

## REVIEW

## EXPLORING DIONYSIUS' NARRATIVE ART

Caroline Hähnel, *Studie zur narrativen Technik des Dionysios von Halikarnass*. Classica Monacensia 63. Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2024. Pp. 294. Paperback, €88.00. ISBN 978-3-381-12091-8.

Over the past four decades, Dionysius of Halicarnassus has enjoyed a genuine renaissance, as the author of the book under review claims (24). Indeed, since the publication of Emilio Gabba's Sather Lectures, *Dionysius and the History of Archaic Rome* (Berkeley, 1991), studies on the Augustan-age historian and rhetor have increased at a steady pace.<sup>1</sup> Since the early nineteenth century, German dissertations seem to have been the ideal place to deal with Dionysius: from Philipp F. Schulin's *De Dionysio Halicarnasseo historico, praecipuo historiae juris Romani fonte* (Heidelberg, 1820) and Anton W. F. Busse's *De Dionysii Halicarnassensis vita et ingenio* (Berlin, 1841), and then from Emil Kremers' *Über das rhetorische System des Dionys von Halikarnass* (Strasbourg, 1907) to Friedrich Meins' *Paradigmatische Geschichte* (Stuttgart, 2019).<sup>2</sup> Caroline Hähnel's endeavour can also be inscribed in the same, distinctly German, tradition: her book is the outcome of a PhD thesis defended at the Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich in 2023.

Previous scholarship has analysed the multi-faceted literary production of Dionysius from different perspectives, but the literary qualities of his historical work have been somewhat neglected and not extensively investigated. Hähnel's book on the narrative technique of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the *Antiquitates Romanae*, or *History of Archaic Rome* (from now on *AR*), is a successful attempt to fill that gap.

The book consists of an introduction (§ 1), a review of earlier scholarship (§ 2), a section on the socio-cultural background of Dionysius' *AR* (§ 3), followed

<sup>1</sup> For more details see my review-discussion of R. Hunter and C. C. de Jonge, edd., *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome. Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography* (Cambridge, 2018): I. Matijašić, 'Da Alicarnasso a Roma: Dionigi tra retorica e storiografia', *RFIC* 149 (2021) 199–217, as well as Daniele Miano's review-discussion of Hunter-de Jonge's edited book and Friedrich Meins' *Paradigmatische Geschichte*: 'The Explosion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus: Ghosts of Rhetoric from the *Artes Historicae* to Postmodernist Historiography', *Histos* 14 (2020) clxxv–clxxxvi.

<sup>2</sup> See my review in *BMCR* 2020.07.14.

by three core sections on, respectively, *enargeia* (§ 4), speeches (§ 5), and the portrayal of female figures in the *AR* (§ 6). Each of these three sections includes a useful summary of the results. The book is rounded up by a brief conclusion (§ 7), a bibliography, and two indexes. Each chapter starts with a commendably clear overview of the problem and an extensive treatment of previous scholarship. The structure is neat and the language sharp and straightforward (at least to a non-native German reader), though the chapter summaries are somewhat repetitive, which may reflect the conventions of a dissertation.

Since identifying the audience of Dionysius is an important issue for the overall argument of the book, Hähnel aptly starts her analysis by placing Dionysius in the cultural and social context of Augustan-age Rome (§ 3). Given the absence of a clear-cut solution to the issue, she infers from several passages that Dionysius' readership was primarily Greek (42–3), though she acknowledges both the presence of Roman readers and the heterogeneous nature of his audience (45). Relying mainly on *AR* 1.8.3, Hähnel identifies three categories of readers: those politically engaged, i.e., active in politics; the intellectuals; and those who were mainly interested in literary enjoyment and entertainment (47). One might have wished for a more precise definition of the intellectuals (*die Intellektuelle*), given that the label is slippery when dealing with ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>3</sup>

A whole chapter is devoted to *enargeia*, called *Anschaulichkeit* in German and usually translated in English as 'vividness' or 'graphic quality' (§ 4).<sup>4</sup> This rhetorical feature, which aims at making the subjects appear before the audience's eyes, is often encountered in the form of *ekphrasis*. The concept is treated by Dionysius in his rhetorical treatises, especially in *Lys.* 7 (quoted and discussed at 69–75) and applied to his historical work in sections dealing with the age of the kings and the early years of the Republic. Hähnel analyses several episodes in the *AR*, such as the famous story of the Horatii and Curiatii in Book 3; Tanaquil's plot after the murder of her husband, the killing of Servius Tullius, and Lucretia's suicide in Book 4; the execution of Brutus' sons in Book 5; the herdsman Faustulus' encounter with the she-wolf and the babies Romulus and Remus, and his revealing the story to the young Romulus in Book 1.

The conclusion of this careful analysis is that the books set in the royal period make deliberate use of narrative techniques to create vivid imagery, prompting readers to engage with the story both emotionally and intellectually. This detailed description of the characters' feelings and thoughts, which arouses the reader's emotions, does not seem to be applied to the same

<sup>3</sup> Cf., e.g., E. Gabba, 'Pubblica opinione e intellettuali nel mondo antico', *RSI* 110 (1998) 5–17; L. Capponi, *Il ritorno della Fenice: intellettuali e potere nell'Egitto romano* (Pisa, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> The expression 'graphic quality' is used by R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work* (Cambridge, 2009) 194–8, which is not quoted in Hähnel's book.

extent in the Republican books. These considerations do not take into account carefully enough the fact that Books 11–20 are only known through excerpts and fragments: perhaps Hähnel’s assessment might be slightly different if we were able to read Dionysius’ work in its entirety.

In the conclusion to Chapter 4, Hähnel makes an interesting point when she states (117) that in ancient historiography, the detailed description of the characters’ feelings and thoughts is usually found in the speeches, while Dionysius places these descriptions in the narrative sections. One might ask why this is the case, and why Dionysius does not conform to previous historiography on this aspect.

The next chapter (§ 5) deals with speeches, focusing in particular on the regal era. The section on the function of speech in Greek historiography is very informative and well written (120–7). It is followed by an analysis of Dionysius’ approach to speeches, especially in the treatise *On Thucydides*, and considerations on the concept of τὸ πρέπον, i.e., what is fitting or appropriate.<sup>5</sup> In Dionysius’ views on speeches in historiography, τὸ πρέπον plays a very important role, as highlighted in his treatment of the ancient historians (*Pomp.* 3.20), in the essay on Lysias (*Lys.* 9), and in several passages in the *On Thucydides* (esp. *Thuc.* 44–5). Despite Dionysius’ insistence on the importance of speeches, both in his treatment of historians and orators, his own use of speeches in *AR* has been widely criticised and often considered nothing more than ‘a succession of cheap platitudes and rhetorical commonplaces’.<sup>6</sup> Hähnel challenges these previous scholarly opinions by tackling several selected speeches (141–81). The detailed analysis leads her to argue convincingly that Dionysius’ speeches in *AR* are not merely literary embellishments or contributions to the dramatic effect of the narrative: their function highlights key stages in his treatment of early Roman history and represents a central instrument of Roman politics. It is probably not surprising to consider the significance of Dionysius’ use of speeches in political terms, but perhaps this was only possible after the disdain of past generations of scholars for Dionysius had subsided.

Chapter 6 on female figures is arguably the most original part, since it has not been extensively considered by previous scholarship on Dionysius. The growing interest in this topic in studies of Greek and Latin historiography is pertinently discussed at 186–92.<sup>7</sup> Hähnel relies extensively on Barbara Kowalewski’s book on female figures in Livy, *Frauengestalten im Geschichtswerk des T. Livius* (Munich and Leipzig, 2002), and fruitfully compares Dionysius’

<sup>5</sup> The most comprehensive study of τὸ πρέπον is still M. Pohlenz, *Tò πρέπον. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des griechischen Geistes* (Berlin, 1933).

<sup>6</sup> Thus E. Cary in *Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The Roman Antiquities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937) I.xviii, quoted at 139.

<sup>7</sup> One should now add M. Zaccarini, *Erodoto e le donne: la presenza femminile nelle Storie* (Rome, 2024).

narrative with Livy's. In fact, the Latin author is omnipresent throughout the book. According to Hähnel, Dionysius constructs various models of femininity in his history of early Rome. The powerful figures of Tullia and especially Lucretia are pivotal in bringing the concept of *patria potestas*—central throughout Roman history—closer to Dionysius' Greek audience. Their stories also reinforce the idea of the end of the monarchy (254–5). More broadly, female characters are portrayed as catalysts of political change and causes (*aitia*) of significant historical transformation. This is to some extent also evident in one of the most prominent predecessors of Dionysius: Herodotus. From the various abductions of women with which the *Histories* begin to the countless female figures (often anonymous) throughout his narrative, women constitute a pervasive presence in Herodotus. Although Dionysius learned his craft from Herodotus, he portrays women as historical agents far more actively than his predecessor.

A note on bibliographic references is in order. Previous scholarship receives extensive citation and detailed discussion, yet Italian publications are conspicuously absent. Two works merit particular mention: S. Fornaro, *Dionisio di Alicarnasso. Epistola a Pompeo Gemino* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1997) and the Italian translation of the *AR: Dionigi di Alicarnasso. Le antichità romane*, edited by F. Donadi and G. Pedullà (Turin, 2010). Beatrice Poletti's recent book *Dionysius and the City of Rome: Portraits of Founders in the Roman Antiquities* (Lanham, 2023) goes unmentioned, likely because it appeared shortly before Hähnel's volume.

To conclude on a more positive note. This review is, by necessity, selective and may not do justice to the wealth of material discussed in this book. It is a work that will prove useful not only to scholars of Dionysius but also to those interested in the literature and culture of the Augustan age, as well as in Greek and Latin historiography more generally.

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