The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio


The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio is a study of the two principal, surviving historical accounts of the years 44-35 BC, the period of civil war intervening the assassination of Julius Caesar and the installation of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, when Rome was ruled by a triumvirate composed of Lepidus, Mark Antony and Octavian (later called Augustus). The authors of these accounts, Appian (ca. AD 92-165) and Cassius Dio (ca. AD 162-239), were both Easterners (from, respectively, what are now Egypt and Turkey), both served in the Roman Imperial bureaucracy, and both wrote comprehensive histories of Rome in Greek. As virtually the only sources for this turning point in Roman history, they provide invaluable information on such famous characters as Mark Antony, Cicero, Caesar's assassins M. Brutus and C. Cassius Longinus, and of course Augustus himself. This book is not, however, simply a reexamination of the role played by these individuals in Roman history, but rather a comparison of how Appian and Dio depict them and, more generally, an analysis of how they wrote history. To that end the book also entails an examination of battles, speeches, and other events as they are presented by the two historians. The central aim of the book is to demonstrate that in writing of the triumviral period, both Appian and Dio were profoundly affected by the political, literary, and social milieu in which they lived and worked; and that their respective triumviral narratives reflect an evolution in historical writing between the second and third centuries AD, when the Roman empire passed from the period of its greatest prosperity to that of irreversible decline.