

Embodying 'Archaic' Simplicity: Hellenism and Primitivism in Dio's *On Beauty* (Or. 21), *Borystheniticus* (Or. 36), and *On Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides* (Or. 52)

Dio's Or. 21, the dialogue *On Beauty*, is a curious work. Taking its cue from a youth ("around sixteen or seventeen") that Dio and his interlocutor recognize as beautiful (*kalos*), the conversation centers on the nature of beauty (male vs. female, Greek vs. barbarian, present vs. past), but also touches upon more tangential topics: e.g., Nero's boy-lover Sporus, the descriptions of heroes in Homer, book-forgery. My interest, however, lies in the description of the youth given by Dio, specifically his claim that the boy's 'form' (*eidos*) is *archaion*. I argue that by using this term Dio wants to convey a sense, not just that the boy's appearance evokes the distant past in general, but that it is somehow 'archaic' or 'old-fashioned', i.e., that there is something primitive, simple, or uncultivated about it. Later in the dialogue, when Dio insists that the boy's "body" (*sōma*) is "utterly Greek" (*Hellênikon akrôs*), he is thus drawing an explicit, albeit enigmatic, connection between Greek identity and this 'archaic' past. By examining several other works of Dio, I try to show how the formulations in *On Beauty* are enmeshed in a way of thinking about the past that profoundly informs Dio's ethico-political project in his exilic and post-exilic writing.

Like *On Beauty*, these three other texts—Or. 52, 36, and 2—depict 'archaic' qualities that are set against those of Dio's own day (*nun*) and, significantly, embodied in individuals: Aeschylus in Or. 52, the Borysthenites in Or. 36, and the young Alexander the Great in Or. 2. In the first two pieces, the term *archaios* seems to signify something not just 'old' or 'ancient', but 'simple', in the sense of unrefined, unaffected, unpretentious. This is explicit in Or. 52, where Dio speaks of the 'archaic-ness', the 'brusqueness', and the 'simplicity' (*to archaion, to authades, to haploun*) of Aeschylus; in Or. 36, Dio calls Borysthenes "*archaia* and Greek" (*Ellênis*) and portrays its inhabitants, who sport long hair and beards "in the *archaios* manner", as primitive, naïve, but nevertheless virtuous—qualities embodied in the youth Callistratus, who is strikingly reminiscent of the beautiful youth in Or. 21, and the elderly Hieroson, whose 'unpretentiousness' (*haplotês*) Dio appreciates. In both works, moreover, Dio connects this 'archaic simplicity' with Homer, the most ancient Greek poet: Aeschylus' artistry is ideally suited to depicting the true character of the Homeric heroes, while the Borysthenites' naïveté (but also their Greekness) is illustrated by their insistence on listening to Homer alone of all the poets. The same cluster of ideas feature in Or. 2, where a young Alexander, who is described in almost identical terms to Callistratus, offers a highly tendentious reading of Homer's heroes that emphasizes their simple and unrefined way of life.

My contention is that one can detect in these works an attempt on Dio's part to associate his Cynic-influenced moralizing emphasis on 'simplicity' with the past on the one hand, and with Hellenic identity on the other, by portraying 'archaic' Greek characters that embody all three of these qualities. Dio appears to present this unique mixture of primitivism, Hellenism, and archaism as a contrast to the corrupt and 'barbaric' values of the present that he so often criticizes. But as is often the case with Dio, matters are not always so straightforward. In Or. 2 and 36, Dio seems to be intimating that 'archaic' ideals, while praiseworthy, are not sufficient for true knowledge, while in Or. 52, Aeschylus' 'old-fashioned' style requires an elaborate apology when compared to the more 'modern' Sophocles and Euripides. And in Or. 21, the specific value placed on the boy's 'archaic' beauty remains elusive, and may even be undermined by Dio's critical remarks on his own era's unthinking praise of antiquity. Dio is unique among his Cynic-oriented contemporaries, e.g., Musonius and Epictetus, in linking the virtue of simplicity both to being Greek and to the historical past, but he does not idealize the 'archaic' figures that he portrays as embodying these qualities. Rather, he employs them as one more device with which to provoke and prod his Imperial audiences into questioning their own personal and political behavior, and into adopting the kind of propriety, moderation, and humility that he envisions as the foundation of moral and civic harmony.