

Lovers of Homer in Dio of Prusa's *On Kingship* (*Or.* 2) and *Borystheniticus* (*Or.* 36)

Dio of Prusa's second oration *On Kingship* (*Or.* 2) is a dialogue (albeit one introduced and, at one point, interrupted by an anonymous narrator) between Philip II and a teenage Alexander, set sometime in the early 330s BCE. Their discussion is "about Homer...and about kingship" (*Or.* 2.1), topics upon which Alexander expounds at length, while Philip plays the role of gentle devil's advocate. As with Dio's other *On Kingship* orations, *Or.* 2 is assumed by most scholars to have been delivered to Trajan (Moles 1990). There are several interpretative difficulties with the dialogue, but in this paper I focus on the problem of Dio's presentation of the young Alexander. Is the listener meant to identify him with Dio himself, as the primary speaker, or with Trajan, whose admiration of Alexander is well attested? In either case, why is Alexander portrayed as alternately hot-tempered, naïve, and pedantic? Previous scholarship has argued that Dio's ambivalent presentation of Alexander is intended either as a negative model of a king (Berardi 1997), as an attempt to persuade Trajan to abandon his obsession with the Macedonian (Gangloff 2006, 260-4), or as a reflection on how a king's education requires not only rhetorical but also philosophical training (Fornaro 2003).

In this paper, I take my cue from these analyses, but suggest that Dio's target is even broader: Homer's position as an authority on kingship. Dio shows, through Alexander's strained readings of Homer in *Or.* 2.37-64, that the poet actually has little to say on the topic; the lengthy and radically different philosophical interpretation (*Or.* 2.65-78) of Homer's simile comparing Agamemnon to a bull (*Il.* 2.480-3) that concludes the dialogue suggests that insight is only acquired when one leaves the Homeric text behind. A further piece of evidence supporting this thesis is the focus of this paper: the striking parallels between *Or.* 2 and Dio's *Borystheniticus* (*Or.* 36), which, to my knowledge, have never been examined in depth.

In *Or.* 36, Dio narrates his encounter, in the Black Sea outpost of Borysthenes (Olbia), with Callistratus, a young man, a warrior, who is just as obsessed as Alexander with Homer, Achilles, and things martial; both, for example, insist that they cannot even listen to any other poet (both also admit Tyrtæus as an exception). And just as Philip, ‘wanting to arouse’ (κινεῖν... βουλόμενος: *Or.* 2.8) Alexander, asks him why he doesn’t appreciate Hesiod, so Dio, ‘teasing’ (προσπαίζων: *Or.* 36.10) Callistratus, asks whether he thinks Phocylides or Homer is the better poet; both young men respond in the same way, ‘laughing’ contemptuously (γελάσας: *Or.* 2.8; *Or.* 36.10). These parallels (and others I will mention) suggest that we should read Alexander in light of the overall portrayal of Callistratus—admired as noble, beautiful, and a worthy student of Dio’s, but also treated with some condescension as naïve, primitive, and as someone who has a lot to learn (Russell 1992; Billault 2013). But even more important is why Dio goes to such length to emphasize Callistratus’ (and the Borysthenites’) naïve, if quaintly admirable, obsession with Homer: because Homer’s poetry is completely *inappropriate* for their city. Dio takes his cue from a two-line poem by Phocylides instead, and speaks to them about the cosmic city, inspired not by Homer, but by Plato and Stoicism instead.

In the second *On Kingship* it is Alexander himself who shifts from naïve Homeric critic to philosophical orator, but the narrative movement of both speeches is similar: the callowness and over-enthusiasm of the young advocates of Homer is meant to suggest the poet’s unsuitability for the topic at hand. In this respect, we might say that Dio is seeking to persuade Trajan to abandon, not his love of Alexander, but his love of Homer.

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