



Summary :

A musician from Halicarnassus, who was active in the reign of Hadrian(117-138 AD). Various musical works of his are known. They have been preserved in fragmentary condition; two of them in other writers. Probably he composed the Hymn to the Muse. It is not certain whether he is identified with Aelius Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

Other Names

Date and Place of Birth

2nd c. AD - Halicarnassus

Date and Place of Death

2nd c. AD

Main Role

musician

1. Introduction

Dionysius was a musician from [Halicarnassus](#) who lived in the time of [Hadrian](#) (117-138 AD). He was called “Musician” due to his theoretical treatises on music. The issue of the identification of Dionysius the Musician with the atticist [Aelius Dionysius](#), who lived in the same period and also came from Halicarnassus, remains unresolved.

2. Works

The Byzantine encyclopedia Suda has preserved the titles and the extent of four of his works.¹ These are the multi-volume works *Μουσική Ιστορία*, *Ρυθμικά Υπομνήματα*, *Μουσική Παιδεία ή Διατριβαί*, *Τίνα Μουσικώς Είρηται εν τη Πλάτωνος Πολιτεία*. None of them has survived. Only excerpts from *Ρυθμικά Υπομνήματα* and *Μουσική Ιστορία* are preserved in the work of other writers. The work of Porphyrius *Εις Πτολεμαίου Αρμονικά* cites certain views of the Pythagoreans about musical rhythm, handed down by Dionysius, under the title *Περί Ομοιοτήτων*. It must be a chapter of his *Ρυθμικά Υπομνήματα*.² It is known that the 36 volumes of Dionysius’ Musical History included references to flute-players, singers, guitar players, creators of **dithyrambs**, **epithalamia** and **hyporchemata** as well as to poets of all kinds in a broader sense of music (epic, tragic, comic and lyrical poets). Also, a historical review of the musical contests and Panhellenic festivals was included.

Stephanus Byzantius mentions the assessment by Dionysius of the work of the comic poet Euages, and notes that it is part of the 23rd book of his Musical History.³ Besides, in the "Life of Aeschylus" an excerpt from Musical History, possibly by Dionysius is included.⁴ Suda uses the 33rd book of his Musical History as a source about the female scholar Pamphile, while the information about the comic poet Antiphanes and the epic poet Orpheus is probably derived from the same work.⁵ Moreover, it seems that, in the 33rd book of his Musical History, Dionysius must have gathered all the stories he knew about the Muses, according to the Dictionary of Photios.⁶ A comment on Pindar⁷ possibly attributes to Dionysius an account on the establishment of the Pythians of Sicily. It has been assumed that several biographies of musicians and poets in Suda, particularly those of victors in competitions and creators of new poetic and musical kinds, base their accounts mainly on Dionysius’ Musical History. It is quite unlikely that the Musical History of Rufus copied that of Dionysius and that the information about issues pertaining to music and poetry, included in the 1st, 14th and 15th chapter of Deipnosophists by Athenaeus or in the *Ονοματολόγος* by Hesychius, comes from Dionysius.

Dionysius is believed to have written at least one of three hymns composed in the 2nd c. AD, possibly in the reign of Hadrian; there is a debate among scholars with regard to the identity of the composer.⁸ Dionysius has been suggested as the composer of the Hymn to the Sun or the Hymn to Nemesis and –more often– the Hymn to the Muse (Calliope). According to the prevailing opinion, the Hymn



to Nemesis and probably the Hymn to the Sun were written by Mesomedes, while the composer of the Hymn to the Muse must either remain anonymous or be identified with Dionysius, who could possibly be Dionysius the Musician.⁹

1. Suda, s.v. Διονύσιος Αλικαρνασεύς (par. 1171). See also ch.2.
2. Porph., *Ἀρμον.*, I. During (ed.), *Porphyrios Kommnetar zur Harmonielehre des Ptolemaios* (Göteborg 1932) pp. 37.15-20.
3. Steph. Byz., s.v. Υδρέα.
4. Life of Aeschylus, G. Dindorf (ed.), *Aeschylus 3: Scholia in Aeschylum* (Oxford 1851) pp. 1-8, particularly pp. 7-8. More specifically, a certain point of the text mentions "from Musical History". There is a debate as to whether the text attributes to the Musical History the following paragraph, which comments on the dignity of its figures, or the preceding paragraph, which deals with the scenic devices of Aeschylus and evaluates his work in comparison with the earlier or later tragic poets. See Scherer, C., *De Aelio Dionysio musico qui vocatur* (Bonn 1886) p. 38.
5. Suda, s.v. Παμφίλη, Σωτηρίδας, Αντιφάνης Δημοφάνους and Ορφεύς Οδρύσης.
6. Phot., *Λεξ.*, s.v. Νύμφαι.
7. Comment on Pindar N 9.
8. It is attested in manuscripts that a certain Dionysius was the creator of all three hymns, while elsewhere (in two instances) he is credited as the creator of the Hymn to the Muse. However, Ιωάννης ο Φιλαδελφεύς (Justinianian period) claims that the Hymn to Nemesis was the work of Mesomedes, a lyric poet and musician, contemporary of Dionysius. Some researchers attribute all three hymns to Mesomedes, while others only the Hymn to the Sun and the Hymn to Nemesis. According to another view, the Hymn to the Sun and the Hymn to the Muse were written by Dionysius, while Mesomedes wrote the Hymn to Nemesis.
9. There is also a suggestion that the surviving melodies are a Byzantine rendering based on the ancient (2nd c. AD) verses. Henderson, I., "Ancient Greek Music", in Wellesz, E. (ed.) *Ancient and Oriental music* (The New Oxford History of Music 1, Oxford 1969) pp. 371-373. See Pohlmann, E., *Denkmäler altgriechischer Musik* (Nürnberg 1970) p. 30.

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Glossary :

	dithyramb, the
Choral song of enthusiastic character performed in honour of Dionysus under the guidance of a leading member. Initially improvised, it was later systematized with the contribution of the famous Lesbian guitarist Arion (7ος/6ος c. BC) and was included in the programme of the 'En Astei Dionysia', of the Panathenaia, etc.	
	epithalamion, the
Wedding song performed by a chorus of boys and girls in front of the bridal chamber. It was divided in the 'katakoimitikon', sang in the evening, and the 'diegertikon', sang in the next morning. The epithalamion might have been also a speech delivered outside the bridal chamber.	
	hyporchema, the
Choral song in honour of Apollo, in combination with dance and accompanied by pipe, guitar of lyre. In the hyporchema either all the members of the chorus sang and danced or half of them sang and the other half danced or the coryphaeus of the chorus sang alone and the rest of the members danced.	

Sources

G. Dindorf (ed.), *Aeschylus 3: Scholia in Aeschylum* (Oxford 1851)