Dio Chrysostom, Speeches XLI.8-10

Praise of Rome’s generosity regarding the grant of its citizenship and its sense of justice.

Name of the author: Dio Chrysostom
Date: 101 CE
Place: Apamea
Language: Greek

Category: Greek
Literary genre: Discourse

Title of work: Speeches
Reference: XLI.8-10
Commentary:

Dio Chrysostom composed his speeches 40 and 41 after his exile under the reign of Domitian, probably during the first years of Trajan’s reign, when he was back in his homeland in Prusa. Christopher P. Jones suggests the date of 101 CE as the date of composition (Jones, The Roman World, p. 138; Salmeri, La politica, p. 30, n. 97). Speech 40 is addressed to the inhabitants of Prusa (modern Bursa), Speech 41 to the council and perhaps also to a part of the assembly of Apamea (modern Mudanya) (see Jones, The Roman World, p. 93; only to the enlarged council of Apamea according to Desideri, Dione, p. 411). These two speeches are connected to the strife that affected the relationship between the two cities. If Prusa was a Greek city, Apamea had a privileged status as it was the only Roman colony in all Bithynia (thus named Colonia Iulia Concordia Apameia). This colony had been established at a date which remains debated but whose terminus post quem is fixed at 45 BCE. In theory, because of its status of Roman colony, Apamea was part of Rome and was entirely independent from the rest of the province. Under Augustus’s reign, Apamea received administrative privileges which were that of a free city. For instance, provincial officials were not allowed to intervene in its affairs (Fernoux, Notables et Élites, p. 172). This privileged status is confirmed by a letter that Pliny the Younger addressed to Trajan when he was governor of Bithynia and Pontus (probably between 110 and 112 CE), in which he reports that the citizens of Apamea exceptionally authorized him as governor to inspect the accounts of the colony, a thing that proconsuls never did before. It is specified that the inhabitants of Apamea had the “privilege (privilegium) and the long-established custom (vetustissimum morem) to manage their internal affairs in their own way” (see Pliny the Younger, Letters X.47.1; about the Roman colony of Apamea, see Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 137-141). However, in spite of its privileged status as a Roman colony, Apamea was not some kind of “Roman bubble” isolated from its Greek environment. According to Aitor Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea was embedded in a Greek context with which it interacted. Such an interaction was to affect its development as a city and functioning civic community” (Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 142). It is in this framework that we have to understand Dio Chrysostom’s speeches nos. 40 and 41, which highlight more particularly the interactions and rivalries existing between Apamea and its neighbour Prusa.

If we ignore the precise causes of the quarrel between the two cities, we may deduce from the text presented here that this strife had been lasting for many years and that an agreement restoring the homonoia (the concord) between the two cities had not yet been found when Dio pronounced the speech at Apamea (first sentence of § 9). Dio explicitly says that he is not committed to favour one of the two cities (Speeches 40.16 and 41.8), but he encourages the inhabitants of Apamea to pursue the path of reconciliation with Prusa. Paolo Desideri has even proposed that Dio may have tried to promote the synoecism (the amalgamation) of the two cities (note that in § 10 one finds the only occurrence in Dio’s corpus of the word ?????????; see Desideri, Dione, p. 410-411; Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 143).

Among the arguments used by Dio to convince the members of the council of Apamea to find an agreement with Prusa, Dio develops the idea that the two cities have close ties in various domains. He thus enumerates the geographical proximity, the mixing between the two civic populations through marriages or participations in festivals of various kinds, and the existence of common institutions (§ 10). But the most interesting element for our purpose is certainly the fact that some citizens of Prusa, the most distinguished and powerful one, had been made citizens of Apamea. Dio himself belonged to the two communities and he was also a Roman citizen. Actually, earlier in Speech XLI.6, Dio gives some details about his family background: his maternal grand-father and his mother had first received Roman citizenship from the emperor (Claudius or Nero), and had been added to the list of the citizens.
of the Roman colony of Apamea. For what concerns his father, Pasicrates, Dio says that he was a peregrine and that he was granted the citizenship (?????????) of Apamea directly from the city without mentioning any imperial intervention or any preliminary grant of Roman citizenship. To explain this state of fact, Henri-Louis Fernoux considers that Pasicrates became an honorary citizen of Apamea (see Fernoux, *Notables et E?lites*, p. 196-197; Thomas, « *Origine* », p. 96-97). However, Aitor Blanco-Pérez has shown that such a grant was probably not only honorific. The fact that, in a Roman colony, an autonomous local citizenship was granted totally independently from Roman citizenship is a phenomenon which may have been frequent in Asia Minor (it is attested for instance at Alexandria Troas), but which did not exist in western Roman colonies (Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 146-147). The last sentence of the passage of Speech XLI: “Besides, several citizens of Prusa you have even made citizens of Apameia, you have made them members of the Council, you have deemed them not unworthy of becoming magistrates among you, and you have admitted them to partnership in these august privileges which pertain to Roman citizenship” has to be understood in light of this interpretation (the participation to the council shows that the Apamean citizenship granted to citizens of Prusa was not only an honorary one). Influential citizens from Prusa could be admitted among the citizens of Apamea, could take part in its political and civic life as the Apameans who were also Roman citizens did. In this case, we can thus see that grants of Roman and Apamean citizenships were two things that were not interrelated.

For what concerns Dio, considering the fact that the provincial law (the *lex Pompeia*) orders that in cities of Bithynia, in case of intermarriage, it was the *origo* of the mother which had to be followed (see *Digest* L.1.1.2), he must have been born a Roman citizen, from a Roman mother (in that perspective, see Thomas, « *Origine* », p. 96-97; Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 144; *contra* Bekker-Nielsen, *Urban Life*, p. 119 who does not take the *lex provincia* into account and uses Gaius, *Institutes* I.75 and *Tituli ex corpore Ulpiani* V.4 to assert that Dio was born a peregrine). For what concerns local citizenships, Dio had various ones: he was citizen of Prusa, and, as his mother, was also citizen of Apamea (mentioned at length in Speech XLI.2-6, see Thomas, « *Origine* », p. 9, n. 15 ; 96-97).

He had also been “adopted” by another city, Nicomedia (Speech XXXVIII.4). As has been largely proved, the restrictions imposed by the provincial law (the *lex Pompeia*) concerning the impossibility to have various local citizenships and the *civitas Romana* were not really in practice in Eastern regions of the Empire (about multiple citizenships in the Roman East see the contributions in Heller and Pont, *Patrie d'origine*; see particularly Jones, “Joys and Sorrows”). In this perspective, in spite of his status of Roman colony, Apamea acted as every other Greek *politeuma* of the region by creating its own local *politeia* and by attracting the most influential and rich members of the neighbouring city, Prusa, into his civic body (Blanco-Pérez, “Apamea,” p. 148-149).

What is of particular concern and interest to us is the praise of Rome made by Dio in § 9 of the speech presented here. To convince the members of the council of Apamea to find an agreement with Prusa, Dio not only develops the idea that the two cities have close ties in various domains, but he also praises the city of Apamea by recalling the exceptional greatness of its elites and its special status of Roman colony: “But still I have confidence in the character of your city, believing it to be, not rough and boorish, but in very truth the genuine character of those distinguished men and that blessed city (?????????? ????????) by which you were sent here as friends indeed to dwell with friends”. Apamea is thus presented by Dio has having inherited from the “genuine character” of its founding city, Rome, here qualified as ????????, “blessed”. Such an idea indirectly echoes the commonplace according to which every Roman colony throughout the Empire was a small-scale reproduction of Rome (the most famous passage is certainly Aulus Gellius when he writes that the status of colony is “nevertheless judged preferable and more prestigious because of the greatness and majesty of the Roman people [amplitudinem maiestatemque populi Romani], of which those colonies seem to be small-scale reproductions, as it were, and copies [quasi effigies parvae simulacraque esse]...”, see Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* XVI.13.9).

Next, Dio praises Rome by using common ideological statements: Rome is superior to all mankind because of her exceptional fortune (????????), power (????????), fairness (???????????) and benevolence (???????????). Then, Dio emphasizes the last two virtues by recalling in particular that Rome’s generosity manifests itself through the fact that she bestows “ungrudgingly” (????????) citizenship (?????????), laws and offices. A similar praise of Rome’s sense of justice and generosity appears in a later famous source, Aelius Aristides’s speech *The Roman Oration* (about the good functioning of justice in the Roman Empire, see Aelius Aristides, *Regarding Rome* 38-39; about Rome’s generosity concerning the grant of Roman citizenship, see Aelius Aristides, *Regarding Rome* 59-60, 63). Moreover, praise of Rome for having been always favourable to bestow its citizenship generously is a motif which has been used by many authors to serve various kinds of arguments. For instance, in his defence speech in favour of L. Cornelius Balbus whose aim was to prove that the Roman citizenship that Balbus received had been legally granted to him, Cicero insist on Rome’s generosity concerning the bestowing of its citizenship by quoting examples from the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE (see Cicero, *On behalf of Balbus* 31.4-6). The motif of Rome’s capacity to integrate foreigners and even former enemies into its civic body is an argument used by the emperor Claudius in the version that Tacitus gave of the speech that the emperor pronounced in 48 CE at the Senate in
Rome to respond to a plea of some leading citizens of Gallia Comata who wanted to obtain the right to hold Roman magistracies, and thus to be part of the Roman Senate (see Tacitus, Annals XI.24). This motif is also used by Josephus in Contra Apionem II.40, when he writes: “Has not the benevolence (???????????) of the Romans ensured that their name has been shared with practically everyone, not only with individuals but with sizeable nations as a whole” (translation by John M. G. Barclay in Flavius Josephus, vol. 10, p. 190). Dio thus reuses a motif which was quite widespread. In the framework of his argumentation, to praise Rome’s generosity in the granting of its citizenship serves to reinforce his argument that Apamea had done the same by granting its local citizenship to men coming from other cities of Bithynia. Thus, if Apamea was able to behave in such a way, there was absolutely no reason for her to refuse the reconciliation with Prusa.

To conclude, the fact that, in the speech he addressed to the council of Apamea, Dio Chrysostom mainly uses eulogies or ideological arguments to convince the Apameans that reaching an agreement with their Prusan neighbours was in their interest, shows that it must have been difficult for the orator to find concrete reasons to convince them. The elite of Apamea were aware of their superior status, and Dio himself, because he was also a Prusan citizen, was suspected by some member of the Apamean council of working on behalf of the Prusan interests (Bekker-Nielsen, Urban Life, p. 128). To counter these fears, Dio praises the city of Apamea and uses his family history to prove that many interactions characterised the relationship between Prusa and Apamea. It is in this framework that Dio offers an ideological development about Rome which is particularly interesting. In a few words, Dio explains Rome’s superiority in good fortune and power, first by its sense of justice, second by its generosity regarding the granting of its citizenship. The latter motif is quite common in Latin or Greek literature, but here it is interesting to see that this Greek orator illustrates the generosity of Rome not by praising it, for instance, for the material benefits it provided, but by recalling precisely its capacity to integrate into Rome’s civic body the best men of the provinces it ruled.

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- Apamea
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- justice
- local citizenship
- Prusa
- Roman citizenship
Bibliographical references:


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Other sources connected with this document:

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