

### Beyond the Centre: Exploration of Dio's Short Dialogues

Dio is known mostly as the author of carefully composed, sophisticated, and dense with allusions speeches and dialogues: the *Kingship Orations*, the memorable *Euboikos*, the speeches delivered in Alexandria, Rhodes, and other cities of the empire. In the context of Dio's fame as an orator-cum-philosopher, it is odd to realize that the majority of his dialogues take a form of short interactions between two anonymous interlocutors and betray little literary elaboration.<sup>1</sup> Their seemingly semi-literary character led scholars to consider them as "transcripts" of real conversations rather than published works. This view has been recently challenged by A.-M. Favreau-Linder, who has rightly argued in favour of their literary character and has analysed some of their characteristics in detail.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I explore two points relating to these short compositions: first, I discuss them in the context of developments of the genre of dialogue, and second, based on their content and on Dio's self-referential remarks, I offer some conjectures about his reasons to embrace this particular format.

In the extant Greek literature preceding Dio, the closest parallel to the format of his short dialogues is provided by some of Platonic *dubia* and *spuria*. Among these works we encounter what C. Müller has labelled a *Kurzdialog*, a sub-type of the dialogue genre, which is characterized by, *inter alia*, brevity, lack of setting details, frequent use of anonymous characters, abrupt openings, transitions, and endings.<sup>3</sup> A comparison of Dio's dialogues with these texts not only reveals some affinity of the format, but also uncovers thematic parallels and evidence of Dio's familiarity with the pseudo-Platonica. At the same time, Dio substantially transforms the format by freeing it from remnants of its Socratic provenience, such as pervasive and monotonous question-and-answer interchange and limited flexibility of conversational roles.

How are we to account for Dio's fondness for this unassuming format? It stands for the rejection of constraints of the polished and the literary: as one reads through the dialogues, one appreciates flexibility of the form and spirit of authenticity and directness they convey. Dio takes advantage of the freedom the format offers: he shifts from the present to the past and back, insists on talking about the here-and-now, questions contemporary writing practices, denounces emperors and moral disintegration of the society, engages in whimsical interpretations of myths and Homer, foregoes clear trajectories in favour of digressions, renounces closures. Many of these features are familiar to a reader of Dio's other works: the short dialogue format allows for their amplification and associates Dio with the peripheral and non-canonical – the posture Dio likes to assume elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> *Or.* 14, 21, 23, 25-26, 55-56, 60-61, 67, 70, 74, 77/8.

<sup>2</sup> Anne-Marie Favreau-Linder, "Entre oralité et mise en oeuvre littéraire: quel genre assigner aux opuscules dialogiques et philosophiques de Dion?," in *Dion de Pruse: L'homme, son oeuvre et sa postérité. Actes du Colloque International de Nantes (21-23 Mai 2015)*, ed. Eugenio Amato et al. (Hildesheim, 2016), 277-93.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Werner Müller, *Die Kurzdialoge. Der Appendix Platonica. Philologische Beiträge zur Nachplatonischen Sokratik* (München, 1975).