



# Sir Richard Morison: An Early Reader of Cassius Dio in Tudor England?

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## Abstract

Scholars have suggested that Cassius Dio's *Roman History* was among the Greek sources used by the 16th century polemicist Sir Richard Morison in two of his treatises from the 1530s. This short article shows that this is not the case. Rather, Morison can be seen to be borrowing from Seneca's *De Clementia* and Politian's Latin translation of Herodian's *History of the Empire after Marcus Aurelius*. This conclusion may cast some further light on the provenance of the booklist contained in British Library Add. MS 40,676 (ff. 110<sup>r</sup>-116<sup>r</sup>), and its attribution to Morison.

The reputation of the propagandist and diplomat Sir Richard Morison (1513–1556) as a classical scholar has solidified in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Particular attention has been paid to Morison's engagement with Greek authors of the classical and imperial periods.<sup>2</sup> Morison was not only a keen collector of Greek books,<sup>3</sup> but, as noted by one recent commentator, his 'reliance on Greek histories, which were not as widely printed or read as Latin ones, marks him out as unusual'.<sup>4</sup> Of the authors that have been named among Morison's Greek sources used in his early political writings is the third-century historian Cassius Dio.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. D. S. Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship and Public Order: Two Tracts against the Pilgrimage of Grace by Sir Richard Morison*, Washington DC, 1984, pp. 61–80, 258–73; J. Woolfson, 'Morison, Sir Richard', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2015; T. Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform in Tudor England: The Careers of Sir Richard Morison, c. 1513–1556*, Oxford, 2010, pp. 14–40.

<sup>3</sup> Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), pp. 62–3; cf. Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), pp. 246–7.

<sup>4</sup> Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), p. 64; Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), p. 33.

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Dio was not a well-known or well-studied author in England during the middle decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the publication of the *editio princeps* of Dio's *Roman History* in 1548, and that of his chief epitomator, Xiphilinus, in 1551 (which furnished the remnants of Dio's narrative from Claudius to Severus Alexander), knowledge of his work in England was seemingly confined to the partial Italian translation of Niccolò Leonicensino (first printed in 1533), which covered the period from Pompey to Claudius, and the selections of Xiphilinus's *Epitome* which covered the 'lives' of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian translated into Latin by Giorgio Merula (first printed between 1490 and 1493).<sup>7</sup> Yet mid-sixteenth-century readers of Dio's *Roman History* and the Dionian tradition in England have been detected with varying degrees of conviction. Morison's contemporary, Sir Thomas Smith (1513–1577), certainly owned and annotated Merula's translation of Xiphilinus's *Epitome*.<sup>8</sup> A little later in the century, perhaps around 1580, Smith's younger friend, Gabriel Harvey (1552/3–1631), seems to have been familiar with Dio's work, if not its content.<sup>9</sup> Humphrey Llwyd (1527–1568) cites Dio (and tacitly Xiphilinus's *Epitome*) in his unfinished and posthumously published (in 1572) *Commentarioli Britannicae descriptionis fragmentum*, a work which was subsequently translated by Thomas Twyne as the *Breviary of Britain*.

Scholars of Richard Morison's works have identified traces of Dio's *Roman History* in two of his tracts from the 1530s: the *Remedy for Sedition; Wherin are Conteyned Many Thynges, concernyng the True and Loyall Obeysance, that Comme[n]s Owe unto Their Prince and Soueraygne Lorde the Kyng* (hereafter: *Remedy*), published in 1536; and *An Invective ayenste the Great and Destestable, Vice, Treason*, published in 1539 (hereafter: *Invective*).<sup>10</sup> These borrowings have added weight to Morison's reputation as a scholar of Greek. But what is particularly remarkable is the dates of these publications, as they predate the first major Greek-Latin editions of Dio and Xiphilinus by a decade or more; and in the case of the *Invective*, it contains material not preserved in the printed texts then available, including

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. the tables in P. Burke, 'A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1700', *History and Theory*, 5.2, 1966, pp. 135–52 (136–9).

<sup>7</sup> For the *editio princeps* of Dio's *Roman History*, see M. Bellissime, 'Le Parisinus graecus 1689 et l'édition princeps de l'Histoire romaine de Cassius Dion', in *Cassius Dion: nouvelles lectures*, ed. V. Fromentin et al., Bordeaux, 2016, pp. 33–8. For a summary of sixteenth-century editions of Dio and his epitomators, see Cassius Dio, *Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt*, ed. U. P. Boissevain, Berlin, 1955, pp. lxxxix–xciv. Leonicensino's Italian translation was confined to Books XXXVI–LX, i.e. those books preserved in the direct MS tradition of Dio's history.

<sup>8</sup> This volume is Erasmus's *Historiae Augustae Scriptores* (= H. Adams, *Catalogue of Books Printed on the Continent of Europe, 1501–1600*, in *Cambridge Libraries*, Cambridge, 1967, S 2024), a composite edition comprising Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Merula's translation of Xiphilinus's epitome of Dio's narrative of the reigns of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian, followed by the *Historia Augusta* and other minor late antique texts dealing with Roman imperial history. Smith's copy was part of his bequest to the Queens' College library.

<sup>9</sup> V.F. Stern, *Gabriel Harvey: His Life, Marginalia and Library*, Oxford, 1979, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> The key work of scholarship on this topic is Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above). Many of Berkowitz's conclusions about Morison's engagement with the classical sources have been adopted by Sowerby in her exemplary study of Morison's career: Sowerby, *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), pp. 31–5.

Leonicenso's translation. This raises an obvious question: how can we account for these supposed borrowings? Before we go down the path of assuming that Morison had access to a Greek manuscript of Dio or one of his epitomators, perhaps gained during his Italian travels in the 1530s, we should ask how secure is the evidence for Morison's use of Dio in the first place. As we shall see, these supposed references to Dio are phantoms of modern scholarship; and, by banishing these ghosts, we may get a better picture of Morison's actual sources and method of work.

Let us consider first the evidence from Morison's *Remedy*. Its editor, D. S. Berkowitz, detected a key passage supposedly derived from Cassius Dio (LV.14–21).<sup>11</sup> This passage concerns the conspiracy of Cinna Magnus against Augustus.<sup>12</sup> Dio is one of two authors who deal with this historical episode and is, *prima facie*, an attractive candidate for Morison's source: especially on account of his supposed predilection for Greek texts. The story forms a key set piece in Book LV of Dio's *Roman History* and is notable for the long dialogue between Augustus and Livia, who appears as Augustus's counsellor. The theme of Livia's speech, the utility of clemency as a political tool, is consistent with Morison's own agenda in this part of the *Remedy*. Yet there are problems with accepting Dio as Morison's source. In Morison's version the story contains the following elements:

- (1) Lucius Cinna starts to conspire against Augustus.
- (2) Augustus gains knowledge of the plot and deliberates what to do.
- (3) Livia, the wife of Augustus, offers advice, using the analogy of the physician treating a sick patient.
- (4) Augustus speaks with Cinna privately and pardons him.
- (5) Augustus subsequently makes Cinna a consul and appoints him as an heir.

Berkowitz noted that Morison's version did not align entirely with that of Dio. The solution, according to Berkowitz, is to be found in Morison's literary art. He comments on the skill with which Morison abridged the speech of Livia from Dio's version.<sup>13</sup> Berkowitz also pointed out that the private interview between Cinna and Augustus is not in Dio's version, nor is the detail that Augustus appointed Cinna an heir.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the problems run deeper. Another critical divergence (not mentioned by Berkowitz) is that Dio does not style the conspirator 'Lucius Cinna', but 'Gnaeus Cornelius'. These putative deviations are not, as Berkowitz assumed, evidence for

<sup>11</sup> Berkowitz *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), p. 155 n. 47; followed by Sowerby *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), p. 33, although on p. 49 n. 42 she recognizes (correctly, as we shall see) Morison's dependence on Seneca for this passage of the *Remedy*. Theoretically, Morison could have accessed Leonicenso's translation of Dio's narrative.

<sup>12</sup> Morison *Remedy*, sigs [C iiiii]<sup>v</sup>–D[i]<sup>f</sup> = Berkowitz *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), pp. 125–6.

<sup>13</sup> Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), p. 155 n. 47: 'Morison skilfully abridged a portion of Livia's speech, preserving its essence'.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: '... the alleged interview between Augustus and Lucius Cinna and the speeches made by the Emperor are not in Cassius Dio, have not been found elsewhere, and perhaps represent the invention of Morison alone'.

Morison's inventiveness or consultation of a subsidiary source. Rather, they are evidence that Morison did not use Dio at all.

Indeed, Morison's account is patently derived from Seneca's *De clementia*, not from Cassius Dio. Not only does Seneca style the would-be conspirator as 'Lucius Cinna', just as Morison does, but the details Berkowitz observed as missing from Dio's account, including the detail about Cinna becoming one of Augustus's heirs, are all present in Seneca's version.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Morison follows his source closely. To illustrate this point, note the opening of the two versions of the interviews between Augustus and Cinna. Seneca writes (*De clementia*, I.9.7): 'Hoc', inquit, 'primum a te peto, ne me loquentem interpelles, ne medio sermone meo proclames; dabitur tibi loquendi liberum tempus ...'. Morison says, in what appears to be a straightforward translation of Seneca's Latin: 'This one thing', saith the emperor, 'I must require of you, that you do not interrupt my communication. Ye shall have time, when I have said my mind, to say what you will'.<sup>16</sup> If we accept that Morison adapted Seneca, rather than Dio, we may see that his manipulation of his source material is less profound than has been proposed: the speech of Livia has not been substantially altered, save the omission of a list of conspirators Augustus had punished;<sup>17</sup> and Morison's retelling of the story does not deviate from the sequence of events or details presented by Seneca.

As there are no traces of Dio in the *Remedy*, what then of the *Invective*? The evidence for the use of the Dionian tradition in the *Invective* is confined to the preface, where Morison adduces the examples of failed conspiracies from Imperial Rome.<sup>18</sup> He starts by citing three rogue praetorian prefects: Perennis, Plautianus and Sejanus.<sup>19</sup> This triumvirate is followed by the story of Commodus's sister Lucilla and her employment of Quintianus as an assassin.<sup>20</sup> The first three appear in this same (unchronological) order in chapter 6 of Book III of Machiavelli's *Discourses* (published in 1531), and we may suspect that Machiavelli was the inspiration for the choice of *exempla*, although, as noted by Sowerby, with additional material not found in the *Discourses*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Livia's shortened speech: Seneca, *De clementia*, I.9.6; interview between Augustus and Cinna: *ibid.*, I.9.7–11; Cinna made an heir: *ibid.*, I.9.12.

<sup>16</sup> Morison *Remedy*, sigs [C iiiii]<sup>v</sup>–D[i]<sup>r</sup> = Berkowitz, *Humanist Scholarship* (n. 2 above), p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> Compare, Morison, *Remedy*, sig. [Ciiii]<sup>v</sup> = Berkowitz *Humanist Scholarship* pp. 125–6: 'Sir, do as physicians do, who when they see that their accustomed medicines will not serve, they prove the contraries. By punishment ye have hitherto done little or nothing, forgive another while, and see what clemency may do. Cinna cannot now hurt your life; he may set forth much [to] your honour' with, Seneca, *De clementia*, I.9.6: 'Fac, quod medici solent, qui ubi usitata remedia non procedunt, temptant contraria. Severitate nihil adhuc profecisti; Salvidienum Lepidus secutus est, Lepidum Murena, Murenam Caepio, Caepionem Egnatius, ut alios taceam, quos tantum ausos pudet. Nunc tempta, quomodo tibi cedat clementia; ignosce L. Cinnae. Deprensus est; iam nocere tibi non potest, prodesse famae tuae potest'.

<sup>18</sup> This is what Sowerby *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), p. 33 n. 108, seems to be referring to, although the passage she cites from Dio (LXXVII.1–4) refers only to the fall of Plautianus.

<sup>19</sup> Morison, *Invective*, sigs aiii<sup>r</sup>–aiiii<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, sig. aiii<sup>r</sup>–v.

<sup>21</sup> Sowerby *Renaissance and Reform* (n. 2 above), p. 94 n. 74.

The additional material included by Morison cannot be derived from Cassius Dio. For instance, Morison describes Plautianus with the following:

Plautianus another, of all men most bound to Severus the emperor, sought also to destroy him, not that ever he had received any injury or displeasure at his hands, but that the blind desire he had to the Empire, wrought much more in him than could all the emperor's benefits.<sup>22</sup>

This is incompatible with the story of Plautianus's fall as transmitted by Xiphilinus's *Epitome* (LXXVII[LXXVI].1–14), where he is undone by the scheming of Antoninus (Caracalla).<sup>23</sup> A more probable source behind Morison's expanded *exemplum* would be one which made Plautianus's treachery explicit: Herodian's *History of the Empire*.<sup>24</sup>

Is there any evidence to indicate Morison's familiarity with Herodian? To answer this, we need to turn to the fourth example, that of Lucilla's plot against her brother. Of the four conspiracy anecdotes at the beginning of the *Invective*, this is the one that is not found in Machiavelli and that suggests familiarity with one of our main historical narrative sources for the reign of Commodus: the *Life of Commodus* from the *Historia Augusta*, Herodian's *History of the Empire*, or Xiphilinus's *Epitome* of Cassius Dio. I shall quote the passage:

Lucilla, sister to Commodus the Emperor, had appointed Quintianus to slay her brother. This traitor waited for the emperor at the entrance in the Amphitheatre, and when he saw Commodus almost came to the place where he intended to have slain him, his hand, his tongue, his gesture, his countenance, could suffer his heart to be no longer hid. No, he having his dagger ready naked, cried out, before the emperor came under his stroke, 'This the Senate sends thee'. Upon these words, he was taken, and Commodus nothing hurt.<sup>25</sup>

The key elements in this passage are the identification of the assassin as Quintianus and the direct speech 'This the Senate sends thee'. Both Xiphilinus's *Epitome* and the *Historia Augusta* have the direct quotation but identify the hapless assassin as Claudius Pompeianus.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Herodian does not include the quotation (although has the essence of it in *oratio obliqua*) but identifies the man as 'Quintianus'.

Are we to suppose that the passage is a confection, or that Morison had read both Herodian and Xiphilinus or both Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*? Such explanations are plausible, but unnecessary. The simplest (and surely correct) solution is that Morison's narrative is a slightly altered version of the passage in Angelo

<sup>22</sup> Morison, *Invective*, sig. aiii<sup>f</sup>. Here and elsewhere, I have modified the spelling but not the syntax of Morison's text.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXXVII(LXXVI).3.1–4.5.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Herodian, *History of the Empire*, III.11.4 (unlike Dio) describes Plautianus's desire to seize the empire from Severus.

<sup>25</sup> Morison, *Invective*, sig. aiii<sup>f-v</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> cf. *Historia Augusta: Commodus*, 4.3: 'hunc tibi pugionem senatus mittit'.

Poliziano's Latin translation of Herodian. For in his rendering of Quintianus's final words, Poliziano translates the Greek 'προειπὼν ὑπὸ τῆς συγκλήτου αὐτῷ ἐπιπεπέμφοι' as the more vivid 'hunc tibi Senatus mittit' – which is exactly what Morison translates.<sup>27</sup>

In sum, contrary to what has appeared in the scholarship on 'Merry' Morison, there is no evidence that he used the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio or the Dionian tradition in the *Remedy* or *Invective*. Although Morison's Greek learning was no doubt considerable, the passages cited above show more a knowledge of Latin texts and translations than with Greek originals, and thus, his debt to Greek historians must be regarded as less profound than has been claimed. Indeed, further interrogation of Morison's engagement with Greek sources may prove illuminating. These examples do show us something more about Morison as a writer. When relating these exemplary anecdotes, Morison follows his source texts faithfully, in a way that amounts to a close, unadorned translation of the (Latin) originals. This is, we may note, consistent with the critical observations which have been made about Morison's English translation of Frontinus's *Strategmata* (1539).<sup>28</sup> More positively, the foregoing discussion has established Morison's use of Seneca's *De clementia* and Poliziano's translation of Herodian's *History of the Empire after Marcus* in the *Remedy* and *Invective*. As such, we can add a footnote to the history of the reception of these two authors.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, if we accept that Morison used Poliziano's *Herodian*, and Seneca's *De Clementia*, then there may be a further implication for our understanding of Morison's library. Sowerby has argued that the mid-sixteenth-century booklist preserved in British Library Add. MS 40,676 (ff. 110<sup>r</sup>-116<sup>v</sup>) is Morison's.<sup>30</sup> The evidence from the *Invective*, and possibly the *Remedy*, surely adds weight to Sowerby's identification, as the list contains a copy of Poliziano's translation of Herodian (no. 443), and, tantalizingly, 'Seneca' (no. 388).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. Herodian, *De Romanorum imperatorum uita & rebus libri Graece octo; quibus etiam Angeli Politiani translationem Latinam ... adiunximus ...*, Basel, 1535, p. 55. It is likely, however, that Morison read the Greek-Latin Aldine edition, Venice, 1524.

<sup>28</sup> J. Wortham, 'Arthur Golding and the Translation of Prose', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 12.4, 1949, pp. 339–67 (342–3).

<sup>29</sup> Morison's use of Seneca has not figured in any study so far of the reception of the *De clementia* in this period, e.g. Seneca, *De clementia*, ed. S. Braund, Oxford, 2009, pp. 78–9.

<sup>30</sup> The anonymous booklist is published in W.H. Henderson and K.R. Bartlett, 'The Library of Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham (British Library Add. 40,676)', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 85.3, 1991, pp. 235–296 (262–296). For the identification of the list as Morison's, see Sowerby *Renaissance and Reform*, pp. 241–244.

<sup>31</sup> It is not clear whether this volume contained the *De Clementia*.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** Not applicable.

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