

DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS

Early Rules for Clients and Patrons

Source: Dion. Hal. RA 2.10-11. Translated by Earnest Cary. In *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*. Loeb classical library. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1937.

Dionysius is extolling the justice by which Romulus placed the plebeians in the hands of the patricians, creating a set of mutual obligations.

The regulations which he [Romulus] then instituted concerning patronage and which long continued in use among the Romans were as follows: It was the duty of the patricians to explain to their clients the laws, of which they were ignorant; to take the same care of them when absent as present, doing everything for them that fathers do for their sons with regard both to money and to the contracts that related to money; to bring suit on behalf of their clients when they were wronged in connection with contracts, and to defend them against any who brought charges against them; and, to put the matter briefly, to secure for them both in private and in public affairs all that tranquility of which they particularly stood in need.

It was the duty of the clients to assist their patrons in providing dowries for their daughters upon their marriage if the fathers had not sufficient means; to pay their ransom to the enemy if any of them or of their children were taken prisoner; to discharge out of their own purses their patrons' losses in private suits and the pecuniary fines which they were condemned to pay to the State, making these contributions to them not as loans but as thank-offerings; and to share with their patrons the costs incurred in their magistracies and dignities¹ and other public expenditures, in the same manner as if they were their relations.

For both patrons and clients alike it was impious and unlawful to accuse each other in law-suits or to bear witness or to give their votes against each other or to be found in the number of each other's enemies; and whoever was convicted of doing any of these things was guilty of treason by virtue of the law sanctioned by Romulus, and might lawfully be put to death by any man who so wished as a victim devoted to the Jupiter of the infernal regions.² For it was customary among the Romans, whenever they wished to put people to death without incurring any penalty, to devote their persons to some god or other, and particularly to the gods of the lower world; and this was the course what Romulus then adopted.

Accordingly, the connections between the clients and patrons continued for many generations, differing in no wise from the ties of blood-relationship and being handed down to their children's children. And it was a matter of great praise to men of illustrious families to have as many clients as possible and not only to preserve the succession of hereditary patronages but also by their own merit to acquire others. And it is incredible how great the contest of goodwill was between the patrons and clients, as each side strove not to be outdone by the other in kindness, the clients feeling that they should render all possible services to their patrons and the patrons wishing by all means not to occasion any trouble to their clients and accepting no gifts of money. So superior was their manner to all pleasure; for they measured their happiness by virtue, not by fortune.

It was not only in the city itself that the plebeians were under the protection of the patricians, but every colony of Rome and every city that had joined in alliance and friendship with her and also every city conquered in war had such protectors and patrons among the Romans as they wished. And the senate has often referred the controversies of these cities and nations to their Roman patrons and regarded their decisions binding.

And indeed, so secure was the Romans' harmony, which owed its birth to the regulations of Romulus, that they never in the course of six hundred and thirty years³ proceeded to bloodshed and mutual slaughter, though many great controversies arose between the populace and their magistrates concerning public policy, as is apt to happen in all cities, whether large or small; but by persuading and informing one another, by yielding in some things and gaining other things from their opponents, who yielded in turn, they settled their disputes in a manner befitting fellow citizens. But from the time that C. Gracchus, while holding the tribunician power, destroyed the harmony of the government they have been perpetually slaying and banishing one another from the city and refraining from no irreparable acts in order to gain the upper hand.

¹ The word *ὑπερηγορία* should mean literally the "bearing, or enjoyment, of privileges," hence a "position of honour" or a "dignity." Presumably the reference is to priesthoods.

² i.e. Dis or Pluto.

³ Dionysius ignores the bloodshed in connection with the slaying of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 and the execution of many Gracchans that followed. The overthrow of C. Gracchus occurred at the very beginning of the year 121, which was the year 631 of the City according to Dionysius' reckoning.