

Ekphrasis in Livy's Depiction of Landscapes

Livy, in his initial description of the Alps at 21.32.6-7, employs rhetorical techniques typical of *ekphrasis*, describing the Alpine landscape as if it were a painting. Livy writes with two Alpine viewers in mind: the men in Hannibal's army who actually experienced the Alpine landscapes and his contemporary readers. In this passage, Livy temporally collapses the distinction between the Carthaginian soldiers approaching the Alps for the first time and the readers of his work, thus highlighting an essential function of *ekphrasis*, which uses *enargeia* to turn the reader into a viewer. In examining the function that the landscape fulfills for both the historical figures and Livy's Roman readership, I am inspired by the approach of Feldherr 1998 who surveys Livy's depiction of public spectacle, paying particular attention to the first books. Feldherr 1998, by understanding the connection a Roman reader might have made between the spectacles Livy portrays and those being conducted in Augustan Rome, points out that "Livy's narrative generates its own *auctoritas*" (19). That is, Livy's text asserts its authority as a work of history by appealing to the power inherent in visual spectacles.

In 21.32.6-7, Livy describes the Alps as *torrida*, which Walsh 1973 translates in his commentary as "shriveled." In combination with Livy's vivid language and his appeal to visuality, this adjective suggests a static quality as if the Carthaginians (and readers) view the landscape as though it were a painting of a scene frozen in time. In addition, Livy ends his description of the Alps with two supines, writing *cetera uisu quam dictu foediora* (everything else [the remaining elements of the landscape] was ghastly to see more than to speak about) (21.32.7), drawing an explicit contrast between sight and speech. It is not enough for Livy to simply produce words about the Alps—nor about the Carthaginian reaction to the famous mountains. Rather, he needs to transport his readers to the Alps themselves so that they might

understand the truly horrifying experience of approaching a foreboding mountain range for the sake of crossing it. Livy's readers would be transported back in time through his deployment of *ekphrasis* and placed shoulder to shoulder with the Carthaginians looking up at the Alps.

My reading of this "transportation" of the reader is further enhanced by engaging with Fowler 1991, who approaches *ekphrasis* as a rhetorical figure that functions on a spectrum between total narrative pause and subservience to the progress of a narrative's themes. Arguing that *ekphrasis* is a rhetorical figure, Fowler states that *ekphrases* ought not "to be separated from the contexts—or reduced to them" (35). In 21.32.6-7, by exploiting the narratological potential of *ekphrasis*, Livy includes moments of description that force his reader to stop, sensing the natural narrative pause, and in stopping to consider how the description impacts the surrounding narrative. Whereas Fowler argues that there are "two realities" (35) of an *ekphrasis*, I posit that both realities are felt simultaneously: the natural narrative pause inherent in an *ekphrasis* informs the very narrative that it interrupts. By way of conclusion I suggest that, in historiography, *ekphrasis* transports the reader. In the moment of reading an *ekphrasis*, the reader slips back in time due to the vivid nature of *ekphrastic* descriptions and due to the power of *ekphrasis* as a rhetorical figure that both interrupts and supports a surrounding narrative. I am thus proposing a new avenue for *ekphrastic* debate: Livy's provides his audience with an opportunity to experience history in the similar way that those about whom he writes experienced it.

Bibliography

Feldherr, Andrew. 1998. *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fowler, D.P. 1991. "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81: 25-35.

Walsh, P.G. 1973. *Livy: Book XXI*. London: Bristol Classical Press.