Christopher L. H. Barnes

Images and Insults

Ancient Historiography and the Outbreak of the Tarentine War

Geschichte

Historia Einzelschriften – 187

Franz Steiner Verlag

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HISTORIA

Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte
Revue d'histoire ancienne
Journal of Ancient History
Rivista di storia antica

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EINZELSCHRIFTEN

HEFT 187

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Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 2005

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.
ISBN 3-515-08689-7

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier. Druck: Printsrevice Decker & Bokor, München.
Printed in Germany

For David and Sabine,

sine quibus non…

CONTENTS

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION OF GREEK NAMES

The choice of how to spell Greek words in English is not easy to make. In the case of the names of authors (Homer, Plato, Thucydides), historical figures (Antiochus), literary characters (Achilles) and most places (Pergamum, Cape Lacinium), I have opted for their Latinate and most commonly used English forms. Only Taras, to reflect its independence from Rome, and certain terms (*kômos, dêmos, kotylê*) have I transliterated so that they reflect the original Greek more accurately. This inconsistency of practice will not content all, and I ask the reader's indulgence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present work had its genesis in a dissertation completed at the University of Michigan. The chapter whence it derives aimed at an exploration of when the *topos* of Tarentine *tryphê* arose and how it came to be used in subsequent literature concerned with the city and its citizens. Immediately noticeable was the way many extant texts tended to concentrate their narratives on resistance to Rome, first in the *Bellum Tarentinum* and later in the Second Punic War. The Tarentines, doomed to lose again and again at the hands of each generation of Roman historiographers, enjoy some consistency in their representations, but striking is the way the allies of Hannibal exhibit comparatively little of the color one encounters when meeting the characters responsible for the Pyrrhic War. Harder to detect were the pains individual authors took to differentiate their version of events from their predecessors. During the dissertation process, my interest in ascertaining or corroborating the 'facts' largely blinded me to the importance of rhetorical nuance. Orosius, for example, was relegated to a footnote, as I had not internalized, nor am I alone in this I fear, the *sententia* (Plin. *Ep*. 7.9.16), *aiunt enim multum legendum esse, non multa*.

What made the writing of the manuscript possible, and more importantly what provided the time for reading, analysis, and contemplation, was a Mrs. Giles Whiting Fellowship. For that, I am deeply grateful to the Whiting Foundation and Brooklyn College, and to Roger Dunkle for nominating me. During that year (2002–3) and since, my colleague and co-recipient Jocelyn Wills provided much needed encouragement. So too did David Potter and Sabine MacCormack. Since my days as a graduate student, both of them have continued to provide me with guidance and inspiration and it is to them I dedicate this book. One may also detect influence from John Pedley and Thelma Thomas, although I have not consulted them since finishing the dissertation. Foremost among those I must also thank is Cynthia Damon who commented on an early version of this work and made invaluable suggestions. Her professionalism is a marvel. *Historia*'s anonymous reader caught numerous errors and offered helpful criticisms, and I would like to thank Alexander Wensler for all of his assistance. John Marincola was kind enough to read a draft at a late stage and provided some excellent advice as well as a very thoughtful critique. Other debts of gratitude are owed to Nicholas Purcell and Angela Poulter. In Taranto, Dottoressa Antonietta dell' Aglio and the staffs of the Soprintendenza of

archaeology, of the library in the Chiostro of San Domenico, of the Istituto per la Storia della Magna Grecia, and of the Biblioteca Comunale Acclavio were generous with their resources and immensely helpful. Similarly, Gerhard Hempel kindly shared his expertise, and both he and his family were extraordinarily gracious and welcoming to a *forestiero*. I should also like to express my appreciation to the American Academy in Rome for allowing me the privilege of working in its library for a short time. Last, and certainly not least, my thanks to Barbara, for her love and support. While I have sought to follow Quintilian's advice (*Ep. ad Tryph.* 2) by completing this work *refrigerato inventionis amore*, whatever failings remain are strictly my own. I regret that I became aware of Laura K. McClure's *Courtesans at Table* too late to make use of it in this study.

INTRODUCTION

In 281 B.C., an embassy travelled from Rome to the Greek city of Taras to demand reparations.[1] In the fall of the previous year, the Romans had lost five ships in a naval engagement in the *Mar Grande* of the southern Italian port.[2] The squadron arrived while the Tarentines were celebrating a festival in their theatre. Initially whipped up by a demagogue called Philocharis, emboldened by wine, the Greeks attacked the intruders, then expelled the Roman garrison from the south Italian polis of Thurii. War, what would become the Pyrrhic War or *Bellum Tarentinum*, was now imminent unless the Tarentines acceded to Roman demands. Once escorted into the theatre, the senatorial legate L. Postumius Megellus delivered his message to the assembled *dêmos*. An unofficial reply came from a drunk identified as Philonides, who spoke not a word, but urinated on Postumius' toga, or at least that is what some authors reported (some might even have believed it). This incomplete narrative can be reconstructed from the extant texts of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, Appian, Florus, and Cassius Dio, among others.[3] Yet, we should be wary about doing so or believing the additional details they make available. As has long been known, the story as recreated above is not trustworthy, yet there has been little sustained inquiry into how or why this is true.[4]

[1] P. Wuilleumier, *Tarente des Origines à la Conquête Romaine* (1968) [henceforth *Tarente*], dates the embassy to the spring, 104.

[2] A small Roman fleet was created in 311 B.C. under the command of *duumviri navales*, see T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* (1995) 388, *CAH*^{2} 7.2 (1989) 410; H. H. Scullard, *CAH*^{2} 7.2 (1989) 548–9, who gives the number of ships as twenty, ten per *duumvir*, based primarily on the evidence of Appian (*Sam*. 3.7.1); and J. H. Thiel, *A History of Roman Sea-Power Before the Second Punic War* (1954) 9–10, 19–27.

[3] Polybius, Valerius Maximus, the *Periochae* of Livy, Florus, Eutropius, Orosius, and Zonaras also furnish testimony for these events. A. Valente, *La storia di Taranto* (1899) 148–51; Wuilleumier, *Tarente* 102–5; P. R. Franke, *CAH*^{2} 7.2 (1989) 457; and K. Lomas, *Rome and the Western Greeks* (1993) [henceforth *RWG*] 50–1, offer such reconstructions, albeit with varying degrees of skepticism.

[4] Exceptions are the works of W. Hoffmann, *Hermes* 71 (1936) 11–24, and more recently G. Urso, *Taranto e gli xenikoì strategoí* (1998) [hereafter *TXS*] 113–28. Cf. Wuilleumier, *Tarente* 102–5; Franke, *CAH*^{2} 7.2 (1989) 457; G. Brauer, Jr., *Taras: Its History and Coinage* (1986) [henceforth *Taras*] 122–6; and Lomas, *RWG* 14–5, 50. The episode has attracted interest as the first recorded instance of a Roman speaking Greek, see J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (2003) 11.

These incidents occurred well before any Romans were writing historical narratives, far enough in the past to put the accuracy of oral tradition into question.[5] Whatever contemporary Greek sources recorded about how the war began quite likely did not resemble what was to come which has been viewed as the result of pro-Roman bias.[6] By the Augustan age at least one detailed account had developed involving three suspicious episodes, all set in Taras and each centered around the figure of a Tarentine inimical to Roman *mores*. Philocharis the demagogue incited his unruly compatriots to a treacherous attack. The actions of Philonides need no further comment except that the story strains credulity, while a third man, Meton, served to highlight the faulty character and poor judgment of his fellow citizens. In his brief moment in the spotlight, this protagonist opposed the notion of summoning Pyrrhus to aid in the war against Rome by playing the part of a reveller; he entered the assembly wearing garlands accompanied by a flute-girl in order to register his disapproval.[7] All three episodes were written in such a way as to highlight life at Taras which, at a minimum, served a twofold purpose.

Blame for the conflict was laid squarely at the feet of the Greeks as one would expect. Fetial law guaranteed that once war began, the Romans were never at fault.[8] Such an attitude poses certain challenges to the historian's interest in cause and effect and the surviving accounts, almost all of which are imperial in date, need to be examined for any evidence which might reflect an unbiased view of the origins of the conflict or which might even put the Romans at fault. As written, the episodes not only blamed the Greeks, they also demonstrated why the Tarentines ultimately lost the war: their unstable democracy produced individuals devoid of morality who lacked the discipline necessary to defeat the Romans in the long run. As such, one argument holds that these hostile portraits derive from the work of an aristocrat incensed at the ruin brought upon his city by its democratic

[5] On oral tradition, see R. Saller, *G & R*, 2nd ser., 27.1 (1980) 69–83. W. V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327–70 B.C.* (1979) [henceforth *WIRR*] 175–6, offers the following: 'Contemporary Roman perceptions of the Italian wars fought in the years 327–264 cannot be recovered … [sc. the period] is an almost complete blank, which writers from Livy to the present have filled with their own more or less informed imaginings'.

[6] Lomas, *RWG* 14–5. If Taras produced any historians of its own, Polybius does not mention them, as he does, for example, the Rhodians Zeno and Antisthenes (16.14.6, 17.8).

[7] The suspicious similarities were first noted by Wuilleumier who remarked in the case of Meton, 'c'est la troisième scène burlesque montée par les auteurs anciens dans le théâtre de Tarente!' His use of the words 'burlesque' and 'montée' are no accident, *Tarente* 105.

[8] See below pp. 73–4.

government. An alternative view sees only the creative talents of Roman annalists at work. Hoffmann combined the two and proposed that Livy put the received accounts in their classic form.[9]

Each of these arguments poses certain difficulties. For one thing, Livy's second decade is not extant, thus we must look to the output of authors known to have drawn upon him to reconstruct his version of the events. Second, like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and others, Livy selected material and cannot be viewed as the purest distillation of the content one might find in his sources. Next, while Taras was bound to have its share of demagogues, drunks, and bon vivants, Philocharis, Philonides, and Meton quite likely never existed.

Their lack of historicity is detectable, in part, through questionable coincidences. For example, the theatre of Taras appears prominently as the location in which each of our players 'struts and frets his hour upon the stage'. The consumption of wine, whether real or feigned, plays an important role and all three Tarentines correspond to stereotypes familiar from Greek literature. Fourth, no two accounts are identical in *res* or *verba* and our authors do not always agree upon the particulars. Appian called the demagogue Philocharis, whereas Dionysius possibly offered Ainesias, or perhaps even provided no name at all. Cassius Dio omitted this character entirely and was the only author to say that the Tarentines were drunk while celebrating the Dionysia when the Roman fleet appeared. A very real likelihood exists that some of these details were not the products of earlier annalists. Dio lived and worked later than Appian, more than 450 years after the events in question and 200 after Dionysius. Perhaps Appian and Dio deviate from Dionysius because they derived their information from sources no longer extant, the lost Book Twelve of Livy, or from something written by Timaeus or a contemporary. At the same time, this explanation gives little credit for content to individual authors, all of whom wrote their accounts adhering to the principles of *inventio*.[10]

This ancient historiographical practice has been the bane of many a modern scholar interested in ascertaining 'what really happened'.[11] According to one view of its tenets, the absence of evidence presented no problem. Authors could supply the necessary 'facts' based on verisimilitude drawn

[9] Hoffmann, *Hermes* 71 (1936) 12, 14–22, and F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, vol. 2 (1967) 101, maintain the possibility that the report of internal dissensions within the community represents the work of the unknown Tarentine. Franke favors the annalists, *CAH*[2] 7.2 (1989) 457, a view rejected by Urso, *TXS* 102.

[10] Cf. T. P. Wiseman, *History* 66 (1981) 388–92.

[11] J. Marincola, *Greek Historians* (2001) 3–8 and esp. 111–2, where he observes, 'the opposite of "research" is not "rhetoric"'.

from rhetorical training, personal experience, and prior work.[12] Such a position looks at Appian's Philocharis and Dio's Dionysia with frustration and dismisses them as flights of fancy, evidence of unreliability, or incompetence. Critics have long considered many historiographers of antiquity at best as literary artists more interested in rhetoric and entertainment than in 'truth' or 'serious' history. To complicate matters further, one prominent scholar has argued ancient claims of 'truth' signify a denial not of fabrication, but of bias.[13] However, precisely this awareness of the importance of fabrication 'like the truth' and the different techniques employed to realize it point us in a new direction.

Inventio assumed that every narrative had a truthful basis, or *fundamenta*, as Cicero (*de Orat*. 2.62–3) put it in a much discussed passage.[14] The trick is to isolate the 'kernel' or 'hard core' of historical truth from each writer's embellishment of it, the *exaedificatio* or *exornatio*, admittedly a difficult if not often impossible task for us.[15] Many ancient writers seldom cited their sources.[16] *Quellenforschung* has contributed to the realization

[12] A. J. Woodman, 'Self Imitation and the Substance of History' in *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature* (1979), edd. D. West and A. J. Woodman, 143–55, and 'Tacitus, Annals 15.36–7' in *Author and Audience in Latin Literature* (1992), edd. A. J. Woodman and J. Powell, 173–188. Cf. T. J. Cornell, 'The Value of the Literary Tradition Concerning Archaic Rome' in *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome* (1986), ed. K. Raaflaub, 52–76. According to Cicero, memory corresponded to the foundation (*Opt. Gen*. 5), a statement open to a number of interpretations about content and veracity.

[13] A. J. Woodman and C. S. Kraus, *Latin Historians* (1997) 6. On the issues and difficulties of writing history without bias, see J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (1997) 158–74, esp. 160–2 where he equates an accusation of bias with one of invention.

[14] Wiseman, *History* 66 (1981) 389, quotes D. A. Russell: '[Inventio] is not "invention" if by that we mean some degree of imaginative creation'. Cf. T. J. Cornell, 'The formation of the historical tradition of early Rome' in *Past Perspectives* (1986), edd. I. S. Moxon, J. D. Smart, and A. J. Woodman, 86; A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (1988) [henceforth *RhCH*] 81–95; and D. S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (1999) 12–8, 135–8.

[15] R. Saller, *G & R*, 2nd ser., 27.1 (1980) 77–9; Woodman, *RhCH* 91–2; and J. von Ungern-Sternberg, 'Formation of the "Annalistic Tradition"' in *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome* (1986), ed. K. Raaflaub, 88. T. Späth, 'Erzählt, Erfunden: Camillus. Literarische Konstruktion und soziale Normen', in *L'Invention des grands hommes de la Rome antique* (2001), edd. M. Coudry and T. Späth, 346–9, offers a method based on narratology for dealing with the hundreds of passages concerning Camillus. Cicero (*Q. fr*. 2.16.4) speaks of *exaedificatio* in terms of circumstances (*situs*), the natures of things and of places (*naturas rerum et locorum*), customs (*mores*), peoples (*gentes*), battles (*pugnas*), and important personages (*imperatorem*).

[16] Saller, *G & R*, 2nd ser., 27.1 (1980) 69–83. Cf. J.-M. David, 'Les étapes historiques de la construction de la figure de Coriolan' in *L'Invention des grands hommes de la Rome antique* (2001), edd. M. Coudry and T. Späth, 17, and F. Millar, *A Study of*

that all too often we cannot be as confident as we would like about whom a given historiographer consulted.[17] Even if we succeed in isolating rhetorical embellishment from the 'core', we usually lack an independent means of corroborating the truth of what was reported. Other difficulties arise from the reading done by each author. For example, Dionysius, Plutarch, or Appian could and probably did look at fourth- and third-century texts which described the Tarentines and their polis, but not necessarily the vicissitudes of the conflict. The works of the Roman annalists whom they consulted have survived only in fragments, all too often in paraphrase rather than in quotation. Furthermore, they incorporated references to texts which, although in some way germane, did not report information about the Tarentines, the Romans, or the war, but which served as indications of each author's own education, sophistication, culture, and wit, with the desired end of improving his narrative's readability and content. Historiography was after all competitive.[18]

With these caveats in mind, an aid in disentangling 'core' and *exaedificatio* comes from having a broad diachronic range of sources to compare. For these three episodes, we possess the accounts of authors from the time of Polybius in the mid-second century B.C. to Zonaras, private secretary of the Byzantine emperor Alexis I in the early twelfth century A.D. Although many of the surviving narratives are fragmentary or epitomes, the differences between them are substantial, allowing us an opportunity to assess the continuity of content and how *exaedificationes* were constructed, in what way they were 'true' or 'factual'. Another help comes from a better understanding of how *exornatores* created increasingly elaborate accounts over time, a phenomenon familiar from Roman historical writing. Worrying a little less about the 'truth' and more about how historians produced their narratives, we must look to a larger arsenal of rhetorical techniques: word play, stereotyping, the use of the theatrical, *enargeia* (helping the reader to visualize the narrative), focalization, and not just the insertion of speeches.[19] Similarly, we must consider a broader array of potential sources for material.

Cassius Dio (1964) 34: 'Hopeless uncertainties prevail in the field of source-criticism. Even where a historian quotes a writer by name it is not certain that he had read him, for the name could have come from an intermediate source'.

[17] The criticisms are almost as old as the method itself. See A. Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (1966) 107; G. B. Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome* (1995) 1–7; and Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* 90–5.

[18] Wiseman, *History* 66 (1981) 383.

[19] Woodman, *RhCH* 99; G. Maslakov, *ANRW* 32.2 (1984) 440–1; A. Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History* (1998) 4–5; Lomas, *RWG* 13–7; and A. Vasaly, *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (1993) *passim*. On *enarge-*