened behaviour), which recur as a unifying factor for his work as a whole.

Introduction

The Roman emperor Septimius Severus is a figure of considerable prominence in Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire*, and occupies a unique place in the total plan of his work. Recent scholarship has been especially perceptive in noting that Severus is "the most important, and certainly

the most complex character in the whole of Herodian's history."¹ In comparison to the other main literary accounts of Severus, specifically those of Cassius Dio and the *Historia Augusta*, Herodian's is perhaps the most elaborate and innovative in terms of both its narrative technique and content.² It is therefore unsurprising that Herodian's portrayal of the emperor has exercised considerable influence on Severus' reception in later times.³

This article aims to advance our understanding of Herodian's portrait of Septimius Severus, with a focus especially on Herodian's literary programme and historical methodology. A systematic comparison with the corresponding account in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, allows for detailed analysis of Herodian's compositional devices of manipulating his source-material in order to suit his own individual themes and emphases.⁴ Indeed, as shall be shown below, there are many occasions on which Herodian reshapes Dio's account in order to favour a more positive reading of Severus and his reign. This view, I suggest, should not be seen in terms of Herodian's use of (now lost) 'biased' sources, as Rubin has emphatically put forward.⁵ Zimmermann has offered a good criticism of Rubin's theory and drawn attention to Herodian's literary-rhetorical method of adapting Cassius Dio's work in order to present compelling,

¹ Pitcher 2018a: 243.

² On the sources about Severus' history, see, more generally, Kreutzer 1882.

³ See Hidber 2006: 240 with n. 225, who refers to Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

⁴ It is now generally accepted that Herodian knew Dio's work well and that he used and remolded his text. See, recently, Hidber 2006: 63, 68-70; Galimberti 2014: 15, 18; Scott 2018a: 438 with n. 14 for further bibliography. On Herodian's reworking of Dio's text through omissions, expansions, alterations, or even distortions, see e.g. Alföldy 1971: 431-32; Kolb 1972: 29-30, 43-44, 47, 160-61; Scheithauer 1990; Zimmermann 1999: 43-251; Scott 2018a: 438 with n. 14, 442-45, 449-50, 451-52; Chrysanthou 2020. Kreutzer 1882: 222-24 draws attention to Herodian's use of Cassius Dio in his account of Severus' accession.

⁵ See Rubin 1980: 92-129, arguing against Bersanetti 1938 who underlines Herodian's propensity to rhetoric and romance, and thus his subsequent interest in creating a contrast between Severus' industry and Niger's sloth. Rubin, on the contrary, suggests that Herodian, despite his anti-Severan feelings, has used a pro-Severan source in his narrative of Severus' war against Niger and a pro-Albinian source in his treatment of the relations between Severus and Albinus.

often one-sided contoured pictures of Septimius Severus and his opponents that allow general laws of history to emerge.⁶

In this article, I build upon Zimmermann's approach to offer a comprehensive examination of Severus' specific function in Herodian's work, both within the immediate context of the narrative of his reign and as part of Herodian's history and literary method as a whole. In order to do this, I divide my discussion into the following parts, which sequentially reflect the different phases of Severus' career: (1) Severus' route to sole power; (2) Severus' trap of the Praetorians and his *adventus* in Rome (193 C.E.); (3) Severus against Niger; (4) Severus against Albinus; (5) Severus' stay in Rome; (6) Severus' Eastern Expedition; (7) Severus, his sons, and his last years.

I argue that Herodian's portrait of Severus is informed by his overall understanding of the post-Marcus world. It illustrates how Herodian uses his emperors as a means to unite, through vigorous comparisons and contrasts, the different parts of his work in an elaborate intratextual web. The final effect is an orderly, coherent, and sequential narrative analysis of a most disordered and chaotic period of Roman history.

1. Severus' route to sole rule

In his introductory sketch of Severus' character, Herodian offers significant information about the emperor's qualities, especially his efficiency and vigour in administrative tasks, his energetic/passionate spirit, his endurance of tough lifestyle, and his sharp mind and strength of action (2.9.2).⁷ All of these details give the reader a (quite reliable) taste of Severus' character and reign. At the same time, they are intended to depict

⁶ Zimmermann 1999: 177-203. Other scholars have focused on Herodian's rhetorical design rather than 'biased tendencies' as well. See e.g. Fuchs 1895: 227: "Did. Iulianus, Pesc. Niger und Clod. Albinus werden zugunsten des Severus mit Absicht und stilistischer Berechnung auf Kosten der historischen Wahrheit in den Schatten gestellt." See also Sidebottom 1998: 2788: "The true explanation of Herodian's varying depictions of Severus and Niger is not to be found in the bias of hypothetical sources, but in the highly rhetorical schemes, underpinned by *paideia*, by which Herodian constructs his history."

⁷ Citations of Herodian's *History* are made according to the text of Lucarini 2005, while those of Dio's work are according to the text of Boissvain 1895-1931, with the 'reformed'

Severus as a foil for Didius Julianus, who was already made emperor in Rome, and Pescennius Niger, who was proclaimed emperor in Syria.⁸

A brief comparison with Cassius Dio drives this point home. Dio moves his narrative focus from Rome to the frontier, and refers to Severus, Niger and Albinus and their position as governors of Pannonia, Syria, and Britain respectively (74[73].14.3). He then mentions the incident of the three stars in Rome which portended Julianus' dreadful fate (74[73].14.4-5). Dio appraises Severus positively as the "shrewdest (cf. δεινότητος) of the three leaders":⁹ he understood in advance that, after Julianus' removal from power, the three would fight against each other for the empire. He thus decided to win over Albinus by appointing him Caesar (74[73].15.1-2). As far as Niger is concerned, Dio says that he "was proud of having been summoned by the populace" and that "Severus had no hopes of him" (74[73].15.2). By contrast, Herodian cuts away any reference to Albinus and the divine sign in Rome. He prefers to expatiate upon Severus' qualities, and particularly his opposition to Niger.

That Herodian frequently transfers or omits details found in Dio's account in order to tidy his narrative and aid its focus on the main historical players, suggesting at the same time a comparative reading of them through creating intratextual analogies and contrasts, is especially apparent in his following account of Severus' career. For example, while in Cass. Dio 75[74].3.1-3 a more detailed report of *omina* pointing to Severus' preeminence is placed after Severus' defeat of Julianus and assumption of power,¹⁰ Herodian relates Severus' omens of empire after

numeration of Boissevain, which Cary's Loeb edition 1914-1927 also uses, followed by the 'traditional' numeration in brackets. For the translations of ancient texts I use those of the Loeb editions – for Herodian's text, in particular, that of Whittaker 1969-1970 – slightly adapted at some points. It is important to notice that Dio's original text about Severus' reign is not extant, and that for this paper we rely on the epitomized or excerpted versions of it. See further Scott 2018b: 2-3 on the reconstruction of Dio's text.

⁸ On the contrasting portrayals of Severus and Niger, see Bersanetti 1938; Sidebottom 1998: 2808; De Blois 1998: 3417; Marasco 1998: 2850-52; Hidber 2006: 207-10; Hekster 2017: 121-22; Pitcher 2018a: 243: "Niger vacillates; Septimius Severus acts," 246.

⁹ Bering-Staschewski 1981: 61-62 thinks that δεινότητος here bears negative connotations, meaning "most dangerous."

¹⁰ Herodian is generally more averse than Dio to giving detailed accounts of omens. See Hidber 2006, 88-89. Closely relevant to this is the fact that Herodian, unlike Dio (cf.

his introduction of Severus into the narrative, more precisely during his explication of Severus' aspirations to power. This section comes after the accession of his opponents Julianus and Niger (2.9.3-6). Herodian's choice, I suggest, has the effect not only of abridging the narrative,¹¹ but also of aiding reflection progressively on the similarities and differences between the circumstances of accession of Severus, Niger, and Julianus.¹²

Turning to Severus' assumption of imperial power itself, one can notice that Herodian constructs his narrative in the most calculated manner in order to make his story of Severus' accession a thought-provoking *comparandum* with that of Niger, which was reported earlier in the *History*.¹³ The detail about Severus' attempt "to sound out the feelings of the army" (2.9.7) recalls Niger's similar practice before his soldiers in Syria: "This is why I have come before you to ask what your feelings are" (2.8.3). It even harks back to Herodian's account of Pertinax's accession, especially the fact that Pertinax and Commodus' murderers "decided to go to the praetorians' camp and test the feelings of the soldiers" (2.2.1). Pertinax himself, before his first meeting with the senate, rejected all of the imperial honours "until he discovered the senate's mind" (2.3.2).

Severus and Niger are linked by further verbal and structural echoes. "The first thing Severus did," as Herodian says, "was to make overtures to small groups of legionary commanders and tribunes and senior centurions, talking about the Roman Empire" (2.9.7). Precise verbal echoes

76[75].13.1-2; 77[76].3.4; 77[76].11.1-2) does not pay attention to Severus' interest in decoding signs. Cf. SHA Sev. 2.8-9; 3.9; 4.3. On Severus' attitude towards astrology, see Rubin 1980: 33-38.

¹¹ Notice that Herodian omits most of the signs and dreams reported by Dio (75[74].3.1-3) and focuses on "the most recent and most important of these dreams, which was also a revelation of Severus' highest expectations" (2.9.4). Indeed, the story of the horse and Pertinax reflects an important aspect of Severan propaganda, namely Severus' (self-)association with Pertinax, which Herodian is keen to revisit (cf. 2.9.8; 2.9.11; 2.10.1; 2.10.4; 2.10.9; 2.13).

¹² Pitcher 2018a: 244 notices that Herodian mentions the dreams "after his initial assessment of the future emperor's character *and* the description of how he swung into action...Thus, Herodian's narrator, by delaying the revelation that Septimius has been having these dreams in favour of an account which initially presents the execution of his plan as a reaction to breaking news, reinforces by apparent *praxis* his description of Septimius as the sort of man who makes decisions and acts upon them in a flash."

¹³ The link between the two stories has been stressed by Fuchs 1884: 10.

connect this section with the account of the same actions performed by Niger (2.7.7).¹⁴ But there is a more subtle effect as well, for the similarities also point up a valuable contrast between the two men, especially Niger's lack of action and Severus' energy. We are told that Niger discussed with his colleagues in order that the news he was receiving from Rome would be spread (2.7.7). For he "hoped that no one would have any difficulty in supporting him, if they heard that he for his part was not making some insidious bid for power, but going to assist the Romans in response to their call" (2.7.8). Severus, on the other hand, tries to stir them up to action by undermining his opponents and pretending that his primary aim was to punish Pertinax's murderers, rather than winning power for himself (2.9.7-10).¹⁵

Herodian explains the Pannonians' easy submission to Severus' duplicity by means of an ethnographic comment: "they were intellectually dull and slow-witted when it comes to crafty words or subtle actions" (2.9.11). It is noteworthy that in the abridged version of Dio's text there is no depiction of the Pannonians as dull-witted.¹⁶ In Herodian's narrative, the digression on the Pannonians evokes Niger's accession-story again, for it is highly reminiscent of the similar excursus on the Syrians there.¹⁷ In both instances, an elaborate characterization of a nation serves to highlight those traits that explain their willingness to support the emperor – "the Syrians were erratic people, always ready to upset established rule, and they loved Niger" (2.7.9) – while illuminating at the same time some of the characteristics of the emperors (cf. 2.7.9-10), which typify their behaviour and their reigns, and help to explicate their success and fall. Thus, duplicity will prove so successful a key to Severus' survival, while Niger's fondness for shows and festivals turns out to be central to his demise (cf. 2.8.9).

The drive to compare and contrast Severus with Niger does not end

¹⁴ Fuchs 1896: 230-31 n. 36; Zimmermann 1999: 172.

¹⁵ On Severus as the avenger of Pertinax, see also SHA *Sev.* 5.4-5; *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 20.10; *Eutr.* 18.

¹⁶ Pitcher 2018b: 225, though see Dio's comments in 49.36. Cf. a similar description of Pannonians as simple-minded in another context in *Tac. Ann.* 1.16.

¹⁷ See Zimmermann 1999: 172; Hekster 2017: 121. In general, see Zimmermann 1999: 171-73 for a schematic presentation of the most important correspondences between the two accession-stories.

here. Herodian reports that Severus, “after he knew the temper of the Pannonians, began to send out messages to the adjoining provinces and to all the governors of the people in the North subject to Rome, all of whom he persuaded through generous promises and hopes, and won them over without any trouble” (2.9.12). Niger, on the other hand, “was absolutely delighted at this [i.e. his proclamation] and believed that the will of the Roman people and the enthusiasm of his own men in the East firmly established his claim to control the empire” (2.8.7). Closely connected to this is the fact that, whereas Severus himself sends messages and tries to win supporters, Niger gains allies only “when the rumour flew in every country of Asia Minor” (2.8.7). Just as before, so here Severus appears to be a man of action, while Niger appears to be much more passive, expecting things to happen. Crucially, Herodian reports that, when enthusiastic offers for help were sent to Niger, he rejected them because he believed that he secured imperial rule (2.8.8). Severus, on the other hand, does not take anything for granted and succeeds through policy and action, trickery and deception, in gaining allies for himself (cf. 2.10.1).¹⁸

The following account of Severus’ appearance before the Illyrian troops reinforces the sharp dividing line between Severus and Niger through close intratextual correspondences. First, Severus’ adoption of the name of Pertinax as a means of winning soldierly and popular support (2.10.1) recalls Niger’s earlier connection with Pertinax.¹⁹ However, there it has been stressed that “Niger had a reputation for modelling his life on the example of Pertinax” (2.7.5), while here it is Severus who personally encourages this reputation. Once again Severus’ action shines and sparkles against Niger’s passivity.²⁰

Likewise, Severus’ speech which follows resonates with Niger’s speech in Antioch before his proclamation as emperor in many respects.²¹ Severus stresses the fact that he does not want to disregard “the Roman empire as it falls in ruins (cf. τὴν τε Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν μὴ περιδεῖν

¹⁸ See also Zimmermann 1999: 172, 175.

¹⁹ Hekster 2017: 121.

²⁰ Zimmermann 1999: 175. See also Sidebottom 1998: 2808: “But the claims of both are shown to be false.”

²¹ Also formulaic is the language which introduces the two speeches: 2.10.1 ~ 2.8.1.

ἐρριμμένην)” (2.10.2). He also mentions that he never before had such hopes (cf. πρότερον μὲν οὐδέποτε ἀντιποιησαμένω τοιαύτης ἐλπίδος), and invites his audience through a direct second-person plural to evoke their knowledge of his loyalty to the emperors (2.10.2). Severus’ language and rhetoric here are highly reminiscent of Niger’s opening words to his soldiers. Niger begins his speech with an emphasis on his personal qualities of gentleness and caution, which he (like Severus) assumes that his audience members are possibly aware of (2.8.2).²² Niger, moreover, like Severus, declares that he is not simply moved to action by his personal choice and some irrational hope (cf. καὶ ἀλόγου ἐλπίδος) or by a stronger desire, but by the urge of the Romans to help them and “not neglect such a glorious, great empire which has been shamelessly fallen in ruins (cf. τὴν οὕτως ἔνδοξον καὶ ἐνάρετον ... ἀρχὴν μὴ περιδεῖν αἰσχροῶς ἐρριμμένην)” (2.8.2). Both Severus and Niger express their intention to save the ruined Roman Empire.²³ Their motivation, however, is considerably different: Niger is motivated by the call to help by the Roman people and not simply by his own hope, desire, or choice. Severus, on the other hand, appears to be inspired by his own desire only (cf. 2.10.2: κάμοι δὲ δι’ εὐχῆς ἔστι). For, while Niger in the rest of his speech repeatedly stresses the need to respond to the call of others in Rome, Severus tries hard to persuade his listeners that they themselves should take the initiative to act.

Moreover, both Severus and Niger refer to Julianus’ lack of support in Rome (2.10.4 ~ 2.8.5), and accordingly they try to assure their men of the safety of the enterprise. However, while Severus bases his claim for safety upon the superior numbers, bravery, and military experience of his soldiers (2.10.5), Niger expresses the opinion that “the very safety of our enterprise lies in the express will of those who summon me and in the fact that there is no opposition to stand in our way” (2.8.4). In other words, Severus, unlike Niger, neither encourages his men to rely on others nor eliminates the possibility of opposition. Rather, he uses the latter to demonstrate the superior military qualities of his own forces and thus inspire his men to take action. It is worth noting that even the reference to ἀνδρεία by the two men is expressed in completely different terms.

²² See Fuchs 1895: 231 n. 37; Fuchs 1896: 199 n. 84.

²³ Fuchs 1895: 232 n. 42.

Severus is more direct and personal: "All in all you are so magnificently equipped to demonstrate your courage (cf. εἰς ἀνδρείαν) that no one...could withstand you" (2.10.5). Niger is more restrained: "a slow response to a call of distress would make us guilty of cowardice (ἀνανδρία) and betrayal" (2.8.3).

Severus himself also draws attention to the contrast between his energy and the laziness of his enemies in both Rome and Syria. In the rest of his speech, he stresses the life of luxury of the Praetorians and the people in Syria (2.10.6) who (as he asserts) are weak and cowardly: "It is elegant, witty remarks that the Syrians are good at, particularly the people of Antioch" (2.10.7). Herodian's similar words about the Syrians and the citizens of Antioch earlier may be evoked in parallel here to reinforce Severus' undermining commentary and enhance his reliability as speaker (2.7.9-10). Severus effectively juxtaposes Niger's inability to rule with courage and moderation with his and his army's energy, effectiveness, and strength (2.10.7-8). The closing words of each emperor are characteristic of their different styles of leadership. Niger appears to be more cautious and reluctant before his soldiers: "Give me an indication therefore of what your feelings are" (2.8.5). Severus is more passionate and energetic: "Let us be the first to take Rome...Starting from there we shall easily control the rest of the world" (2.10.9). Unsurprisingly, Niger turns to a life of idleness and luxury and neglects his administrative tasks as well as his departure for Rome, being elevated by vain optimism (2.8.7-9). Severus, in contrast, does not allow any delay, but announces the departure for Rome (2.10.9-2.11.1).²⁴

The rest of the narrative of Severus' route from Pannonia to Rome is designed to illuminate his energetic attitude. Attention is especially given to Severus' vigorous participation in soldierly tasks, which make him an example for his men to imitate (2.11.1-2) – a practical demonstration of Marcus' deathbed instruction on how to gain the goodwill (εὐνοίαν) of one's subjects (1.4.4-5). In general, it is a sign of Herodian's good emperor to be able to inspire his subordinates with goodwill.²⁵ Herodian does not forego the opportunity to stress Severus' quick

²⁴ See Zimmermann 1999: 173; Hekster 2017: 121-22.

²⁵ See esp. Pertinax (2.3.5; 2.4.2), Geta (4.3.3), Caracalla (4.14.5), Severus Alexander (6.4.2), Maximinus (6.8.2), and Maximus (8.6.6; 8.7.8).

movement (2.11.3). He also ignores specific details or events in order to place Severus in an attractive light. He omits, for example, some of the actions taken by Julianus against Severus' approach (cf. 2.11.7-9), which are mentioned in Cass. Dio 74[73].16.1-17.1.²⁶ This narrative choice brings into sharp relief Julianus' cowardice and inactivity,²⁷ which is used as a foil to Severus' courageous demeanour. Moreover, Julianus' desperate reaction and his lack of support in Rome confirm Severus' words in Pannonia (2.11.7-2.12.5).

Also provocative is Herodian's sustained interest in delineating the reactions of contemporary social groups in order to comment on the character and leadership of the emperors. We are told that the Roman people, as soon as they received the news about Severus' arrival in Rome, "were all in a complete panic, and, for fear of Severus' force, they pretended to support him by condemning Julianus' cowardice and Niger's negligent delay" (2.12.2). The senate, in turn, "as they viewed Julianus' cowardly state of despair, all proceeded to go over to Severus' side" (2.12.3). They were "in contempt of Julianus" (2.12.4), and, "when they learned of his total demoralization and that his bodyguard had deserted him," they decided to acknowledge Severus as sole emperor (2.12.6). In Cass. Dio 74[73].17.3 more stress is laid on the soldiers, and particularly on the fact that they were persuaded by Severus to kill Pertinax's murderers and keep peace themselves in order to suffer no harm. Herodian omits these details and mentions only the soldiers' desertion of Julianus (2.12.6). This narrative choice has the effect of keeping the focus of the narrative around Julianus and his complete state of demoralization, which is emphatically revealed through the presentation of the people and the senators' views.²⁸

²⁶ Cf. SHA *Sev.* 5.5-8. See also SHA *Did. Jul.* 5.1; 5.3-9; *Pesc. Nig.* 2.6.

²⁷ See 2.11.7: "When Julianus received news of this, he was reduced to a state of utter desperation"; 2.11.9: "Julianus, however, did not dare to advance from the city." See also 2.12.2-3; 2.12.5. Cf. Whittaker 1969: 219 n. 1: "[Julianus] was too late to defend the Alpine passes, but he was not as completely inactive as H[erodian] suggests."

²⁸ Zimmermann 1999: 167-68 notes Herodian's strong emphasis on the figure of the emperor here and explains that the role of the soldiers in Julianus' overthrow is downplayed because, according to Herodian, they are considered as representatives of his tyrannical rule.

Even Herodian's narrative of Julianus' death is constructed towards this end. In Cass. Dio 74[73].17.5, there is a reference to Julianus' murder in the palace. There is also a glimpse of Julianus' lack of understanding and ignorance, shown through a vivid citation of the emperor's last words (cf. "But what evil have I done? Whom have I killed?"). This characteristic of the emperor is consistent with the emphasis, often given with a tinge of irony or sarcasm, on Julianus' lack of shrewdness in the abridged version of Dio's history (74[73].12.5; 74[73].14.2^a; 74[73].16.3-4). Herodian prefers to stress (as we saw) Julianus' bumbling cowardice and inactivity.²⁹ This is also apparent in his narrative of Julianus' death and his concluding judgement on the emperor: "One of the military tribunes was dispatched against Julianus to kill the cowardly, wretched, old man who had purchased this sorry end with his own money. Julianus was found alone and deserted by everyone and was murdered amid a shameful scene of tears" (2.12.7-2.13.1). Herodian's decision to give prominence to Julianus' cowardice and wretchedness throughout his narrative should be explained by the fact that this pattern of behaviour is applicable to other emperors in the subsequent narrative, such as Niger, Albinus, Macrinus, Severus Alexander, and Gordian I. At the same time it helps to illuminate Severus' prowess and valiance, and thus explain his victory.

To sum up, Herodian's account of Severus' route to sole power is constructed in such a calculated manner as to call attention to Severus' energy by setting him, through the development of intratextual analogies and contrasts, against his opponents, Julianus and Niger. To this end, Herodian is ready to omit, simplify, or even alter details found in Dio's work in order to give more space and prominence to Severus and the other contenders for imperial power and place Severus in an attractive light.

²⁹ See also Timonen 2000: 204, 210. On Julianus' madness, cf. SHA *Did. Iul.* 7.9; *Pesc. Nig.* 2.4-6. On Julianus' death-scene in different literary sources, see Timonen 2000: 200-6.

2. Severus' trap of the praetorians and his *adventus* in Rome (193 C.E.)

After he becomes emperor, Severus turns to punish Pertinax's murderers. Herodian privileges narrative compression that serves to place his focus on the principal characters. While Cass. Dio 75[74].1.1 distinguishes between the soldiers who took part in Pertinax's murder, on whom Severus inflicts the death penalty, and the rest, whom he summons and traps, Herodian simply refers to Severus' deception of Pertinax's murderers (2.13.1). Indeed, his narrative of Severus' trap of the soldiers invites the reader to attend to various themes which have been stressed in the preceding narrative.

First of all, this incident most clearly shows Severus' treacherous nature, which Herodian has already drawn notice to (cf. 2.9.2; 2.9.10-1). This is a characteristic that suggests a clear parallel between Severus and his son Caracalla who later tricks and massacres the Alexandrians (4.9).³⁰ The word *σόφισμα*, literally meaning 'clever device'/'trick', is repeatedly used to denote Severus' action (2.13.1; 2.13.11; 2.13.12). Moreover, Herodian's narrative underlines Severus' 'passionate spirit' (cf. 2.13.5: *θυμοειδῆ τῷ πνεύματι*), a crucial characteristic of the emperor which Herodian already mentioned in his introductory sketch of Severus (2.9.2). In addition, the whole scene is a clear manifestation of the congruence between Severus' avowed rhetoric in Pannonia and his current action. The Praetorians, following Severus' instructions, willingly come to his camp, wearing ceremonial clothes (2.13.2-3; cf. 2.13.10). We may recall that Severus has emphasized the Praetorians' aptitude for ceremonies earlier in his speech in Pannonia (2.10.2; cf. 2.10.6). Moreover, here as there, Severus lavishes attention on the superiority of his forces, especially in terms of their 'intelligence', strength, and their number of allies.³¹ Severus also refers to Pertinax in terms which are now familiar to the reader: "You murdered a respected and honourable, old emperor"

³⁰ See Sidebottom 1998: 2816.

³¹ See esp. 2.10.6 (in Pannonia): "But the guards in Rome have become increasingly intoxicated with this life and now they could not even resist your battle-cry let alone your attack" ~ 2.13.5 (in Rome): "You have been easily trapped and are our prisoners without even a struggle."

(cf. σεμνὸν πρεσβύτερον καὶ βασιλέα χρηστόν) (2.13.6). Compare Severus' similar words about Pertinax in his speech in Pannonia: "But when the empire devolved on a respected, elderly man (cf. εἰς σεμνὸν πρεσβύτερον), the memory of whose courage and integrity (cf. οὗ τῆς ἀνδρείας τε καὶ χρηστότητος) is even now instilled into our hearts" (2.10.4).³²

A further link between the two speeches concerns the way in which Severus expresses his intentions to deprive the Praetorians of their role as imperial guards: "You have broken your oath and defiled your hands with the blood of fellow-citizens and an emperor" (cf. ἐς τὸν ὄρκον ἀσεβήσαντας καὶ ἐμφυλίῳ καὶ βασιλικῷ αἵματι τὰς δεξιὰς μιάναντας) (2.13.8). Here, we may recall Severus' earlier derogatory words in Pannonia about the Praetorians: "He criticized the Roman garrison for disloyalty and staining their oath of allegiance by shedding the blood of emperors and fellow citizens" (cf. διέβαλλε δὲ τοὺς ἐν Ῥώμῃ στρατιώτας ὡς ἀπίστους καὶ βασιλείῳ καὶ ἐμφυλίῳ αἵματι μιάναντας τὸν ὄρκον) (2.9.8). The echo demonstrates that Severus' action against the Praetorians lives up to his earlier pre-battle rhetoric. Moreover, another reminder may be evoked in parallel, namely Pertinax's own words to the soldiers before his death: "For you of all people to become murderers and to stain your hand with the blood of a citizen, let alone an emperor (cf. καὶ μὴ μόνον ἐμφυλίῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ βασιλείῳ μιᾶναι τὰς δεξιὰς αἵματι), may, I warn you, be an act of sacrilege today and later a source of danger to you" (cf. ὁρᾶτε μὴ πρὸς τὸ νῦν ἀνόσιον, ὕστερον καὶ ἐπικίνδυνον ὑμῖν ἦ) (2.5.6). Severus' words to the Praetorians hence bring to fruition the expectations that Pertinax's speech has generated, and suggest an essential link between Severus and Pertinax, his avowed paradigm.

Particularly striking is the way in which Herodian focalizes Severus' entry into Rome through the reactions and gaze of the groups at the time. Comparison with the abridged version of the history of Cassius Dio reveals insights into Herodian's peculiar narrative technique. Herodian

³² Pitcher 2018a: 245 notices, in addition that "the adjectives which he [i.e. Severus] uses to describe the deceased Pertinax during that oration ('respected (*semnon*) ... honourable (*khreston*)') recall the ones used of his unfortunate predecessor before and immediately after his assassination." See esp. Pitcher 2018a: 245 n. 15, who notes that 2.13.6 recalls 2.5.8 (with reference to *semnon* focalized through Pertinax's future assassins) and 2.6.2 (with reference to *khreston* given through the perspective of the senators).

stresses that “Severus approached Rome with all the rest of his army, fully armed” (2.14.1). It is little surprise, then, that “the Romans were absolutely terrified at his appearance” (2.14.1). In Cass. Dio 75[74].1.3, “Severus advanced as far as the gates on horseback and in cavalry costume, but there he changed to civilian attire and proceeded on foot; and the entire army, both infantry and cavalry, accompanied him in full armour.”³³ Also notable is the fact that, in Cass. Dio 75[74].1.3-5, it is the unanimous enthusiasm and pleasure with Severus’ arrival that are spaced out, not the ‘terror’ and ‘fear’ of the Romans as in Herodian’s version of events (2.14.1).³⁴ Moreover, in Cass. Dio 75[74].1.3-5 the interest lies neither in the internal reflections of the participants – it is rather the appearance and actions of the different groups in the city that are described – nor in calling attention to any specific characteristics of Severus. It seems that Dio was witness of this spectacle.³⁵

Herodian, on the other hand, pays more attention to the internal thoughts of the onlookers, rather than their appearance and specific actions.³⁶ This is a technique that Herodian regularly employs to mark the emperor’s *adventus* and call attention to some of the most noteworthy qualities of him that have been central to his rise to power. We might compare Commodus’ accession, where the focal point of interest lies in Commodus’ noble origins and heredity (1.7.1-4), or Elagabalus’, where the emperor’s appearance is the focus of attention (5.5.7). Here, the qualities considered encourage a backward glance at the earlier narrative of

³³ Notice Herodian’s omission of the details about Severus’ change of clothes and assumption of the appearance of an ordinary citizen (see Meulder 2002: 91); an act which might show his alleged ‘modesty and humility’ and thus his deceptive character, especially at the beginning of his rule, when he needed the support of the senate (Madsen 2016: 154-55). Lange 2015 stresses the importance of entering Rome not in arms but on foot. Whitaker 1969: 234-35 n. 2 notes the parallel with Vitellius’ entry into Rome ‘in civilian dress’ (Tac. *Hist.* 2.89).

³⁴ Müller 1996: 317 ad loc.

³⁵ Cass. Dio 75[74].1.4: “The spectacle proved the most brilliant of any that I have witnessed.”

³⁶ 2.14.1-2: “The people and the senate went out with garlands of laurels to greet him as the first man and emperor to have achieved such enormous successes so effortlessly and without bloodshed. Apart from his general qualities, they were particularly impressed by his shrewd judgement, his noble endurance of hardship and the confidence and courage of his daring enterprises.”

Severus' reign, especially his introduction into the narrative (cf. 2.9.2), and offer an explanatory framework whereby the reader can ponder anew the reasons for Severus' preeminence. To the same effect contribute some remarkable echoes of Severus' earlier career. In particular, the initial 'terror' and 'fear' felt by the Romans towards Severus' *adventus*, as well as the senate's and the people's act of welcoming Severus with garlands of laurels (δαφνηφοροῦντες) (2.14.1),³⁷ recall the similar reaction of the Italians to Severus' arrival at the Italian frontier (2.11.6).³⁸ Moreover, the term ἀναιμωτί, which is used to underline that Severus succeeded without bloodshed, perhaps ironically recalls Niger's vain optimism in Antioch and his claim that "he would rule without bloodshed" (cf. ἀναιμωτί τε ἄρξειν) (2.8.8). The term ἀκονίτι ('effortlessly') also echoes Severus' success over the Praetorians (2.13.5: "You have been easily trapped and you are our prisoners without even a struggle [ἀκονίτι])."

Severus' appearance in the senate offers another instance where Herodian seems to diverge from Dio's account. In particular, Severus' promise of a rule of aristocracy and his rejection of tyrannical acts, such as murders, unjust confiscations of properties, and strengthening of sycophants (2.14.3), repeat a theme already familiar from Pertinax – whom Severus affects to emulate strongly (2.14.3) – and elsewhere (cf. 5.1.4 on Macrinus; 6.1.2 on Severus Alexander).³⁹ In his speech to the senate after his elevation to the throne, Pertinax claims that his rule will be an aristocracy rather than a tyranny (2.3.10).⁴⁰ The theme might go even further back to Marcus Aurelius – whom Severus here affects to emulate as well (2.14.3) – and his exhortation to his councillors to stand by his son Commodus and guide him through his government of the empire (1.4.4; 1.4.6), representing a sort of 'joint administration' as well.

³⁷ Cf. Cass. Dio 75[74].1.4: ἡ τε γὰρ πόλις πᾶσα ἄνθεσί τε καὶ δάφναις ἐστεφάνωτο καὶ ἱματίοις ποικίλοις ἐκεκόσμητο ("for the whole city had been decked with garlands of flowers and laurel and adorned with richly coloured stuffs").

³⁸ 2.11.6: "Not daring to offer any opposition in his way, they went to meet him with garlands of laurels (δαφνηφοροῦντες) and opened wide their gates to admit him." Cf. the similar reactions at 1.7.3; 2.2.10; 4.1.3. See also Fuchs 1886: 200 n. 88.

³⁹ See Whittaker 1969: 237 n. 1. On the meaning of ἀριστοκρατία, τυραννίς, and βασιλεία in Herodian, see Marasco 1998: 2857-63; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 302-6; Hidber 2006: 221-22 n.163; Bekker-Nielsen 2014: 238-45.

⁴⁰ See Hidber 2006: 209-10.

Severus later displays the same tyrannical behaviour that here he strongly rejects (cf. 3.8.2; 3.8.6; 3.8.8). The disjunction between Severus' speech and actions is made explicit in Cass. Dio 75[74].2.2. In Herodian's narrative, we are told that, despite Severus' promises, some elder men were able to grasp Severus' trickery (2.14.4). Herodian is on-hand to confirm this opinion – "this was later proved to be true" (2.14.4) – thus preparing the reader for a significant discrepancy between Severus' rhetoric and action. It is remarkable, however, that Herodian omits the murder of Julius Solon as well as other discreditable deeds of Severus, which are detailed in Cass. Dio 75[74].2.3-6. Specifically, Severus is blamed for having so many troops present in the city, spending money excessively, and relying on the power of his army rather than his associates' goodwill (Cass. Dio 75[74].2.3). He is also censured for his practice of "recruiting bodyguards exclusively from Italy, Spain, Macedonia and Noricum ... and ordering that any vacancies should be filled from all the legions alike" (Cass. Dio 75[74].2.4-6). Herodian ignores these unfavourable details about Severus (at least for now) and simply refers to his actions of favouring the people and the soldiers (esp. through distribution of money and organization of shows) and selecting the best of the soldiers as his guards (2.14.5-6).⁴¹

It is, therefore, remarkable how Herodian's narrative of Severus' trap of the Praetorians in Rome is jointed thematically and verbally with Severus' pre-battle speech in Pannonia in order to emphasize a number of characteristics of Severus, such as his action and rhetoric, courage and shrewdness, which have been central to his rise to power. Particularly striking is also the way in which Herodian constructs the scenes of Severus' arrival in Rome and his appearance in the senate. Although both scenes hint at some questionable aspects of Severus' leadership, such as his cruelty and trickery, they primarily serve to highlight some of the most noteworthy qualities of Severus. His speech to the senate, in addition, suggests an association of Severus with Pertinax and Marcus

⁴¹ My reading here stands in contrast to Rubin 1980: 57-58 who thinks that Dio's version of Severus' entry into Rome is positive and highly influenced by Severan propaganda, which Herodian and esp. the *Historia Augusta* avoid.

Aurelius, which, even if it turns out to be only a matter of rhetoric, enhances our understanding of a crucial component of Severus' propaganda which significantly contributes to his predominance.

In the next sections on Severus' civil and external wars, we shall see that this urge to compare and contrast Severus with other emperors constitutes a most useful tool at the hands of Herodian for evaluating and historically interpreting Severus' military career.

3. Severus against Niger

In his account of the preliminaries of Severus' war against Niger, Herodian again underlines the contrast between Niger's inaction and Severus' energy. He begins his narrative by stressing that "Severus hurried off (ἠπειγέτο) to the East, where Niger was still putting off his departure and remaining inactive amidst the pleasures of Antioch (cf. ἔτι γὰρ μέλλοντος καὶ ὑπιτάζοντος τοῦ Νίγρου, τῆ τε Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἐντροφῶντος)" (2.14.5-6). Niger's idleness invites the readers to recall Julianus' similar lack of carefulness (cf. ἔνδον ἦσαν τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ ἔτι ὑπιτάζοντος καὶ τὰ πραττόμενα ἀγνοοῦντος) (2.12.2). Severus, as Herodian declares, "intended to launch an unexpected attack to catch Niger unprepared" (2.14.6). It is notable that, at the corresponding point in the abridged version of Dio's *History*, there is a reference to Niger's lack of intelligence and the fact that he was vainglorious (Cass. Dio 75[74].6.2^a).

Next Herodian reports Severus' dealing with Albinus (2.15.1-5). As noted above, in Cass. Dio 74[73].15.1 the same incident is related before Severus' accession to the throne. Herodian retains the information about Severus' deception of Albinus, but he delays to mention the story after his narrative of the overthrow of Julianus and during his account of Severus' preparation for the war against Niger (2.15.1). This displacement, I suggest, serves not only to "minimize the switching around and maintain a linear focus" in his narrative,⁴² but also to invite the readers to compare Severus' way of handling his three opponents, thus primarily advancing our understanding of Severus' shrewdness and guile (cf.

⁴² See Kemezis 2014: 237 n. 26, who specifically refers to Herodian's delayed introduction of Albinus into the narrative.

2.15.2: σοφίσματα) used in overpowering Albinus (cf. esp. 2.15.1; 2.15.3; 2.15.5). In general, Severus' concern to gain an advantage over his enemy has been a consistent characteristic of him in his dealings with both Julianus (2.10-1) and Niger (2.14.6).

The narrative of the conflict between Severus and Niger, just as his earlier account of Severus' fighting against Julianus, is designed to illuminate Severus' superior principles of military leadership. To this end, Herodian at several points of his narrative is at pains to place an entirely different colouring on the events from the one that Cassius Dio had, while at the same time he develops substantial structural, thematic, or even verbal intratextual associations between Severus' earlier and current campaigns.

For example, Niger's state of complete panic, when he received the unexpected news about Severus (3.1.1), recalls Julianus' similar response (2.11.7), though Niger proves to be much more decisive and energetic than Julianus (3.1.1-7).⁴³ Herodian mentions Niger's attempt to gain allies (3.1.2), his barricade of the Taurus Mountains (3.1.4), and his seizure of Byzantium (3.1.5). He also omits his unsuccessful attack against Perinthus (75[74].6.3),⁴⁴ while he is much more brief than Cass. Dio 75[74].10-12 in his topographical excursus on Byzantium, offering only those details that are essential for understanding Niger's decision to move against the city.⁴⁵ In addition, he does not forego the opportunity of hinting at Severus' later success in capturing Byzantium, by referring at this point to "the power of those who later destroyed it" (3.1.7). This 'advance notice' of Severus' accomplishment serves to undermine Niger's preparatory movements, and "helps to establish the military efficiency of Severus, who will go on to do just that."⁴⁶ Herodian's subsequent, perhaps ironical, comment on Niger contributes to the same effect: "In this way Niger made provision for his side with great foresight and regard for

⁴³ Pace Bersanetti 1938, who stresses Herodian's one-sided emphasis on Niger's sloth.

⁴⁴ Bersanetti 1938: 359; Whittaker 1969: 256 n. 1; Rubin 1980: 99.

⁴⁵ See Pitcher 2012: 270-71.

⁴⁶ Pitcher 2012: 271.

safety – *as he thought* (cf. ὡς ᾤετο)” (3.1.7).⁴⁷

Herodian gives a brief notice of the battle of Cyzicus. A variation between Herodian's account and that of Cassius Dio concerns the depiction of Aemilianus, Niger's commander. In Cass. Dio 75[74].6.2 there is a rather positive picture of the general: “Niger had as one of his lieutenants Aemilianus, since this man, by remaining neutral and watching events in order to take advantage of them, seemed to surpass all the senators of that day in understanding and in experience of affairs”. On the contrary, in Herodian's narrative, which here follows multiple sources (cf. 3.2.3: φασὶ δέ τινες ... οἱ δὲ φασιν), Aemilianus is clearly presented as a traitor to Niger, being outmanoeuvred by Severus' trickery and ingenuity (3.2.3-5).⁴⁸ Severus' victory once again illuminates his shrewd mind and forethought (3.2.3), while at the same time it shows the accuracy of Severus' defamatory statements at 2.10.6-8 about the superiority of the Danube army to the Syrian troops.⁴⁹

The same positive appraisal of Severus occurs in Herodian's report of the Battle of Nicaea (3.2.10). Here Herodian omits several less positive details about Severus' forces, which are mentioned in Cass. Dio 75[74].6.4-6. In the latter we are told that the fortunes of the two forces varied during the battle: first, Severus' followers under the command of Candidus are victorious, although Severus is absent from the battle;⁵⁰ then, upon Niger's appearance, Niger's men temporarily prevail.⁵¹ Herodian continues to tilt the scales towards Severus in his account of his

⁴⁷ Pitcher 2018a: 246 aptly notices the narrator's skepticism here (through the parenthetical “so he thought”) and the contrast between Herodian's characterization of Niger and that of Severus as ἀνὴρ προμηθής (“a man endowed with foresight”) earlier (2.15.1).

⁴⁸ See Zimmermann 1999: 185. Interestingly, in Cass. Dio 75[74].6.2-2^a, Aemilianus is implicitly contrasted with Niger who (as we are told) “was not a man of keen intelligence.”

⁴⁹ Kemezis 2014: 255 n. 77.

⁵⁰ Ward 2011: 161-65 reflects helpfully on the fact that Severus is mostly present in name only; he does not appear to take any action himself. As Ward 2011: 165 puts it: “Severus seems to be a constant presence but is in reality just as absent in Herodian as in Dio.” Cf. Rubin 1980: 100 with n. 74 who comments on Herodian's use of expressions that give “the impression that Severus commanded his campaigns in person.”

⁵¹ Cf. Whittaker 1969: 266-67 n. 1. Bersanetti 1938: 359-62 notes that Herodian, unlike Dio, omits Niger's active presence in the battle and stresses that such omissions should be

siege of the defences in the Taurus Mountains. Despite the strong resistance of the besieged, Severus wins because of the extreme weather conditions (3.3.6-8). As a result, Herodian says, Severus' soldiers were encouraged by the belief that "they were being guided by divine providence" (3.3.8).

The clash between Niger and Severus culminates in the battle of Issus. Comparison with the corresponding (abridged) account of Dio's *History* reveals that Herodian's primary aim is to illuminate Severus' military excellence. First, in Cass. Dio 75[74].7.1, the battle is said to have taken place near the 'Cilician-Syrian Gates', rather than at the bay of Issus. Herodian distinguishes between two different battles, one at the pass of the Cilician Gates (3.3.7-8) and another at the bay of Issus (3.4.1-5). Second, in Cass. Dio 75[74].7.1 there is mention of Severus' commanders, Valerianus and Anullinus, and to the fact that Niger was present in the battle. In Herodian, it is clear that Niger was present, but there is no mention of the specific commanders of Severus, leaving it unclear whether Severus himself was present or not (3.4.4). Moreover, Herodian omits all specific details about the array and first movements of the two armies, which are found in Cass. Dio 75[74].7.2-5. In Cass. Dio 75[74].7.6, there is a reference to the superiority of Niger's forces during the battle and to the sudden storm that deprived them of their complete success (75[74].7.6). In Herodian, by contrast, it is simply mentioned that the two forces fell upon each other and that they fought for a long time with heavy casualties. Considerable emphasis is given to the rout of Niger's army (3.4.4-5). It is noticeable how Herodian transfers the detail about the supernatural intervention and the subsequent encouragement of Severus' troops, which is mentioned in Cass. Dio 75[74].7.6-7, earlier to the context of Severus' besiegement of the pass of the Cilician Gates (3.3.7-8).⁵² There it is linked with another successful enterprise of Severus' army. Herodian's narrative is designed to present Severus' military activity in a glamorous light.

One might also consider Herodian's account of the aftermath of the battle. In Cass. Dio 75[74].8.3, it is mentioned that Niger is caught while

attributed to Herodian's rhetoric which aims to contrast Niger's idleness to Severus' energy. Rubin 1980: 101 attributes this omission to Herodian's reliance on a pro-Severan source.

⁵² See Kolb 1972: 73-74.

he tries to flee from Antioch. He is beheaded, and Severus has his head sent to Byzantium and affixed to a pole, so that the Byzantines, at the sight of it, should go over to him. Herodian cuts away such unfavourable information about Severus. He only says that Niger “was found in one of the outlying areas of the city...and was caught and beheaded” (3.4.6). He also ascribes blame to Niger’s ‘sloth’ and ‘sluggishness’ for his demise (3.4.7). Herodian, as we saw, has throughout contrasted these characteristics of Niger with Severus’ energy and prowess. It is true that Herodian does not eschew a reference to Severus’ ruthless punishment of Niger’s partisans (3.4.7) – a point which presents a striking contrast to Severus’ avowed promise to the senate earlier (2.14.3).⁵³ But, he omits all of the specific details about Severus’ confiscations of properties and mercilessness in raising funds (Cass. Dio 75[74].8.3-5), as well as his trials of senators (Cass. Dio 75[74].9.1-4).

4. Severus against Albinus

Herodian omits Severus’ Parthian War of 195 C.E., which is narrated in Cass. Dio 75[75].1-3. This omission might be explained in terms of his earlier programmatic statements on his method of selectivity at 2.15.6-7. Herodian might have considered that this campaign does not meet his standards of narrative treatment, and thus he preferred to streamline his account in order to focus more closely on events that he might have felt were necessary to his narrative.⁵⁴

Herodian concentrates on Severus’ civil war with Albinus. Both he and Cassius Dio make clear that Severus, after Niger’s death, intended to secure the full control of imperial power, and that Albinus aspired to become emperor (Cass. Dio 76[75].4.1 ~ Hdn. 3.5.2). However, while Cass. Dio 76[75].4.1 openly declares that “Severus no longer gave Albinus even

⁵³ On this disjunction, see Hekster 2017: 118-19.

⁵⁴ See Sievers 1867: 263; Kemezis 2014: 236 n. 24: “Herodian may be deliberately signaling, to those who know the facts, that he is streamlining the story and giving his characters neater motivations, thus presumably increasing the reader’s pleasure.” See also Whitaker 1969: 283 n. 1: “H[erodian]’s omission might be explained if the victories were primarily for propaganda.”

the rank of Caesar,” Herodian prefers to stress the senators’ support of Albinus because of his nobility of birth (3.5.2) – a point which confirms Severus’ initial anxiety about Albinus (2.15.2),⁵⁵ providing a contrast, at the same time, with Severus’ humble origins (3.10.6).⁵⁶ Herodian also mentions Severus’ resort to trickery (again) because Albinus “offered no valid pretext for his hostile action” (3.5.3). His account thus tallies nicely with his portrait of the emperor so far.

Herodian does not include in his narrative the elaborate (eyewitness-)scene found in Cass. Dio 76[75].4.2-7, describing the reactions of the senators and the populace to the current critical situation and the accompanying divine signs. Instead, he focuses on Severus’ attempt to overpower Albinus through deception; but to no avail this time, for Albinus was alert to Severus’ ‘underlying character’, which was manifested (as Herodian states) through his earlier misdeeds and failure to follow his promises (cf. 3.5.3-8). Even Severus’ speech is designed to illuminate his deceptive and treacherous nature, especially in the way in which he affects to present himself as loyal to Albinus (3.6.1-2) and tries to belittle him and his forces (3.6.1-7).⁵⁷

The following narrative focuses on Severus’ siege of Byzantium (3.6.9), which reflects another major divergence of Herodian from the epitomated account of Dio’s history, with a view to depicting Severus on the field in a more favourable light. We may remember that Herodian has proleptically suggested, during his narrative of Niger’s capture of Byzantium, Severus’ success (3.1.7). A detailed account of Severus’ two-year siege of Byzantium is given in Cass. Dio 75[74].10-14, in an earlier chronological context than in Herodian. Crucially, Herodian omits the details about Severus’ pleasant reaction to the news about the victory of his troops, mentioned in Cass. Dio 75[74].14.2, and limits himself to some details about the destruction and lowering of the status of the city (3.6.9).

⁵⁵ Timonen 2000: 82.

⁵⁶ See Hekster 2017: 121 on Severus as an ‘outsider’ to Roman cultural background.

⁵⁷ See esp. 3.6.3-4 where Severus accuses Albinus of injustice and aggression, although Herodian made clear that Albinus offered no valid pretext for an open aggression (3.5.3). See Hekster 2017: 123. Moreover, Severus’ focus on the deficiencies of the British army (3.6.6) presents a striking contrast with Herodian’s earlier statement about Severus’ suspicions of Albinus’ army in Britain (2.15.1). On this last point, see also Whittaker 1969: 291 n. 2. On Severus’ deceptive rhetoric here, see Ward 2011: 165-66.

In Cass. Dio 75[74].14.3-5, the same point receives more attention, and the reader is drawn to cast a critical eye at Severus' destruction of the walls of Byzantium. Kemezis rightly explains Herodian's brevity in his account of the siege by the historian's compositional technique of "omitting anything that would detract from momentum": "by the time it [i.e. the siege] is over, the narrative is done with the eastern war and rushing on toward Severus' reckoning with Albinus."⁵⁸

It is noticeable that Herodian's brief account of the siege of Byzantium offers a less critical assessment of Severus' behaviour than that of Dio. This presentation is strengthened by Herodian's subsequent focus on Severus' military excellence through his participation in all hardships (3.6.10). This, as Herodian suggests, allows Severus "to set his men a concrete example of determination and bravery" and to inspire them to persist not only by fear and regulations, "but by encouraging them to imitate their emperor" (3.6.10). Severus' action lives up to his pre-battle words about the superior strength of himself and his soldiers (2.10.5-6; 2.10.8; 3.6.3; 3.6.6-7). It is remarkable that Herodian's narrative movement here has several structural and thematic similarities to his earlier description of Severus' expedition against Julianus and Niger, which invites the readers to read Severus' civil wars in parallel with one another.

There, as we noted above, Herodian relates first Severus' pre-battle speech in Pannonia (2.10.2-9), and then his initial military actions (2.11.1),⁵⁹ focusing especially on Severus' excellent military conduct, particularly his sharing in the soldiers' hardships, which inspired his men with goodwill and emulation (2.11.2). The verbal and thematic parallelism between the two scenes pertains to a number of key characteristics of Severus' aptitude, which evoke Marcus' ideal model of leadership (cf. 1.4.5), and which guaranteed Severus' victory over Julianus and Niger. Accordingly, they serve as an encouraging sign of Severus' successful fighting against Albinus.

To this effect also contributes Herodian's depiction of Albinus' reaction to Severus' approach: "When the news reached Albinus...it terrified him, because he was living idly whiling away his time in easy living" (3.7.1). Herodian's description not only confirms Severus' words to his

⁵⁸ Kemezis 2014: 236.

⁵⁹ See also Fuchs 1884: 62 n. 4 for the connection between 3.6.10 and 2.11.1.

soldiers about Albinus' predilection for luxury (cf. 3.6.7), but also encourages the reader to reflect back to Niger and Julianus, both of whom appear to have similar reactions.⁶⁰ There is a thematic continuity between the three men, which is also stressed by identical words and phrases.⁶¹ The reader is thus sensitized to a pattern of imperial behaviour and course of events, which sharpens the contrast with Severus' energy and military prowess, and thus leaves an ominous impression.

Herodian conveniently omits the exploits of Numerianus, detailed in Cass. Dio 76[75].5.1, and concentrates on the decisive Battle of Lugdunum. Herodian's account, although it remains basically positive, shows some chiaroscuro. The focus of the narrative alternates between the competing parties, while the actual clash is described in terms that are familiar from Severus' earlier battles against Niger (3.7.2).⁶² In Cass. Dio 76[75].6.3-6, a much more detailed account (as usual) of the phases and shifts of fortune of both contending sides is found. In Cass. Dio 76[75].6.1, moreover, it is explicitly mentioned that, during the battle of Lugdunum between Severus and Albinus, "both leaders were present in the conflict." By contrast, Herodian favours a more positive reading of Severus, noting that Albinus took refuge in the city and sent his army out to fight (3.7.2). Note also that, at Cass. Dio 76[75].6.1, it is stressed that this was the first

⁶⁰ The connection with Niger is also noted by Fuchs 1884: 62 n. 4; Whittaker 1969: 297 n. 1. See also Hidber 2006: 208 with n. 92. Fuchs 1895: 238 n. 83 mentions Commodus (1.8.1), Julianus (2.7.1) and Macrinus (5.2.4) in parallel.

⁶¹ Julianus: 2.11.7 (ὡς δὲ ταῦτα τῷ Ἰουλιανῷ ἀπηγγέλλετο, ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἀπογνώσει ἦν); 2.12.2-3 (καὶ ἤδη οἱ πολέμιοι ἔνδον ἦσαν τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ ἔτι ὑπτιάζοντος καὶ τὰ πραττόμενα ἀγνοοῦντος...ὁ δὲ Ἰουλιανὸς πολλῇ καταλαμβανόμενος ἀφασίᾳ τε καὶ ἀπορίᾳ, ὅπως χρῆσεται τοῖς πράγμασιν οὐκ εἰδώς); Niger: 2.14.6 (ἔτι γὰρ μέλλοντος καὶ ὑπτιάζοντος τοῦ Νίγρου, τῇ τε Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἐντροφῶντος); 3.1.1 (ὁ δὲ Νίγρος, ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷ μηδὲν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ κατειληφώς μὲν τὴν Ῥώμην ὁ Σεβήρος, ... ἐν μεγίστῃ ταραχῇ ἦν); Albinus: 3.7.1 (ὡς δὲ ἀπηγγέλη τῷ Ἀλβίνῳ μὴ μέλλων ὁ Σεβήρος ἀλλ' ἤδη παρεσόμενος, ὑπτιάζοντι καὶ τρυφῶντι μεγάλην ταραχὴν ἐνέβαλε). See also Whittaker 1969: 297 n. 1; Müller 1996: 320 ad loc.

⁶² 3.7.2: γενομένης δὲ συμβολῆς καρτερᾶς. Cf. Battle of Cyzicus: 3.2.2: μάχαι καρτεραὶ γίνονται κατ' ἐκεῖνα τὰ χωρία. Battle of Nicaea: 3.2.10: καὶ μάχης καρτερᾶς γενομένης. Cf. Severus' British expedition (3.14.10); Maximinus' German expedition (7.2.6; 7.2.8); the civil war between the soldiers and the people in Rome during the reign of Maximus and Balbinus (7.12.4). See also Fuchs 1895: 251 with n. 166.

battle where Severus was himself present. In Herodian's narrative, Severus' presence in this battle is clear (cf. 3.7.3: "in the sector where Severus and his personal troops were stationed"). Additionally in Cass. Dio 76[75].6.2, there is mention of Albinus' defeat of Lupus, one of the generals of Severus (cf. SHA Sev. 10.7). Herodian does not make mention of this earlier victory of Albinus.

In the rest of his narrative of the Battle of Lugdunum, nevertheless, the image of Severus as a good general is offset by less respectable sides of his behaviour which are brought to the fore. Especially striking is Herodian's focus on "the bravery and bloodthirsty courage of the British," which (according to the historian) were not inferior to that of the Illyrians (3.7.2). Herodian's favourable statement concurs with his earlier reference to the power of this army (cf. 2.15.1), but contrasts with Severus' pre-battle rhetoric (3.6.6).⁶³ Herodian then shows his aversion to favouritism in historiography by reporting (as he himself declares) the version of those historians who "give an unbiased account aimed at the truth" (3.7.3). He thus refers to the superior strength of Albinus' battle-array at the place where Severus and his soldiers were stationed, as well as the subsequent flight and misfortune of Severus (3.7.3). In Cass. Dio 76[75].6.6-7 Severus' misfortune is treated in a more detailed manner, but the description shows his heroic stature and concern for others rather than his inferior act of flight stressed by Herodian. Despite this, it is true that the fact that Severus "comes close to destroying the Praetorians along with himself" leaves a shadow over his military action in Cassius Dio as well.⁶⁴

Furthermore, Herodian's attitude towards favouritism in historiography is highly problematized in his narrative of the aftermath of the battle. As far as Albinus' death is concerned, the epitomated account of Cassius Dio's *History* mentions that Albinus committed suicide, and continues: "Severus, after viewing the body of Albinus and feasting his eyes upon it to the full, while giving free rein to his tongue as well, ordered all but the head to be cast away, but sent the head to Rome to be exposed

⁶³ See Whittaker 1969: 242 n. 1, 292 n. 2; Kemezis 2014: 255 n. 77; Hekster 2017: 122.

⁶⁴ Ward 2011: 168. See also Rubin 1980: 22, 125 who acknowledges too that Dio's account "is slightly less hostile in tone" than that of Herodian (22). Cf. Roques 1990: 245 n. 58; Zimmermann 1999: 186.

on a pole” (Cass. Dio 76[75].7.3). It is explicitly noted that this account reflects *not* what Severus himself wrote about this incident, but what actually happened (Cass. Dio 76[75].7.3). Herodian, on the other hand, seems to follow Severus’ own propaganda. He does not suppress the fact that “Albinus was taken prisoner and executed” (3.7.7), that his head was carried to Severus (3.7.7) and that it was then “sent to Rome with orders that it should publicly be displayed on a pole” (3.8.1). However, Herodian leaves out all specific details about Severus’ humiliating treatment of Albinus’ corpse.⁶⁵ He simply mentions that Severus’ intention of sending Albinus’ head to be displayed publicly was to show to the Roman people the measure of his temper as well as his anger with the friends of Albinus (3.8.1). This statement clearly reflects Severus’ cruel and fierce character; but while the narrator in Cass. Dio 76[75].7.4 openly points a censorial finger at Severus – “As this action showed...he [i.e. Severus] possessed none of the qualities of a good ruler” – Herodian omits an explicit condemnation of his subject. At the same time, he is prepared to praise Severus for his incomparable military achievements (3.7.7-8).

Herodian’s positive comment on Severus’ victories, I suggest, is aimed at illuminating Severus’ superior principles of military leadership. Herodian suggests a backward glance in time at Roman history, and particularly at other well-known civil wars, especially (as he says) that of Caesar against Pompey, that of Octavian against Antony and Pompey’s sons, and that of Sulla against Marius (3.7.8). This overview of past civil wars serves to offer historical contextualization and add an extra laudatory dimension to what we have hitherto read about Severus’ achievement. Interestingly, in Cass. Dio 76[75].8.1 a speech of Severus to the senate is related, in which Severus praised the cruelty of Sulla, Marius, and Octavian, while he blamed the mildness of Caesar and Pompey.⁶⁶ It is plausible that Herodian enters into an elaborate intertextual dialogue with Dio here, turning a negative detail about Severus into a highly encomiastic one.

Herodian, nevertheless, is not shy to mention Severus’ executions and

⁶⁵ Timonen 2000: 82-3. Contrast the gruesome description in SHA *Sev.* 11.5-9; *Albinus* 9.6-7, with Timonen 2000: 84-85.

⁶⁶ See Whittaker 1969: 303 n. 3. On the connection between Severus and Sulla and Marius with reference to their cruelty, see also SHA *Pesc. Nig.* 6.4.

confiscations of Albinus' supporters (3.8.2-3 ~ Cass. Dio 76[75].7.4; 8.4), which find a parallel in his similarly harsh treatment of Niger's friends (3.4.7). Severus' tyrannical conduct, both here and there, is opposed to his avowed promise to the senate about a rule of aristocracy (2.14.3), thus bearing out his earlier dissimulation. However, Herodian is also ready to omit Severus' self-stylization as the son of Marcus and brother of Commodus – an act which (as Dio says) inspired the senate with special dismay (Cass. Dio 76[75].7.4).⁶⁷ Dio's Severus also appears to deify Commodus and strongly support him before the senators (Cass. Dio 76[75].8.1-4). Likewise, Herodian's concluding verdict on the way in which Severus destroyed Julianus, Niger, and Albinus is quite oversimplified in comparison with the preceding narrative,⁶⁸ being intended to eventually present Severus in a rather glamorous light.

So, it is arguable that Severus' combats against Julianus, Niger, and Albinus are narrated in such a careful way as to draw the reader through verbal, thematic, and structural repetitions to consider them together. These repetitions readily show some common faulty features of Niger, Albinus, and Julianus, which reveal an ominous pattern that will come back in a similar way during the reigns of future emperors (particularly, Macrinus, Severus Alexander, and Gordian I) in Herodian's work. At the same time, they help to illuminate Severus' military qualities in contrast, which are closely in line with Marcus' ideal model of leadership at the outset of the *History*. It is true that at times Herodian refers to tyrannical facets of Severus' character, and he also mentions Severus' great misfortune in the battle of Lugdunum. But, as we saw, these less creditable moments in Severus' military career are offset or qualified by other more positive threads that follow in Herodian's narrative.

⁶⁷ On Herodian's omission, see Hekster 2017: 124-25. Herodian only refers to Severus' apology for Commodus in his speech to the soldiers in Pannonia (2.10.3-4). On this point, see Zimmermann 1999: 146-50.

⁶⁸ See Ward 2011: 179-80: "So, then, neither Severus nor his army fought any battles against Julianus. Pescennius was defeated by force but, as was shown above, Severus himself was present in name only. Lastly, that Albinus was overcome by Severus' abundant courage could hardly be more at odds with the way Herodian narrates the Battle of Lugdunum."

Shall we consider, therefore, that Herodian's portrait of Severus turns out to be encomiastic at the end? Herodian's subsequent narrative calls into doubt any such simplistic conclusions.

5. Severus' stay in Rome

Severus' *adventus* in Rome, which is described in formulaic terms,⁶⁹ dwells on the emotive and cognitive reactions of the onlookers. In particular, Herodian elaborates on the Romans' great fear of Severus' cruel and hostile disposition (3.8.3). One is thus reminded of Severus' earlier arrival in Rome (193 C.E.) and Herodian's similar reportage of the opinion of the people and the senate there. It is true that earlier it is said that Severus causes fear and consternation to the Romans (2.14.1), but Herodian puts the spotlight on those qualities of Severus (such as his shrewd mind, courage, and nobility in enduring hardships) that impress the Roman people and the senate and lead him to assume the sole power (2.14.2). The contrast between the onlookers' responses in the earlier and current arrival of Severus in Rome strikingly calls attention to Severus' shifting behaviour and his gradual fall into tyranny.

This shifting behaviour is further documented in Herodian's report of Severus' military reforms. Herodian expands upon the gifts and privileges that Severus offers to the soldiers and the negative consequences for their military discipline and aptitude (3.8.5). This signals a contrast with Severus' own military prowess and excellent military behaviour (cf. 2.11.2; 3.6.10), while at the same time it recalls Herodian's earlier defamation of Julianus' corruption of the soldiers (2.6.14).⁷⁰ It thus suggests an uncomplimentary association between Severus and Julianus.

In the following lines, Herodian casts around for material that shows Severus in an even worse light. Severus, according to Herodian, appears before the senate, where he ruthlessly attacks Albinus' friends and destroys prominent, noble, and rich men (3.8.6-7). He also gives bad press to Severus for his φιλοχρηματία (3.8.7: "There never was an emperor so obsessed with money"). Although Herodian tries to soften this negative

⁶⁹ See 3.8.3 ~ 1.7.6 (Commodus) ~ 2.14.1 (Severus' earlier *adventus* in 193 C.E.).

⁷⁰ See also Fuchs 1895: 248 with n. 151.

point by referring to Severus' unprecedented military excellence (3.8.8), he is keen to stress Severus' large-scale murders and confiscations that made "his rule one of intimidation, not affection" (cf. φόβω γοῦν ἤρξε μᾶλλον τῶν ἀρχομένων ἢ εὐνοίᾳ) (3.8.8). This information contrasts sharply with Severus' exemplary conduct on the field before (2.11.2; 3.6.10) and Marcus' relevant advice (1.4.5), though it is in keeping with Herodian's earlier emphasis on Severus' expertise in "pretending to and giving assurance of goodwill" (cf. μάλιστα προσποιήσασθαι τε καὶ πιστώσασθαι εὐνοίαν) in his pre-battle speech in Pannonia (2.9.13). We may compare Severus' son Caracalla who pretends to show goodwill towards the Alexandrians (4.8.7-8) and the Parthian king (4.11.1), much to the latter's detriment. Severus is aligned here with other bad emperors in Herodian's *History*, who either inspire their people with fear,⁷¹ and whose decline is marked by a shift in the goodwill of their subordinates.⁷²

Severus' savage behaviour here diverges significantly from his earlier appearance in the senate after his acclamation (cf. 2.14.3: "On the following day he went down to the senate house, where he made a very moderate and promising speech"). In his earlier speech to the senate, he claimed that he would follow a rule of aristocracy, putting no one to death and having no one's properties confiscated. He would offer, as he said, his subjects a period of true prosperity, emulating Marcus' rule and adopting the name as well as the disposition of Pertinax (2.14.3). The antitheses between Severus' earlier and current appearances before the senate, I suggest, flag up Severus' deceptive character (cf. 2.14.4) and tyrannical conduct, which distinguishes him sharply from the paradigms of Marcus and Pertinax,⁷³ and align him with examples of cruel emperors

⁷¹ Commodus: 1.14.9; 2.1.7; 2.2.4; 3.2.4; Caracalla: 4.3.4; 4.11.9; Maximinus: 7.1.1; 7.5.1; 7.7.2; 7.7.4; 7.8.2. On fear in Herodian's work, see Opelt 1998; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 293-96.

⁷² Commodus: 1.14.7; 1.17.5; Julianus: 2.10.4-5. Interestingly, Herodian stresses the lack of soldierly goodwill towards Macrinus upon his accession, which underlines the aura of doom surrounding the emperor. Macrinus is reported to have "obtained the principate not so much through the love and loyalty of the soldiers as through necessity and the demands of the immediate situation" (4.14.3) Herodian has previously mentioned Macrinus' deficient military experience and his extravagant lifestyle for which Caracalla treated him with contempt (4.12.1-2).

⁷³ On Severus' deviation from Marcus' paradigm in Herodian's narrative, see also Hekster 2017: 124-25.

in Herodian's *History*, such as Commodus (1.13.7; 1.14.7; 1.17.2; 2.7.2), Caracalla (3.15.4; 4.13.1; cf. 4.3.4; 4.6.1-3; 4.6.5), Elagabalus (5.7.6), and Maximinus (7.1.4; 7.1.8; 7.3.1-4; 7.4.2).

The connection between Severus and Herodian's model of *princeps malus* is further endorsed by Herodian's report of the emperor's demagogic deeds, which provide another parallel to his earlier brief stay in Rome (cf. 2.14.5). Most of the acts described here (3.8.9-10, shows, celebrations, and games, distributions of money, slaughters of animals, and so on) are found in connection with other bad emperors in Herodian's *History*.⁷⁴ The whole description of Severus' shows and games, in particular, echoes verbally and thematically Commodus' performances in 192 C.E. In both incidents, Herodian claims that he was present (1.15.4; 3.8.10).⁷⁵ However, it should be stressed that one significant difference between Severus and the other (bad) emperors in Herodian's *History* is that, despite these activities, Severus neither neglects the duties pertaining to his office because of indolence (cf. 3.9.1), nor does he insult the Roman elite or his own imperial dignity by involving others in abominable professions or taking up himself shameful roles (cf. Commodus or Elagabalus). Herodian thus does more justice to Severus by presenting his activities as a political means of favouring the Roman people.

⁷⁴ See Niger (2.7.10; 2.8.9); Geta and Caracalla (3.10.3-4; 3.13.1; 4.4.1; 4.11.9); Macrinus (5.2.4); Elagabalus (5.5.8-10; 5.6.6-10). On distributions of money to the people, in particular, see 3.8.4; 3.10.2 (Severus); 5.5.8 (Caracalla); 7.6.4 (Maximinus).

⁷⁵ See Whittaker 1969: 314 n. 1.

6. Severus' eastern expedition

Crucial at this point is Herodian's presentation of Severus' motives: the emperor wanted to gain a reputation for himself not simply because he won a civil war over Roman forces, but also by erecting victory monuments (τρόπαια) against the barbarians (3.9.1). The word *τρόπαια*, especially those that commemorate victories over the barbarians, evoke both Marcus and Pertinax (1.15.7; 2.1.4; 2.9.9),⁷⁶ Severus' avowed paradigms. Here, the motivation which lies behind Severus' expedition against the East, however, is not to imitate Pertinax's or Marcus' examples, but to win reputation for himself, although he uses as a pretext the friendship of the king of Hatra with Niger (3.9.1). We may compare his alleged motivation earlier of fighting against Julianus and Niger, in order to avenge the murder of Pertinax rather than winning personal power (2.9.8; 2.9.10; 2.14.3).

Herodian takes special interest in Severus' siege of Hatra. In the epitomated account of Cassius Dio's *History*, two attacks on Hatra are mentioned, which are placed chronologically later to the capture of Ctesiphon (Cass. Dio 76[75].10-11).⁷⁷ In both of these attacks, Severus' defeat is emphasized. In the account of the first attack, there is also a reference to Severus' killing of Julius Crispus and Laetus (Cass. Dio 76[75].10.2-3; cf. SHA Sev. 15.7), an incident which finds no mention in Herodian's *History*. Herodian also omits the mutiny of the European legions – a clear indication of the soldiers' disobedience to Severus – which finds a place in the narrative of the second attack in Cass. Dio 76[75].12.3.⁷⁸ Crucially, in Herodian there is no reference to the presence of a divine force that is *not* in favour of Severus, and which saves the city (cf. Cass. Dio 76[75].12.4). Severus appears to withdraw his forces out of fear of destruction (3.9.7). According to Herodian, fortune *favours* Severus and offers him comfort after his defeat in Hatra (3.9.8). Herodian, as often, works hard to present a favourable picture of Severus' military conduct.

⁷⁶ See Ward 2011: 154.

⁷⁷ See Whittaker 1969: 317 n. 4, 320-1 n. 2. Hidber 2004: 208 considers that here we have an "instance of economic narration." See also Herodian's omission of the incident of Severus and the boar (Cass. Dio 76[75].9.2).

⁷⁸ See Whittaker 1969: 320 n. 1.

Indeed, Severus' capture of Ctesiphon, which in Herodian's work is placed after the defeat in Hatra, serves the purpose of characterizing this success as a powerful counterweight to Severus' defeat in the siege of Hatra, drawing attention to the good fortune which is said to have accompanied Severus throughout his career and which gave him compensation at that moment too (3.9.8).⁷⁹ Herodian cares to repeat the *unintended* movement of the Romans, the unexpectedness of their attack, and the unprepared state of the Parthians (3.9.9; 3.9.10; 3.9.11). This theme fits well with and reinforces Severus' quality of military swiftness and ability to catch his enemies unprepared;⁸⁰ a theme that Herodian has already stressed in his account of Severus' earlier military exploits (cf. 2.14.6; 3.1.1).

Herodian's narrative of the aftermath of Severus' Eastern expedition endorses his favourable portrait of the emperor. Severus orders that his battles and victories should be publicly staged, while the senate bestows honourable tributes upon him (3.9.12). His own visual narrative of victory at the end comes full circle and confirms his initial motivation for waging the campaign against the East (cf. 3.9.1),⁸¹ echoing at the same time the erection of two huge victory monuments after his success over Albinus in the Battle of Lugdunum.⁸² In Herodian's narrative, as we saw throughout this section, Severus' civil and external wars are knitted together through several parallels to suggest a continuous, positive appraisal of Severus' military career.

⁷⁹ The historicity of Herodian's account in this respect has been rightly doubted. See Roques 1990: 247 n. 82; Müller 1996: 321 ad loc. 'Supernatural sanction' is an important aspect of Severus' propaganda itself: Rubin 1980: 38, 43; Kemezis 2014: 60-61.

⁸⁰ See Ward 2011: 175.

⁸¹ See also Ward 2011: 155, 175-76. In general, Ward 2011: 153 stresses that "Severus ... is by no means the only emperor in Herodian's narrative who is concerned with how he presents himself visually" and cites as parallels Commodus (1.14.9), Caracalla (4.8.1-2), Elagabalus (5.5.6-7), and Maximinus (7.2.8).

⁸² Ward 2011: 178-79.

7. Severus, his sons, and his last years

Herodian does not mention Severus' visits to Palestine and Egypt (cf. Cass. Dio 76[75].13, including an excursus on the river Nile).⁸³ He simply refers to Severus' visit to the armies in Moesia and Pannonia and then his enthusiastic reception in Rome (3.10.1). The latter is described in terms reminiscent of Herodian's earlier account of Severus' return after his defeat of Albinus (3.8.3). Several of Severus' actions described here, including his offer to the people of sacrifices, holidays and public festivals, spectacles and victory games as well as money (3.10.2), find parallels in his earlier stay in Rome after his triumphant completion of the civil wars (cf. esp. 3.8.3-4; 3.8.9-10).

However, the similarities between the two scenes also bring out important differences. Earlier, Severus comes to Rome full of wrath against Albinus' friends, amidst an atmosphere of anxiety and fear. He mercilessly kills many senators and other distinguished men in order to satisfy his avarice, and he strives to appeal to the Roman people through demagogic means (3.8.3-10). In the present case, however, the emphasis shifts from Severus' tyrannical attributes to his attention to the administration of the empire and his attempt to educate (cf. παιδεύων) and teach his sons self-control (cf. σωφρονίζων) (3.10.2; 3.10.4). Both Severus' assiduous dealings with his civil duties as emperor and his education of his sons evoke earlier ideal emperors in Herodian's narrative, particularly Marcus Aurelius (1.2-4) and Pertinax (2.1.4; 2.2.7; 2.4.6-9). Indeed, Severus himself, as Herodian relates, encourages a connection with the Antonines by naming his older son 'Antoninus' (3.10.5). Additionally, Severus' act of providing the daughter of Plautianus, an infamous man (according to Herodian) as wife to his son Caracalla (3.10.5) recalls and contrasts with Marcus' careful choice of his sons-in-law on the basis of their virtuous conduct (1.2.2).

Herodian omits all of the specific details about Plautianus' actions and his relationship with Severus, which are spaced out in the abridged account of Dio's work.⁸⁴ He simply makes a handful of generalizing

⁸³ See Whittaker 1969: 325 n. 4; Müller 1996: 321 ad loc.

⁸⁴ See Cass. Dio 76[75].14.1-7; 76[75].15.1-7; 76[75].16.3-4; 77[76].2.2-3.

comments, perhaps drawn from or inspired by Dio, on Plautianus' severity and violence (3.10.7) and Severus' empowerment of him (3.10.6). Herodian is particularly careful to keep before our eyes a *disturbing theme* that matters to the principate as a whole, namely the irregular promotion of infamous people to positions of high influence.⁸⁵ Similar tendencies are noticed in the reigns of Commodus (1.12.3) and Elagabalus (5.7.6-7).

The following narrative clearly illustrates how Plautianus overreaches his position as praetorian prefect and tries to make an insidious bid for imperial power. It has been compellingly argued that, while the version of Plautianus' conspiracy in Dio's abridged text (77[76].2.5-4.5) is much more negative towards Caracalla, keeping the spotlight on Caracalla's active role in contriving the plot (Cass. Dio 77[76].3.1-3), Herodian chooses to give this role to Plautianus (3.11-12).⁸⁶ This difference might be explained by the fact that Dio's senatorial history is much more critical of Caracalla in general, as well as by the fact that Herodian's *History* shows an intense interest in the figure of the praetorian prefect, above all the challenges and dangers he put to imperial rule.⁸⁷ Comparable examples are Herodian's stories of the plots of Perennis, Cleander, or Laetus against Commodus, which have been shown to present several similarities among themselves and with that of Plautianus.⁸⁸

This connection between Severus and Commodus is set in uniquely sharp focus in Herodian's narrative of the aftermath of Plautianus' plot:⁸⁹ "In future Severus appointed two military prefects, and he himself spent most of his life on the imperial property in the suburbs of Rome and the

⁸⁵ On the same theme in Cassius Dio, see Kemezis 2014: 144-45.

⁸⁶ See Zimmermann 1999: 196; Scott 2018a: 452-53. On a comparative reading of Plautianus' plot in Cassius Dio and Herodian, see also Hohl 1956: 33-46.

⁸⁷ On this theme, see Scott 2018a: *passim* and esp. 450-54 on Plautianus' plot.

⁸⁸ See Scott 2018a: esp. 445-54.

⁸⁹ Herodian cares to abridge his narrative again and keep his focus on the main players by omitting the meeting of the senate, which Severus called after Plautianus' death, where the news about Plautianus' plot is announced to the senate (Cass. Dio 77[76].5.1-2). Herodian also omits the details that are given about the fate of several intimates of Plautianus (Cass. Dio 77[76].5.1-6), as well as the honours bestowed upon Saturninus and Euodus by the senators (Cass. Dio 77[76].6.1). See also Herodian's omission of the affair of Bulla the robber (Cass. Dio 77[76].10).

coast of Campania, there doing his judicial and administrative work" (3.13.1). Commodus too, after his destruction of Perennis and his son, "appointed two praetorian prefects, because he thought it safer not to entrust so much power to one man. He believed that a divided office would diminish anyone's ambitions for supreme power" (1.9.10).⁹⁰ Moreover, after he escapes Maternus' plot, Commodus spends most of his time in the suburbs and the imperial estates far away from the city of Rome (1.11.5). Here too differences are as important as similarities. Herodian is explicit about the fact that Commodus avoids legal and imperial administration (1.11.5). Severus, on the other hand, does not neglect the duties pertaining to imperial rule, and he is also concerned to move his two sons away from the life in Rome and offer them a sense of good living (3.13.1; cf. 3.8.9-10 analysed above).⁹¹

Herodian lavishes especial attention on Caracalla's intolerable state and his desire, after Plautianus' disposal, to cause the death of his wife (3.13.2), whom "Severus exiled together with her brother to Sicily, giving them enough means to live on comfortably" (3.13.3). It is remarkable here that Herodian departs from the more hostile treatment of Severus in Cass. Dio 77[76].6.3, according to which the children of Plautianus were banished to Lipara and, while they lived, they spent their lives in fear and hardship and with lack of the necessities of life.⁹² Herodian, unlike Dio, cares to underline Severus's philanthropy.⁹³ Given this positive appraisal of Severus, it is no wonder that Herodian eschews references to Severus' numerous executions of senators, mentioned in Cass. Dio 77[76].5.3-6; 77[76].7.3-9.4.

Another notable instance of Herodian's deviation from Dio's story, which has the effect of presenting a more favourable picture of the emperor and promoting recurring themes which are central to Herodian's understanding of history, concerns Severus' instructions to his sons about the importance of fraternal love and mutual support. Herodian places this incident after Plautianus' death and before Severus' departure in the

⁹⁰ The link is also noted by Müller 1996: 322 ad loc.

⁹¹ See Zimmermann 1999: 197, who underlines the similarities and differences between Commodus and Severus at 3.13.1.

⁹² Whittaker 1969: 351 n. 2.

⁹³ On this point, see also Zimmermann 1999: 196.

British expedition (3.13.3-5). In Cass. Dio 77[76].15.2 a similar piece of advice given by Severus is mentioned, albeit in less elaborated terms, before his death: “Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men.”⁹⁴ Herodian’s version of Severus’ teaching evokes Marcus’ dying words in the first book of the *History* (1.3-4), which highlights a crucial aspect of the way in which Severus appears to abide here by the ideal model set by Marcus at the beginning of the work.⁹⁵ Moreover, both Marcus’ and Severus’ speeches recall intertextually Cyrus’ dying speech in the *Cyropaedia* (8.7) and that of Micipsa in Sallust’s *Bellum Jugurthinum* (10).⁹⁶ Herodian thus draws on an extensive intertextual tradition in order to enrich Severus’ scene and elevate his ideas and instructions. By the same token, this intertextual dialogue serves as a forewarning of his death, which follows during the British campaign, and the continuation of the conflict between his two sons.

Most significantly, Herodian’s decision to place Severus’ words before this campaign, rather than in his narrative of Severus’ death might be explained by the fact that Herodian, unlike Cassius Dio (and the *Historia Augusta*), goes to some lengths to stress Severus’ role as an ‘educator’ of his two sons (3.10.2-5; 3.13.1-6; 3.14.2).⁹⁷ Indeed, the complexities of teaching and learning in the post-Marcus world is a recurrent theme in

⁹⁴ Potter 2008: 206 notes that these words may sum up Severus’ most significant problem during his reign, which “is that he seems never to have felt at home with the governing class of the empire, and that his discomfort translated into behavior that undermined the subtle balance of power between different interest groups that had been the basis of Antonine government.”

⁹⁵ Zimmermann 1999: 199-200 stresses the inferiority of Severus to Marcus in terms of ‘teaching principles’.

⁹⁶ See Whittaker 1969: 16 n. 2; Sidebottom 1998: 2806; Hidber 2006: 195-201; Galimberti 2014: 55. Cf. SHA Sev. 21.10: “Severus, when laid low by sickness, sent to his elder son that divine speech in Sallust in which Micipsa urges his sons to the ways of peace.”

⁹⁷ On this point, see Zimmermann 1999: 195, 197, 199. In Cass. Dio 77[76].7.1, Plautianus is a kind of a ‘pedagogue’ (cf. οἶον παιδαγωγῶν τινός) of Geta and Caracalla. After his death, the two brothers went to great lengths in their outrageous aptitude (cf. Cass. Dio 77[76].7.2-3). See also Zimmermann 1999: 199 n. 243 who mentions, in addition, Herodian’s omission of Euodus, the τροφεύς of Caracalla (77[76].3.2), which in turn lays special emphasis on Severus’ role as ‘instructor’.

Herodian's *History*.⁹⁸ Herodian's reference to Severus' instruction before the British campaign adds to his role as 'pedagogue' of his two sons. It also features in his attempt to reconcile them and put an end to their squabbling. Crucially, Herodian relates that an important reason for Severus' British expedition itself was, besides his love for glory (cf. 3.9.1 on his Eastern expedition),⁹⁹ his anxiety "to get his sons out of Rome in order that they could return to their senses, leading a sober military life away from the luxurious delicacies of Rome" (3.14.2).¹⁰⁰

After Severus' departure for the expedition, Herodian (as often) calls attention to his excellent military aptitude (3.14.3). We may remember the corresponding reflection at 2.11.2, after his departure from Pannonia to move against Julianus and Niger, or at 3.6.10, during his war against Albinus. This is another way in which civil and external wars are linked together in Herodian's narrative to suggest repeated patterns of imperial behaviour. Here the reference to Severus' old age and bad health (3.14.2) are especially designed to elevate his military qualities (3.14.2-3). Despite his weakness, Severus continues to show the same power and firmness on the field that he did during the civil wars. Moreover, Herodian omits specific details about Severus' march against Britain (cf. Cass. Dio 77[76].13.1-2: invasion of Caledonia, the hardships which Severus faces, and the positioning of the enemy). He simply repeats the usual success of Severus on the field, namely to catch his enemies unprepared and attack them unexpectedly (3.14.4; cf. 2.14.6; 3.1.1; 3.9.11). This is another theme that connects Severus' current campaign with the earlier ones, continuing the praise of the emperor's leadership qualities, particularly his energy and swiftness.

⁹⁸ On the importance of *paideia* for Herodian, see e.g. Sidebottom 1998: 2776, 2779, 2805-12; Zimmermann 1999: 29-31, 36, 37, 45, 62, 233-37.

⁹⁹ Later we read that Severus rejects the offer for peace because (as Herodian says) he wanted to delay his return to Rome and also wanted to "win a British victory and title" (3.14.5). Different is Cass. Dio 77[76].13.4: Severus "forced the Britons to come to terms, on the condition that they should abandon a large part of their territory."

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Cass. Dio 77[76].11.1: "Severus, seeing that his sons were changing their mode of life and that the legions were becoming enervated by idleness, made a campaign against Britain." See also Cass. Dio 77[76].13.1: "Severus, accordingly, desiring to subjugate the whole of it [i.e. Britain], invaded Caledonia."

Of special interest is Severus' act of giving his son Geta "a council of senior friends" to accompany him in his exercise of legal and political business (3.14.9). This is a clear remembrance of Marcus Aurelius, who entrusts his relatives and *amici* with the task of advising his son Commodus (1.4.1-6). It is also a theme that remains central to Herodian's narrative,¹⁰¹ where it is shown that an ideal imperial court is one where "the emperor worked in concert with his *amici*."¹⁰²

The association between Severus and Marcus Aurelius is also visible in Severus' death-scene. Herodian's description of Severus' situation is strongly reminiscent, both thematically and verbally, of Marcus Aurelius' circumstances towards the end of his life.¹⁰³ Like Marcus, Severus is an old man who is attacked by an illness and dies while executing his imperial tasks (3.15.1). Caracalla's portrait, in turn, is evocative of that of Commodus in the first book of the *History*, thus suggesting a parallel pair of fathers and sons.¹⁰⁴ Caracalla does not show interest in continuing the war against the barbarians.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Commodus abandons the war of Marcus against the barbarians and wishes to return home (1.6.3).¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Caracalla's attempt to win over the benevolence of the soldiers (cf. 3.15.5; 4.5.1) recalls Commodus' similar act upon his accession to the throne (1.5.1; 1.5.8).

Nor does Herodian mention Severus' preparation to fight against the revolt of the Caledonians and the Maeatae, related in Cass. Dio 77[76].15.1-2. Rather, he notes that Severus died 'in grief' (λύπη) (3.15.2),

¹⁰¹ See e.g. 3.15.6 on Geta and Caracalla; or 6.1.2 on Severus Alexander. On this theme, see Crook 1955: 76-91.

¹⁰² Scott 2018a: 456.

¹⁰³ 3.15.1 (Severus): τὸν δὲ Σεβήρον γηραιὸν ὄντα ἤδη νόσος ἐπιμηκεστέρα καταλαμβάνει ~ 1.3.1 (Marcus): γηραιὸν ὄντα Μάρκον, καὶ μὴ μόνον ὑφ' ἡλικίας, ἀλλὰ καμάτοις τε καὶ φροντίσι τετραχωμένον διατρίβοντά τε ἐν Παίοσι, νόσος χαλεπὴ καταλαμβάνει.

¹⁰⁴ See also Hekster 2017: 114. In the SHA Sev. 21.5 there is an explicit association between Severus and Marcus in that regard: "What could have been more fortunate for Marcus than not to have left Commodus as his heir? What more fortunate for Septimius Severus than not to have even begotten Bassianus?" See SHA Sev. 20-21 more generally.

¹⁰⁵ Müller 1996: 322 ad loc.

¹⁰⁶ See Whittaker 1969: 363 n. 2.

presumably because of Caracalla's impropriety and the antagonism between his two sons.¹⁰⁷ This is another element that provides comparison with Marcus Aurelius, who at the end of his life is disturbed (according to Herodian) and feels fear and sorrow (cf. δεδιώς ... ἐτάραττε ... ἐλύπει ... ἔδεδίει) about the future of his son (1.3.1-5).¹⁰⁸

Most importantly, Caracalla's attempt to kill his father evokes a tradition about Commodus' patricide that is mentioned in the epitomized version of Dio's history (Cass. Dio 72[71].33.4²; 77[76].14.7), but not in Herodian.¹⁰⁹ In particular, there is a strong analogy between Caracalla's attempt to persuade his doctors and attendants to kill his father (3.15.2) and the detail we find about Commodus in Cass. Dio 72[71].33.4², namely that "Marcus passed away...not as a result of the disease from which he still suffered, but by the act of his physicians...who wished to do Commodus a favour." In Cass. Dio 77[76].14, there is mention of two attempts by Caracalla to kill his father, but neither is made through doctors and attendants.¹¹⁰ It is not implausible that Herodian transfers the detail about Commodus' patricide in Cassius Dio to his account of Caracalla in his history. The connection between the two incidents, after all, is present in Cass. Dio 77[76].14.7. Scholars have noted acutely that Herodian's decision to include Caracalla's patricide in his account of Severus' death, while omitting Commodus' similar attempt, allows Severus to appear

¹⁰⁷ Hidber 2006: 164.

¹⁰⁸ Müller 1996: 323 ad loc; Hidber 2006: 262 n. 312. Another link between Severus and Marcus might be found in the aftermath of their death. Herodian offers some details about Severus' sons carrying to Rome in an alabaster urn the ashes of Severus' body, which are taken to the sacred imperial mausoleum (3.15.7; 4.1.3-4) and Severus' funeral and *apotheōsis* (4.2). Cf. SHA *Sev.* 19.4; 24.2. A reference to Marcus' *apotheōsis* occurs in Commodus' speech to the soldiers as well (1.5.6). Moreover, Herodian does not mention the funeral-ceremonies and the honours bestowed upon Pertinax by Severus (Cass. Dio 75[74].4-5), but see 4.2 on the long excursus on the *apotheōsis* of Severus. Whittaker 1969, 375 n. 3 asks whether Herodian was "deliberately writing a parallel" to that of Dio about Pertinax. Might this be another indication of Herodian's implicit parallelism between Severus and Pertinax?

¹⁰⁹ On this point, see Zimmermann 1999: 201; Hidber 2006: 270-71; Hekster 2017: 114.

¹¹⁰ Whittaker 1969: 363 n. 3. For a comparison between the death scenes of Marcus and Severus in Herodian, see Hekster 2017: 112-15. Cf. Müller 1996: 322-23 ad loc.

more ambiguous in the end than Marcus in his virtue and leadership, particularly in his role as parent-educator.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the soldierly εὐνοία towards Geta and Caracalla, which Herodian mentions next, adds to Severus' posthumous reputation. The soldiers, we are told, did not yield to Caracalla's request to acknowledge him as sole emperor, because "they remembered Severus and the fact that they had reared (cf. παραθρέψειαν) the children as equals from childhood" (3.15.5; cf. Cass. Dio 78[77].1.3). A similar line of argument used by Commodus in his speech to the soldiers on the northern front might be evoked in comparison. There Commodus asks for the goodwill (εὐνοίαν) of the soldiers and stresses the fact that Marcus, when Commodus was a small boy, used to bring him to the soldiers and entrust him to their care. Thus, Commodus claims, the elder soldiers owe him their allegiance as τροφεία, namely as a kind of return gift for rearing and bringing him up (1.5.4). Commodus, unlike Caracalla, manages to win over the support of the soldiers. Marcus' memory (μνήμη), which Commodus directly evokes (1.5.7), plays a central role to his success, just as Severus' memory contributes, even temporarily, to the state of peace and concord between Geta and Caracalla (3.15.6); precisely to what Severus constantly strived for while he was alive.

Conclusion

This article has corroborated the view of recent scholarship as regards Herodian's complex characterization of Septimius Severus.¹¹² It has shown throughout that Herodian's Severus is composed of light and shade, and that his portrait is progressively shaped with great richness and complexity. Severus is depicted as a successful (military) leader *par*

¹¹¹ See Zimmermann 1999: 37, 201, who also accepts the possibility of Herodian's transferring Dio's details about Commodus' patricide to that of Caracalla. See also Hekster 2017: 114, who considers in general that Severus turns out to be a negative mirror-image of Marcus.

¹¹² Pitcher 2018a: 243; Ward 2011: 69, 147-48, 156; Hekster 2017: 111-27.

excellence, who demonstrates strength, swiftness, and dynamism, and inspires his men with prowess through his words and actions.¹¹³ He stands out as a capable commander who gets his way by cleverness and foresight. None of this is to say, however, that Herodian's narrative of Severus is pure encomium.¹¹⁴ Several flaws of Severus' character and reign are exposed and criticized, such as his cruelty and violence, his obsession with money and ambition.¹¹⁵ Cassius Dio's *History*, which stimulates a sceptical approach towards similar misdemeanours of the emperor, may have reasonably been Herodian's source here.¹¹⁶ However, it is my contention in this study that, despite these reservations, Herodian's narrative is designed to show Severus in a better light than that of Cassius Dio.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ See also Pitcher 2018a: 246: "Septimius' career is a triumph of rhetoric, as well as of determined action. Herodian's depiction of him leaves little doubt of this."

¹¹⁴ Cf. Herodian's avowed statements about his adherence to objective and unbiased historiography (1.1.1-2; 2.15.7; 3.7.3; 3.7.6). Hidber 2004: 202 mentions that Herodian might be especially thinking of Cassius Dio, who, apart from the *Roman History*, wrote panegyric works about Septimius Severus. See also Sidebottom 1998: 2781. On Herodian's criticism of other historians, see also Hidber 2006, 82-92. Photius, the ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, appreciated Herodian's historiographical approach for its clarity, moderation, and impartiality (*Bibl.* 99).

¹¹⁵ See Meulder 2002: 86-87 on the connection of Herodian's Severus with the Platonic tyrant.

¹¹⁶ See e.g. on Severus' cruelty and violence, Cass. Dio 75[74].2.2; 75[74].8.3; 75[74].9.4; 75[74].9.5-6; 76[75].7.3-8.4; 76[75].10.2-3; 77[76].7.3-9.4; his obsession with money, see Cass. Dio 75[74].2.3; 75[74].8.4-5; his concern for personal glory, see Cass. Dio 75[74].1.1. On this point, see Bering-Staschewski 1981: 71-72. On the close connections between Herodian's and Dio's portraits of Severus, cf. Zimmermann 1999: 186-88; Meulder 2002: 92. Later sources include criticism of the same points. See e.g. on Severus' cruelty: SHA *Sev.* 6.6-7; 8.1-5; 9.4-9; 10.8; 11.5-9; 12-14; 15.4-7; 17.7; 18.7 ("He wrote a trustworthy account of his own life, both before and after he became emperor, in which the only charge that he tried to explain away was that of cruelty"); 18.8; 21.10; SHA *Albinus* 12.1-14. Cf. Aur. Vic. *Caes.* 20.10; Eutr. 18. On his love for glory and money, see SHA *Sev.* 15.1-2; Eutr. 18.

¹¹⁷ On Dio's portrait of Septimius Severus, Scott 2018b: 6 aptly notes: "In response to this decline in status, Dio's view of the principate from Commodus through Severus Alexander is generally negative, apart from the example set by Pertinax. Each emperor of this period, even those who at times receive Dio's praise, was inherently flawed. These flaws range from the ignorance and cowardice of Commodus, to the violence and cruelty of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, to the outrageousness of Elagabalus." See also Scott

Indeed, a close comparison of Herodian's treatment of Severus with that offered by the (epitomated) account of Cassius Dio has shown that Herodian goes to some trouble to rework his source-material, in order to favour a more positive reading of Severus. In particular, we noted many instances of omissions, displacements, and modifications of specific contexts, which cumulatively offer insights into Herodian's method of streamlining his account and selecting that which best suits his themes and interests.¹¹⁸

In this article I repeatedly stressed Herodian's tendency to develop substantial structural, thematic, and verbal *intratextual* associations and comparisons between specific historical agents and events, which are designed to draw the reader to perceive his history of Septimius Severus in a dovetailed and comparative manner.¹¹⁹ More precisely, I suggested that

2018b: 6 n. 34: "Dio's presentation of Septimius Severus and Macrinus is decidedly mixed, but neither approaches the praise lavished upon Marcus Aurelius, or to a lesser extent on Pertinax." Cf. Kemezis 2014: 146: "Even if Dio's harshest castigation is confined to the officially disgraced Elagabalus and the embarrassing Caracalla, still Septimius Severus is made insufficiently heroic and Macrinus insufficiently villainous." On Dio's complex portraiture of Severus, see also Ward 2011: 24-25, 69. Cf. Rantala 2016: 160-63, who approaches "Dio's text as a statement from the senatorial point of view, or even as a form of senatorial resistance against Severus and his policy" (161). Rantala 2016: 175 concludes in a critical manner: "Dio's comments about Severus' policy were not pure coincidental, but should be seen as a conscious attempt to demonstrate the unpleasant nature of the Severan reign...Severus possessed, in Dio's eyes, all the features of a tyrant." Further bibliography on Dio's 'mixed' characterization of Severus is cited in Scott 2018b: 13 n. 71. On Dio's criticism of the Severans, see also Madsen 2016: 154-58. On Severus in the SHA, see Ward 2011: 191-92: "While the theme of good and bad emperors is one that looms large in the HA, Severus, who possesses both virtues and vices, hangs somewhere in between the *boni* and the *mali*."

¹¹⁸ On Herodian's narrative method, see further bibliography cited above, n. 4.

¹¹⁹ More generally, on Herodian's penchant for formulaic scenes, patterning, and repetition, see also Fuchs 1895: 222-52; Fuchs 1896: 180-234; Sidebottom 1998: 2815-17; Zimmermann 1999: 7, 64, 144, 151, 171, 255, 259-61; Scott 2018a: 434-59; Alföldy 1973: 352: "Jedes in sich geschlossene historische Einzelbild in Herodians Werk birgt in sich Motive, durch die das nächste Bild verständlich wird: Dadurch ist die Kontinuität des aus einzelnen Erzählungen bestehenden historischen Romans gesichert." Cf. De Blois 1998: 3416: "He made use of contrasting schemes." See also Pitcher 2018a: 242 on Herodian's Maximinus ("Herodian's narrator establishes a web of correspondences which

Severus' gradual descent into tyranny is marked by Herodian's construction of similar scenes that develop in opposing ways and thus force the reader to contemplate all the more profoundly the emperor's deceptive behaviour. Remember, for example, how Herodian's account of Severus' entry into Rome and his subsequent appearance in the senate after his victory over Albinus (3.8.3-10) encourages the reader to reflect back to the preceding narrative of his earlier *adventus* in 193 C.E. (2.14.1-7). Along the same lines, I showed that in his account of Severus' accession Herodian constantly invites his readers to compare and contrast Severus with his contenders, Julianus, Niger, and later Albinus, thus offering them an enhanced understanding of Severus' superiority and predominance. Within this interpretative analysis, Herodian cares to associate, through several intratextual linkages, Severus' three main opponents in order to allow a less ideal pattern of imperial behaviour to emerge, which in turn brings into sharp relief Severus' excellent military principles in contrast.¹²⁰ Closely relevant to this is the elaborate way in which Herodian's narrative of Severus' trap of the Praetorians in Rome is linked thematically and verbally with Severus' pre-battle speech in Pannonia in order to emphasize a number of commendable characteristics of Severus. Also notable is the artful way in which Severus' civil and external wars are knitted together to suggest a continuous, positive appraisal of his military qualities (such as his energy, swiftness, and shrewdness) and achievements. This culminates in Herodian's concluding verdict on the emperor, whom he praises for his incomparable military distinction in both civil and foreign wars (3.15.3).

Crucially, this image of Severus appears *only* in Herodian's *History*. There is no such consistent focus on Severus' active demeanour and successful leadership on the field, particularly as opposed to his opponents,

anchors the interpretation of his reign firmly within that of the larger text that surrounds it"), 248 on Herodian's Severus ("And, as with Maximinus, one needs to pay attention to the web of allusions that link and contrast him with many other characters, both within and (in the case of Odysseus) without the text of the history to make full sense of what Herodian is doing with him as a character"), and 249 on Herodian's tendency "to compare, contrast, and categorize emperors or would-be emperors of Rome against each other."

¹²⁰ On this contrast, see also Fuchs 1895: 227-28, 248; Sidebottom 1998: 2851; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 286-87; Hidber 2006: 208.

either in the abridged version of Dio's *History* or the *Vita Septimii Severi*, or even Aurelius Victor's biography of the emperor (*Caes.* 20).¹²¹ Rather, in Dio's account of Severus' battle against Albinus near Lugdunum, it is plainly stressed that this was the first battle at which Severus was present (76[75].6.1).¹²² This view causes special wonder, especially if we take into account that Cassius Dio wrote a laudatory work on Severus, which he incorporated into the *History*.¹²³ Moreover, it is only Herodian who emphasizes the similar disposition of cowardice and idleness of Julianus, Niger, and Albinus, and links the three men into a triangle for cross-comparison and reflection.¹²⁴ Likewise, it is only in Herodian's *History* that we read about Severus' role as educator of his two sons.¹²⁵ The same is true of Severus' guile to which no similar weight is accorded in the other main literary accounts of his reign. Herodian's narrative method and portrait

¹²¹ In Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 20.14 there is only a praiseworthy comment on Severus' superiority to everyone in battle, but (as expected) there is no elaborate development of the theme. See also [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 20.5; Eutr. 18-19. With reference to Cassius Dio's narrative, Ward 2011: 79 aptly notes: "In fact, as a military commander, Septimius Severus leaves much to be desired...: he suffers defeats, most often relies on the superior skills of his officers, and only rarely secures a victory himself." Cf. Bering-Staschewski 1981: 69-72. However, Ward 2011: 170 concludes that Herodian's Severus is more like that of Dio.

¹²² Cf. Cass. Dio 75[74].6.4-5; 75[74].7.1; 77[76].10.6. Strikingly, in *SHA Sev.* 5.6 it is mentioned that Severus was *terrified*, when he heard that legates were sent by the senate to order his soldiers to desert him.

¹²³ Whittaker 1969: 246-47 n. 2; Rubin 1980: 52-53; Sidebottom 1998: 2781; Scott 2018b: 10 with n. 61.

¹²⁴ On the depiction of Niger and Albinus in their corresponding biographies in the *SHA*, see Ward 2011: 208-21. On Niger, Ward 2011: 211 aptly notes: "It is Pescennius' military endeavors and leadership that receive the most detailed attention in the narrative of his life. While it is often the case that the narrator simply mentions Pescennius' positive qualities as a general (*PN* 3.6; 6.10), there are also a few, longer anecdotes that put this on full display (*PN* 7.7-9; 10.1-9; 11.1-4). The quality that is perhaps most noticeable within this wider theme is his strictness as a leader." On Albinus, see Ward 2011: 220: "Still, in the few places where the narrator voices an opinion and/or relates an anecdote that illustrates Albinus' character, it can be said that Albinus is portrayed in a rather negative light, especially regarding his cruelty (*CLA* 11.6; 13.1)."

¹²⁵ A plausible exception is Cass. Dio 78[77].13.2: "Severus, to be sure, had trained him (i.e. Caracalla) in absolutely all the pursuits that tended to excellence, whether of body or of mind, so that even after he became emperor he went to teachers and studied philosophy most of the day."

of the emperor, therefore, are his own innovation, and they should be tailored, I suggest, to his unique literary programme and historical methodology.

First of all, Herodian's emphasis on Severus' credentials as a competent general might be justified by appealing to the specific theme of his work, which concerns the explication of what Herodian perceived as the unparalleled series of imperial successions and the drastic transfers of power in the post-Marcus world (1.1.4-6). Severus' military achievements are marshalled to make a crucial point about his successful possession of the empire and the dreadful failure of his opponents. In line with this, Herodian has another arrow in his quiver, namely that his narrative of Severus' military success allows, through presentational repetition and variation (*poikilia*),¹²⁶ a network of behavioural patterns to emerge, which are amenable to his more general analysis of imperial history.

Herodian, as has been shown, is concerned to suggest how many of the key characteristics and situations of Severus go back to Marcus Aurelius, Pertinax, or even Commodus, and look ahead to other emperors, such as his son Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Maximinus who continue to show, and often bring to a climax, tyrannical traits that have been associated with Severus. It has also been proposed that Julianus establishes a pattern of cowardly behaviour which concerns both Niger and Albinus, and which is applicable to future emperors as well, such as Macrinus, Severus Alexander, and Gordian I. Often, as has been noticed, the drive to compare emperors against each other is part of the emperor's propagandistic self-representation as well,¹²⁷ which makes the reader reflect upon the gaps between rhetoric and action, the ideal and the real.¹²⁸ In the

¹²⁶ This accords with Herodian's programmatic statement in the prologue to his work about the *poikilia* of the content of his history: "In a period of sixty years the Roman Empire was shared by more rulers than the years warranted, so producing many different phenomena which are worthy of wonder (cf. πολλά καὶ ποικίλα ἤνεγκε καὶ θαύματος ἄξια)" (1.1.5). On the use of the term *poikilia* in historical works and works of literary criticism to denote both thematic and stylistic variety which can be useful and pleasing to the audience, see Hidber 2006: 114-16; Nünlist 2009: 31, 139, 198-202.

¹²⁷ See Pitcher 2018a: 249 on *sunkrisis* being part of the emperors' self-depiction.

¹²⁸ The complex relationship between Severus' words and actions in Herodian's *History* is also stressed by Pitcher 2018a: 246.

course of our discussion, we have repeatedly stressed how Herodian's image of Severus reinterprets and often undermines Severus' own propaganda, especially as it concerns his projected connection with Marcus Aurelius' family and Pertinax.

On the whole, the associations drawn between different emperors in Herodian's *History* have the effect of infusing Herodian's characterization with some degree of 'typification'; in other words, his characters appear to have some typical and common, rather than idiosyncratic and distinctive, traits.¹²⁹ This aspect also serves to alert the readers to some predictable sets of behaviour and course of events, which are forthcoming in the narrative, thus enhancing the readers' engagement with history, by generating expectations in them about how characters will behave, act and impact the plot.¹³⁰ The recognition of the "horizons of expectation"¹³¹ involved in Herodian's gradual installation of behavioural patterns throws considerable light on how he creates a reading dynamic that promotes suspense and makes history comprehensible and attractive through narrative cohesiveness and progression.¹³² It also warns against the view that Herodian composed his work hastily, carelessly, or even incomprehensively.¹³³ Rather, it suggests that Herodian's *History* more generally, as well as his image of Severus more specifically, involved deliberate and careful planning.

Our discussion has clearly demonstrated that Herodian's portrait of Severus provides a sense of continuation and repetition among separate reigns, which draw the reader's attention to recurring themes and explanatory strands. More specifically, Herodian uses Severus to establish thematic oppositions between activity and cowardice, and between tyrannical and enlightened behaviour, which will recur and constitute a

¹²⁹ On Herodian's 'typical' characters, cf. De Blois 1998: 3419; Hidber 2006: 184.

¹³⁰ On this aspect of Herodian's technique, cf. Ward 2011: 114-44, 148, 182-84, 236-37 who focuses especially on scenes of 'internal viewing' in the *History*.

¹³¹ For this term, see Jauss 1982.

¹³² In the prologue to his work, Herodian has drawn attention to the pleasurable knowledge of his *History* (1.1.3). That a cohesive narrative design enhances intelligibility and pleasure in reading is a point well stressed by ancient critics as well. See e.g. Arist. *Poet.* 23, 1459a17-1459a29; Diod. Sic. 20.1.5; Polyb. 1.4.11; Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 3.13-14; *Thuc.* 9; Lucian *Hist. conscr.* 55.

¹³³ See e.g. Whittaker 1969: x; Millar 1969: 14.

unifying factor for his work as a whole. Several of the leading themes of Herodian's narrative of Severus' reign (such as aristocracy, the *eunoia* of the subordinates, education, victories in external wars), as we saw, go back to Marcus Aurelius himself and have a wider application to the empire as a whole. On this understanding, I suggest that Herodian's portrait of Severus has been shaped by his universalizing view of imperial history. It is unique both in terms of the function it fulfils within this section of Herodian's *History* and as part of his overall narrative method of providing a cohesive, unified, and intelligible re-configuration of the fragmented and chaotic post-Marcus world.¹³⁴

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¹³⁴ I would like to thank the anonymous reader of the journal for the extremely useful comments. I am also grateful to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for funding my research. The article is a result of my DFG project "Soziales Bewusstsein (social minds) im antiken griechischen Roman und in der antiken griechischen Historiographie der Kaiserzeit."

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