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Biasmos in Dionysius of Halicarnassus: The rape of Ilia in the *Antiquitates Romanae*[1]

Biasmos em Dionísio de Halicarnasso A violação de Ília nas *Antiquitates Romanae*

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Abstract

This article examines the use of the word *biasmos* in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Antiquitates Romanae*. The word, which several scholars have seen as a rough equivalent to contemporary conceptions of rape, is quite rare in Greek literature; however, it is found several times in Dionysius' history, always in relation to the rape of Ilia/Rhea Silvia. Analyzing the attestations of this lexeme in Dionysius and beyond, this paper asks why the Greek historian opted for this rare word, which he avoids when narrating other acts of sexual violence in his history. Interpreting the contexts in which the word appears as well as the connotations associated with the noun *bia* in the *Antiquitates Romanae,* the paper argues that the lexical choice helps highlight important themes in this section of the *Antiquitates Romanae,* including Ilia's status as a victim and the inappropriate use of force.

Keywords: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ilia/Rhea Silvia, rape, tyrant, violence, *bia*.

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Resumo

Neste artigo analisa-se o uso da palavra *biasmos* na obra *Antiquitates Romanae* de Dionísio de Halicarnasso. Tal palavra, considerada por vários estudiosos como estando próxima das noções contemporâneas de violação, raramente aparece na literatura grega. Todavia, Dionísio usa-a várias vezes, relacionando-a sempre com a violação de Ília/Reia Sílvia. Analisando as atestações do lexema neste autor, em particular, e na tradição sucedânea, a presente reflexão procura indagar o motivo pelo qual o historiador grego optou pelo uso de uma palavra pouco empregada, que evita quando fala de outros atos de violência sexual na sua obra historiográfica.

Ao interpreter os contextos em que o termo aparece, assim como as conotações associadas ao nome *bia* no *Antiquitates Romanae*, o artigo sustenta que tal escolha lexical ajuda a esclarecer temas importantes desta parte da obra, nomeadamente o estatuto de Ília enquanto vítima e o uso inapropriado da força.

Palavras-chave: Dionísio de Halicarnasso, Ília/Reia Sílvia, violação, tirano, violência, *bia*.

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence in Greek literature from epic and drama to oratory and historiography,[2] there is no Greek word that perfectly corresponds to our contemporary concept of rape,[3] which is closely linked to the concept of consent.[4] Instead, ancient literature is peppered with words that can refer to rape, but often do so somewhat obliquely, since these lexemes also designate other crimes or destructive behavior (e.g., theft [*harpage*] or adultery [*moicheia*]). Things are further complicated

[2] The same is true for Roman literature and the Latin language. The bibliography on rape in antiquity has steadily grown over the last decades and I cannot offer exhaustive references here, but rather highlight some influential studies that may be of interest to readers. For epic, see Gaca 2018; for tragedy, Scafuro 1990, Sommerstein 2006 and Gaca 2018; for comedy, Pierce 1997 and Omitowoju 2002; for historiography, Gaca 2010 and Reeder 2017; for Athenian law, Harris 1990, Ogden 1997 and Omitowoju 2002; for Roman law, Nguyen 2006. Lauriola 2022: chapter 1 provides a thorough overview of the issue with up-to-date and thorough references. After this article was submitted and accepted for publication, a limited preview of *Revisiting Rape in Antiquity* (2023), edited by Deacy, Magalhães and Menzies, was released. Several chapters, including Harris 2023 and Deacy 2023 are bound to be of relevance, though I was not able to access a full version of these chapters.

[3] For a discussion, see Lauriola 2022: 16 with further references. She also discusses the difficulties of defining the concept of rape today and offers a useful overview of approaches to rape in Classics (1-8).

[4] Consent itself is a tricky concept, which does not just mean saying 'yes', but having the power to actually say 'no'. Omitowoju 2002: 4 identifies consent as the "key element" in contemporary legal debates about rape. Also see Omitowoju 1997 and Lauriola 2022: 12-13 with further references.

since in Antiquity rape was often discussed as a crime committed against a man who held custody over a woman (e.g. a father or husband)—not as a crime perpetrated against the raped woman herself.[5] This means that the distinction between sexual violence and other types of wrongdoing can be blurred in ancient texts. In some cases the wide semantic range of different words means that sexual violence is alluded to rather euphemistically. However, several scholars have suggested that there is one Greek lexeme that comes closer to approximating a contemporary understand of rape: *biasmos*.[6] Given the familiar root *bia* (most basically meaning 'force'),[7] this lexeme points towards sex that is coerced and hence non-consensual.[8]

What is less well known, however, is that *biasmos* is a surprisingly rare word, especially when compared to the other lexemes that can refer to sexual violence. In fact, it is only attested eight times between the fifth century BCE (Eupolis) and the early second century CE (Plutarch) when used in connection with rape.[9] Furthermore, four of these eight attestations come from a single author and work, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Antiquitates Romanae*. This fact has not received sufficient attention, since more often than not the scholars who mention the word have done so in passing as part of a

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[5] See Lauriola 2022: 36-45 for the "patriarchal" patina that colors discourses of rape in antiquity.

[6] For this argument, see Sommerstein 2006: 245; Cole 1984: 98; Nguyen 2006: 80 n.31; Lauriola 2022: 16-18. *Hybris* often approximates 'rape', but as Lauriola 2022: 21 argues, "ὕβρις and ὑβρίζομαι, when used in a context of sexual assault, put an emphasis on the sexual dishonoring of the victim. They do not designate the violence used to accomplish it, for which the most suitable words remain indeed βιασμός and βιάζομαι. Through ὕβρις and ὑβρίζομαι the violence of the act is rather defined by its effects on the victim, or, better, by its societal consequences for the victim" (p. 21). Hence, the semantic subtleties attached to *hybris* mark a notable divergence from much contemporary discourse about rape.

[7] Other *bia*-words can also refer to rape (e.g., *biazomai*) and the inclusion of the noun *bia* with less explicit verbs can also make it clear that rape is at issue in a given passage; see Lauriola 2022: 21.

[8] LSJ gives the primary definition of *biasmos* as 'violence'. CGL simply gives 'rape'. As LSJ correctly points out, in later medical texts the noun takes on the technical meaning of 'constipation'.

[9] A TLG search of the attested forms of *biasmos* returns the following results: Plu. *Mor.* 755c.10; D.H. 1.77.2, 1.77.4, 1.78.3 and 2.56.6; Str. 6.1.14; Eup. fr. 72; Men. *Epit.* 443. The search also returned examples from medical texts (Pseudo-Galen and *Conspectus medicinae*), Judeo-Christian texts (*Vita Adam et Evae* and Epiphanius of Salamis) and scholia (*in Nicandrum* and *in Theocritum*), which will not be dealt with here. The word is also used by Aen.Tact. 24.15 to refer to the storming of a city.

larger argument about rape in antiquity.[10] Not only does Dionysius appear to be the author who uses the word *biasmos* with the highest frequency, but an examination of the evidence shows that he uses the word in a very particular setting and context. While the early legendary history of early Rome is littered with instances of sexual violence,[11] the historian exclusively uses the lexeme in connection with the rape of Ilia (Rhea Silvia), the mother of Romulus and Remus.[12] This article asks why of all the words that could be used to refer to sexual violence *biasmos* was the *mot juste* for the rape of Ilia. After briefly commenting on the other relevant attestations of *biasmos*, I offer two connected explanations for Dionysius' lexical choice.

1. *Biasmos* in Greek literature

The earliest attestations of the noun come from drama. In the case of Eupolis, we only know that the old comedian used the word and so must make the educated guess, based on subsequent examples and the common themes in comedy, that it was used in connection with rape.[13] Menander uses the word in *Epitrepontes*, a play that revolves around questions of rape and mistaken identities.[14] Strabo, for his part, employs the word in a passage discussing what he deems to be a somewhat farfetched tale about Athena's cult statue closing its eyes so as not to witness the rape of Cassandra.[15] In these passages, the word is used in passing, though context (when available) does make its meaning clear.

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[10] In fact, most of the authors cited above mention the word in foot- or endnotes. Lauriola 2022 is the welcome exception.

[11] Henry and James 2012: 89-90 make the point succinctly. For rape in Livy, see Arieti 1997.

[12] When narrating the rape of the Sabine women in the *Antiquitates Romanae*, for instance, Dionysius opts for *harpage* and *harpazo*; for Sextus Tarquinius' Rape of Lucretia, he uses the language of *hybris*. I provide a brief discussion of the issue below in the conclusions.

[13] Eup. fr. 72. Sommerstein 2006: 245 n.6 uses this logic to argue that the fragment refers to rape.

[14] Men. *Epit.* 453. In the passage, the slave Onesimos realizes that a ring which his master Charisios had lost at the Tauropolia was connected to an abandoned baby, thus linking his master to an illegitimate child born from rape. For the play, see Traill 2008: 177-244, though she does not focus on the use of *biasmos*.

[15] Str. 6.1.14. Throughout the chapter, he refers to these stories as belonging to the realm of the legendary (*mytheuousin … mytheuein*).

It is in Plutrach's *Amatorius* where we can best glimpse the idea that *biasmos* denotes coerced sex, hence showing how the lexeme comes closer to approximating contemporary understandings of rape than the other words in the Greek sexual lexicon. The beginning of *Amatorius* depicts a heated debate about whether an older, wealthy and attractive widow, Ismenodora, should be allowed to marry the attractive and younger Bacchon. Amid the heated debate, the interlocutors learn that Ismenodora has taken matters into her own hands, "abducting"[16] the young Bacchon and locking him in her house where she will stage a forced wedding. Those who had been arguing that it was inappropriate for the older woman to marry the beautiful youth rush to town, whereas those who had supported Ismenodora's bid to marry Bacchon stay put and express their amused bewilderment over the recent developments. In this context, one interlocutor, Soclares, coyly questions whether this is truly an instance of forced abduction and rape. Perhaps, he suggests, Bacchon, who had been embarrassed about marrying the older Ismenodora—though he wanted to do so—, has somehow staged his own abduction as a way to make it appear that he was compelled to marry Ismenodora:

> καὶ ὁ <Σώκλαρος> ὑπομειδιῶν 'οἴει γὰρ ἁρπαγήν' ἔφη 'γεγονέναι καὶ βιασμόν, οὐκ ἀπολόγημα καὶ στρατήγημα τοῦ νεανίσκου νοῦν ἔχοντος, ὅτι τὰς τῶν ἐραστῶν ἀγκάλας διαφυγὼν ἐξηυτομόληκεν εἰς χεῖρας καλῆς καὶ πλουσίας γυναικός;
>
> Soclarus asked with a little smile, "Do you really think that it's a case of kidnapping and rape? Isn't it rather the plausible counter-stratagem of a sensible young man who has slipped away from the clutches of his lovers and deserted to the arms of a rich and beautiful woman?" (*Amatorius*, 755c; trans. LCL)

Though the whole story has been introduced as something that could be found on the comic stage and makes light of sexual assault,[17] this Plutarchan passage most clearly highlights the idea that *biasmos* denotes forced sex. This is thanks to the antithesis between abduction and rape, on

[16] The verbs used are *synarpasantes* (Plu. *Mor.* 754f, plural because Ismenodora has enlisted the help of her friends) and *herpaken* (Plu. *Mor.* 755b).

[17] Plu. *Mor.* 479.A: εὐθὺς ἡ πρόφασις, ἐξ ἧς ὡρμήθησαν οἱ λόγοι, χορὸν αἰτεῖ τῷ πάθει καὶ σκηνῆς δεῖται, τά τ' ἄλλα δράματος οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει·

the one hand, and a clever face-saving trick on the other.[18] Furthermore, the doublet ἁρπαγήν… καὶ βιασμόν is not redundant: the first refers to the idea of theft/abduction, while the second refers to sexual violence.[19] In short, a review of the available, albeit limited, evidence confirms that *biasmos* does indeed refer to non-consensual sex in which, as the word's etymology clearly suggests, force plays a predominant role.

2. *Biasmos* in the *Antiquitates Romanae*

Dionysius only uses *biasmos* in connection with the rape of Ilia (Rhea Silvia)[20] in the *Antiquitates Romanae*, eschewing it in his telling the rape of the Sabine Women and Lucretia. In many of the myths surrounding Rome's founding, Ilia was raped and gave of the twins Romulus and Remus, whom she was subsequently forced to abandon. The twins, of course, were raised by shepherds and eventually overthrew their wicked uncle Amulius and reinstated their grandfather Numitor as the rightful king of Alba Longa. While the basic outlines of the myth will be familiar to all readers of Roman history, ancient sources do diverge in several meaningful ways. For our present purposes, we will see that different authors attributed the rape to different actors.

In book 1 of the *Antiquitates Romanae,* the word *biasmos* appears three times within the span of several pages: once in the version of the story where Mars is identified as the culprit who committed the act,[21] next in the immediate aftermath of the rape when Ilia tries to conceal her pregnancy,[22] and finally when Numitor tells his version of the story to the

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[18] The theme of coerced versus consensual sex between men had already been discussed at Plu. *Mor.* 751d, where *bia* is used: ἡ [χάρις] δ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρρένων ἀκόντων <μὲν> μετὰ βίας γινομένη καὶ λεηλασίας, ἂν δ' ἑκουσίως.

[19] Again note the plural participle *synarpasantes* (Plu. *Mor.* 754f): multiple people were involved in kidnapping Bacchon, but they did not all plan to have sex with him.

[20] For her name, see Martínez-Pinna 2011a: 120-21 and 2011b 105-108.

[21] D.H. 1.77.2: φασί τε εἰπεῖν τῇ κόρῃ παρηγοροῦντα τὴν λύπην τὸν βιασάμενον, ἐξ οὗ γενέσθαι δῆλον ὅτι θεὸς ἦν, μηδὲν ἄχθεσθαι τῷ πάθει. τὸ γὰρ κοινώνημα τῶν γάμων αὐτῇ γεγονέναι πρὸς τὸν ἐμβατεύοντα τῷ χωρίῳ δαίμονα, τέξεσθαι δ' αὐτὴν ἐκ τοῦ βιασμοῦ δύο παῖδας ἀνθρώπων μακρῷ κρατί στους ἀρετὴν καὶ τὰ πολέμια.

[22] D.H. 1.77.4: κόρη μετὰ τὸν βιασμὸν ἀρρωστεῖν σκηψαμένη… Dionysius goes on to say that Ilia ceased to carry out the sacred rites of Vesta after being raped, which constitutes a subtle but important way of pointing to her good intentions in a troubling situation; for the importance of purity for properly performing religious duties, see Wildfang 2006: 51-55.

council of Alban elders.[23] While one might first suspect that the clustering of this rare word could be explained by historian's close reliance on a now lost source in which the word had been used,[24] this appears quite unlikely: Dionysius not only uses the word three times in a restricted space in book 1,[25] but he also uses *biasmos* in book 2 when he mentions the miraculous conditions of Romulus' birth and death.[26] The passages are separated by many pages, which include the rape of the Sabine women; furthermore, in the second passage from book 2, the historian is merely referring back to the story of Ilia in passing, not providing the sort of detail that would involve consulting another source. Accordingly, it is doubtful that his diction was momentarily influenced by a lost source when he narrated the rape of Ilia. All of this suggests that Dionysius has deliberately chosen this word to tell this particular story. A closer look at his version of this foundational story from Rome's immediate pre-history can help explain his notable lexical choice. Below I briefly outline two possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive and indeed support one another.

As all readers of Roman history know, one prominent strand of the tradition maintains that Ilia, while in a grove sacred to Mars,[27] was raped by that same god, who then foretold that she would give birth to twin sons.[28] This version of events places the foundation of Rome within a well-known *topos* from Greek mythology wherein rape leads to the birth of a semi-divine

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[23] D.H. 1.78.3: τόν τε βιασμὸν τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ γενόμενον ἀπέφαινε καὶ τοὺς λεχθέντας ὑπ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τῶν διδύμων παίδων λόγους διεξῆλθεν ἠξίου τε πίστιν ποιήσασθαι ταύτην τῶν λεγομένων

[24] E.g., Q. Fabius Pictor, whose version of the overthrow of Amulius is later recounted in great detail (D.H. 1.79.4-83), only to be rejected as dramatic and fanciful (D.H. 1.84.1). For Dionysius'use of sources in book 1, see Cornell 2023.

[25] In this context, the act of rape is also described with the passive verb *biazetai* (D.H. 1.77.1) and the rapist is later referred to with the middle participle *biasamenon* (D.H. 1.77.2).

[26] D.H. 2.56.6: ἔν τε γὰρ τῷ βιασμῷ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ εἴθ' ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων τινὸς εἴθ' ὑπὸ θεοῦ γενομένῳ τὸν ἥλιον ἐκλιπεῖν φασιν ὅλον καὶ σκότος παντελῶς ὥσπερ ἐν νυκτὶ τὴν γῆν κατασχεῖν ἔν τε τῇ τελευτῇ αὐτοῦ ταὐτὸ συμβῆναι λέγουσι πάθος. Notably Dionysius expresses doubt about whether it was a god by including the either-or structure (see below).

[27] There is some limited evidence that *bia*-words could be associated with Mars in Greek literature. Cf. Pi. *P.* 1.10 and A. *Ag*. 1511. That said, the evidence is far from overwhelming to support a clear link between the god and *bia*. Aen.Tact. 24.15 claims that the word 'Herakles' would be an excellent code word when giving the signal in cases of *biasmos* (here 'forceful assault').

[28] For the tradition of Mars as Romulus and Remus' father, see Martínez-Pinna 2011b: 104; for Ennius' version of the story and alusions to the *Odyssey*, see Connors 1994.

hero.[29] And yet there are some complicating details that make this story uncomfortable in the context of early Rome. Apart from Dionysius' own belief about the nature of the gods (see below), Ilia was, after all, a priestess of Vesta and hence had to remain a virgin to carry out her duties.[30] This detail, which is important for the plot, means that Ilia would have been held responsible for the act of which she was the victim, just as other raped Vestals would be in Rome's subsequent history.[31] The repeated use of the word *biasmos* in this context leaves no room for the reader to doubt that this sex was forced upon Ilia. This can be seen as eliciting sympathy for her plight, despite the larger religious/legal considerations about the purity of Vestal virgins. A passing reference to marriage in the Mars version of the story adds to this idea:[32] not only is Ilia the victim of an act of violence, but it is (rather improbably) referred to with the language of sanctioned sexual relationships between men and women. In other words, the lexical choice puts a sympathetic spin on the situation,[33] even if later religious law concerning the Vestals would nevertheless classify this act as *incestum*.[34] And indeed within the narrative context of the *Antiquitates Romanae* this version of the story does seem to arouse the sympathy of those who hear it:

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[29] See Sommerstein 2006 and Lauriola 2022: 141-143 on the so-called "girl's tragedy" and the birth of heroes.

[30] For the chastity of Vestals and *incestum*, see Beard 1980: 14, Cornell 1981: passim, Wildfang 2006: 51-55 and Kroppenberg 2010: 428-432.

[31] Whereas Ilia was not necessarily put to death (cf. Pavón Torrejón 2006: 290-291 and Martínez-Pinna 2011a: 121-122), other Vestals certainly were. See the rape of the Vestal Opimia at D.H. 8.89.5, where it is clear that she was raped by two men (δύο δὲ τοὺς ἐξελεγχθέντας διαπράξασθαι τὴν φθορὰν μαστιγώσαντες ἐν φανερῷ παραχρῆμα ἀπέκτειναν). Nevertheless, she was buried alive in order to appease the gods, and her rapists were then punished as well. On this point, I disagree with some previous scholars who have claimed that Vestals were punished for "willingly" engaging in sexual acts (e.g., Cornell 1981: 35 and Kroppenberg 2010: 428).

[32] See τὸ γὰρ κοινώνημα τῶν γάμων at D.H. 1.77.2.

[33] See Sommerstein 2006 for the argument that readers of tragedy could care about whether inappropriate sex was coerced; also see Harris 1990 (and now 2023). Livy also suggests that depicting Rhea Silvia's plight in the most favorable light was an important consideration (Liv. 1.4.2 *seu ita rata, seu quia deus auctor culpae honestior erat*…), as stressed by Hallett 2012: 379.

[34] As recognized by Miles 1995: 141-142. In the *Antiquitates Romanae*, customs and laws surrounding the Vestals are depicted as part of an evolving practice. Cf. D.H. 2.65.3 where Dionysius claims that Romulus did not require Vestals to be virgins, despite established precedent, due to the misfortune that had befallen his mother.

the Alban council is initially persuaded by Numitor's account of the rape, though fear of the king ultimately leads its members to adopt Amulius' version of events (see below). Fostering a sense of sympathy is important for the narrative and Dionysius' historiographical project—though probably not out of concern for Ilia's wellbeing. Instead, this characterization of the rape negatively reflects on Amulius while also making the circumstances of Romulus' birth slightly less problematic.[35]

While both Dionysius and Livy relate the version of the rape in which Mars is the perpetrator, neither historian is ultimately convinced by it—though for different reasons: in line with his general attitude towards Rome's most remote and mythological past, Livy simply appears skeptical,[36] whereas Dionysius objects to the story on the grounds that it would be inappropriate for a god to be the author of such base behavior.[37] Accordingly, the Greek historian introduces this common version of the story as the stuff of myth (οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι μυθολογοῦσι, D.H. 1.77.2) only to reject it as inappropriate. Though he does not want to dwell on the matter excessively, he dismisses the story as either the misdeeds of a man being attributed to the god or the possibility that it was not a god, but rather some semi-divine *daimon* that committed the crime.[38] Ruling out Mars, Dionysius gives two other options that better fit his historiographical taste:

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[35] Miles 1995: 141-144 argues for the problematic nature of the story. For Dionysius' claim that he is telling a pro-Roman story, see the prologue to the *Antiquitates Romanae.* For other historiographical priorities, such as telling a plausible, non-"theatrical" version of Rome's early history, see Fox 2019: 192. For the idea that Dionysius' history and critical essays are supposed to offer useful exempla for his readers, see Wiater 2011: 167-68 with further bibliography; also cf. de Jonge and Hunter 2019: 4-6.

[36] See Miles 1995: 140-141, who argues that Livy does not accept the story, but finds that there is nevertheless something fitting about Mars being depicted as the father of Romulus and Remus. Livy famously claims that it is only after the Gallic sack of the fourth century BCE that the history of Rome becomes more reliable; for a discussion, parallels and further references, see Kraus 1994: 84-88 on Liv. 6.1.2-3.

[37] For this passage and the influence of Middle Platonic "theological" reasoning on Dionysius' historiographical practice, see Driediger-Murphy 2014, who provides further references. Many aspects of this argument are quite convincing, though the *extent* to which Driediger-Murphy sees theology as one of the leading principles guiding Dionysius' work may not convince all readers.

[38] D.H. 1.77.3: ὅπως μὲν οὖν χρὴ περὶ τῶν τοιῶνδε δόξης ἔχειν, πότερον καταφρονεῖν ὡς ἀνθρωπίνων ῥᾳδιουργημάτων εἰς θεοὺς ἀναφερομένων μηδὲν ἄν τοῦ θεοῦ λειτούργημα τῆς ἀφθάρτου καὶ μακαρίας φύσεως ἀνάξιον ὑπομένοντος, ἢ καὶ ταύτας παραδέχεσθαι τὰς ἱστορίας, ὡς ἀνακεκραμένης τῆς ἁπάσης οὐσίας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ μεταξὺ τοῦ θείου καὶ

> τοῦτον δέ τινες μὲν ἀποφαίνουσι τῶν μνηστήρων ἕνα γενέσθαι τῆς κόρης ἐρῶντα τῆς παιδίσκης, οἱ δὲ αὐτὸν Ἀμόλιον οὐκ ἐπιθυμίας μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπιβουλῆς ἕνεκα φραξάμενόν τε ὅπλοις ὡς ἐκπλη κτικώτατος ὀφθήσεσθαι ἔμελλε καὶ τὸ τῆς ὄψεως γνώριμον εἰς ἀσαφὲς ὡς μάλιστα ἐδύνατο καθιστάντα.
>
> Some say that the author of the deed was one of the maiden's suitors, who was carried away by his passion for the girl; others say that it was Amulius himself, and that, since his purpose was to destroy her quite as much as to satisfy his passion, he had arrayed himself in such armour as would render him most terrible to behold and that he also kept his features disguised as effectively as possible.[39]

First, Dionysius mentions that it could have been some infatuated youth who raped Ilia. The offhanded way in which Dionysius relates this possibility reflects the ubiquity of rape in Antiquity, since apparently no further details are needed to explain it. Although Dionysius does not explicitly champion one explanation over the other,[40] it is the second possibility that he develops in greater detail: it was actually Ilia's uncle, Amulius, who raped her.[41] Within Dionysius' overall account, it is this story that makes the most sense: not only would Amulius dressing up as the god explain Ilia's confusion about the identity of her rapist, but Amulius also had a

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θνητοῦ γένους τρίτης τινὸς ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως, ἣν τὸ δαιμόνων φῦλον ἐπέχει, τοτὲ μὲν ἀνθρώποις, τοτὲ δὲ θεοῖς ἐπιμιγνύμενον, ἐξ οὗ ὁ λόγος ἔχει τὸ μυθευόμενον ἡρώων φῦναι γένος, οὔτε καιρὸς ἐν τῷ παρόντι διασκοπεῖν ἀρκεῖ τε ὅσα φιλοσόφοις περὶ αὐτῶν ἐλέχθη. Also cf. D.H. 2.20 about Greek mythology and inappropriate stories for the general public.

[39] D.H. 1.77.1; trans. LCL.

[40] Dionysius is an author who seeks high levels engagement from his readers; cf. Wiater 2011: 281-297 on the constructed community of readers and Fox 2019 on the ways that Dionysius raises questions and demands reader participation in book 1. For audience engagement in Livy and historiography more generally, see Kraus 1994: 13-15.

[41] Dionysius is not the only author to put forth this theory and certainly did not invent it from whole cloth. Plutarch also mentions this possibility: having "fooled" Ilia by disguising himself, Amulius "snatched" her up and she was "deflowered" (*Rom.* 4.2: καίτοι τοῦτο παθεῖν αὐτὴν ἐξαπατηθεῖσαν λέγουσιν, ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀμουλίου διαπαρθενευθεῖσαν, ἐν ὅπλοις ἐπιφανέντος αὐτῇ καὶ συναρπάσαντος). Furthermore, at *Origo Gentis Romanae* 19, we read that Marcus Octavius and Licinius Macer had claimed that it was Amulius who raped Rhea Silvia. The same source attributes the Mars version to Fabius Pictor and Vennonius. Gersht and Mucznik 1988: 124 suggest that there is also visual evidence for the Amulius version of the story.

clear motive for committing the crime, which is both based on his lust for the young woman and, especially, his desire to cling to illegitimate power in Alba Longa.[42] Indeed, giving sense, coherence and meaning to his story is among Dionysius' historiographical objectives throughout the opening books of the *Antiquitates Romanae*, an idea that he repeated explicitly before beginning the story about Ilia.[43] It is in relation to the possibility that Amulius was the rapist that we can find a second reason why Dionysius would narrate the rape of Ilia with the language of *biasmos*.

The choice of *biasmos* can be seen as playing an important role in contributing to the negative characterization of Amulius. This makes sense given the larger associations that *bia* has in the *Antiquitates Romanae*. While the word generally means 'force' or 'violence', which can be a neutral or even positive characteristic,[44] in Dionysius the word has a markedly negative connotation. Indeed, *bia* is common in Dionysius' history, occurring over 50 times, and is used in a relatively limited number of contexts.[45] Most often, the word is linked to the illegitimate use of power (or threat thereof) within the city of Rome. This can either be in the context of the Tarquins and their tyranny[46] or the possibility of violence erupting between the Patricians and Plebeians that would threaten the fragile social order at

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[42] Dionysius had already narrated how Amulius had orchestrated the murder of Numitor's son Aegestus (D.H. 1.76.2), thus characterizing him as capable of raping his niece.

[43] D.H. 1.75.4: λεχθήσεται δὲ κἀμοὶ τὰ πιθανώτατα τῶν μνημονευομένων. The language here is typical and found repeatedly throughout the first four books. It is beyond the scope of this paper, but it bears mentioning that in the end Dionysius nevertheless seems to rely on crucial aspects of the Mars version of the story (i.e., the prediction that Ilia would give birth to twins at D.H. 1.78.3), even though he had dismissed this possibility.

[44] See LSJ and CGL for examples.

[45] A TLG search returns 53 examples. Not all of them can be mentioned here, but the general patterns of usage are briefly summarized. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning that the use of Latin *vis*, which is used more broadly and often—but certainly not always—seen as legitimate (e.g. Liv. 1.5.3 for an example).

[46] E.g., the wicked Tullia running over her father's corpse (D.H. 4.39.5) or later claims that Tarquinius' Superbus did not become king by following proper protocols but rather through the unseemly use of force (Turnus speaking to the Latins [D.H. 4.46.4] and Brutus plotting the overthrow of the tyranny [D.H. 4.80.3]). Also see D.H. 5.5.3 and 8.29.4 for the idea that the Tarquins resort to violence to get what they want. Latin *vis*, of course, can be used in similar contexts; cf. Dunkle 1971: 16.

Rome.[47] Furthermore, *bia* is directly contrasted with the ideas of justice, law and political friendship[48] and is also linked to the concepts of craftiness and deceit.[49] The word is also employed in connection with other instances of sexual transgression.[50] It is only in less frequent cases that the word is used in the context of actual warfare, where the use of force would be expected. However, even in these contexts, relying on force is not always depicted as a positive tactic.[51] Furthermore, *bia* can be used when military action is depicted as unjust or improper.[52] In sum, *bia* is connected not simply to force, power or violence generally, but overwhelmingly to the illegitimate or questionable use thereof. The distinction is important for Dionysius, who argues that Rome does not just rule the world because of her might, but does so justly and legitimately.[53]

This general association with *bia* can help explain Dionysius' use of *biasmos* when narrating the rape of Ilia. While presenting Ilia as a sympathetic victim, the word also links the rapist to the illegitimate and anti-social use of violence for achieving selfish political outcomes. Hence the word can be seen as pointing to Amulius, who had already orchestrated the death of his

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[47] There are many examples: for trying to prevent the succession of the Plebs, see D.H. 6.46.1; for the threat of Plebeian violence in response to debt, see D.H. 6.81.3; for the threat of using force against a senator or magistrate, see D.H. 7.23.3, 7.26.3, 8.87.7, 10.49.1 and 11.55.3; for improper political procedures being pushed through, see D.H. 8.72.4, 8.78.1, 9.41.5 and 9.45.1.

[48] For *dikasyne*, D.H. 4.9.9; for *dike*, D.H. 7.30.4 and 10.40.2; for *nomos*, D.H. 11.11.2; for *philia*, D.H. 1.58.5.

[49] With *lathra* at D.H. 5.5.2; with *doloi* (dat. sing.) at 2.74.5 and 4.75.2; with *klopei* at 2.38.2; with *cheirkrasiai* (dat. sing.) at 8.72.4; with *hapatei* at 7.43.2. Contrast Latin *vis* at Liv. 5.22.8 on the capture of Veii where *vis* is contrasted with *opus* (*…operibus tamen, non ui expugnata est*).

[50] For Sextus Tarquinius and Lucretia, see D.H. 4.82.3; For Appius Claudius and Verginia, see D.H. 11.33.1; for the abuse of a young soldier, see D.H. 16.4.2. Livy, of course, uses the ablative *vi* for the rape of Rhea Silvia (*vi compressa vestalis*, Liv. 1.4.2).

[51] For a camp being taken 'by force', see D.H. 9.6.5 and 9.6.7. For unwisely trusting in force in warfare, see D.H. 8.88.2 and 9.3.2. Passive forms of the verb *biazomai* do occur more frequently in descriptions of battles when an army has been routed and forced to flee (e.g. D.H. 3.33.4 and 5.46.5 for just two examples).

[52] For Latinus scolding Aeneas, see D.H. 1.53.5; for Coriolanus' (unconvincing) claim that Rome illegitimately held Volscian territory, see D.H. 8.8.3 and 8.47.2.

[53] For a well-known and succinct version of this argument about Rome's positive influence on the world, see D.H. *Orat.Vett.* 3 as well as the prologue of *Antiquitates Romamae* (especially D.H. 1.4).

own nephew[54] and ruled Alba Longa through fear,[55] as the *auctor culpae*, to borrow Livy's terminology. In other words, it was the tyrant who raped her—not the god.[56] In this sense, the language of *biasmos* should be read as adding to the negative portrayal of Amulius as a tyrannical figure who wields power unjustly and hence ought to be overthrown.[57] In this respect, Dionysius underscores the contrast between Alban Amulius and Romulus who, as Rome's founder and lawgiver, is elected king by the city's first citizens.[58]

Though Dionysius does not make the connection explicit, there is a final interesting way that this characterization foreshadows later passages in the *Antiquitates Romanae*: if Amulius were the rapist, he would then be Romulus' father. Though it might seem uncomfortable to add another (possible) instance of parricide to Romulus' résumé, this would nevertheless anticipate the conflict that occupies the first half of Book 3 of the *Antiquitates Romanae* in which Rome overthrows and destroys her "metropolis" Alba Longa, an event that itself is characterized in terms of sons usurping fathers.[59]

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[54] D.H. 1.76.2: βουλευσάμενος δὲ ταῦτα ἐκ πολλοῦ πρῶτον μὲν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Νεμέτορος Αἴγεστον ἄρτι γενειάζοντα φυλάξας ἔνθα ἐκυνηγέτει, προλοχίσας τοῦ χωρίου τὸ ἀφανέστατον, ἐξελθόντα. ἐπὶ θήραν ἀποκτείνει καὶ παρεσκεύασε λέγεσθαι μετὰ τὸ ἔργον ὡς ὑπὸ λῃστῶν ἀναιρεθείη τὸ μειράκιον. οὐ μέντοι κρείττων ἡ κατασκευαστὴ δόξα τῆς σιωπωμένης ἀληθείας ἐγένετο, ἀλλὰ πολλοῖς καὶ παρὰ τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ἐτολμᾶτο λέγεσθαι τὸ πραχθέν. In this instance of foul play, the Albans were not fooled, suspecting Amulius of the crime.

[55] Dionysius claims that the council wanted to side with Numitor in the debate over Ilia's rape (ταῦτα λέγοντος αὐτοῦ τὸ μὲν τῶν συνέδρων πλῆθος ἐπείθετο, D.H. 1.78.4), but its members were afraid of defying Amulius and hence gave into the king's wishes that she be punished and killed along with her children (ὡς δὲ τὴν γνώμην τοῦ βασιλέως ἔμαθον οἱ σύνεδροι ἀπαραιτήτῳ <τῇ> ὀργῇ χρωμένην ἐδικαίωσαν καὶ αὐτοὶ καθάπερ ἐκεῖνος ἠξίου χρήσασθαι τῷ νόμῳ κελεύοντι τὴν μὲν αἰσχύνασαν τὸ σῶμα ῥάβδοις αἰκισθεῖσαν ἀποθανεῖν, τὸ δὲ γεννηθὲν εἰς τὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ βάλλεσθαι ῥεῖθρον, D.H. 1.78.5).

[56] This analysis supports the "theological" interpretation put forth by Driediger-Murphy 2014.

[57] For Amulius as a tyrant who needs to be overthrown to restore the proper order of things, see Pelling 2019: 207-208 and passim for regime change/restoral in the *Antiquitates Romanae*. This characterization of Amulius squarely conforms to established *topoi* about the tyrant that are found in drama, historiography and declamation (cf. Dunkle 1971).

[58] At D.H. 2.3-4, Romulus has the Romans choose which form of government they want and, in the case of monarchy, to elect a leader. They willingly choose monarchy and Romulus as king. On the passage, see Fox 2019: 194.

[59] This possibility cannot be dealt with completely here, but see D.H. 3.10.3 where Mettius Fufetius argues that Alba should rule over Rome and not vice versa: ἐὰν δὲ ἀναστρέψασα τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας δικαιώσεις ἡ φύσις τὰ νέα τάξῃ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρχειν

3. Conclusions: the various guises of rape in the *Antiquitates Romanae*

Dionysius chooses a different set of lexemes to characterize each of the three main instances of rape in Rome's early mythological history. That is because each case of sexual violence embodies an important theme or adds to the characterization of an important figure within the context of the historian's larger narrative. In his telling of the rape of Ilia, Dionysius stresses the idea of illegitimate force and violence, not only to reduce Ilia's culpability, but also to characterize Amulius as a tyrant who wields violence towards inappropriate ends. In book 2 when Dionysius relates the rape of the Sabine women, he prefers the word *harpage*, which is certainly more euphemistic and helps characterize Rome's "first marriages" within a long tradition of abduction.[60] In his narration of the rape of Lucretia, which marks the end of the Regal Period and leads to the inauguration of the Republic, Sextus Tarquinius' actions are described through the language of *hybris,* thus characterizing him as a tyrant who puts his own desires first and mistreats those around him who are deserving of respect.[61] Although Amulius and Sextus Tarquinius are both tyrannical figures, the historian's focus is slightly different in the two episodes. The first lays greater emphasis on the violent nature of the act, whereas the second highlights the negative consequences of that act for Lucretia and, hence, Rome herself.[62]

While the stories of Ilia, the Sabine women and Lucretia all refer to the same thing (coerced sex), the language used to describe each act is different. In this sense, the nuances of the language of sexual violence makes rape into a flexible narrative tool that can imbue a story with different implications and underscore different themes that further strengthen Dionysius' version of Roman history. One could be tempted to read Dionysius' use of *biasmos*, the Greek word that appears to be the closest analogue to the modern conception of rape, as a criticism of sexual violence. However, I am afraid

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καὶ τὰ ἔκγονα τῶν προγόνων, τότε καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνεξόμεθα τὴν μητρόπολιν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀποικίας ἀρχομένην, πρότερον δὲ οὔ.

[60] For marriage and abduction, see Dumézil 1979 and Miles 1995: 188-189. At D.H. 2.30.5 Romulus stresses that his actions are not hubristic, but done to contract legitimate marriage. His claim is not wholly credible. For possible illusions in this passage to the opening of Herodotus, see Jerue forthcoming.

[61] On the rape of Lucretia in book 4 of the *Antiquitates Romanae*, see Schultze 2019: 168-174, with further references. For this nuance of *hybris*, see note 5 above.

[62] Cf. n. 5 with the analysis of the language of *hybris* in Lauriola 2022.

that this would be too radical of a conclusion: Dionysius, like other male authors from antiquity, does not appear to be primarily interested in the experience of women who were victims of rape.[63] As Jorge Martínez-Pinna has succinctly put it, "Ilia es presentada como un juguete del destino" in the historiographical tradition.[64] Instead, the point is how those traumatic experiences could structure a narrative and drive a plot forward, often creating situations in which men, like the Romulus of book 2 or the Brutus of books 4 and 5, take historic actions that propel Rome's march towards fulfilling her destiny.

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[63] Indeed, Ilia disappears from the narrative rather quickly, though Dionysius does tell us she may have been imprisoned instead of killed at D.H. 1.79.1-3.

[64] On this point with further references, see Martínez-Pinna 2011a: 123. As he goes on to point out, poets make a different use of Ilia than historians.

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