9. Conclusions:
Urban Life and Local Politics

The combination of two important literary sources: the *Orations* of Dion and the *Letters* of Pliny, provide a unique in-depth view of local politics in Prusa. They also reveal how little we know about local politics and politicians in general. If we had to reconstruct the biography of Dion from an inscription, even a fairly detailed one like that in honour of Flavius Severianus Asklepiodotos (fig. 31) or M. Domitius Paulianus Falco (fig. 21), we would have known nothing about the informal and personal aspects of his political life – his conflicts with the Prusan gentry, the negative rumours circulated by his opponents, the difficulty of enforcing *pollicitationes*, Dion's ill-starred alliance with the governor, or his personal feud with Flavius Archippos. For the many other Bithynian grandees and politicians whose formal achievements are all that is known to us, the effects are visible at the formal level, but not their underlying causes.

What we can do is to combine the insights we have gained from a detailed study of Dion's career with what we know of other local politicians to produce some generalizations and informed guesses about the informal aspect of Prusan politics. We may also draw on some general social and historical theories and hold them up against our observations in Roman Bithynia. It may also be useful to make some diachronic comparisons, for in some respects ancient small-town politics were not that different from later periods: in Prusa, a reader of Hardy or Leacock will find much to remind her of Casterbridge or Mariposa. This chapter will attempt to identify some possible underlying factors and motives of Bithynian local politics.

Honour

One of the most influential theories of social behaviour in premodern societies is the "honour-shame" model elaborated in the early postwar period by scholars who argued that in an agonistic face-to-face environment, social control is maintained by the constant threat of losing "face" or "honour"; thus the punishment for transgressing social norms is public and external ("shame") rather than private and internal ("guilt"). As an ideal type, "shame society" was taken to represent an earlier evolutionary stage different from, or in the more extreme view, antithetical to, western "guilt-society".[1] Some would place the transition from "shame" to "guilt" culture as early as late Archaic

Greece, others claimed to find remnants of the shame-culture in the twentieth century – in the Mediterranean world, the Middle East, in Japan.

A key concept in this analysis is *philotimia*, literally "love of honour", which is taken to be a characteristic of rural "Mediterranean" societies. J.G. Peristiany describes it thus, using the dichotomy between *honour* and *honesty* to illustrate his point:

> The punctiliousness of honour must be referred to the code of an exclusive and agonistic microsociety; that of honesty to an inclusive, egalitarian macrosociety. Duty, in the first instance, is to those with whom one shares honour. In the second, the un-Greek macrosociety, one's duty is to all fellow citizens, or even further, to fellow humans.[2]

The chief attraction of the honour-shame model is its ability to explain a number of striking features of modern Mediterranean rural society; as a closer reading of the above quotation reveals, however, this approach leads into the trap of orientalism, i.e. viewing the world through a dichotomistic prism dividing "western" and "modern" from "non-western", where "non-western" social organization is implicitly assumed to be primitive, pre-rational, even pre-ethical. (Honesty is "un-Greek"; presumably, dishonesty is "Greek"?). A further problem is that anthropological studies of contemporary honour-shame cultures generally focus on *rural* communities; indeed, many honour-shame theorists stress the difference in outlook between village and city.[3] That a similar cultural divide existed in the ancient world is clearly brought out by Pausanias (above, p. 45), Basil of Kaisareia (p. 46-47) and Dion of Prusa (p. 136-137).

Nonetheless, Peristiany's distinction between the importance of "honour" and "honesty" is valid for ancient Prusa: it is at the core of the conflict between Dion and Archippos over Dion's building accounts (above, p. 133-135). Dion could easily enough have proven his *honesty* by submitting his books for inspection as requested, but in the specific situation, it was more important for him to demonstrate his *honour* by refusing to bow to the request of Archippos.

Giving and receiving

Another approach stresses the reciprocal relationship between the governing class and the governed, the principle of *do ut des*, something given and something received in return. A classic example of this money-for-power transaction is the liturgy of the classic *polis*. Its counterpart in the more stratified society of Rome is clientilistic interaction between wealthy patrons and their followers. Roman patron-client relationships have been described in numerous studies, e.g. Gelzer (1912) and Scullard (1951). The model has also

been applied by anthropologists to some contemporary societies, such as modern Sicily.

Money plays an important role in patronage, and it was one of the characteristics of the fully developed Republican clientage system that the large cash outlays required to establish a power base at the commencement of a political career were often recouped – by fair means or foul – in its later stages.

Though in many respects a provincial city is a small-scale version of the *urbs*, the patron-client model as we know it in Rome does not in every respect offer a convincing interpretation of Bithynian local politics. If political success depended on generosity and the distribution of largesse in return for political support, one would expect offices with a potential for liturgistic expenditure – such as agonothete or gymnasiarch – to figure prominently in the political *cursus*. Yet the office of agoranome is the typical entry-level magistracy of a municipal career. There is no denying that some *agoranomoi* won popular support on a large scale by using their personal fortunes to provide grain or other staples in times of shortage; but with terms of office as short as four months, it was not every agoranome that could demonstrate euergetism by saving his city from a food shortage (and the fact that such euergetism is singled out for mention in the inscriptions indicates that it lay beyond what was normally expected of an agoranome). Other *agoranomoi* in the Greek world financed building or renovation projects in the market place but again, not every office-holder would find a place to build or embellish a public market building.

On this question, the honour-shame approach, with its emphasis on *philotimia*, offers a more convincing interpretation: The *agoranomos* was a public figure, present in the town centre on every market day. His tasks included maintaining order, overseeing prices and settling disputes; these gave him a chance to demonstrate such virtues as leadership, helpfulness, strictness, impartiality, and the ability to deal with people; in short, to demonstrate that he possessed the qualities required of a coming political leader, a future archon. Pythias, the ambitious agoranome of Hypata (p. 76 above), is keen to demonstrate that he is at once helpful (to his friend), severe (to unscrupulous traders), patriotic (concerned for the reputation of his city) and capable of decisive action (inflicting punishment on Lucius' fish) – an "honourable" man in every respect. For good measure, his harangue of the fishmonger gives the bystanders a glimpse of his potential as public speaker.

Two other arguments against a too facile application of the classical patron-client model are first, the near absence of clientilistic vocabulary from the works of Dion – even in his very negative picture of life in the Euboian city; second, that unlike conditions in Rome or at the imperial level, small-town politics offered few chances of recouping one's initial investment. It was notoriously easy for an imperial governor or army commander to enrich himself in the provinces, but the career of a Bithynian grandee would rarely take him outside the borders of his province and there would thus be no third party at whose expense he could regain what he had spent on his voters.

A caste society?

Another approach to the relation between governing and governed citizens is offered by Paul Veyne, who sees a more one-sided relationship between patrons/benefactors and their clients/cities. As a declared non-Marxist, Veyne rejects the notion that liturgists and *euergetai* are driven by the prospect of later gain; their actions are governed by an aristocratic ethos combining the obligation to be generous with the right to govern. Where the patron-client model assumes a reciprocal relationship, Veyne's model sees no overt trade-off between individuals, yet tacitly assumes that the euergetic class receives something, enjoys some privileges in return for its generosity; if not, resources for future gift-giving would soon be exhausted. Likewise, the privileged group must be closed to outsiders or social climbers, if its privileged character is to be maintained. In Veyne's interpretation, the *société à ordres* was essentially a caste society, and membership of the elite was hereditary and closed. From time to time, a succesful *parvenu* might obtain access to the charmed circle through the patronage of established elite members or princely favour, but such chances – to use the metaphor of Veyne – were as unpredictable, and as rare, as a winning lottery ticket.[4]

While this may hold true for other periods, it does not give a true picture of early Imperial Rome, where a significant number of succesful social climbers are recorded. While some owed their rapid advancement to "princely favour" (Agrippa, Seianus, Flavius Archippos, Dion of Prusa) or a lucky chance – Veyne's "lottery ticket" – there were others who worked their way upwards by stages. From an unpromising start as a deserter from Pompey's army, T. Flavius Petro established himself as a debt collector; his son Flavius Sabinus became a *publicanus* in Asia and an equestrian, while his grandson – albeit with some difficulty – won an aedileship and a place in the Senate. This family history happens to be known to us because the grandson in question eventually became the emperor Vespasian, but many similar cases will have gone unrecorded.[5]

Nor should one forget that the rather optimistic Veynean view of a class of benefactors motivated by aristocratic ideals is based entirely on sources produced by this same class for the purpose of self-representation. A useful corrective, not discussed by Veyne, is provided by the accusations of the aggressive "first" speaker in the Euboian assembly that the hunter and his family neither pay taxes nor perform liturgies, behaving *as though they were benefactors of the city*.[6] It seems that the euergetic class of our Euboian city *does* get something in return for its euergetism. Whatever the purpose of the remark – introduced into the narrative to characterize the speaker or prepare the ground for the *coup de théatre* that is to follow – it presupposes that it was normal for *euergetai* to enjoy fiscal privileges, and that this is known to Dion's listeners.

A compartmentalized agôn

Friedemann Quass' concept of a *Honoratorenschicht* owes much to Veyne[7] in that the Hellenistic roots of the urban elites are taken to be aristocratic and hereditary, but basing himself on a much wider range of sources, Quass demonstrates a higher degree of social mobility in the Hellenistic and especially the Roman period than envisaged by Veyne. Fernoux (2004) takes the analysis one step further, with a greater sensitivity to divisions *within* the urban upper classes.[8]

These divisions are crucial to understanding the provincial career patterns studied in chapter 6. Bithynian urban society was stratified into social compartments, yet it was *not* a caste society. It was possible for a social climber to move from the lower end of his compartment to the higher; from here, the next generation could attempt to cross the line of social demarcation and start *their* ascent through a new compartment. The stepping-stone was often an advantageous marriage: Flavius Sabinus the equestrian *publicanus* married the sister of a senator; Pasikrates the peregrine money-lender of Prusa married the daughter of a Roman citizen. The social anabasis of the Flavii of Reate is neatly paralleled, at a slightly lower level, by the Augiani of Prusias ad Hypium: the father-in-law of Augianus was a phylarch, his son-in-law became an urban councillor and an archon; in the third generation, Augianus junior entered the equestrian order.[9]

Given this compartmentalisation of local careers and ambitions, the social and political *agôn* could be played out without endangering the stability and cohesion of the community. The division into levels was more detailed and more subtle than the formal structure imposed by the *census*; it was based on unwritten social codes and thus in the last analysis unenforceable. Ambitious pattern-breakers like Dion of Prusa might cross invisible boundaries, but were sure to feel the force of the establishment's condemnation.

Fernoux sees the subdivision ("*hiérarchisation*") of the *notables* as the result of three successive patterns of government imposed first by the Bithynian kings, then by the Republic (74-27 BC) and finally by the Empire.[10] While the overall priorities implicit in the *Lex Pompeia* obviously reflected the timocratic preferences of the late Republic in general and the *optimates* in particular,[11] it is not clear how the subtle internal divisions *within* the class of "notables" serve the interests of one external régime or the other. As these norms furthermore appear to be self-imposed rather than based on laws enacted by their royal or Roman masters, unwritten norms are more likely to be an expression of the notables' own desire to maintain a social status quo and limit the scope for political and financial manoeuvres, to avoid attracting the unfavourable attention of the ruling power if the city's finances or its political discourse got out of hand. The negative consequences of both eventualities are well attested in the case of Prusa.[12]

Even at the inter-urban level, the *agôn* was held in check. To Dion, to

Herodian and many modern scholars, the incessant rivalry between neigh-
bouring cities is a typically Greek weakness. In our region, the classic ex-
ample is the *agôn* of Nikaia and Nikomedia, who for centuries struggled over
the title of "first city", over the imperial cult and after the advent of Chris-
tianity, over the borders of their dioceses. In his thirty-eighth oration, Dion
castigates his fellow-Greeks for their irrational squabbling over empty titles
and meaningless symbols.[13] One can only agree with Dion. Yet the positive
side of the picture is that titles and symbols were *all* that was fought over, a
clear contrast with the mutually destructive inter-city conflicts of an earlier
age described for us in Xenophon's *Hellenika*. As a re-reading of Herodian's
account of the events of 196 reveals, the cities of Roman Bithynia did not
jeopardize the future of their communities or the lives of their citizens for
the sake of urban rivalry; the Nikaians simply had no choice but to remain
with Pescennius Niger, while Nikomedia very sensibly shifted its allegiance
to the victor of Kyzikos.

Status

Status, the individual's place within the social hierarchy, is defined by the
interplay of a number of factors, among which "honour" or "face" is among
the most important. A claim to status is established, *inter alia*, by "correct" or
"virtuous" behaviour (e.g., generosity, magnanimity, equanimity); by educa-
tion and *paideia* (speaking well, knowing one's classics); by family and mar-
riage connections (respectable descent, successful sons) and by relations of
friendship and clientage with powerful persons (the governor, the emperor).
On the other hand, two factors that play an important role in today's social
agôn are conspicuously absent.

One is *wealth*. While there is no doubt that being wealthy was socially
preferable to being poor, wealth as such is rarely singled out for comment
by our sources, apart from the indirect statement that so-and-so belonged to
the bouleutic, the equestrian or the senatorial order. Furthermore, it is never
quantified: a person does not boast that he owns a certain amount of prop-
erty,[14] but that he has *given* this or that amount.

Another is *acquaintance with famous persons.* In the post-renaissance world,
intimacy with actors, artists, intellectuals and other celebrities has been a mark
of status, sought after by the wealthy and powerful. In the Roman world,
the social standing of performers was low and the friendship of an actor or
gladiator was not sought for its status value. Association with intellectuals
was a different matter. Numerous Roman aristocrats or emperors posed as
friends or – more often – patrons of writers or philosophers, but perhaps the
value of the relationship was primarily as evidence of their *paideia* or their
generosity.[15]

In the opposite direction, familiarity with the emperor was an important
status indicator and a tool in the hands of ambitious career-builders. The

importance of "closeness to the monarch" – *Königsnähe* – is a familiar phenomenon in the Carolingian world,[16] in absolutist Europe as well as in some not-so-absolute monarchies, such as England. Familiarity with the ruling house might bring wealth and social advancement (as it did for Dion, for Dion's grandfather and for Flavius Archippos, to take just three examples). In a conflict situation, having – or claiming – the friendship of the emperor could be a decisive factor, as we saw in the case of Pliny and the freedman procurator Maximus. Intimacy or acquaintance with the ruler could be used to bolster one's position in the local community (as in the case of Dion); even an ephemeral acquaintance with an emperor passing through a village gave a special status to the person who was chosen to *papapompein* the imperial visitor.

The koinon

The role of the *koinon* in this connection is not clear from our sources, but it may have been more significant than scholars have tended to assume. Deininger (1965) and others have focused on the political functions of the *koina,* but its social aspects deserve to be more thoroughly explored.

For instance, from the evidence of Bithynian careers, it would appear that the *koinon* provided an alternative avenue allowing members of the equestrian order to bypass the traditional urban liturgies and move directly into politics at the regional level.

According to the dominant scholarly tradition (Brunt 1961, Deininger 1965, Ameling in *IK* 27) province, *koinon* and imperial cult all formed part of one system of interaction between province and emperor. The provincial governor ruled on behalf of the emperor; his actions were checked by the threat of *repetundae* proceedings, which were instituted by the *koinon*, and the leader(s) of the *koinon* also served as priests of the imperial cult.

This study has shown that in Bithynia, there is precious little evidence for a direct link between the *koinon* and *repetundae* proceedings, while Friesen (1999a-b) has demonstrated that "koinarch" and *archiereus* are not synonymous but indicate two different persons; indeed, different functions. While Bithyniarchs typically have extensive administrative and political experience (either from a long urban *cursus* including the three A's or from serving as imperial *logistês* of a city) it is rare for an *archiereus* to come to the job with an extensive *cursus* behind him.

Instead of a one-track interaction between province and emperor, we should perhaps see governor, *koinon*, koinarchate and imperial cult as parallel institutions only loosely connected and coordinated – for instance, governor's provinces and *koina* are not geographically contiguous. The province and the governor were imperial instruments of top-down administration. *Koina* and their associated cult served different purposes, creating and maintaining reciprocal goodwill between the provincial élite and the emperor, and

their geographical organisation reflects the traditional spatial structure of elite power – in Asia, the four leading cities; in Bithynia et Pontus, the pre-Roman kingdoms – rather than the structure of provincial administration. The functions of the *archiereus* were religious and ceremonial in nature, but the position of Bithyniarch in addition required both administrative experience and a certain social standing. The task of the *archiereus* was to maintain a symbolic link between the provincial populace and the emperor in his function as head of state and *pater patriae*; we may imagine that the Bithyniarch served to maintain a direct liaison between the provincial equestrian elite and the emperor in his function as supreme administrator, bypassing the provincial governor. As late as the reign of Alexander Severus, the Bithynian *koinon* corresponded directly with the emperor about the repressive practices of the local governor.[17]

Mutual recognition

The Hegelian concept of "recognition" has recently been taken up by social philosophers who see it as a key to the interpretation of relations at the interpersonal level (Axel Honneth) as well as the political level (Francis Fukuyama). Honneth views the social *agôn* as a "struggle for recognition" (*Kampf um Anerkennung*); the pursuit of immaterial ("honour") as well as material (wealth) status markers is a symptom of this desire to be "recognized" – that is, recognized by *another person*. While wealth, *paideia* and correct behaviour can exist in a social vacuum, recognition cannot; like clientage, it is a reciprocal relationship requiring two persons and to be valid, recognition must be offered freely and willingly by the "other" whom we ourselves would recognize.

Indeed, much of Dion's post-exilic career can be described as a *Kampf um Anerkennung*. In *Or.* 44, the recently returned Dion stressed that being a local politician is as important as being a philosopher, but the unenthusiastic response of the Prusan bouleutic class led to a hostile rejection on Dion's part, a reaction familiar to any observer of human psychology (and to any reader of Aesop). Posing as a friend of the *dêmos* was not a sufficient substitute, and his attempt to win the attention of the governor proved disastrous. In orations 49-50, Dion attempts to return to his original position – perhaps more tactically than heartfelt – and win the acceptance of the bouleutic class. Finally, in *Or.* 7, looking back with the clarity that comes of hindsight and reflection, Dion concludes that recognition within the family is more important than status within the city.

The reciprocal character of the *Kampf um Anerkennung* comes out equally clearly in the rivalry between Nikomedia and Nikaia. Both are prosperous towns, both enjoy status in the eyes of outsiders, yet that is not enough; their continuous emulation of each other in titles and coinage reveals that what is important is not status in the eyes of the world at large, but in the eyes of *each other*. "First" is an empty title, asks Dion, why is it so important to the Niko-

medians that others do not share it? The answer is that only by renouncing the title would the Nikaians recognize that Nikomedia was the "first" city.

The applicability of recognition theory to the study of ancient urban life has some interesting implications for our view of the ancient world in general. In so far as he focuses on the individual's desire for acceptance and status in the eyes of others, Honneth is not far from the honour-shame theorists. A decisive difference between recognition theory and honour-shame theory, however, is the place they claim for themselves in the evolutionary scheme: whereas Dodds and Peristiany interpreted the emphasis on "honour" as a remnant of a primitive stage of social evolution predating the "guilt-society", Honneth and Fukuyama see the "struggle for recognition" (*Kampf um Anerkennung*) as a characteristic of *modern* society. Perhaps ancient local politics were, after all, not that different from today's?

Politics and the polis

It is characteristic of many modern democracies that at their lower levels, the "political" and ideological aspects play a lesser role in the decision-making process, while pragmatic considerations and personal relations play a proportionately greater rôle. Parties that would not be able to form a coalition at the national level may form alliances in the city or county council; parties with a strong ideological commitment will seek pragmatic solutions to the problems encountered at the regional or municipal level. The perceived ability or popularity of a mayoral candidate may take precedence over class interest and ideological orientation. The limited competences and resources of local councils also sets limits to innovative or revolutionary policies.

How "political" were the urban politics of Prusa? Salmeri argues first, that class interests were a constant fact of political life in ancient cities, secondly, that class conflict took the form of clashes between the *boulê* (representing the interests of the propertied élite) and the *ekklêsia* (representing the have-nots), and that *stasis* and riot should be seen not as "gratuitous events but … rather as a virtual continuation and transformation of the ordinary political strife".[18]

While few would wish to question the first premise of Salmeri, his second point is open to debate. Certainly there were class interests in ancient urban society, which found expression both within the political system and sometimes transgressed its boundaries, erupting into antagonistic civil violence. But it does not follow that the two *institutions*, council and assembly, represent the two classes. Rather it would seem that as long as the conflict kept within the bounds of ordinary political life, the *boulê* and the *ekklêsia* both served as its venue, while the opposing interest were represented by factions (*hetaireiai*) within the group of councillors or citizens.[19]

The basic ideological divide in the ancient Greek world was between "oligarchs" and "democrats". In the classical period, when the *poleis* could

still pursue independent military and foreign policies, the dominance of one party or the other was often correlated with a preference for Sparta or Athens, and a shift of power at the urban level might lead to a reorientation of foreign policy or changes in the city's constitution, sometimes with disastrous results. By the Roman period, *poleis* could no longer wage war or enter military alliances, nor change their constitutions without the approval of the Roman governor, but the oligarchic-democratic divide remained, and forms the background to several of Dion's speeches. Thanks to the *census*, the *boulê* would be dominated by the larger property-owners and presumably be more sympathetic to oligarchic viewpoints than the *ekklêsia*.[20]

Salmeri points to the period of civil strife at Prusa in the early second century leading to the temporary ban on assembly meetings (above, p. 131) as an example of violent conflict between the two opposing class interests, represented by *boulê and ekklêsia*.[21] The governor's decision to suspend the *ekklêsia*, however, argues against the notion that these two bodies represented opposing sides in a class conflict. If the governor wished to be perceived as an impartial outsider reestablishing *homonoia* between the opposing parties, he would not impose sanctions against only one of them. A more convincing motive for the governor's decision is that the conflicts *within* the *ekklêsia* had reached a point where suspension was the only way to reimpose order. Similarly, in Dion's seventh oration, the fictional conflict is played out between the opposing parties within the *ekklêsia*.

This contains some of the most "political" urban speeches in Dion's preserved *oeuvre*, dealing as they do with the application of general principles to a specific situation; but they are of course fictional. The speeches that were actually held are less ideological in content, though Dion sometimes invokes the oligarchic-democratic dichotomy (posing variously as the champion of the *dêmos* or a member of the bouleutic oligarchy) he more often appeals to basic values such as moderation, stability and above all *homonoia*.

Nor did political events at the imperial level seem to have left a strong mark on Prusan life. In September 96, the emperor Domitian was murdered and replaced by the elderly senator Nerva; at Nerva's death in early 98, the purple passed to Trajan. Not everyone was pleased with Domitian's downfall, nor with Nerva's choice of Trajan as his successor, and the period was marked by plots and counterplots at Rome, bitter rivalries and the settling of old scores.[22] Surprisingly, these are not reflected in our picture of life in Prusa under Trajan's reign. The Prusan philosopher Flavius Archippos had been a protégé of Domitian, his colleague Dion was s self-professed friend of Nerva and Trajan; but there is no evidence that one belonged to a "Domitianic", the other to a "Trajanic" faction, nor that Archippos' Domitianic connection was held against him by Pliny, or used against him by Dion. In Prusa, as no doubt in hundreds of other small towns across the Roman empire (and in countless small towns of today), local politics were made by local politicians whose actions and decisions were more often dictated by personal and

parochial pride, social ambition and bonds of loyalty and marriage than by abstract political ideas.

Notes

1   Dodds 1951, 28-30; Peristiany 1966; for a more moderate interpretation, Pitt-Rivers 1966.
2   Peristiany 1966, 189-190.
3   Cf. Peristiany's description of an expatriate's return to his Cypriot village: 1966, 178.
4   Veyne 1973, 314.
5   Suetonius, *Vesp*. 1-2.
6   *Or*. 7.28.
7   Quass 1993, 14-15.
8   Fernoux 2004, 19.
9   *IK* 27.6; Fernoux 2004, 434; cf. above, p. 103.
10   Fernoux 2004, 19.
11   Fernoux 2004, 129-146.
12   Pliny, *Ep*. 10.17a; Dion, *Or*. 48.1.
13   Dion, *Or*. 38.38.
14   When Dion gives us the size of his father's nominal fortune (*Or*. 46.5) he is not boasting, but deprecating its size.
15   For a discussion of this unequal relationship, see Konstan 1997, 137-145.
16   McKitterick 2001, 34-35.
17   *Dig*. 49.1.25.
18   Salmeri 2000, 74.
19   Dion, *Or*. 45.7-10.
20   Cf. *Or*. 51.
21   Salmeri 2000, 73-75.
22   Eck 2002, 223-225.