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Rewriting rivers in ancient literary criticism

Jonge, C.C. de; Cannavale, S.; Miletto, L.; Regali, M.

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Cannavale | Miletto | Regali (edd.)

I luoghi delle Muse

La funzione dello spazio nella
fondazione e nel rinnovamento
dei generi letterari greci



ACADEMIA

Serena Cannavale | Lorenzo Miletto
Mario Regali (edd.)

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Rewriting Rivers in Ancient Literary Criticism

Casper C. de Jonge

1. Introduction: Landscapes in Ancient Literary Criticism

Reading ancient literary criticism can be an adventurous experience. It often feels like travelling through different landscapes, climbing mountains and navigating rivers. Greek and Roman rhetorical treatises abound in visualizations of beautiful landscapes. On the one hand, rhetoricians may cite literary passages from classical texts in which impressive or remarkable landscapes are described. On the other hand, rhetoricians themselves may evoke certain spaces, like mountains, volcanoes, roads or rivers, in order to illustrate metaphorically the character of a certain text, style or genre. Rhetorical treatises on style, like Demetrius' *On Style*, Dionysius' *On Composition* and Longinus' *On the Sublime*, contain many references to inspired spaces, like Mount Helicon, the Ilissus river near Athens, and the Aetna volcano.¹ Homer is like a spring or the Ocean; Sappho is charming like the flower gardens of the nymphs; and the disorganized outbursts of Archilochus are like the explosions of a volcano.² Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which ancient critics associate different styles with landscapes, in particular springs, gardens, rivers, paths, and mountains. Important publications on the connection between landscape and style in ancient literary criticism include Richard Hunter's *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature. The Silent Stream* and Nancy Worman's *Landscape and the Spaces of Metaphor in Ancient Literary Theory and Criticism*.³

This article will focus on the remarkable role that rivers and river landscapes play in ancient literary criticism.⁴ It will be shown that the analogy between river and text is a suggestive didactic tool, which can be employed to bring out the specific qualities of different styles and genres. Various as-

1 See Worman (2015). On space in ancient Greek literature, see de Jong (2012).

2 See Longinus, *On the Sublime* 13, 3; 35, 4; Demetrius, *On Style* 132; Longinus, *On the Sublime* 33, 5 (cf. 35, 4 on the Etna).

3 Hunter (2012); Worman (2015).

4 On water as a metapoetic metaphor in ancient literary criticism, see Asper (1997), 109–120 and Hunter (2009), 159.

pects of rivers can be evoked in order to illustrate the stylistic characteristics of a text. A river can be small or broad; it can be quietly flowing or wildly flooding; a river has a source, somewhere up in the mountains, and a mouth, where it discharges itself into the sea; and it flows in one direction only, from its origin to the sea, passing on the way through different towns and landscapes. All these characteristics of a river can be evoked in comparisons between rivers and texts. Thus the style of a literary work can be modest like a small creek, or impressive like a broad river; it can be charming and refreshing or forceful and grand. Like a river, a text has a beginning and an end; it moves in one direction, from the opening of the narrative to its conclusion; and while ‘flowing’ through the narrative world, the text introduces us to many different characters and events. It is not surprising that ancient critics exploited this rich potential of the analogy between rivers and texts or styles.

2. *Rewriting Rivers: from Callimachus to Longinus*

The obvious point of departure for our examination is the concluding passage of Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo* — a programmatic passage that has been widely debated in recent scholarship:⁵

ὁ Φθόνος Ἀπόλλωνος ἐπ’ οὐατα λάθριος εἶπεν· (105)

‘οὐκ ἄγαμαι τὸν αἰοιδὸν ὃς οὐδ’ ὅσα πόντος αἰεῖει.’

τὸν Φθόνον ὠπόλλων ποδί τ’ ἤλασεν ὧδέ τ’ εἶπεν·

‘Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλὰ

λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ’ ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἔλκει.

Δηοῖ δ’ οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι μέλισσαι, (110)

ἀλλ’ ἥ τις καθαρὴ τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει

πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον.’

χαῖρε, ἄναξ· ὁ δὲ Μῶμος, ἴν’ ὁ Φθόνος, ἐνθα νέοιτο.

Envy spoke privately into Apollo’s ear: ‘I do not admire the poet who does not sing as much as the sea (πόντος).’ Apollo gave Envy a kick and said: ‘Great is the stream (μέγας ῥόος) of the Assyrian river, but it car-

5 Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo* 105–113. Translation by Cameron (1995). On the *Hymn to Apollo*, see Petrovic (2011) and Stephens (2015) with further bibliography.

ries much filth and refuse in its waters. And the Bees do not bring water from everywhere to Demeter, but only the pure and undefiled stream that trickles from a holy fountain, the best of the best.' Hail, lord; but let Blame go where Envy dwells.

Callimachus' references to the sea, the muddy river of Assyria, and the pure and undefiled stream from a holy fountain have been interpreted in different ways. Does Callimachus refer to the contrast between two genres, that is, Homeric epic versus small-scale epigrams?⁶ Or does he rather refer to the opposition between two different styles, an impressive and rich but muddy style on the one hand versus a pure, modest and subtle style on the other hand, as Alan Cameron has argued?⁷ For our purposes it is important to note that Callimachus' lines were highly influential in ancient literary criticism.⁸ The contrast between the muddy river and the subtle stream is evoked also by ancient critics who did not agree with Callimachus' program of aesthetics. It is clear, for instance, that Longinus, the author of the treatise *On the Sublime* (probably to be dated to the first century AD), turns Callimachus' programmatic statement upside down:⁹

ἐνθεν φυσικῶς πῶς ἀγόμενοι μὰ Δί' οὐ τὰ μικρὰ ρεῖθρα θαυμάζομεν, εἰ καὶ διαυγῇ καὶ χρήσιμα, ἀλλὰ τὸν Νεῖλον καὶ Ἰστρον ἢ Ῥῆνον, πολὺ δ' ἔτι μᾶλλον τὸν Ὠκεανόν.

So it is by some natural instinct that we admire, not the small streams (οὐ τὰ μικρὰ ρεῖθρα), clear and useful as they are, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and above all the Ocean.

Whereas Apollo (in Callimachus' hymn) rejects the sea and the Euphrates in favor of a pure stream, Longinus makes the opposite move: he rejects small streams and prefers the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine and the Ocean. Longinus' reversal of Callimachean aesthetics is not a statement about genre (epic versus epigram), but rather about style and aesthetics. In the context of this passage Longinus argues that sublime writers, even if they

6 Williams (1978), 85–89. Williams claims that πόντος (the sea) stands for Homer. For objections against this interpretation, see Cameron (1995), 403–409. See further Stephens (2015) chapter 2. Callimachus' interest in rivers is clear from the title of his treatise *On Rivers*.

7 Cameron (1995), 403–409.

8 For Callimachus' profound influence, see Hunter (2006).

9 Longinus, *On the Sublime* 35, 4. Translation by Russell (1995). On the date and authorship of *On the Sublime*, see Russell (1964); Russell (1995), 145–148; Mazzucchi (2010) xxix–xxxvii; De Jonge (2012). On this passage, see also Porter (2016), 175.

make mistakes, are to be preferred to faultless mediocre (pure) writers: Plato makes mistakes, but he is more sublime than the faultless Lysias; Demosthenes has bad moments, but he is more sublime than Hyperides. The Hellenistic poet Apollonius of Rhodes is impeccable, but, Longinus asks us, ‘would you not rather be Homer than Apollonius?’¹⁰ In other words, the Nile, the Rhine and the Danube seem to represent sublime writers like Plato, Demosthenes and Herodotus, who in their sublimity sometimes make mistakes; and the Ocean without any doubt represents Homer himself.¹¹ Longinus’ response to the Callimachean Apollo could be reformulated as follows: ‘Yes, it is true, the stream of the Assyrian river carries much filth, but I still think a great river (μέγας ῥόος) is much more sublime than your pure (faultless) little stream.’

Longinus is thus rewriting Callimachus by reversing his program of aesthetics, replacing Apollo’s small and pure creek with the most impressive river landscapes of Egypt and Europe.¹² Longinus is not the only ancient critic who rewrites rivers in order to illustrate his aesthetic program. In this paper I would like to draw attention to the remarkable role that rivers seem to play in the ancient practice of *metathesis*. Metathesis is the rewriting of a classical text passage that results in a new formulation: the procedure of rearranging the words of a text allows the teacher and student of rhetoric to compare two different versions of one sentence, or two formulations of the same thought. The rewriting may involve changing the choice of words and the order of words, which will also affect the rhythm and melody of the sentence. Metathesis is an important didactic tool,

10 Longinus, *On the Sublime* 33, 4: ἄρ’ οὖν Ὅμηρος ἂν μᾶλλον ἢ Ἀπολλώνιος ἐθέλοις γενέσθαι; See also 33, 5; 34; 35, 1.

11 For Homer as ‘the great ocean’, see Porter (2016), 360–381. The sea, the Danube and the Nile also occur together in Demetrius’ *On Style* 121 (discussed below): see Porter (2016), 276.

12 For a different reading, see Porter (2016), 146: Porter emphasizes the continuity between Callimachean refinement (λεπτότης) and the Longinian ‘aesthetics of detail’. It is clear from *On the Sublime* 33–36, however, that impeccability and attention for detail are of secondary importance to Longinus: ‘perfect precision runs the risk of triviality’ (τὸ γὰρ ἐν παντὶ ἀκριβὲς κίνδυνος μικρότητος, *On the Sublime* 33, 2). The differences between Callimachus and Longinus are more significant than the similarities. For Callimachus and Longinus, see also Hunter (2009), 159. Innes (1995a) demonstrates that landscapes (rivers, sea, volcano) and natural phenomena (sun, lightning) contribute to the structure and unity of *On the Sublime*.

which is widely employed by critics like Demetrius, Dionysius, Longinus and Hermogenes.¹³

Among the rewritings of classical passages we find a surprising number of sentences that describe the course of a river. Thus, Demetrius rewrites a sentence from Thucydides on the course of the river Achelous and a sentence from Xenophon on the river Teleboas. And Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Hermogenes of Tarsus rewrite a famous sentence from Herodotus that describes the course of the river Halys. In my interpretation of these passages I want to suggest that the ancient critics choose ‘river sentences’ for their rewriting exercises for a particular reason: the analogy between river and text greatly helps their students to think about style and to visualize various aspects of stylistic writing. The mimetic quality of language is a central idea in ancient literary criticism: language should perfectly mirror the world that it describes. Thus, the description of a river in language should mimetically represent the length, the course and the nature of the river that exists in the real world. If however such a verbal representation of a river is then changed through a rewriting exercise, the perfect correspondence between form and subject matter will be ruined. Rewriting a gently flowing sentence that describes a river in Herodotus or Thucydides is thus like forcing a beautiful river to change its course. Changing the literary representation of a river is therefore as destructive as redirecting the natural course of a river in the real world; and by its destructiveness the metathesis proves the quality of the original passage — before it was rewritten. Let us look at some examples of this phenomenon in Demetrius’ *On Style*, Dionysius’ *On Composition*, and Hermogenes’ *On Types of Style*.

3. *Demetrius on Thucydides’ Achelous*

At the end of book 2 of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides describes the course of the river Achelous, a river in western Greece, 220 km long, which begins at 2,000 meters height in the Pindus mountains and empties into the Ionian Sea. It is the largest river of Greece: Herodotus actually compares the Achelous with the Nile in terms of its enormous size.¹⁴ A Greek audience would of course remember that Achelous was

13 See De Jonge (2005) and De Jonge (2008), 367–390 on metathesis in Dionysius’ rhetorical works.

14 Herodotus II 10.

honored as a god. Thucydides gives the following description of the river:¹⁵

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμός ρέων ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους διὰ Δολοπίας καὶ Ἀγρραίων καὶ Ἀμφιλόχων καὶ διὰ τοῦ Ἀκαρνανικοῦ πεδίου, ἄνωθεν μὲν παρὰ Στράτον πόλιν, ἐς θάλασσαν δ' ἐξιείς παρ' Οἰνιάδας καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτοῖς περιλιμνάζων, ἄπορον ποιεῖ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν χειμῶνι στρατεύειν.

For the river Achelous (ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμός), flowing (ρέων) from Mount Pindus through the country of the Dolopians, Agraeans, and Amphilochians and then through the Acarnanian plain, passing by the city of Stratus high up the stream, and by Oeniadae emptying (ἐξιείς) into the sea, surrounding the city with water (περιλιμνάζων), renders military operations there impossible in winter by reason of the water.

This is an impressive periodic sentence, which follows the river Achelous from the beginning (Pindus) to the end (Oeniadae at the Ionian Sea); the grammatical subject ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμός is combined with a series of participles ρέων, ἐξιείς and περιλιμνάζων, before the predicate ποιεῖ expresses the point that Thucydides wants to make. Demetrius, the author of the treatise *On Style* (possibly second or first century BC), cites the sentence in his section on the grand style.¹⁶ He claims that the grandeur of this sentence is achieved through the periodic structure. I would suggest that Demetrius' choice to cite this example in his section on the grand style is not only based on the periodic form of the sentence, but also on the impressive size of the river and the divine associations that it evokes: enormous size and the divine are both 'thematic markers of the sublime', as Porter has pointed out.¹⁷ Here is Demetrius' analysis of the passage:¹⁸

Μεγαλοπρεπὲς δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐκ περιαγωγῆς τῇ συνθέσει λέγειν, οἷον ὡς ὁ Θουκυδίδης·

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμός ρέων ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους διὰ Δολοπίας καὶ Ἀγριανῶν καὶ Ἀμφιλόχων, ἄνωθεν παρὰ Στράτον πόλιν ἐς θάλασσαν διεξιείς παρ' Οἰνιάδας καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτοῖς περιλιμνάζων ἄπορον ποιεῖ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν χειμῶνι στρατεύεσθαι.

15 Thucydides II 102, 2. Translation adapted from Smith (1919).

16 Demetrius, *On Style* 45–47. The grand style is discussed in *On Style* 38–127. On Demetrius' *On Style*, see Grube (1961); Schenkeveld (1964); Chiron (2001); Marini (2007).

17 Porter (2016), 51–53.

18 Demetrius, *On Style* 45–47. Translation adapted from Innes (1995b).

σύμπασα γὰρ ἡ τοιαύτη μεγαλοπρέπεια ἐκ τῆς περιαγωγῆς γέγονεν καὶ ἐκ τοῦ μόγις ἀναπαῦσαι αὐτόν τε καὶ τὸν ἀκούοντα. (46) Εἰ δ' οὕτω διαλύσας αὐτὸ εἴποι τις·

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμὸς ρεῖ μὲν ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους, ἐκβάλλει δὲ παρ' Οἰνιάδας ἐς θάλασσαν· πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἐκβολῆς τὸ Οἰνιαδῶν πεδίον λίμνην ποιεῖ, ὥστ' αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὰς χειμερινὰς ἐφόδους τῶν πολεμίων ἔρυμα καὶ πρόβλημα γίνεσθαι τὸ ὕδωρ.

εἰ δὲ τις οὕτω μεταβαλὼν ἐρμηνεύσειεν αὐτό, πολλὰς μὲν ἀναπαύλας παρέξει τῷ λόγῳ, τὸ μέγεθος δ' ἀφαιρήσεται. (47) Καθάπερ γὰρ τὰς μακρὰς ὁδοὺς αἱ συνεχεῖς καταγωγαὶ μικρὰς ποιοῦσιν, αἱ δ' ἐρημίαι κὰν ταῖς μικραῖς ὁδοῖς ἔμφασιν τινα ἔχουσι μήκους, ταὐτὸ δὲ κὰπὶ τῶν κώλων ἂν γίγνοιτο.

Elevated is also the periodic form of composition, as in the following passage of Thucydides:

'For the river Achelous, flowing from Mount Pindus through Dolopia and the land of the Agrianians and Amphilochians, passing inland by the city of Stratus on the way into the sea near Oeniadae, and surrounding that town with a marsh, by its floods makes a winter expedition impossible.'

All this impressiveness has come from the periodic form and from the fact that Thucydides hardly allows any pause to himself and the reader. (46) If you were to break the sentence up to say,

'For the river Achelous flows from Mount Pindus and makes its way into the sea near Oeniadae (ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμὸς ρεῖ μὲν ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους, ἐκβάλλει δὲ παρ' Οἰνιάδα); but before reaching its outlet it turns the plain of Oeniadae into a marsh, so that the floods form a defense and protection against enemy attack in the winter.'

If you vary and rephrase it in this way you will give the passage many pauses (*ἀναπαύλας*) but destroy its grandeur (*τὸ μέγεθος*). (47) Inns (*καταγωγαί*) at frequent intervals make long journeys shorter, while desolate roads (*ἐρημίαι*), even when the distances are short, give the impression of length. The same principle applies to clauses.

In her discussion of this passage Nancy Worman draws attention to the fact that 'Demetrius frames Thucydides' river of prose with the language of roads'.¹⁹ The flow of the river is reinterpreted as the path that a traveler needs to go: in Thucydides' version this is a long and lonely journey of

19 Worman (2015), 238.

sublime proportions; in the new version that results from Demetrius' rewriting, however, the journey becomes a pleasant experience that is interrupted by regular 'rest-stops' (*ἀναπαύλαι*) along the way.

Let us have a closer look at the metathesis: how does Demetrius change the style of Thucydides' sentence on the Achelous?

Thucydides II 102, 2 as cited by Demetrius' metathesis:
Demetrius:

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμὸς ρέων ἐκ ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ποταμὸς ρεῖ μὲν ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους διὰ Δολοπίας καὶ Πίνδου ὄρους, ἐκβάλλει δὲ παρ' Ἀγριανῶν καὶ Ἀμφιλόχων, ἄνωθεν Οἰνιάδας ἐς θάλασσαν· πρὸ δὲ τῆς παρὰ Στράτον πόλιν ἐς θάλασσαν ἐκβολῆς τὸ Οἰνιαδῶν πεδῖον λίμνην διεξιεῖς παρ' Οἰνιάδας καὶ τὴν πόλιν ποιεῖ, ὥστ' αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὰς χειμερινὰς αὐτοῖς περιλιμνάζων ἄπορον ποιεῖ ἐφόδους τῶν πολεμίων ἔρυμα καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν χειμῶνι πρόβλημα γίνεσθαι τὸ ὕδωρ. στρατεύεσθαι.

Three changes should be mentioned here. First, Demetrius adds the particles *μὲν* and *δέ* to the two first participles; he changes the first participle *ρέων* into the main verb *ρεῖ*, and the second one *διεξιεῖς* into the main verb *ἐκβάλλει*; he also postpones the words *ἐς θάλασσαν*, placing them directly after the name of the town Oeniadae, so that the river ends into the sea (as it does in reality). Finally, he starts a new sentence after *θάλασσαν* in which he describes much more explicitly and more elaborately than Thucydides how the floods of the river around Oeniadae protect the city against military attacks. The difference between periodic grandeur and simple clarity is thus achieved by adding structuring particles (*μὲν*, *δέ*), by changing participles into main clauses, and by adding words for the sake of precision. It is important to observe that Demetrius does not present his own version of the sentence as superior to Thucydides' original version: his rewriting makes the passage perhaps clearer, but also less grand and less impressive. Demetrius' version also leaves out Dolopia, the lands of the Agrianians and Amphilochians, and the city of Stratus. In fact, Demetrius' rewriting destroys the sublimity of the river Achelous.

Demetrius returns to the same example in his section on the plain style: having pointed out that the plain style makes use of short sentences, he rewrites Thucydides' sentence on the Achelous once more. Again he adds

the particles μέν and δέ, which he now calls ‘signposts’ (σημεῖα) and resting places (ἀναπαύλαι):²⁰

Πειρᾶσθαι δὲ μὴ εἰς μῆκος ἐκτείνειν τὰς περιαγωγάς·

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ῥέων ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους ἄνωθεν μέν παρὰ Στράτον πόλιν ἐπὶ θάλασσαν διέξεισιν·

ἀλλ’ αὐτόθεν ἀπολήγειν καὶ ἀναπαύειν τὸν ἀκούοντα οὕτως·

ὁ γὰρ Ἀχελῷος ῥεῖ μέν ἐκ Πίνδου ὄρους, ἔξεισιν δὲ εἰς θάλασσαν·

πολὺν γὰρ οὕτως σαφέστερον, ὥσπερ ἂν αἱ πολλὰ σημεῖα ἔχουσαι ὁδοὶ καὶ πολλὰς ἀναπαύλας· ἡγεμόσι γὰρ τὰ σημεῖα ἔοικεν, ἡ δὲ ἀσημεῖωτος καὶ μονοειδής, κἄν μικρὰ ἦ, ἄδηλος δοκεῖ.

Try not to make your periodic sentences too long. Take this sentence:

‘For the river Achelous, flowing from Mount Pindus, passing inland by the city of Stratus, runs into the sea.’

Make a natural break here and give the listener a rest:

‘For the river Achelous flows (ῥεῖ μὲν) from Mount Pindus, and runs (ἔξεισιν δὲ) into the sea.’

This version is far clearer. Sentences are like roads. Some roads have many signposts and many resting places; and the signposts are like guides. But a monotonous road without signposts seems unclear, even if it is short.

It is interesting to note that this rewriting of the Thucydidean passage, just like Demetrius’ first rewriting of the same sentence (discussed above), places the words εἰς θάλασσαν (into the sea) at the very end of the first sentence: this transposition seems to reflect the idea that a clear and straightforward description of a river will mirror the exact course of that river so closely that the sentence ends exactly at the point where the actual river also comes to an end. Demetrius’ version of the sentence thus could be said to correspond more closely to the real world than Thucydides’ version. At the same time, however, Demetrius’ rewritings of Thucydides introduce a certain mismatch between form and content: Thucydides’ impressive period mirrors the sublime river that it portrays, whereas Demetrius’ short sentences with their signposts break the river up into small pieces, thereby diminishing, interrupting and abbreviating what is in reality the largest river of Greece.

20 Demetrius, *On Style* 202. Translation adapted from Innes (1995b).

4. Demetrius on Xenophon's Teleboas

Propriety, the correspondence between form and content, is indeed a central concern in Demetrius' *On Style*. Whereas the long Achelous river demands a sublime periodic style, the river Teleboas, which is described in Xenophon's *Anabasis* as being 'not large', must receive a more modest treatment. Xenophon gives us the following description of the river:²¹

ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἐπορεύθησαν σταθμοὺς τρεῖς παρασάγγας πεντεκαίδεκα ἐπὶ τὸν Τηλεβόαν ποταμόν. οὗτος δ' ἦν καλὸς μὲν, μέγας δ' οὐ· κῶμαι δὲ πολλαὶ περὶ τὸν ποταμὸν ἦσαν.

From there they marched three stages, fifteen parasangs, to the Teleboas river. This was a beautiful river, but not a large one (οὗτος δ' ἦν καλὸς μὲν, μέγας δ' οὐ), and there were many villages about it.

We may observe that Xenophon here uses exactly the signposting particles μὲν and δέ (καλὸς μὲν, μέγας δ') that Demetrius proposed to add to Thucydides' sentence on the Achelous river in order to make it clearer (see above). The river Teleboas in eastern Turkey is in reality 450 km — not that small really; it is twice as long as the Achelous in Greece. But Demetrius seems to follow Xenophon's remark on the modest size of the Teleboas ('not a large one'), when he argues that the style of Xenophon's sentence appropriately imitates the smallness and the beauty of the river. Again, he supports his analysis with a rewriting of the river sentence, by which he demonstrates the charming impact of the original Xenophontic version:²²

Μακροῦ μὲν δὴ κάλου καιρὸς γίνοιτ' ἂν ποτε διὰ ταῦτα· γίνοιτο δ' ἂν ποτε καὶ βραχέος, οἷον ἦτοι μικρόν τι ἡμῶν λεγόντων, ὥς ὁ Ξενοφῶν φησιν, ὅτι ἀφίκοντο οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐπὶ τὸν Τηλεβόαν ποταμόν. οὗτος δὲ ἦν μέγας μὲν οὐ, καλὸς δέ. τῇ γὰρ μικρότητι καὶ ἀποκοπῇ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ συνανεφάνη καὶ ἡ μικρότης τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ χάρις· εἰ δὲ οὕτως ἐκτείνας αὐτὸ εἶπεν·

οὗτος δὲ μεγέθει μὲν ἦν ἐλάττων τῶν πολλῶν, κάλλει δὲ ὑπερεβάλλετο πάντας

τοῦ πρέποντος ἀπετύγχανεν ἂν καὶ ἐγίγνετο ὁ ἡλερόμενος ψυχρός.

21 Xenophon, *Anabasis* IV 4, 3. Translation Brownson (1998), adapted.

22 Demetrius, *On Style* 6. Translation Innes (1995b).

Sometimes, then, a long clause may be appropriate for the reasons given, at other times a short one, for instance when our subject is small, as in Xenophon's account of the Greeks' arrival at the river Teleboas, 'this river was not large, but it was beautiful' (οὗτος δὲ ἦν μέγας μὲν οὐ, καλὸς δέ — [Demetrius gives a wrong quotation]). The short, broken rhythm brings into relief both the smallness of the river and its charm (ἡ μικρότης τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ χάρις). If Xenophon had expanded the idea to say,

'this river was in size inferior to most rivers, but in beauty it surpassed them all'

he would have failed in propriety (τοῦ πρέποντος); and would have become what is called the frigid writer.²³

Xenophon preserves propriety by using the simple style for what is (according to Demetrius) a small river. Not all writers however observe the rule of propriety so well. In his section on frigid style (*On Style* 114–127), Demetrius mentions some writers who use grand language on slight themes; according to the rhetorician this is only excusable in playful and humoristic texts, where the use of the grand style may provoke laughter.²⁴ Otherwise, the grand style is for grand subjects, the simple style for simple subjects. Again, Demetrius illustrates his point with a reference to Xenophon's description of the river Teleboas. He contrasts Xenophon's simple portrayal of the modest river with the description of a similar river by an unknown author, who used the elevated language that one should (according to Demetrius) reserve for immense rivers like the Nile or the Danube:²⁵

παίξειν μὲν δὴ ἐξέστω, ὡς φημί, τὸ δὲ πρέπον ἐν παντὶ πράγματι φυλακτέον, τοῦτ' ἔστι προσφόρως ἐρμηνευτέον, τὰ μὲν μικρὰ μικρῶς, τὰ μεγάλα δὲ μεγάλως. Καθάπερ Ξενοφῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ Τηλεβόα ποταμοῦ μικροῦ ὄντος καὶ καλοῦ φησιν· οὗτος δὲ ποταμὸς ἦν μέγας μὲν οὐ, καλὸς δέ· τῇ γὰρ βραχύτητι τῆς συνθέσεως καὶ τῇ ἀπολήξει τῇ εἰς τὸ δὲ μόνον οὐκ ἐπέδειξεν ἡμῖν μικρὸν ποταμόν. ἕτερος δὲ τις ἐρμηνεύων ὁμοίον τῷ Τηλεβόα ποταμῷ ἔφη, ὡς ἀπὸ τῶν Λαυρικῶν ὁρέων ὁρμώμενος ἐκδιδοῖ ἐς θάλασσαν, καθάπερ τὸν Νεῖλον ἐρμηνεύων κατακρημνιζόμενον ἢ τὸν Ἴστρον ἐκβάλλοντα. πάντα οὖν τὰ τοιαῦτα ψυχρότης καλεῖται.

23 On frigidity, see *On Style* 114–127 with Marini (2007). Cf. Hunter (2009), 131.

24 Demetrius, *On Style* 120.

25 Demetrius, *On Style* 120–121. Translation adapted from Innes (1995b).

So play, as I say, is legitimate, but otherwise preserve propriety, whatever the subject; or in other words, use the relevant style, slight for slight themes, grand for grand themes, just as Xenophon does when he describes the small and beautiful river Teleboas, ‘this was not a large river; but it was a beautiful one’ (μέγας μὲν οὐ, καλὸς δέ). Through the conciseness of the construction and the final position of δέ he makes us all but see a small river. Contrast another writer who describes a river similar to the Teleboas, saying that it ‘rushed from the hills of Laurium and disgorged itself into the sea’, as though he were writing about the cataracts of the Nile or the mouth of the Danube. All such language is frigid.

Demetrius suggests that the words ἀπὸ τῶν Λαυρικῶν ὀρέων ὀρμώμενος ἐκδιδοῖ ἐς θάλασσαν (‘rushing from the hills of Laurium it disgorges itself into the sea’) would be appropriate in a description of the Nile or the Danube, but not in a passage describing a modest river in the southeast of Attica. In this case Demetrius does not rewrite the sentence that he finds ‘frigid’; but we could easily imagine a schoolteacher asking his students to rewrite the frigid sentence by introducing less elevated, more appropriate words to characterize the modest hills of Laurium and its small creek.²⁶ Demetrius evidently associates the Nile and the Danube with the grand or sublime style — like Longinus, who (as we have seen) prefers the Nile, the Danube and the Rhine to Callimachus’ small stream.²⁷

5. *Dionysius on Herodotus’ Halys*

Another famous river in Greek literature is the Halys, which prominently figures in the first book of Herodotus’ *Histories*. The Halys (now Kızılırmak, the ‘Red River’) is the longest river that is entirely located within present-day Turkey. It has a total length of more than 1,350 km, starting in Eastern Anatolia, from where it flows into the southwest and then to the north, where it discharges itself into the Black Sea. In ancient times the river formed the border between Lydia and Persia, until Croesus, the Lydian king, crossed it when attacking the Persian king Cyrus, thereby

26 Are the words ὄρος (mountain, hill) and ὀρμάομαι (to rush) inappropriate because of their high register? Or is it the sequence of long *ō* vowels (τῶν Λαυρικῶν ὀρέων ὀρμώμενος), which gives the passage an elevated, almost epic character?

27 Longinus, *On the Sublime* 35, 4 (see above). Cf. Porter (2016), 276.

‘destroying a great empire’ (547 BC).²⁸ Here is the well-known beginning of Herodotus’ Croesus narrative:²⁹

Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δὲ Ἀλυάττεω, τύραννος δὲ ἐθνέων τῶν ἐντὸς Ἄλως ποταμοῦ, ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσαμβρίας μεταξὺ Συρίων <τε> καὶ Παφλαγόνων ἐξίει πρὸς βορῇν ἄνεμον ἐς τὸν Εὐξείνιον καλεόμενον πόντον.

Croesus was Lydian by birth. He was the son of Alyattes and ruled over all the various peoples who live west of the river Halys, which flows from the south (between where the Syrians and the Paphlagonians live) and in the north issues into the sea which is known as the Euxine Sea.

The main sentence is composed of three short clauses, followed by a relative clause that describes the course of the river Halys (ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσαμβρίας ... ἐξίει). Dionysius of Halicarnassus cites this famous sentence from Herodotus in his work *On Composition* (first century BC), in order to demonstrate the importance of σύνθεσις ὀνομάτων, the arrangement of words.³⁰ He first quotes the Herodotean sentence, changing the Ionic into the Attic dialect. Subsequently he experiments with the style of the sentence, by offering two alternative versions, one in the style of Thucydides, and another one in the style of the Hellenistic author Hegesias of Magnesia, who was considered the archetype of bad, Asianic writing.³¹ Here is Dionysius’ analysis:³²

‘Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δ’ Ἀλυάττου, τύραννος δ’ ἐθνῶν τῶν ἐντὸς Ἄλως ποταμοῦ· ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας μεταξὺ Σύρων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων ἐξίησι πρὸς βορέαν ἄνεμον εἰς τὸν Εὐξείνιον καλούμενον πόντον’.

μετατίθημι τῆς λέξεως ταύτης τὴν ἁρμονίαν, καὶ γενήσεται μοι οὐκέτι ὑπαγωγικόν τὸ πλάσμα οὐδ’ ιστορικόν, ἀλλ’ ὀρθόν μᾶλλον καὶ ἐναγώνιον.

28 Herodotus I 75.

29 Herodotus I 6, 1. Translation Waterfield (1998).

30 On this treatise, see Donadi, Marchiori (2013). On Dionysius, see Hunter and De Jonge (2019).

31 On Hegesias’ bad reputation in Greek and Roman literary criticism, see Ooms (2019).

32 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Composition* 4, 8–11, ed. Aujac (1981). Translation adapted from Usher (1985). See also De Jonge (2005).

‘Κροῖσος ἦν υἱὸς μὲν Ἀλυάττου, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τύραννος δὲ τῶν ἐντὸς Ἄλως ποταμοῦ ἐθνῶν· ὃς ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας ῥέων μεταξύ Σύρων καὶ Παφλαγόνων εἰς τὸν Εὐξείνιον καλούμενον πόντον ἐκδίδωσι πρὸς βορέαν ἄνεμον.’

οὗτος ὁ χαρακτήρ οὐ πολὺ ἀπέχειν ἂν δόξειεν τῶν Θουκυδίδου τούτων (Thuc. I 24, 1): ‘Επίδαμνός ἐστι πόλις ἐν δεξιᾷ εἰσπλέοντι τὸν Ἰόνιον κόλπον· προσοικοῦσι δ’ αὐτὴν Ταυλάντιοι βάρβαροι, Ἰλλυρικὸν ἔθνος.’ πάλιν δὲ ἀλλάξας τὴν αὐτὴν λέξιν ἐτέραν αὐτῇ μορφὴν ἀποδώσω τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον·

‘Ἀλυάττου μὲν υἱὸς ἦν Κροῖσος, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τῶν δ’ ἐντὸς Ἄλως ποταμοῦ τύραννος ἐθνῶν· ὃς ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας ῥέων Σύρων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων μεταξύ πρὸς βορέαν ἐξίησιν ἄνεμον ἐς τὸν καλούμενον πόντον Εὐξείνιον’.

Ἡγησιακὸν τὸ σχῆμα τοῦτο τῆς συνθέσεως, μικρόκομπον, ἀγεννές, μαλθακόν· τούτων γὰρ τῶν λήρων ἱερεὺς ἐκείνος ἀνὴρ τοιαῦτα γράφων· ‘Εξ ἀγαθῆς ἐορτῆς ἀγαθὴν ἄγομεν ἄλλην.’ ‘Ἀπὸ Μαγνησίας εἰμὶ τῆς μεγάλης Σιτυλεύς.’ ‘Οὐ γὰρ μικρὰν εἰς Θηβαίων ὕδωρ ἔπτυσεν ὁ Διόνυσος· ἡδὺ μὲν γὰρ ἐστι, ποιεῖ δὲ μαίνεσθαι.’

‘Croesus was Lydian by birth, and the son of Alyattes, and king of all the peoples who live west of the river Halys, which, flowing from the south, between where the Syrians and the Paphlagonians live, issues to the north into the sea which is called Euxine.’

I alter the arrangement of the words in this passage, and I shall find that the manner of writing is no longer leisurely and historical (*ὑπαγωγικόν* and *ιστορικόν*), but rather direct and fitted for debate (*ἀλλ’ ὀρθὸν μᾶλλον καὶ ἐναγώνιον*):

‘Croesus was the son of Alyattes, and by birth a Lydian, and king of all the peoples who live west of the river Halys (Κροῖσος ἦν υἱὸς μὲν Ἀλυάττου, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τύραννος δὲ etc.), which from the south flowing, between where the Syrians and the Paphlagonians live, issues into the so-called Euxine sea towards the north.’

This style would not seem to differ greatly from that of Thucydides in the words: ‘Epidamnus is a city on the right as you sail into the Ionian Gulf; its immediate neighbors are barbarians, the Taulantii, an Illyrian race’ (Thuc. I 24, 1). I shall alter the same passage once more and give a new form to it as follows:

‘Alyattes’ son was Croesus, by birth a Lydian, of the peoples who live west of the river Halys he was king (Ἀλυάττου μὲν υἱὸς ἦν Κροῖσος, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τῶν δ’ ἐντὸς Ἄλως ποταμοῦ τύραννος

ἐθνῶν); which river from the south flowing (ὃς ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας ῥέων), between where the Syrians and the Paphlagonians live (Σύρων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων μεταξὺ), discharges itself to the north, into the so-called sea Euxine (ἐς τὸν καλούμενον πόντον Εὐξεινον).’

This precious, degenerate, effeminate (μικρόκομψον, ἀγεννές, μαλθακόν) way of arranging words resembles that of Hegesias. That writer was the high-priest of this kind of humbug, and wrote passages like: ‘After a goodly festival another goodly one we celebrate.’ ‘From Magnesia am I, the mighty land, a Sipylean.’ ‘It was not a small drop that into Theban waters Dionysus spewed: sweet it is indeed, but it makes men mad’ (Hegesias FGH 142, fr. 18–20).

Dionysius describes the original sentence from Herodotus as ὑπαγωγικόν and ιστορικόν, ‘leisurely’ and ‘historical’. The first rewriting (in the style of Thucydides) is called ὀρθὸν μᾶλλον καὶ ἐναγώνιον, ‘more direct’, and ‘involving’. The term ἐναγώνιος is used in ancient literary criticism for language that suits the ἀγών, i.e. forensic and political debate; by extension it can also refer to language that actively engages the audience.³³ The second rewriting (in the style of Hegesias) is called μικρόκομψον, ἀγεννές, μαλθακόν: ‘affected’, ‘low-born’ and ‘soft’ or ‘weak’. Is Dionysius here talking about different genres or about different styles? Herodotus, Thucydides and Hegesias are of course all historians. Nevertheless, there are a few pointers that suggest that Dionysius is partly thinking of generic distinctions. Hegesias was not only a historian but also a rhetorician; Dionysius may be suggesting that the second rewriting (in Hegesias’ style) is more rhetorical than Herodotus’ sentence and the Thucydidean version.³⁴ Dionysius uses the word ιστορικόν for the Herodotean version, whereas he labels the Thucydidean version as ἐναγώνιον. Thucydides was indeed valued for his many (political) speeches; I would argue that the three different versions of the sentence that Dionysius presents, with different descriptions of the Halys river, present three stages in the spectrum from historiography on the one hand to rhetoric on the other: Herodotus is properly historical, the Thucydidean version is more rhetorical, and the Hegesianic version is excessively rhetorical — weak, effeminate and hence completely wrong. Let us compare the three versions that Dionysius presents to us:

33 On the semantics of ἐναγώνιος, see Ooms, De Jonge (2013).

34 On Hegesias, see Prandi (2016).

I. Herodotus I 6 as cited by Dionysius: II. Thucydidean style: III. Hegesias' style:

Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δ' Ἀλυάττου, τύραννος δ' ἐθνῶν τῶν ἐντὸς Ἰλίου ποταμοῦ· ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας μεταξὺ Σύρων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων ἐξίησι πρὸς βορέαν ἄνεμον εἰς τὸν Εὐξείνιον καλούμενον πόντον.	Κροῖσος ἦν υἱὸς μὲν Ἀλυάττου, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τύραννος δὲ τῶν ἐντὸς Ἰλίου ποταμοῦ ἐθνῶν· ὃς ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας ῥέων μεταξὺ Σύρων καὶ Παφλαγόνων εἰς τὸν πρὸς βορέαν ἐξίησιν ἄνεμον Εὐξείνιον καλούμενον πόντον ἐκδίδωσι πρὸς <u>βορέαν ἄνεμον.</u>	Κροῖσος, γένος δὲ Λυδός, τῶν δ' ἐντὸς Ἰλίου ποταμοῦ τύραννος ἐθνῶν· ὃς ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας ῥέων Σύρων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων <u>μεταξὺ</u> <u>πρὸς βορέαν</u> ἐξίησιν <u>ἄνεμον</u> ἐς τὸν <u>καλούμενον</u> πόντον Εὐξείνιον.
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Herodotus gives a straightforward list of three predicative expressions (Λυδός, παῖς, τύραννος: Lydian, son, king). The Thucydidean style (number II) is more systematic (ὀρθόν) in that it starts from Croesus' family, and then turns to his nation and his rulership (υἱός, Λυδός, τύραννος). But it also changes the word order, reversing Λυδός μὲν γένος into γένος δὲ Λυδός. 'Hegesias', number III, puts the reader completely on the wrong track, by starting with the genitive Ἀλυάττου μὲν, which deceivingly suggests that Alyattes is going to be the topic of this sentence. The Hegesianic version also places the word τύραννος in the middle of the clause that it governs (τῶν δ' ἐντὸς Ἰλίου ποταμοῦ τύραννος ἐθνῶν). Things become even more interesting when we get to the relative clause that describes the river Halys. In the Thucydidean style (number II), Dionysius has changed the order of words so that the relative clause now starts with the south (ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας) and ends in the north (πρὸς βορέαν ἄνεμον). This may be one reason why Dionysius calls this version more 'direct' or 'systematic' (ὀρθόν). The last rewriting (in the style of Hegesias, number III) is rather ridiculous in its excessive use of hyperbaton: the preposition μεταξὺ is placed after the Syrians and Paphlagonians, 'the north' comes too early, βορέαν is split off from ἄνεμον, and καλούμενον is separated from the name Εὐξείνιον to which it belongs.

The dual rewriting of the sentence from Herodotus I 6 has a programmatic function in Dionysius' *On Composition*: it gives a powerful illustration of the effects of σύνθεσις, the topic of the treatise, and it involves the student (and other readers) in an instructive and entertaining exercise. While *On Composition* contains many cases of metathesis, this is the only passage where Dionysius offers two different rewritings of one passage. I want to suggest that Dionysius had a good reason for selecting for this pro-

grammatical experiment a sentence that describes the course of a famous river. The Thucydidean version of the sentence makes the river Halys more straightforward, running from south to north, but this systematic directness does not fit the course of the actual river, which flows rather zigzag and ‘informally’ through Anatolia, first to the west and then to north, northeast. The version in the style of Hegesias makes things even worse: here the word order is so unorderedly and weird, that it becomes actually impossible for the reader to follow the course of the river. In other words, Dionysius demonstrates the importance of word order, not just by drawing attention to stylistic differences between the three versions, but also by suggesting that in the two rewritten versions there is a mismatch between form and content; the actual river landscape in Anatolia is perfectly presented by the ‘historical’ and ‘slowly drawn out’ (ὕπαγωγικόν) style of Herodotus’ sentence.³⁵ The other two versions violate the Herodotean composition, as if one would intervene in a beautiful landscape in order to force a river to change its natural course.

6. Hermogenes on Herodotus’ Halys, and Dionysius’ Tiber

Herodotus’ opening sentence on the Lydian king Croesus seems to have been quite popular in ancient rhetorical schools. One can imagine that students were asked to rewrite the sentence in different styles, so that they could learn to master various modes of writing. In his treatise *On Types of Style*, Hermogenes of Tarsus (second century AD) presents another rewriting of the same sentence. Hermogenes demonstrates the effects of starting a sentence with different grammatical cases. If Herodotus had started his celebrated sentence with a genitive absolute (Κροίσου ὄντος Λυδοῦ μὲν γένος, παιδὸς δὲ Ἀλυάττεω, τυράννου δέ ...), this would have been rather confusing. The reader would assume that the information on Croesus merely presents the setting, after which a more important point will be introduced:³⁶

35 In De Jonge (2005) I argued that Dionysius considers the Herodotean and the Thucydidean versions as stylistic alternatives; if however the Thucydidean version is a kind of intermediate stage between Herodotus and the bad ‘Hegesias’, it is more plausible that Dionysius regards the original sentence in Herodotus as superior to the Thucydidean version that he presents in his first rewriting.

36 Hermogenes, *On Types of Style* I 3, 12, ed. Patillon (2012). Translation adapted from Wooten (1987).

τὸ γὰρ «ἦν Κανδαύλης» καὶ τὸ «Κροῖσος ἦν» καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὕτω μὲν εἰσφερόμενα κατ' ὀρθότητα καὶ καθαρὸν ποιεῖ τὸν λόγον καὶ σαφεῖ· εἰ δὲ πλαγιάσαις, οὐ τοιαῦτα ἔσται, οἷον 'Κροῖσου ὄντος' καὶ 'Κανδαύλου ὄντος' εἰ λέγοις· ταραχὴ γάρ τις εὐθὺς ἐγγίνεται διὰ τὸ δεῖν πάντως ἐπακολουθησαί τι ἕτερον νόημα καὶ ἡ περιγραφή τῆς ὅλης ἐννοίας μακρὰ καὶ οὐ πάνυ σαφής, οἷον

‘Κροῖσου ὄντος Λυδοῦ μὲν γένος, παιδὸς δὲ Ἀλυάττεω, τυράννου δὲ ἔθνων τῶν ἐντὸς Ἰλίου ποταμοῦ’ ...

ὁρᾷς, πῶς ἔτι κρέμαται ἡ διάνοια;

If you say ‘Candaules was’ and ‘Croesus was’, using a straightforward sentence with the subject in the nominative case, you make the sentence pure and clear. If you use subordination and say ‘When Croesus was’ or ‘Since Candaules was’ the style is no longer pure and clear. There is at the outset some confusion, since it is necessary that some other thought follow, and the lengthy expression produces a certain lack of clarity. If Herodotus, for example, had said

‘Since Croesus was a Lydian by birth and since he was the son of Alyattes, and since he ruled those nations on this side of the Halys River’ (...)

do you see how the point that he really wanted to make would have been kept in suspense?

Hermogenes’ rewriting of Herodotus in genitive absolute constructions might appear rather far-fetched in the first instance. But it is not difficult to find parallels in ancient Greek literature. A very similar sentence on the river Tiber in Italy, which starts with a long series of genitive absolute constructions, can be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *Roman Antiquities*. It is perhaps not surprising that we find this elaborate sentence, which almost sounds like a rhetorical exercise, in the history of Rome written by a teacher of rhetoric. Dionysius describes how king Ancus Marcius (the fourth king of Rome, ca. 677–617 BC) decided to build a seaport at the mouth of the river Tiber. Dionysius paints the course of the river in a monumental periodic sentence, which seems to echo both Herodotus’ Halys (rewritten by Dionysius in his *On Composition*, as we have seen above) and Thucydides’ Achelous (discussed above):³⁷

37 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* II 44, 1. I have adapted the translation of Cary (1939) in order to bring out the genitive absolute constructions.

τοῦ γὰρ Τεβέριος ποταμοῦ καταβαίνοντος μὲν ἐκ τῶν Ἀπεννίνων ὄρων, παρ' αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν Ῥώμην ρέοντος, ἐμβάλλοντος δ' εἰς αἰγιαλοὺς ἀλμένους καὶ προσεχεῖς, οὓς τὸ Τυρρηνικὸν ποιεῖ πέλαγος, μικρὰ δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἄξια λόγου τὴν Ῥώμην ὠφελοῦντος διὰ τὸ μὴθὲν ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκβολαῖς ἔχειν φρούριον, ὃ τὰς εἰσκομιζομένας διὰ θαλάττης καὶ καταγομένας ἄνωθεν ἀγορὰς ὑποδέχεται τε καὶ ἀμείψεται τοῖς ἐμπορευομένοις, ἱκανοῦ δὲ ὄντος ἄχρι μὲν τῶν πηγῶν ποταμηγοῖς σκάφεσιν εὐμεγέθεσιν ἀναπλεῖσθαι, πρὸς αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν Ῥώμην καὶ θαλαττίαις ὀλκάσι μεγάλαις, ἐπίνειον ἔγνω κατασκευάζειν ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκβολαῖς αὐτοῦ λιμένι χρησάμενος αὐτῷ τῷ στόματι τοῦ ποταμοῦ.

As the river Tiber descends (τοῦ γὰρ Τεβέριος ποταμοῦ καταβαίνοντος) from the Apennine mountains, and as it flows (ρέοντος) close by Rome, and as it discharges itself (ἐμβάλλοντος) upon harborless and exposed shores made by the Tyrrhenian Sea, and as this river was of small and negligible advantage (ὠφελοῦντος) to Rome because of having at its mouth no trading post where the commodities brought in by sea and down by the river from the country above could be received and exchanged with the merchants, but as it is navigable (ἱκανοῦ δὲ ὄντος) quite up to its source for river boats of considerable size and as far as Rome itself for sea-going ships of great burden, he [king Ancus Marcius] resolved to build a seaport (ἔγνω κατασκευάζειν) at its outlet, making use of the river's mouth itself for a harbor.

Dionysius here uses the elaborate description of the course of the river as a monumental setting for an important event in his narrative — King Marcius' great building project. There is an important difference between this description of the Tiber and the river sentences that we have discussed so far. In Dionysius' Tiber description we first flow with the stream from the Apennine mountains via Rome to the Tyrrhenian sea, like we navigated from the mountains to sea with the Achelous in Thucydides and with the Halys in Herodotus; but unlike Herodotus and Thucydides, Dionysius makes us travel all the way back upstream to Rome. The long sentence mimetically presents not only the natural course of the river (as we have seen in the river descriptions of Herodotus and Thucydides), but also, and more innovatively, the commercial use of the river by human beings who travel the river upstream. We can imagine that a rhetorician like Dionysius, who was familiar with the didactic exercise of rewriting rivers, enjoyed composing a complex period on the river Tiber, thereby imitating and emulating the great historians of the classical past: in competition with Herodotus' Halys and Thucydides' Achelous, Dionysius proudly presents his own Tiber.

7. Conclusion

The Euphrates, the Nile, the Danube and the Rhine, the Achelous, the Teleboas, the Halys and the Tiber: ancient literary criticism is flooded with rivers. The rich potential of the analogy between river and text is primarily used to demonstrate aspects of style: big river landscapes are like sublime texts, which impress their audience, whereas small and elegant streams are like clear and straightforward narratives. In some cases, however, as in Dionysius' remarks on Herodotus, Thucydides and Hegesias, differences between genres (especially historiography and rhetoric) also seem to play a role. We have seen that river sentences figure prominently in rhetorical treatises, in particular as examples that can be rewritten through the method of metathesis. It is the crucial notion of appropriateness (τὸ πρέπον) that connects all the critical discussions that we have seen: a great river deserves a monumental period, whereas a small stream needs to be described in clear and precise language. As ancient critics strongly believe in the mimetic qualities of language, they argue that the style of a sentence should reflect the form of the river itself: changing the language (for example by adding particles or altering the word order) immediately spoils the correspondence, so that a mismatch is created between river and sentence, between content and form. Rewriting a classical text by spoiling its style is similar to redirecting the natural course of a river. Such a rewriting exercise can be an instructive, didactic experiment, as it will demonstrate the unsurpassable quality of the classical text, which is like an unspoiled, natural and beautiful landscape.

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