

# The Rôle and Status of the Indigenous Population in Bithynia

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The indigenous population of Bithynia was of Thracian origin. This was known to ancient authors from the time of Herodotos and Xenophon onwards, and is attested by numerous inscriptions from Bithynia containing Thracian personal names.<sup>1</sup> What is, however, less clear, is the social status of these Thraco-Bithynians and possible changes in it over the course of time. This is, of course, mainly due to a lack of evidence, especially a lack of literary and epigraphical sources, but also to the fact that scholars have not yet realised the full potential of those sources which we do have at our disposal. For it is not only written evidence that is useful in this respect; archaeological evidence as well is a rich source of information, especially when used in combination with inscriptions and literature.

In the belief that there is in fact enough evidence to tackle the question of the social status of the Thracian population in Bithynia, I will, in what follows, examine a number of monuments, most of them with a sculptured relief and an inscription. In order not to draw hasty conclusions from material coming from regions that have not yet been sufficiently explored, I will limit this study to the area of four cities, for which we have abundant and well-published documentation. These are the cities of Nikaia, Nikomedeia, Prusa ad Olympon and Kios. It is evident that, on the monuments in question, the reliefs and inscriptions mutually reinforce the message they contain about the social and economic status of those they commemorate. The focus here will be on the Roman period and on possible changes between this and the preceding Hellenistic period, changes which might have been brought about by a process of what could be called Romanisation, or, speaking less theoretically, simply by the imposition of Roman social conditions which followed in the wake of Roman domination.

In order to make this comparison between the situation in Roman times with that in the Hellenistic period, we have to know what conditions prevailed during the latter. I have argued elsewhere – and will only briefly recapitulate it as a starting point – that in the Hellenistic period, a large part of the fertile land of Bithynia was in the hands of a ruling élite of Thracian origin. This can be deduced from a number of funerary stelae found in the surroundings of the cities, but not in the cities themselves. Their reliefs and inscriptions attest a class of cavalry officers who bore Thracian names and

whose affluence was based on exploitation of the estates allotted to them.<sup>2</sup>

In the imperial period, however, the distribution of Thracian personal names and the evidence for landholding give a different picture. Then it appears that people with Thracian names lived in the countryside as well as in the cities, and that most of them were of inferior social rank. On the other hand, what we know of estate holders is that some of them bore Greek names, but most Roman names or even the Roman *tria nomina*. In what follows, I propose first to examine separately the documents with Thracian names and then those concerning landholding, before attempting to draw any conclusions.

I start with the evidence for Thracian names. In imperial Nikaia, there are ten inscriptions with Thracian personal names, one of which was found in the city itself. This is a list of names, unfortunately incomplete, dating probably from the first century AD, and it contains, among a large number of Greek and Roman names, only three or four Thracian names.<sup>3</sup> The other nine inscriptions are all on tombstones which were found in the neighbourhood of Nikaia, five in the region of Gölpazarı, two near Göynük and one each from near Geyve and Osmaneli. Judging from their appearance, most of them were erected by members of the middle class, and only one, the huge funerary monument of a certain Diliporis, qualifies as evidence for the wealth of his family.<sup>4</sup>

In Nikomedeia the result is similar. There we find 14 inscriptions with Thracian names, two or three of them from the city itself, the rest from the countryside. They are lists of personal names, dedications and, of course, tombstones.<sup>5</sup> Here again all these monuments are rather modest, and there is no indication that any of the owners belonged to the upper social strata.

Now, Prusa. In this city, there are only three inscriptions of the imperial period which contain Thracian names, all tombstones of modest or inferior workmanship.<sup>6</sup> One of them is reported to have been found in Bursa (the modern name of Prusa), and two in its surroundings.

Finally, the evidence from Kios and its territory is not so helpful. There are altogether four inscriptions with Thracian names, two of which are clearly Hellenistic,<sup>7</sup> while the other two are not datable.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning the social status of these people with Thracian names, it is clear that – with the exception of Diliporis near Nikaia<sup>9</sup> – they did not belong to the upper class of imperial Bithynia, but should be assigned to the middle, or even to the lower, classes. They are probably to be equated with the people who are called “those living in the countryside” in an inscription from Prusias ad Hypium in eastern Bithynia: οἱ τὴν ἀγροικίαν κατοικοῦντες, people without citizenship in the city to which the land belonged.<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence for any of them owning a large estate. Of course, Diliporis from near Nikaia could have been a rich landowner, given the find spot and the impressive character of his grave monument. But he would be an exception, perhaps the only one.

But who were, then, the owners of the domains which had been in the hands of the ruling Thracio-Bithynian élite in Hellenistic times? If we go through the



Fig. 1. Map of Roman Bithynia.

epigraphic material in search of them, we find that almost all those attested as landowners bore Roman names, besides a few Greek names.

Again, we start with the rich epigraphic harvest from Nikaia. In order not to tax your patience with an endless enumeration of inscriptions, personal names, dates, findspots etc., I offer you only the essential data. Inscriptions inform us about nine estate owners and their administrators who are usually called *oikonomoi*.<sup>11</sup> Except for two, all the owners bear the *tria nomina* (or, in the case of women, two names); the two exceptions are an Euangelos and a woman with the name Antipatris.<sup>12</sup> Not one of the administrators has a Thracian name. Most of their names are Greek, and at least one *oikonomos* claims Roman citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

Nikomedeia has fewer inscriptions to offer or, to be more precise, just two, and their relevance is not entirely clear.<sup>14</sup> One of them mentions a *patron*, who could be the owner of an estate, with the name Publius Vedius Cornelianus Strato.<sup>15</sup> The second is the grave inscription of a Gaios, *oikonomos* of Tryphon.<sup>16</sup> Thus, no Thracian names; instead we have a man with a Greek name and a Roman citizen as landowners.<sup>17</sup>

In Prusa only two landowners are attested, one with the name of Timotheos, the other a Roman citizen, Tiberius Claudius Polio Phaedrus.<sup>18</sup> The city of Kios, or Prusias ad mare, is rather disappointing for our purpose.<sup>19</sup> We know of a village which must have been named after an ancient owner of the

land to which the village belonged: the δῆμος τῶν Χαρμοιδεανῶν, that is the village on the land of a certain Charmides, thus a man with a Greek name.<sup>20</sup> Otherwise, there is an *oikonomos* Claudius Caricus, from whose name we can infer that he was a Greek freedman of a Roman landowner with the *nomen* Claudius.<sup>21</sup> Then we have a freedman of a Catilius, who must have been the owner of an estate.<sup>22</sup> That is all, but it suffices to show that at Kios, too, most land was in the hand of Romans.

The fact that all the landowners of the imperial period known to us had Greek or Roman names does not, of course, from the outset exclude that the estates still belonged to the same old Bithynian families. One could imagine, for example, that the descendants of the Bithynian landowners with Thracian names of the Hellenistic period took Greek or Roman names or even received Roman citizenship shortly before or during the imperial period. However, what this would presuppose is that all members of the Bithynian élite without exception had exchanged their indigenous names for Greek or Roman names, something that seems highly improbable. It is therefore evident that there must have been a radical change in the ownership of the fertile and economically attractive land between the third century BC and the time of Augustus.

However, when did that occur and why did the changes described happen? I suggest that the origins for this profound change are to be sought as early as the time of the war against Antiochos III and were most pronounced in the period from the last stages of the Bithynian monarchy to the time preceding the reign of Augustus.<sup>23</sup> In the first phase, that is in the early second century BC, Prusias I came under the influence of Rome when he was forced to aid the Romans against the Seleucids.<sup>24</sup> Next, it is known from Diodoros that before 104 BC many Bithynians had been enslaved by Romans, since the Bithynian state had become indebted.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the last Bithynian kings, Nikomedes III and IV, had great difficulties in maintaining their kingdom against their adversaries, foremost the Pontic king Mithradates VI. Nikomedes IV was eventually forced to ask the Romans for help, and as these did not offer assistance without an appropriate reward, he had, so to speak, to sell himself and his land to the Romans<sup>26</sup>. As a result, Bithynia became heavily indebted to the Romans. This certainly does not mean that the king alone was indebted, but that he had to turn to his noblemen for help. So, what the Romans took from him he tried to recover from the noblemen – if the Romans had not already done just this before him. After the end of the kingdom, the situation changed from bad to worse: even more *negotiatores* came in; on top of that, the *publicani* arrived, and together they plundered what was left.<sup>27</sup> When people thought it could not really get worse, civil war broke out in Rome, and the East suffered again.<sup>28</sup>

By the time Augustus finally overcame his enemies and brought peace to the Roman world, most, if not all, of the Bithynian land that had been in the hands of indigenous noblemen, had fallen into the possession of Romans who, then, continued to enlarge their land-holdings.<sup>29</sup> A good example of a family

which eventually acquired large and widespread land-holdings in Bithynia allows me to come back, so to speak, to my roots. In my very first article (Corsten 1985), I dealt with a family with the *nomen* Catilius. They bought or received land in Apameia, a city which was refounded as a Roman colony, and during the first century AD accumulated more and more estates to the extent that we find them eventually also in the region of Nikaia.<sup>30</sup>

As a consequence of these developments during the last phase of the kingdom and the early imperial period, the epigraphic record no longer attests people with Thracian personal names, i. e. Bithynians, as owners of large estates, but we find Romans in their place (and some men with Greek names). The formerly wealthy Bithynian land-owning élite must have joined the middle- and lower-class Thraco-Bithynian population, which is visible in the inscriptions of the Roman imperial period. Only Diliporis from near Nikaia seems to stand out as a fossil of a time gone by.

*Appendix: Inscriptions mentioning owners and/or administrators of estates*

1) Nikaia (*Die Inschriften von Nikaia* = IK 9-10)

- 196: Philon, *oikonomos* of Claudia Gallita
- 205: Cl. Thallos, *oikonomos* of C. Claudius Calpurnianus
- 1062: Graptos, *oikonomos* of Annia Astilla
- 1201: Doryphoros, *oikonomos* of Cl. Eias
- 1203: P. Anteros, *pragmateutes* of P. Ta[-] Achaicus
- 1336: Quirinus, *oikonomos* of Euangelos
- 1413: Euangelos, *oikonomos* of Antipatris
- 1466: Eupraxia, *oikonomissa* of C. Catillius Claudianus Thraso
- EA 3, 1984, 105/6: Archelas, *oikonomos* of M. Scribonius Capitolinus

2) Nikomedeia (*TAM* IV.1)

- 70: Publius Veditus Cornelianus Strato (*patron*)
- 276: Gaius, *oikonomos* of Tryphon

3) Prusa (*Die Inschriften von Prusa ad Olympon* = IK 39-40)

- 68: Anthousa, *oikonomissa* of Timotheos
- 165: Hesperos, son of Hesperos, *oikonomos* of Tiberius Claudius Polio Phaedrus

4) Kios (*Die Inschriften von Kios* = IK 29)

- 26 and 27: δῆμος τῶν Χαρμιδεανῶν
- 91: C. Caricus, *oikonomos* of a Claudius
- 105: L. Catillius Philom[-], ἀπελεύθερος of a Catil(l)ius

## Notes

- 1 E. g. Herodotos 7.75; Thukydides 4.75.2; Xenophon, *Hellenika* 1.3.2; 3.2.2; *Anabasis* 6.4.2; Strabon 12.3.4; Arrian, *Anabasis* 1.29.5. – Cf. Detschew 1957, VI; Danov 1976, 6; 97. Cf. also F.K. Dörner, “Bithynia”, *DkP* 1.909; Mitchell 1993, I 175; Cohen 1995, 60; K. Strobel, “Bithynia”, *DnP* 2.698.
- 2 I have dealt with this question in a paper given at the LGPN colloquium “Old and New Worlds in Greek Onomastics” in Oxford in March 2003, which will be published in its proceedings (forthcoming).
- 3 *IK* 9/10.81: Diliporis (line 8), Rhaikosos (line 14 – if Thracian), Sallous (line 18), and Ziailas (line 19).
- 4 The rich family’s tomb monument is *IK* 9/10.1232 from Akçakaya/Geyve (2nd-3rd century AD): Diliporis; the others are: *IK* 9/10.1289 from Yukarı Kınık/Göynük (imperial period): Perobres; 1308 from Kayabaşı/Göynük (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Perobres, Ziailas; 1341 from Gözaçanlar/Gölpazarı (imperial period?): Biobris or Biobres; 1375 from Tekeçiler/Gölpazarı (1st-2nd century AD): Lala (if this is a Thracian name); 1389 from Dereli/Gölpazarı (3rd-4th century AD): Lala; 1416 from Nasuhlar/Gölpazarı (2nd century AD): Dili[-]; 1434 from Hüyük-Köy/Osmaneli (1st-2nd century AD): Skopes; 1592 from Necmiye/Bilecik (2nd century AD): Lala.
- 5 TAM IV.1, 8, perhaps from Nikomedeia (imperial period?): Moukaporis; 16 from Ihsaniye (122-27 AD): Diliporis; 17 from Ihsaniye (128-131 AD): Dil(l)iporis; 60 from Ishakçılar (98/99 AD): Mokazis; 62 from Akpınar (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Moukazos/os; 69 from Akpınar (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Mokazis; 84 from Sevindikli (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Zielas (?); 140 from Nikomedeia (imperial period?): Dada (if Thracian); 144 from Nikomedeia (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Moukazis; 182 from Sapanca (imperial period?): Doidalsos/os; 218 from Kıyırlı (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Moukazis (?); 256 from Cumaköy (imperial period): Moukaporis; 363 from Karamatlı (uncertain date, perhaps imperial period): Moukaporis; Peschlow-Peschlow-Bindokat-Wörrle 2002, 440-441 no. 111 from north-western Bithynia (2nd century AD): Mokazis.
- 6 *IK* 39.56 (perhaps still late hellenistic); 73; 150.
- 7 *IK* 29.98 (Bioeris); p. 183 T 29 (honorary decree from Aptera on Crete for Dintiporis). It is not certain, whether the latter text mentions a citizen of Prusias ad mare (Kios) or Prusias ad Hypium; cf. *IK* 27 p. 204-205 T 9.
- 8 *IK* 29.72 (Diliporis); 111 (Mokazeis).
- 9 *IK* 9/10.1232.
- 10 *IK* 27.17 line 14 (with commentary); cf. Dion Chrys., *Or.* 45.13. Mitchell 1993 I 177-178; Fernoux 2004, 136-137; 341. – For the difference between citizens and country dwellers in Asia Minor cf. Schuler 1998, 195-196.
- 11 See appendix under “1) Nikaia”. I consider here and give in the appendix only those cases which are certain enough to base my argument upon. However, there are more inscriptions (here quoted after *IK* 9-10) that do or might testify to landholding in the territory of Nikaia. All (including those in my appendix) are listed in Fernoux 2004, 239-241. They fall into three groups, each of them with their own difficulties of interpretation. 1) There are several which do not mention the owners of the (possible) estates or where the man mentioned is only *perhaps* the owner: 192 (Italos, *oikonomos*, perhaps of Chrestos); in 1057, 1118, and 1292, no landlord is mentioned. 2) There are others where a *patron* is named of

- whom we cannot know whether he was the owner of an estate: 1128 and 1131. 3) There are those where the people mentioned might just be the owners of (small) farms: 1380, 1411, 1511. Fernoux 2004, 238 note 18 excludes *IK* 9/10.196 since no provenance is given; it seems, however, sufficiently certain that the tombstone originates from the environs of Nikaia.
- 12 *IK* 9/10.1336; 1413.
- 13 *IK* 9/10.205 (Cl. Thallos). The administrator (*pragmateutes*) in *IK* 9/10.1203 is not a Roman citizen, since he is called P. Anteros and thus lacks a Roman *nomen gentile*.
- 14 See appendix under "2) Nikomedeia".
- 15 TAM IV.1, 70.
- 16 TAM IV.1, 276.
- 17 Fernoux 2004, 241 mentions two further inscriptions which he considers uncertain in this respect: 1) TAM IV.1, 57: however, the stone does not come from Nikomedeia, but from Nikaia, and has since been republished with improved reading in *EA* 3, 1984, 105-106 (this is the last inscription mentioned in my appendix under "Nikaia"). 2) TAM IV.1, 150: the inscription is heavily damaged, and only the possible restoration of the word οἰκονόμος would point to a context of landholding.
- 18 See appendix under "3) Prusa". Fernoux 2004, 241 includes also *IK* 39.98, but since the two freedmen (one of them a *πραγματευτής*), for whom the tombstone was erected in their hometown of Prusa, died in Syria, they were rather employees of a merchant.
- 19 See appendix under "4) Kios".
- 20 *IK* 29.26; 29.27; cf. Fernoux 2004, 136; 246. The name of the village has been explained by Robert 1937, 242-243; cf. Flam-Zuckerman 1972; *IK* 29 pp. 10-11; Mitchell 1993, I 161. The original owner of the land, after whom the δῆμος was named, may be mentioned in an inscription from a village in Bithynia which was until recently believed to belong to the territory of Klaudiopolis. The text has therefore been included in the corpus of this city (*IK* 31.117). However, following a suggestion by S. Şahin, C. Marek has studied the area in question (the ancient Modrene) and concluded that it should have belonged to Nikaia (he has also rediscovered the inscription *IK* 31.117 and (re-)published it as new in Marek 1997, 84 [*SEG* XLVII, 1481]). The inscription is the epitaph of a councillor of Nikaia with the name Χαρμιδης Χαρμιδου. The supposed fact that this Nikaian councillor owned land in the territory of neighbouring Kios does not constitute an obstacle, since no law restricted the possession of land to one's own home-town. That the δῆμος τῶν Χαρμιδεανῶν in fact lay within the territory of Kios (and not that of Nikaia), is borne out by the epitaph *IK* 29.100, found in the modern village of Yeniköy near the north-western corner of the Lake of Iznik (Nikaia). A clause at its end states that the fine for any violation of the tomb is to be paid to the city of Kios. Çeltikçi, where the inscriptions mentioning the δῆμος τῶν Χαρμιδεανῶν were found, is situated between Kios and Yeniköy and must therefore also have belonged to the former; cf. *IK* 10.1 p. 4 and *IK* 29 p. 9.
- 21 *IK* 29.91.
- 22 *IK* 29.105.
- 23 For this period cf. e.g. the overviews of Vitucci 1953, 53-119; Harris 1980, 862-874; Fernoux 2004, 113-123; 167-185.
- 24 Polybios 21.11; Livy 37.25.

- 25 Diodoros 36.3.1. Cf. Magie 1950, 318; Badian 1972, 87; Mitchell 1993, I 30; Debord 1998, 147.
- 26 Justin 38; Appian, *Mithr.* 11. Cf. Magie 1950, 319.
- 27 Mitchell 1993, I 160; Debord 1998, 150. According to Cicero, *De lege agraria* 2.40, Bithynia was in the hands of the Roman people: ... *regnum Bithynia, quod certe publicum est populi Romani factum* ... – As to the *publicani*, there is a controversy as to whether they arrived only at this time or whether they had already exercised their power in Bithynia during the last phase of the kingdom: Fernoux 2004, 115 holds the first view, arguing against Vitucci 1953, 101 and Badian 1972, 87, who favour the second. Thanks for several suggestions are due Amelia Dowler, Oxford.
- 28 Cassius Dio 42.49, 1. Cf. Fernoux 2004, 184-185.
- 29 Cf. Fernoux 2004, 185.
- 30 Corsten 1985; cf. Fernoux 2004, 247; Mitchell 1993, I 160.