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GREEK POPULAR ASSEMBLIES IN THE IMPERIAL PERIOD AND THE
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The line of development of Greek city institutions after Alexander has for a long time been regarded with a consensus among ancient historians. According to the prevailing opinion, democratic constitution was almost universally accepted in the Greek cities in the late 4th and early 3rd century B.C. and held firm for centuries to follow, relegating tyrannies and oligarchies among the marginal phenomena of polis history. Nevertheless, while democracy gradually became the standard constitution in Greek poleis, internal social development within these same communities created an essentially different reality, a reality in which a wealthy civic elite monopolized the local government. This situation is documented by a noticeable proliferation of honorary inscriptions celebrating the patriotic deeds of many wealthy individuals and families throughout the Greek-speaking world. Such documents are comparatively rare in the classical era, but very frequent in the Hellenistic and Roman period.

Many explanations were brought forward for this phenomenon, among others the gradual increase of economic needs of the cities, that could no longer be covered by the customary sources of revenue and which were then gradually taken over from the cities by the powerful families. Ordinary citizens, according to this explanation, were perfectly content to leave the decision-making process in the hands of the elite, as long as they enjoyed economic and social safety. Therefore, the constitution of an average Greek city in the Hellenistic and Roman era was a democracy only in a very formal sense, and such a community was actually ruled on the conservative lines by a purely aristocratic government¹. Other factors were also involved: the increasingly complicated diplomacy of the Hellenistic age required services of influential aristocrats and their international connections in dealing with other cities and the Hellenistic kings. Finally, there was, from the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. on, the ever-growing influence of Rome, an aristocratic republic in her own right.

It is usually considered that direct Roman intervention brought this development to its completion. After the establishment of the Roman provincial administration in any given region of the Greek world, local constitutions were deliberately altered by the Roman authorities: all the real power left to provincial cities was now (even formally) in the hands of a small and enclosed circle of rich families; this situation, with minor modifications, persisted under the Roman rule. Two most important city institutions – the council and the civic assembly – were treated differently, because the council evolved into both the city government and the main legislative body².

* I wish here to express my gratitude to Prof. M. Riel for reading this text and suggesting many corrections that improved it significantly.

¹ Certainly any city government after the 4th century B.C. would avoid to call itself “oligarchy” (and even the more neutral term “aristocracy” is not very frequent), considering a very negative image that this form of constitution acquired in the later Greek tradition; cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1966²), 170: “Democracy had in these ways ceased by the beginning of the second century B.C. to be a living reality, but it remained a popular ideal. No government, however oligarchic, would confess to the hateful title of oligarchy ... and the term democracy came to be watered down so that it meant little more than constitutional republican government.”

² But even the legislative capacity of the council was limited, for Roman administration rarely allowed major alterations in the internal constitution of cities, Jones, *The Greek City*, 132.

If any power was left to the cities, it was entrusted to councillors, themselves representatives of influential families whose members served as public officials. The city council also deliberated on any resolution before it was brought before the assembly. According to the prevailing view, this system left little room for a functional popular assembly. Therefore, Greek assemblies under the Roman Empire must have been summoned rarely and only if it was necessary to confirm decisions already made elsewhere. It follows that assembly meetings in the Greek cities of the 1st and 2nd century A.D. were only formal ceremonies or even ceased to be held altogether, popular assembly being now a mere relict of a distant past³. Was this really the case, and does this picture fully corroborate with the existing evidence? First, it is hard to ignore the actual domination of wealthy elites in the civic life of any Greek city during both the late Hellenistic and the Roman periods. There are hardly any trustworthy instances of individuals from lower social strata being elected to some high official posts. The same applies to the membership of the boule in the Greek cities. On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence, especially in Asia Minor, that sons of wealthy families held important civic post and council membership one after another for generations. However, setting civic officials and council aside, the actual position of the popular assembly is much harder to establish. The widespread explanation that Romans straightforwardly reduced popular assemblies to a symbolic position or even abolished them completely, rests on very slim evidence in historical sources. It is mostly based on the following statement of 2nd century A.D. author Pausanias (concerning the treatment of the vanquished Achaean League in 146 B.C.):

The walls of all the cities that made war against Rome Mummius demolished, disarming the inhabitants, even before assistant commissioners were dispatched from Rome and when these did arrive, *he proceeded to put down democracies and to establish governments based on property qualifications*. Tribute was imposed on Greece, and those with property were forbidden to acquire possessions in a foreign country. *Racial confederacies*, whether of Achaians, or Phokians or Boiotians, or of any other Greek people *were one and all put down* (trans. by W. H. S. Jones, The Loeb Classical Library, London 1966)⁴.

Several objections can be easily put forward against the conclusion that this settlement was permanent and general throughout the Greek world. First is the frequent inaccuracy of Pausanias when dealing with the more distant past. The author is in this case more than three centuries distant from the period he comments on and therefore entirely dependent on his sources. These are mostly unknown, and an investigation into other passages treating remote past in Pausanias' work does not necessarily arouse confidence. Secondly, in the following lines Pausanias clearly states that some privileges of the Greek cities were restored immediately afterwards, including

³ The prevailing view does not survive without dispute. F. Quass, *Zur Verfassung der griechischen Städte im Hellenismus*, *Chiron* 9 (1979), 37–52 made an attempt to describe the Hellenistic and early Roman Greek polis as the genuine democracy. Quass argued on the ground of official ideology which was distinctly democratic and anti-oligarchic that the average Greek city in these times was still essentially a democratic polis. This view was criticized by H. W. Pleket, *SEG* 29, 1734. Of the more recent works, the best analysis of the complex political reality of the Graeco-Roman city is by A. Zuiderhoek, *On the Political Sociology of the Imperial Greek City*, *GRBS* 48 (2008), 417–445.

⁴ Pausanias, *Perieg.* 7.16.9–10: πόλεων δέ, ὅσαι Ῥωμαίων ἐναντία ἐπολέμησαν, τείχη μὲν ὁ Μόμμιος κατέλυε καὶ ὄπλα ἀφηρεῖτο πρὶν ἢ καὶ συμβούλους ἀποσταλῆναι παρὰ Ῥωμαίων· ὡς δὲ ἀφίκοντο οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ βουλευσόμενοι, ἐνταῦθα δημοκρατίας μὲν κατέπαυε, καθίστα δὲ ἀπὸ τιμημάτων τὰς ἀρχάς· καὶ φόρος τε ἐτάχθη τῇ Ἑλλάδι καὶ οἱ τὰ χρήματα ἔχοντες ἐκωλύοντο ἐν τῇ ὑπερορίᾳ κτᾶσθαι. συνέδριά τε κατὰ ἔθνος τὰ ἐκάστων, Ἀχαιῶν καὶ τὸ ἐν Φωκεῦσιν ἢ Βοιωτοῖς ἢ ἐτέρωθί που τῆς Ἑλλάδος, κατελέλυτο ὁμοίως πάντα.

the liberty to form federal states, and that some of the fines were also remitted⁵. It is probably safe to assume that the other penalties (for all of these measures were just that) were also abolished in the long run. Third, Mummius punished only those cities that waged war on Rome (πόλεων ... ὅσαι Ῥωμαίων ἐναντία ἐπολέμησαν), but there were others that suffered no penalties or even received awards (Athens). Pausanias' testimony concerns only the cities of southern Greece, and there is hardly any reason to think that Mummius' treatment of Achaia provided the model for the Roman conduct in other areas of the Greek world⁶. On the contrary, the majority of the cities of the former Attalid kingdom assisted the Romans in their war against Aristonikos (132–129)⁷. On these grounds, it is perhaps better to assume that Greek civic assemblies were not automatically abolished or controlled by Romans, and that the rule of wealthy local elites is not due to any direct Roman interference, but to the long development of the Greek society since death of Alexander.

Epigraphical Evidence: the Case of Ephesos

Some years ago, G. M. Rogers challenged the prevailing opinion on the role of civic assembly in a short article based on evidence from early 2nd century Ephesos⁸. Rogers based his conclusions on some passages of the well-known inscription recording the foundation of C. Vibius Salutaris. This very long inscription, containing seven different documents, includes detailed instructions on the use of twenty-nine statues that were to be donated to the city after the benefactor's death. These images were to be publicly displayed during every regular assembly meeting in the Great Theatre of Ephesos. Some of them (statues of the emperor Trajan and the empress Plotina, a golden statue of Artemis and other images) were to be placed "during the assembly meetings above the area of the boule"⁹. Following lines indicate that the most important associations of the city – Gerusia, Ephebes and Paidēs – probably also had their representatives in the assembly meetings. This alone shows that the role of the popular assembly may not have been so formal and, essentially, unimportant as held by the majority of scholars today.

Rogers further strengthens his case with a brief overview of extant decrees (Hellenistic and Roman) of the council and the popular assembly in Ephesos. These include not only numerous honorary decrees but also resolutions on matters such as the repair of canals and supply of water

⁵ Pausanias, *Perieg.* 7.16.10: "A few years later the Romans took pity on Greece, restored the various old racial confederacies, with the right to acquire property in a foreign country, and remitted the fines imposed by Mummius" (ἔτεσι δὲ οὐ πολλοῖς ὕστερον τράποντο ἔλεον Ῥωμαῖοι τῆς Ἑλλάδος, καὶ συνέδριά τε κατὰ ἔθνος ἀποδιδόναι ἐκάστοις τὰ ἀρχαῖα καὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ ὑπερορίᾳ κτᾶσθαι, ἀφῆκαν δὲ καὶ ὅσοις ἐπεβεβλήκει Μόμμιος).

⁶ Although there is no positive evidence, ancient historians usually assumed that measures approximate to those taken in Greece, were applied in all other regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, cf. the contradictory statement of Jones, *The Greek City*, 170: "For the other province we have no evidence, but there can be no doubt that this rule was universal."

⁷ Half a century later (85–84), many of these cities suffered heavy punishment at the hands of Sulla's army for supporting the Pontic king in his war against Rome. The indemnities imposed on the cities were equally heavy (if not much heavier) as those imposed on the Achaean cities by Mummius, but there is no mention of Sulla's interference in the cities' constitutions or the reduction of assembly's powers.

⁸ G. M. Rogers, *The Assembly of Imperial Ephesos*, *ZPE* 94 (1992), 224–228.

⁹ *I.Ephesos 27B*, 157: ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἐπάνω τῆς σελίδος τῆς βουλ[ῆς].

for a fountain¹⁰. All these led Rogers to the assumption that at the very least, the Ephesian assembly was not unimportant, but a living and functional institution during the early Roman Empire¹¹.

A piece of literary evidence can be adduced to strengthen this claim, namely, the well-known riot of silversmiths in Ephesos started by one Demetrios and mentioned by the *Acts of the Apostles* 19¹². Apprehensive of the possibility that the teachings of early Christian missionaries could cause the neglect of the cult of Artemis, silversmiths began a riot that exploded into a general citizen unrest directed against Christians in Ephesos¹³. The restless crowd gathered in the Great Theatre (the location of regular assembly meetings), dragging with them some of Saint Paul's disciples, the Apostle himself being out of their reach. After some time, during which the theatre was the scene of uproar and disorder, a secretary "of the people" (of assembly?) appeared before furious citizens and succeeded in convincing them to break up their gathering. The secretary cautioned them on the power of Roman consuls (ἀνθύπατοι) and on the possibility of their intervention. Continuing, he said: "If you demand anything else, that will be settled in the *legal assembly meeting*."¹⁴ Clearly, a spontaneous gathering of mutinous citizens could in no way be treated as a regular assembly session¹⁵. However, it is also clear that citizens saw the assembly as an instrument for solving their problems and that demands of populace could be, and probably were, discussed in the assembly¹⁶.

Ephesos was the most important city of the Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor and (from the early 1st century B.C.) the seat of Roman governors. It can be argued that the situation in Ephesos is not representative and that no general conclusions can be drawn from it. However, leaving the size of the city apart, there are no particular grounds for assuming that the Ephesian popular assembly was essentially different from popular assemblies in other Greek cities. Attempts could be made to verify this using epigraphical testimony from elsewhere, but the situation with the extant sources is not particularly promising.

Epigraphical Evidence from the Rest of the Greek World

Epigraphic evidence for the survival of civic assemblies is abundant throughout the Greek world, especially in the early Roman period. The number of decrees published in the name of the council and the assembly is enormous. We encounter the couple "the council and the people" very frequently and almost everywhere, usually in the standard formula "it was decided by the council

¹⁰ *I.Ephesos* 2108; 419.

¹¹ Rogers, l.c. 224: "If this was case with Ephesos ... perhaps ancient historians should re-examine the idea (which has now been passed down through several generations of scholars), that the assemblies of imperial Asia Minor were simply reduced to confirming lists of candidates presented by the boulai."

¹² For the present discussion it is irrelevant whether this event actually took place. The writer of *Acts* is clearly someone well acquainted with the circumstances and institutions of late 1st century Ephesos; cf. H. Koester, Ephesos in Early Christian Literature, in id. (ed.), *Ephesos – Metropolis of Asia* (Cambridge MA 2004), 129–131.

¹³ *Acta Apostolorum* 19.21–40.

¹⁴ *Acta Apostolorum* 19.39: εἰ δέ τι περαιτέρω ἐπιζητεῖτε, ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπιλυθήσεται.

¹⁵ It ought to be noticed that the term ἐκκλησία is used at the end of the text even for this informal gathering: "And after saying this he (the secretary) dismissed the assembly" καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἀπέλυσεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (19.40). In the preceding lines the less precise term "ὄχλος" (the crowd) is used (19.33, 35).

¹⁶ It is hard to agree with the opinion expressed by S. Dmitriev, *City Government in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford 2005), 276–277 that this episode shows the manipulation of the assembly by civic officials (secretary in this case).

and the people” (ἔδοξεν τῆ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ). Extant examples in most Greek cities are far too numerous for quoting.

In its plainest meaning, the formula denotes that a proposition was first discussed by the council and then voted on in the assembly of the given city to become a proper resolution. The opinion that makes the assembly an unimportant institution draws most of its strength from the assumption that this second part, the voting in the assembly, was reduced to a formal acclamation of decisions made in the council. Allegedly, there was no discussion, no orators to dispute each other over proposals, and no public official to explain the proposal to citizens. It is very difficult to prove or disprove this statement using only public documents and it would be a very formal approach to claim from a standard formula that the assembly really took part in the process of decision-making. A great majority of preserved public documents from 1st–3rd century are honorary decrees and although they provide much information on the careers of public officials and on their social standing, their bearing on the role of the assembly is minor.

However, a significant number of documents scattered through the eastern provinces provide examples of civic assembly as the sole decision-maker, without mentioning the council¹⁷. There are also some rare examples of the council making decisions without the assembly.

Two epigraphical testimonies should be mentioned as particularly useful for this purpose. A document from Chalkis on Euboeia, an honorary decree for one Aurelios Hermodoros from the late 2nd or 3rd century B.C. gives some insight into the everyday assembly procedure¹⁸. The text consists of three main parts: the proposition according to which Hermodoros should receive the perpetual neokoria because of his numerous benefactions to a local sanctuary (lines 1–13); the decision of the boule (13–21); the resolution of the people (21–29). Members of the council and the citizens in the assembly both vote by a show of hands. The secretary asks for the vote on the proposal, and adds that whoever agrees should raise his hand (ἀράτω τὴν χεῖρα)¹⁹. Nothing surprising there, but then a very similar voting procedure takes place in the assembly. A strategos (Νόουιος Λυσσανίας) comes forth with the proposal – in his opinion, the only proper course is to support the decision of the council. “So, the council had already reached the same decision. If you also think so, raise your hands.”²⁰ Citizens voted in favor of the proposal, and the motion was carried²¹.

At least in this case, we have the proof of an assembly meeting that actually voted to confirm a proposal made by the council. The explicit proof of voting by a show of hands is elsewhere rarely found in inscriptions, and this is the only case where it is explicitly connected with a popular

¹⁷ For example *IG V 1*, 485, 7–8 (Sparta, reign of Hadrian); *I.Smyrna* 771, 14–19 (ca. AD 125); *TAM II* 41, 9–11 (Telmessos, AD 149); *BCH* 10 (1886), 305–307, no. 2, 1 (Alabanda, reign of Augustus); Newton, *Discoveries II* 698, no. 6a, 1 (Halikarnassos, reign of Claudius); *I.Iasos* 89, 1 (Imperial), *I.Labraunda* 65, 1 (Imperial) etc.

¹⁸ *IG XII 9*, 906. Prof. M. Riel brought the existence of this inscription to my attention.

¹⁹ *IG XII 9*, 906, 17–20: ἐπρωτότησεν ὁ γραμματεὺς Μαμερτεῖνος· ὅτω δοκεῖ κατὰ τὴν πάντων ὕμῶν βούλησιν καὶ τὴν εἰσήγησιν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ Παμφίλου καὶ εἰς τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ | ταύτην τὴν τεμὴν μετελθεῖν, ἀράτω τὴν χεῖρα.

²⁰ *IG XII 9*, 906, 26–28: ἔφθακεν οὖν ταῦτὰ ἐψηφίσθαι καὶ (τ)ῆ βουλῆ· εἰ καὶ ὑμεῖν δοκεῖ, ἀράτω τὴν χεῖρα.

²¹ In his standard work on the post-Alexander Greek City, Jones makes only a passing remark of this inscription: *The Greek City*, 177.

assembly²². This is perhaps merely another consequence of the prevailing epigraphical formulae that as a rule did not record actual voting procedures.

Direct evidence from a Euboian city comes from Karystos in a document from the early 2nd century A.D. (*IG XII 9*, 11). This text shows that even in the time of Hadrian the council members were chosen by lot, a thoroughly democratic method.

More evidence ought to be sought in the narrative texts of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D.

Dio of Prusa Speaking before the Civic Assembly

In many ways the works of Dio of Prusa, a prominent orator and a traveller of the Flavian and early Antonine eras, provide a valuable insight into the life of the early Roman Empire. His numerous discourses, although sometimes dismissed as works of inferior literary value, certainly provide much information for the study of many aspects of Greek society and institutions under the Roman Empire. There are many examples of his speeches that were delivered, or at least were written to be delivered, before a large audience resembling assembly meetings. These texts are numbers 31–50 in the traditional order. Some of these occasions were of a less formal nature than an assembly meeting but there are still several cases where it can be claimed with certainty that the speech was meant to be held in front of a popular assembly. Moreover, there is one particular speech that actually describes an assembly at work from an outsider's point of view. These orations will be discussed presently, first the ones concerning Rhodes and Alexandria.

The famous “Rhodian speech” (31st in the traditional order) was apparently prepared to be delivered during a session of the Rhodian assembly. The exact date or circumstances during which the oration was composed are unknown. The subject of the speech is the treatment of honorary statues and inscriptions by Rhodians: an ever-increasing demand for public honours by wealthy Romans induced the citizens to turn to re-inscribing the bases of extant statues to honour their new benefactors. Dio criticizes this practice at length (the “Rhodian speech” is by far the longest in the preserved part of Dio's corpus) in an unusually harsh tone, and makes numerous examples and comparisons to portray the immorality of such a practice.

The value of the speech for the present discussion lies chiefly in the fact that this oration was meant to be delivered before the Rhodian civic assembly, although the length of the text raises doubts whether the speech was actually held before the assembly or merely written for such an occasion. In the speech, Dio makes several allusions to the role of the “people” (δημος), mentions the voting-procedure and refers to his audience as the “men of Rhodes” (he begins some sentences with ὁ ἄνδρες Ῥόδιοι), a usual appellative for a gathering of citizens (Or. 31.1, 68). The topic itself – the practice of conferring honorary statues on the benefactors of the city – belongs to the category of issues that could only be discussed before a council or an assembly; in this case, it could only have been the Rhodian assembly. “When you *vote* a statue to someone ...”,²³ he says,

²² There is a 3rd century Athenian honorary decree (*IG II² 1064*; J. H. Oliver, *The Sacred Gerusia*, Hesperia Supplement 6 (1941), no. 31; *SEG 21*, 506) where exactly the same formula (ἀράτω τὴν χεῖρα) is used to describe the voting in the council. In this case there were two stages of voting procedure (for and against the motion) and the decision was unanimous – first, “all raised hands” (πάντες ἐπήραν) and afterwards “no one raised a hand” (οὐδεὶς ἐπήρεν). The second example is also from Athens, an honorary inscription of the society of Iobachi (*IG II² 1368*, 23–24) from mid 2nd century: ὄτω δοκεῖ | κύρια εἶναι τὰ ἀνεγνωσμένα δόγμα|τα καὶ ἐν στήλῃ ἀναγραφῆναι, ἀράτω | τὴν χεῖρα. πάντες ἐπήραν.

²³ Trans. by J. W. Cohoon and H. L. Crosby, Loeb Classical Library, London 1979; Or. 31.9: ὅταν γὰρ ψηφίσῃσθε ἀνδριάντα τινί.

and then asks: “What stops you from writing in your *decree*?”²⁴ One does not get the impression that the orator considered the assembly meeting an unimportant formality.

The exact date of this speech is unknown, but it probably antedates Dio’s exile from Rome under Domitian (before ca. 89 A.D.).²⁵ Consequently, in the late 1st century Rhodes had a popular assembly that actually met, discussed proposals and enacted resolutions.

Comparable to this is Dio’s 32nd or the “Alexandrian discourse”, delivered before a mass gathering of citizens in the theatre of Alexandria. On this occasion, Dio also censures his audience in a fairly harsh tone, this time on account of their irresponsible behaviour at public ceremonies²⁶, displaying the typical contempt of a Greek aristocrat for the follies of the multitude²⁷. From the text itself, we gather that the meeting took place at a public festival or during a session of the civic assembly. The solemn treatment of the subject by the speaker implies a more formal gathering than a mere theatrical performance, but the conclusive evidence in this sense is lacking. As in the previous example, circumstances under which the discourse was delivered are unknown and the exact date is debatable²⁸.

All the other cases where it can be maintained with some certainty that Dio spoke before an assembly concern the cities of Asia Minor. In most of these orations, the author chose to speak on the typical and recurring problems of Greek cities: internal strife among citizens and external disputes with the neighbours.

Of the two speeches held in Tarsus, the first one (the 33rd) was not, in my opinion, held before the civic assembly, but before a less formal gathering: there are no direct references to an assembly meeting, the topic is a trivial one and the tone of the speaker not very serious. The Second Discourse (34th) was without doubt delivered in the meeting of the civic assembly. This is directly attested in the text: “For let me tell you, you must not think that there is harmony among the Council itself, nor yet among yourselves, *the Assembly*.”²⁹ Later in the text, Dio mentions actual conflict between various civic institutions: the council, the assembly, the ephebes and the gerousia (Or. 33.21). If this is not just a figure of speech or a rhetorical overstatement, it is clear that the Assembly had an autonomous role in the city, taking an independent stand against the Council itself. Accordingly, the tone of speech is much more serious, as well as the topic itself: the civic

²⁴ Or. 31.38: τὶ γὰρ ἐκώλυεν εὐθὺς ἐν τῷ ψηφίσματι γράφειν;

²⁵ So far there has been no general agreement among the scholars on the date of the speech: H. von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa* (Berlin 1898), 212–218 (in the first year of Titus’ reign); C. P. Jones, *The Date of Dio of Prusa’s Rhodian and Alexandrian Orations*, *Historia* 41 (1992), 407–414 (Trajan’s reign); A. Momigliano, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the Late Republic and Early Principate* by Ch. Wirzubunski, *JRS* 41 (1951), 149–151 (first years of Vespasian’s rule).

²⁶ E. K. Borthwick, *Dio Chrysostom on the Mob at Alexandria*, *The Classical Review*, n.s. 22 (1972), 1–3.

²⁷ W. D. Barry, *Aristocrats, Orators and the “Mob”*: Dio Chrysostom and the World of Alexandrians, *Historia* 42 (1993), 82–103.

²⁸ The date of the Alexandrian speech is even more controversial than the Rhodian oration: von Arnim, *Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa*, 435–438 (after 105, before 112); C. P. Jones, *The Date of Dio of Prusa’s Alexandrian Oration*, *Historia* 22 (1973), 302–309 (early years of Vespasian’s rule); J. F. Kindstrand, *The Date of Dio of Prusa’s Alexandrian Oration – A Reply*, *Historia* 27 (1978), 378–383 (agrees with von Arnim); H. Sidebottom, *The Date of Dio of Prusa’s Rhodian and Alexandrian Orations*, *Historia* 41 (1992), 407, 415–419 (Trajan’s reign). Many modern scholars maintained that Dio came to Alexandria as an envoy of Vespasian, being allegedly an amicus of the Flavian dynasty, and therefore, that the speech must have been delivered sometime during Vespasian’s reign, but this view finds no support from the preserved sources, v. H. Sidebottom, *Dio of Prusa and the Flavian Dynasty*, *The Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 46 (1996), 447–456.

²⁹ Or. 33.20: ἐπεὶ τοι μηδὲ τὴν βουλὴν αὐτὴν ἡγεῖσθ’ ὁμονοεῖν μηδ’ ὑμᾶς τὸν δῆμον.

discord in Tarsus and inamicable relations between the people of Tarsus and other regional communities. Moreover, in this speech we have even more valuable information: at the time of Dio's visit Tarsus had a timocratic constitution! The most important cause of disorder, in Dio's opinion, was the rift between those who had access to the assembly and those who did not; Tarsus had a yearly census of 500 drachmas for membership of the assembly (Or. 33.23). Dio proposes to abolish the census as something shameful and to give access to the assembly to all men born in the city. Apparently, in Dio's experience, the normal order of things in a Greek city is that every citizen, regardless of his property, has access to the assembly. It is equally apparent that together with the fighting inhabitants of 2nd century Tarsus he regarded the popular assembly as an institution important enough to fight one's way into it.

Neither the 35th (concerning Phrygian Kelainai) nor the 36th discourse (on his visit to Borys-thenes, delivered in his native city) are meant to be spoken before an assembly meeting, while the 37th (Corinthian) is not Dio's work, although included in his corpus.

The 38th discourse is another case of a speech certainly delivered before the assembly in session. Dio speaks to "Men of Nikomedia" on the occasion of receiving the award of citizenship from them (Or. 38.1). He presents them with a lengthy speech on the problem of their relations with their great neighbour, Nikaia. Two cities are seriously engaged in the dispute over primacy in the province (the title of "metropolis"), although there are also other points of conflict (Or. 38.7, 21–29, 38–39). Relations have deteriorated so much that there is even talk of violence. Dio proposes to the assembly an end to this pointless contest that is both irrational and shameful for the two cities. Again, the example strongly emphasizes the importance of speaking before the assembly.

There is nothing to indicate that the 39th discourse ("On Concord", spoken in Nikaia) is an address to the assembly. There are no specific phrases or direct references to this institution. The topic is at first glance important (restoration of civic concord in the city) but it is dealt with briefly and in a very theoretical manner, with no specific details. The language points to some extraordinary occasion, and Dio mentions that he has just received some form of honour (Or. 39.1).

Discourses 40 and 41 are connected by a common topic – a dispute between two cities, Dio's hometown Prusa and the neighboring coastal city of Apameia. The 40th discourse is another speech containing explicit confirmation that it was held during an assembly session in Prusa³⁰. After some passing remarks showing that the speech was composed after his long exile and another visit to Rome (Or. 40.1–2), he speaks on two important matters. The first one regards a project for embellishment of the city, the execution of which he has personally promised before the assembly, but has failed to accomplish it satisfactorily (Or. 40.3–15). The second is some unspecified problem in the relations with the neighbouring Apameia. Dio states that he has refrained from visiting that city or initiating any contact with it at all, because he was waiting for the two cities to settle their unspecified dispute and officially restore good relations. Then he explains at length why it is beneficial for Prusa to restore good relations with Apameia, using both ethical and practical arguments; the end of the text is not preserved³¹. The 41st discourse is a

³⁰ Or. 40.6: "When I made that speech on the occasion referred to (sc. when he made the failed promise), the Assembly arose in enthusiasm for it." (Τούτον ἐμοῦ τότε εἰπόντος τὸν λόγον, ἐπήρθη τε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ δῆμος). Another sentence (40.16) mentions the session schedule of the assembly: "Well, why have I made all this harangue, when you were considering other matters?" (Τίνος οὖν ἔνεκεν εἴρηκα πάντα τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὑπὲρ ἄλλων ὑμῶν βουλευομένων;). His audience is referred to as ὁ ἄνδρες πολῖται.

³¹ Or. 40.41 breaks in the middle of a sentence.

continuation of the 40th since it was composed shortly afterwards and deals with the same topic; this time Dio is acting as a member of an official delegation dispatched from Prusa to Apameia to settle the dispute mentioned in the previous speech. For the present purpose, however, the 41st speech is of no special value, because it was delivered before the council³².

For the 42nd speech there is no ground to claim that it was intended for an assembly session, in fact the contents and language used would point to the opposite conclusion; it is also one of the shortest texts in the entire corpus and may have been intended as a prologue to some longer speech.

The 43rd discourse is probably intended to be delivered before the assembly of Prusa³³ but only as an introduction into a longer speech. In this case, certain charges were brought forward against Dio and he came before the assembly to defend himself (Or. 43.6, 12).

The 44th is also an address to the assembly of Prusa, but the occasion is an honorary one³⁴.

In the 45th discourse, Dio is again in his native Prusa, defending himself against various charges. He speaks of his relations and good intentions towards his home city, renders an account of his two journeys to Rome and in conclusion, defends his program of beautification of the city³⁵.

The audience of the 46th discourse, another one delivered in Prusa, cannot be indentified with certainty, but there is nothing pointing to an assembly session.

In the 47th discourse, Dio again talks of his plans for embellishment of the city and again needs to defend himself against his opponents, because his project necessitated demolition of a number of older structures, some of them sacred. The speech was delivered during an assembly session³⁶. The project is also mentioned in the 48th discourse, although here the main topic is the preparation for the arrival of the new Roman governor, Varenus (Or. 48.1, 9–12). Dio uses the opportunity to advise his fellow-citizens not to show their internal discord before the new governor (Or. 48.16).

The 49th and the 50th discourse are delivered before the council of Prusa and have no direct bearing on the work of the popular assembly.

Dio of Prusa on Civic Assembly: The Euboian Discourse

The final and the most peculiar example is the so-called “Euboian Discourse” or “The Hunter” (*Εὐβοικός* or *Κυνηγός*, 7th in the traditional order). This is a somewhat peculiar rhetorical work, delivered before an unknown audience, probably in Rome and certainly during the final years of Dio’s life³⁷. It consists of two parts: in the first (7.1–80), Dio recounts an event, allegedly from his own personal experience, that took place on the southeast coast of Euboea during his exile under Domitian; in the second (7.81–152), he lengthily elaborates on the morals of this story. According to his report, Dio survived a shipwreck on the southeast coast of Euboea, and after a

³² Although there were others present: “Ὅτι μὲν ὑμεῖς, ὦ βουλή καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οἱ παρόντες οἱ μετριώτατοι” (Or. 41.1).

³³ Both the council and the assembly are mentioned: Or. 43.3.

³⁴ Again (Or. 44.1) the appellative ὦ ἄνδρες πολῖται is used for those present at the assembly meeting.

³⁵ Or. 45.2–5, 12–14. The address ὦ ἄνδρες πολῖται is used here as well (45.1) and in one sentence Dio explicitly identifies his audience with the civic assembly (45.16).

³⁶ Cf. Or. 47.1.

³⁷ As he says at the very beginning of the discourse (7. 1): ἴσως γὰρ οὐ μόνον πρεσβυτικὸν πολυλογία καὶ τὸ μηδένα διαθεῖσθαι ῥαδίως τῶν ἐμπιπτότων λόγων, πρὸς δὲ τῷ πρεσβυτικῷ τυχὸν ἂν εἴη καὶ ἀλητικόν.

short time of aimless wandering through an unknown region, a group of local hunters rescued him (Or. 7.2–8). He spent a few days with these hunters' families (none of whom is named) and by doing so learned a great deal about their lives, their family histories, the surrounding area and the neighbouring city (also unnamed, perhaps Karystos or Eretria³⁸). The quantity of valuable historical details in this speech is substantial, and ancient historians managed to extract important information from it.

The most extensive digression (7.21–63) is directly related to the role of civic assembly. At one time, a citizen from the near-by city who demanded payment of taxes for the public land the hunters were tilling confronted the above-mentioned hunters. The same individual persuaded one of the hunters to follow him to the city, where he was brought before the magistrates. Those in turn led him to the theatre where a multitude of citizens gathered and an assembly meeting began (Or. 7.21–24).

The hunter's case was not the first on the agenda: at the outset, several speakers addressed the crowd and a number of proposals were brought to vote by acclamation (Or. 7.24–26). When his time arrived, the accuser charged the hunter before the assembly for usurping the public land, and made several false accusations concerning the wealth and the property of the hunter. A long debate ensued, during which the public opinion gradually shifted in favour of the hunter. The hunter defended himself to the best of his abilities and one of the citizens spoke on his behalf, while the accuser presented the second charge, this time claiming that the hunters were actually brigands, preying on travellers and plundering shipwrecks. Two adversary rhetors then spoke against each other over this matter for a long time. An official asked the hunter whether he could pay regular taxes to the city, but the hunter's family had no money and no means of obtaining it. Instead, the hunter could only offer agricultural products and skins of wild animals in lieu of a tax payment (Or. 7.27–47).

Finally, a citizen who recognized in the hunter the person who rescued him and his friend from a shipwreck in the Hollows of Euboia brought the issue to conclusion³⁹. On hearing this, the orator who had previously defended the hunter, now praised him as a saviour of two fellow-citizens and a benefactor of the city. He proposed to grant fiscal immunity to the hunter and his family who will be free to till the public land and transmit this privilege to their children. In addition, the hunter would be given a reward of one hundred drachmas. The hunter who saw no use of money promptly refused the gift (Or. 7.60–63).

What Dio gives us here is an interesting description of a complete assembly procedure. The time of the regular assembly meeting is known well in advance, and the hunter is brought just before the beginning. The meeting opens when a sufficient number of citizens have gathered, but the problem of misappropriated public land is not the first on the agenda (Or. 7.23–24). The proposals were undoubtedly brought forward in the order predetermined by the council, and the gathered citizens voted openly by acclamation. A magistrate (ὁ ἄρχων, Or. 7.43), perhaps the secretary of the assembly (γραμματεὺς τοῦ δήμου), chairs the meeting in the presence of other officials (τινες ἄρχοντες, οἱ ἄρχοντες, Or. 7.23, 24). The presence of civic officials at assembly meetings is attested in other Greek cities in the Roman period. When a citizen brings forth the accusation against the hunter (Or. 7.27–29), the accused is given opportunity to speak for himself

³⁸ The identification depends on the location of the so-called "Hollows of Euboia" (τὰ κοίλα τῆς Εὐβοίας, Or. 7.2), mentioned by several ancient authors (Herodotos 8.14; Livius 31.47; Strabon 10.1.2); v. G. C. Richards, *The Hollows of Euboea*, *The Classical Review* 44 (1930), 61–62.

³⁹ This man is the only one whose name (Σωτάδης) is actually mentioned in the entire discourse (Or. 7.59).

(Or. 7.41–53). Since there are others interested in the matter, voting does not begin before everyone who wished to do so had spoken and before the presiding official had asked questions of his own (Or. 7.44–47). The full institutional procedure, not dissimilar to that of the classical period but also in accordance with the information we know from the decrees of imperial Greek cities, has been carried out.

The historical value of Dio's testimony is a difficult question. Modern scholars differ greatly on how to interpret the contents of the 7th discourse, and their views usually divide in two categories. It is either (A) a genuine experience of Dio's, although presented in a very distorted shape, to suit the rhetorical form and the moralistic purpose of the second part of the discourse; or (B) a work of pure fiction, inspired by some of Plato's dialogues and idyllic novels of Dio's time, composed to demonstrate the difference between the ideal pastoral life of hunters and the corruption and decay of urban life⁴⁰.

Undeniably, there are important similarities between Dio's story and some works of Plato, and his description of pastoral life in Euboeia brings to memory some of the passages from ancient novels, particularly Longus' four books on Daphnis and Chloe. However, there are important differences as well, and there is Dio's claim: "I report a personal experience of mine, not something I have heard from others."⁴¹ If the event was completely fabricated, such a claim would make him a downright liar, in a manner that has no parallel anywhere else in his orations. Of course, even if the described story really happened, the Euboian speech is certainly not a precise report on all that occurred on the same occasion. It was prepared for the public many years later and it suffered much distortion, both because of frailties of human memory and of the necessary reshaping to suit its rhetorical and philosophical purpose⁴².

For our specific purpose all this is beside the point, and Dio's information on the role of civic assemblies in Greek cities retains its value even if the actual event never took place. Even if the pastoral utopia of Euboian hunters is entirely of his making⁴³, the urban society he confronts it with is not another utopian imagination, but a living city of his day. A modern author writes:

It is uncertain that in reality Dio was shipwrecked on Euboeia, or that he met two families of isolated hunters ... To further his moral message of the virtue available to the poor, Dio wanted to make a contrast between the homes and the tables of the worldly great and the happiness of the poor yet free rustics with whom he claimed to have feasted.⁴⁴

Perhaps so, but what was the life of hunters contrasted with? With yet another ideal picture of a Greek city from a distant (classical) past, a city possessing a functional assembly that was nowhere to be seen in his own day? By doing so, Dio would have missed his purpose entirely.

⁴⁰ E. L. Bowie, in: K. J. Dover et al., *Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford 1980), 167; G. Anderson, *The Second Sophistics. A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London 2006), 53, 170; H. Sidebottom, *Dio of Prusa*, 455–456.

⁴¹ Or. 7.1: Τόδε μὴν αὐτὸς ἰδὼν, οὐ παρ' ἑτέρων ἀκούσας, διηγῆσομαι.

⁴² Of the more recent works, G. Anderson, *Some Uses of Storytelling in Dio*, in S. Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford 2002), 145–150 is especially critical of the possibility that such "convincing and spontaneous detail in fiction" should be used as a historical source.

⁴³ Dio's attitude towards the lower classes is noticeably negative in his early orations. A very positive opinion on humble hunters is distinctively different from the one he expresses about the lower classes of Alexandria in the 32nd discourse, which is perhaps another point showing that the Euboian speech was delivered late in his life, cf. Barry, *Aristocrats, Orators and the "Mob"*, 98–99. Of course, one could say that Dio shows a positive attitude towards the hunter but still despises the urban mob (as Ma, op. cit.); but cf. Or. 34.21–23.

⁴⁴ Sidebottom, *Dio of Prusa*, 455–456.

According to many modern scholars, the situation as he describes it ought not to have existed anywhere in the eastern part of the Roman Empire for centuries before Dio's time. Yet Dio of Prusa draws this picture before his audience, an audience that must have known better than we do today the real conditions of the contemporary Greek city. No matter how we assess the "truth" of Dio's story (a genuine event from his experience or an imaginary dialogue), the description provides us with a glimpse into the general conditions prevailing in civic assemblies of his times. Coincidence or not, the above-mentioned example of assembly vote in *IG XII 9, 906*, is from Chalcis, another Euboian city. Many details in Dio's story can be verified by using information from other available sources, and one recent work has clearly shown that Dio's description corresponds well with what we know of the reality of the Graeco-Roman city⁴⁵.

Conclusions

The discussed examples have bearing on the several Greek cities of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries B.C. (Ephesos, Rhodes, Alexandria, Tarsos, Prusa, Nikaia, Nikomedia and an unnamed Euboian city, either Karystos or Eretria). The basic conclusions from the analysis of the mentioned sources are:

1. The Romans did not formulate and pursue any general policy of checking or abolishing civic assemblies in the Greek cities. Measures taken by Lucius Mummius after the sack of Corinth in 146 B.C. were only temporary and directed against those cities of the former Achaean league that took up arms against Romans.

2. Inscriptions confirm the existence of civic assemblies in nearly every Greek city of the early Imperial period but give almost no indication as to their actual position and role in public life.

3. Combined epigraphical and literary evidence from Ephesos (Salutarius foundation inscription – *I.Ephesos 27*; an episode from the *Acts of the Apostles* 19.21–40) points to a considerable importance of assembly in public life, with sessions attended by representatives of the city council and other collegia.

4. Several cities visited by Dio during his life – Rhodes, Alexandria, Tarsos, Nikaia, Nikomedia and his native Prusa – had a functional assembly in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries A.D. as indicated by Or. 31–48.

5. Popular assemblies in the above-mentioned cities dealt with a large number of issues of considerable importance. Apart from voting public honors to individuals, they made decisions about public constructions and usage of public space and funds, discontent among citizens, internal strife and public order, relations and disputes with other cities, charges against public officials. In one case there, we learn of a conflict between the assembly and the council.

6. In his Euboian discourse, Dio gives a general description of the conditions and dealings of Greek public assemblies of his time. Such an assembly was attended by a multitude of citizens who listened to speeches of prominent orators and voted in favour or against a proposal. Confirmation of this statement is found in two inscriptions from the island of Euboia (*IG XII 9, 11* and *906*).

7. Various sources show that civic officials were present during regular assembly meetings, with one of them chairing a particular session.

⁴⁵ J. Ma, Public Speech and Community in the Euboicus, in S. Swain (ed.), *Dio Chrysostom. Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford 2002) 108–124.

Although it cannot be positively proven, contemporary Greek assemblies in other cities probably functioned on the similar lines as those described by Dio.

Could these conclusions be taken even further, to challenge the prevailing view of an essentially elitist government in late Greek poleis and of the central role of the council? Most probably not. The dominant social and economic position of a small number of families is obvious to all who study honorific inscriptions of any Greek city in the first two centuries A.D. The social standing of elected officials, who almost universally belong to upper classes, points in the same direction. In addition, the important question of who had the right to bring proposals before the council and the assembly remains unsolved.

A general reexamination of all the evidence on Greek popular assemblies during the Roman Empire is desirable. Considering the evidence previously examined, it is reasonable to assume that the end of the prominent role of the assembly in the Greek city should not be sought in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. but at a much later date, most likely in the great turmoil of the mid-3rd century, when the epigraphical record suddenly falls silent on public assemblies.

Özet

Bu makalesinde yazar, Hellenistik ve Roma dönemlerindeki Grek kentlerinde demokrasinin yalnızca bir şekilden ibaret olup, klasik devirdeki özelliklerini yitirdiklerine ve halk meclislerinin yalnızca temsilî birer kurum haline geldiklerine ilişkin genel kanıyı reddetmekte ve buna ilişkin kanıtlar sunmaktadır. Yazara göre bu düşünceyi savunanların tek dayanağı, İ.S. II. yüzyılda yaşayan Pausanias'ın bazı ifadeleridir. Ama hem bazı resmî kayıtlarda ve hem de diğer bazı yazarlarda, tam tersine, halk meclisinin önemli işlevlerini ortaya koyan kanıtlar vardır. Buna ilişkin Anadolu'da bulunan çok sayıdaki örnekten biri, örneğin, Ephesos'da ele geçen C. Vibius Salutaris'un kurduğu vakfa ilişkin yazıttır. Ama buna ilişkin kanıtların en önemlileri, Prusa'lı Dion'un verdiği nutuklarda bulunmaktadır. Dio, bu nutuklardan birkaç tanesini değişik bazı kentlerin meclislerinde vermiş ve bu nutuklarında ilgili kentin çok önemli konularına değinmiştir. Sonuçta, bu kanıtların ışığında, halk meclislerinin en azından Chalcis, Rhodos, Alexandria, Tarsos, Nikaia, Nikomedia, Prusa vs. gibi önemli birçok kentte lağvedilmediklerini ve bunların İsa'dan sonraki yüzyıllarda da varlıklarını sürdürdüklerini rahatça söyleyebiliriz.