Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Theopompus, and the Historical Marvel: The Rhetoric of Myth and the Myth of Rhetoric

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1. Introduction

In the flourishing field of studies on Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the use of myth has been discussed primarily as a problem of rationalisation. Dionysius would have tried to integrate “irrational” myths in a “rational” story, and he would have done so in a way that shows that he had an imperfect sense of rationality.¹ The contention of this paper is that, rather than in terms of rationalisation, the use of myth in Dionysius can be studied as a pedagogical and aetiological instrument in Dionysius’ complex political, moral, and philosophical message, shaped according to a sophisticated rhetoric. I argue that Dionysius’ use of myth can be enlightened by his use of the related concept of wonder (thauma). The discussion below will show that wonder has, according to Dionysius, a clear pedagogical value, which consists primarily in providing clues to understand the order of things, but which also has a role in Dionysius’ theory of imitation. Dionysius theorised that wonder is essential to give emulation a spiritual value. Consequently, myths can have more or less value depending on their ability to be marvellous.

Myth in Dionysius has been described as “crucial but slippery” by Clemence Schultze.² Schultze has observed, in particular, that Dionysius accepts or rejects myths in a peculiar way, by presenting two versions of the same story, one of which is considered “truer” than the other.³ According to a large part of modern scholarship, the approach of Dionysius to myth should be understood in similar terms, as a form of rationalisation. For the greatest part of modern scholarship, Dionysius is

¹ For a discussion of recent publications on Dionysius see Miano 2020.
² Schultze 2000, 40.
³ More in general on these strategies see also Marincola 1997, 117-119 and Fowler 2019.
a rationalist when it comes to myth, but a flexible rationalist, ready to make exceptions. 4 This view was formulated in a particularly clear and concise way by Anouk Delcourt:

On le voit : Denys ne rejette pas systématiquement les éléments fabuleux – ne reconnaît-il pas quelque utilité philosophique aux mythes? -, mais se donne le droit de le faire s’ils viennent contredire sa logique rationaliste. Il démontre ici encore la profonde originalité avec laquelle il exploite le bagage que lui livrent ses sources. 5

For Wiseman, the matter of whether or not historians wanted to include mythical stories was mostly a question depending on their own theological beliefs, and Dionysius would be prone to accepting all mythical narratives and include them in his historiographical work. 6 In a recent article, this argument was further expanded by Driediger-Murphy, who believes that Dionysius’ use of myth was not only influenced by his views on gods, but that his methods for distinguishing history from myth had a strong theological consistency. 7 In her words:

From a historiographic perspective, then, Dionysius seems to have thought that some Roman myths were true and some false, and that he himself was able to tell the difference. The criteria by which he made this judgement are complex (and not always obvious to the modern reader), but they can be shown to have internal consistency when they are regarded as theological criteria, derived from Dionysius’ own ideas about what the gods were like and what they were and were not able to do.

Dionysius seems to have had principles and ideas on what the gods were and how they operated in history, but he really does not seem to apply these principles consistently. Dionysius, as Driediger-Murphy points out, is clearly sceptical about the divine parentage of Romulus, slightly less so about that of Servius Tullius, and explicitly writes that he does not think that gods have intercourse with women. However, in other parts of his work he accepts without hesitation the genealogy of Dardanus from Zeus and a daughter of King Atlas, in order to prove that the Trojans were Greeks, and, indirectly, so were the Romans (Ant. Rom. 1.61). The general principles, therefore, are subordinated to the political message, and not vice versa.

4 Gabba 1991, 118; Schultze 2000; Koenig 2013, 106; Fox 2016, 57; and Meins 2019, 48–49.
5 Delcourt 2005, 60.
6 Wiseman 2002.
7 Driediger-Murphy 2014.
In modern historiography, there seem to have been two types of interpretation of the use of myth in Dionysius. One interpretation is that Dionysius’ treatment of myth must be considered part of a rationalising effort, according to a *mythos vs logos* kind of narrative. The second interpretation is that myth in Dionysius can be understood as part of a coherent set of philosophical and/or theological beliefs. I propose to consider Dionysius’ approach to myths as that of a rhetorician who was writing a historical work with substantial pedagogical and (in the broadest sense) political aims. My argument is that shifting the focus of the discussion from the construction of a rational narrative and the expression of theological beliefs to the way in which Dionysius crafts his pedagogical messages allows us to see a new significance of myth in his historiographical and critical works. In this particular case, myths could be marvels, and marvels, as I shall argue, open up pedagogical opportunities because they can stimulate emulation and imitation. I shall attempt to study this topic as a whole by employing the critical essays of Dionysius and the *Roman Antiquities*. While I do not assume that these two parts of the work of Dionysius express necessarily a perfectly coherent system of thought, I believe that they are expressions of the same pedagogical project, in a broad sense. First of all, the literary essays allow us to read Dionysius’ assessment and his criticism of other ancient historians. Although the internal evidence from the *Roman Antiquities* is important to exemplify Dionysius’ historiographical practice, it gives only a partial picture of the situation, which must be completed by looking at his thoughts on historiography, as expressed in particular in his *On Thucydides* and in his *Letter to Pompeius*. We can subsequently compare these assessments with how he deals with his subject matter in the *Roman Antiquities*. I shall focus in particular on Dionysius’ assessment of the historical work of Theopompus of Chios. There are several reasons for this choice. The first reason is that Theopompus, according to Dionysius, is an outstanding historian, who receives, together with Herodotus, the most positive assessment among the different historians discussed by Dionysius.8

8 See Sacks 1982; Matijašić 2018, 66-122.
The second reason is that Dionysius has very interesting things to say, including some criticism, with regard to the way in which Theopompus uses myth. The second way in which one can look beyond the *Roman Antiquities* is to look at how Dionysius’ historical work relates to that of previous historians. A number of lines of inquiry have been established in this regard, especially concerning Dionysius and Polybius, but, as my starting point will be Dionysius’ assessment of Theopompus, I shall attempt the difficult task of comparing the use of myths in Dionysius and Theopompus. I am aware that this comparison will have strong limitations, as Theopompus’ work is fragmentary and can be known only to a frustratingly limited extent, irremediably distorted by the interests of the authorities quoting it.

This paper will be structured in the following way. I shall first of all look briefly at some of Dionysius’ programmatic statements on myths in the *Roman Antiquities*. I shall subsequently discuss Dionysius’ evaluation of the work of Theopompus, and what Dionysius believed were his strengths and weaknesses. In the final part of this paper, I shall use Dionysius’ evaluation of Theopompus to consider the extent to which he applied similar methods in the *Roman Antiquities*. Finally, on the basis of the extant fragments of Theopompus, I shall attempt to understand what parts of Theopompus’ use of myth Dionysius rejected, and why. I shall argue that Theopompus was Dionysius’ model for methodology and style, and that Dionysius adopted certain aspects of his myth-writing practices while he rejected others.

2. *Mythos* in the *Roman Antiquities*

Let me start with a short introduction to the problem of myth in the *Roman Antiquities*. Already in the preface, Dionysius makes clear that one of the most original parts of his history will be...
dedicated to the *palaiotatoi mythoi*, the most ancient myths, which will be his starting point (1.7.4-1.8.2).

λοιπὸν ἔτι δέ μοι καὶ περὶ τῆς ἱστορίας αὐτῆς προειπεῖν, τίσι τε αὐτὴν περί λαμβάνω χρόνοις καὶ περὶ τίνων ποιοῦμαι πραγμάτων τὴν διήγησιν καὶ ποταμὸν ἀποδίδωμι τὸ σχῆμα τῇ πραγμάτεια. Ἀρχομαι μὲν οὖν τῆς ἱστορίας ἀπὸ τῶν παλαιοτάτων μύθων, οὓς παρέλιπον οἱ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γενόμενοι συγγραφεῖς χαλεποὺς ὄντας ἄνευ πραγματείας μεγάλης ἐξευρεθῆναι· καταβιβάζω δὲ τὴν διήγησιν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχήν τοῦ πρώτου Φοινικικοῦ πολέμου τὴν γενομένην ἑναυτῷ τρίτῳ τῆς ὀγδόης καὶ εἰκοστῆς ἐπὶ ταῖς ἑκατὸν ὀλυμπιάσιν.

But it yet remains for me to say something also concerning the history itself — to what periods I limit it, what subjects I describe, and what form I give to the work. I begin my history, then, with the most ancient legends, which the historians before me have omitted as a subject difficult to be cleared up with diligent study; and I bring the narrative down to the beginning of the First Punic War, which fell in the third year of the one hundred and twenty-eighth Olympiad.

The indication that Dionysius’ predecessors omitted (παρέλιπον) the most ancient myths probably implies that the *palaiotatoi mythoi* must be identified in particular with the content of Book 1, which covers the period from the immigrations of Greek peoples in Italy to the foundation of the city of Rome. Especially the first part of the book, which is heavily ethnographic in its subject matter, is arguably the most original part of the whole *Roman Antiquities*. It is characterised by an outstanding number of quotations – Delcourt has counted 93 references to other Greek or Roman authors.

This section has the twofold aim of providing a genealogical basis for Dionysius’ synthetic view of early Rome as a Greek polis, and of establishing his authority as a historian who does not shy away from dealing with difficult subject matters. Charlou Koenig has observed that the first two books are also those in which Dionysius uses most frequently vocabulary related to *mythoi*.

Valérie Fromentin has identified several strategies that Dionysius uses to argue whether or not a story is mythical, and they can be divided under two different headings: first, Dionysius uses Roman institutions, and especially religious institutions, such as rituals, sanctuaries and statues, to

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10 Delcourt 2005, 54. For an updated discussion of Book 1 see Cornell in this volume.
11 Koenig 2013, 203.
demonstrate that a certain story is true. One example can be the demonstration that Aeneas came to Italy (1.49.3). Dionysius adduces as evidence that all Romans know about this, but also that Aeneas’ arrival is celebrated with sacrifices and religious festivals (τὰ δρώμενα ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ θυσίαις καὶ ἔορταῖς μηνύματα). Dionysius also reconstructs Aeneas’ journey using a mixture of local legends, toponyms, and temples of Aphrodite (1.49.4-1.50). Statues can have a similar sacralising function as rituals and temples, and have a demonstrative value for myths. In 1.59, for example, Dionysius refers to a prodigious fire that Aeneas encountered during the foundation of Lavinium: the fire was fomented by a wolf and an eagle, while a fox tried to put it out by throwing water at the flames with its tail, eventually in vain. Dionysius argues that the story must be true because the omen corresponded to the good fortunes of Lavinium, but also because in the Forum of the city there were statues of the animals (καὶ ἔστιν αὐτῶν μνημεῖα ἐν τῇ Λαουϊνιατῶν ἀγορᾷ χαλκᾶ εἰδώλα τῶν ζῴων ἐκ πολλοῦ πάνω χρόνου διατηρούμενα, “there are monuments now standing in the forum of the Lavinates, in the form of bronze images of the animals, which have been preserved for a very long time”).

The second strategy is to use philosophical arguments, as we can see in the following passage, dedicated to the story of the rape of Ilia. Dionysius is sceptical about the identification of the father of the twins with Mars (1.77.3).

ὅπως μὲν οὖν χρὴ περὶ τῶν τοιῶν δόξης ἔχειν, πότερον καταφρονεῖν ως ἀνθρωπίνων ἡμερινοργημάτων εἰς θεοὺς ἀναφερομένων μηδὲν ἂν τοῦ θεοῦ λειτούργημα τῆς ἀφθάρτου καὶ μακαρίας φύσεως ἀνάξιον ὑπομένοντος, ἢ καὶ ταύτας παραδέχεσθαι τὰς ἱστορίας, ως νακεκραμένης τῆς ἀπάσης οὐσίας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ μεταξῶ τοῦ θείου καὶ θνητοῦ γένους τρίτης τινὸς ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως, ἣν τὸ δαιμόνον φύλον ἐπέχει, τοτέ μὲν ἀνθρώπως, τοτέ δὲ θεοῖς ἐπιμιγνύμενον, εἶπεν ὅλος ἢ ἂν τὸ μυθεύμενον ἡρώων φῦνα γένος, οὗτοι καιρὸς ἐν τῷ παρόντι διασκοπὲν ἄρκει τε ὅσα φιλοσόφοις περὶ αὐτῶν ἐλέχθη.

This is not a proper place to consider what opinion we ought to entertain of such tales, whether we should scorn them as instances of human frailty attributed to the gods, — since god is incapable of any action that is unworthy of his incorruptible and blessed nature, — or whether we should admit even these stories, upon the supposition that all the substance of

13 See also Cornell in this volume.
the universe is mixed, and that between the race of gods and that of men some third order of being exists which is that of the daemons, who, uniting sometimes with human beings and sometimes with the gods, beget, it is said, the fabled race of heroes. This, I say, is not a proper place to consider these things, and, moreover, what the philosophers have said concerning them is sufficient.

Dionysius seems quite adamant in his view that human misdeeds (ῥᾳδιουργήματα) should not be attributed to gods, and so in his view, one should either reject these stories altogether – which seems closer to his opinion – or to imagine that there is a race of δαίμονες, who are neither gods nor men, and who can have intercourse with both, thus generating heroes.14 This point of view is closely related to another key passage from Book 2, in which Dionysius discusses the constitution of Romulus and praises the lack of myths in Roman theology as compared with Greek, arguing that, although some myths can be useful to some people, for the most part they can lead to despising the gods, or to the justification of all sorts of shameful behaviour (Ant. Rom. 2.20).15

Fromentin’s approach is particularly helpful because it underlines the multiplicity of approaches of Dionysius towards myths, even though it remains within the framework of rationalising historiography. It is clear that these two forms of explanatory argument, the one based on monuments and institutions and the one based on philosophical arguments, although very different in form, can be both included in the category of aetiology. They show that Dionysius had pedagogical aims in his treatment of mythical stories, but to further understand these aims one has to look at the problem from a different angle.

3. The assessment of Theopompus

14 Also Dridiger-Murphy 2014, 336-337.
15 Koenig 2013, 92-94.
Let me now consider Dionysius’ view of Theopompus, turning to the critical essays. In the essay *On Composition*, Dionysius writes that Theopompus and Ephorus were the historians whose style is most worthy of imitation (23). It is, however, in the *Letter to Pompeius* that Dionysius places his extensive treatment of Theopompus. The letter has a notoriously inhomogeneous structure: in the first part, Dionysius writes a defence of his critique of the style of Plato, which he had published in his treaty *On Demosthenes*. The second part, however, is on a completely different subject matter, and is entirely focused on historiography, presenting Dionysius’ assessment of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Philistus and Theopompus. Dionysius explains that this second part is an excerpt of another work, which is now lost to us, *On imitation* (*Pomp*. 3.1).\(^{16}\) Other than from this long excerpt, *On imitation* is only known through an epitome of Book 2, and some scattered fragments.\(^ {17}\) Dionysius gives an overwhelmingly positive picture of Theopompus’ works in terms of the narrative (πραγματικός τόπος), both with regard to the subject matter, (ὑπόθεσις), and the arrangement (oικονομία).\(^ {18}\) He commends in particular his accuracy (ἐπιμέλεια), the amount of energy he dedicates to historical research, and that he was witness (αὐτόπτης) of many events. A further positive characteristic of Theopompus’ history writing is its manifoldness (τὸ πολύμορφον τῆς γραφῆς), which Dionysius exemplifies this way (*Pomp*. 6.4):

καὶ γὰρ ἐδοῦν εἰρήκεν οἰκισμοὺς καὶ πόλεων κτίσεις ἐπελήλυθε, βασιλείων τε βίους καὶ τρόπων ἰδιωμάτων δεδήλωκε, καὶ εἰ τι θαυμαστὸν ἢ παράδοξον ἑκάστη γῆ καὶ θάλασσα φέρει, συμπεριείληφεν τῇ πραγματείᾳ. καὶ μηδεὶς ὑπολάβῃ ψυχαγωγίαν ταύτ’ εἶναι μόνον· οὐ γὰρ οὐτος ἔχει, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαν ὡς ἐπος εἰπεῖν Ὦφέλειαν περιέχει.

(Theopompus) has related the settlements of tribes, described the foundation of cities, portrayed the lives of kings and peculiarities of custom, and has included in his work everything remarkable or extraordinary in land and sea. And nobody should suppose that this is purely for our entertainment: this is not the case, but the material contained in it is virtually all for our practical benefit.

In multiple ways, the significance of this passage emerges most clearly in contrast with Polybius.

First of all, the excellence of Theopompus’ *oikonomia* is based exactly on the kind of things that

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16 Rather than a verbatim quotation, this section of Dionysius’ work might be an expanded re-elaboration of the part on historiography from *On imitation*. See Sacks 1982.


18 See Fornaro 1997, 248-266.
Polybius does not want to include in his work, and reproaches Ephorus for doing so (e.g. Pol. 9.1: *apoikiai, ktiseis, syngeneiai*), identifying these topics as *mythoi* (9.2). Polybius claims that different topics are of interest to different types of readers: genealogies attract those who love to hear stories (9.1.4: τὸν φιλήκοον), the foundation of colonies and cities, and the stories of consanguinity interest those who are curious and erudite (τὸν δὲ πολυπράγμονα καὶ περιττόν), whereas the deeds of peoples, cities and powers are appealing to the political reader (τὸν δὲ πολιτικὸν); Polybius goes on to explain that his work is addressed only to the political reader (9.1.5). He is defending himself against criticism by saying that his work might appear monotonous, and at the same time polemizes against historians who included all these different forms in their works. There are strong thematic connections between Polybius and Dionysius, but Dionysius claims to follow different principles in history writing from those advocated by Polybius.¹⁹ In particular, Dionysius’ declared intention is to write history mixing up all different forms, so that he may appeal to all sorts of readers; Dionysius names three types of readers partially overlapping with the categories mentioned by Polybius: those interested in political affairs, those interested in philosophical speculation and those interested in entertaining stories (*Ant. Rom*.1.8.3).²⁰

The *oikonomia* of the *Roman Antiquities* matches very closely that attributed to Theopompus: settlements of tribes, foundations of cities, lives of kings, and customs represent a substantial part of Dionysius’ narrative in the first books. Polybius’ refusal to deal with foundation stories and genealogies (which, incidentally, is not as firm as he makes it seem in some programmatic statements, and partially depends on the incomplete transmission of his work²¹), can be contrasted with Dionysius’ positive assessment of the manifoldness of Theopompus, and with his own aim of addressing a broad audience in the *Roman Antiquities*.

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²¹ Thornton 2021.
In his assessment of Theopompus, Dionysius also underlines the presence of the θαυμαστός and παράδοξος element, wonderful and extraordinary, which might partially refer to a section of Theopompus’ Philippika, which included marvellous stories (thaumasia). Dionysius insists that the manifoldness of Theopompus is not connected with ψυχαγωγία (sensationalism, or entertainment), but is useful to the readers. If opheleia is such a commonplace in historiography, this point can again be contrasted with Polybius’ criticism that Theopompus’ work was characterised precisely by exaggeration of marvellous stories (16.12.7-11). Writers can be tellers of wonderful stories (τερατευόμενοι), but only when these cause feelings of piety to the gods (16.12.9). Recent scholarship has underlined the multiple roles that wonders and the unexpected could have in ancient literature and culture. In a recent volume, the particular focus has been on its pedagogical, and cognitive function (i.e. wonder sets in motion a process of learning), on one of characterization in narrative texts, and on the ability of wonder to stir emotions, all themes relevant to a discussion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

The only substantial criticism that Dionysius makes of Theopompus’ πραγματικός τόπος is the insertion of long digressions (παρεμβολαί) (Pomp. 6.11).

Justin έστι δὲ ἃ καὶ κατὰ τὸν πραγματικὸν τόπον ἁμαρτάνει, καὶ μάλιστα κατὰ τὰς παρεμβολὰς· οὔτε γὰρ ἀναγκαῖα τίνες αὐτῶν οὔτ' ἐν καιρῷ γενόμεναι, πολὺ δὲ τὸ παιδιώδες ἐμφαίνουσαι· ἐν αἷς ἐστι καὶ τὰ περὶ Σιληνοῦ τοῦ φανέντος ἐν Μακεδονία καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ δράκοντος τοῦ διαναυμαχήσαντος πρὸς τὴν τριήρη καὶ ἄλλα τούτοις οὐκ ὀλίγα ὅμοια.

There are those (parts) in which he fails in his narrative, especially in his digressions; for these are neither necessary nor relevant, but appear most infantile. Among these are the story of the Silenos that appeared in Makedonia and the story of the serpent that battled a trireme, and many others like these.

One can see that Dionysius quotes examples of the unnecessary παρεμβολαί of Theopompus using the marvellous and extraordinary stories that we know were in the section of Theopompus’ work

22 See below, section 4.
23 See Hardie 2009 for the Augustan period, and Gerolemou 2018a for a general discussion.
24 Gerolemou 2018a, X.
known as *thaumasia*. Dionysius does not like them for three reasons: they are not necessary (ἀναγκαῖαί), they are not in the appropriate place (ἐν καιρῷ), and they are also childish. Dionysius does not bring up explicitly the question of falsehood of these stories, but he gives an indication that Theopompus’ digressions lack usefulness.

These observations complicate Dionysius’ ideas about useful historiographical marvels in Theopompus, and make it impossible to straightforwardly identify such marvels with the *thaumasia* in the *Philippika*. Part of the manifoldness of his work, which allows Theopompus to appeal to a variety of types of readers, as Dionysius himself aspires to do as a historian, is precisely the use of *thauma* and unexpected stories. These marvels, Dionysius explains, are almost always useful. If this is not the case, they become unnecessary digressions. Therefore, the question is how marvels can be useful, and when they are unnecessary and inappropriate.

4. *Thauma* and the unexpected in the *Roman Antiquities*

After discussing what Dionysius had to say on Theopompus’ writing, let us turn to the *Roman Antiquities*. Dionysius made clear that a θαυμαστός and παράδοξος element was a positive characteristic of Theopompus work, one making his work useful. As Dionysius’ assessment of the manifoldness of Theopompus is reflected in Dionysius’ famous claim to appeal to different types of readers, it is possible that he has equally tried to use marvels in a “useful” way. In the *Roman Antiquities* these words are recurring: *thauma* and derivates appear 126 times, the adjective παράδοξος and related words appear 29 times. Taken individually, these terms have the meaning that one would expect them to have in Greek. But the adjectives θαυμαστός and παράδοξος also appear together in eleven passages. Their meaning in these passages is likely to be close to the
methodological qualities ascribed to Theopompus by Dionysius. The position of the pairing of adjectives in some key passages of the *Roman Antiquities* strongly suggests that they hold a methodological value for Dionysius. In the table below I show where they are and which narrative they relate to:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.5.3</td>
<td>Preface.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.13.3</td>
<td>Horatii and Curiatii: it is wonderful and extraordinary that two triplets of cousins of the same age were born in Rome and Alba, and it was an expression of θεία πρόνοια.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21.1</td>
<td>Horatii and Curiatii: the surviving Horatius achieved in a short time a wonderful and extraordinary position, and on the same day the great unhappiness of killing his own sister for the whim of an envious δαίμων.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.22.10</td>
<td>Horatii and Curiatii: the reversals of their story are wonderful and extraordinary (θαυμαστὰς καὶ παραδόξους περιπετείας).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.47.3</td>
<td>The prodigy of the eagle and Tarquinius Priscus.</td>
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<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>The prodigy of the flames surrounding baby Servius Tullius.</td>
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<td>5.8.6</td>
<td>Brutus’ impassive behaviour during the execution of his sons.</td>
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<td>6.13.4</td>
<td>An epiphany of the Dioscuri.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.66.3</td>
<td>Methodological considerations on the importance of speeches through which παράδοξοι καὶ θαυμασταὶ πράξεις occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.60.2</td>
<td>Closing of the first decade. The fact that the patricians allowed the Decemvirs to take away their liberty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.1.2</td>
<td>Preface of the second decade: the deeds of men are wonderful and extraordinary.</td>
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There is a variety of situations that deserve to be described as wonderful and unexpected. Even if some of the marvels described by Dionysius are more or less what we would expect under such a category, and are included in stories that can be characterised as mythical (such as the prodigies concerning Tarquinius Priscus and Servius Tullius and the epiphany of the Dioscuri), it appears that it is frequently human behaviour and virtues that are unexpected and cause wonder. This is the case of Brutus’ severity during the execution of his sons, and even more so of the story of the Horatii and...
the Curiatii, which Dionysius calls marvellous and unexpected three times. All these passages
deserve a closer examination.

4.1 *Thauma* in the methodological passages.

Let me start with the methodological passages. In the two prefaces and the reflection on speeches,
Dionysius repeatedly stresses the value of the unexpected and the marvellous in history. The two
prefaces are particularly telling of what Dionysius means by marvellous and extraordinary (1.5.3):

μαθοῦσί γε δὴ παρὰ τῆς ἱστορίας, ὅτι μυρίας ἤνεγκεν ἀνδρῶν ἄρετας εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς μετὰ
tὸν οἰκισμόν, ὡς οὔτ' εὐσεβεστέρους οὔτε δικαιοτέρους οὔτε σωφροσύνη πλείον παρὰ
pάντα τὸν βίον χρησαμένου οὐδὲ γε τὰ πολέμια κρείττους ἀγωνιστὰς οὐδὲ
ἡγεγενος οὔτε Ἐλλὰς οὔτε βάρβαρος, εἰ δὲ ἀπέσται τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἐπίφθονον· ἔχει γάρ τι καὶ
tοιοῦτον ἡ τῶν παραδόξων καὶ θαυμαστῶν ὑπόσχεσις.

particularly when they shall have learned from my history that Rome from the very
beginning, immediately after its founding, produced infinite glorious deeds of men whose
superiors, whether for piety or for justice or for life-long self-control or for warlike valour,
no city, either Greek or barbarian, has ever produced. This, I say, is what I hope to
accomplish, if my readers will but lay aside all resentment; for some such feeling is aroused
by the undertaking of wonderful and extraordinary things.

"The undertaking of extraordinary and wonderful things" (ἡ τῶν παραδόξων καὶ θαυμαστῶν
ὑπόσχεσις) corresponds to the unparalleled glorious deeds (ἀρεταί) that the Romans have
accomplished in piety, justice, wisdom and war, and through these marvels Dionysius hopes to
provide some sort of teaching, as the opening predicate μαθοῦσί makes clear. There seem to be
references to Herodotus’ preface, including a reference to the inclusion of Greeks and barbarians,
and to the role of the marvellous. Herodotean echoes are even stronger in the shorter, second
preface at the beginning of Book 11 (11.1.2).

ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τόπους, ἐν δὲ αἱ πράξεις ἐγένοντο, βούλονται παρὰ τῆς ἱστορίας μαθεῖν, καὶ
tάς αἰτίας ἄκουσαι, δι’ αὐτό ταῦθαμα καὶ παράδοξα ἔργα ἐπετέλεσαν, καὶ τίνες ἦσαν οἱ
tῶν στρατοπέδων ἡμεῖς τῶν τε βαρβαρικῶν καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἱστορῆσαι, καὶ μηδενὸς
ὡς εἰπεῖν ἀνήκοοι γενέσθαι τῶν συντελεσθέντων περὶ τοὺς ἄγωνας.
but they wish also to learn from history of the places where those actions occurred, to hear of the causes that enabled those men to perform their wonderful and extraordinary exploits, to know who were the commanders of the armies, both Greek and barbarian, and to be left ignorant of not a single incident, one may say, that happened in those engagements.

As in the previous passage, it is the deeds of men (ἔργα) that are θαυμαστά καὶ παράδοξα, and history must explore the causes (αἰτία) of these remarkable deeds. There is, again, the verb μαθεῖν, which points at the didactic quality of what is said. Dionysius’ θαυμα as formulated in the prefaces seems to have strong similarities to that of Herodotus: in his comparison of Herodotus and Thucydides in the Letter to Pompeius (3.6), Dionysius stresses precisely that it is τὰ θαυμαστὰ ἔργα of Greeks and barbarians that make Herodotus’ subject matter superior to that of Thucydides. It is, however, also important to be cautious when one considers these connections. The gap in our knowledge of Greek historiography of the Hellenistic period is vast, and there were other authors where Dionysius might have found similar references to the marvellous and the unexpected in history. As shown by Lisa Hau (2018), Polybius, in spite of his reputation for sobriety, uses thauma and related terms a considerable number of times in his work: his subject matter itself is described as the wonder that defines his own time (1.4: τὸ θαυμάσιον τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς καιρῶν).

In the observation of the usefulness of speeches, which Dionysius introduces during the trial of Coriolanus (Ant. Rom. 7.66.3), he attacks historians who do not compose speeches to illustrate situations of civic discord, even though it is by these speeches that wonderful and unexpected things come to pass. The general impression of Dionysius’ references to marvellous and unexpected events in the methodological passages is that they tend to refer to exceptional human behaviour rather than divine miracles. This assertion, however, is complicated when one considers the ways in which Dionysius uses thauma in the narrative parts of the Roman Antiquities.

4.2 The Horatii and the Curiatii
In the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii, Dionysius uses the adjectives θαυμαστός and παράδοξος a record number of times. Contrary to what Dionysius says in the methodological passages, thauμα in this story is very thinly connected with human deeds and seems to be occasioned by divine intervention. The first passage in which the adjectives are employed comes shortly after the decision that the conflict between Rome and Alba should be resolved by a duel fought by a group of three champions for each city: many Romans and Albans are so enthusiastic about this decision that they volunteer to fight. It is the Alban leader Mettius Fufetius, Dionysius explains, who has an idea of who should be selected as champions. He claims that divine providence had long foreseen those who would be destined to represent the cities in the contest (3.13.3: ὅτι θεία τις πρόνοια ἐκ πολλοῦ προορωμένη τὸν μέλλοντα συμβήσεσθαι ταῖς πόλεσιν ἀγώνα), and that those were distinguished by the unusual circumstances of their birth, which was wonderful and unexpected (καὶ οὐ γενέσεως όμοίας τοῖς πολλοῖς μετειληφότας, ἀλλὰ σπανίον καὶ θαυμαστής διὰ τὸ παράδοξον). He goes on to explain that there were two triplets of cousins born at the same time, the Horatii and the Curiatii (3.13.4). The birth of the triplets is wonderful and unexpected, and Fufetius states that this is ultimately the result of divine πρόνοια. Fufetius reinforces this point in the direct speech in which he proposes to Tullus Hostilius that the two triplets must be the champions of each city; he makes the argument that a divine fortune (3.14.3: θεία τις ἔφθακε τύχη) has chosen them.

In his detailed description of the battle between the triplets, Dionysius repeatedly speaks of changing τύχη, switching sides and favouring alternately the Horatii and the Curiatii (3.19.6). After the battle is won, the surviving Horatius comes back home to announce the news of his victory to his father, and here comes the second marvel of the story (3.21.1).
But it was ordained after all that even he, as he was but a mortal, should not be fortunate in everything, but should feel some stroke of the envious god who, having from an insignificant man made him great in a brief moment of time and raised him to wonderful and extraordinary distinction, plunged him the same day into the unhappy state of being his sister's murderer.

In the context of the recurring theme of *tyche* in the whole story, it is clear that the “envious god” who had raised Horatius to glory to plunge him in unhappiness must be *Tyche* itself. In the passage it is the distinction (*ἐπιφάνεια*) of Horatius which is wonderful and extraordinary, and it is so because it depended on several reversals of fortune during an uncertain battle. In the final appearance of a marvel in the story, Dionysius closes his narrative by saying that it has shown wonderful and unexpected reversals (3.22.10: θαυμαστὰς καὶ παραδόξους περιπέτειας). Stephen Oakley has shown that this passage is rich in references to Herodotean themes and vocabulary, especially for its tragic tone, and particularly for the theme of changing fortunes.25

The use of wonder and unexpectedness in the story is applied to different objects: the unusual circumstances of the birth of the triplets, the distinction attained by the surviving Horatius after winning the duel, and the reversals of the story. The connection between these three separate uses is the intervention of a mutable *tyche*: Fufetius thinks that a divine *tyche/pronoia* was responsible for the birth of the triplets to prepare champions destined to fight in the duel; the multiple reversals of the duel, explicitly attributed to *tyche*, make it plausible that she was the envious *daimon* responsible for the downfall of Horatius from his distinguished position. Closing the whole story, Dionysius makes it clear that it is the different περιπέτειαι suffered by the Horatii that are wonderful and unexpected.

### 4.3 Supernatural stories

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Dionysius characterises supernatural stories as wonderful and extraordinary on three different occasions. All these stories show or strongly imply divine intervention. The first such story concerns Lucumo/Tarquinius Priscus and his arrival in Rome (Ant. Rom.3.47.3). When Tarquinius and Tanaquil were approaching the Janiculum, an eagle came up from the sky and snatched Tarquinius’ hat. After flying above the clouds, the eagle returned and placed the hat back on Tarquinius’ head. This prodigy (3.47.4: σημεῖον) seemed wonderful and extraordinary to all present, and in particular to Tanaquil, who was trained in Etruscan divination (οἰωνοσκοπία), and who gave Tarquinius great hopes of raising from his private station to royal power (ὡς ἐξ ἰδιωτικῆς τύχης εἰς ἐξουσίαν βασιλικῆν). Tarquinius subsequently prays to the gods that these predictions might come true, before entering the city (3.48.1).

Divine intervention is also a characteristic of the second supernatural story, in which there are elements classified by Dionysius as wonderful and unexpected. After providing the human genealogy of Servius Tullius, from a man of the royal family of Corniculum and his wife Ocrisia, who was enslaved by the Romans after the conquest of the city (4.1.2-3), Dionysius gives another version of the story, which he classifies as μυθῶδες (4.2.1). This is, of course, the well-known legend of the conception of Servius from a phallus raising up from the hearth of the house of King Tarquinius (4.2.1-3). Dionysius makes illuminating remarks on the story (4.2.3-4).

τοῦτο τὸ μῦθευμα οὐ πάντως τι πιστὸν εἶναι δοκοῦν ἑτέρα τις ἑπιφάνεια θεία γενομένη περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα θαυμαστῆ καὶ παράδοξος ἤττον ἀπιστεῖσθαι ποιεῖ. καθημένου γάρ ποτ’ αὐτοῦ μεσούσης μάλισθ’ ἡμέρας ἐν τῇ παστάδι τῶν βασιλείων καὶ κατενεχθέντος ὑπ’ ὕπνον, πῦρ ἀπέλαμψεν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ.

This fabulous account, although it seems not altogether credible, is rendered less incredible by reason of another manifestation of the gods relating to Tullius which was wonderful and extraordinary. For when he had fallen asleep one day while sitting in the portico of the palace about noon, a fire shone forth from his head.
So, although in principle Dionysius is sceptical of stories of divine parentage, which is illustrated by the example of Romulus mentioned above, in this case another divine manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια θεία) makes the story more credible, and this divine manifestation is wonderful and extraordinary.

The third and final occurrence of *thauma* and unexpectedness in a supernatural context concerns the epiphany of the Dioscuri at the battle of Lake Regillus, and shortly thereafter in the Forum, where the gods brought news of the Roman victory. Key to the understanding of the epiphany in the text is the speech that Dionysius attributes to Postumius, in which the Roman dictator offers encouragement to his troops, dispirited by the size of the enemies’ army. Postumius’ speech opens precisely with the claim that the Romans could count on divine support in the battle. Postumius then moves on to explain why the Romans had good reasons to be hopeful in spite of their inferior numbers, but just before he starts explaining these reasons, he adds that they explain how victory was promised to the Romans by *tyche*. As in the story of the Horatii, there is a stress on divine benevolence but also – through the reference to *tyche* – on the unexpectedness of Roman victory. Dionysius reinforces this message with a meticulous description of the battle, in which he underlines its many unexpected changes and reversals, not unlike what he did with the various περιπέτειαι in the story of the Horatii.

It is only after the narrative of the Roman victory that Dionysius introduces the story of the epiphany (6.13), with the description of the two wonderful horsemen appearing on the battlefield, and later in the Forum. The story is introduced by a third person plural “they are said” (λέγονται), to underline its uncertain character. It is only at the end of the narration that the identification of the

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26 See also Gartrell 2021, 75-112, and in this volume.
27 *Ant. Rom.* 6.6.2: Θεοὶ μὲν ἡμῖν ὑπαχρεοῦνται δι’ οἰωνῶν τε καὶ σφαιρίων καὶ τῆς ἄλλης μαντικῆς ἔλευθερίαν τῇ πόλει παρέξεντα καὶ νίκην εὐτυχον. “The gods by omens, sacrifices, and other auguries promise to grant to our commonwealth liberty and a happy victory.”
28 *Ant. Rom.* 6.6.3: ἄλλα πλεονεκτήματα πρὸς τὸ νικᾶν ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης παρεσκευασμένα, τρία δὲ πάντων κάλλιστα καὶ φανερώτατα. “We have many other advantages conducive to victory prepared for us by fortune, but three in particular, which are the greatest and the most obvious of all”.
29 *Ant. Rom.* 6.10.3: ἐγίνοντο δὲ ποικίλαι καὶ ἀγχότροφοι περὶ αὐτῶν οἱ τοῦ ἄγονος τύχαι. “And various and sudden shifting fortunes marked their struggle”.
two horsemen with the Dioscuri is introduced, where it is presented as a conclusion of “those in charge of the Republic” (6.13.3: οἱ τῶν κοινῶν προεστῶτες) after they received a letter from Postumius. After this cautious introduction of the story of the epiphany, Dionysius goes on to explain that there are many signs in Rome of this wonderful and unexpected manifestation of the gods (6.13.4: ταύτης ἐστὶ τῆς παραδόξου καὶ θαυμαστῆς τῶν δαιμόνων ἐπιφανείας ἐν Ῥώμῃ πολλὰ σημεῖα), such as their temple in the Forum and the festivals, and the ritual of the *transvectio equitum*. In Cary’s translation, σημεῖα is rendered a “monuments”. The word σημεῖον has multiple meanings, but I wonder if here Dionysius is using it more in the logical and Aristotelic sense of deductive evidence in support of a probable conclusion, so that the temple of the Dioscuri, and the other monuments and ceremonies, make the epiphany story probable.²⁰ Reading the story starting from the speech of Postumius makes it clear that the “wonderful and unexpected” event of the epiphany is a sign of divine providence, which through a typical reversal of *tyche* allows the Romans to win the battle in spite of their numerical inferiority to the enemy. It is revealing of the importance of speeches for the interpretation of Dionysius’ historical narrative that the “unexpected” epiphany is, after all, not so unexpected, clearly foreshadowed by Postumius’ speech.

4.4 Human behaviour

In two passages it is human behaviour which is described by Dionysius as wonderful and extraordinary. The first of these instances refers to Brutus’ execution of his own sons. Dionysius starts by explaining that the “great and wonderful deeds” (Ant. Rom. 5.8.1: ἔργα μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά) of Brutus might appear rather cruel and incredible (σκληρὰ καὶ ἄπιστα) to the Greeks.³¹

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²⁰ On this see Grimaldi 1980a and Ginzburg 1999.

³¹ In a passage which is a clear reference to the story of Brutus, Polybius (6.54.5) also highlights the unbelievable nature of this behaviour and exemplifies the potential horror of a Greek reader at this story (I owe this reference to John Thornton).
Dionysius insists on this point of credibility: one judges what is said about others according to their own experience (ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων παθῶν), and thus distinguishes the believable and the unbelievable (τὸ πιστὸν ἀπιστὸν). Dionysius goes on to explain that it was discovered that the sons of Brutus were involved in a conspiracy to bring back King Tarquinius to Rome. After the discovery of the evidence, hand-written letters, Brutus impassively pronounces the death sentence. Dionysius observes that if this severity towards his own offspring was marvellous (5.8.4: θαυμαστός), his behaviour during the punishment seemed even more so (θαυμασιώτερος): he was present during the execution and he did not even spare his sons the humiliation of being scourged before they were decapitated. What was above all extraordinary and wonderful (τὰ παράδοξα καὶ θαυμαστὰ) is that he personally witnessed the ordeal without shedding a tear. If this story of a marvel seems to involve only human agency, a closer contextual reading of the pages that Dionysius dedicates to the conspiracy in which the sons of Brutus were involved reveals that this is not the case. In fact, the discovery of the conspiracy by a wily servant, who understood that something nefarious was going on in the house of his masters and secretly denounced them to Publius Valerius, is described by Dionysius as an act of divine pronoia (5.7).32 Not unlike the story of the Horatii, when unexpected marvels occur, pronoia is never far off, although in this specific case its connection with Brutus’ behaviour is less direct.

The final passage in which Dionysius uses wonder and unexpectedness to describe a situation concerns the decemvirate, and it is the closing paragraph of Book 10. Dionysius begins with explaining that the decemvirs started using as bodyguards lictors carrying fasces with axes within the city, reviving a practice used by the kings but abandoned afterwards, as consuls would be escorted by lictors with axes only outside the city (10.59). This made clear to everyone that the

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32 See in particular 5.7.1: Ἐκ πολλῶν μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλων ἔδοξέ μοι τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα προνοίᾳ θεῶν εἰς τοσαύτην προελθεῖν εὐδαιμονίαν, οὐχ ἦκιστα δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν τότε γενομένων. “Not only from many other circumstances has it seemed to me to be due to the providence of the gods that the affairs of the Romans have come to such a flourishing condition, but particularly by what happened upon this occasion”.

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decemvirate had become a tyranny, but the Romans were now subject to ten kings and not one (10.60.1). Each decemvir then started to build his own faction of followers that they used to control the state and the courts, disregarding the authority of the people and the senate. To Dionysius, this acceptance of tyranny from men of low condition was neither surprising nor unexpected (10.60.2: οὔτε παράδοξον ὢτ' ἀνέλπιστον ἦν). What everyone found astonishing (τοῦτο θαυμαστὸν ἅπασιν εἶναι ἐδόκει) is that even some of the patricians joined the decemvirs to destroy the liberty of the republic.

If, as we have seen so far, Dionysius tends to inscribe instances of unexpected marvels within an aetiology which relates them, directly or not, to divine manifestations, he does not do so in this particular story. The position of this passage at the end of Book 10 is particularly important to its interpretation. Dionysius has just finished exploring the descent of the decemvirate into tyranny, but he leaves the story suspended, to be resolved at the beginning of the following decade of the work. As it happens, this passage immediately precedes the second preface at the beginning of book 11, which I have discussed above, where Dionysius goes back to the theme of the pedagogical virtues of unexpected marvels. This peculiar position might explain why Dionysius does not develop much of an argument on this specific marvel: the reference foreshadows the discussion of marvels in the second preface.

4.5 The pedagogy of wonder

The discussion above shows that Dionysius used the marvellous in a complex way in the Roman Antiquities. First of all, it seems to operate on different temporal levels. On the one hand, historical characters see it as operating in their time; they see it as connected to divine fortune/providence and

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33 Hogg 2019 on the decemvirate and its crucial role in Dionysius’ narrative.
it allows them to determine what should or will happen. Such is the case of Fufetius, who is able to recognise the expression of *pronoia* in the birth of the triplets, or of Tanaquil, who sees in the prodigy of the eagle a sign of Tarquinius’ ascent to kingship. Wonder, however, also operates on the reader in the present time. This is the case, for example, with the methodological remarks, with the passage concerning the decemvirs, and with that on the behaviour of Brutus. These two temporal dimensions in which wonder operates are not mutually exclusive. In the story of the Horatii, Fufetius sees wonder in the birth of the triplets, but it is the reader who marvels at the sudden reversals of fortune in the story. In almost all the cases, except for the methodological remarks and the passage on the tyranny of the decemvirs, wonder operates very closely with the gods: in two cases (Servius and the Dioscuri), it is a divine epiphany which directly causes the marvel, and in most of the stories wonder is more or less directly connected with divine intervention.

This association of wonder with deities might at first sight seem partially contradictory with the insistence in the methodological passages that wonder is connected with human deeds. There is clearly a tension there, but this tension between human and divine agency is not uncommon in ancient historiography. In particular, Herodotus comes to mind. Fowler has recently discussed how, in Herodotus, divine intervention in history can operate at a micro or a macro level.\(^{34}\) While Herodotus is generally sceptical of stories about direct divine intervention, he tends to accept that gods can influence the course of history. A marvel (*θῶμα*), which to Herodotus presupposes divine intervention, is the fact that, when the Persians were fighting next to the precinct of Demeter, not a single one of them had entered, or was killed, within the precinct, which he explains with an intervention of the goddess (9.65.2).\(^{35}\) The same sort of tensions between micro and macro level can be seen in Dionysius’ narrative, with wonder playing a similarly ambivalent role. This can be

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\(^{34}\) Fowler 2010 and Fowler 2015.

contrasted with the role of θαῦμα in Polybius which, according to Lisa Hau, with the exception of the preface is more decisively focused on human virtues, thus defusing the Herodotean tension that Dionysius fully embraces.36

As stated explicitly by Dionysius himself in the prefaces, wonder has a strong pedagogical significance. This significance is further highlighted by Dionysius’ On imitation. The modern understanding of this work is irremediably imperfect because of the mutilated status of its transmission.37 We know from references within other works by Dionysius that it consisted of three books: one with a theoretical definition of imitation, a second with a discussion of the authors of different genres worthy of imitation, and a final one on the practice of imitation (Pomp. 3.1). Of these books, we have an epitome of Book 2, and the long quotation on historiography, presumably also from Book 2, which constitutes the second part of the Letter to Pompeius. Consequently, it is impossible to reconstruct in detail Dionysius’ mimetic theory. Nevertheless, it would appear that thauma had a very important role in it.

Two fragments from Book 1 preserve definitions of the related concepts of imitation and emulation. Imitation is defined as the activity of receiving the impression of an example through contemplation (fr. 2 Aujac 1992: μίμησίς ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια διὰ τῶν θεωρημάτων ἐκματτομένη τὸ παράδειγμα), whereas emulation is the activity of the soul when it is moved to marvel at something which seems beautiful (ζῆλος δὲ ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ψυχῆς πρὸς θαῦμα τοῦ δοκοῦντος εἶναι καλοῦ κινουμένη). These definitions have been widely discussed in connection with an epitomised passage from Book 2 of the work, in which Dionysius explains imitation through the story (mythos) of the ugly peasant.38

After claiming that one must spend time reading ancient writers so that one can achieve emulation of their language (Epit. 1.1: τὸν τῶν ἰδιωμάτων ζῆλον), Dionysius makes a remark that by

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36 Hau 2018, 77-78.
38 Epit. 1, Aujac 1992, p. 31.
continuous observation, the soul of the student attracts “a likeness of character” (Epit. 1.2: τὴν ὀμοιότητα τοῦ χαρακτῆρος), such as in the story of the peasant’s wife. According to the story an ugly peasant was worried that he would have ugly children. To prevent this, he had his wife look at beautiful paintings before sleeping with her, and consequently had beautiful children. In the same way, Dionysius argues, likeness originates through imitation, and one should take the best characteristics of ancient writers and channel them into one’s soul (Epit. 1.3: εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν μετοχετεύσῃ). Although the understanding of them is extremely limited by the difficult transmission of this text, it has been convincingly argued that these fragments represent an essential clue to the understanding of Dionysius’ theory of imitation. Richard Hunter, in particular, has shown that in Dionysius’ theory there seem to be two overlapping aspects of imitation: “‘imitation’ in a theoretical, Platonising mode, and the more down-to-earth practice of allusive mimesis, which we are familiar with through later Greek and Roman writing”39; thus, imitation would have a literary and a spiritual aspect.

Even if we shall never know the details of Dionysius’ theory, it is important to underline the importance of emulation (ζῆλος). Imitation and emulation are activities which are closely related but subtly different. Meins has recently observed that it is emulation (ζῆλος) that differentiates a merely technical imitation from a “pregnancy of the soul”, caused by the contemplation of beauty40. In the definition of emulation one can see the importance that wonder had in Dionysius’ pedagogical conception: beauty causes wonder, and wonder generates ζῆλος, which in turns gives to imitation its spiritual value. Without wonder, imitation would be a merely technical procedure, which would not touch the soul of the student.

Wonder had a pedagogical value not only for Dionysius, but was a recurring theme in Hellenistic historiography. In Polybius, for example, wonder could be a reaction due to ignorance of the true

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40 Meins 2019, 86.
causes of natural phenomena: in a criticism of Timaeus, Polybius explains this well with regard to the goats of Corsica (12.4). Wonder is a normal reaction when one first hears that goats living in the wild answer the calls of shepherds, but Polybius is able to explain that the goats are only seemingly wild. The shepherds are unable to pasture them normally because the terrain is inaccessible, so they condition their animals to react to the calls. Knowledge of the proper explanation puts an end to wonder.

Another relevant example (even though words related to wonder are not used here) is the passage in which Polybius attempts to persuade his reader of the usefulness of a signalling system he perfected (10.47.5-11). Polybius compares this system to reading: if it appears very complicated, with practice it can be used with ease. He illustrates this with an example. If an illiterate and ignorant man sees a boy reading a book, the man will not be able to believe that the boy is able to read with ease an unfamiliar text. Therefore, one should not give up a useful system only because it appears complicated. In conclusion, surprise and unbelief depend primarily on ignorance. Learning and practice put an end to ignorance, in a similar way that a proper explanation puts an end to wonder.

Aristotle had theorised a pedagogy of wonder which similarly connects it with imitation. In chapter 11 of Book 1 of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses different types of pleasure. As pleasant activities, marvelling and learning are closely connected because marvelling implies a desire to learn (*Rhet. 1.11.21 = 1371 a 31*). The pleasant aspect of learning and marvelling involves also imitation (*τὸ τε μεμιμημένον*): even though the object imitated is not necessarily pleasant, it is the act of inference which causes pleasure because it involves a learning process. So it would appear that to Aristotle, imitation had a pedagogical value and a connection to wonder, even though it is spelled out in other terms than in Dionysius, without the distinction between imitation and emulation. But also the

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41 Hau 2018, esp. 68 on this passage.
42 I am grateful to John Thornton for pointing out this passage to me.
43 Halliwell 2002, 151-259 has a wider discussion of imitation in Aristotle.
44 Grimaldi 1980b, 262-264.
following remark by Aristotle has a direct connection with the use of wonder in the Roman Antiquities: “the same may be said (i.e. they allow to learn something) of sudden changes of fortune and narrow escapes from danger; for all these things excite wonder” (Rhet. 1.11.24 = 1371 a 10-12: καὶ αἱ περιπέτειαι καὶ τὸ παρὰ μικρὸν σώζεσθαι ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων· πάντα γὰρ θαυμαστὰ ταῦτα). Reversals (περιπέτειαι) and sudden changes of fortune are explicitly connected with wonder in several of the passages discussed above, perhaps most clearly in the story of the Horatii. Aristotle also expressed a theory of learning through wonder in Metaphysics Book 1. A section explains the beginning of science through marvelling. Men first started wondering at obvious things, and then at extremely complex ones. Wonder made them realise their ignorance, and consequently caused their learning. Aristotle insists that, in this regard, myths have a strong pedagogical value: they cause wonder and, through wonder, they start a learning process which leads to knowledge. In his mimetic theory, wonder had a genuine spiritual value, as it was through wonder that emulation would affect the soul. Of course, Dionysius’ mimetic theory can hardly be translated straightforwardly to the Roman Antiquities. The reader of Dionysius’ historical work is not expected to emulate the beautiful things from ancient writers in his orations. Dionysius’ insistence on the didactic value of wonder in the prefaces suggests that historical examples could work in a similar way as literary models. In a more direct sense, they could teach something about the past and provide aetiologies. But they could also educate in the sense that they provide examples of appropriate civic behaviour worth emulating, and perhaps enrich the soul of the reader, which is consistent with Dionysius’ mimetic theory.

45 Metaph. 982 b 17ff: ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οίεται ἄγνοον (διό καὶ ὁ φιλόμωθος φιλόσοφος πῶς ἔστιν ὁ γὰρ μόθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων) “The man who is puzzled and marvels understands that he is ignorant, therefore the lover of myths is also a lover of wisdom, as myth is based on marvel”. See Casadio 2009.
46 Another interpretation of a transposition of Dionysius’ mimetic theory to the Roman Antiquities would be that historiography would imitate reality, but would not necessarily be truthful. For a criticism see Meins 2019, 54-61.
5. The drunken Silenus

The analysis of Dionysius’ remarks on the wonderful and the unexpected stories in Theopompus has allowed us to discuss the use of these categories in Dionysius’ Roman Antiquities and in his theory of imitation. What remains is to look at the extant fragments of Theopompus so that we can attempt to determine what the wonderful and unexpected things worth imitating were, and, on the contrary, what sort of things were the superfluous digressions that lack usefulness, condemned by Dionysius. Both tasks are extremely arduous because of our partial knowledge of Theopompus’ work.

Discussing myth writing in Theopompus might appear, at first sight, relatively easy. We know that Theopompus explicitly claimed to include mythoi in his history from Strabo, who considered him a better storyteller than Herodotus or Hellanicus.47 In this, therefore, Dionysius seems to have followed him in the preface. Aelian calls Theopompus a clever storyteller (T 26b), whereas Diodorus says that Theopompus, like Ephorus, does not write about palaioi mythoi (‘ancient myths’), which must mean before the return of the Heraclids (T 12). I shall focus here on two points for my comparison between Dionysius and Theopompus: the question of the marvellous and the story of Silenus.

Theopompus’ thaumasia must have been one of the reasons why the writings of the historian had the manifoldness admired by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. This section of Theopompus’ work included a broad range of stories, including anecdotes about the Magi (BNJ 115 F 64a-65), stories of miracles performed by Pherekydes of Syros and Epimenides of Knossos (F 67-71), a long story

47 Θεόπομπος FGrHist 115 F 381: Θεόπομπος δὲ ἐξομολογεῖται φήσας ὅτι καὶ μύθους ἐν ταῖς ἱστορίαις ἔρει, (κρείττον ἢ ὡς Ἡρόδοτος καὶ Κτησίας καὶ Ἑλλανικὸς καὶ οἱ τὰ Ἰνδικὰ συγγράφοντες). “Theopompus acknowledges this when he says that he will also narrate myths in his Histories, and does so better than Herodotus, Ctesias, Hellanicus and the writers of works on India”. See Biraschi 1996.
of the imprisonment of Silenus by King Midas (F 74-75), and probably other stories concerning miracles (F 260, 392, 394). Theopompus’ reasons for including these marvels in the Philippika are rather unclear. Moreover, apart from the content of some of the stories included in this section, we are hardly in the position of saying anything concrete about the methodological value of these stories for Theopompus. Given how they appear in the section of thaumasia, it seems a safe assumption that wonder must have had some kind of value within the framework of Theopompus’ historiographical project, but we are not able to articulate a theory of wonder comparable to that formulated by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. In conclusion, although we apparently know something about myth writing in Theopompus, we are not in a position to ascertain why this aspect of his work was considered worth imitating by Dionysius.

The other task of this section, determining the characteristics that made some of Theopompus’ marvels useless for Dionysius, might seem even more difficult. However, Dionysius’ remarks that these useless digressions included the myth of Silenus give us a much better starting point. Theopompus’ story of Silenus was very well known in antiquity, and we can reconstruct it from several fragments. In the story, King Midas decided to capture Silenus. Midas knew of a source of water where Silenus regularly drank, and he had copious quantities of wine mixed in the water (BNJ 115 F 75a). After Silenus got drunk, Midas had him captured (F 75b) and conversed with him on several topics, including a story concerning two cities that must have been quite well-known in antiquity (F 75c).48

The reason this story is useful for understanding why it was inappropriate for Dionysius of Halicarnassus is that a virtually identical story existed for King Numa, the oldest known version of which is in a fragment of Valerius Antias transmitted by Arnobius (FRHist 25 F 8). The story has it that Numa was eager to know how to avert the ill omen of thunderbolts. He learnt from Egeria the

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48 On the content of Midas’ conversation see Pédech 1989, 179-183; Shrimpton 1991, 144; Flower 1994, 216; and Morison 2015 ad loc. On the afterlife of the myth of the two cities see, in particular, Leigh 2015.
spring where Faunus and Picus normally came to drink, and he had wine and mead mixed in the water, with twelve youths hidden nearby. After the two deities drank and fell asleep, the youths chained them, and Numa asked them for instructions on how to summon Jupiter. After that, Numa summoned Jupiter on the Aventine, and learnt from him the rituals needed to avert the omen. The same story is also mentioned by Ovid (Fast. 3.285-348) and Plutarch (Numa 15.3-10). Plutarch also gives a slightly different version of the story, in which Picus and Faunus themselves give to Numa the instructions for averting the omen.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus does not tell this story, and I believe that this is significant. Dionysius (2.60.4-61) and Plutarch (Numa 15) both have sections dedicated to the fabulous stories concerning Numa and Egeria. These sections are structurally quite similar, but they also include important differences. They are summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plutarch, Life of Numa 15</th>
<th>Dionysius, Ant. Rom. 2.60.4-61</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Numa’s reforms had such a beneficial effect on the city that citizens were willing to believe fabulous stories concerning him.</td>
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<td>- He once invited several citizens for a simple lunch and claimed that the goddess with whom he consorted was to visit him.</td>
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<td>- Suddenly, a sumptuous meal and rich furniture appeared.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- But the strangest story concerned Numa’s conversation with Jupiter. On the Aventine lived two daimones, Picus and Faunus.</td>
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<td>- Numa caught them by mixing wine and honey in the spring where they used to drink.</td>
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<td>- They foretold Numa many things, and taught him how to avert thunder and lightning. According to another version, they summoned Jupiter and Jupiter taught Numa.</td>
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<td>- These fabulous stories show how people of that time had an attitude of</td>
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<tr>
<td>- There are many fabulous stories about Numa, explaining his wisdom as due to the advice of the gods.</td>
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<td>- It is said that he had a relationship with Egeria. People did not believe him, and to persuade them, he did the following.</td>
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<td>- He invited several illustrious citizens and showed them his simple house, without anything necessary for a banquet, and told them to come back in the evening.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- When they came back, they found a luxuriously furnished hall with a sumptuous banquet, and became convinced that he consorted with Egeria.</td>
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<td>- But some people say that the relationship with Egeria was invented by Numa so that people would follow his laws.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- In this, Numa followed the example of Minos and Lycurgus, who claimed to receive their laws from Zeus and Apollo.</td>
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confidence towards the gods. Numa himself had such confidence.

- Dionysius prefers to omit such stories and concentrate on the benefits of Numa’s rule.

A direct connection between the two passages cannot be demonstrated. The thematic connection would be enough to explain many of the similarities. Dionysius and Plutarch both have the story of the dinner party. In the following section, while in Plutarch we have the story of Picus and Faunus at the spring, in Dionysius we see some observations on the motif of lawgivers presenting their laws as if they were granted by the gods. In particular, “those who take away everything that is mythical from history” (2.61.1: Οἱ δὲ τὰ μυθώδη πάντα περιμωροῦντες ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας) affirm that Numa followed the example of Minos and Lycurgus, who had claimed that they conversed with Zeus and Apollo, and received their laws from them, so that people would more readily follow them (Ant. Rom. 2.61.1-2).

But, as I am sensible that to give a particular account of the legendary histories, and especially of those relating to gods, would require a long discussion, I shall omit doing so, and shall relate instead the benefits which the Romans seem to me to have received from this man’s rule, according to the information I have derived from their own histories. But first I will show in what confusion the affairs of the State were before he came to the throne.

The fact that here Dionysius mentions the stories of Minos and Lycurgus claiming to converse with Zeus and Apollo might suggest that he had in mind the story of Numa with Picus, Faunus, and Jupiter, and deliberately chose to omit it. Dionysius does not take a clear stance on the truthfulness of the allegations that Numa had invented his relationship with the gods. However, he prefers to omit such stories because they would require a long discussion. If Dionysius was referring to the story of Picus and Faunus, the reason why he might have decided to omit it was that, as he stated when commenting on the birth of Romulus, he believed that human misdeeds should not be attributed to the gods, such as the drunkenness of Faunus and Picus and the anger of Jupiter.
Unexpectedly, this might offer a clue as to why he considered the story of Silenus in Theopompus inappropriate and misplaced. Although the language is, at first sight, a language of rationalisation, similar to the one that Dionysius used to praise the lack of mythology in Roman religion (Ant. Rom. 2.20), the criteria used to include or omit the story rather refer to Dionysius’ rhetorical and pedagogical principles. The problem concerns Dionysius’ imitative pedagogy: as the peasant shows to his wife only beautiful pictures so that she will beget beautiful sons, one should not show the gods engaging in inappropriate behaviour.

6. Conclusions

I have attempted in this paper to look at the way Dionysius thought one should write about myths and marvels, having in mind both the Roman Antiquities and his critical work, and considering in particular the way Dionysius describes the work of his favourite historian, Theopompus. I believe that the discussion above has shown that Dionysius claimed to be part of a tradition of manifold historiography, which was proud to include a variety of material, including mythical stories and marvels. Myths and miracles in Dionysius are far from identical and have a complex relationship, deeply interconnected with their value in terms of aetiology and pedagogy. Marvellous and extraordinary stories could occasionally overlap with myths. When the pedagogical value of wonder and paradox was involved in myth, the myth could be accepted and looked at positively, as it could play a role in Dionysus’ project. The story of Silenus shows how, inversely, not all marvels could play a role in Dionysius’ work. Dionysius was particularly sensitive on the subject of divine intervention, and, he might have chosen not to include the story concerning Picus and Faunus in the Roman Antiquities. Divine intervention was only possible if the gods were not involved in mundane misdeeds. In all of the above, rationalisation does not play any significant role. Not that Dionysius was particularly irrational – but what mattered to him was framed in other terms. He cared for the
aetiological, the pedagogical, and even the spiritual value of the stories he was telling. Wonder could provide a way towards beauty, and a spiritual path for the soul.

Bibliography


