

## REVIEW

DESCRIBING THE KNOWN WORLD:  
A NEW EDITION OF DIONYSIUS PERIEGETES

J. L. Lightfoot, *Dionysius Periegetes, Description of the Known World. With Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 575. Paperback, £130.00/\$250.00. ISBN 978-0-19-967558-6.

In 1789, several shops in London as well as ‘the booksellers of Oxford and Cambridge’ offered a small book in the *duodecimo* format, which is so handy if you want to read a book without alerting others to your use of it: ‘*Tyrocinium geographicum Londinense* or the London geography, consisting of Dr. Free’s short lectures, compiled for the use of his younger pupils, Published Chiefly for the Information of genteel Young Citizens not attending the Gresham Professors, and very proper for the Upper Forms of great Schools, for Gentlemen of the first year in the Universities; and for Ladies that read History. To which is added, by the editor, Translated from the Greek into English blank Verse The *periegesis* of Dionysius, the geographer, from the edition of Dr. Wells, containing the antient and modern Science.’ The book combined basic geographical information with a translation of a pertinent Greek text: the *Oikumenes Periegesis* by Dionysius of Alexandria. The book was such a success that a second edition was published already one year later.

Indeed, editions of Dionysius’ geographical work had long enjoyed a wide readership, first in Latin translations, then in the Greek original first printed in 1512 by Johannes Maciochus (Mazzocchi) in Ferrara. Already one year later, another edition of the Greek text was published by Aldus Manutius (Manuzio) in Venice (which, incidentally, contained the *editio princeps* of Pindar’s Odes). In the sixteenth century seven more editions of the Greek text appeared, some of which were repeatedly reprinted, as well as the first translation into English (Thomas Twyne (1572)); a further eleven new editions followed in the seventeenth century, when the use of the Greek text is also attested in the classroom by editions such as that *in usum Scholae Regiae Etonensis* of 1633. Geography, of course, became a school subject in its own right only in the later nineteenth century; before then geographical information tended to be presented in Latin (often using Pomponius Mela) or Greek (details in my *Classics Outside Classics* (2015) 31–46). To that effect, a bilingual Greek–Latin version of Dionysius was first published by Edward Wells in 1704 and saw another five editions in the eighteenth century alone. Here, pupils could read, and had to translate, what Dionysius had said on Rome (vv. 354–6, transl. Lightfoot p. 217):

Θύμβρις, ὃς ἱμερτὴν ἀποτέμνεται ἄνδιχα Ῥώμην,  
 Ῥώμην τιμήεσαν, ἐμῶν μέγαν οἶκον ἀνάκτων,  
 μητέρα πασάων πολίων, ἀφνειὸν ἔδεθλον.

Tiber, which parts in twain delightful Rome,  
 Prestigious Rome, great homeland of my lords,  
 Of all cities the mother, wealthy seat.

And on Britain the ancient author told them (vv. 565–8; transl. Lightfoot p. 229):

ἄλλαι δ' Ὀκεανοῖο παραὶ βορεώτιδας ἀκτάς  
 δισσαὶ νῆσοι ἔασι Βρετανίδες, ἀντία Ῥήνου·  
 κέϊθι γὰρ ὑστατίην ἀπερεύγεται εἰς ἄλα δίνην,  
 τάων τοι μέγεθος περιώσιον οὐ κέ τις ἄλλη  
 νήσοις ἐν πάσῃσι Βρετανίσιιν ἰσοφαρίζοι.

By the ocean's northern fringes, other isles—  
 The twin Bretanides—face the Rhine's mouth,  
 For its last eddies issues in that sea.  
 Enormous is their size: of all the isles,  
 None could with the Bretanides contend.

It is thus not surprising that Dionysius appealed to 'genteel Young Citizens', the 'Upper Forms of great Schools', 'Gentlemen of the first year in the Universities', and even 'Ladies that read History' in Britain! The later fate of Dionysius' work, however, is less appealing, as it 'sank into obscurity', as Jane Lightfoot rightly states in the preface of her great volume (vii), which is the first full-length English commentary on the entire *Oikumenes Periegesis*, and is unlikely to be superseded for a very long time.

Lightfoot's work consists of nearly 600 (xviii + 575) densely printed pages in two parts. The 'Introduction' (1–193), which in a previous (but largely identical) version is still freely available online at [http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/tl\\_files/Downloads/Dionysius-Periegetes.pdf](http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/tl_files/Downloads/Dionysius-Periegetes.pdf), presents as 'preliminaries' observations on poetry and prose, on the *hypotyposis geographias* as overview of the known world, and on conceptions of space. Lightfoot presents an up-to-date and lively survey of these topics, which have found much interest in the last two or so decades. Of the same high quality are the second chapter discussing the presumed sources of Dionysius, and the third on his language. Here, Lightfoot succeeds in a magisterial survey of the lexicon (with an interesting note on the *-us* terminations of nouns and adjectives), on word-formation, on formulae

and pseudo-formulae, and most helpfully on metre; the third chapter culminates in a discussion of the question whether there is ‘a language for geography’ in Dionysius. Having discussed language, the fourth chapter situates Dionysius in the genre of didactic poetry, studying catalogues and lists in general, and looking at the didactics of the narrator, the addressees and spectators, and on the relationship of authors and narrators, and their ‘bird’s-eye vision’ as evident in the text. The fifth chapter discusses what Lightfoot calls ‘geopoetics’: epithets, chorography and ethnography, landscape, natural resources, peoples and their environment, but also the divine, mythology, and finally history and time. An elegant final chapter on ‘the end of journey’ wraps up this substantial introduction.

The book’s second part presents the Greek text (without attempting a new critical edition, as work by others towards this goal is in progress for the *Budé* series), an elegant translation (for which examples were given above; for an alternative go to [http://www.dh.informatik.uni-erlangen.de/IMMD8/staff/Goerz/Dionysius\\_Periegetes.html](http://www.dh.informatik.uni-erlangen.de/IMMD8/staff/Goerz/Dionysius_Periegetes.html)), and a full commentary (261–509), which raises, and addresses, every conceivable question on the text and its content. A copious appendix of twenty-six pages lists echoes and allusions—a great help for further studies on intertextuality in Dionysius—even if it is cheekily introduced as ‘guaranteed’ to be ‘incomplete’, and a full bibliography, as well as several great indices; perhaps the publishers (who have done an excellent job in producing this fine, but expensive book) could persuade Lightfoot to add a survey of the contents of the *Oikumenes Periegesis* when the book is next reprinted.

The reception of Dionysius’ work is not covered here, so there is no discussion of (possible) references by Appianus (praef. 3.10; cf. H. Usener, *Rheinisches Museum* N.F. 25 (1870) 612–13), by Triphiodorus (cf. M. Campbell, *Lexicon in Triphiodorum* (1985) 209), by scholiasts (on Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 789, on Aristophanes, *Plutus* 586, and on Nicander, *Theriaca* 175a and 607), by Themistius, who could quote Dionysius’ work without mentioning the author’s name (*Oratio* 30 p. 183–4), or by Metrodorus in the ‘arithmetic problems’ verse (*Anthologia Palatina* 14, 121, and 129), where two quotations from Dionysius are so cleverly combined in two questions on distances that not only a mathematical solution can be found, but also the reference to the unnamed author can be identified. There is also no discussion of the Latin translations, or rather adaptations, by Avien(i)us and Priscianus, and of the *Nachleben* as a school text referred to at the beginning of this review. But given the great quantity, and quality, of the material presented by Lightfoot this would have been far too much ground to cover, of course!

Such a study of the *Nachleben* would then also show how Dionysius’ was expanded to cover parts of the *oikumene* which Dionysius had not described, but which British ‘genteel Young Citizens’ and ‘Ladies that read History’

should find in the Greek text. In his edition of 1704 Wells changed the verses on Rome (quoted above), and Free in his 'crib' in *duodecimo* format that so handily fits under a school desk translated them as follows:

Θύμβρις, ὃς ἱμερτὴν ἀποτέμενεται ἄνδιχα Ῥώμην,  
Ῥώμην τιμήεσαν, ἰδὲ προπάροιθε πολλῶν  
μητέρα πασῶν πολίων, κρατερῶν μέγαν οἶκον ἀνάκτων,  
νῦν ἱερὸν Πάππου μέγα κοιρανέοντος ἔδεθλον.

Tiber, which lovely Rome divides in two  
Much honor'd Rome, and formerly the Queen  
Of other Cities; seat of powerful Kings;  
But now the sacred Mansion of the Pope.

And about London ἐμοῦ μέγας οἶκος ἀνακτος, the British Isles, Ireland (*Ierne*), and the *Pteroton castrum* mentioned in Ptolemy's geography, which was then (wrongly) identified with Edinburgh, this Dionysius states:

νῆσοι δὲ προτέρωσε Βρετανίδες εἰσὶ νότονδε,  
δισσῶν τοι μέγεθος περιώσιον ἢ μὲν ἐπ' ἡῶ  
κλήζεται Ἀλβίων, ἢ δὲ πρὸς δυσμὸν Ἰέρνη.  
εὐρυτέρην μέντοι Ἀλβίονα (τοῦνεκα καὶ νῦν  
τὴν μεγάλην ἐκαλεῦσι Βρεταννίδα) ναιετάουσι  
πρὸς βορέην Σκοττοί, ζέφυρον Καμβροί, νότον Ἄγγλοι.  
Ἄγγλιακὴ ἐπὶ χώρῃ ὑπὲρ Ταμίσαο ῥέεθρον  
ἄσπετον ἦδ' ἐνναϊόμενον καὶ εὐκτιτον ἄστν  
Λόνδινον περίπυστον, ἐμοῦ μέγας οἶκος ἀνακτος.  
ἔστιν ἐπὶ Σκοτία Ἡδενβύργου πτολίεθρον,  
ἔνθα ποτ' Αὐσονίοιο στρατοῦ πέδον ἔσκε πτερωτόν,  
ἦδ' ὑπὲρ ἡῶν ῥηγμῖν' Ἰβερνίδος αἴης  
Δουβλινίου εὐναιομένη πόλις ἐστήρικται,  
ἦν τέ περ' Ἐβλάνην οἱ πρόσθεν ἐφημίξαντο.  
κεῖναι τοι μέγεθος περιώσιαι, οὐδέ τις ἄλλη  
νήσοις ἐν πάσῃσι Βρετανίσιν ἰσοφαρίζει.

But of the British Isle upon the South  
Two for their Size the others far exceed,  
One to the East, which Albion hears for Name,  
The other westward is Ierne call'd.  
The larger, Albion, (by a modern Name  
Great Britain call'd,) is by three Nationes held,  
Northward the Scotch: westward the Welch possess,

And to the South, the English hold their Seats.  
In English Realms, and o'er the Thames' wide Stream  
Stands a large City nobly built and rich,  
London far fam'd, where our great King resides.  
In Scotland, Edinborough City lies,  
Where once the Romans winged Camp was seen  
And on the Eastern Coast of Irish Land  
Is Dublin's well built City plac'd; the same  
Once by the Antients was Eblana call'd;  
These, in their Bigness far exceed the rest,  
Nor among all the other British Isles,  
Can any for Comparison contend.

Nor among all the other studies on Dionysius' *Oikumenes Periegetes*, can any for Comparison contend with that of Jane Lightfoot.

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