

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen, *Urban Life and Local Politics in Roman Bithynia: The Small World of Dion Chrysostomos* (Black Sea Studies, 7), Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008. 211 pp. ISBN 9788779343504.

The Roman province of *Bithynia et Pontus* has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years.¹ The monograph by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen (henceforth B.-N.), which presents a welcome brief survey of the history and civic life of this region, serves as further evidence to this growing interest. As the author states, his main aim is 'to focus on Dion the local politician and on the political, intellectual and social urban environment of Roman Bithynia' (17), but the scope of his study is certainly much broader than one would have expected from the title since it covers the history of the region from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity. The main target readership is evident from the presentation of the material: sources are given in translation, Greek words are transliterated and terms of common usage in modern scholarship are explained to the reader. In its size, narrative and style the book has the character of an introduction to the subject which does not presuppose any special knowledge on the part of the reader. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the reader will not find here a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of Dio Chrysostom's life and work; for this the studies of H. von Arnim, C.P. Jones, P. Desideri or G. Salmeri still remain fundamental.²

The book is divided into nine chapters, which range from basic information about the classical *polis* to a portrayal of the "petty world" of civic affairs in the Bithynian cities under Roman rule as well as a discussion of modern approaches and concepts in the study of political life in the Graeco-Roman world. Chapter 1 ('Introduction') provides a short but very broad overview of the significance and status attached to the city-state in the Greek and Roman world. B.-N. discusses the Aristotelian idea of the citizen as a *zōon politikon* and outlines various socio-political factors, which in his view essentially determined life in the *polis*, such as the philotimetic *agōn* between the citizens, the inter-city rivalries or the significance of "informal" politics. As is the case with any such broad overview, it is inevitably marked by generalization. What, however, is particularly problematic in this chapter is the fact that the author randomly jumps from one period or place to another. In Chapter 2 ('Before the Romans'), B.-N. highlights the three Bithynian cities Nikaia, Nikomedia and Prusa, which form the heart of his analysis, and describes their geographical location, briefly outlining the circumstances of their foundation in the Hellenistic period and sketching the political history of the region from Nikomedes I to the establishment of the Roman province of *Bithynia et Pontus* under Pompey the Great. Chapter 3 ('Windows on the Past') provides a useful survey of the source material (archaeological remains, inscriptions, coins, letters, speeches, legal texts) for the study of Roman Bithynia and the problems involved in its interpretation. Of particular interest is B.-N.'s discussion revolving around the circumstances of the preservation and publication of Dio Chrysostom's speeches. B.-N. rejects the notion that Dio's speeches were taken down in shorthand by city clerks or his pupils. In his view the orations were most likely based on Dio's own, often incomplete notes which he prepared beforehand. Chapter 4 ('The Urban Environment') explores the contrast between urban and rural life in the province, discusses the notorious rivalries between Nikaia and Nikomedia over imperial *beneficia* (e.g.

¹ See e.g. C. Marek, *Pontus et Bithynia. Die römischen Provinzen im Norden Kleinasien*, Mainz, 2003; H.-L. Fernoux, *Notables et élites des cités de Bithynie aux époques hellénistique et romaine (III^e siècle av. J.-C. - III^e siècle ap. J.-C.)*. *Essai d'histoire sociale*, Lyons, 2004; and most recently J.M. Madsen, *Eager to be Roman. Greek Responses to Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia*, London, 2009.

² H. von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa*, Berlin, 1898; C.P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom*, Cambridge, 1978; P. Desideri, *Dione di Prusa. Un intellettuale greco nell'impero Romano*, Messina-Florence, 1978; G. Salmeri, *La politica e il potere. Saggio su Dione di Prusa*, Catania, 1982.

titles, immunity) and reconstructs the urban landscape of the three *poleis* under discussion on the basis of the archaeological and literary evidence. Here the maps and pictures, which neatly tie in with the text, are quite helpful to the reader. The following chapter ('Political Institutions') is concerned with the working of the civic institutions in the context of Roman administration. B.-N. gives a valuable overview of the major public institutions of the *polis* (e.g. council, *gerousia*, *gymnasion*) and of the practices of local self-government (e.g. euergetism, the management of civic finances). He also provides a sound summary of the various magistracies on the local and provincial level (e.g. *archōn*, *agōnothetēs*, *agoranomos*, *Bithyniarchēs*). One may wonder, however, why B.-N. does not take account of the role of the *dēmos* in view of the fact that the majority of Dio Chrysostom's speeches were delivered in the *ekklēsia* and that the People are presented by him as a significant force in civic politics. Chapter 6 ('The Political Class') sketches a vivid picture of the Bithynian political elite. After a discussion of the elite's ethnic composition, its social stratification and the spread of Roman citizenship in the upper echelons of Bithynian society, B.-N. turns to the analysis of some well-selected epigraphic sources in order to trace the careers of some leading figures of the province on the local, regional and imperial level (e.g. the Domitii of Prusias ad Hypium or the Cassii of Nikaia). Chapter 7 ('A Political Biography: Dion Chrysostomos') is primarily concerned with Dio Chrysostom, the most prominent figure of the Bithynian elite in the imperial period. B.-N. explores the main stages of Dio's life as a local politician at Prusa, as a friend of the emperors and Roman officials and as a wandering philosopher. It should be noted in passing that B.-N. tries to give some substance to Synesius' debatable claim that Dio Chrysostom "converted" from a sophist to a true philosopher during his exile under Domitian (121-122). It is in this chapter that the subtitle of the book lives up to its promise and the reader's expectations: B.-N. offers an illuminating insight into the "small world" of political conflict, personal feud, envy, rumour and gossip. His analysis is based on a chronology of Dio's speeches (given in the appendix) which slightly differs from that of C.P. Jones. The chapter culminates in an intriguing discussion of the Euboean Oration (*Or.* 7), which, as B.-N. convincingly argues, must be read as 'the political testament of Dion and a resigned retrospective view of his own life' (140). Chapter 8 ('The Bithynian Cities under the Later Empire'), which is the chapter least relevant to the world of Dio Chrysostom (as the author concedes himself), provides an overview of the later history of the region under the Antonine and Severan emperors, during the "crisis" of the third century and under Diocletian and Constantine. In the final chapter ('Conclusions: Urban Life and Local Politics') the author discusses civic politics in Roman Bithynia in the light of some modern theoretical concepts, such as the "honour-shame model", and critically examines conceptions of the Greek elite as put forward by P. Veyne, F. Quass and H.-L. Fernoux.³ It is in particular B.-N.'s discussion of Alex Honneth's "struggle for recognition model" and his scrutiny of the idea of "class interests" between council and assembly in the post-classical *polis* that provides an important stimulus for future debate in this field.

No doubt, the overall concept of the book makes it very accessible for students of the Ancient World. There is an index of persons, places and sources, but an index of subjects and terms is regrettably missing. Despite some omissions, the bibliography provides a useful starting-point which makes it possible to follow up the topics and discussions touched upon by the author. The text is illustrated with several black and white pictures, though their quality — particularly those of the inscriptions — is poor.

B.-N. does not introduce major changes to our general picture of the subject, but some of his observations and ideas may serve as a starting-point for further discussion. Those familiar with the topic will probably wonder whether the book would have benefited from a sharper chronological

³ P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris, 1976; F. Quass, *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens: Untersuchungen zur politischen und sozialen Entwicklung in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1993. For Fernoux see n. 1.

and thematic focus or whether certain topics should have been subject to deeper analysis. But overall, the book provides an informative introduction for all those interested in the history and civic life of Roman Bithynia. B.-N. certainly succeeds in drawing a graphic picture of the complex facets of civic affairs as they come to the fore in the fascinating source material of this region, most notably in Dio Chrysostom's speeches.

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Peter F. Bang, *The Roman Bazaar, A Comparative Study of Trade and Markets in a Tributary Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 358 + xv pages. ISBN 978-0-521-85532-7.

This is a book about Roman trade, approaches to ancient economies and above all comparative history. Several recent studies have applied comparative analyses to Roman History,¹ yet none have conducted the comparison drawn here between the Roman Empire and seventeenth-century Mughal India. In fact, this is only one out of two lines of comparison drawn in the book under review, the other being between Rome and Early Modern Europe. Although Bang (hereafter B.) declares that 'it is time to abandon *the tyranny of Europe over Rome*' (59, italics in origin), the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European *exemplum* with its possible resemblance but mainly its dissimilarities to Rome, keeps reappearing throughout the book. By presenting the interpretations of others B. gradually strives towards a justification of his own analysis. Previous models are first shown as useful for explaining certain aspects of the Roman past, only to be cast away as partial, restricting or even misleading explanations. A good example of this is the discussion of the Ricardian model, traditionally used by economists to explain interregional trade on the basis of comparative advantages (72-77).

Yet, this is not to say that economics cannot offer applicable methods for understanding Roman trade. B. informs us that a recently increasing interest in market imperfections and asymmetries has led economists to realise 'that traditional economics have overestimated the tendency of markets to become integrated' (139). Thus New Institutional Economics (D. North and others) serves B. as an inspiration, even a guide one may say, for his analysis. The unique characteristics of the social and political institutions of a particular culture — Early Modern Europe, Mughal India, Imperial Rome or communities within it — are crucial for understanding its economy. Institutional structure therefore becomes a key feature in B.'s description of interregional trade in the Roman Empire, decisive for constructing what he calls the 'bazaar economy'. The choice of the word bazaar is not unproblematic. As B. himself admits, in the Western mental map bazaar 'is a symbol of the Orient' (1) and of 'exotic rarities and enticing luxuries' (297). By employing this term B. hopes that 'the sense of familiarity will disappear' (1) and old traps in the debate on Roman commerce will be avoided. In practice, however, the latter goal is not fully achieved as the "market"/"state" (modernist/primitivist) dichotomy continues to cast its shadow over the discussion; while the former statement actually weakens what B. is really aiming at — creating in his readers a genuine feeling of alienation from the Roman experience, as opposed to the Renaissance-old sense of continuity rooted in European tradition. However, one cannot help but wonder whether estranging Rome as a foreign eastern (hence irrational) society,

¹ W. Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, Oxford, 2009; E. Dal Lago and C. Katsari (eds.), *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern*, Cambridge, 2008; H. James, *The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire*, Princeton, 2006; P.F. Bang, M. Ikeruchi and H.G. Ziche (eds.), *Ancient Economies, Modern Methodologies: Archaeology, Comparative History, Models and Institutions*, Bari, 2006.