

Dionysius
of
Halicarnassus

on Herodotus

A Greek Reader

prepared by
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(last revised 8 September 2017)

Introduction

Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a literary critic and historian who lived and worked at Rome from c. 30 BC. We learn from the preface to his works on the orators (*de Oratoribus Veteribus*) that Dionysius was a convinced Atticist and as such strongly opposed the Asianist style which, he argues, took over after the death of Alexander the Great. Asianism is vaguely described in the sources as a rather overdone flamboyant sing-song style known particularly for its emphasis on certain prose rhythms. Dionysius refers to Atticism as something that had come about in his own times and now held the upper hand. This turn of events is attributed to the world domination of Rome.

Dionysius writes in a very clear style of Greek and his work is never difficult to grasp. In his treatise *De compositione verborum*, which concerns us here, he begins by contrasting the question of the choice of words (ἐκλογή) with the art of putting words together (σύνθεσις) arguing that the latter is more important. He then illustrates this by rewriting a passage from Homer and a passage from Herodotus. For Herodotus he chooses the very passage concerning Gyges, which we have translated. An important aspect of σύνθεσις for Dionysius is the question of ἁρμονία, by which he means the musical quality of the language in terms of the linear progression of the text (Greek music was monophonic). His analysis centres around a discussion of the juxtaposition of harsh or smooth combinations of letters and syllables, and of rhythms and metres. He analyses the ‘harmony’ of language using a threefold analytical scheme: the rough, smooth and mixed style.

Extract from *De Comp. Verb.* § 3 (Usener/Rademacher)

Ἴνα δὲ μὴ δόξω φάσιν ἀναπόδεικτον λέγειν, ἐξ ὧν ἐπέισθην κρεῖττον εἶναι καὶ τελειότερον ἄσκημα τῆς ἐκλογῆς τὴν σύνθεσιν, ἔργω πειράσομαι δεικνύναι, ἐμμέτρων τε καὶ πεζῶν λόγων ἀπαρχὰς ὀλίγας προχειρισάμενος. λαμβανέσθω δὲ ποιητῶν μὲν Ὅμηρος, συγγραφέων δὲ Ἡρόδοτος· ἀπόχρη γὰρ ἐκ τούτων καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων εἰκάσαι. ...

ἐξ ὧν ... τὴν σύνθεσιν, the final word is emphasised λόγοι πεζοί, 'prose' (lit. 'words of feet' / 'walking words')	προχειρίζομαι, 'to choose / select'
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An example from Homer follows. And then ...

Φέρε δὴ μεταβῶμεν ἤδη καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν πεζὴν διάλεκτον καὶ σκοπῶμεν, εἰ κάκεινι τοῦτο συμβέβηκε τὸ πάθος, ὥστε παρὰ μικρὰ καὶ φαῦλα πράγματά τε καὶ ὀνόματα συνταχθέντα καλῶς μεγάλας ἡδονὰς γίνεσθαι καὶ χάριτας. ἔστι δὴ παρὰ τῷ Ἡροδότῳ βασιλεὺς τις Λυδῶν, ὃν ἐκεῖνος Κανδαύλην <καλεῖ, Μυρσίλον δὲ> καλεῖσθαι φησὶν ὑφ' Ἑλλήνων, τῆς ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὸς ἐρῶν, ἔπειτα ἀξιῶν τινα τῶν ἐταίρων αὐτοῦ γυμνὴν τὴν ἄνθρωπον ἰδεῖν, ὃ δὲ ἀπομαχόμενος μὴ ἀναγκασθῆναι, ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἔπειθεν, ὑπομένων τε καὶ θεώμενος αὐτὴν – πρᾶγμα οὐχ ὅτι σεμνὸν ἢ καλλιλογεῖσθαι ἐπιτήδειον, ἀλλὰ καὶ παιδικὸν καὶ ἐπικίνδυνον καὶ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ καλοῦ ἐγγυτέρω· ἀλλ' εἴρηται σφόδρα δεξιῶς, καὶ κρεῖττον γέγονεν ἀκουσθῆναι λεγόμενον ἢ ὀφθῆναι γινόμενον. ἴνα δὲ μὴ τις ὑπολάβῃ τὴν διάλεκτον εἶναι τῆς ἡδονῆς αἰτίαν τῇ λέξει, μεταθεὶς αὐτῆς τὸν χαρακτήρα εἰς τὴν Ἀτθίδα γλῶτταν καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλο περιεργασάμενος οὕτως ἐξοίσω τὸν διάλογον.

Φέρε δὴ, idiomatic 'Come now' ἐράω, + gen. 'to love or desire passionately' καλλιλογεῖν, 'to beautify with words' / 'to embellish' οὐχ ὅτι ... ἀλλά idiom. 'not only ... but'	σεμνὸν ἢ καλλιλογεῖσθαι ἐπιτήδειον the ἢ introduces a comparison, even when not preceded by a comparative, 'solemn rather than fit to be embellished' ἐγγυτέρω 'nearer' / 'akin to' + gen. δεξιῶς, 'courteously' / 'kindly'
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<p>Dionysius' Attic rewrite</p> <p>Γύγη, οὐ γὰρ σε δοκῶ πείθεσθαι μοι λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἴδους τῆς γυναικός· ὧτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποις ὄντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν· ποιεῖ ὅπως ἐκεῖνη θεάσῃ γυμνὴν. Ὁ δ' ἀναβοήσας εἶπε· Δέσποτα, τίνα λόγον λέγεις οὐχ ὑγιᾶ, κελεύων με δέσποιναν τὴν ἐμὴν θεάσασθαι γυμνὴν; ἅμα δὲ χιτῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή. Πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποις ἐξεύρηται, ἐξ ὧν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν οἷς ἐν τόδ' ἐστίν, ὅρᾳν τινα τὰ ἑαυτοῦ. ἐγὼ δὲ πείθομαι ἐκεῖνην εἶναι πασῶν γυναικῶν καλλίστην, καὶ σοῦ δέομαι μὴ δεῖσθαι ἀνόμων. ὃ μὲν δὴ λέγων ταῦτα ἀπεμάχετο ..., ὃ δ' ἠμείβετο τοῖσδε· Θάρσει Γύγη, καὶ μὴ φοβοῦ μήτ' ἐμέ, ὡς πειρώμενόν σου λέγω λόγον τόνδε, μήτε γυναῖκα τὴν ἐμὴν, μή τί σοι ἐξ αὐτῆς γένηται βλάβος· ἀρχὴν γὰρ ἐγὼ μηχανήσομαι οὕτως, ὥστε μηδὲ μαθεῖν αὐτὴν ὀφθεῖσαν ὑπὸ σοῦ. ἀγαγὼν γὰρ σε εἰς τὸ οἶκημα, ἐν ᾧ κοιμώμεθα, ὅπισθε τῆς ἀνοιγομένης θύρας στήσω· μετὰ δὲ ἐμὲ εἰσελθόντα παρέσται καὶ ἡ γυνή ἢ ἐμὴ εἰς κοίτην. κεῖται δ' ἐγγυδὸς τῆς εἰσόδου θρόνος· ἐπὶ τοῦτον τῶν ἱματίων καθ' ἐν ἕκαστον ἐκδύσα θήσει, καὶ καθ' ἡσυχίαν πολλὴν παρέσται σοι θεάσασθαι. ὅταν δ' ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου πορευῆται ἐπὶ τὴν εὐνὴν κατὰ νότου τε αὐτῆς γένη, σοὶ μελέτω τὸ ἐνθεῦθεν, ὅπως μὴ σε ὄψεται ἀπίοντα διὰ θυρῶν. ὃ μὲν δὴ ὡς οὐκ ἐδύνατο διαφυγεῖν, ἔτοιμος ἦν [ποιεῖν ταῦτα].</p>	<p>Herodotus' Ionic version</p> <p>Γύγη, οὐ γὰρ σε δοκέω πείθεσθαι μοι λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἴδους τῆς γυναικός (ὧτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν)· ποιεῖ ὅπως ἐκεῖνη θεήσασθαι γυμνὴν.» Ὁ δὲ ἀμβώσας εἶπε· «Δέσποτα, τίνα λέγεις λόγον οὐχ ὑγιᾶ, κελεύων με δέσποιναν τὴν ἐμὴν θεήσασθαι γυμνὴν; Ἄμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή. Πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐξεύρηται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν τοῖσι ἐν τῷδε ἐστὶ, σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ. Ἐγὼ δὲ πείθομαι ἐκεῖνην εἶναι πασῶν γυναικῶν καλλίστην καὶ σεο δέομαι μὴ δέεσθαι ἀνόμων. Ὁ μὲν δὴ λέγων τοιαῦτα ἀπεμάχετο, Ὁ δ' ἀμείβετο τοῖσδε· «Θάρσει, Γύγη, καὶ μὴ φοβεῦ μήτε ἐμέ, ὡς σεο πειρώμενον λέγω λόγον τόνδε, μήτε γυναῖκα τὴν ἐμὴν, μή τί τοι ἐξ αὐτῆς γένηται βλάβος· ἀρχὴν γὰρ ἐγὼ μηχανήσομαι οὕτω ὥστε μηδὲ μαθεῖν μιν ὀφθεῖσαν ὑπὸ σεῦ. Ἐγὼ γὰρ σε ἐς τὸ οἶκημα ἐν τῷ κοιμώμεθα ὅπισθε τῆς ἀνοιγομένης θύρας στήσω· μετὰ δ' ἐμὲ ἐσελθόντα παρέσται καὶ ἡ γυνή ἢ ἐμὴ ἐς κοῖτον. Κεῖται δὲ ἀγγυδὸς τῆς ἐσόδου θρόνος· ἐπὶ τοῦτον τῶν ἱματίων κατὰ ἐν ἕκαστον ἐκδύνουσα θήσει καὶ κατ' ἡσυχίαν πολλὴν παρέξει τοι θεήσασθαι. Ἐπεὰν δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου στήχῃ ἐπὶ τὴν εὐνὴν κατὰ νότου τε αὐτῆς γένη, σοὶ μελέτω τὸ ἐνθεῦθεν ὅπως μὴ σ' εὐδοῦται ἰόντα διὰ θυρῶν.» Ὁ μὲν δὴ, ὡς οὐκ ἐδύνατο διαφυγεῖν, ἦν ἔτοιμος·</p>
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οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι τις οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τὸ ἀξίωμα καὶ ἡ σεμνότης τῶν ὀνομάτων εὐμορφον πεποίηκε τὴν φράσιν· ἀνεπιτήδευτα γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ ἀνέκλεκτα, οἷα ἡ φύσις τέθεικεν σύμβολα τοῖς πράγμασιν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἤρμοττεν ἴσως κρείττοσι χρήσασθαι ἑτέροις. ἀνάγκη δὲ δὴ που, ὅταν τοῖς κυριωτάτοις τε καὶ προσεχεστάτοις ὀνόμασιν ἐκφέρηται, τὰ νοήματα μηδὲν σεμνότερ' εἶναι, ἢ οἷά ἐστιν <ἐκεῖνα>. ὅτι δὲ οὐδὲν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐστὶ σεμνὸν οὐδὲ περιττόν, ὁ βουλόμενος εἴσεται μεταθεὶς οὐδὲν ὅ τι μὴ τὴν ἁρμονίαν. πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παρὰ τούτῳ τῷ ἀνδρὶ τοιαῦτά ἐστιν, ἐξ ὧν ἂν τις τεκμήραιτο, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ κάλλει τῶν ὀνομάτων ἡ πειθὴ τῆς ἐρμηνείας ἦν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ συζυγίᾳ. καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἱκανὰ ταῦτα.

<p>τὸ ἀξίωμα, 'quality' / 'dignity' ἀνεπιτήδευτος, ον, 'made without care or design' σύμβολον, τό, 'corresponding piece' (originally each of two halves or corresponding pieces of an object, which any two contracting parties broke between them, each party keeping one piece, in order to have proof of the identity of the presenter of the other) ἴσως, 'probably' / 'perhaps' κρείττοσι χρήσασθαι ἑτέροις <i>sc.</i> ὀνόμασι προσεχής, ἐς, 1. 'next to', <i>thus</i> 2. 'suitable'</p>	<p>περιττός, ἡ, ὄν 'beyond the required number'; 'superfluous'; 'remarkable' εἴσομαι = fut. of οἶδα ὅ τι μὴ, 'except' πολλὰ δὲ καὶ <i>sc.</i> ὀνόματα τεκμηρόομαι (Mid.) 'draw inferences' (Act. 'to prove') Πειθῶ, -οῦς, ἡ, 'persuasion' / 'persuasiveness' ἐρμηνεία, ἡ, (ἐρμηνεύω) 'interpretation'; 'explanation'; 'expression'</p>
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