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mikten ex amphoin: The Origin of Latin and the Loss of Binary Opposition in Dionysius of Halicarnassus

In a recent book on Latin language and culture, Joseph Farrell mentions in passing an intriguing ancient idea on the origin of Latin: Latin is actually a dialect of Greek (Farrell 2001, 38). Farrell is right to note that this idea deserves more recognition and consideration than it commonly receives. He is also right to take issue with the modern *communis opinio*, which views the ancient idea as only the most extreme manifestation of the tendency to assimilate Latin to Greek, and thus as yet another symptom of an intense desire on the part of Latin culture to be Greek (emphasis added). In this light the tradition deriving Latin from Greek appears as part of a profound inferiority complex felt by Rome when comparing itself to superior Greek culture (e.g. Dubuisson 1984 and Gabba 1963). Farrell himself offers a similar interpretation, no less psychological for being reversed: the theory that would make Latin a dialect of Greek is a reflex of Greek hope (Farrell 2001, 39). The primary objection to such readings must be their reliance on just this sort of cultural psychologizing, that is their error of taking [psychoanalytic] metaphors for [social] realities (Loraux 1993, 20, citing Agulhon 1981, 236). Even without the psychoanalytic and other complications facing such starkly Freudian claims, these readings must be rejected due to their refusal to allow the ancient tradition its full, potentially self-contradictory diversity of articulation and attestation over time and place - in short, its historicity.

In this paper I attempt a corrective, through reconsideration of the fullest ancient source on the tradition in question, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (esp. 1.90.1). I approach the historian and his statements from the perspective of recent work on ancient group interaction, which seeks to move away from a dichotomy of acceptance and resistance between distinct groups, and stresses the complexity and evolution of identity within overlapping groups continually redefined by their partial mutual participation in shared social practice (quoted material from Laurence 1998, 105 and 109; cf. Farrell 2001; Feeney 1998; Woolf 1998; Jones 1997; Gruen 1992, esp. 223-271; and Shennan 1989). I thus examine Dionysius not for any adherence to group psychology, but with an eye to what Loraux, with reference to Athens, has called the civic imaginary: the contentious and seemingly contradictory discourse surrounding ideals of organization within a given society (Loraux 1993, 13). I conclude that Dionysius' engagement with Latin may indeed be understood as a single, linguistic instance of a more general phenomenon - not a cultural inferiority complex, but grudging awareness of the impermanence and permeability of inter-group boundaries, in particular of those between what was considered Roman and what counted as Greek.

For Dionysius to have endorsed this idea may not be surprising, but it is important to remember that he did not invent it. Seen in this light, the intriguing ancient idea deriving Latin from Greek is part of a widespread Roman-era imaginary, or image of inter-group organization, which envisions a culture tending above all to interpenetration and overlap. This culture, although centered on Rome and indeed authentically Roman, is, like the Latin language, always already Greek (cf. Farrell 2001, 25: Again and again, when Latin

culture confronts itself and inquires into its nature, it sees Greek.). Like the language, too, it is best understood as an indissoluble mixture of both: in Dionysius apt phrase, a culture which is *mikten ex amphoin*.