Thucydidean Dionysius

This paper argues that the rhetorical framework of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *De Thucydide* is more sophisticated than scholars have argued. For the first time, Dionysius appropriates the stylistic traits of his predecessor. Therefore, his criticism is not only limited to the analysis of passages of the *History*, but it also takes the form of a "critical mimesis".

In the *De Imitatione*, Dionysius claims that neither Thucydides' style, nor his subject matter is worth imitating. In the *De Thucydide* he seems to express a more objective judgment (Weaire 2005; Grube 1950): while pointing to flaws (κακίαι) in Thucydides' arrangement of events, convoluted style and biased depiction of Athens, Dionysius also devotes some space to his predecessor's qualities (ἀρεταί): devotion to the truth, which corresponds to the rejection of mythical elements (τὸ μυθῶδες), is the most important ἀρετή. Recent scholarship (Irwin 2015, Luraghi 2003) points to the fact that Dionysius' opinion of Thucydides in the *De Imitatione* is not in contrast with that expressed in the *De Thucydide*, because the praise of Thucydides in the latter essay is merely a *captatio benevolentiae* aimed at captivating the reader. Although I agree with this, I believe that there is more to Dionysius' rhetoric. In fact, the introductory chapters of the *De Thucydide* reveal a systematic, yet implicit, attempt at imitating the *History*, teaching the reader simultaneously how to read and to emulate Thucydides.

At the beginning of his essay (*Thuc.* 2), Dionysius adopts a position analogous to that of Thucydides: whereas most men accept the latter's account without question, only Dionysius understands the truth about Thucydides, a writer biased in his nature (χαρακτήρ). Similarly, Thucydides criticizes men's uncritical acceptance of ready-made accounts and claims that only he was able to discover the truth about the Peloponnesian War.

A second parallel can be seen in Dionysius's survey of ancient historians (*Thuc.* 5-6), after which the uniqueness of Thucydides becomes all the more manifest (Toye 1995). In the *History*, the survey of events preceding the Peloponnesian War shows that no earlier military endeavor was as exceptional as the war between Athens and Sparta (Hornblower 1991).

Dionysius goes further, for he appropriates Thucydides' techniques of persuasion, based on repetition and accumulation rather than on proof (Plant 1999). In fact, it is by accumulating statements that emphasize the difficulty of his enterprise (1.20.1; 1.22.1; 1.22.3) and discrediting the reputation of others (1.20.3; 1.21.2) that Thucydides appears irrefutable, even though he may not be. Dionysius does the same: he discredits his critics (*Thuc.* 2), subject to envy or arrogance, and he accumulates statements on his unbiased attitude in order to appear irrefutable (*Thuc.* 2, 4, 8). Truth itself becomes a *topos* of persuasion in both authors. Despite his apparent rejection of τὸ μυθῶδες, Thucydides resorts to mythical characters (Hellen, Deucalion...). A mythical framework of events is in fact necessary to make Thucydides' work acceptable to as large a Panhellenic audience as possible (Howie 1998). Since Dionysius refers to the rejection of myth as Thucydides' most praiseworthy means to achieve the truth (*Thuc.* 7), it appears that also Dionysius is trying to persuade his readers of something untrue. One reason may be that he himself resorts to myth in his *Antiquitates Romanae*, because he wants to produce an idealized account of Rome (Fox 1993). Despite claims to truthfulness and lack of bias, Dionysius incurs the same κακίαι as his predecessor, but he is equally canny about not seeming to do so. Dionysius' appropriation of Thucydides' rhetoric shows the very power of this rhetoric and is the most effective way to prove that the *History* is flawed.

In the *De Thucydide*, Dionysius maintains the same opinion he had in the *De Imitatione*. However, his criticism, subtler than in earlier essays, takes the form of direct imitation of Thucydides' χαρακτήρ.

Bibliography

Fox, M. A. 1993. "History and Rhetoric in Dionysius of Halicarnassus", *JRS* 83: 31-47.

Grube, G. M. A. 1950. "Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Thucydides", *Phoenix* 4: 95-110.

Hornblower, S. 1991. *A Commentary on Thucydides* vol. 1. Oxford.

Howie, J. G. 1998. "Thucydides and Pindar: the *Archaeology* and *Nemean* 7", in *Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar Tenth Volume*: 75-130.

Irwin, E. K. 2015. "Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Thucydides* and Thucydides' Rhetoric of the Episodic", in C. Werner, A. Dourado-Lopes, E. Werner (eds.), *Tecendo narrativas: unidade e episódio na literatura grega antiga*. São Paulo: 121-99.

Luraghi, N. 2003. "Dionysios von Halikarnassos zwischen Griechen und Römern", in U. Eigler, U. Gotter, N. Luraghi and U. Walter (eds.), *Formen römischer Geschichtsschreibung von den Anfängen bis Livius: Gattungen, Autoren, Kontexte*. Darmstadt: 268-86.

Plant, I. M. 1999. "The Influence of Forensic Rhetoric on Thucydides' Principles of Method", *CQ* 49: 62-73.

Toye, D. L. 1995. "Dionysius of Halicarnassus on the First Greek Historians", *AJP* 116: 279-302.