

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

THE EXPLOSION OF DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS: GHOSTS OF RHETORIC FROM THE *ARTES HISTORICAE* TO POSTMODERNIST HISTORIOGRAPHY*

Richard L. Hunter and Casper C. de Jonge, edd., *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome: Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography*. Greek Culture in the Roman World. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. ix + 300. Hardback, \$105.00. ISBN 978-1-108-47490-0.

Friedrich Meins, *Paradigmatische Geschichte: Wahrheit, Theorie und Methode in den Antiquitates Romanae des Dionysios von Halikarnassos*. Palingenesia 113. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019. Pp. 169. Hardback, €44,00. ISBN 978-3-515-12250-4.

It has long been a commonplace that every piece of scholarship concerning Dionysius of Halicarnassus should start with the complaint that the author has been historically underappreciated and understudied. There were good reasons to do so. From the nineteenth century until just recently, Dionysius was considered a ‘dirty’ author to study. The lack of appreciation for Dionysius in the last two centuries has become even more striking after the recent reevaluation of his importance in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In a series of brilliant studies, Gabriele Pedullà has demonstrated that Dionysius had an absolutely essential role in the development of European political thought, and was a major influence on Bodin, Montesquieu, and perhaps even Machiavelli.¹ Until the early nineteenth century, he was fully part of the canon of ancient historians one was expected to be familiar with alongside Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, and Tacitus.

The reasons for the decline of Dionysius’ reputation in the nineteenth century have been discussed at great length by Pedullà. The rise of historicism with its romantic and nationalist ideology was the real reason for Dionysius’ fall from grace. There were three arguments on which criticism was based.

* I am grateful to John Thornton and Tim Cornell for their comments on a first draft of this review. I discussed several of the ideas presented in this review article with Carmine Ampolo and Ivan Matijašić.

¹ Pedullà (2010) and (2018).

The first is that there were new ideas of how political institutions were created, namely that constitutions reflected the spirit of a given nation rather than a rational, nomothetic process. These ideas could not reflect favourably on Dionysius.² A second argument against Dionysius in nineteenth-century historicism was that he did not have political experience and that he was a Greek living under Roman rule. In terms of nineteenth-century nationalist historiography this meant that, lacking liberty, he could not be a proper historian—according to Pedullà, he could be placed in the same category as the German historians who welcomed Napoleon, or the Italian historians who celebrated Austrian rule. There was an implication of treason: Dionysius was a traitor to his own kind, someone who composed a historical work to flatter his Roman rulers. The third and final argument identified by Pedullà is a different approach to literary imitation: if classicism prized the elegance of a good imitative style, romanticism preferred originality and spontaneity of expression. Pedullà showed how all these different arguments were blended together in the notorious condemnation without appeal that Eduard Schwartz pronounced on Dionysius in his entry for the *Realencyclopädie*. In his words:³

the ‘pedantic little Greek’ (as Schwartz called him) looked imitative because he was rhetorical, rhetorical because he lacked reliable information, lacking reliable information because he was servile. Moreover, he was servile because he was rhetorical, imitative because he was servile, and he lacked reliable information because—as a mere rhetorician—he was only interested in the formal aspects of history writing.

Rhetoric was fully part of the problem, in several, profound ways. Johann G. Droysen, for example, believed that, after Thucydides, and with the exception of Polybius, ancient historiography was dominated by the school of Isocrates, and was consequently associated with rhetoric: ‘[historiography] became, and with the Romans it remained, so far as philology did not get possession of it, a part of rhetoric or *belles lettres*. Between the two, philology and rhetoric, historical sketches for practical purposes, including encyclopaedias and school books, gradually sank to the most miserable dryness.’⁴ It did not help that Dionysius was also associated with the Humanist tradition of *artes historicae*: *De Thucydide* was included in the influential collection *Artis historicae penus* (1579) as an ancient example of this genre, and the treatment of ancient historians in the *Epistula ad Pompeium* was translated by Stanislaw

² Pedullà (2010) CXXX–CXXXIII.

³ Pedullà (2010) CXLIII, referring to Schwartz (1903). For a critique of Schwartz’s conception of Greek historiography see also Gabba (1979).

⁴ Droysen (1897) 106.

Ilowski and printed alongside Francesco Robortello's *De historica facultate*, and a short treatise with the same title written by Ilowski himself (1556).⁵

It was 105 years after Droysen's *Historik* that Hayden White published his seminal monograph *Metahistory*.⁶ Droysen's notion of the decadence of historiography caused by the negative influence of rhetoric could not have been more radically turned upside down. As is well known, for White all forms of historical writing and historical thinking are deeply and essentially rhetorical. To put it in Droysen's terms, for White *all* historiography, and not just 'bad' historiography, was rhetorical, and in a way part of *belles lettres*. With time, this approach started to be applied to ancient historiography: A. J. Woodman's *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*, where Dionysius' work is discussed as encomiastic history, was the first work on the topic to explicitly engage with White's theoretical premises.⁷ From the 1990s, significant scholarly contributions published by Matthew Fox, and, more recently, by Nicolas Wiater, have discussed Dionysius, the historian and rhetorician, through the lens of Hayden White's theories.⁸

But if the historical oblivion of Dionysius for the last two centuries may require further inquiry, the old *topos* that Dionysius is a neglected author must be now surely and clearly abandoned. As testified by the volumes under review, the study of Dionysius of Halicarnassus is currently a flourishing field of scholarship. We have today a vastly different picture of this author, and we can finally recognise that he was a sophisticated historian, literary figure, and thinker. For this discussion I shall start with short, individual accounts of the books under review. Subsequently, I shall attempt to outline thematically what these books bring to the table with regard to the study of Dionysius, with an eye on perspectives for future research.

I

The volume *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome* is based on a 2012 conference that took place at the University of Leiden. It starts with an extensive and thoughtful introduction by the editors, which lucidly outlines the complexity of the topics discussed in the book through a series of sections that make clear how the study of Dionysius may be situated in a tension between complementary concepts that do not always have a clear, linear relationship with one another. 'History and rhetoric' is the first one: it is compellingly argued that the two halves of Dionysius' work, the rhetorical essays and the

⁵ On the *Penus* see Grafton (2007); on Ilowski see Fornaro (1997) 35–43.

⁶ White (1973).

⁷ Woodman (1988).

⁸ Fox (1993), (1996), and (2001); Wiater (2011).

Roman Antiquities, ought to be studied together because they complement each other as expressions of the same pedagogical project; in the second section, ‘Greece and Rome’ are undercurrents in the work of Dionysius as they refer to the hybrid position of the author, a bilingual individual living in Rome during times of massive political and cultural change, well connected with contemporary literary and political circles. This position can in turn be related to the famous Dionysian thesis of the Greekness of archaic Rome. Thirdly, the editors underline that Dionysius must be contextualised within works of other Greek authors of the same period, such as Strabo and Nicolaus of Damascus, and that these authors should be understood in their Augustan context, not just in terms of whether they should be seen as favourable or opposed to Augustus, but in the sense that their work reflects concerns of the Augustan period. Finally, they go back to rhetoric: Dionysius ought to be understood within the context of Hellenistic and Roman rhetorical criticism, in authors such as Philodemus and Cicero, both from the point of view of the choice of an Atticist literary model, and in the sense of the technical instruments used for critical analysis.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, ‘Dionysius and Augustan Rhetoric and Literary Criticism’, starts with a chapter by Richard Hunter, who lucidly analyses the Dionysian idea of ‘the critic’, and how its pedagogical value depends on his position between several real or imagined agents: the authors of the past, his pupils, and his critics. Hunter argues that the value of criticism can be illustrated by the complex relationship between Dionysius and Thucydides, which is discussed through several implicit Thucydidean echoes in Dionysius’ works, and involves the creation of a rhetorical concept of truth endowed with a certain moral light. Nicolas Wiater’s chapter builds on his monograph on Dionysius and concepts of classicism, and analyses the tension between ideal and historical in the references to fifth- and fourth-century Athens within the work of Dionysius. He shows that Dionysius is perfectly capable of historicising the old Athenians, but he chooses to do so only when this fits his pedagogical agenda; he is therefore interested in the past only as long as it can be helpful to shape the future. Moreover, Wiater analyses how this works in practice through the use of *μίμησις* and *μετάθεσις* within the rhetorical essays. Finally, Harvey Yunis’ and Laura Viidebaum’s remarkably well-assorted chapters look at Dionysius’ views on Demosthenes and Lysias respectively, showing how Dionysius’ criticism must be interpreted in the context of his ideas on Atticism in Augustan Rome.

The second section of the book is focused more specifically on the *Roman Antiquities* and Dionysius’ historical method. That is precisely the topic of the first chapter of this section, a penetrating discussion of the wordiness and sheer length of Dionysius’ historical work by Stephen Oakley. Its importance lies in the connection with the extent of Dionysius’ invention of historical details in his work. Especially in the nineteenth century, the sheer amount of detail

included by Dionysius was seen as a reason to be suspicious of his work, as it was assumed that most of these details must have been made up using criteria of plausibility. Oakley, however, argues that the comparison with the length of Livy's narration of the same time span might be misleading, in the sense that several fragmentary historians, particularly Cn. Gellius, are known to have written very extensive histories of early Rome in which Dionysius might have found many of the narrative details he provides. Dionysius' expansiveness can be explained by looking at several of his key historiographical concepts, such as his claim to ἀκρίβεια and his aspiration to ὠφέλεια, but also at his attempt to write a 'total' history that might be appealing to different types of readers. Clemence Schultze's chapter, 'Ways of Killing Women', analyses Dionysius' treatment of the deaths of Horatia and Lucretia. In these stories Schultze identifies several plausible references to the Augustan context of the *leges Iuliae* and concerns regarding women's behaviour and marriage, and she outlines key differences in how the two narratives are developed: Horatia's story is developed with distinctively Greek literary echoes, whereas the story of Lucretia has a different significance because it is primarily a story of regime change, which focuses on the Roman character during times of political transformation (in this sense, the story is more politically sensitive to an Augustan audience). The third and final chapter of this section, written by Matthew Fox, concerns Book 1 of the *Roman Antiquities*, dedicated to Italian prehistory. Fox argues that one of the most striking characteristics of this book, namely the numerous narrative variants and the copious sources quoted by Dionysius, is a way for the author to open up questions concerning ethnicity between Greeks and Romans in a far more complex and open-ended way than would appear from his own programmatic statements. It is also a way of constructing Dionysius' authority as a historian of early Rome in spite of his outsider status.

The third and final section of the book, 'Dionysius and Augustan Rome', starts with a chapter on political constitutions and regime change by Christopher Pelling. Pelling closely looks at the similarities and the differences between some central concepts in Polybius and Dionysius, and how these concepts play out in their respective historical narratives. Dionysius comes out from this comparison as less teleological than Polybius. According to Pelling, the many constitutional speeches in Dionysius show some unexpected ideas on regime change, such as the emphasis that the reign of Tarquinius Superbus represented a change from monarchy to tyranny, and in this sense the beginning of the Republic was in fact a restoration of many of the good practices of previous monarchs. The central argument remains that, while to Dionysius constitutions matter a great deal, having the right man for the job is even more important. As a consequence, Pelling rightly advocates a more sophisticated approach to Augustan echoes in Dionysius, one which recognises that Dionysius is concerned with central themes of contemporary political and

cultural life, without necessarily being anti- or pro-Augustus. Pelling's insistence on the role of speeches in Dionysius within the framework of regime change and constitutions is also interesting. Speeches count as political actions for Dionysius: they have an essential role in making sure that political conflict does not result in violence, and they are one of the most prominent characteristics of his Romans, whom Pelling effectively describes as 'speechifying'. This chapter is nicely followed by Daniel Hogg's attempt to apply precisely the approach advocated by Pelling to Augustan elements in Dionysius, with an analysis of the narrative of the decemvirate. Hogg shows that many elements of Dionysius' narrative bear echoes of late republican Rome, especially how the Roman institutional framework is insufficient to stop the degeneration of the decemvirate into tyranny. At the same time, Dionysius also looks back at the Greek historiographical tradition, with Appius' character described in remarkably similar terms to those used by Herodotus to describe Cambyses, a point reinforced by the Herodotean references in Dionysius' second preface, placed in the middle of the decemviral narrative (11.1–8). With the final chapter of the book we step back from the *Roman Antiquities*, as Casper de Jonge discusses the many similarities between Dionysius' *On Composition* and Horace's *Ars poetica*. De Jonge cautiously avoids explaining these similarities with a common source or the derivation of one of the works from the other. He argues that the two works display concepts, concerns, and a set of rhetorical tropes that were common within the tradition of literary criticism of the Augustan period and earlier, suggesting that perhaps the characteristic of the idea of composition expressed by Horace and Dionysius which most closely corresponds to Augustan concerns is the search for a sublime style through the careful arrangement of common words and expressions. The book is closed by an insightful essay by Joy Connolly, who fascinatingly suggests, using theoretical insights drawn from Homi Bhabha and Édouard Glissant, that new perspectives on Dionysius might be found seeing him as a 'migrant' thinker.⁹

II

The other volume discussed in the present review article is a slim but ambitious German doctoral dissertation, defended by Friedrich Meins in Leipzig in 2014, a book that goes straight to the heart of the historiographical conceptions of Dionysius by looking at his theories and methods of truth, as presented in the rhetorical essays and his historiographical work. The work is structured in four dense chapters. The first, 'Forschungsmethode und Darstellungsabsicht', is focused on the main concepts of Dionysius' historiography. These are developed in relation to his predecessors—especially Polybius—but are at the same

⁹ For further discussion of Meins' book see my forthcoming review in *MedAnt* 17 (2020).

time quite original. Κοινὴ ἱστορία, for example, does not entail a spatial universality, but a thematic one, able to be of interest to readers of all kinds for its richness of forms and content. This novel conception allows Dionysius to make archaic Rome part of a universal history. Παραδείγματα are a central concept for Dionysius, as they allow the desirable qualities of φρόνησις and σοφία to develop (AR 11.1.4), while the ἦθος allows the recognition of what is worthy of narration and consideration. Meins claims that this ethical/paradigmatic part of Dionysius' historiography is mediated by rationalistic concepts, such as ἀκρίβεια and τεκμήρια. If so, Dionysius' position would be somewhat ambiguous, exemplified by his rationalisation of myth, which normally occurs through the comparison of different variants, one being defined as 'truer' (ἀληθέστερος) than the others.

The second chapter, 'Plausibilität und Angemessenheit als Wahrheitskriterien', focuses on concepts related to truth; the more substantial part of Meins' argument emerges with a discussion of a practice essential to Dionysius, that of μίμησις. Meins argues that this practice is frequently thought to be based on merely formal criteria, as if it aimed at a plausible, but not necessarily true, representation of reality, not unlike the concept of τὸ πρέπον. Meins argues against a formalist reading of both practices: at a formal level μίμησις concerns the imitation of a certain rhetorical style, but it does not entail that Dionysius formulated a general theory of historical μίμησις, conceived as a verisimilar imitation of truth. The same goes for τὸ πρέπον, which is not a general criterion of historical plausibility but, on a formal level, is applied primarily to speeches that must always be appropriate to the circumstances.

The third chapter is dedicated to idealisation in Dionysius. Meins starts by expanding the discussion of μίμησις as formulated in the fragments of *On Imitation*, and he shows that it is a concept strongly associated with Dionysius' paradigmatic approach: examples cause ζήλος, which starts in turn an imitative process that tends towards κάλλος, conceived in terms quite similar to Plato's. Discussions of idealising processes within the *Roman Antiquities* follow. Meins shows that, among various influences, Plato seems to have a particularly important role in the development of Dionysius' approach, especially in speeches, and it can be detected in particular in the constitutional discussions and in the demythicisation of the religion of Romulus. In spite of these idealising tendencies, Meins believes that Dionysius never abandons the realm of concrete experience: the idealisation of archaic Rome does not correspond to the abstract characteristics of an ideal state, but it remains connected to historical factors that allowed the stability and the prosperity of Rome. This practical idealisation is therefore connected to a pedagogical political project: the ultimate aim is to teach Dionysius' readers how to administer the state correctly through the admiration and imitation of παραδείγματα.

The fourth and final chapter is dedicated to the paradigmatic character of Dionysius' history, in the first place seeking to understand the methodological basis of his historiography in relation to the central concepts of his eclectic idea of education, and, secondly, analysing concrete examples of this methodology. Meins thinks that exemplarity in Dionysius has both Greek and Roman characteristics that correspond to Dionysius' synthetic view and his famous opinion on the Greekness of archaic Rome. Several characteristics of Dionysius' aetiology can be traced back to a pedagogical vision influenced by Isocrates, for which the aim of rhetoric is the development of moral qualities useful to the polis. Consequently, Meins discusses the state of rhetoric in the Augustan period and the famous passage in which Dionysius claims that under the Roman empire rhetoric flourished (*De oratt. vet.* 3.1–2). According to Meins, the opinion that this passage refers to the development of a type of rhetoric whose excellence is merely formal and stylistic is not convincing: rhetoric still had a political function. The second part of the chapter discusses the usefulness of history for Dionysius, and how it leads to *φρόνησις* and *σοφία* as both moral and political qualities. A further section focuses on aetiology, which had not merely a reconstructive role but a marked usefulness according to the political and paradigmatic pedagogy of the author, which shows influences from Isocrates and Aristotle. Meins further discusses the role of *tychē* in historical events, arguing that Dionysius tends to diminish its role in favour of a rational conception which gives an important place to the benevolence of the gods. Only a more rational view of history would enable political virtues to be learnt from historical *παραδείγματα*; such a vision is also reflected in the interpretation of the mixed constitution promulgated by Romulus, who is represented as a proper law-giver, and Dionysius' take on *ἀνακύκλωσις*, which depends not on nature but on political process. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to the usefulness of speeches. The reason why speeches have such a prominent role in the work of Dionysius is that he considers them political *ἔργα*, as Meins convincingly demonstrates with a discussion of the occasions where Dionysius comments on his speeches with remarks on pedagogy and psychology that can be related to his aim of writing a useful history.

III

These two volumes represent a genuine development in the scholarship on Dionysius. In what follows, I shall attempt a schematic discussion of what in my view is the most significant progress in three crucial areas for the study of Dionysius.

The first is the topic of history and rhetoric. One of the main contributions of Meins' monograph is that he shows—successfully, in my opinion—that the view of Dionysius as a sort of Hayden White of antiquity is rather forced. In

his view of historiography, Dionysius always subordinates formal criteria to his philosophical, pedagogical, and political message. Meins still somehow accepts, in the end, Schwartz's description of the *Roman Antiquities* as *rhetorische Geschichtschreibung* insofar as rhetoric plays an important role in Dionysius' project: the problem is, rather, that this role has been misunderstood and misrepresented as being concerned with merely stylistic criteria whose relationship with the truth would be just pretence, historically empty, and without moral value. In my opinion this must form the basis of future discussions of Dionysius. If Hayden White's ideas have allowed the rekindling of an interest in the work of Dionysius because of the subsequent reevaluation of the role of rhetoric, they have also entailed the risk of seeing Dionysius, historian and rhetor, as a precursor of certain postmodernist ideas on historical writing, a sort of Hayden White *avant la lettre*. If *Metahistory* turned upside down historicism's ideas on the worthlessness of rhetoric for historiography, it still favoured the view that rhetoric in historiography was just about writing entertaining stories without any ambition of ascertaining historical truth, with which Droysen would have agreed enthusiastically. The discussion of rhetoric and historiography has evolved hugely since White. One can think of the outstanding work that Carlo Ginzburg has produced on this topic over the last couple of decades: rhetoric can be studied as an art that is not in contrast with a search for historical truth, and can even be an instrument to establish such truth through a range of types of evidence, such as those that Aristotle spells out in his *Rhetoric* under the category of *πίστεις*. Some of these are an integral part of Dionysius' methodological toolbox as described by Meins, such as *τεκμήρια* and *παραδείγματα*.¹⁰ Stephen Oakley's essay on the wordiness of Dionysius goes in a similar direction: this characteristic of Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities* does not necessarily mean that it is a historical novel full of made-up detail, but must be seen in the light of Dionysius' concern to present an adequately complete history.

The second topic is politics and rhetoric. Here I think in particular of Meins' argument that one should not assume that rhetoric in the Augustan period was merely a way of writing up panegyrics for the monarch, but that it could have had—and, in Dionysius' eyes, certainly did have—an important function of public service, which is both theorised in *De oratt. vett.* and shown in practice in the *Roman Antiquities*. Pelling and Hogg arrive at the same place by a different route in their pieces on Dionysius and Augustus. The political dimension of Dionysius' rhetoric is far from being imperial panegyric, as it is more nuanced, and has primarily pedagogical aims. Moreover, if speeches *are* political acts for Dionysius, one could see the whole *Roman Antiquities* as a political act, in which the author tries to persuade the reader of his pedagogical

¹⁰ Ginzburg (2000) 51–67. See also Ginzburg (2006), esp. 205–24 on White.

and political project. One could propose as a promising direction for future research the conceptual dialogue that Dionysius has with his predecessors, and particularly Polybius, as proposed by Pelling and Meins. As shown brilliantly by Quentin Skinner, the political concepts of canonical texts can be studied through a close analysis of their verbal expressions via the use of rhetorical figures, an approach that works best if these texts are interpreted in dialogue—and in conflict—with other texts, and allows us to try to recover the problems they were originally designed to resolve.¹¹ These recent contributions demonstrate beyond doubt that the most fruitful of these relationships of dialogue and conflict are those with Polybius, Thucydides, Herodotus, and Livy, but a variety of discussions can be opened up with regard, for example, to Dionysius and Horace, as proposed by de Jonge, or to Dionysius and Plato, Cicero, Demosthenes, and Isocrates, as attempted in a recent book on Dionysius by Emanuele Santamato.¹²

The final topic is the question: how Roman, or how Greek, was Dionysius' work? These recent studies have made clear that one must renounce any attempt to give a straightforward answer to the questions raised by Dionysius' ideas on ethnicity, and the related issue of audiences. There seems to be a consensus that the principles of Dionysius' work were both Greek and Roman, and so was his audience. I was fascinated by Joy Connolly's suggestion that Dionysius' work can be seen as the product of a 'migrant' thinker and understood in terms of hybridity. I think that, even more than hybridity (a notoriously problematic term, as it assumes a level of cultural purity), it would be interesting to think of Dionysius in terms of cultural translation, using the metaphor of translation both in the sense of movement and interpretation. Here, rather than Homi Bhabha, I think that the formulation of this theory that can be most usefully applied to Dionysius is that of Peter Burke. According to Burke, cultural translation is different from hybridity because it has a higher degree of self-consciousness.¹³ Dionysius certainly moves between the Greek and the Roman political and conceptual worlds, and, without doubt, what he does is very self-conscious; his work cannot be described as simply Greek or Roman.

I think that all the perspectives mentioned above can be considered as part of the same problem. If, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle ambiguously called the different types of evidence *πίστεις*, he did so because they are meant to demonstrate but also to persuade. The object of persuasion in Dionysius' work must be his complex political and pedagogical project, which leads to being a better citizen and a better human being by contemplation and emulation of

¹¹ Skinner (2018) 10–11.

¹² Santamato (2018), esp. 201–307.

¹³ Burke (2016) 11–42 and (2009) 55–61.

παρδείγματα. Dionysius' political and pedagogical project must be connected with his lived experience as a Greek individual living in Augustan Italy, who was able to move between Greek and Latin language and literature in several ways: these included being a teacher of Greek rhetoric to the Roman elite and being a Greek historian writing about a period of Roman history that had been widely covered by Roman authors but very little by fellow Greek historians. Therefore, one has to go back to the idea of a substantial unity of Dionysius' work as a historian and essayist. The brilliant books under review show that much progress has been made on Dionysius in the last decade, and foreshadow a number of potentially exciting developments in the years to come.

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