

On the Political Sociology of the Imperial Greek City

Arjan Zuiderhoek

But above all things, we must remind them that being a politician consists not only in holding office, being ambassador, vociferating in the assembly and ranting round the speakers' platform proposing laws and motions. Most people think all that is part of being a politician, just as they think of course that those are philosophers who sit in a chair and converse and prepare their lectures over their books.

THUS WROTE PLUTARCH in his essay *Whether an old man should engage in public affairs*.¹ It seems an offhand remark, but all the more interesting for that. For here we have a comment on contemporary Greek civic politics, written probably sometime in the first two decades of the second century, in which the activities of the Greek politicians of the day are described in terms (“vociferating in the assembly,” “ranting around the speaker’s platform”) at least to some extent reminiscent of the political world of democratic Athens centuries earlier. It is a description that does not quite seem to fit the common scholarly depiction of the later Hellenistic and Roman Greek cities as strongly oligarchic societies, dominated socially and politically by small coterie of (often interrelated) elite families whose governing institution of choice was the *boule*, the city council.² This, then, prompts the question: which of these two contrasting images is nearer the truth? Should we dismiss Plutarch’s remarks as merely another manifestation of

¹ *Mor.* 796C–D (transl. Fowler, modified).

² See most recently M. W. Gleason, “Greek Cities under Roman Rule,” in D. S. Potter (ed.), *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Oxford 2006) 228–249, at 234. For a brief overview of the development of scholarly opinion on Greek politics under the Principate during the past century, see below.

the anachronistic classicising so common among Greek authors under the Principate, in a text, moreover, that is didactic and prescriptive rather than descriptive?

I argue in this paper that the evidence for Greek civic politics in the Roman Empire presents a complex and at times contradictory picture, with the sources pointing to a strong element of oligarchy as well as to a continuing tradition of popular politics, against a background of a growing social and political hierarchisation. Given this state of things, simply to engage in a labelling exercise and describe these political communities either as “oligarchic” (still the majority position among scholars, see below) or “democratic” is to misrepresent the situation. To develop a deeper understanding of imperial Greek civic politics, as far as the fragmentary evidence allows, we should rather focus on relations *between* the various socio-political groupings within the *poleis*, and on the political dynamics created by their ongoing interaction. I shall first discuss the evidence for the various ostensibly contradictory tendencies within Greek civic politics under the Empire, and then try to sketch the outlines of a model that might remove the element of contradiction and offer a coherent interpretative framework.

I.

The sources for Greek civic politics under the Principate are both fragmentary and scattered *and* extremely numerous, comprising literary texts (e.g. Dio Chrysostom’s orations, Plutarch’s moralistic essays) as well as thousands of inscriptions. It is nonetheless possible to distil from them several broad socio-political tendencies current in the imperial *poleis*, and these are presented as three groups of observations below. In a short essay it is possible to discuss only a fraction of the material available, but I would argue that the instances selected are indeed representative of wider trends in imperial *polis* society.

1. We begin with the commonplace observation that decrees of the Greek cities in the Roman east continue to use the formula “the council (*boule*) and people (*demos*) decide/honour” well into the third century. Emperors and governors habitually addressed their letters to eastern cities to “the council, magistrates, and people,” thus formally but explicitly acknowledging the popular element in Greek civic politics. Pliny the Younger,

as governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan about a decision taken by the council and the people of Amisus (*bule et ecclesia consentiente*), his offhand manner clearly implying that for him there was nothing remarkable about the people's involvement in day-to-day policy making in the Bithynian cities (*Ep.* 10.110). What is more, on quite a number of recorded occasions in cities throughout the Roman east, it is the people (*demos*) on their own who are stated to have made a decision, without any apparent involvement of the council.³

Other evidence confirms that the *demos*, that is, the popular assembly (*ekklesia*), could and indeed *did* assume an active political role in the Greek cities during the imperial period. An inscription from Cyzicus, for instance, dating to A.D. 37, shows the assembly clearly involved in the decision-making process, by itself commissioning the *archontes* to draft and propose a decree, which it then discussed and passed at a later meeting (*Syll.*³ 798 = *IGR* IV 145).⁴ At Smyrna, the *demos*, not the council, was responsible for the election of the city's treasurers (*tamiai*), as an inscription from the reign of Hadrian reveals (*I. Smyrna* 771). The decision-making capabilities of the popular assembly are also clearly recognised in two other categories of texts, namely epitaphs and the epigraphically preserved (extracts from) testaments of elite donors of foundations. These documents quite often contain a clause warning against possible misuse of the tomb or sarcophagus, or, in the case of foundations, of the funds or real estate donated, and they commonly stipulate a punishment, usually a fine, for anyone trying to do so. As these are legal texts, donors had to be quite detailed and comprehensive in their listing of possible perpetrators. One second-century text from Aphrodisias,⁵ detailing the gift of over 120,000 denarii to the city by a certain Attalos

³ E.g. *I.Prusa ad Olymp.* 1006–1011 (all first or second century); *I.Smyrna* 676 (A.D. 117–138?); *TAM* V.2 1264 (Hierocaesarea, A.D. 25?); *I.Selge* 31 (late I–early II), 32 (imperial); *I.Kourion* 87 (A.D. 113/4); *IGLSyrie* I 167 (Nicopolis, imperial).

⁴ See P. J. Rhodes and D. M. Lewis, *The Decrees of the Greek States* (Oxford 1997) 416, for discussion.

⁵ *MAMA* VIII 413b; transl. A. Chaniotis, "New Inscriptions from Aphrodisias (1995–2001)," *AJA* 108 (2004) 377–416, at 401.

Adrastos, is quite revealing:

[Neither a magistrate nor a secretary?] nor a private person will have the authority to transfer part of or the entire capital or the interest or to change the account or to use the money for a different purpose, either by organizing a separate vote or through a decree of the assembly (ψηφισμα), a letter, a decree or a written declaration, nor through violence of the mob, or in any other way ...

Chaniotis lists several other examples of such texts. They all date from the second century onwards and all clearly regard decrees voted by the popular assembly as a possible source of misuse of tombs, sarcophagi, or funds bequeathed, something which would make sense only if the assembly was indeed still to a certain (if unknown) extent a legislative body in its own right. That this was indeed the case is also suggested (though not proved conclusively) by another Aphrodisian text, an epitaph this time:⁶

No one else will have the authority [—] to place another person (in this sarcophagus) ... not even as a result of a decree of the assembly (ψηφισμα), an act of the council (ἄκτου βου<λ>ῆς), or an intercession of the governors.

The text clearly distinguishes three possible sources of misuse: decrees of the assembly, acts of the council, and intercessions by governors. Again, there would have been little point to listing assembly decrees separately from acts of the council if the assembly had become so completely dominated by the *boule* that the possibility of such independent assembly decrees was actually non-existent.

It was also in the assembly, not the *boule*, that members of the elite wishing to act as public benefactors first made their public promise and negotiated and defended the terms and conditions of their gifts. This is clear not only from the example of Dio Chrysostom, whose speeches to the assembly of his native Prusa, defending his proposal to donate a portico to the city, comprise some of the most insightful documents on post-classical Greek civic politics preserved from antiquity (*Or.* 40,

⁶ Chaniotis, *AJA* 108 (2004) 406–408, no. 26, for text, translation, and commentary.

45, 47), but also from the dramatic affirmation, in the epigraphic dossier concerning C. Vibius Salutaris' donation of a festival to the city of Ephesus in A.D. 104, that Salutaris made his public promise first by "coming forward into the assembly" (προσελθὼν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν).⁷ Similarly, at Thera in 149, it was in the "lawful public assembly" (ἔννομος ἐκκλησία) that Ti. Flavius Clitosthenes Claudianus made his formal public promise to finance a large building project (*Syll.*³ 852). In numerous instances, we find civic assemblies deeply involved in negotiating the details of benefactions and liturgies promised by elite individuals, and passing formal decrees to confirm the agreements reached.⁸ A clear example is in the dossier concerning the festival foundation of C. Iulius Demosthenes at Oenoanda in Lycia in 124/5:⁹

Concerning the festival's tax-free status and the agonothete's exemption from official duties it was decided that the most distinguished governor Flavius Aper should be petitioned and that ambassadors should be chosen in the assembly to approach him, and that a proposal concerning all the matters which had been decreed [viz. in relation to Demosthenes' festival] should be put to the assembly, so that it might be confirmed by it.

It might be objected that much of this evidence is concerned with just one sphere of civic activity, euergetism. How repre-

⁷ *I.Ephesos* 27A.22; G. M. Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesos* (London/New York 1991) 152. Throughout his study Rogers makes a persuasive case for deep involvement by the *demos* in the establishment and functioning of Salutaris' festival foundation. See also A. Zuiderhoek, "The Ambiguity of Munificence," *Historia* 56 (2007) 196–213.

⁸ E.g. *MAMA* VI 180 (Apamea); *IGR* III 408 (Pogla); *IG* XII.5 662 (Syros); *TAM* V.2 829 (Attaleia), all of which speak of ψηφίσματα, i.e. decrees passed by the popular assembly, in relation to the details of liturgies and benefactions. F. Quass, *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens* (Stuttgart 1993) 375–376, cites these texts as well as additional evidence, but does not explore the political implications.

⁹ M. Wörle, *Stadt und Fest im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Munich 1988) 4–17, lines 100–101 [*SEG* XXXVIII 1462.C]; transl. S. Mitchell, "Festivals, Games and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor," *JRS* 80 (1990) 183–193, at 186. See esp. G. M. Rogers, "Demosthenes of Oenoanda and Models of Euergetism," *JRS* 81 (1991) 91–100, at 95; also Zuiderhoek, *Historia* 56 (2007) 205–206.

sentative is such material of political life in a broader sense? It should be realised, however, that the organisation of benefactions usually meant that decisions had to be made which touched on many and widely different areas of civic life—for instance, public construction, festive and religious life, public finance, civic administration, relations with Roman governors and/or emperors, and so on. It would be strange if political and administrative processes that took place in the context of euergetism did not conform to the normal patterns of decision-making outside of that context. In other words, if, for example, the *demos* had a say in the organisation of a festival donated by a benefactor, then we might confidently expect them to have had a say in the organisation of festive life generally. Euergetism and the decision-making procedures associated with it (about which we are relatively well informed) can thus serve as useful proxy for political life in a wider sense. The fact that, in honorific decrees, benefactors are commonly praised for virtues that were not strictly euergetic but had far wider social and political connotations indeed suggests that contemporaries did regard euergetism as an inextricable part of, and perhaps even as emblematic of, political life in general.

Was there any real debate in the assemblies? Sceptics might point to proposals confirmed by acclamation and the (near) unanimity of votes recorded in some Hellenistic and Roman-era Greek decrees. However, as P. J. Rhodes has written, “unanimity or near-unanimity is not a sign that the assembly was not taking its decision-making duties seriously”—or, I would add, was prevented from doing so. There were certainly matters “in which a genuinely active assembly can be unanimous,” such as, for instance, honouring a benefactor, where “the purpose of recording a large and unanimous vote is to add to the honour by showing that the citizens turned up in large numbers to approve it.”¹⁰ Provincial elites in the Roman east were certainly not powerful enough to force assemblies into submission and have them merely applaud and rubber-stamp pre-arranged decisions in the manner of modern dictatorships (see below, section III). The protracted struggle between Dio

¹⁰ Rhodes and Lewis, *Decrees* 511.

Chrysostom and his elite opponents over public building at Prusa seems to have consisted mostly of parties trying to win over the assembly to their point of view, even though the conflict eventually became intense enough to involve the Roman governor.¹¹ Also, it was the assembly which registered its severe displeasure with the financial corruption among the Prusan elite, with Dio desperately trying to prevent an escalation of events (48.9–10). Elites *tried* to control assemblies; whether they actually could do so in most cases remained very much the question. This is also one of the main themes of Plutarch's essay *Precepts of Politics*: the politician should not try to pander to the people's wishes by donating games and shows, but rather make them respect him because of his virtue and forthrightness.¹² Yet, Plutarch warns, the people are "easily moved to anger."¹³ There would naturally have been little point to this advice had the assembly been as docile and politically inconsequential as some modern accounts suggest.¹⁴ When Dio informed his fellow-councillors at Prusa that they should harbour no suspicions about his popularity with the people (50.3), the point to note is that a Greek civic politician under the Principate apparently found it necessary to be regarded publicly as being on good terms with the *demos*.

All this, however, is still circumstantial; is there direct evidence? Consider the following scene, a picture of a Roman-era Greek assembly (quite probably in Carystus, Euboea) in full swing:

¹¹ See *Or.* 40.6–8; 47; *Plin. Ep.* 10.81–82. Many of Dio's speeches were made in the assembly and often, though no doubt well-prepared, manage to convey a sense of immediacy; note e.g. *Or.* 47.1, "In the first place, men (of Prusa), do not in any way suppose, when I stand up to speak (ὅταν ἀναστῶ), that you are about to hear a discourse that is extraordinary" (transl. Crosby, modified).

¹² See e.g. *Mor.* 818E–819B, 821F–823F.

¹³ *Mor.* 799C. Plutarch here refers to the classical Athenian assembly, but given the theme and purpose of his essay—advice to Greek civic politicians in his own day—there was obviously a contemporary relevance to his remark.

¹⁴ See section II below for references.

Sometimes they [the people] all shouted kindly and joyfully, in praise of some men, sometimes loudly and angrily. This anger of theirs was terrible; and straightaway they terrified the men whom they shouted at, so that some were in great fear and ran around, others threw down their *himatia* out of fear ... Other men, some going forward, others standing up in the middle [of the assembly], spoke to the multitude, some saying few words, some many. And they listened to some for a long time, but were angry at others as soon as they spoke and did not even let them squeak.¹⁵

But of course this is not direct at all—nor, some might say, is it evidence. The scene comes from Dio's *Euboicus*, and it is presented as a story (though, it is claimed, a true one), a tale within a tale, even, as the poor huntsman whom Dio has met relates to him his experiences with civic politics. John Ma, however, has convincingly argued for the relative authenticity of the *ekklesia* scenes in the *Euboicus*, urging that they indeed seem to mirror fairly closely Greek political practice in Dio's time.¹⁶ He adduces Dio's own speeches before the assembly at Prusa, which, as we saw, convey an image of notables negotiating with, rather than dominating, popular assemblies, but also epigraphic and papyrological evidence from the second and third centuries that clearly echoes the proceedings, rhetorical strategies, and ideological sentiments of the assembly meeting as portrayed by Dio.¹⁷ To be sure, Roman-era Greek cities were

¹⁵ Dio 7.24–26; transl. J. Ma, “Public Speech and Community in the *Euboicus*,” in S. Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford 2000) 108–124, at 111.

¹⁶ Of course this still does not imply that the story as a whole has therefore to be true, in the sense of “what really happened” (it may or may not have been constructed around a factual core), but simply that the assembly scenes and their setting are described in such a way as to reflect contemporary conditions and practices.

¹⁷ Ma, in Swain, *Dio* 119–120, citing e.g. *Syll.*³ 898 (Chalcis, third century), which shows the people passing, by acclamation, an honorific decree “in language which strongly echoes the second decree proposed in the assembly in Dio's tale,” and *P.Ryl.* II 66 [*Sel.Pap.* II 241], which shows a lively public assembly in an Egyptian town in A.D. 192. Ma (120) makes the salutary observation that “[t]he vehemence of debate portrayed by Dio

by no means full-blown Athenian democracies. For one thing, civic law courts had declined, and magistracies were the prerogative of the rich (see below). Yet they were also not quite the stifling oligarchies they have sometimes been made out to be. The material discussed above does indeed support Ma's conclusion (123) that "the post-Classical city ... was still the scene for real popular politics."

2. A second set of observations concerns the increasingly hierarchical social structure of the apparently still so politically active *demos* in the Roman Greek cities. Civic rituals betray a distinctly hierarchical mindset. In the civic processions associated with the festival foundation of Vibius Salutaris at Ephesus, a collection of statues including representations of the reigning emperor and his wife, of the goddess Artemis, as well as personifications of Roman and Ephesian political institutions (Senate, *ordo equester*, *populus Romanus*, *boule*, *gerousia*, ephebes, Ephesian tribes, the *demos*) were ceremoniously carried round the city.¹⁸ Thus the internal political hierarchy of the Ephesians was depicted both on its own terms *and* as seamlessly integrated in the broader hierarchical structures of the *imperium Romanum*.

Seating arrangements in the theatres of the imperial *poleis* can be similarly instructive: the older, more "egalitarian" Greek seating arrangement by tribe remained in use, but often became partially overlaid by a classification system proceeding from more hierarchical principles. Increasingly, scratched into individual seats and rows of seating, we find names of individuals, prominent families, magistracies, and priesthoods, as well as civic status groups. Pride of place, in the front, was of course given to the councillors (*bouleutai*), but we also find seats for the ephebes, the *gerousiastai* (members of the council of elders), and non-elite civic associations of various types, particularly the urban professional *collegia* (see below).¹⁹ Dio crit-

warns us against assuming that florid official language and acclamation necessarily mean an inert, formalized politics."

¹⁸ Rogers, *Sacred identity*, ch. 3, esp. 84, table 9; O. Van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam 1997) 191–195; F. Millar, "The Greek City in the Roman Period," *Rome, the Greek World, and the East III* (Chapel Hill 2006) 106–135, at 130.

¹⁹ D. B. Small, "Social Correlations to the Greek Cavea in the Roman

icizes his *bouleutic* peers at Tarsus for their obsession with “crowns, front seats in the theatre, and purple robes” (34.29–30), while the Salutaris inscription stipulates that during every assembly-meeting in the theatre, the statue-types endowed by Salutaris should be placed directly above the seating blocks reserved for the *boule*, the *gerousia*, the ephebes, and the tribes.²⁰

The hierarchisation of the citizenry is most poignantly revealed, however, in inscriptions detailing public handouts of cash among citizens. Thus, in a famous set of texts from Sillyon in Pamphylia, ordinary citizens (*politai*) are clearly distinguished from, and receive less money per head than, *ekklesiastai* (“assembly men,” see n.57 below). The *ekklesiastai* are in turn clearly distinguished from the truly elite sections of the citizenry, the councillors (*bouleutai*) and *gerousiastai*, who receive the largest amounts of money per head (*IGR* III 800–802). Other apparently similarly privileged subgroups among the non-elite citizenry are also on record, such as the enigmatic *sitometroumenoi andres*, who on several occasions are distinguished from both the ordinary citizens (*politai*) and (though not always very clearly) from the civic elite (*bouleutai*).²¹ Differentiations within the citizenry, sometimes based on a property qualification, were of course nothing new in the Greek cities. Indeed, we know them already from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. What seems new in Roman imperial times, however, is the clear visibility of non-elite civic subgroups, however defined, in our source material. They seem to acquire an importance in civic social and political life that was unheard of previously, especially, and tellingly, in the ideological discourse and symbolic imagery associated with civic political ritual.²² Though it

Period,” in S. Macready and F. H. Thompson (eds.), *Roman Architecture in the Greek World* (London 1987) 85–93; Van Nijf, *Civic World* 216–240.

²⁰ Rogers, *Sacred Identity* 102 with n.171, on lines 202–208 (p.162).

²¹ For the *sitometroumenoi (andres)* see Wörrle, *Stadt und Fest* 123–135; A. Balland, *Xanthos* VII pp.212 ff.; Van Nijf, *Civic World* 165; *SEG* XXVII 938 and *TAM* II 578 (both from Tlos in Lycia).

²² In addition to civic subgroups’ prominence in distributions (for which see in addition e.g. *Xanthos* VII no. 67) note in particular Van Nijf, *Civic World* 131–146 and 191–206, on the role of professional associations in civic festivals and processions.

is difficult to prove, the general sense one gets from the evidence is that, whereas in the democratic *poleis* of the Greek past (if not so much in those that had always been oligarchic) internal divisions within the *demos* had, in the final analysis, always been subsumed under the broad blanket of *isonomia*, in imperial times there was a clear move away from isonomic ideology towards a more hierarchical civic ideal.²³

This is particularly evident in the case of the one type of non-elite civic subgroup that proliferated on an unprecedented scale in the Greek cities during the high Roman Empire, the

²³ In Classical Athens the Solonic property classes had by 457/6 B.C. lost most of their political relevance with the opening of all offices, including the archonship, to *zeugitai*, and became completely irrelevant in the fourth century, when even *thetes* could and did hold office. See J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton 1989) 79–82. Signs of the growing socio-political relevance of internal status divisions within the *demos* become apparent in the Hellenistic period. Note e.g. the increasing prominence of magistrates as a distinctive status group, dining together at specially organised banquets, discussed by P. Fröhlich, “Les magistrats des cités grecques: image et réalité du pouvoir (II^e s. a.C. – I^{er} s. p.C.),” in H. Inglebert (ed.), *Les idéologies et valeurs civiques dans le monde romain. Hommage à Claude Lepelley* (Paris 2002) 75–92. Van Nijf, *Civic World* 134, 163, 187, 217, and *passim*, has most clearly argued for an ideological shift towards hierarchisation in Greek civic ideology under the Principate, a phenomenon he describes as “*ordo*-making”: “Public ceremonies in the Roman East reinforced a hierarchical conception of society within which identity was derived from membership of a status group constructed along the lines of a Roman *ordo*” (245). Roman influence on the process of hierarchisation may indeed have been considerable, though it is often difficult to pin down in any detail. For an example, see Pliny’s letter to Trajan concerning money distributions in the Bithynian cities (*Ep.* 10.116–117): what worries Pliny about such distributions, by members of the elite on the occasion of weddings or other festivities, is not their existence, but the fact that they included not just the *bouleutai* but also “a not inconsiderable number of the common people” (*etiam e plebe non exiguum numerum*). He regards distributions of this type among “a thousand or even more” ordinary citizens as a clear sign of corrupt practice, for which, tellingly, he uses the Greek term (δυσνομία). Trajan confirms Pliny’s judgement. In other words, as Greg Woolf has argued, this was Greek demagogic (democratic?) generosity, betraying an un-Roman lack of respect for social hierarchy, and it needed therefore to be checked, and transformed. G. Woolf, “Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East,” *PCPhS* 40 (1994) 116–143, at 123.

professional association, or *collegium*. Here Onno van Nijf's research on professional associations in the Roman east is most pertinent.²⁴ From the abundance of epigraphic documentation concerning professional associations, he is able to show how *collegia* played a highly visible and important part in the public life of the Greek cities during the high Empire. Most importantly, however, he shows how through their participation in civic festivals and public rituals, and especially through links with elite patrons and benefactors, professional associations were able to negotiate a recognised place for themselves in the city's social hierarchy. Thus the benefactress Aba from Histria in Moesia in the second century very explicitly included, alongside the *bouleutai* and the members of the *gerousia*, physicians, teachers, builders, craftsmen, and traders in her distributions of money and wine among the citizenry.²⁵ In general, the evidence from the Greek cities seems very much in line with that from elsewhere in the Empire, in that members of the *collegia* almost uniformly received larger handouts of cash per head in public distributions than did ordinary citizens (*politai/plebei*).²⁶ The relatively privileged position of *collegia* is further underlined by their evident participation as distinctive groups in the civic processions that were part and parcel of most public festivals, and by the network of relationships of euergetism and patronage connecting these non-elite civic subgroups to the bouleutic elite.²⁷ Politically, they are likely to have been a factor of great

²⁴ Van Nijf, *Civic World*. See also A. Gutsfeld and D. A. Koch (eds.), *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Tübingen 2006); P. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations. Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis 2003); J. S. Kloppenborg and S. G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London/New York 1996). For the west, see most recently K. Verboven, "The Associative Order: Status and Ethos among Roman Businessmen in Late Republic and Early Empire," *Athenaeum* 95 (2007) 861–893.

²⁵ *I.Histriae* 57 with Van Nijf, *Civic World* 170–186.

²⁶ Van Nijf, *Civic World* 154; R. P. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire. Quantitative Studies*² (Cambridge 1982) 141–143; S. Mrozek, *Les distributions d'argent et de nourriture dans les villes italiennes du Haut-Empire romain* (Brussels 1987) 85–88 and 96.

²⁷ See Van Nijf, *Civic World* 73–128, 131–136, and 195–200.

significance, as we shall see in section II below.

To conclude: the social and political world of the imperial Greek cities seems to have been a distinctly hierarchical one, in which some groups of citizens were decidedly less ordinary than others.

3. The third set of observations concerns the people at the very top of the civic social hierarchy, the councillors and their families, or the *bouleutic* elite.

Whereas the urban councils had already started to assume decidedly oligarchic characteristics in the later Hellenistic period, it was only with the onset of Roman rule that the development received some formal constitutional recognition. Roman *leges provinciae* turned the Greek councils into mini-senates that increasingly acquired the characteristics of a Roman *ordo*.²⁸ Aspiring councillors had to come from respectable elite families, and mostly had to have held some important magistracy. New members either followed in their fathers' footsteps or were co-opted by sitting members. If there were still popular elections (i.e. for magistracies implying council membership), then councillors drew up the list of candidates. As in the west, there was a property qualification for membership, and we hear frequently of urban censors (τιμηται).²⁹ Occasionally, aspiring

²⁸ Our best evidence for a Roman *lex provinciae* in the Greek east comes from Pliny the Younger's summary of the *lex Pompeia* of 65 B.C. for Bithynia and Pontus (*Ep.* 10.79). Elsewhere evidence is more ambiguous, though in many cities there are indications of Roman influence on constitutional structure and political practice (e.g. lifelong membership in the *boule*, urban censors, *summae honorariae*, and so forth): see Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht*, 384–394. For a possible *lex provinciae* in Roman Lycia dating to the reign of Vespasian see Wörrle, *Stadt und Fest* 96–100, 123. S. Mitchell, *Anatolia I* (Oxford 1993) 88–89, notes the clear similarities between city constitutions in Galatia soon after the annexation of that province ca. 25 B.C. and those in Bithynia and Pontus.

²⁹ Respectable background and office-holding as entry requirements: Plin. *Ep.* 10.79 on Bithynia and Pontus, but councils probably had the same characteristics in most other eastern cities, see Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 384–394 and n.28 above. On co-optation of candidates or nomination of successors by councillors see H. W. Pleket, "Political Culture and Political Practice in the Cities of Asia Minor in the Roman Empire," in W. Schuller (ed.), *Politische Theorie und Praxis im Altertum* (Darmstadt 1998) 204–216, at 206 with references. On the existence of a census qualification for coun-

members also had to pay an entrance fee (*summa honoraria*).³⁰ Once admitted, council members sat for life. Inscriptions reveal that the councillors and their families increasingly came to have a corporate identity as a ruling class, and began to refer to themselves collectively as the βουλευτικὸν τάγμα, the bouletic order (or *ordo decurionum*).³¹ To sum up, Roman influence, either directly in the form of provincial laws or more indirectly through the adoption and adaptation of Roman social norms (such as the shift from *isonomia* to hierarchy as a civic ideal) seems to have been a decisive factor in the oligarchisation of the Greek civic elites.

Oligarchisation did not occur solely in the political realm. The urban upper classes' sense of corporate identity also manifested itself in the form of a distinct elite lifestyle which became ever more visible during the high Empire. Gymnasial athletics, literature and distinct forms of literary expression, especially rhetoric, and, naturally, public munificence (*euergetism*), were some of the ingredients essential to this lifestyle, and they served to create cultural barriers between mass and elite in addition to the existing social, economic, and political ones.³² Increasingly, elite citizens began to identify themselves on pub-

cillors in the east see A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City* (Oxford 1940) 180; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford 1966) 720, on *Ep.* 10.110.2; C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1978) 96; Quass 343 and 383; Pleket 206. Finally, on urban censors, see Quass 385–386 for many references.

³⁰ Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 328 ff., 387.

³¹ E.g. *CIG* 4411a, b, 4412b; *RECAM* II 195; *SEG* XXXIII 1123; Bean-Mitford, *Journeys Rough Cilicia 1964–1968* 152, 154c. See Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 388 n.170, for further references; also Pleket, in Schuller, *Politische Theorie* 205–206.

³² On literature and rhetoric see S. Swain, *Hellenism and Empire* (Oxford 1996); M. W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-representation in the Roman Empire* (Princeton 1994). On athletics as a form of elite self-representation see O. M. van Nijf, “Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-fashioning in the Roman East,” in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek under Rome. Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge 2001) 306–334, and “Athletics, *andreia* and the *askēsis*-culture in the Roman East,” in R. M. Rosen and I. Sluiter (eds.), *Andreia. Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston 2003) 263–286.

lic inscriptions as βουλευτής, councillor, or as “citizen and councillor” (πολίτης καὶ βουλευτής): like citizenship, council membership had become an aspect of one’s social persona, rather than just an office.³³ It was also something that preferably should stay within the same family, as councils tried to turn themselves into a closed hereditary upper class. Thus sons of councillors were habitually designated *patrobouloi*, the Greek pendant of the Latin *praetextati*.³⁴

Literature and rhetoric of the period, although mostly at pains to stress the importance of harmonious relations (*homonoiā*) between mass and elite,³⁵ when caught “off guard,” so to speak, often reveal starkly oligarchic attitudes, sometimes in unlikely places: Artemidorus, in his *Dreambook*, suggests that dreams concerning the entire community are only appropriate to members of the elite; a poor citizen’s dream could not possibly affect the whole state.³⁶ Dio Chrysostom, speaking to his fellow-councillors at Prusa, hastened to assure them that his public displays of sympathy for the Prusan *demos* were “no sign that I am on more friendly terms with them than with you” (50.3), though this statement, as we saw earlier, is equally revealing of the people’s continuing ability to constrain the power of the notables.

II.

These three sets of observations, when combined, present a rather contradictory and confusing picture of political life in the imperial Greek cities. The evidence points simultaneously

³³ Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 388–389, for references.

³⁴ L. Robert, *Documents de l’Asie Mineure méridionale* (Geneva/Paris 1966) 88; P. D. A. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1970) 242–245; H. W. Pleket, “Sociale stratificatie en sociale mobiliteit in de Romeinse Keizertijd,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 84 (1971) 215–251, at 235; M. Kleijwegt, *Ancient Youth. The Ambiguity of Youth and the Absence of Adolescence in Greco-Roman Society* (Amsterdam 1991) 221–272; Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 389.

³⁵ See e.g. G. Salmeri, “Dio, Rome, and the Civic Life of Asia Minor,” in Swain, *Dio Chrysostom* 53–92, at 75–86, esp. 77.

³⁶ Artem. *Oneir.* 1.2, with A. J. Pomeroy, “Status and Status-Concern in the Greco-Roman Dreambooks,” *AncSoc* 22 (1991) 51–74, at 57, 61; Pleket, in Schuller, *Politische Theorie* 206.

to (1) a continuing measure of (more or less) autonomous decision-making power for the assembly/*demos*, (2) an increasingly hierarchical internal structuring of the citizen body, and (3) an increasingly visible and dominant oligarchic elite of rich citizens who monopolised the major magistracies and the council, and assumed the characteristics of a veritable *ordo decurionum*. Which, if any, of these scenarios should we prioritise?

Scholars from A. H. M. Jones and his pioneering work on the post-Classical Greek city onwards have almost universally preferred the third option, and have emphasised the increasing and all-conquering dominance of the bouletic elite.³⁷ Dazzled by the countless and all-too-visible honorific inscriptions, statues, and public monuments erected by and for members of these urban elites, and by the splendour of the public buildings to which they contributed as benefactors, historians have generally made the *bouleutai* and their kin the centrepiece of their analysis of post-Classical Greek civic politics. Thus David Magie, in what is perhaps the clearest short exposition of the oligarchisation-thesis, wrote of “the formation of a wealthy ruling-class, composed of councillors and their families, which, like the Senatorial Order in Rome, held the reins of government and enjoyed both political and social privileges.” Similarly Paul Veyne, in his masterful *Le pain et le cirque*, took the notion of social distance, of the unbridgeable and ever-widening gulf between the wealthy oligarchy of civic notables and their non-elite fellow citizens, to provide much of the rationale for the flourishing of munificence in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial Greek cities. Sir Moses Finley was sceptical about the level of proper politics, in the sense of a system “in which binding decisions are reached by discussion and argument and ultimately by voting,” in the post-Classical Greek cities, while G. E. M. de Ste. Croix wrote bitterly of “the destruction of Greek democracy in the Roman period.”³⁸

³⁷ Jones, *Greek City* ch. XI.

³⁸ D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950) 641; P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris 1976); M. I. Finley, “The Ancient Greeks and Their Nation,” *The Use and Abuse of History* (London 1975) 120–133, at 132, and *Politics in the Ancient World* (Cambridge

Without doubt major changes had occurred in the socio-political structure of the Greek *polis* during the centuries since the battle of Chaeronea, not the least of which was indeed the transformation of the urban councils into powerful oligarchic institutions with lifelong membership. Nonetheless, the evidence for the continuing importance, vitality, and decision-making powers of the public assemblies, so clearly on display not only in epigraphic texts but also in literary sources such as the writings of Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom, should not be ignored, nor trivialised, as it is so often in the canonical accounts. The role of the assemblies, A. H. M. Jones argued, “became more and more formal” or, in the words of H. W. Pleket, “increasingly became a ritual one.”³⁹ It is all the more important to stress this point because the tendency to focus almost exclusively on the oligarchic role of the bouleutic elite, and to largely ignore the still existing popular side of Greek civic politics, is by no means absent from more recent research.⁴⁰ In the

1983) 52, from which the quotation is taken; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London 1981) 518–537, Appendix IV.

³⁹ Jones, *Greek City* 177; Pleket, in Schuller, *Politische Theorie* 211. Note also Magie, *Roman Rule* 640: “[T]he Assembly ... had become little more than a confirmatory body”; de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle* 532: “The Assembly had ceased by at any rate the middle of the second century to have any political importance.”

⁴⁰ See for instance M. Sartre, *L’Orient romain. Provinces et sociétés provinciales en Méditerranée orientale d’Auguste aux Sévères* (Paris 1991) 129–130 (“Les institutions perdirent au plus tard sous le règne d’Auguste ce qu’il pouvait leur rester de tradition démocratique”); Woolf, *PCPhS* 40 (1994) 124 (“the progressive entrenchment of the well-off at the expense of the *demos* in all Greek cities” as “the most obvious feature of a Romanization of the civic life in the east”); R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven/London 2000) 4 (“The form of government in cities throughout the east remained very much as Roman conquest had found it, oligarchic), 10 (“the realities of power remained, oligarchic and plutocratic”); Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East* 118 (“What is in any case certain about the Greek, or Graeco-Roman, city of the imperial period is the central place occupied by the council”); Gleason, in Potter, *Companion to the Roman Empire* 234 (“in the Roman period the assembly of the people lost the power to initiate legislation”). The recent subtle account of S. Dmitriev, *City Government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford 2005), is a positive exception to the general rule where analysis of the Roman-era Greek assemblies is

imperial Greek city, “it is the *boule* which initiates and formulates policies,” Pleket has reaffirmed.⁴¹ Friedemann Quass devoted an extensive and exhaustive monograph solely to the topic of the rise to dominance, from late Classical times into the high Roman Empire, of what he calls the *Honoratiorenschicht*, or elite of civic notables in the Greek cities.⁴² Michael Wörle, in his analysis of the festival foundation donated by C. Iulius Demosthenes to Oenoanda in 124/5, stated emphatically that in the Roman Greek city “gemacht wurde die Politik im Rat” —politics was made in the council.⁴³

In the face of the complexity of the evidence available to us, this is not a very satisfactory solution. Yet, what is the alternative? A first step towards a different model would be to let go of the dichotomy oligarchy/democracy, which is too schematic and simplistic. Surely, as we saw, the imperial Greek cities had oligarchic elites, supported, to some extent, by Rome, yet there was also present within them a strong and continuing tradition of democratic popular politics, exemplified by active and, in many cases, apparently independent assemblies. It was often an uneasy combination, as contemporary sources frequently testify, exacerbated by the elite’s urgent desire to prevent Roman intervention in civic affairs.⁴⁴ Conflicts between elite and *demos* are attested with some frequency (see below), yet if elite citizens were to hold on to their exalted positions and keep out the

concerned, though even he retains an element of indecision in his concluding pronouncement on the topic (330: “Although the political activity of the people’s assemblies became extinct, the people retained, albeit formally, the final say in political and administrative matters”). Other more upbeat appraisals are, briefly, S. Mitchell, *Anatolia I* 204, and particularly Salmeri, in Swain, *Dio Chrysostom*, esp. 71–73.

⁴¹ Pleket, in Schuller, *Politische Theorie* 205, cf. 206: “one may say that the council embodied city politics.”

⁴² Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht*. See also E. Stephan, *Honoratioren, Griechen, Polisbürger. Kollektive Identitäten innerhalb der Oberschicht des kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (Göttingen 2002).

⁴³ Wörle, *Stadt und Fest* 133.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 815A: once the Romans intervene, “the council (*boule*) and the people (*demos*) and the law courts and the entire local government lose their power”; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 46.14.

Romans, conflicts had to be avoided. The solution was one that had since time immemorial provided the Greek *poleis* with a remedy against the dangers posed by social inequality in a politically egalitarian community, viz. the politics of redistribution, but it was now applied with an unprecedented intensity. Thus the friction generated by growing social and political oligarchisation in what was still, essentially, a politically democratic context helps to explain the remarkable proliferation of euergetism we see in the eastern provinces during the first two centuries.⁴⁵ Benefactions to the community served to justify and legitimate elite positions, while gifts such as money distributions could also be employed to underline and “naturalise” the growing hierarchisation of *polis* society. Public rituals of praise for generous elite members served as symbolic, festive occasions emphasising and reinforcing the harmonious relations between elite and *demos*, and the self-representation of the elite as a virtuous, deservedly powerful civic aristocracy. Conspicuously, moreover, the phenomenon allowed for an active participation of the people, for not only did they have a say in the organisation of benefactions (see above), but it was also the *demos* that bestowed honours on generous elite individuals, thereby implicitly acknowledging the legitimacy of the latter’s claim to social eminence.⁴⁶ Thus the euergetic rituals served to ease the tensions created by oligarchisation in a Greek democratic *polis* context, by allowing those tensions to be acted out symbolically, in a public exchange of gifts for honours that served to “naturalise” and legitimate existing power relations.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See A. Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁴⁶ Note e.g. Dio addressing the assembly at Prusa (48.10): “is it not you who often praise us [the councillors, the urban elite] all day long, calling some ‘excellent’ (ἀριστοεῖς), others ‘Olympians’ (Ὀλυμπίους), others ‘saviours’ (σωτήρας), others ‘nourishers’ (τροφέας)?” The power of the people was real here, because they could, and sometimes did, refuse to play along, as is acknowledged by Plutarch, *Mor.* 822A, in a discussion of the role of munificence in civic politics. For a clear example of the *demos* refusing to honour a benefactor see *I.Ephesos* 1491.

⁴⁷ It is of course precisely this centrality of euergetism to imperial Greek civic politics that makes it such an ideal proxy for political relations in the *poleis* in a wider sense.

Euergetism and its proliferation therefore provide us with one route towards understanding the political complexity of the imperial Greek *poleis*. Yet on its own it is not entirely sufficient. We saw that popular politics was still a reality in the imperial *poleis*, alongside oligarchisation, and that euergetism may have served to ease the political tension arising from this situation. There remains however a question we have not properly addressed so far: *why*, in fact, did popular politics not quietly die out? Why did it actually survive for so long, and how did it manage to, given the strong oligarchic tendencies that were also present in civic life, and given an imperial government that had little patience with it? Greek political custom is no doubt part of the answer: assemblies were an essential part of *polis* life, so when eastern cities adopted *polis* constitutions, they got assemblies as well (in cities that had been Greek from the start, assemblies had of course always been present). Yet this does not adequately explain the active political part played by these assemblies well into the later Principate, which we have documented in the previous section. So, how to account for that enduring political activity?

For a possible answer, we have to focus on the (changing) composition of, and the interactions between, the various socio-political groups that made up imperial *polis* society. We saw that the early and high Empire was the great age of civic professional associations, or *collegia*, which flourished in that period as never before or after. There is a growing consensus among Roman economic historians that from later Republican times onwards, the Empire as a whole experienced a modest but sustained trend of *per capita* economic growth, which probably trailed off again some time during the third century.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁸ See in particular R. Saller, "Framing the Debate over Growth in the Ancient Economy," in W. Scheidel and S. von Reden (eds.), *The Ancient Economy* (Edinburgh 2002) 251–269, building on the work of K. Hopkins ("Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire," *JRS* 70 [1980] 101–125; "Rome, Taxes, Rents and Trade," *Kodai* 6/7 [1995/6] 41–74, repr. Scheidel/von Reden ch. 10). For a clear expression of the current consensus, with full bibliography, see the introduction by the editors to the new *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, eds. W. Scheidel, I. Morris, and R. Saller (Cambridge 2007).

jury is still out on the causes, but factors such as increased security, greater ease of transport and communication (Roman roads, a relatively safe internal sea), institutional (the spread of a uniform legal system, also, gradually, in the east)⁴⁹ and technical innovations, and the demand created by increasing urbanisation will all have played their part. As a working hypothesis, I offer here the suggestion that if there was one group within the Empire that would most clearly and directly have benefited from the peace dividend of the *pax Romana*, it will have been urban-based manufacturers and traders (whether of the local, regional, or interregional variety)—in short, precisely the people we would expect to find in the urban professional *collegia*, and to whom the Romans referred as the *plebs media*.⁵⁰ It is of course hard to prove this empirically.⁵¹ How-

⁴⁹ See J. Triantaphyllopoulos, “Le droit romain dans le monde grec,” *JJP* 21 (1991) 75–85.

⁵⁰ For a good short discussion of the *plebs media* see P. Veyne, “The Roman Empire,” *A History of Private Life* I (Cambridge [Mass.] 1987) 6–234, at 131–134.

⁵¹ Note however Dennis Kehoe and Willem Jongman in the *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*. Kehoe, writing on production in the early Roman Empire, concludes (568–569) that “the modest economic growth that characterised the early imperial period created an increasing demand for basic manufactured goods such as ceramic wares and textiles” and tentatively suggests that “there were many such people [i.e. non-elite entrepreneurs] who could take advantage of the business opportunities that Roman rule created.” Jongman, discussing consumption, presents evidence for a dramatic increase in meat consumption during the late Republic and early and high Empire (based on a large dataset of animal bones collected from sites throughout the Empire compiled by A. King, “Diet in the Roman World: A Regional Inter-site Comparison of the Mammal Bones,” *JRA* 12 [1999] 168–202). Since “meat consumption is ... a useful indicator of intermediate prosperity,” being “too expensive for those living at bare subsistence” but “[e]qually, ... not something one could or would consume ever more of” the richer one was, “changes in meat consumption are a useful indicator of the extent to which significant numbers of quite ordinary people attained standards of living above bare subsistence” (604–605, 613–614 for the graphs). *Ergo*, the economic situation of the early and high Empire was particularly favourable to those involved in trade and manufacture, and we do have clear evidence for a rise in living standards among a fairly wide stretch of the population, who reached a level of intermediate prosperity,

ever, as a working hypothesis it may be quite useful in that it provides a possible solution to a few puzzling aspects of imperial Greek politics, including, indeed, the survival of popular decision-making.

To begin with, our hypothesis would provide at least a partial explanation for the extraordinary rise in the number, presence, and visibility of *collegia* themselves during the early and high Empire. For a gradual rise in living standards among the urban professional middling strata of craftsmen, shopkeepers, traders, and so forth may well have functioned as a trigger to raise their socio-political awareness. This, then, would have translated into the growing numbers of increasingly active *collegia* that we see in our sources. Hence the energy and eagerness with which *collegia* attempted to negotiate a place for themselves within the civic social and political structures during this period, and the willingness of civic elites to accommodate this. Hence also the governmental anxieties surrounding *collegia*, which from time to time were viewed, not altogether without justification, as engines of sedition.⁵²

Most important in the context of the present paper, however, is that the hypothesis of an economic and political “rise of the *plebs media*/collegiate classes” also allows us to account for the continuing vitality of popular politics in the Greek east well into

between the truly poor on the one hand and the elite on the other. The collegiate classes, or *plebs media*, are the obvious candidate.

⁵² W. Cotter, “The *Collegia* and Roman Law. State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations, 60 BCE–200 CE,” in Kloppenborg/Wilson, *Voluntary Associations* 74–89, provides a good overview and discussion of Roman Republican and imperial legislation against *collegia*, with very full evidence. Recent research on *collegia* has emphasised their drive towards integration into civic society (this is the main theme of van Nijf, *Civic World*, and Harland, *Associations*), arguing against an older view (of which Cotter is a recent exponent), based primarily on attested government anxieties about lower-class associations, according to which *collegia* were primarily subversive groups operating outside and against the civic order. It might well be possible, however, that both phenomena, i.e. the associations’ drive towards integration into civic society and governmental anxieties about their potentially subversive nature, were alike occasioned by the growing economic and political vigour of the class from which they recruited their members, the *plebs media*.

the high Empire. It is well known that the assemblies of the east consisted for the most part of craftsmen and traders; that is, in fact, the *plebs media* who made up the membership of the *collegia*. Cicero remarks contemptuously upon the *sutores* (cobblers), *zonarii* (belt-makers), *opifaces*, and *tabernarii* who populated the assemblies of Asia (*Flacc.* 17–18). The peasants and hunters depicted in Dio's *Euboicus*, even though they are citizens, rarely if ever visit the city to take part in its public meetings, suggesting that those citizens present at assembly meetings consisted mostly of people active in non-agrarian pursuits.⁵³ In his native Prusa, Dio's elite opponents found a most effective argument against the orator's building scheme for the city in the suggestion that he was deliberately demolishing workshops (including a smithy) to make way for his portico, an accusation sure to infuriate an assembly mostly composed of craftsmen and traders.⁵⁴ Inscriptions from the imperial period occasionally refer to occupational *phylai* (tribes) in the Greek cities, implying some formal political role in the assemblies for men of a similar trade.⁵⁵ Intriguing, if often somewhat elusive evidence is also provided by seating inscriptions reserving (often prominent) places for members of *collegia* in the theatres of the imperial Greek cities.⁵⁶ Van Nijf interprets these inscriptions, which appear among other seating inscriptions reserving places for groups such as the *bouleutai*, ephebes, *neoi*, magistrates, and so

⁵³ *Or.* 7.27–29 and *passim*; Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 357.

⁵⁴ *Or.* 40.8–9; 47.11; Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 358–359.

⁵⁵ *TAM* III.3 1490 (ἱερὰ φυλὴ τῶν ἐριουργῶν, “the sacred tribe of the wool-weavers”), 1491, 1492 (ἱερὰ φυλὴ τῶν σκυτέων, “the sacred tribe of the shoemakers”); Van Nijf, *Civic World* 20.

⁵⁶ See Van Nijf, *Civic World* 224–234, referring e.g. to place inscriptions for professional associations in the theatre of Termessos (stone-cutters, *TAM* III.1 872), the theatre of Dionysos at Athens (stone-cutters once again, *IG* II² 5087), the theatre of Miletos (linen-weavers, harbour porters, goldsmiths, references in Van Nijf 226–227), a stadium at Didyma (cult personnel, performers, actors, shellfish dealers, and a host of other groups, *I.Didyma* 50), the theatre at Bostra (bronzesmiths, makers of leather bags for wine transport, goldsmiths, *I.G.Syrie* XIII 9156, 9159, 9158, 9160, 9161–9162, 9193?), the theatre, an odeum, and a stadium at Aphrodisias (butchers, corn-dealers, goldsmiths, tanners, market-gardeners, see Van Nijf 231–232), and the stadium of Saitai in Lydia (linen-weavers, Van Nijf 232–233).

forth, as a sure sign of the successful integration of the *plebs media* into the social hierarchy of the imperial *poleis*. That is no doubt right, but it is probably only part of the story, since theatres were not just venues for plays and shows, but also the places where popular assemblies were held. We can imagine the members of the *collegia* taking their allocated places during assembly meetings, and vigorously cheering or booing any measure that touched on their interests. That the assembly was indeed the preferred venue for the trading and manufacturing classes of the imperial *poleis* to give vent to their political (dis)pleasure is of course also dramatically illustrated by Acts 19:23–41, where the silversmiths (*argyrokopoi*), craftsmen (*technitai*), and workers (*ergatai*) of Ephesus manage to call together an impromptu assembly (actually called an *ekklesia* by the author of Acts) in the theatre to oppose Paul and the Christians.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The fact that some groups within the *demos* were present at assembly meetings more often and in greater numbers than others also provides a possible solution to the puzzle of the *ekklesiastai* mentioned in some inscriptions in Roman Asia Minor (section II above). In texts from Sillyon (*IGR* III 800–802) and Pogle (409) *ekklesiastai* are distinguished from ordinary citizens, the *politai*. This has led scholars to argue that access to the assembly in Greek cities was in the imperial period officially restricted to a select group among the *demos* (e.g. de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle* 528, 532, who regards this alleged restriction as part of the process of “the destruction of Greek democracy in the Roman period”). Taking his cue from Dio Chrysostom’s remarks (34.21–3) on the linen-weavers of Tarsus and their problems with the 500-drachma fee for citizenship, Jones, *Greek City* 174, sees in the *ekklesiastai* yet another indication of the existence of a universal property qualification for assembly membership in the imperial period; see Jones, *Roman World of Dio* 81, and M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1973) 136, for similar conclusions. Careful assessment of Dio has however shown that the 500 drachmas were not a census criterion but the price at which citizenship was sold to foreigners at Tarsus; for some unknown reason, the linen-weavers, unlike other occupational groups at Tarsus, were banned from citizenship, something which Dio evidently regarded as odd: see Van Nijf, *Civic World* 19; Quass, *Honoratiorenschicht* 355–356; Sartre, *L’Orient romain* 128–129. The passage therefore does not support the hypothesis of a property qualification for assembly membership in the imperial Greek cities. Equally, interpreting the references to *ekklesiastai* as evidence for an official policy of restricted access to the assembly seems to be reading too much into a single word. More likely, the term simply signifies an acknowledgement of the situation that some citizens, viz. craftsmen

It will be clear, given this domination of the assemblies by craftsmen and traders, that our hypothesis of a modest rise in living standards among the urban professional classes of the *plebs media* during the early and high Empire, which translated into an increasing political awareness and activity among these groups, does much to explain the continuing vitality of popular politics during this period. Here was a numerically significant group of people whose activities were vital to the economic well-being of the cities (and indeed to the lifestyle of the civic elite), who had developed some economic and political clout, were very capable indeed of causing grave social and political trouble, and whose demands could therefore not be ignored.⁵⁸ At least, not if the bouletic elite wanted to maintain political stability, and more importantly, prevent Roman intervention, which often followed in the wake of civic disturbances.⁵⁹ Naturally, elites could, and indeed occasionally did manage to, calm the *demos* by the threat of precisely such interference, but as they had a strong incentive to avoid it themselves, this was a weapon of limited usefulness.⁶⁰

and traders, were more likely to participate in assembly meetings than others (this is probably also the reason why Dio regards the situation of the linen-weavers at Tarsus as so anomalous). If, as I argue, precisely these groups were indeed somewhat better off in economic terms during the early Principate, then it seems likely that they also enjoyed a somewhat higher status, and hence would naturally receive a larger handout per head than *politai* outside this category in hierarchically structured distributions such as those recorded at Sillyon and Pogra. Of an official restriction of access to assemblies, there is no trace in the sources. Indeed, if Dio's *Euboicus* is any guide, even the poorest citizens, working as herdsmen in the countryside, were free to participate in assembly meetings if they so wished. That they not very often chose to do so is another matter.

⁵⁸ Evidence for the political restiveness of the *plebs media* generally and the *collegia* in particular is scattered but suggestive, and mostly well-known. We have already seen the riotous assembly called together by the Ephesian silversmiths (Acts 19). Note also the riots caused by *collegia* in Bithynia-Pontus, referred to by Trajan in Plin. *Ep.* 10.34 and 10.39, and the troubles and disturbances caused by the Ephesian bakers reported in *I.Ephesos* 215. See Harland, *Associations* 101–106 and 169–173, for discussion of the political activities of *collegia* and their role in disturbances.

⁵⁹ Plutarch *Mor.* 814F–815A.

⁶⁰ Dio Chrys. 46.14; Acts 19:39–41.

Finally, our theory of the rise of an economically more vigorous and politically more vocal *plebs media* in the east during the Principate might go a long way towards solving the old puzzle of why there are relatively numerous and geographically widespread indications of civic disturbances, often resulting from conflicts between *boule* and *demos*, precisely for the late first and second centuries, the Empire's "Golden Age," as Gibbon called it, when particularly the provinces in Asia Minor flourished as never before. References (sometimes elusive) to civic discord during the period are on record for cities all across Asia Minor, from Sardis to Aspendus to Smyrna, Rhodes, Tarsus, Nicaea, and indeed Dio Chrysostom's Prusa, suggesting that we are dealing with a pattern rather than a string of isolated events.⁶¹ The cohabitation of oligarchisation, hierarchisation, and a continuing measure of active popular politics (fuelled quite possibly by a politically vocal middling stratum within the *demos*) seems often to have been an uneasy one.

Overall, however, the political history of the Greek cities during the first two centuries of our era seems not to have been one of permanent conflict and revolution, but of relatively stable, functioning political entities within the context of Roman provincial rule. This leads naturally to the question why a politically engaged *demos*, led by an active middle stratum of urban traders and craftsmen, would have accepted the growing oligarchisation and hierarchisation of society (note that the conflicts referred to above tended to end with the reconciliation of *boule* and *demos*, not with the overthrow of the civic order). The civic elites, of course, were *in ultimo* supported by Rome, which made actual revolution (should it even have been conceived of as an idea, which seems unlikely) a near impossibility. Also, non-elite citizens naturally wanted and often also direly needed, the gifts, protection, aid, and patronage that only members of the elite could provide. In addition, in Greco-

⁶¹ Sardis: Philostr. *Letters of Apollonius* 56; Aspendus: Philostr. *V. Apoll.* 1.15; Smyrna: Philostr. *V. Soph.* 1.25 (p.531); Rhodes: Aelius Aristides, *Oration to the Rhodians: Concerning Concord* (*Or.* 24); Tarsus: Dio Chrys. *Or.* 34.16–20; Nicaea: *Or.* 39; Prusa: *Or.* 46, 47.19, 48.9. On *boule/demos* conflicts in Roman Asia Minor see the pertinent remarks of Salmeri, in Swain, *Dio Chrysostom* 73–86.

Roman cities, the burden of economic exploitation rested by and large on the shoulders of the rural population, as members of the urban elite derived the vast bulk of their income from landed wealth. Thus the urban non-elite citizenry, most of whom, as we saw, were commonly engaged in non-agricultural pursuits, would primarily meet the elite of their city as magistrates, benefactors, and as customers for the goods and services they produced, not as exploiters of their labour.

However, there was something else too, perhaps equally important if not more, namely the fact that it was precisely the oligarchic and hierarchical social order that had become both ideal and, increasingly, reality in the Greek cities of the high Roman Empire which paradoxically offered non-elite citizens an extra, alternative route to influence over the behaviour of the wealthy and powerful. This was so because, as we saw, the civic professional *collegia*, driven by the economic and political good fortune of the class from which they derived, the *plebs media*, consistently sought and also achieved a recognised place in the civic social hierarchy through the establishment of links of patronage and euergetism with members of the civic elite, who could in turn well use the associations' support in the intra-elite struggles for influence and prestige.⁶² Since lower-class influence through *collegia* and clubs was predicated precisely on the existence of a hierarchical social order in which the standing of these associations depended on their success in establishing links with the civic elite, the *demos* as a whole was hardly likely to object to the growing hierarchisation and oligarchisation. In a recent paper, Ilias Arnaoutoglou has drawn attention to the contrast between the long series of anti-*collegia* laws drawn up by Rome from the mid-Republican period onwards on the one hand, and the apparently unperturbed flourishing of *collegia* in the eastern provinces on the other.⁶³ He

⁶² See Van Nijf, *Civic World* 73–128. Harland, *Associations* 140–147, fig. 24, has a nice diagram illustrating the links of patronage and euergetism between the association of dyers at Thyatira and elite individuals over the span of ca. two centuries from A.D. 50 onwards.

⁶³ I. N. Arnaoutoglou, “Roman Law and *collegia* in Asia Minor,” *RIDA* 49 (2002) 27–44.

concludes that Roman policy towards *collegia* in the east was mostly *ad hoc* and highly dependent on the local and regional political context, and he follows Van Nijf in stressing the conditioning effects of the associations' integration into the civic social hierarchy. There is much to be said for this argument, but, as the foregoing will have made clear, it ignores the distinct possibility that the *collegia*, and with them the *plebs media* in general, may actively have profited in political terms from such integration, and may actively have sought it for precisely that reason, and not just because of a need to conform and be accepted. Thus, the process whereby the *collegia* became encapsulated within the civic hierarchy—a process which, from the standpoint of the civic elites, might well be viewed as a useful strategy to neutralise the associations' subversive political potential—in fact provided the urban professional classes who already dominated the popular assemblies with yet another channel through which to influence the behaviour of the elite. In such intricate and paradoxical ways, popular politics, hierarchisation, and oligarchisation in fact mutually reinforced one another.

III.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to sketch the contours of an interpretative model of Greek civic politics under the Roman Principate. The model is still very crude, and its central assumptions remain to some extent hypothetical. Further research should refine and, where needed, adjust it. Nonetheless, for the moment I think it has the merit that it can account for the ostensible paradox that our source material for Greek civic politics under the Empire makes the cities look oligarchic, hierarchical, and democratic at the same time. It removes the need to overemphasise one strand in the evidence at the expense of the others to create an internally coherent picture.

To sum up: the cities were home to an elite of a strongly oligarchic character and appearance, a self-consciously politically active assembly/*demos*, and a social order based on a hierarchy of status groups rather than the classical notion of *isonomia*. The public rituals associated with euergetism did much to ease possible tensions arising from this political configuration, by

creating a dynamic exchange of gifts for honours which allowed the elite to present itself as a virtuous, benevolent upper class, while simultaneously allowing the *demos* to affirm (and thereby legitimate) or reject this image through the public allocation of honours. To understand, however, *why* both oligarchisation and popular politics remained such enduring features of imperial *polis* society, the effects of two important external factors have to be invoked. First, the efforts by the Romans to turn the Greek civic councils into the type of oligarchic senate-like institutions that they were familiar with and to which local administration could be safely entrusted, and their continued support for an oligarchic social order in the Greek cities. Second, and somewhat more hypothetically, the impact of the modest but sustained *per capita* economic growth characteristic of the early and high Empire on the living standards of the urban professional classes, which turned them into a political factor of significance and allowed them to exercise, through the popular assemblies *and* through their *collegia*, an enduring influence over political life in the cities of the Roman east. The combined effects of these factors led to a political situation characterised by an ongoing process of negotiation between the various groups that made up *polis* society, rather than one in which a single group dominated all others.⁶⁴

July, 2008

Department of Archaeology and
Ancient History of Europe
Ghent University
Blandijnberg 2
B-9000 Ghent, Belgium
andriesjohan.zuiderhoek@ugent.be

⁶⁴ An early version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Cambridge Philological Society in February 2007. I would like to thank those present on that occasion, as well as the anonymous readers for *GRBS*, for many helpful comments and suggestions. Responsibility for the argument, and all remaining mistakes, rests exclusively with the author.