Casper C. de Jonge:

Between Grammar and Rhetoric. Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Language, Linguistics and Literature

(*Mnemosyne* Supplement 301)

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008

xiv + 456 pages (bibliography; indexes)

ISBN: 978-90-04-16677-6

Price: €146; $217

The Greek critic and historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who worked at Rome in the period of Augustus, is a central witness to the rhetorical and stylistic criticism of the late Hellenistic period, as well as our principal source for Greek Atticism in this period; it cannot, however, be claimed that his critical works have recently received widespread attention beyond a relatively small group of specialists. The reasons for this are complex, but perhaps not difficult to understand. On the one hand, much of the material, particularly in his major work *On the arrangement of words* (*De compositione verborum*), which is importantly concerned with such things as the effect of particles and conjunctions and of the quality of different rhythms and of the sounds produced by individual letters and their combinations, is of an arcane and technical nature, which may well seem to most classicists to have very little to do with what they look for in reading, say, Demosthenes. Secondly, as de Jonge points out in this important new study (based on a Leiden thesis), the assumption that Dionysius was simply an unoriginal exploiter and transmitter of other people's ideas has too often meant that, even where attention has been paid to his text, it is not his own intellectual systems and constructions which have been at the forefront of scholarly interest, despite the fact that Dionysius' work operates across such traditional category divisions as 'rhetoric', 'philosophy and history of language', 'grammar' and 'literary criticism'. There are, as always, exceptions to such generalisations of neglect, but de Jonge's book is bound to bring Dionysius on to many a radar where he has not been found before. Moreover, there have already been signs of serious stirring in the forest – one thinks of James Porter's discussions of Dionysius' classicism[1] or of Gian Biagio Conte's use of Dionysius in his account of the background to Virgilian style[2] – and, if Dionysius' time has indeed come, a principal impetus for this new life will be the important links between some of his central ideas and those of earlier Hellenistic *kritikoi*, as they are being painstakingly reconstructed from the charred remains of Philodemus' *On Poems* (cf., e.g., de Jonge, pp. 37-39); suddenly, Dionysius has an intellectual context (of sorts), and we are somewhat better placed to understand what he thought he was doing, even if we may still be puzzled at the directions his intellectual ingenuity took.

[1] Cf. J. I. Porter (ed.), *Classical Pasts* (Princeton 2006), Index *s.v.* "Dionysius of Halicarnassus".

[2] Cf. *The Poetry of Pathos* (Oxford 2007), pp. 63-67. For the current interest in Dionysius' rhetorical works I hope that I may be allowed also to cite Chapter 4 of my *Critical Moments in Classical Literature* (Cambridge 2009), which was completed before de Jonge's book was known to me.

Putting Dionysius within his intellectual context is indeed one of de Jonge's prime aims in this book. Two themes in particular stand out; both are familiar, but de Jonge's book should now be the first port-of-call on both of them. The first is Dionysius' links to other Greek *grammatikoi* working in Rome at this time; the subject is, of necessity, fraught with speculation (and de Jonge is rightly cautious when it comes to seeking to identify 'sources' for Dionysius, though major figures such as Asclepiades of Myrlea come into view), but it gains a particular importance through the figure of Caecilius of Caleacte, a fellow Atticist with Dionysius and apparently the principal object of criticism in Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*. Putting Dionysius and Pseudo-Longinus beside each other can always be suggestive for the style of argument that dominated contemporary critical discourse. De Jonge also turns his attention to Dionysius' possible use of Latin sources, most notably of course Cicero, and he sees no reason in principle why Dionysius, who tells us that he learned Latin (which he regarded as, to an important degree, a form of Aeolic Greek) and who clearly engages with Latin sources in his historical work, could not have used ideas from Cicero's rhetorical treatises. Certainly, Quintilian's great treatise on oratory, which seems to draw on both Cicero and Dionysius, suggests an intellectual world in which grammarians did indeed move between languages.

The second theme to which de Jonge gives proper attention is Dionysius' debt to specifically Stoic sources. De Jonge traces the links with painstaking care (it must be admitted that some of these pages will make very tough going for all but the most ardent devotee of ancient grammatical theory), and he always properly insists that shared material does not, of itself, mean that Dionysius has used straightforwardly Stoic material, for Stoic ideas had penetrated deep into the intellectual *koinê* of educated discourse at almost every level. De Jonge is a sympathetic reader of Dionysius, who, as is very clear from what he has to say about Chrysippus in *On Arrangement* 4, is a rhetorician with an essentially practical, didactic aim in view, not a philosopher or a grammarian, from whom absolutely consistent accounts of language may be demanded; too often in the past, Dionysius has disappointed, because unreasonable demands have been made of him. Dionysius is not a man of rigid systems: alternative structures and classifications, of, for example, word classes, can always be entertained, if such multiplicity serves appropriate ends. So too, de Jonge is sensitive to the possibility (indeed high probability) of change over time in Dionysius' views, particularly to an increasingly 'theoretical' bent to his work. De Jonge, however, properly insists that Dionysius was interested in more than just linguistic form, i.e. in what the great figures of the past said (their *noêmata*), as well as in how they said it (their *onomata*), even though de Jonge's book is in fact principally concerned with the latter.

De Jonge's concern in this book is the intersection of linguistics and 'literary criticism' and, as such, the treatises *On Demosthenes*, *On the Arrangement of Words*, *On Thucydides*, and the *Second Letter to Ammaeus* stand at its heart; this is not, e.g., a study of Dionysius' accounts of Lysias and Isocrates or of his comparison of Herodotus and Thucydides. After an introductory chapter which sets the scene and explains the scope of the book (pp. 1-48), in Chapter 2 ("Dionysius on the nature of language", pp. 49-90), de Jonge lays the basis for his study by carefully picking his way through Dionysius' statements, and their modern interpretations, on the hierarchical nature of language – first letters, then syllables, then words, etc. – and on the relation between 'words' and 'things'; much here depends on a correct appreciation of the nuances of 'nature' (*phusis*), in its oppositions both to the 'imposition' (*thesis*) of names and to 'art' (*technê*). De Jonge's conclusion is that Dionysius' surviving views on these subjects are not so riddled with inconsistency as has been alleged in recent times.

In Chapter 3 ("Dionysius on the grammatical theory of the parts of speech", pp. 91-165), de Jonge turns to the parts of speech; chapter 2 of *On Arrangement* in fact offers "the first extant history of linguistics in the western world" (p. 96), and behind Dionysius it is necessary to trace the interplay between Stoic and Alexandrian/Aristarchan categorisations of the parts of speech (here the work of Stefanos Matthaios has laid important pathways for de Jonge to follow[3]).

Chapter 4 ("Linguistics, composition, and style: Dionysius' use of the parts of speech", pp. 167-250) continues the theme by considering how Dionysius actually uses classifications of the parts of speech in his analysis of classical texts. De Jonge rightly calls particular attention, as have others, to Dionysius' repeated use of an architectural metaphor in his descriptions of how the building blocks of words are put to together in structures of greater or less ruggedness, with greater or less "bonding" between individual "stones", corresponding to the different "smoothness" of the different styles; the possibility of some connection with Dionysius' contemporary Vitruvius (de Jonge, p. 191) is not to be ruled out. De Jonge's lengthy account of Dionysius' discussion of Thucydidean style will be of interest beyond the circle of historians of ancient linguistics; Thucydides enjoyed a considerable vogue in late Republican Rome (cf. Cicero, *Orator* 30-31), but the difficulties and idiosyncrasies of his style make him not an author suitable for imitation by Dionysius' pupils, with regard either to correct usage or to clarity. De Jonge tentatively suggests that, in at least one case, Dionysius has influenced the grammatical tradition which has filtered down into the extant scholia on Thucydides; if this is correct, it would, as de Jonge puts it, have "far-reaching consequences" (p. 226), but the matter must, I think, remain open. However that may be, de Jonge's full account is a very welcome addition to the bibliography of Thucydides' *Nachleben*, a subject which still awaits a proper modern account.

Chapter 5 ("*Natura artis magistra*: Dionysius on natural style, syntax and word order", pp. 251-328) considers Dionysius' views on what was for him a subject of the greatest importance, namely 'natural' style and word order; Dionysius' frequent rewritings of classical texts to bring out that 'natural' order are one of his most striking techniques, and one which is very instructive for the modern student of ancient style, whatever Dionysius' putative pupils made of them. Dionysius mentions eight principles of 'natural order' (nouns precede verbs, verbs precede adverbs, etc.), and shows that, though these are often observed in beautiful writing, they are also often neglected, most notably by Homer, and as such there is no point in thinking that knowledge of these 'natural principles' will, of itself, lead to excellent writing. De Jonge offers an interesting comparison of Dionysius' views to those of Pseudo-Longinus and Quintilian.

In Chapter 6 ("*The initiation rites of style*: Dionysius on prose, poetry, and poetic prose", pp. 329-366), de Jonge turns to Dionysius' views on the distinctions between prose and poetry, and the troubling question of why his account of prose rhythm in, say, Demosthenes seems to modern scholars to be so wide of the mark; in fact Dionysius gives two incompatible accounts of the rhythm of the same Demosthenic sentence, and de Jonge does his best to save Dionysius' reputation by insisting that we give due attention to the local context of each citation. For de Jonge, the apparent oddity of the fact that Dionysius, who is otherwise so fierce and Aristotelian a critic of poetic unclarity within prose, holds in the highest esteem, at least in *On Arrangement*, excellent prose which is 'like excellent poetry', is to be explained from his aesthetic focus in this treatise: beauty and attractiveness as the most powerful effects of style cut across any prose-

[3] *Untersuchungen zur Grammatik Aristarchs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

verse division, and here (again) very interesting links may be suggested between Dionysius and the *kritikoi* known to us from Philodemus, *On Poems*.

Finally, in Chapter 7, ("*Rewriting the classics*: Dionysius and the method of metathesis", pp. 367-390), de Jonge turns to Dionysius' third method of criticism, after *analysis* and *synkrisis*, namely *metathesis* or 'change', by which passages in classical authors are re-arranged and re-written in various ways in order to bring out particular qualities. If Dionysius is not always very explicit about the stylistic virtues that his *metatheseis* highlight, then this is explained by de Jonge from his didactic purpose – the pupils should work these out for themselves – and from the importance which Dionysius places upon the 'irrational criterion' which is innate in all of us. Why should Dionysius explain at length what is in fact self-evident?

De Jonge has absorbed and analysed a very great deal of often very difficult material, and all students of ancient rhetoric, grammar, and stylistics should be grateful to him; this book will, I am sure, become a standard point of reference. It is, however, far from being an easy read, particularly for someone such as myself who claims no special expertise in ancient grammar and linguistic theory. It is also rather too long – there are repetitions and other persisting signs of the thesis which underlies it – and the proofreading has let through quite a number of typos. This is, however, quite clearly a book which we will be very glad to have and which has advanced our understanding of what is a central area of ancient criticism. De Jonge deserves our gratitude.

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