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THE HISTORIAN DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS AND THE GODS*

Abstract: This article looks in detail at Dionysius' presentation of the role of what he calls 'the *daimonion*' in human affairs; he sees it often at work, usually in support of justice and thus, in the main, of Rome; he regularly sees providence guiding Roman fortunes, but also deplores contemporary neglect for the guidance provided by divination. It notes the traditional stories that he rejects as 'myth-like' (μυθώδη), but also the many about which he is less sceptical than his near contemporary Livy. Like another near contemporary Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius represents a bounce back from hard-headed Polybian scepticism; but he is reluctant to accept myths that offend against an exalted conception of the divine nature.

Keywords: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, early Rome, *to daimonion*, mythical traditions, divination, lightning

Vocabulary: τὸ δαιμόνιον

An alternative title would have been 'The historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus and the *Daimonion*', because τὸ δαιμόνιον[1]—a usefully vague term that goes back to Herodotus—is the term he uses most often to speak of the divine sphere; I shun it only to avoid possible confusion with the *daimonion* of Socrates. Some examples from many: the fleeing Trojans were stopped from sailing beyond Italy by oracles and by the *daimonion*, which shows its wishes in many ways (1.55.1); Romulus was unwilling to assume kingship unless the *daimonion* showed its support through auspicious signs (2.4.2); Crassus marched out despite the opposition of the *daimonion*; but to speak of modern contempt for the *daimonion* would be a long story (2.6.4); Romulus appointed many individuals to 'serve' (θεραπεύειν) the *daimonion* (2.21.1); the *daimonion* didn't allow the plot of Ancus Marcius' sons against Tarquin to remain unavenged (3.72.2); from this omen they knew that the *daimonion* promised them a rapid victory (5.46.3); 'if you break the oath you will have the *daimonion* against you' (8.2.3); thinkers who concede to the *daimonion* no control over human affairs (8.56.1); the *daimonion* sends a message through an omen (9.6.5); the *daimonion* which was angry with them (9.6.6); Lucius Valerius in 470 'attempted to lay siege to the camp of the Aequi, but was

* The text of Dionysius used is the Teubner; all translations are my own. I thank Tim Rood warmly for editorial advice, and two readers for *Histos* for constructive criticism.

[1] On δαίμων and τὸ δαιμόνιον in D. see Mora (1995) 70–9, within a broader discussion, 43–88, of D.'s religious vocabulary.

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prevented by the *daimonion*', through a sudden, violent but short-lived storm (9.55.2).[2] (But divine intervention can be differently described. Poplicola's sister Valeria was 'moved by a kind of divine inspiration', *θείῳ τινὶ παραστήματι κινηθεῖσα*, when she proposed the embassy of women sent to obdurate Coriolanus, 8.39.2.) Dionysius declares programmatically that readers of history need, not a summary outline of events, but a full account of 'causes and the fashion of them and the thoughts of the agents and involvement of the *daimonion*' (*τὰ παρὰ τοῦ δαιμονίου συγκυρήσαντα*) (5.56.1). And one could add much more …

When Dionysius actually names a god, he naturally, given the convention of *interpretatio*, uses Greek names, though occasionally abandoning the founding fiction that there is perfect equivalence between the two pantheons: he wonders whether Consus is Poseidon, offers different options for the epithet of Juppiter Feretrius, notes gods hard to name in Greek, and is once reduced to describing Janus as 'a local god or *daimon* called Ianos'.[3]

Multiple Explanations

The role of *τὸ δαιμόνιον* in human affairs is sometimes clear but at other times debatable. At 3.5.1–2, discussing the sudden death of the Alban leader Cluilius, Dionysius offers a generous selection of explanations that were offered at the time: those who refer all human *tychai* to divine providence (*θεία πρόνοια*) explained the death by divine anger (*χόλος δαιμόνιος*, glossed later as *θεία νέμεσις*); others to rivals or suicide; others to 'natural necessity' (*φύσεως ἀνάγκη*) and fate (*τὸ χρέων*) 'since he had completed the portion (*μοῖρα*) owed him which each person is fated (*πέπρωται*) to receive at the moment of birth'.[4] In this case he casts a vote: the last view is the best. Elsewhere he leaves the choice between different explanations open. The plot of the Veians and people of Fidenae to throw off the Roman yoke was foiled when some conspirators spilled the beans, whether from desire for personal gain, envy of the chief conspirators, fear of betrayal or 'constrained by a divine judgement (*θεία γνώμη*) which didn't accept that an impious deed should reach a successful outcome' (3.6.4). Why did the senate not send out a force against Coriolanus? Were they worried about the inexperience of the troops, the timidity of the consuls, or did the *daimonion* oppose them through bird-omens or Sibylline oracles or some other traditional form of divination (*ὀττεία πάτριος*) such as

[2] Livy 2.62.2 is less committal: *religio* was felt about renewing the attack on 'velut numine aliquo defensa castra'.

[3] 2.31.2–3, 34.4, 50.3; 3.22.7.

[4] Livy 1.23.4 records his death without comment.

men in those days weren't prepared to neglect (8.37.3)?[5] But, on the matter of the fire that destroyed Tullus Hostilius along with his family and whole household, he comes down firmly for the view that divine anger over a blend of ritual neglect and ritual innovation was the cause. He records what he calls the commoner position that the fire was caused by Tullus' successor Ancus Marcius, but rejects it, partly on pragmatic grounds—how could Ancus have got away with it? how could he be sure of the succession?—and partly on religious: his accession would have had to be confirmed by the gods with favourable omens, and 'what god or *daimon* was going to admit a polluted man, stained with so many unjustified killings, to approach altars and initiate offerings and perform the rest of the rites?' (3.35).[6] In this case, therefore, a theological principle can decide a disputed historical fact. [7]

Impiety Punished

Explicit instances of acts of impiety and injustice being said to incur divine punishment are not rare.[8] The *daimonion* didn't allow the plot of the sons of Ancus Marcius against Tarquinius Priscus to remain unavenged (3.72.2, 73.3–4).[9] A 'perfectly fair avenging justice' (8.80 *δίκη τιμωρὸς οὐ μεμπτή*) struck those who tried to debar the children of Sulla's victims from office. Many signs (strange voices and sights) indicating divine anger led to the burial of an unchaste Vestal alive (8.89.3–5; cf. Livy 2.42.11). The murderers of Siccius were exposed 'by fate itself (*ὑπὸ τοῦ χρεὼν αὐτοῦ*) and justice which oversees all mortal affairs' (11.27.1) (though no bad consequence except alienation against the then prevaling 'rule of ten', 11.27.7, is recorded[10]). The gods heeded Camillus' pleas for revenge against his fellow-citizens (Exc. 13.6.1).[11] Above all, in an impressive long sentence, five possible reasons for Pyrrhus' defeat are

[5] Cf. 9.60.7: no campaign in 466 BCE, whether through obstruction from the *daimonion* or because of diseases. Livy 3.2.1 speaks just of disease.

[6] Livy 1.31.8 says nothing of human involvement, just that 'they say' (*tradunt*) that Ancus attempted in secret a sacrifice to Juppiter Elicius which he found in the *commentarii* of Numa, but enraged the god by misperformance and was killed by thunderbolt in consequence.

[7] So Driediger-Murphy (2014) 339. The central argument of her important paper is that D. regularly applied this principle.

[8] Speakers of course appeal to probable divine judgement on their enemies, e.g., 10.28.6, Exc. 12.13.2 (in this case proved right by events). (I adopt for convenience the order and thus numeration of fragments in Jacoby's standard Teubner edition, though aware that it is uncertain: Pittia (2002).)

[9] In Livy 1.41.7 they just go into exile.

[10] So too Livy 3.43.7: 'pessima decemvirorum in vulgus fama'.

[11] A Veian envoy's prediction (12.13.2–3) was thus fulfilled. On this incident, and the language of Camillus' prayer at 13.5.2–3, see Poletti (2020).

rejected in favour of 'the anger of the goddess against whom he committed impiety [by raiding the treasury of Persephone], as not even Pyrrhus himself was unaware, as the historian Proxenos records [*FGrHist* 703 F 9] and Pyrrhus himself writes in his Commentaries' (Exc. 20.10). Pyrrhus had been led on to that crime by 'the worst and most impious of his friends … followers of those godless, accursed beliefs'—Epicureans presumably (Exc. 20.9).[12] (On the other hand, he can record 'god-sent' (θεήλατος or θεόπεμπτος) disasters such as plague without accounting for the gods' anger, as if sometimes they just happened—though reporting the view of king Ancus Marcius that 'plagues have often struck the city because of neglect of the gods'.[13])

Roman Piety Rewarded

Naturally then the Roman belief that they owed their success to their piety (*dis te minorem quod geris, imperas*[14]) is repeatedly endorsed by Dionysius. He gives an account of the powers of the Fetiales in declaring war 'in order that those ignorant of the piety practised by the Romans of that time may not find it surprising that all their wars achieved a most successful outcome. For it will appear that they ensured that their origins and causes were entirely pious and for that reason above all they had the gods on their side in times of danger' (2.72.3–4). Despite his reservation, noted above, about those who refer everything to divine providence (3.5.1–2), we hear repeatedly of Rome benefiting from the *eunoia* or *pronoia* (terms which appear often indistinguishable) of the gods: the claim often appears in speeches,[15] but often too in the historian's voice. Instances of the latter: the Alban general Fufettius realised that θεία τις πρόνοια, anticipating the conflict between Rome and Alba, had prepared a triad of brothers on either side to fight it out (3.13.3, echoed in a speech, 3.14.1,

[12] Cf. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 20.6. (But Pittia et al. (2005) 441 suppose an anachronistic allusion to the scepticism of the New Academy.) Dionysius' polemical pamphlet against 'unjust critics of political philosophy' (*Thuc.* 2) is thought to have been an attack on Epicureans: Gabba (1991) 40. The 'practitioners of godless philosophies, if indeed they can be called philosophies', of 2.68.1 and the proponents of divine indifference of 8.56.1 will be Epicureans.

[13] Plagues unexplained: 9.42.1, with a Thucydidean description; 9.67.1–3, also Thucydidean (the senate in Livy 3.6.5 ascribes it just to 'subita deum ira'); 12 VIII (9) (leading to a consultation of the Sibylline books); 'the greatest plague hitherto' at 10.53.1 is again described *more thucydideo*, and without any mention of the gods except for the futility, despite certain cultic innovations, of supplications to them (cf. Livy 10.32.1–4, also without an aetiology). Ancus Marcius: 3.36.2. For the concept of 'god-sent' disasters see too 3.10.1, 11.9.6 (both in speeches).

[14] Horace, *Od.* 3.6.5, where see the commentary of Nisbet and Rudd (2004).

[15] 1.82.6; 4.26.2; 8.26.3 (varied in 8.26.4 to '*tyche* from the gods'); 10.9.4, 10.2 ('which always saves us').

θέος τις προνοούμενος); the Sibylline books proved a great blessing to Rome, whether it was the *eunoia* of one of the gods or of one of the *daimones* that granted it (4.62.1); there are many signs that the growth of Rome occurred through the gods' *pronoia*, and especially the folly of the conspirators who supported the exiled Tarquin in writing incriminating letters to him in their own hands (5.7.1);[16] a further plot in favour of Tarquin was frustrated by 'the divine *pronoia* which at all times saves the city and had persisted up until my days' (5.54.1—it took the form of repeated terrifying dreams which forced two of the conspirators, after failed attempts at ritual appeasement, and consultation of a seer, to turn informer);[17] 'a kind of divine favour' (θεῶν τις εὔνοια) which did not want Rome subjected to an enemy sent a plague against the Volsci (7.12.4); only 'a kind of divine *pronoia*' (θεία τις πρόνοια) protected Roman troops serving in Campania in 342 BCE from either murdering their Campanian hosts or fighting their own fellow-citizens (Exc. 15.3.1); the self-appointed tyrant Decius was defeated by *pronoia* of the *daimonion*, aided by a deceitful doctor (Exc. 20.5.2); 'just *pronoia* showed her force' when Pyrrhus' attempt to steal Persephone's temple treasure was frustrated by contrary winds (Exc. 20.9); as noted above, divine *pronoia* was one of several possible explanations for the sudden death of Cluilius (3.5.1–2).[18] Stories in which the gods show kindness to mortals gain in credibility for that reason.[19] When he says that the one of the Horatii brothers who survived the battle of the champions but then slew his sister 'could not, being a man, be happy in everything but had to have a taste of the jealous *daimon* (ἀπολαῦσαί τι τοῦ φθονεροῦ δαίμονος)', he is striking a note of traditional pessimism uncharacteristic of him. We are occasionally told that Rome's greatness was fated, πεπρωμένον,[20] but more emphasis falls on the active benevolence of the divine to Rome. Livy's pessimism about the course taken by recent Roman history is quite alien to him.[21]

Dionysius admired Roman religion, as he admired so much else about Rome. He praises Romulus for establishing a religious system which, though

[16] Livy 2.3–4 fails to draw such a conclusion.

[17] This plot, taken by scholars to be a fictional back projection of the Catilinarian conspiracy, is absent from Livy 2.19.1 (where see the note ad loc. in Ogilvie (1965)).

[18] Cf. 2.63.3, 'while the Romans were still unclear whether the disappearance of Romulus occurred κατὰ δαίμονος πρόνοιαν or from a human plot'; for D. the former was the case.

[19] Driediger-Murphy (2014) 337.

[20] E.g., 1.31.3, 56.4. Other references to 'fate' in D. are not frequent, but note that both Tarquin (4.63.2–3) and Pyrrhus (Exc. 20.12) proved unable, despite warnings through dreams or omens, to defeat τὴν πεπρωμένην (Pyrrhus) or διακρούσασθαι τὴν μοῖραν and defeat τὸ χρεών (Tarquin).

[21] Gabba (1991) 21, 96. The first sentence of *On the Ancient Orators* declares oratory too to be in a fine state. Livy is also more reserved about providence than D.: Liebeschuetz (1967) 51–3.

closely based on the Greek, rejected all discreditable myths about the gods, 'ascribing to them nothing unworthy of their blessed nature'[22]—a great good, for all that some Greek myths are beneficial to mankind in different ways (consoling, banishing fears, and in other ways)—and exercised a strict control over foreign cults which meant, for instance, that no free-born Roman participated in degrading aspects of rites of the Great Mother (2.18.2–20).[23]

Divination

According to Dionysius, divination gives, or used to give, the Romans access to divine intentions. Romulus' insistence on taking omens before assuming the kingship prompts a complicated cosmological explanation (with a mythological alternative subjoined) as to why lightning passing from left to right is a good omen (2.5). No-one used to assume office unless the *daimonion* indicated approval (ἐπιθεσπίζειν). (The bird-portent too that marked out Tarquinius Priscus as a future king is duly reported,[24] not a product of divination this but a self-offering sign.) But nowadays omens are taken fraudulently or even neglected, and many disasters have ensued, Crassus' Parthian expedition above all. 'But it would be a large task to describe the contempt for the *daimonion* shown by some people in our times' (2.6; on modern contempt cf. 8.37.3).[25]

In one remarkable passage Dionysius seeks to explain the physical mechanism behind what was often taken as an indicator of divine will, the lightning strike. After telling of such a strike on a Roman camp that killed five soldiers, destroyed two standards and did much damage to equipment, he goes on:

> Lightning bolts (κεραυνοί) came down the name of which corresponded to their effect. For they are a kind of devastating force (κεραϊσμός) and transformation of what is subject to them, reversing human fortunes. For, first of all, the fire of the bolt itself is forced to change its own nature

[22] 'Blessed nature': cf. 1.77.3, quoted below on p. 191.

[23] On D.'s treatment of Romulus cf. Poma (1994).

[24] 3.47.3–4; cf. Livy 1.34.8–9.

[25] For the better early practice see 3.1.3, 46.1 (people's choice of king confirmed by auspicious bird signs). It is surprising that at 9.49.5 he states with approval that since 471 BCE elections of tribunes and praetors had been conducted without omens and other divination (ὀττεία). His condemnation of contemporary religious neglect in 2.6 and 8.37.3 sits ill with the Augustan religious revival: some have supposed that he is influenced by a pamphlet from the Caesarian period (Sordi (1993), reviving a theory of M. Pohlenz).

> as it comes down, whether it is in the upper air or in the skies.[26] For it is not permitted to it to press upon the earth in its own nature, but it must hover up above the earth. For the sources of divine fire are in the upper air. The fire among us (whether it is a gift of Prometheus or of Hephaestus) shows this, being carried up, whenever it breaks the bonds in which it has been forced to remain, to that kindred fire which embraces the whole nature of the universe in a circle. That fire which is divine and rides through the air, separated from perishable matter, when once, under the pressure of some powerful constraint, it is thrust down to earth, foretells changes and reversals.[27]

Just how the physical process comes to embody a message, or punishment, from the gods, is not made clear. But the Romans neglected the omen (unknown however to Livy)[28] and the result was the humiliation of the Caudine forks.

Public prodigies, alien though they were to the early experience of a man from Halicarnassus, he records scrupulously, and without the open scepticism sometimes shown by Livy.[29]

Tyche

In consequence of his strong belief in divine guidance, Dionysius is reserved about the role of Tyche in world affairs. In an important early passage he rejects the offensive view of malicious historians that Rome's rise to eminence occurred 'through a kind of random process and unjust chance' (δι' *αὐτοματισμόν τινα καὶ τύχην ἄδικον*), not piety and justice and general

[26] *εἴτε δὴ αἰθέριον* (Carey, for *αἴθριον* of the mss) *εἴτε μετάρσιόν ἐστι*.

[27] Exc. 16.1.1–2. David Sedley kindly writes that the inspiration looks to be 'Platonist rather than Stoic, since he thinks the heaven consists of eternal fire, and that earthly fire is drawn upwards to its own kind (*syngenes*) in the heaven, for which cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 62–3'. Briquel (2002) 292 suggests that the theory may have come via someone who 'Etruscorum disciplinam Graeca subtilitate miscuerat' (Sen. *QNat.* 2.50.1), as may the observations about omens from natural phenomena in Exc. 16.6 and 19.7; he argues, 293–4, that Dionysius took an interest in the *Etrusca disciplina*, and was feeling for natural explanations of how the communication worked.

[28] 9.2–6; from Livy's silence Briquel (2002) 290–1 concludes that the omen was invented to explain the disaster. In Livy the disaster looks like punishment for arrogant refusal of the Samnite offer of peace (9.1.3–2.1).

[29] See Engels (2012), who notes, 167–8, that D. records more than does Livy, but concludes, 171, that 'public prodigies do not seem to be an intrinsic part of the historian's personal philosophy of history'.

excellence.[30] When various portents were succeeded by plague after the exile of Coriolanus, some detected divine anger over the expulsion of the best of citizens, whereas others thought 'nothing of what occurred was a god's work, but these and all other human experiences were products of chance (τυχηρά)' (7.68.2).[31] Neither group was right; the trouble was in fact due to a ritual infraction. (But on one occasion τὸ αὐτόματον was helpful, in the form of the timely arrival of certain Daunians to support the Romans against Pyrrhus: it was a case of 'manifest help to the Romans from the *daimonion*', Exc. 20.3.1–2.) Speakers in the *Histories* are readier to deploy the concept. For them, *tychai* are often not clearly separable from *to daimonion*: Aulus Verginius defends his fellow general with the argument that plans, deeds, and *tychai* from the *daimonion* (bad in this case) were shared between them (9.33.2, in indirect speech); Titus Verginius tells his troops that they have the gods on their side and many other grounds of confidence prepared by *tyche* (6.6.3); Horatius can speak of the 'Tyche which has long bolstered (αὐξάνουσα) this city'. For speakers, therefore, Tyche tends to be a helper (to Rome, but not necessarily to individuals: 'there is nobody in any age for whom everything has gone right with no opposition from *tyche*', 8.27.1).

Leader's Luck

Tyche of a different kind, leader's luck, becomes a theme for explicit reflection in the defence speech of Servius Servilius (9.30), which the historian prepares for by saying that the defendant was being called to account not for a crime but for *tyche* (9.28.1). The charge of the prosecutors was that a rash attack on the enemy barricade had led to loss of lives (ib.), even though the Romans had in the end won an 'unhappy victory' (οἰκτρὰ νίκη, 9.26.6). Servilius begins his defence by saying that he will not use the argument, reasonable though it is, that he should not be called to account for his *tyche*; uniquely, he will be willing for his luck to be on trial no less than his judgement. He notes that humans judge the good or bad luck of a general exclusively by final outcomes, not stage by stage, and declares that he is happy to be judged by that criterion. 'And if you find that I was defeated by the enemy, then call my luck bad, but if I prevailed over them, good. [He is appealing to the (admittedly unhappy) victory the Romans eventually achieved.] I could say more about luck but will stop here, well aware how vulgar (φορτικοί) are all those who speak about it.'[32]

[30] 1.4.2. The view attacked is traced to Metrodorus of Scepsis by Whitmarsh (2018).

[31] Oakley (2010) stresses the role of *tyche* in D.'s account of this incident; but 'divine *pronoia*' was also involved (3.13.3, and in a speech 3.14.1, 2, where we also meet, 3.14.3, θεία τις τύχη).

[32] Livy 2.52.6–8 mentions the trial but gives the defendant Spurius as praenomen, and a quite different line of defence.

(We would like to know more about this 'vulgar' line of defence!) In Dionysius' presentation, Servilius appears to have reframed an attack on him for rashness as an attack for being unlucky, a reframing proleptically endorsed (9.28.1) by the historian. We note the well-attested Roman stress on the need for a general to be lucky.[33]

Occasional Fatalism

A curious incident, unmentioned by Livy,[34] within a great battle against the Etruscans strikes a note of fatalism not typical of the work as a whole. A thunderbolt struck the tent of one of the Roman generals, Manlius, killing some servants and his finest horse. Manlius' seers explained that capture of the palisade where Manlius was camped and death of men of high repute was predicted; so he shifted his camp to a different palisade. The enemy learnt of the incident, and their seers, great experts in interpreting 'things on high' (τὰ μετάρσια), gave the same interpretation, but added that had the Romans not shifted camp the *daimonion*'s anger against them would have been satisfied by the capture of one camp and destruction of one army. But since they had tried to be smarter than the gods, 'as if the god were predicting disaster for a place and not for men', the god's anger would strike both those who left the one palisade and those who received them in the other. And since, 'when divine necessity foretold the capture of one of their palisades they did not wait for what was fated, but of their own accord surrendered it to their enemies, the palisade which replaced the abandoned one would be overcome by force and captured in its place' (9.6.2–7)—as in fact happened (9.12.2: τέλος εἶχε τοῖς Τυρρήνοις τὰ μαντεύματα). The Etruscan seers' grim prognostic was not wholly wrong. More Romans of note died than in any previous battle; none the less, 'victory in the contest seemed to belong to the Romans' (9.13.2).

'Myth-Like' Stories—What to Believe

I turn to consider his attitude to the 'myth-like' (μυθώδης, μυθικός) stories in which early Roman history was rather rich.[35] Among the accounts of Heracles' dealings with Cacus on arrival at the site of Rome, he distinguishes (1.39.1) between the 'more myth-like' (μυθικώτερα) and the 'truer' (ἀληθέστερα): the former (1.39–40) make Cacus a small-time thief who cunningly stole the hero's

[33] Cf. Weinstock (1971) 112–16; Clark (2007) index s.vv. *fortuna* and *felicitas*; Miano (2018). Not Roman alone: Parker (1983) 268, and add Thuc. 6.17.1; 7.77.2–3.

[34] His account of the battle is 2.44.7–47.9.

[35] On the μυθικόν/ἱστορικόν distinction in D. see section 7.2 in Schultze (2000).

oxen backwards, the latter, 'which many of those who have given a historical account of his deeds have employed' (1.41.1), a thuggish local boss (δυνάστης).[36] About the rape of Ilia, mother of Romulus and Remus, he reports two views which make the rapist a mortal and moves on to what he calls the *mythos* told by most authors (μυθολογοῦσι) that it was 'the spectre (*eidolon*) of the *daimon* whose grove it was', who went on to reassure Ilia that her twin offspring would be supreme in excellence (*arete*) and warfare; writers who take this view 'add many other *daimonia* phenomena', including an eclipse. He goes on (1.77):[37]

> What view one should take of such accounts, whether to scorn them as a case of mortal misdeeds being ascribed to gods even though a god would sustain no task unworthy of its deathless and blessed nature, or accept these stories too on the basis that the whole material of the world is mixed and there is a third nature, occupied by the tribe of demi-gods (*daimones*), between the races of gods and men, associating sometimes with men, sometimes with gods, from which the story goes that the fabled (μυθευόμενον) race of heroes was born, now is not the moment to investigate; what philosophers have said on the subject suffices.

Later he speaks of the twins as being of uncertain paternity, 'but the Romans believe them to be children of Ares' (2.2.3).[38] He does not mention the 'completely fantastic' (μυθώδης παντάπασι) story reported by Plutarch (*Rom.* 2.4–6) of a servant girl having sex with a mysterious phallos that appeared in the hearth of the Alban king and bearing the twins.[39] But he allows that the circumstances of Romulus' birth and death 'give no small support to those who make gods of things mortal (τοῖς θεοποιοῦσι τὰ θνητά) and elevate the souls of the eminent to heaven':[40] for it was said that a total eclipse of the sun

[36] On the two accounts see Fox (1996) 78, who notes that both accounts are rationalised in some measure: was the backwards stealing the 'more mythical' element?

[37] The claim of Gabba (1991) 124 that D. here rejects the theory of *daimones* seems too strong; D. merely avoids commitment on the point. Driediger-Murphy (2014) 335 suggests that the 'demonic' explanation of the rape might be D.'s invention.

[38] At 1.78.3 D. slips into speaking of the 'rape by the god', in contradiction of his own position; in 2.56.6 too it is allowed as a possibility. Livy 1.4.2 says merely that Rea Silvia named Mars as the father, whether because she believed so or 'because a god was a more respectable source of the offence'. (For views in other sources see Driediger-Murphy (2014) 335 n. 29.) He lacks the eclipses; that at the death is known to Ov. *Fast.* 2.493–4, Plut. *Rom.* 27.6–7.

[39] A doublet of the story of the birth of Servius Tullius, on which see below.

[40] For such elevation see the note of Nisbet and Rudd (2004) on Horace, *Odes* 3.2.21–2.

occurred both when his mother was raped, whether by god or man, and when he died (2.56.6).

Dionysius' attitude to stories in this class is therefore ambiguous,[41] as these citations already show. Those who reject everything of this kind, he says, treat the story of Numa's relation to the demi-goddess Egeria as a fiction devised by Numa to secure respect for his legislation.[42] But precise argument (ἀκριβολογεῖσθαι) about myths and things concerning gods needs a long discussion which he will omit (2.61.1–3). He designates as μυθωδέστερα the accounts of Romulus' death which speak of him disappearing, snatched by his father Ares, amid sudden darkness and a storm from a clear sky, and finds 'more plausible' the theory that he was murdered (2.56.2).[43] But later he stresses (2.63.3–4) the reliability of a witness Julius—'not a man to lie for his own profit'—who heard Romulus in a post mortem epiphany requesting him to 'tell the Romans that the *daimon* which got me at birth is taking me to the gods now I've finished my mortal life. I am Kyrinos'.[44] One story, however—that all the males of the gens Fabia, barring one child, three hundred and six in all, were wiped out in the battle of Cremera—he rejects with an argument from probability as 'resembling myths and inventions for the stage' (9.22.3); here, for once, he takes an outsider's view of a cherished Roman tradition.[45]

While discussing the Vestal Virgins in relation to Numa, he tells two stories concerning unjustly accused Vestals to rebuff 'the practitioners of godless philosophies, if it is right to call them philosophies, who ridicule all the manifestations (ἐπιφάνειαι)[46] of gods that have occurred among Greeks and barbarians and will make a great joke of them, ascribing the stories to human

[41] The judgement of Gabba (1991) 118, that 'he has sought, as far as it lay within his power, to leave aside any myth involving divine intervention in human affairs', appears extreme, given the several instances that in fact occur. Wiseman (2008) 256 rightly dissents.

[42] Livy was one such, 1.19.4–5, in line with his general approval of religion as a mechanism of social control: Liebeschuetz (1967) 48 nn. 8–9. D. might have rejected the story because of his disbelief in sexual contact between gods and mortals (so Driediger-Murphy (2014) 338), but does not; he notes, however, probably disapprovingly, that the story comes from those who 'refer all human wisdom to instruction from the gods'.

[43] Driediger-Murphy (2014) 334–5 points out that the 'snatched by Ares' theory implies, objectionably to D., the postulate of a god fathering a mortal.

[44] Livy 1.16 mentions Proculus Iulius' report (already known to Cicero, *Rep.* 2.20; also in Ov. *Fast.* 2.499–508; Plut. *Rom.* 28.1–3) as having a decisive effect on public belief, but remains noncommittal. On this incident cf. Delcourt (2005) 248–55.

[45] Livy 2.50.11 and Ov. *Fast.* 2.235–40 are less sceptical.

[46] We know of collections of 'epiphanies' as a sub-literary genre in Greece (e.g. *IOSPE* I² 344.3, epiphanies of Parthenos on the north coast of the Black Sea; Istros, *Epiphanies of Apollo* and *of Heracles*, *FGrHist* 334 FF 50–3; a section of the Lindian chronicle, *FGrHist* 532 D): were there Roman equivalents? At 3.65.6 he speaks of the '*epiphaneia* which occurred from the divine (θεῖον)' in regard to Servius Tullius.

fraud, on the grounds that no god cares for any mortal. But those who don't exempt the gods from care for men but on the basis of considerable investigation think they are favourable to the good and hostile to the bad won't find these manifestations incredible either' (2.68.2). The first story tells how the sacred fire had gone out; the Vestal wrongly deemed responsible asserted her innocence and threw her linen belt (?—*τελαμών*) on the cold ashes with a prayer, and a flame sprung up, so 'the city no longer needed purifications or new fire'. His second story (2.69) he introduces as 'still more amazing and like a myth'. An unjustly accused Vestal successfully fetched water in a sieve from the Tiber to the forum, where she poured it out at the feet of the pontifices; her accuser could thereafter be traced neither alive or dead. 'I have much more I could say about manifestations of the goddess but I think that this suffices', he concludes.

On the matter of the birth of Servius Tullius he contrasts a realistic account, which he himself favours, with another 'elevating it into the mythical (*μυθῶδες*) which I have found in many Roman histories, if it pleases gods and daimones for such a story to be told' (4.2.1). A male genital organ appeared in the royal hearth; the wise Tanaquil explained that offspring of more than human level would be born of the woman who had union with what had appeared (*τὸ φάσμα*). So Okrisia, who had first seen the portent, was dressed as a bride, shut in the room where the portent appeared, and became pregnant after intercourse with 'some god or daimon' who then disappeared, 'whether it was Hephaestus or the hero of the household'.[47] He continues 'This mythic story (*μύθευμα*), little credible though it seems, is made less incredible by another amazing and paradoxical divine *epiphaneia* that happened in relation to him': while he was taking a midday nap fire blazed out on his head and continued to burn until his mother rushed up and woke him (4.2).[48] The conclusion of his account of Servius Tullius maintains Dionysius' ambiguous attitude to the stories about him. 'Another supernatural (*δαιμόνιον*) event revealed that he was a man dear to the gods, which is why the incredible mythical notion about his birth, as I have said before, has been accepted as true by many.' When the temple of Tyche that he himself built burnt down, the gilded wooden statue of him was the only thing to survive (4.40.7).

[47] Driediger-Murphy (2014) 336 argues that D. rejects this version because it entails, objectionably, sexual union between god and mortal. But D.'s concession that subsequent facts make it 'less incredible' works a little the other way.

[48] Livy 1.39.1–3 has the fire on the head (so too Cic. *Div.* 1.121 and others; this is probably what D. himself calls an *epiphaneia* at 3.65.6) but not the penis in the hearth: Ogilvie (1965) in his note ad loc. quotes parallels for 'king's fire' and strangely supposes the former to be a rationalisation (!) of the latter, where he takes 'penis in the fire' to refer to a flame so shaped. For other sources for the penis in the hearth see J. G. Frazer's note on Ov. *Fast.* 6.627.

Other stories that might well have been tagged as μυθώδη he accepts. After a battle at Silva Arsia against the invading Tarquins a voice was heard by both armies assuring the Romans that they had won a narrow victory; it came either from the hero Horatius (5.14.1) who occupied the *temenos*, or 'the so-called Faunus' (τοῦ καλουμένου Φαύνου), the *daimon* to whom Romans attribute panic attacks and other disturbances (5.16.2).[49] His long account of the two appearances of the Dioscuri at the battle of lake Regillus (6.13) is introduced with a 'they are said to' have appeared, but he goes on to list the 'many signs at Rome of this paradoxical and amazing *epiphaneia* of the *daimones*', taking the elaborate cult then instituted for the Dioscuri as proof; he concludes 'from all this, along with many other important items, one can infer how dear to the gods were the men of that time'.[50] The story that the statue of Juno at Veii, asked whether the goddess was willing to relocate to Rome, said 'yes' (twice!), is reported without scepticism in the form in which we have it (13.3); but it comes in one of the books known only in excerpts and could conceivably have undergone abbreviation.[51] There is no such doubt, however, about his account, taken from the records of the Pontiffs, of the double *epiphaneia* that accompanied the dedication of the temple of Fortuna Muliebris (8.56): the cult statue paid for by women itself announced, twice, 'The married women have dedicated me in accord with the city's pious law'. He has introduced the story by explaining at length its value in bolstering piety, refuting those who deny that gods relish cult and resent wrongdoing, and encouraging 'those who disregard ancestral habits and give the *daimonion* no control over human reasoning' to know better, or if incurable to become yet more hated by the gods.[52] As for his account of the wanderings of Aeneas and early experiences in Latium (1.55–7), successful oracular guidance and various wonders abound.[53]

My concern has been with Dionysius the historian; but I note that in his critical writings, though matters of religious belief are not prominent, where

[49] Livy 2.7.2 is more sceptical: 'addunt miracula huic pugnae' (and for him the voice is of Silvanus).

[50] Livy, by contrast, 'blandly omitted the theophany' (Ogilvie (1965), note on Livy 2.20.12), though mentioning the temple of 'Castor' vowed by the commanding general Postumius and dedicated by his son (2.20.12, 42.5).

[51] For Livy 5.22.6 the reply came from bystanders and the voice was 'fabulae adiectum', but the transfer of the image was strangely easy. Plut. *Cam.* 6.2–6 notes sceptics, including Livy, but argues that Rome's Tyche, which permitted her extraordinary rise, could not have happened without many great *epiphaneiai*; he alludes to comparable cases that have been collected, and ends agnostic.

[52] Livy 2.40.11–12 has the foundation of the temple but, unlike Val. Max. 1.8.4 and Plut. *Cor.* 37.5 ('the Romans say'), no speaking statue. 'Records of the pontiffs': for these cf., presumably, Cato as cited in Gell. 2.28.6, Cic. *De or.* 2.52.

[53] See Fromentin (1988) 323–5.

they surface he is true to himself: he approves of Theopompus for his moralising (*Pomp.* 6.6), of Xenophon for his ἦθος θεοσεβές (*Pomp.* 4.2), of Thucydides for avoiding stories of sexual intercourse between gods and mortals (*Thuc.* 6), while he sharply criticises that author's depiction of the cynicism of the Athenian generals about the divine (*Thuc.* 40.)

Conclusion

Where, in conclusion, should we place Dionysius's treatment of the divine within the history of Greek historiography? Part of the explanation for his strong emphasis on religious factors will lie in the Roman traditions he was working with. On the other hand he repeatedly accepts motifs that Livy, heir to the same tradition, rejects or doubts (Varro, whose work Dionysius doubtless knew, may have been less critical).[54] There is no hint of an outsider's cool appraisal of a nation's beliefs about itself—even if we should never forget his strongly-asserted theory that the Romans were Greeks by origin. Like him, his near-contemporary Diodorus Siculus speaks much of the *daimonion*, of *pronoia*, and of divine punishment of wrongdoing. Both are far removed from the hard-headed scepticism of a Polybius. They represent a bounce back of traditional belief, much like the bounce back that followed Thucydides. Dionysius adds a moralising filter, a rejection of traditions that depict the gods behaving in ways unbefitting their 'blessed nature'. In this, as has been pointed out,[55] he anticipates and may have influenced Plutarch.

ROBERT PARKER
New College, Oxford robert.parker@classics.ox.ac.uk

[54] Livy: see nn.. 2, 4, 5, 9, 16, 21, 38, 42, 44, 48, 49–51. Varro: see Wiseman (2008) 249.

[55] Driediger-Murphy (2014) 341–2.

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