

## Ῥωμαικὴ Ἀρχαιολογία

*Roman Antiquities* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 19 BCE)

Here is a brief biography of the author by Donald Andrew Frank Moore Russell.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Greek critic and historian, lived and taught rhetoric at Rome, arriving at the time Augustus put an end to the civil war, and publishing the first part of his *Roman Antiquities* 22 years later (*Ant. Rom.* 1. 7). This great work was in twenty books, going down to the outbreak of the First Punic War; we have the first eleven (to 441 BC), with excerpts from the others. Dionysius used the legends of Rome's origins to demonstrate that it was really a Greek city, and his whole history is an erudite panegyric of Roman virtues. It is also very rhetorical, abounding in long speeches. He doubtless thought of it as exemplifying his literary teaching, which was directed towards restoring Classical prose after what he saw as the aberrations of the Hellenistic period. The treatises in which he developed this programme seem mostly to have been written before the *Antiquities*, though their chronology is much disputed. These are: (1) *On imitation*, in three books, of which only fragments survive; the judgements on individual authors coincide largely with those in Quintilian *Inst.* 10. 1; (2) a series of discussions of individual orators (Lysias, Isocrates, Isaeus, Demosthenes), prefaced by a programmatic statement of distaste for 'Asiatic' rhetoric, hope for an 'Attic' revival, and the writer's consciousness that this happy change is due to the good taste of the Roman governing class; (3) a group of occasional works: *On Dinarchus*, *On Thucydides* (important); two letters to Ammaeus (one on Demosthenes' alleged indebtedness to Aristotle, the other on Thucydides), and a letter to Cn. Pompeius on Plato, of whose 'dithyrambic' style Dionysius was very critical; (4) *On Arrangement of Words* (*De compositione verborum*), the only surviving ancient treatise on this subject, full of interesting observations on euphony and onomatopoeic effects (note especially ch. 20, on *Odyssey* 11.593-6); this was a fairly late work, but the second part of Demosthenes (35 ff.) presupposes it.

For all the traditional terminology and character of Dionysius' criticism—he frequently gives the impression of 'awarding marks' for good qualities narrowly and unimaginatively defined—he is an acute and sensitive stylistic critic, whose insights deserve attention; and he understood the importance of linking historical study (e.g. on questions of authenticity) with the purely rhetorical and aesthetic (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd Edition, 1996, 478).

4.24. Now that I have come to this part of my narrative, I think it necessary to give an account of the customs which at that time prevailed among the Romans with regard to slaves, in order that no one may accuse either the king [Tullius Hostilius, the legendary third king of Rome, who reigned according to Roman tradition 672-640 BCE] who first undertook to make citizens of those who had been slaves, or the Romans who accepted the law, of recklessly abandoning their noble traditions. The Romans acquired their slaves by the most just means; for they either purchased them from the state at an auction as part of the spoils, or the general permitted the soldiers to keep the prisoners, they had taken together with the rest of the booty, or else they

bought them of those who had obtained possession of them by these same means. So that neither Tullius, who established this custom, nor those who received and maintained it thought they were doing anything dishonourable or detrimental to the public interest, if those who had lost both their country and their liberty in war, and had proved loyal to those who had enslaved them, or to those who had purchased them from these, had both those blessings restored to them by their masters. Most of these slaves obtained their liberty as a free gift because of meritorious conduct, and this was the best kind of discharge from their masters; but a few paid a ransom raised by lawful and honest labour.

This, however, is not the case in our day, but things have come to such a state of confusion, and the noble traditions of the Roman commonwealth have become so debased and sullied, that some who have made a fortune by robbery, housebreaking, prostitution and every other base means, purchase their freedom with the money so acquired and straightway are Romans. Others, who have been confidants and accomplices of their masters in poisonings, murders and in crimes against the gods or the state, receive from them this favour as their reward. Some are freed in order that, when they have received the monthly allowance of corn given by the public or some other largesse distributed by the men in power to the poor among the citizens, they may bring it to those who granted them their freedom. And others owe their freedom to the levity of their masters and to their vain thirst for popularity. I, at any rate, know of some who have allowed all their slaves to be freed after their death, in order that they might be called good men when they were dead and that many people might follow their biers wearing their liberty-caps; indeed, some of those taking part in these processions, as one might have heard from those who knew; have been malefactors just out of jail, who had committed crimes deserving of a thousand deaths. Most people, nevertheless, as they look upon these stains that can scarce be washed away from the city are grieved and condemn the custom, looking upon it as unseemly that a dominant city which aspires to rule the whole world should make such men citizens.

One might justly condemn many other customs also which were wisely devised by the ancients but are shamefully abused by the men of today. Yet, for my part, I do not believe that this law ought to be abolished, lest as a result some greater evil should break out to the detriment of the public; but I do say that it ought to be amended, as far as possible, and that great reproaches and disgraces hard to be wiped out should not be permitted entrance into the body politic. And I could wish that the censors, preferably, or, if that may not be, then the consuls, would take upon themselves the care of this matter, since it requires the control of some important magistracy, and that they would make inquiries about the persons who are freed each year—who they are and for what reason they have been freed and how—just as they inquire into the lives of the knights and senators; after which they should enroll in the tribes such of them as they find worthy to be citizens and allow them to remain in the city, but should expel from the city the foul and corrupt herd under the specious pretense of sending them out as a colony. These are the things, then, which, as the subject required it, I thought it both necessary and just to say to those who censure the customs of the Romans.