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DIONYSIUS OF  
HALICARNASSUS  
CRITICAL ESSAYS  
VOLUME I



*Translated by*  
STEPHEN USHER

# DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS

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VOLUME I

藏书章

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY  
STEPHEN LUSH



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I

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## INTRODUCTION

Greek men of letters formed an essential part of the cultural scene at Rome from the third century B.C., and their numbers and influence increased, in spite of discouragement from Roman chauvinists and conservatives, after the conquest of the Greek world by Rome. Most of them were attached to eminent Roman families by more or less close bonds of patronage, connections having originally arisen through diplomatic or social contact before the conquest or through imprisonment and transportation to Rome after it. Over a century later, after Rome had suffered her own internal war, and Octavian, later Augustus, had reunited the East and the West of her empire, there was a renewed migration of Greeks to Rome. Dionysius of Halicarnassus arrived there late in 30 B.C. or early in 29 B.C., preceding the famous geographer Strabo by about a year and joining the historian Timagenes and the poets Parthenius and Crinagoras. He appears to have made the journey uninvited, since the gratitude he expresses for the hospitality he has received<sup>1</sup> is addressed to Rome at large and to no individual; but he must have known that rewarding and congenial employment awaited him in the great city. Roman education had for a long time included the learning of Greek, some boys

<sup>1</sup> *Antiquitates Romanae*, 1. 6. 5.

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mastering it before their native tongue,<sup>1</sup> and many declaiming in Greek as a part of their training.<sup>2</sup> But more significant in the consideration of Dionysius's career is the fact that, in imperial as in republican Rome, Greek continued to enjoy a privileged position as the *lingua franca* of the literary world, so that the study of Greek language and literature at an advanced level was essential for any Roman who was to have any pretensions to wider culture, and remained so for many years to come.

But literary Greek had undergone great changes since the period of its highest achievement, the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The greatest change accompanied the political revolution in which Philip II of Macedon, Alexander the Great and his Successors transformed the Greek world from a number of free, independent city-states into three kingdoms ruled absolutely. At the time of these conquests the Greek literary genius was expressing itself in its highest form in public oratory and political discourse, both of which depended for their inspiration upon the complete freedom of speech which the autonomous city-state provided. Athens, the home of the greatest orators and historians, came under the rule of Demetrius of Phalerum, a governor appointed by one of Alexander's successors, Cassander. In fact Demetrius himself tried to keep the Athenian literary tradition alive by writing treatises on history, politics and philosophy; but Cicero, while admiring the genuine Attic flavour of his oratory, saw in its weakness and effeminacy the beginnings of the rot.<sup>3</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Quintilian, i. 1. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *Brutus*, 90. 310.

<sup>3</sup> *Brutus*, 9. 38; 82. 285.

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accordance with the political trend away from city-state orientation towards cosmopolitanism (in the limited Greek, not the modern sense), Athens ceased to be the only centre of letters and learning, and these activities themselves assumed a scholastic and academic character. The foundation of the great libraries at Alexandria and Pergamum, both at the instance of royal patrons, and the establishment of schools of rhetoric at Rhodes and elsewhere, were further steps in the sequestration of Greek literature from the world of real life. Freshness and originality were not to be expected from institutions devoted solely to criticism and recension, or to the study of techniques perfected by the great orators of the past. It is true that exceptionally gifted creative writers, like the poets Theocritus and Callimachus, overcame their environment, but their rare achievement only serves to demonstrate the relative poverty of talent in their field. History fared much better than poetry in these surroundings, however. The Greeks, unlike the earlier Romans, did not regard history as the exclusive province of the man of action: Polybius found himself in a minority when he criticised Timaeus of Tauromenium for spending all his time in libraries<sup>1</sup> instead of travelling, as he himself had done, and seeing history in action: Timaeus survived these criticisms and remained, from the shelter of the dusty shelves, one of the most popular of all the Greek historians. Of his immediate predecessors Ephorus of Cyme was at once one of the most popular and one of the least notable for any active participation in the events from which history is made. Polybius himself, however, came under heavy criticism for

<sup>1</sup> xii. 25f.

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what was regarded by most readers as a worse fault in a historian than remoteness from events and lack of political experience—the inability to write in an attractive style. It was mainly from this standpoint that the historians attracted, and in some cases almost monopolised, the attention of the literary critics. It was a historian, Hegesias of Magnesia, who became for our own Dionysius the personification of “Asiatic” bad taste. Oratory and philosophy are virtually unrepresented in this early Hellenistic period.

Details of the activities of Greek rhetorical schools in the Hellenistic period are meagre and incoherent. Aeschines is said to have retired to Rhodes on finding his political career in ruins after his duel with Demosthenes over the Crown, and to have founded a school of rhetoric there which may have retained some of the features of the best Athenian oratory<sup>1</sup> and so established an Attic tradition. In the hands of teachers of less imagination, like Artamenes, Aristocles, Philagrion and perhaps even Cicero’s teacher Molon,<sup>2</sup> the Attic style lost its more colourful features, because these were more difficult to imitate, and became conservative and aridly academic. Rival centres grew up on the Asiatic mainland: Caria, Mysia and Phrygia are three areas in which the new style was practised.<sup>3</sup> Cicero distinguished two kinds of Asiatic style, an earlier epigrammatic style, practised by Hierocles and Menecles of Alabanda, and a modern style which was ample, fluent and ornate,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators*, 840D.

<sup>2</sup> Dionysius, *Dinarchus*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *Brutus*, 95. 325; Dionysius, *On the Ancient Orators*, Introd. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

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whose exponents included Aeschylus of Cnidus and Aeschines of Miletus. The absence of comparable information concerning developments in the Attic tradition illustrates the advantage which the new style had over the old. It was untrammelled by rules, precedents and preconceptions, and could develop in whatever direction its masters chose, always providing novelty and change. Atticism, on the other hand, became synonymous with conformity and restraint, with study and imitation rather than spontaneous creativity and originality: such, at least, are its characteristics when it emerges from obscurity in Roman literary controversy in the first century B.C. The subject will arise again in the course of the following discussion of individual influences on Dionysius.

Now rhetoric, as Plato knew, was too important a subject to be left to rhetoricians. His pupil Aristotle, a practical philosopher who found his master's theoretical and moral objections to rhetoric unconvincing, set out in his *Rhetoric* to present the sum of rhetorical teaching up to his own time, and many ideas of his own which answered Plato's objections and followed lines of enquiry adumbrated by him.<sup>1</sup> Dionysius was thoroughly familiar with the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle. In the *First Letter to Ammaeus* he refutes an assertion of an unknown Peripatetic that Demosthenes learned his oratorical technique from the *Rhetoric*, and in the course of his argument quotes from all three books. Again, his critical essays are replete with technical terms and statements which are to be found in Aristotle's great treatise. But these occasional points of contact between Aristotle

<sup>1</sup> See Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics*, pp. 92-3.

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and Dionysius in the details of their rhetorical teaching are overshadowed by the fundamental difference of purpose, not to say of mental powers, of the two men. Aristotle's training and cast of mind, and in particular his biologist's interest in analysis, analogy and classification, led him to construct an elaborate and wholly admirable rhetorical system based on the work and the experience of earlier practitioners, but defining their terms and differentiating between types of evidence and the other materials of persuasion. His is an ideal system: the practical orators of the fourth century were both less systematic and less inventive than the sources provided by Aristotle would have enabled them to be. On the other hand, in the matter of style, to which Aristotle devotes only one of his three books, the Attic orators provide models which are superior to any system which even Aristotle could have provided; and it is with style that Dionysius is concerned in most of his critical writing. Thus it is not surprising to find no explicit reference to the *Rhetoric* in Dionysius's essays on the Attic Orators.

But Theophrastus, Aristotle's pupil, is quoted four times in these essays and once in the *De Compositione Verborum*. He wrote a treatise On Style (*περὶ λέξεως*) in which he elaborated upon his master's teaching that lucidity (*τὸ σαφές*) was the essential virtue of style, and that the application of this principle should be regulated by the criterion of appropriateness.<sup>1</sup> Theophrastus, whose system is reproduced by Cicero,<sup>2</sup> derived four virtues of style from this simple Aristotelian concept: purity of language

<sup>1</sup> *Rhetoric* iii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Orator*, 79.

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(ἐλληνισμός), lucidity (τὸ σαφές), appropriateness (τὸ πρέπον) and ornament (κατασκευή), the latter being subdivided into choice of words (ἐκλογή ὀνομάτων), arrangement (ἁρμονία) and the use of figures of speech (σχήματα). Most of these terms, or terms derived from the concepts underlying them, are used by Dionysius in his critical essays. The concept of purity was of especial relevance to Atticism. Aristotle uses it to try to differentiate between the language of poetry and the language of prose. In Dionysius we find a different distinction: his idea of Attic purity is that of a literary language which was based on the everyday language of Athens in the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. It is tempting to trace this idea back to Theophrastus, but evidence is lacking. Theophrastus's other "virtues" were considerably elaborated, either by Dionysius himself or by an unknown intervening critic, and were divided into "essential" (ἀναγκαῖαι) and "additional" (ἐπίθετοι). Theophrastus's systematisation of virtues has led to the unwarranted assumption that he also devised the more important and far-reaching system of three "styles," "grand," "middle" and "plain," which Dionysius uses in the essay on Demosthenes and in the *De Compositione Verborum*. The earliest extant reference to it is in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (iv. 8-11), but the identity of its inventor seems likely to remain obscure. The only other subjects treated by Dionysius which may be traced back to the work of Theophrastus are prose rhythm and figures of speech. The former is discussed in general terms by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* iii. 8), but Dionysius's discussion of the effects of various rhythms in *De Compositione Verborum* 18 is much more

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comprehensive; and Cicero tells us that Theophrastus discussed prose-rhythm more thoroughly than Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Regarding figures of speech, both Theophrastus and Dionysius use the word *σχήματα* in that sense whereas Aristotle does not. This at least makes Theophrastus an original source for the concept as used by Dionysius.

With Hermagoras of Temnos we return to professional rhetoricians. Closer to Dionysius in time than Aristotle and Theophrastus (he taught at Athens around the middle of the second century B.C.), he reaffirmed the view of the earliest rhetoricians, Corax and Tisias, and the sophists Protagoras and Prodicus, that rhetoric was a complex technique (*τέχνη*) which could be taught on its own without reference to philosophical or moral principles. He devised his own complete rhetorical system, embracing all types of oratory and all the conventional parts of the speech, from the point of view of both style and subject-matter. He analysed different types of subject-matter, dividing it into general (*θέσεις*) and particular (*ὑποθέσεις*) questions, and defined the different standpoints of an argument (*στάσεις*). This probably represents the most original part of his work, and was of fundamental importance in the development of practical oratory under the Republic and of declamatory oratory under the empire. Dionysius's debt to Hermagoras might have been greater if his purpose had been to train practical orators from first principles. But, as with other predecessors, his purpose and his methods are different. In Dionysius discussion centres upon ready-made models. In the course of these discussions, however, Dionysius uses a

<sup>1</sup> *Orator*, 172; *De Oratore* iii. 184.

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number of technical terms which may ultimately derive from Hermagoras, particularly those which describe various aspects of the division of a speech, e.g. κρίσις, διαίρεσις, ἔφοδος, ἐξεργασία, μερισμός.

Attempts to find predecessors who influenced Dionysius thus succeed only in underlining his apparent isolation and originality. His mission as an Atticist and the obscurity of the early history of that movement (if it can be given so definite a form), account for this isolation in some measure. It is natural to seek the origin of Atticism in the libraries of Alexandria and Pergamum, where part of the librarians' work was to identify the authors of manuscripts of unknown provenance. Such work would involve the consideration of dialect as well as of chronological evidence, and it is interesting to find Dionysius doing this as a part of his own work. Librarians were also concerned with acquiring the works of the best authors of the Classical period, and the ability to identify Attic style was necessary if errors were to be avoided. It is therefore not surprising to hear that the first librarian at Pergamum, Crates of Mallos, made a study of the Attic dialect. The proximity of Pergamum to the cities in which the Asianic style was born may have led it to assume an early importance in the preservation of Attic standards. But the terms of the controversy were probably dictated at all times as much by the personal caprice of individual critics and teachers as by absolute stylistic standards; and the transference of the controversy to Rome did nothing to change this.

If no Greek predecessor is to be closely identified with Dionysius's Attic crusade, there is yet one whose life and work was devoted to increasing the beneficial

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influence of the spoken and the written word. Isocrates wrote and taught in the fourth century, and was one of those who contributed most to making that period most productive of the best Attic prose. He gathered around him a select circle of able pupils and taught them a special kind of literary discourse, claiming that education based upon this teaching would produce citizens whose counsels would confer the greatest benefits upon the state. Such democratic possibilities no longer existed in the imperial Rome under which Dionysius lived, but the underlying principle, that the study and composition of artistic prose was the finest medium of education and moral training was wholly consonant with his position and his work in the city. Though he could not boast a Timotheus, and so rival Isocrates in the training of men of action, Dionysius could point to pupils who distinguished themselves as historians, like the Isocrateans Ephorus and Theopompus. Both men valued the practical application to life and to educative literature of their own special form of rhetoric, "philosophic rhetoric."<sup>1</sup> Dionysius wrote a treatise, now lost, on "Political Philosophy,"<sup>2</sup> and he invariably uses the terms "philosophy" and "philosophic" with reference to the practical life of man as a political animal (as Isocrates does)<sup>3</sup> rather than to abstract speculation. Isocrates was also an attractive and influential precursor from the point of view of style in that he was (after Demosthenes) the most successful exponent of the middle style, which Diony-

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius, *On the Ancient Orators*, Introduction, 1; Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*, 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Thucydides*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Antidosis*, 184-5, 271; *Panathenaicus*, 28-30; *Helen*, 5.

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sus pronounces to be the best.<sup>1</sup> Dionysius's criticisms of the style of Isocrates, and in particular of his excessive addiction to parallelism and assonance, arise partly out of his enthusiasm for Demosthenes; and his own style shows closer affinities with that of Isocrates than with that of Demosthenes. Regarding content, on which a "philosophic rhetorician" might be expected to be judged by the highest standards, Dionysius's verdict on Isocrates is unreservedly favourable: he states that readers of his discourses cannot fail to be imbued with feelings of pride, patriotism, justice and responsibility.<sup>2</sup> He agrees with Isocrates that a rhetorical training is the best preparation for public life,<sup>3</sup> and saw in the subjects on which he discoursed the ideal material for great literature, better for the education of future writers than the narrowly specialised speeches of forensic orators, even when one of the forensic orators is Lysias.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to Dionysius's Roman environment, we are faced with the complexity of two vigorous literary cultures living side-by-side in a city itself torn by political tumult. The late republic was a turbulent period, but also a fruitful one for literature. Native Roman talent abounded in all media: in poetry Lucretius, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, Horace and Virgil, and in prose Caesar, Cicero, Sallust and Livy realised to the full the potential of Latin as a literary

<sup>1</sup> *Demosthenes*, 34.

<sup>2</sup> *Isocrates*, 5-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Antidosis*; 30. 306-309. Dionysius, *On the Ancient Orators*, Introd. 1: *ἐτέρα δέ τις . . . τὰς τιμὰς καὶ τὰς προστασίας τῶν πόλεων, ὥς ἔδει τὴν φιλόσοφον ἔχειν, εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἀνηρτήσατο.*

<sup>4</sup> *Isocrates*, 12.

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language and created a Golden Age of Latin literature which rivalled the Attic period of Greece. The attendant upsurge of Roman confidence in Latin as a literary language led to a change of emphasis both in the more esoteric discussions of the literary coteries and in curricular education. In the latter, Latin played a more prominent part in its literary role than hitherto, while in the former, discussions of fundamental questions, like that of the ideal style, were conducted in the terms of early Greek controversy (in the above case, Atticism and Asianism), but with Latin and not Greek as the subject. The models are both Greek and Roman orators, but since the latter—accomplished speakers like Gaius Gracchus, Crassus, Antonius, Galba and Carbo—had done the vital spadework of adapting Greek theory to Roman practice, it was relatively easy and natural for Cicero's contemporaries to discuss Latin style in the general aesthetic terms which may be permitted only to mature critics of a mature language. In the hands of Hortensius, Cicero, Calvus and Caesar, Roman oratory attained heights comparable with those achieved by Greek oratory in the age of Demosthenes, and under political conditions of similar stress. Nothing popularises an art so much as great performers. In the case of oratory, performance without practical purpose had always been a part of training: both the teacher and his pupils declaimed in the classroom, the former to show how it should be done, the latter in order to perfect his technique. The teacher also opened his school to the outside world and gave public hearings in order to advertise his school. From this practice in Greece, and more especially in Rome, declamation developed into one of the most

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popular forms of entertainment, rivalling the theatre. But its very popularity with the Roman public promoted Latin still further at the expense of Greek, for the average Roman was not sufficiently fluent in Greek to enjoy listening to a prolonged discourse in that language. Nor would he feel constrained to by cultural deference, for Latin was now the equal of Greek as a medium of great literature. It is therefore hardly surprising to find no evidence for the practice of public declamation in Greek at Rome in Dionysius's time of residence there.

Apart from learning the Latin language in order to study sources for his *Antiquitates Romanae*, Dionysius confined himself strictly to his Greek microcosm, an island populated by a few learned Hellenes in a vast ocean seething with cultural activity of an alien kind. In spite of his expressed gratitude to Rome, he felt no apparent affinity even with men of similar literary interests to his own, like Cicero and Horace: at all events he mentions neither, nor any other important Roman writer. His small circle of friends and pupils (hardly a school), shared his interest in maintaining the status of Greek as a literary language, especially for the writing of history and antiquities. Their discussions centred mainly upon topics of narrow literary interest, and on occasion smack of academic quibbling. They represent his esoteric world: his wider audience was catered for by the *Antiquitates Romanae*, which were addressed, like the *Histories* of Polybius, to the cultured Mediterranean world at large. It has been assumed, I think rightly, that the composition of this work occupied most of Dionysius's working hours at Rome. The absence of the name of a dedicatee suggests that, if it was commissioned, the com-