



The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus

Cassius Dio , Ian Scott-Kilvert (Translator) , John Carter (Introduction)

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Augustus Caesar, the first emperor of Rome (27 BC-AD 14), brought peace and prosperity to his city after decades of savage civil war. This selection from Cassius Dio's Roman History gives the fullest description of that long struggle and ultimate triumph - detailing the brutal battles and political feuds that led to the collapse of Rome's 400-year-old republic, and Augustus' subsequent reign as emperor. Included are accounts of military campaigns from Ethiopia to Yugoslavia, and of long conflict with Antony and Cleopatra. With skill and artistry, Dio brings to life many speeches from the era - among them Augustus' damning indictment of Antony's passion for the Egyptian queen - and provides a fascinating account of the debate between the great general Agrippa and Maecenas on the virtues of republicanism and monarchy.

The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus Details

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Joe says

An example of the merging of Roman and Greek historical writing styles. With the political and social deductions akin to Polybius, and the oratory skill of Livy, Dio is able to create a biography of Augustus, as well as a moral blueprint for future emperors (shame on you, Commodus).

I especially liked book 52, where Augustus hears arguments from Agrippa and Maecenas on whether to accept the title of King. Likewise the ending speech from Tiberius, delivered at the funeral of Augustus, encapsulates his accomplishments.

Andrada says

Given I read several accounts of the Civil Wars and they all tended to end at the same point, namely the death of Anthony and the ascendency of Augustus as sole ruler, I realized I didn't know much about what actually followed except that Augustus had ruled for a long time and was considered the first and most accomplished of the emperors. Because of this, I decided to fill in the blanks so to speak and read Cassius Dio's account of his reign.

While Augustus was not a brilliant military leader (there were several successful generals during his rule, but he rarely achieved any military success himself), he was definitely a great reformer and a moderate character. Those being the precise reasons I think that he is not a historical character quite as notorious as Caesar and Anthony and his exploits beyond the end of the civil wars are not as well known. He was however just what the Roman people needed after all the internal strife of the civil wars. The emperors seem to have a history of poor choices in choosing successors, although in Augustus' defense all his first choices perished prematurely and shortly before his death he may have been considering reinstating the last son of Agrippa as a possible successor.

The Reign of Augustus is a rather dry read, but if you're interested in the events of those years, it's a good account of them although there are places where Dio only touches upon certain subjects without elaborating them and it makes you want to find out more about them from other sources.

Heather Domin says

This was a re-read of the Augustan section of Dio's Rome for research purposes. I still enjoy his way with words.

Josh says

Although Dio's style is influenced by Thucydides more than I'd like, I appreciate this work nonetheless. Covers, for me, one of the most interesting people and periods of Rome. In particular Augustus' reforms and attitudes towards the senate are especially interesting. Requiring senators to actually attend meetings on set days and giving more transparency to the senate's undertakings are surely positive moves, but increasing the property requirements for entry to the senate from 400,000 sesterces to 1,000,000 a negative.

Jesse says

Cassius Dio was not an excellent writer, but the information gathered together here, along with the rhetorical exercises, creates a curious and satisfactorily linear impression. One suspects Augustus' reign to have been extremely bloody, but the disingenuous Cassius Dio merely quips, "he killed a number of people at this time," and has his wife, Livia, chastising him for being so brutal and paranoid. This history gives one that depressed feeling of something going horribly wrong, and indeed, it is evident that this was so from the facts, though Cassius Dio is somewhat reluctant to comment: public offices, for the first time in Roman history, were difficult or impossible to fill, and those senators in office rarely showed up to work, to the point where Augustus had to pass a law stating that no matter the number of senators motions should be passed in the interest of expediency. Beyond its historic interest, this book examines the problems of democracy and monarchy in the guise of two exquisite set pieces of oratory, while the events themselves superbly illustrate how thin the line is between the two.

Susanne Knudsen says

For at forstå Augustus' regeringstid er dette nok en af de bedste bøger til formålet. Dio giver en samlet fortælling, også hvis man læser bøgerne før denne, og da han er den antikke kilde, som fortæller mest om Augustus er han bestemt værd at læse

Dan says

Dio is to some extent the victim of circumstances beyond his control. He avowedly imitates Thucydides in his literary and historiographic style. And the surviving portion of his work focuses on roughly the same period covered by Tacitus. As a result, Dio inevitably finds himself compared to the two greatest historians in antiquity.

Viewed objectively, Dio's work provides us with a reliable account of a critical moment in European history. The fictionalized debates between Maecenas and Agrippa and between Augustus and Livia give illuminating dramatizations of the ideological considerations behind Augustus's domestic policies -- policies that would remain in place for two centuries. His description of Actium and the fall of Antony and Cleopatra give some insight into the personal and political issues underlying events that time and Augustan revisionism have largely hidden. He also provides us with our most detailed account of the Varian disaster.

Dio is writing during the reign of Caracalla. He thus provides the last full-scale historical expression of classical culture before the disasters of the third century laid the groundwork for Ammianus on the one hand, for Eusebius on the other.

Tara Calaby says

Dio is fantastic. I first read this for uni, but I've re-read it for fun.

Bruce says

This work is part of a longer history written by Cassius Dio (sometimes referred to as Dio Cassius) early in the 3rd century CE, only part of which remains extant. This present volume presents the years 32 BCE to 14 CE and focuses on the character and reign of Augustus. The author is largely an annalist, presenting events year by year during Augustus' reign. The work also contains many long "constructed" speeches that, while certainly not verbatim accounts of what was said, nonetheless provide a good summary of the pertinent topics and times and also offer Cassius Dio an opportunity to convey his own ideas, understandings, and philosophical-politic biases. Much of the text is rather dry linear historical narrative, but one does gain insight into how Augustus ruled, preserving some of the forms and fictions of the Republic. It is also interesting to understand the roles of many of the personages who were contemporaries of Augustus - Agrippa, Drusus, and Tiberius, to name only a very few. The author liberally sprinkles portents and prodigies throughout the narrative, and I wonder to what extent these were still believed at the time.

The work is of interest as a piece of historical writing, providing a glimpse into the events of Augustus' life and times. It is also interesting to see the kind of source materials that our "knowledge," such as it is, is based on. Combined with the works of Tacitus, Polybius, Livy and others, we have an impressive body of literature that gives us an understanding of both the Roman republic and the principate, each author giving his own perspective. Comparing these writings with each other is fascinating. Cassius Dio's contribution is a valuable addition to all these sources even if it is more interesting than entertaining.

Tony Blackmore says

The first chapter focusing on Octavian's disputes with Mark Antony and detailing the Battle of Actium and its aftermath was a rip roaring great read. According to Dio, the outcome was not a foregone conclusion and could of gone the other way. Dio shudders at the thought of Cleopatra ruling from Rome, but how would today's world look if that had come to pass? That chapter alone made it worthwhile.
