

DIODORUS MELITENSIS

by

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Caius Verres, the ex-propraetor of Sicily, was brought to trial in 70 B.C. for the crimes he had perpetrated against the Sicilians. All the cities of the Province, with exception of Messina and Syracuse, sent their representatives to Rome to give evidence in the trial. The island of Malta, which in Roman times was inextricably linked with Sicily, was represented by a delegation. One of the Maltese who bore witness was Diodorus.

Diodorus, a distinguished and well-to-do Maltese, had emigrated to Lilybaeum, modern Marsala, where he enjoyed great popularity. He was fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to own some remarkable silver cups. Verres, who had been propraetor in Sicily for less than a year, sent for Diodorus and asked him for them. The latter craftily replied that he did not have them with him at Lilybaeum but that he had left them in Malta with a relative of his. Verres sent some reliable friends to Malta and wrote to some Maltese asking them to make a thorough search for the silverware. Furthermore, he solicited Diodorus to send a letter to his relative in Malta. In his letter, Diodorus advised his relative to inform the men sent by the propraetor that the cups had already been taken to Lilybaeum a few days before their arrival. Then he left Lilybaeum and Sicily altogether, taking care, of course, to take the cups away with him.

When Verres found out that he was outwitted by Diodorus and that the owner of the silverware was not to be found in Sicily, he first spread the story that the cups belonged to him and that Diodorus was a thief; then he commissioned one of his "stooges" to spread the story that he wanted to bring Diodorus to trial on a criminal charge. In this way he hoped to have him brought back to Sicily. Verres, the propraetor, did not hesitate to have the charge laid against Diodorus *in absentia*.

In the meantime our Maltese friend had reached Rome. He visited several influential persons and told them his story. Verres's friends and his own father brought pressure to bear on the propraetor and urged him to drop the case. Verres finally gave in to their protests. Diodorus on the other hand never approached Sicily until Verres's term of office (73-71 B.C.) expired. In 70 B.C. he was back in Rome; this time to turn the tables on his former persecutor.

This is the story of Diodorus as told by Cicero in the fourth Book of his *Verrine Orations* (11, iv, 36-42). There are various points in this account which call for comment.

Like the hundreds of Sicilians who were called to Rome to give evidence in Verres's trial, the Maltese witness mentioned by Cicero bore a Greek name. *Diodorus* was a very common Greek name in Sicily.

Another Maltese spoken of by Cicero in his correspondence also had the Greek cognomen Aristotelis¹. The latter had become a Roman citizen. Cicero in an earlier passage, mentions a certain Q. *Lutatius Diodorus*, who received the Roman citizenship from the hands of L. Sulla through the intervention of this benefactor Q. Catulus². Now both Q. Catulus and the Maltese Diodorus bore the same Greek name *Diodorus*; both lived at Lilybaeum; both fell foul of Verres. There is some possibility that the two were really one and the same person.

Diodorus was a distinguished person in Malta. Cicero calls him *domi nobilis*. He had also apparently made a name for himself in Lilybaeum. Like so many other important Sicilians he had powerful *patroni* in Rome who were ready to help him out of his difficulties. Furthermore he had ties of hospitality with several people in Rome. When Verres tried to have him called back to Sicily it was these people Diodorus contacted and it was they who exerted pressure upon Verres, directly or indirectly, to stop harrasing him .

Diodorus was also wealthy. Cicero says that he owned some splendid cups. Cicero also tells us that they were Thericlean in shape and that they were made with exquisite artistry by Mentor himself — the fourth-century Greek potter who was so much admired by Roman connoisseurs³. We are told that Pliny possessed two skyphoi made by Mentor which cost him 100,000 sesterces, i.e., more than 1000 pounds⁴. We do not know how many such cups Diodorus possessed. Cicero speaks of *quaedam pocula* i.e. more than one cup. We know also that besides the cups Diodorus had some other magnificent works in relief.

The passage shows that in Verres's time there were people in Malta who knew how to read and write. Diodorus wrote a letter to his relative, Verres wrote to some Maltese. We do not know in what language these letters were written. Verres, of course, would not write in Greek, for Cicero calls him *barbarus* because he knows no Greek⁵. As for Diodorus it is reasonable to suppose that he knew a certain amount of Latin, otherwise how could he have contacted so many Patrons and friends in Rome? It is also likely that he knew Greek.

In the Verrine Orations we hear time and again of people moving from one city to another in Sicily. People in the Province would move from one part to another without let or hindrance in search of work or better jobs. We do not know why Diodorus left Malta and settled in Lilybaeum though the words *apud eos quo se contulit* might possibly suggest that he married a girl from Lilybaeum. On the other hand Lilybaeum was an

1. Cf. *Ep. ad Fam.*, XIII, 52.

2. Cf. *Actionis Secundae in C. Verrem*, lib. IV, 37: "Tu . . . mensam citream a Q. Lutatius Diodoro, qui Q. Catuli beneficio ab L. Sulla civis Romanus, omnibus scientibus Lilybaei, abstulisti".

3. Cf. R.E. Vol. XV, 1; pp. 965-966.

4. Cf. N.H. XXXIII, 147; also R.E. *ibid.*

5. Cf. *Actionis Secundae in C. Verrem*, Liber. V, 148: Sed scriptum exstat in isdem

administrative centre of the Province where one of the two Roman Quaestors in Sicily was stationed. Diodorus might have gone there because his chances of social and economic betterment were easier.

Verres wrote to certain Maltese to search for the cups. In other words, Verres must have known certain Maltese persons who could help him in his schemes and on whom he could rely. This gives us an insight into how he administered and controlled the Province; at the same time this shows that some Maltese persons were at the service of tyrants like Verres.

Finally this passage shows how close Malta was to Sicily in the social, cultural, and economic fields. Cicero relates the story of a person, who like other Sicilians, had a Greek name. Like other Sicilians he could move from one part of the Province of Sicily to another. He was, like other Sicilians, under the 'patronage' of powerful individuals in Rome. He had exquisite taste for Greek art. Furthermore, we are told that he went to Rome to present his case to his protectors, *sordidatus* i.e. dressed in mourning. This shows that Roman customs were already making themselves felt and were being followed in Malta.



APPENDIX

Melitensis Diodorus est, qui apud vos antea testimonium dixit. Is Lilybaei multos iam annos habitat, homo et domi nobilis, et apud eos, quo se contulit, propter virtutem splendidus, et graciosus. De hoc Verri dicitur, habere eum perbona toreumata: in his pocula duo quaedam, quae Heraclia nominatur, Mentoris manu, summo artificio, facta. Quod iste ubi audivit, sic cupiditate inflammatus est non solum inspiciendi, verum etiam auferendi, ut Diodorum ad se vocaret ac posceret. Ille, qui illa non invitus haberet, respondit Lilybaei se non habere. Melitae apud quendam propinquum suum reliquisse. Tum iste continuo mittit homines certos Melitam: scribit ad quosdam Melitenses ut ea vasa perquirant; rogat Diodorum ut ad illum propinquum suum det litteras; nihil ei longius videbatur, quam dum illud videret argentum. Diodorus, homo frugi ac diligens, qui sua servare vellet, ad propinquum suum scribit, ut iis, qui a Verre venissent responderet illud argentum se paucis illis diebus misisse Lilybaeum. Ipse interea recedit. Abesse ab domo paulisper maluit, quam praesens illud optime factum argentum amittere. Quod ubi audivit iste usque eo commotus est ut sine ulla dubitatione insanire omnibus ac furere videretur. Quia non poterat argentum eripere a Diodoro erepta sibi vasa optime facta dicebat, minitari absenti Diodoro, vociferari palam, lacrimas interdum vix tenere.

litteris quod iste homo *barbarus* ac dissolutus neque attendere neque intellegere potuit: Edicaiothesan inquit, hoc est, ut siculi loquuntur, supplicio affecti ac necati sunt.

Eriphylam accepimus in fabulis ea cupiditate, ut, cum vidisset monile, ut opinor, ex auro et gemmis, pulchritudine eius incensa, salutem viri proderet. Similis istius cupiditas, hoc etiam acrior atque insanior, quod illa cupiebat id, quod viderat, huius libidines non solum oculis sed etiam auribus excitabantur.

Conquiri Diodorum tota provincia iubet. Ille ex Sicilia castra iam commoverat et vasa collegerat. Homo, ut aliquo modo in provinciam illum revocaret, hanc excogitavit rationem, si haec ratio potius quam amentia nominanda est. Apponit de suis canibus quendam qui dicat se Diodorum Melitensem rei capitalis reum velle facere. Primo mirum omnibus videri Diodorum reum, hominem quietissimum ab omni non modo facinore verum etiam minimi errati suspicione remotissimum; deinde esse perspicuum fieri omnia illa propter argentum.

Iste non dubitat iubere nomen deferri, et tum primum opinor istum absentis nomen recepisse. Reclamat Sicilia tota, propter caelati argenti cupiditatem reos fieri rerum capitalium, neque solum praesentis reos fieri, sed etiam absentes. Diodorus Romae sordidatus circum patronos atque hospites cursare rem omnibus narrare. Litterae mittuntur isti a patre vehementes ab amicis item: videret quid ageret de Diodoro, quo progredere; rem claram esse et invidiosam; insanire hominem, periturum hoc uno crimine, nisi cavisset. Iste etiam tum patrem, si non in parentis, at in hominum numero putabat; ad iudicium nondum se satis instruxerat primus annus erat provinciae; non, ut in Sthenio, iam refertus pecunia. Itaque furor eius paululum, non pudore sed metu ac timore, repressus est. Condemnare Diodorum non audet absentem, de reis eximit. Diodorus interea praetore isto prope triennium provincia domoque caruit. Ceteri non solum Siculi, sed etiam cives Romani hoc statuerant, quoniam iste tantum cupiditate progredere nihil esse quod quisquam putaret se quod iste paulo magis placeret conservare aut domi retinere posse; postea vero quam intellexerunt isti virum fortem, quem summe provincia expectabat, Q. Arrium, non succedere, statuerunt se nihil tam clausum neque tam reconditum posse habere quod non istius cupiditati apertissimum promptissimumque esset⁶.

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6. Cf. Actionis Secundae in C. Verrem, lib. IV, 36-42.