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Psellus' Contemporaries

When Psellus composed the original version of his *Chronography*, around 1062, the readership for Byzantine histories seems to have been expanding. Though new histories continued to appear at roughly the same rate as they had since the later eighth century, the picture changes if we consider histories that survive today in ten or more manuscripts and seem to have reached more than a marginal Byzantine readership. While the three hundred years before 1060 produced just six such histories, the next fifty years produced four, with five more to come in the following hundred years.¹ This expansion had little to do with Psellus, whose historical works had a modest circulation. The reason was rather an enlargement of the audience for all Byzantine literature that accompanied growing prosperity and urbanization in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.² Psellus observed with dismay that under the eleventh-century emperors more and more new men were being made government officials.³ When such men entered the bureaucracy, they sent their sons to the secondary schools that taught future bureaucrats how to read classical and classicizing literature with pleasure, or at any rate with respect. After reading Thucydides and perhaps Herodotus and Xenophon at school, some graduates went on to read Byzantine histories or even to write them.

¹ See the table on pp. 490–92 below. The histories written before 1060 and preserved in ten or more MSS are Nicephorus' *Concise Chronography*, George the Monk's *Concise Chronicle*, George Syncellus' *Selection of Chronography*, Theophanes' *Chronography*, the first edition of Symeon the Logothete's *Chronicle*, and Constantine VII's *Historical Excerpts*; those written after 1060 are John Xiphilinus' *Epitome of Dio*, John Scylitzes' *Synopsis of Histories* and *Epitome of History* (including *Scylitzes Continuatus*), George Cedrenus' *Compendium of Histories*, Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, John Zonaras' *Epitome of Histories*, Michael Glycas' *Chronicle*, Constantine Manasses' *Chronological Synopsis*, and Nicetas Choniates' *Chronological Narrative*.

² On this general phenomenon, see Mango, *Byzantium*, pp. 80–87 (urbanization), 142–43 (the growth of schools), and 237–38 (the expansion of readership), Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change*, pp. 31–39 (urbanization), 120–26 (the growth of schools), and 197–98 (showing some hesitation about the expansion of readership), and Treadgold, *History*, pp. 691–95 (the expansion of readership) and 699–706 (urbanization and prosperity).

³ Psellus, *Chronography* V.15–16, VI.29–30, VII.2, and VIIa.15.

Xiphilinus' *Epitome of Dio*

The first of these newly popular historical works was the epitome of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* by John Xiphilinus the Younger, nephew of Psellus' friend the patriarch John VIII Xiphilinus.⁴ Because the epitomator observes that he worked during Michael VII's reign and mentions that his uncle was patriarch of Constantinople without adding "of blessed memory," the epitome should presumably be dated between Michael's accession, in 1071, and the patriarch's death, in 1075.⁵ We know that before the elder John distinguished himself the Xiphilini were an obscure family in the provincial town of Trebizond.⁶ Since the younger John identifies himself not by a rank but only as his uncle's nephew, he probably came from Trebizond to seek his fortune in the capital after his uncle became patriarch, in 1064, not when the uncle was still a monk on Mount Olympus who could offer little help to his relatives. The nephew received a good classical education, of a sort most likely to be obtained at a school in Constantinople. He probably is the same John Xiphilinus who appeared with the official rank of vestarch at John Italus' trial for heresy, in 1082. Perhaps the epitomator was born around 1050, came to Constantinople for his secondary education around 1064, composed his epitome around 1073 to advance his career, and found his place in the bureaucracy before 1082. Later he may possibly have become the monk John Xiphilinus who wrote homilies and hagiography under Alexius I (1081–1118).⁷

Perhaps on the advice of his learned uncle, the younger Xiphilinus chose a promising project, because Dio's was the most comprehensive account of Roman imperial history. Xiphilinus entitled his work *Epitome of Dio of Nicaea's Roman History, Which John Xiphilinus Abridged, Comprising the Reigns of Twenty-Five Caesars, From Pompey the Great to [Severus] Alexander the Son of Mamaea*. Apparently Xiphilinus used a copy of Dio's work that was missing Books I–XXXV (up to 68 B.C., where Xiphilinus begins) and LXX (on Antoninus Pius). Of Dio's original text, Photius and Constantine VII's excerptors apparently had all eighty books, while in the twelfth century John Zonaras had Books I–XXI but not XXII–XXXV. Xiphilinus cannot therefore have epitomized the most complete copy of Dio's history to be found in Constantinople at the time. Though today we have most of Books XXXVI–LX, we know Books LXI–LXXX (on A.D. 47–229) chiefly

⁴ On this epitome, see Millar, *Study*, pp. 1–4, K. Ziegler in *RE IXA2* (1967), cols. 2132–34, Kazhdan in *ODB III*, p. 2211, Brunt, "On Historical Fragments," pp. 488–92 (though confusing the epitomator with his uncle, the patriarch), and Wilson, *Scholars*, p. 179.

⁵ Xiphilinus, *Epitome*, pp. 479 and 526.

⁶ See *PBW*, Ioannes 18 (the patriarch).

⁷ *PBW*, Ioannes 504. The protovestest Nicholas Xiphilinus (*PBW*, Nikolaos 254), also present at Italus' trial, was doubtless another relative. While the identification of the epitomator with the monk and homilist is assumed by Beck, *Kirche*, pp. 629–30, and most other authorities, nothing identifies the epitomator as a monk or churchman. Though John could of course have decided to become a monk after 1082, monks often adopted monastic names different from their given names.

from Xiphilinus' epitome.⁸ When Xiphilinus reaches Augustus' constitutional arrangements in 27 B.C., in Dio's Book LIII, he declares he will begin to summarize at greater length: "Especially from this point on I shall relate in detail whatever things are necessary, because our way of life depends very much on those times, and our political system reflects them." Consequently his epitomes of the books after LIII, including those lost to us, are on average about three times as long as his epitomes of the earlier books, and about a quarter as long as Dio's full text.⁹

Xiphilinus appears to have been generally well read. He prefers Polybius' skepticism about omens to Dio's acceptance of them, and Plutarch's admiration for Brutus and Cassius to Dio's condemnation of them, and he adds from Plutarch's *Life of Marcellus* that Augustus' nephew Marcellus was descended from the Marcellus who had fought against Hannibal.¹⁰ Probably Xiphilinus added these references from memory. He even makes an effort to fill in Dio's lost account of the reign of Antoninus Pius from Eusebius' *History of the Church* and an unknown source.¹¹ Xiphilinus adds at least thirty comments of his own to Dio's text, in one of them using the dual number twice (for Brutus and Cassius) and in another expressing qualified admiration for Cleopatra. His comments seem, however, to become fewer after the reign of Augustus.¹²

⁸ According to one plausible reconstruction, in late antiquity Dio's eighty books were copied in fifteen volumes of four to seven books each. If so, they apparently reached Xiphilinus, Zonaras, and us as follows:

Known to Zonaras alone: I–XXI (vols. 1–3?)

Known to none: XXII–XXXV (vols. 4–5?)

Known to us and Xiphilinus: XXXVI–XLIII (vols. 6–7?)

Known to us, Xiphilinus, and Zonaras: XLIV–LX (vols. 8–10?)

Known to Xiphilinus and Zonaras: LXI–LXXX (vols. 11–15, with Xiphilinus' vol. 13 missing LXX at the end?).

⁹ Xiphilinus, *Epitome*, p. 526. Note that the epitomes of Books XXVI–LII occupy about 43 pages in Boissevain's edition and the epitomes of Books LIII–LXXX (not counting LXX, which Xiphilinus lacked) take up about 207 pages.

¹⁰ Xiphilinus, *Epitome*, pp. 495 (Plutarch on Brutus and Cassius), 506 (Polybius; Xiphilinus also ridicules Dio's credulity about omens on pp. 518–19), and 527 (based on Plutarch, *Marcellus* xxx.6).

¹¹ Xiphilinus, *Epitome*, pp. 658–59, citing Eusebius' *History of the Church* (IV.9) and one "Quadratus," who may be either the contemporary apologist and bishop of Athens (see *RE* XXIV [1963], col. 677) or, more likely, the historian of the early third century. (See Millar, *Study*, pp. 61–62 and n. 1, *RE* II [1896], cols. 1603–4, and *Suda* K 1905.) Since this citation from Quadratus is not in Eusebius' history, Xiphilinus presumably consulted an as yet unidentified chronicle (or scholion) that cited this obscure author.

¹² Each comment is marked in the margin with the notation "Xiph." by Boissevain in Xiphilinus, *Epitome*, pp. 481, 484 (twice), 485, 487 (twice), 494 (twice), 495, 497, 500 (duals: ἴσθην ... ἐλαχέτην), 501, 505, 506 (twice), 509, 515, 518, 518–19, 520, 521 (on Cleopatra), 523, 526 (twice), 527, 529–30, 530, 568, and 569–70. Boissevain makes no further notations after p. 570, because after p. 583 we no longer have Dio's original text to compare with the epitome, but Xiphilinus doubtless made more additions, including his treatment of Antoninus Pius. (See n. 11 above.)



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