

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## *Introduction: missing years*

As a youth, the future emperor Claudius set out to write the recent history of Rome and, with initial encouragement from Livy, then the greatest living historian, produced an account that began with the assassination of Julius Caesar. Some were less supportive. Claudius' mother, Antonia, and grandmother, Livia, repeatedly criticized his efforts; he could not write as frankly as he wished. Thus warned, Claudius left in his final version the assassination and its immediate aftermath, but omitted everything that happened in the civil wars that followed: an eloquent silence.<sup>1</sup> This book is in one sense an effort to recover what Claudius left out and why. Its reader will have to face up to the killing squads, the land confiscations, the famine, the propaganda, the agonizing dilemmas of these years.

But I have not set out to write the kind of political narrative Claudius would have produced. For if the emperor has been one inspiration, another has been Vergil, whose first and ninth *Eclogues* exemplify how civil war swept through the lives of ordinary Italians during Claudius' missing years. My work too aims to retrieve the men and women who fought and endured the bloody struggles that beset the Roman world under the triumvirate of Mark Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus. It is all too easy in writing about these years to focus only on high politics and constitutional questions, and the results become depressingly top-heavy. This war engulfed everyone. So terrible was its chaos, so many traces did it leave, so much was it talked about, that a history of it can and ought to include stories of small towns and people on the street; of women, slaves, and children; of poets and intellectuals, farmers and soldiers, shopkeepers and soothsayers. It needs, also, to include rival versions.

Ronald Syme modeled his spellbinding narrative of Octavian's rise to power – still the leading account – on another lost work, the history of the civil wars written by the acidic Asinius Pollio. In a “pessimistic and truculent tone,” the Oxford historian irrefutably demonstrated in his

<sup>1</sup> Suet. *Claud.* 41. See further below.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*The Roman Revolution* (1939) how the old ruling nobility of Rome was edged out by a group of small-town Italians, foremost among them the first emperor, Augustus.<sup>2</sup> The unforgettable portrait of this “party,” which drew so much of its vigor from Syme’s implicit comparison to the Fascists and National Socialists of 1930s Europe (and a Tacitean gift for insinuation), left less room in his work for the lives of others.<sup>3</sup> For Syme, “Roman history, Republican or Imperial, is the history of the governing class.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet for all the detail in which Syme sketches his “governing class,” the portrait is at times incomplete: its members always act without hesitation, purely on the basis of self-interest. The unraveling of the Roman state after the Ides required these individuals to make decisions that were rarely straightforward. I dwell on those dilemmas here, even if they are the dilemmas of the “governing class,” not merely because they need more nuanced treatment, but also because they at times suggest the struggles that others faced too. Also, I will argue that the crucial step in Octavian’s rise to power was his decision not to act merely out of self-interest but to heed the needs of men and women in Rome, Italy, and the provinces. Popular opinion did count.

---

My own account of the triumviral years, then, will hew more closely to the still extant *Civil Wars* of the Greek historian Appian, who tried, at least in places, to examine the effects of civil war on Italian and even, occasionally, provincial society at large. For the battles fought in the triumviral period made up the sort of total war that leads to social change separate from the political circumstances that precipitated it. The historian Arthur Marwick has identified four features of such wars, all of which apply to the period I examine here.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Syme (1939), viii.

<sup>3</sup> Note especially the titles of chapters 5 and 24, “The Caesarian Party” and “The Party of Augustus,” but also those that evoke specific moments in recent European history (e.g., chapter 9, “The First March on Rome”).

<sup>4</sup> Syme (1939), 7. The limits of Syme’s prosopographic approach were set forth in the important review of Momigliano (1940) and continue to be discussed today – proof of how much *Roman Revolution* still dominates the field. See, e.g., the collections of essays Raaflaub and Toher (1990), Habinek and Schiesaro (1997), and Millar et al. (2000). Yet for all this, historians have tended to make contributions that supplement or correct Syme (see, e.g., the masterful essay of Brunt [1988], 1–92) rather than producing a new narrative.

<sup>5</sup> Marwick has considered this topic across a series of publications. For a brief summary see Marwick (1974), 11–14. In a short but suggestive paper, Patterson (1993) suggested the benefit of applying Marwick’s descriptive categories to the civil wars of the last century BC.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: missing years*

3

First, this was a war of massive destruction and disruption. Thousands upon thousands gave up their lives, on the battlefield and in political purges, while large areas of Italy and the provinces were confiscated and resettled with veteran soldiers. Second, this war tested society's institutions and, in some cases, reformed them. Italian women were taxed, for instance, a measure almost without precedent. Provincials too paid steep new levies, and also had to learn to address their concerns to the triumvirs rather than the Senate or its governors. The geographer Strabo's story of the fishermen from the small Aegean island of Gyaros sending an embassy to Octavian – rather than the Senate – to petition for tax relief in 29 BC hints at one change that did last into the empire.<sup>6</sup> Third, this war drew its fighting ranks from a large part of Rome's population. By one estimate 25 percent of citizen males aged 17 to 46 were serving in one of the triumviral armies by the time of Philippi: this became their struggle as much as their commanders', and their demands, their sense of importance, and their time in service together shaped the history of these years.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, this war left a colossal psychological legacy. Its horrors seared the memories of a whole generation, including its poets, artists, and thinkers.

Following Asinius Pollio, Syme chose 60 BC as the starting date for *The Roman Revolution*. For both, the last stage in the fall of the Roman Republic began with the so-called "first triumvirate" of Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus. (This was an informal compact, never represented as an official constitutional arrangement, as the "second triumvirate" was.) I limit myself here to roughly the years Claudius seems to have left out: 43–29 BC.<sup>8</sup> Falling after the Dictatorship of Caesar and before the new Principate of Augustus, this period is often considered transitional and tends, therefore, to be lost between histories of the Republic and histories of the Empire. Yet these missing years had a distinct unity. "Tangled, chaotic, hideous," they were dominated by an entirely new form of government, the triumvirate.<sup>9</sup> Autocratic, like Caesar's rule before, this regime was also desperately

<sup>6</sup> Strabo 10.5.3.

<sup>7</sup> The figure comes from Brunt (1971), 509–12. See also Brunt (1988), 240–80. Brunt's estimates of the size of Italy's population in the later Republic have been challenged as too small: see the discussion in chapter 1 below.

<sup>8</sup> Suetonius writes *initium autem sumpsit historiae post caedem dictatoris, sed transit ad inferiora tempora coepitque a pace civili*; he then adds *prioris materiae duo volumina posterioris unum et quadraginta reliquit* (Claud. 41.2). Bücheler (1915–30), 1.455 suggested that these later forty-one books covered the forty-one years from 27 BC to 14 AD (while the first two would treat 44–43). Note also the arguments of Momigliano (1934), 6 n. 14.

<sup>9</sup> The quotation is from Syme (1939), 3 n. 2. Appian (*B. Civ.* 4.7) rightly describes the triumvirate as *καυρή ἀρχή*.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

unstable, since its members could not easily share power for long and fought until one of them, Octavian, emerged supreme. Life was so bad under this autocracy, one ancient historian claims, that contemporaries started to think Caesar's dictatorship an age of gold.<sup>10</sup> Modern accounts have often failed to come to grips with what it was like for the men and women of these years; that is what I have tried to do here; I have not set out another theory to explain the fall of the Republic.<sup>11</sup> A preliminary chapter eases the reader into the chaos by recounting the (relatively) mild months after the Ides up to the ratification of the triumvirate in November 43 BC.

To get back to the emotional side of this civil war I draw heavily on contemporary poetry and prose. This tumultuous period produced a number of the most highly regarded works of Latin literature, all of them haunted by the contemporary civil war and ready to confront it in creative ways. The authors of these works came not from the city of Rome (nor – for the most part – from the ruling classes) but from all over Italy: the exuberantly fertile Po River valley, for instance, and the rolling landscape of Apulia, Umbria with its hill towns, and the Sabine country. Strangely enough, their writings are never read together as a discrete group, since scholars lump the prose texts into the earlier “Age of Cicero” and the poetry into the later “Age of Augustus” rather than, as Syme himself suggested, creating a “Triumviral Period” of literature published from 43 BC, which saw the death of Cicero, to 28 BC, the year before which Octavian took on his new name Augustus.<sup>12</sup> This includes, in addition to Vergil's early poetry, the histories of Sallust, Horace's *Epodes* and *Satires*, Propertius' first love poems, Cornelius Nepos' biographies, the final works of the polymath Varro, and (perhaps) an anonymous curse poem.<sup>13</sup>

Creating a “Triumviral Period” of literature brings into focus specific themes that occur throughout the history of these fifteen years – the disgust felt at the meteoric careers of social upstarts, for instance, or the fear that Rome's men were losing their manliness. More generally, its often somber

<sup>10</sup> Dio 47.15.4. Caesar allegedly predicted as much: see Suet. *Iul.* 86.2.

<sup>11</sup> While structured as a political narrative, Levi (1933) stands out for trying also to portray more sympathetically the popular mood of Italy in the triumviral period. But the provinces are largely ignored: see further below. And his Augustus is too idealized.

<sup>12</sup> Syme (1964), 274–75. The suggestion was repeated in Syme (1978), 169–79 and Syme (1986), 12. The now standard history of Latin literature, Conte (1994), has as Part II “The Late Republic” (ending with Sallust) and Part III “The Age of Augustus” (beginning with Vergil's *Eclogues*).

<sup>13</sup> The date for these works, including the *Dirae*, will be discussed as each one comes up. The *Panegyricus Messallae*, if dated to 31 BC, should be regarded as triumviral also, but some scholars put it after 27. Note too that some of Tibullus' poems, Horace's earliest odes, and part of Livy's first pentad may have been written in this period, but as published works all of these appeared only later.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: missing years*

5

tone – its sense, above all, that Rome's problems might be totally insoluble – offers a contrast to the more muted pessimism of late Republican literature. Triumviral literature is full of dashed expectations and wasted effort. Caught in scenes of “bondage, frustration, or absurdity,” its protagonists belong to what Northrop Frye called “the ironic mode” of literature. They contend with angry gods – or gods absent altogether, pointless murder, and a world threatening to spiral out of control.<sup>14</sup>

Yet for all its gloom and doom, my sequence of texts shows a development that parallels the unfolding situation in Italy. Whereas the earlier literature tends to bear witness to the losses of a population at cross-purposes with the triumvirs, the very last texts sound at least some notes of a victory that much of Italy – and even some provincials – shared with Octavian (although suppressing the voices of Antony and his supporters). The losers tended to describe a world ruled by a capricious and awe-inspiring Fortune, whom the winners tried to exorcise with proclamations, or promises, of a new stability. It was in the triumviral period, not the age of “Augustus,” that poets – as well as sculptors and architects – began forging a new imperial style. By 28 BC massive temples of gleaming white marble in a newly emerging Corinthian order stood in Rome to mark Octavian's victory, copies of his portrait were spread throughout Italy, and provincial cities, in the east, had established cults in his honor.<sup>15</sup>

Literature does not merely reflect lived experience: it also helps people give shape to their perceptions of historical events. Contemporary literature, therefore, lets one see some of the patterns and forms Romans living through the triumvirate conferred upon their experience. It refracts the grand narratives, gives us personal versions.<sup>16</sup> This is why I include so much of it here. A wealth of anecdotal material preserved in later sources also survives to show how palpable the continuing memory of these years was, and some of the myths that formed around them. In confronting a war with so much literary resonance and a society where creative literature was a principal means of commemoration, I draw on a third inspiration, Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), which so hauntingly illuminated the horrors of trench warfare by examining “some of the literary means by which it has been remembered, conventionalized, and

<sup>14</sup> Frye (1957), 33–35 briefly outlines his theory of modes; pages 35–67 work out the theory more fully. The relevance struck me after reading Fussell (1975), on which see further below.

<sup>15</sup> On the birth of Roman Corinthian in the triumviral period, see Strong (1963), 80. On portraiture, see briefly R. Smith (1996). On temples of Rome and Augustus in the east, see Dio 51.20.6–8 and Reinhold *ad loc.*

<sup>16</sup> For a thoughtful statement on the relation of poetry to history see Kermode (1990), 49–67.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

mythologized.”<sup>17</sup> While identifying, then, how Roman authors tried in literature to make sense of civil war and how they tried to share its own particular brand of horrors, I also occasionally ask what role their memories played in Augustus’ new empire.

---

Yet precisely because Latin literature incorporates only some personal – and at times very imaginative – responses to the civil war, for a full picture of the Roman world in the triumviral era one must look to three other sources. First, to gain additional perspectives, I have juxtaposed literary texts that concern events in Italy with the material evidence of coins, public inscriptions, epitaphs, and other works of visual art. A discussion of the land confiscations following the battle of Philippi, for instance, uses archeological and historical evidence along with Vergil’s *Eclogue* 9 to describe how the townspeople of Mantua unexpectedly, and tragically, lost their land. Since Vergil’s poem omits altogether the equally important perspective of the veteran soldiers, I also examine coins minted for them and the funeral monuments they set up on their new farms. Still another view of this event survives in the epitaph of one of the land commissioners, who celebrates his role in the process. A discussion of the Perusine War compares Propertius’ treatment of its impact with the messages inscribed on the lead bullets shot during the siege by its combatants; it also compares his family to one from a neighboring town, the Volumnii, whose tomb tells a similar story. I place literary tales of the proscriptions alongside a massive private inscription that offers the testimony of an actual survivor. Such evidence is priceless for historians trying to understand the impact of the triumvirs’ rule on Italy.

In focusing on the (changing) membership of Augustus’ party, Syme deliberately restricted the space he devoted to “provincial affairs” in *Roman Revolution*.<sup>18</sup> While understandable, the omission has helped perpetuate a bias in subsequent discussions of the culture of the triumviral period and the Augustan age proper, which likewise dwell on the city of Rome and Italy.<sup>19</sup> As Octavian himself well knew, the Roman empire comprised

<sup>17</sup> Fussell (1975), ix. Other works exploring the ways literature documents war that I have happened upon and found suggestive include Bergonzi (1965), Spence (1981), Scarry (1985), Fussell (1989), Eksteins (1989), and Lepore (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Syme (1939), vii.

<sup>19</sup> The bias is observed by Woolf (2000), 122 n. 23. But notable papers of Millar, especially Millar (1984a) and Millar (1984b), as well as the fundamental study of Bowersock (1965) have tried to examine the impact of the whole “Roman Revolution” on the provinces, especially in the east.

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: missing years*

7

so much more. From Syria to Spain, men and women felt the impact of the triumvirs' rule; through the battles fought, and the waves of colonists sent out afterwards, the civil wars were a major event in Mediterranean history. Since Latin literature barely mentions what happened to Rome's provinces in this period, another crucial source – and one in which new evidence constantly turns up – is a series of inscriptions, coins, monuments, and literary texts, mostly from the Greek-speaking eastern half of the empire, that allow other stories to emerge.

From Aphrodisias, for instance, in southern Asia Minor, a dossier of administrative documents posted in the town's lavish theater complex shows how this community suffered during Rome's civil war, and how it struggled to repair its fortunes with an embassy to Rome shortly afterwards. The inscriptions reveal that, even as the triumvirs were trying to appear more constitutional in the eyes of the Italians by taking the Aphrodisians' request to the Senate, the Aphrodisians themselves found dealing with the triumvir Octavian quite acceptable. They were more concerned with securing a tax break, gaining asylum rights for their temple, and recovering stolen property, which included a gold statue of the god of love that they believed had been removed to the great sanctuary of Artemis at Ephesus. The monument of Seleucus of Rhosus, a sea captain from Syria, shows that while in the west Octavian (like Vergil) may have represented Actium as the victory of Italians over easterners, Octavian relied on easterners for his victory and bestowed lavish praise on them. For Seleucus, Actium had nothing to do with oriental degeneracy but was a chance to improve his station in life. Greek writers such as the geographer Strabo and Nicolaus of Damascus, working in the Augustan period, looked back to the earlier times they lived through and also, therefore, give us a sense of how provincials viewed Rome's civil war. And Josephus, though he wrote later, used Strabo and Nicolaus to construct his parallel histories of Judea; often merely used to garner otherwise unattested facts, the *Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War* preserve vivid memories of how the events of the entire triumviral period affected those living at the very edge of the empire.

---

All of this evidence would be impossible to interpret, at least historically, without a third, fundamental source, the works of the major ancient historical writers. The most obvious way contemporaries would have memorialized the events of the triumviral era was in history books, as some of them in fact did: Pollio's account of the civil wars went through to

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the battle of Philippi (and possibly further), Livy covered the whole of the triumviral period in Latin, and Strabo did the same in Greek.<sup>20</sup> In later generations historians such as Claudius would retell the story, and, unlike the emperor's, at least some of their results were published. Of all these many authors' writings, three of real importance survive, and they provide the larger historical framework into which more intimate stories – and, at times, rival versions – can be fit. Since Plutarch's *Brutus* and *Antony*, Appian's *Civil Wars*, and Dio's *Roman History* will be discussed throughout this book, only a few words need be said here about the sort of material these authors preserve, and the ways in which they recast it.

Plutarch's biographies of Brutus and Antony belong to the series of *Parallel Lives* this Greek writer, who had strong interests in philosophy, wrote in the first decades of the second century AD.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch arranged the *Parallel Lives* in pairs, matching a Greek with a Roman (e.g., Alexander the Great with Julius Caesar), not so much to illustrate what was different between the two cultures but to try to formulate universal lessons about virtue and vice.<sup>22</sup> While most of his subjects – including Brutus, a Platonist like Plutarch himself – exemplify noble qualities, the biographer says that he wrote of Antony and the Greek he is matched with to illustrate what is “blameworthy and bad.” Beautifully written as they are, Plutarch's lives of Antony and Brutus do aim, then, to explore ethical, rather than historical, problems. But they are valuable for incorporating evidence from first-hand sources we might otherwise know nothing about. To supplement his reading of historians such as Pollio, Plutarch used, for the *Brutus*, a series of admiring accounts written by the assassin's stepson Bibulus, campmate, and teacher; for the *Antony* he consulted, among other sources, the account of the Parthian War given by Antony's officer Dellius and the memoirs of Cleopatra's physician, Olympus.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The evidence on Pollio's history is gathered at Peter *HRR* 2.lxxxiii–lxxxvii and 67–70; for two recent discussions, citing earlier studies, see Morgan (2000) and Woodman (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Of recent work Pelling's scholarship has contributed immensely to our understanding of Plutarch's Roman lives by paying attention both to their literary dimensions and to the history of the late Republic and triumviral period. Many of his essays are now collected in Pelling (2002); the commentary on *Antony*, Pelling (1988), represents a major contribution to triumviral scholarship too. See also Scardigli (1979). On the *Antony* specifically, see also the commentary of Scuderi (1984) and Brenk (1992). Moles has produced a number of valuable studies on various aspects of *Brutus* and the “Brutus tradition” including Moles (1983) and Moles (1997).

<sup>22</sup> Duff (2000) is a full and recent investigation of Plutarch's lives along these lines.

<sup>23</sup> Plutarch's use of Pollio's *Histories* (or perhaps an intermediate source) is inferred from (1) frequent overlapping with Appian, suggesting a shared *historical* source; (2) the quality of Plutarch's information for the years after 60 BC, the starting point of Pollio's history; and (3) occasional explicit



Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: missing years*

9

A few decades after Plutarch was at work on his lives, the Alexandrian Appian, who had come to Rome to work as a lawyer and who later seems to have served in the administration of the emperor Antoninus Pius, produced his history of Rome. Condensing 1,000 years into only twenty-four books, Appian organized his work around the people Rome conquered (e.g., book 3 dealt with the Samnites). Though large portions of the history have failed to survive, the *Civil Wars* (originally books 13–17) do, and narrate Rome's struggle with herself in the years from the Gracchi to Octavian's defeat of Sextus Pompey, in 36 BC.<sup>24</sup> (The lost Egyptian history, in books 18–21, dealt with the following period, down to 30 BC.) Relying on earlier accounts – including, once again, Pollio's – Appian tried, in reworking these sources, to emphasize how the civil wars differed from Rome's other military struggles: this makes his text of particular value to one trying to understand what was new in the triumviral period.<sup>25</sup> And because he was writing explicitly of civil war, Appian narrates his history not from the winner's point of view (as so much Roman historiography was), but from a variety of perspectives.<sup>26</sup> The most eloquent speeches he includes are those of the triumvirs' enemies; he devotes numerous chapters to the less distinguished victims of the three men; and, at the same time, he is fairer to Antony than any of our other sources, which too often follow the (distorted) version of events that originated in Octavian's now lost thirteen-book *Autobiography*.<sup>27</sup>

Though even more removed in time from the triumviral era than Plutarch and Appian, the historian Dio Cassius did have the advantage

references to Pollio (e.g., *Caes.* 32.5, the crossing of the Rubicon). Pollio's work may have been available in Greek translation (*FGrH* 193). On the whole topic see further Pelling (1979), who discusses earlier studies of importance, including Kornemann (1896).

<sup>24</sup> On the triumviral portion of Appian's *Civil Wars*, we now have the splendid discussion of Gowing (1992a), whose main method is to compare Appian with Dio, but also, where relevant, other sources. Other important discussions of Appian include Levi (1933), 2.214–37, Gabba (1956), Hahn (1982), Goldmann (1988), Brodersen (1993), Magnino (1993), Hose (1994), Famerie (1998), and Bucher (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Appian's use of Pollio (or an intermediate source) is inferred from his frequent overlap with Plutarch on events after 60 BC, including those where Plutarch clearly depended on Pollio (e.g., the crossing of the Rubicon, *B.Civ.* 2.35). But it is not clear that Pollio is the principal source for *all* of the *Civil Wars*, as Gabba (1956) maintained. In particular, there is no firm evidence that Pollio, starting his history in 60 BC, would have gone back to the period of the Gracchi, as Appian does; and there is also no firm evidence that Pollio went beyond Philippi, making the sources for the fifth book of the *Civil Wars* quite uncertain. I am inclined, along with scholars such as Gowing (1992a), to see the preoccupations of the *Civil Wars* as Appian's.

<sup>26</sup> Not that most accounts of civil war were written this way (as, e.g., Caesar's *Civil War* shows).

<sup>27</sup> The basic evidence on Octavian's *De vita sua*, addressed to Maecenas and Agrippa, is gathered at Peter *HRR* 2.lxxi–lxxvi and 54–64; on this text see now R. Lewis (1993), 669–89, and the earlier studies cited there, especially Blumenthal (1913–14).

Cambridge University Press

0521671779 - Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire

Josiah Osgood

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of living through another era of civil war, the turbulent years of the late Antonine and Severan dynasties.<sup>28</sup> Around 200 AD he began doing research for his eighty-book *Roman History*, a work that would extend from the foundation of Rome, through the fall of the Republic, on to the year 229 AD, when Dio served as consul with the emperor Alexander Severus as his colleague. Unlike Appian, this author adopted a more traditional annalistic framework, narrating events (more or less) year-by-year in an effort to see how the imperial system in which he was such an important player had developed over the centuries, and what might have caused its recent problems. Though he does, to add grandeur to his narrative, write wildly improbable battle scenes, and though he does, because of his views on human nature, fail to show how historical actors such as Octavian developed over time, Dio does preserve valuable information about administrative acts of the Senate, the triumvirs, and other leading figures. Independent external evidence, usually from inscriptions and coins, occasionally survives to show his detailed notices to be correct.<sup>29</sup>

For all the richness of this evidence we should end by recognizing its limits. I said before that Vergil's *Eclogues* offer inspiration to the historian of the civil wars; a central part of their design is to issue a challenge too. Though the reader learns something of the land confiscations Claudius omitted from his final draft, the effect of the poems is not in the end so different from the emperor's incomplete history. Reading them feels like stumbling on the scene of a crime without being told exactly what has taken place. As it happens, the story of the confiscations can be pieced together; other tales can too, of individuals not given the chance to speak for themselves in the literature of Rome, and so often crowded out of our history books. But not even the most zealous investigator will lay bare all that came to pass during these "missing years." This is not just the old matter of winners writing the history; it also has to do with what resources were available for the commemoration of war, and to whom. What we do

<sup>28</sup> In addition to Gowing (1992a), other relevant studies of Dio include Fadinger (1969), Millar (1964), Manuwald (1979), Fechner (1986), Rich (1989), Reinhold and Swan (1990), Hose (1994), and Swan (1997).

<sup>29</sup> To give just four examples: (1) Dio 47.18.5–6 reports that, in 42 BC, July 12 was designated a holiday in honor of Caesar's birthday (which actually was 13 July): *Fast. Amit.* and *Fast. Ant.* record this *feriae*; (2) Dio 48.26.5 reports and correctly interprets the titles Labienus took in 40 BC, *Imperator* and *Parthicus*: these appear also on coins he issued (*RRC* 524); (3) Dio 48.34.1 reports that in 39 the triumvirs had the Senate ratify all of their acts to date: one of the Aphrodisias documents (Reynolds *Aphrodisias* no. 8) now shows that this indeed did happen; (4) Dio 49.39.1 reports that, since Antony resigned the consulship of 35 on 1 January of that year, some gave the name of his replacement, L. Sempronius Atratinus, when naming the years' consuls: *Fast. Mag.* gives M. Anton[ius M. f], *Fast. Ven.* gives L. Sempronius.