

THE PERCEPTION OF IMPERIAL POWER IN APHRODISIAS: THE EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

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The modern visitor to Aphrodisias, who usually arrives in the city after a visit to the splendid ruins of Ephesos and on his way to the spectacular landscape of Hierapolis, sees a fairly typical urban center of a Roman province. Unusual is perhaps the abundance of marble statues and the excellent preservation of the public buildings, but at first sight there is nothing that would warn him that he is entering the most glorious city of the most distinguished Demos of the Aphrodisieis, allies of the Romans, devoted to the emperor, free and autonomous.¹ An ancient visitor, a citizen of another city in the Roman Empire, would probably not have failed to notice the elevated status of this city. If he did not do so by reading the inscriptions, e.g., on the epistyles of buildings built by C. Iulius Zoilos, the priest of Aphrodite and the Eleutheria,² then he would do so as soon as he used the coins, inscribed with the words *Eleutheria ton Aphrodisieion* under Hadrian and Gordian III or *Eleutheros Demos* under Gordian III, coins that commemorated the confirmation of the privilege of freedom by the Roman emperors.³ But should our ancient visitor have stayed at Aphrodisias for several months or years, would he have noticed any difference between the life in this city and in other urban centers of the Roman East that lacked these privileges — as a modern European notices some differences as soon as he enters the United Kingdom? Any contracts our imaginary visitor may have entered into with the Aphrodisians would have been dated according to the months of the local calendar, among them months with the names Ioulios (MAMA VIII 541), Kaisar (MAMA VIII 322) or Klaudios (MAMA VIII 566A). His partners might be Roman citizens; the population would use Latin words every now and then.⁴ At the festivals of the

* I am very grateful to Joyce Reynolds and Charlotte Roueché for providing information on unpublished material and to Rudolf Haensch and Christina Kokkinia for their critical remarks.

¹ For these titles of Aphrodisias see J. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome: Documents from the Excavation of the Theatre at Aphrodisias* (London 1982), from now on A&R, 43 LL. 1-5; cf. A&R 42 LL. 6-8.

² A&R 36, 37, 39. For a new fragment of A&R 39 see A. Chaniotis, 'New Inscriptions from Aphrodisias (1995-2001)', *American Journal of Archaeology* (forthcoming), no. 12.

³ D. MacDonald, *The Coinage of Aphrodisias* (London 1992), 82, 126, 132.

⁴ E.g. ἄκτος, see below; προβάτα (= *probata*): on stones reused for the *bouleuterion* (unpublished); cf. A. Chaniotis, 'Alltagsskizzen aus Aphrodisias', *Ruperto Carola. Forschungsmagazin der Universität Heidelberg* (2002) 1, 6f.; φαμίλια: Ch. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias*

city he would notice the prominent position of the high priest of the emperor cult. In the stadium members of the tribes, the subdivisions of the citizen body, would be seated together, among them members of the tribes Rhomais and Hadrianis could also be observed.⁵ On a walk through the city he would see the statues of the emperors in prominent places, the Sebasteion, the complex dedicated to their worship, or the honorary statues for proconsuls of Asia.⁶

Of course the nature of our evidence, public documents, honorary inscriptions and epitaphs, does not allow us to form a clear picture about the way the privileged status of Aphrodisias influenced the life of its citizens or its visitors. We can be certain that the Aphrodisians were proud of this status and we do know that they did not neglect to refer to their privileges whenever they faced a problem, in particular whenever the community or individual citizens wanted to avoid a financial burden (A&R 14-15). But naturally the public inscriptions inform us only about the successful requests of the Aphrodisians, not about their failures. Bearing this in mind, let us now turn to the epigraphic evidence and the way it reflects the perception of imperial power.

Sometime around A.D. 230 the authorities of Aphrodisias covered the wall of the north *parodos* of the city's theater with 16 documents that provide important information about Aphrodisias' privileges.⁷ These documents date from c. 38 B.C. to c. A.D. 224. Under the reign of Gordian III (after 243) more recent documents of similar content were added to this dossier. These and other relevant documents were published by Joyce Reynolds, and her pioneer work in the discussion of the individual texts is the basis of my paper.⁸ Reynolds characterized this epigraphic monument as the 'archive wall'. This term is somehow misleading.⁹ City archives contain documents that have been deposited in them regardless of their relative importance. What we have on the north *parodos* of the theater is the result of a selection, and we cannot be even certain whether all the documents (including documents sent by Roman

(London 1993), no. 15; φίσκος: MAMA VIII 538; φούνδη and καμπίστρον: Th. Reinach, 'Inscriptions d'Aphrodisias', *Revue des Études Grecques* 19 (1906), 103-105, no. 17; κούρσωρ: Ch. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (London 1989), no. 150.

⁵ Rhomais: MAMA VIII 413; Hadrianis: unpublished epitaph.

⁶ Sebasteion: R.R.R. Smith, 'The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias', *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987), 88-138. Honorary statues for proconsuls: M. Vinicius (A&R 45a, ca. 12-10 B.C.?), P. Vinicius (A&R 45b, A.D. 2), Sulpicius Priscus (A&R 47, ca. A.D. 222-233), L. Egantius Victor Lollianus (SEG XLIV 863, A.D. 244/245), P. Aelius Septimius Mannus (SEG XLVI 1394, ca. A.D. 250-260).

⁷ Full discussion of this dossier by J. Reynolds in A&R, pp. 33-148; further bibliography in SEG XXXII 1097; XXXIII 855; XXXIV 1044; XXXV 1081; XXXIX 1101.

⁸ Reynolds 1982, op.cit. (n. 1).

⁹ Cf. C.P. Jones, *American Journal of Philology* 106 (1985), 262-264.

emperors to Ephesos, Samos, and Smyrna; A&R 12-14) were in fact kept in the archive of Aphrodisias. The authorities responsible for inscribing or reinscribing these documents have carefully selected from a large number of documents only a very small number of texts, exactly the texts that highlighted the city's privileges, especially its status as a free and autonomous city. A central theme in these texts is the fact that the Aphrodisians had offered great services to the Romans as their trustworthy allies (A&R 7 LL. 1-8; 8 LL. 21-29; 12 LL. 5-7; 13 LL. 3).

If one studies only these documents, one gets the impression of continuity: time and again we read that the emperors confirmed the privileges of freedom, autonomy and freedom from taxation (A&R 15, 17, 19-21, 25), and Septimius Severus and Caracalla underline precisely the fact that the privileged status had remained unchanged until their reign (A&R 17 L. 11-12; 18 L. 5).

But in order to fully understand the importance of the privileges we need to look at the documents that were not selected to be inscribed on the archive wall, documents from the Republican period that have survived in inscriptions other than this monument of Aphrodisian self-representation in the third century. The earliest among them are documents from the period of the Mithridatic Wars. We observe in them a vocabulary of subordination. A decree of Plarasa/ Aphrodisias in 88 B.C. (A&R 2) expresses the attitude of this community towards the Romans. Its envoys ask the proconsul of Cilicia Q. Oppius to give his instructions (LL. 4f : *epitassein*);¹⁰ they inform him that the citizens of Plarasa/Aphrodisias did not want to live without the rule (*hegemonia*) of the Romans. The second document informs that Oppius accepts the request of this community to undertake the position of a patron (A&R 3). This attitude is paralleled by one of the clauses of the treaty of alliance between Plarasa/Aphrodisias, Kibyra and Tabai (A&R 1).¹¹ I am referring to the clause which obliges these communities never to undertake anything against the Romans (".. and in order that they shall take no action in opposition either to the Romans or to each other and that no one shall draft, advocate, introduce a proposal or record anything contrary to what has been written in the sworn agreement"). Such a clause is characteristic for treaties

¹⁰ The words *epitagma* and *epitage* are used, e.g., in letters of Hellenistic kings sent to subordinate communities; see C.B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (London 1934), nrs. 68 L. 9 and 75 L. 13.

¹¹ On the date see R.M. Errington, "Θεὰ Πόμῃ und römischer Einfluß südlich des Mäanders im 2. Jh. v. Chr.", *Chiron* 17 (1987), 97-118 (after 167 B.C.); G. Thériault, *Le culte d'Homonoia dans les cités grecques* (Lyon-Québec 1996), 82-85 (after 129 B.C.).

between a hegemonial power and a subordinate community.¹² A still unpublished honorary decree for the local benefactor Hermogenes also reveals the mentality of dependence in the late Republican period. Hermogenes had become a great benefactor of the *polis* thanks to the relationship (*gnosis*) he had established with the Roman authorities.¹³

The situation changed dramatically in the year 39 B.C. when Octavian and the senate awarded a series of privileges, described in detail in the relevant *senatus consultum* (A&R 8) and summarized in another document (A&R 9); both texts are found in the 'archive wall'. The later documents of the 'archive wall' inform us that these privileges remained unchanged until the reign of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, as the two emperors write in two letters in A.D. 198 and between 200 and 205 (A&R 17 and 18); they were confirmed by Gordianus III in A.D. 239 and Traianus Decius and Herennius Etruscus in A.D. 250 (A&R 20 and 25).

The Aphrodisians were conscious of the fact that their position was privileged, not only with regard to their relationship with Rome, but also with regard to other cities in the East. Bearing in mind the competition among the cities of the Greek east it is interesting to notice that two of the documents selected to be inscribed in the theater not only mention Aphrodisias' privileges, but compare the position of this city with that of other cities. A letter of Octavian to a certain Stephanos expresses precisely this unique position (A&R 10):

I have freed Zoilos' city... This one city I have taken for my own out of all Asia. I wish these people to be protected as my own townsmen (translated by J. Reynolds).

This is even more clear in Octavian's subscript to Samos (A&R 13 = IG XII 6.1, 160) with which he rejects the Samian request to be awarded freedom:

You yourselves can see that I have given the privilege of freedom to no people except the Aphrodisieis, who took my side in the war

¹² See e.g., A. Chaniotis, *Die Verträge zwischen kretischen Poleis in der hellenistischen Zeit* (Stuttgart 1996), 92 and 96f.

¹³ A. Chaniotis, art. cit. (n. 2) no. 1 LL. 16-18: παρά τε | ταῖς ἔξουσίαις καὶ τοῖς ἡγουμένοις | πλείστην γνῶσιν καὶ σύστα[α]σιν σχῶν εὐεργέτησεν καὶ διὰ τούτων μέγιστα τὴν πόλιν ("a man who has established relationships and has received appreciation (recommmendation) by the authorities and the officials (governors?) becoming a great benefactor of the *polis* through these as well").

and were captured by storm because of their devotion to us. For it is not right to give the favour of the greatest privilege of all at random and without cause. I am well-disposed to you and should like to do a favour to my wife who is active on your behalf, but not to the point of breaking my custom. For I am not concerned for the money which you pay towards the tribune. But I am not willing to give the most highly prized privileges to anyone without good cause (translated by J. Reynolds).

The inclusion of this document — which is not addressed to Aphrodisias and does not directly concern this city — in the dossier demonstrates that the Aphrodisians were aware of the fact that they had succeeded exactly where others had failed.

This proud and self-confident attitude is, again, confirmed by other texts, public and private documents preserved in inscriptions other than the archive wall. In addition to the cult of Eleutheria (A&R 33 and 39), the members of the local elite did not neglect to mention these privileges in the inscriptions they set up. An early inscription, probably still of the late first century B.C., honors an anonymous man who had been active for the freedom and the laws of his country:¹⁴ He had struggled for the freedom (of the fatherland) and the laws and the right of asylum and the privileges granted to it. In an inscription commemorating his foundation (A&R 43, c. A.D. 200), M. Aurelius Hermes Pa[--] not only mentions these privileges (*eleutheras kai autonomou poleos*), but also underscores the fact that they had been awarded and confirmed by the senate and the emperors (*kata ta dogmata tes hierotates synkletou... kai tas theias antigraphas*) and protected by treaty oaths (*kata ta horkia*). The *horkia* mentioned here can certainly be identified with the treaty of alliance between Plarasa/Aphrodisias and Rome concluded during the second triumvirate, of which a clause survives in one of the documents of the 'archive wall' (A&R 9).

An even more interesting piece of evidence, because of its private nature, is the epitaph of the high priestess Iulia Paula (MAMA VIII 564, c. A.D. 200-250). The inscription on her sarcophagus highlights the fact that she was a descendant of those who had contributed to the city's autonomy (*ton synaition tei polei tes autonomias apogonos*).

¹⁴ A&R 41: αγωνισόμενος δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ τῶν | νόμων καὶ τῆς ἀσυλίας καὶ τῶν δεδομένων | [φι]λανθρώπων (“... who has struggled for the freedom (of the fatherland) and the laws and the right of asylum and the privileges granted to it”).

It was on the basis of such self-confident expressions of freedom from the imperial power that Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum did not exclude the possibility that Roman laws (e.g., the legislation concerning the Jews) were not automatically in force at Aphrodisias, a free city.¹⁵ One may indeed find supporting evidence pertaining to the fact that these privileges were taken seriously. When a citizen of Aphrodisias, Ti. Julianus Attalos was asked to undertake a liturgy connected with the temple of the emperor cult in Smyrna, he refused to do so. The Smyrnaians appealed to the emperor Trajan, but received the answer they deserved (A&R 14):

I wish no one from the free cities to be forced into performing your liturgy, and especially no one from Aphrodisias, since that city has been removed from the *formula provinciae* so that it is not liable either to the common liturgies of Asia or to others.

Hadrian's reaction was similar, when the city objected to the tax on the use of iron nails (A&R 15); he mentions the fact that he had confirmed Aphrodisias' freedom and autonomy and accepts this request.¹⁶

When the Aphrodisians invited the proconsul of Asia Sulpicius Priscus (c. A.D. 222-235) to visit their city and sacrifice to Aphrodite for the well-being of the emperor, his reaction was very reluctant. In his letter, after mentioning the city's freedom, he informs the Aphrodisians about his intention to come to the city, only if "neither a law of your city nor a *senatus consultum* nor an instruction nor a letter of the emperor prevents the proconsul from making a stay in your city" (A&R 48).¹⁷ The formulation used in this letter places the laws of the Aphrodisians on the same level as expressions of the will of the Roman authorities (*senatus consulta, edicta, epistulae*).¹⁸ This doubtless made the Aphrodisians again very proud, and we should not be surprised that such an answer was included in the dossier of the 'archive wall'

¹⁵ J. Reynolds & R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge 1987), 43-45.

¹⁶ For a second copy of this letter see J.M. Reynolds, 'New Letters from Hadrian to Aphrodisias: Trials, Taxes, Gladiators, and an Aqueduct', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 13 (2000), 15f.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Haensch, *Capita provinciarum. Statthaltersitze und Provinzialverwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz 1997), 297 n. 199.

¹⁸ R. Haensch, 'Das Statthalterarchiv', *ZRG* 109 (1992), 277 n. 198, has, however, tentatively suggested an alternative interpretation of νόμος τῆς πόλεως ὑμῶν: not 'a law of your city', but 'a law regarding your city', since it is hardly conceivable that a city on its own account could forbid a representative of the imperial administration to visit it. I do not believe that the formulation used in this document permits this interpretation.

along with far more important documents such as the *senatus consultum* of 39 B.C. or imperial letters.

But does the picture remain the same when we leave the 'archive wall' and look at evidence that was not and could not be included in it? A particularly interesting and hitherto rather neglected group of testimonia consists of epitaphs, testaments and donations that guarantee the validity of the testator/donor's wishes. Such declarations that the testator's wish cannot be changed, neither by a magistrate nor by a private person, have a long tradition in the Greek East and one can easily find standardized formulations e.g. in the material collected by Bernhard Laum,¹⁹ among them the foundation of Attalos in Aphrodisias:

Neither a magistrate nor a secretary (?) nor a private person will have the authorisation to transfer the entire capital or part hereof or any part of the interest or to change the account (of the receipts) or to use the money for a different purpose, neither by organising a separate vote nor by means of a decree of the assembly, a letter (of the emperor or the governor?), a decree (or *senatus consultum* or a decree of the provincial *koinon*?) or a written declaration nor through violence of the mob nor in any other way, but the money should be used only for (the purpose stated) in the testamentary disposition written by me.²⁰

In this document the potential intervention of non civic authorities is only indirectly implied by the terms *epistole* and *dogma*. This possibility is more explicitly ruled out in the foundation of C. Iulius Demosthenes at Oinoanda, which forbids any violation of Demosthenes' will, any changes in the use of the funds (ἢ εἰ ἄλλην χρεῖαν μεταθῆ τὸν πόρο[ν]), any decree and petition to a provincial governor to this effect (ἢ εἰσήγησεται ἢ ψηφίσεται ἢ ἡγεμόνι ἐντυχῆ περὶ τοῦ μὴ γείνεσθαι τι ὑπ' ἐμοῦ διεσταλμένων).²¹

A petition sent to the governor with regard to the affairs of Oinoanda is not surprising, since the Lykian city lacked the privileges of Aphrodisias. When

¹⁹ B. Laum, *Stiftungen in der griechischen und römischen Antike* I (Leipzig 1914), 190f.

²⁰ MAMA VIII 413: [ἐξέστιν μήτε ἄρχοντι μήτε γραμματεῖτι? μή[τε] ἰδιώτῃ μήτε μέ[ρος] [μή]τε πᾶν μήτε ἀρχαίου μήτε | [τό][κο]υ μεταγαγεῖν ἢ μεταπολογ[ί]σασθαι μηδὲ εἰς ἕτερον χρήσα[σθ]αι μηδὲν μήτε ψηφορία [ι]δία συντάσσοντι μήτε ψηφίσμα[τι] | μή]τε δι' ἐπιστολῆς μήτε διὰ δόγμα[α]τος μήτε διὰ ἀπογραφῆς ἢ ὀχλικῆς καταβαρῆσεως μηδὲ ἄλλ[ω] τρόπῳ μηδενὶ ἢ εἰς μόνην τα[ύτη]ν τὴν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ γεγραμμένην [δι]αταγήν.

²¹ M. Wörtle, *Stadt und Fest im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien. Studien zu einer agonistischen Stiftung aus Oinoanda* (Munich 1988), 9.

the proconsul was reluctant even to visit Aphrodisias (see above), it is quite surprising to see that several Aphrodisisais included in their testaments a clause forbidding interventions of the governor that might change their will. We know of this clause from excerpts of testaments referring to the right of burial and inscribed on sarcophagi. The following variants are hitherto known:

1. CIG 2829 = MAMA VIII 554 LL. 10f.: οὔτε διὰ ψηφίσματος οὔτε δι' ἐντεύξεως ἡγεμονικῆς οὔτε ἄλλω τρόπῳ
2. J.M.R. Cormack, 'Inscriptions from Aphrodisias (found in 1893)', *ABSA* 59 (1964), 24f. no. 32 b: [---] ἢ ἐντεύξεως ἡγεμονικῆς
3. Reinach, art. cit. (n. 4), no. 163 L. 1: [--- ἐντεύξ]εως ἡγεμόνος
4. Chaniotis, art. cit. (n. 2), no. 26: οὔτε διὰ ψηφίσματος ἢ διὰ ἄκτου βου(λ)ῆς ἢ ἐ[ντεύ]ξεως ἡγεμόνων
5. unpublished epitaph (inv. 67.507): [οὔτε διὰ ψηφίσματος ἢ ? δι'] ἄκτου βουλῆ[ς ---]
6. unpublished epitaph (69.28 + 71.445): [-- οὐδὲ] ψηφίσματος ὄνοματι οὐδ[ὲ ---]

These texts place the will of the deceased person concerning burials in his or her sarcophagus above other (obviously conceivable) sources of legal norms, i.e. above the decrees of the assembly (*psephisma*), the acts of the council (*aktos boules*), and the intercessions of the provincial governor (*enteuxis hegemonike* or *hegemonos/hegomonon*). The word *enteuxis* means both a petition and a petition that has received a positive response.²² Similar clauses in epitaphs of other areas are unknown, and the next parallels are epitaphs that mention the approval of a provincial governor for the erection of a grave or the deposition of a testament in his archive.²³ One might be tempted to assume that the expressions listed above were automatically taken from the formulary of testaments used in cities that lacked Aphrodisias' privileges, but this can be ruled out, since we know these expressions only from epitaphs of Aphrodisias. We, therefore, have to assume that at least at a certain period of time the

²² E.g., in the inscription of Skaptopara: IGBulg IV 2236 + SEG XLIV 610 + SEG XLVIII 956; K. Hallof, 'Die Inschrift von Skaptopara. Neue Dokumente und neue Lesungen', *Chiron* 24 (1994), 425-427.

²³ TAM II 1 122 (erection of a grave monument); TAM III 1 657 (a copy of the testament kept in the governor's archive); on this practice see Haensch, op. cit. (n. 17) 295 and 305; cf. SEG XXIV 569 (Thessalonike, 3rd cent. A.D.): λόγον ὑφέξει τῷ κατὰ καιρὸν ἡγεμόνει (the violator of a grave would be subject to punishment by the governor). SEG XXXIII 1162 may refer to a testament which was drafted in accordance with the rules laid down by the imperial procurator. I am very grateful to R. Haensch who discussed this subject with me and provided these references.

Aphrodisians expected interventions of the proconsul Asiae, no less than decrees of their assembly or the council of their city.

Now the question arises how realistic this expectation would be and what might cause an intervention of the proconsul Asiae. Again, some inscriptions may provide the answer: we know that the Aphrodisians themselves were sometimes more than willing to forget their privileges and request the intervention of the provincial governor, particularly with regard to the finances of their city. As we learn from a letter sent to Aphrodisias by Commodus in A.D. 189 (A&R 16) the Aphrodisians asked the proconsul to come to their city and take care of the problems of their internal financial administration. The fact that Commodus had to intervene and send his friend, the jurist Ulpius Marcellus, shows, as Joyce Reynolds has pointed out, that the proconsul was as reluctant about accepting the request of the Aphrodisians as Sulpicius Priscus thirty years later. A decretum of the proconsul Silius Italicus in A.D. 77, with which he confirmed decrees concerning the treatment of Aphrodite's pigeons (MAMA VIII 411), was most probably the result of a request of the Aphrodisians and not of the proconsul's initiative. Joyce Reynolds has collected several fragmentary documents that concern the presence of *curatores reipublicae* in Aphrodisias.²⁴ This evidence shows that interventions of imperial and provincial authorities were not only to be expected, but also that they were requested by the Aphrodisian authorities, if not necessarily welcomed by the entire population.

An inscription from Beroia published recently gives us an interesting insight into such interventions (SEG XLVIII 742 = I.Beroia 7). L. Memmius Rufus, an otherwise unknown proconsul of Macedonia under Trajan or Hadrian, issued an edict concerning the funding of the gymnasium. The gymnasium of Beroia was periodically closed because of financial problems; the proconsul's intervention aimed at creating a fund of 100,000 *denarii*, the interest of which (6,000 *denarii*) should be used for the gymnasium; the capital consisted of money earlier bequeathed to the city by prominent citizens and of the public revenues from water mills. Despite the fragmentary state of preservation we may be certain that the money diverted by the proconsul to the gymnasiarchical funds had only partly been donated for this purpose. The money left by a certain Julianus to the city was indeed meant to be spent on the gymnasium (εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ ἀλειπτικόν). On the contrary, the money bequeathed by Plautianus Alexandros was intended for a phallus, probably for a Dionysiac

²⁴ A&R, pp. 184-197.

procession;²⁵ other money was originally given for the supply of the city with grain.²⁶ In this document we clearly see in practice what Attalos of Aphrodisias was afraid might happen with his donation: μεταγαγεῖν ἢ μεταπολογ[ι]σασθαι, εἰς ἕτερον χρήσα[σθ]α. The proconsul disregarded the will of testators and donors and used the money bequeathed for a different purpose. He was able to proceed only because he could count on the support of the local elite²⁷ and this suggests that his decision was by no means approved by the entire population.²⁸ The explicit reference to the support of the honoratores in his ‘struggle’ (*synagonisamenon*) makes sense only if the governor had to overcome some substantial opposition. The inscription of Beroia shows that the fear of some Aphrodisians that successful petitions to the local authorities (enteuxeis) might cancel the provisions of their testaments was not purely imaginary.

The evidence which I have presented briefly, suggests that Aphrodisians were consciously trying to find a balance between the illusion of freedom and the reality of imperial power.²⁹ They seem to have succeeded in retaining their status and repeatedly defending their privileges from those who tended to ignore them, tax-collectors or their neighbors. Sometimes, when pressing matters demanded the support of the imperial administration, they themselves - or rather the elite or a group within the elite - were willing to forget the privileges and requested the intervention of the provincial authorities. In her commentary on an unfortunately very fragmentary letter of Hadrian concerning itself with *chresmatikai dikai* Joyce Reynolds has very aptly summarized this practice:

It is a commonplace that a small and powerless city-state lying inside a Roman province was liable to find that its privileges were steadily eroded, and might even collaborate, without realizing it, in the process; and it is hardly surprising to find that while Hadrian claims that he is maintaining Aphrodisias privileges [...], his actions

²⁵ δηναρία χεῖλια τὰ ὑπὲρ τοῦ φαλλοῦ ὑμεῖν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ χα[ρισθέντα].

²⁶ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ὑπὸ Εὐλαίου δοθέντος σείτο[υ λογευθέντα]?, Ἐλημ(ι)ωτῶν τοῦ σείτου χάριτος συνδεόμενα δηνάρια.

²⁷ συναγωνισαμένων σὺν μοι καὶ τῶν κ[ρατίστων] ? ----- ca. 29 ---- τῆς βουλῆς, συνέπνευσαν οἱ τε πρότοι πατρίδος καὶ ἡ βουλ[ῆ ----]

²⁸ For rivalries and social conflicts in the cities and interventions by the governor see most recently E. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, *Πολιτικῶς ἄρχειν. Zum Regierungsstil der senatorischen Statthalter in den kaiserzeitlichen griechischen Provinzen* (Stuttgart 2002), 298-306.

²⁹ Cf. H. Halfmann, ‘Die Selbstverwaltung der kaiserzeitlichen Polis in Plutarchs Schrift Praecepta gerendae rei publicae’, *Chiron* 32 (2002), 83-95.

are in some ways equivocal, while those of the Aphrodisians, who feel the need for his support and approval, play into Roman hands.³⁰

Sometimes the Aphrodisieis seem to have failed in keeping their autonomy intact. And then it required excellent rhetorical skills in order to present a financial burden not as a violation of freedom, but as an invitation to voluntary assistance. A superb example of these rhetorical skills is a letter of Gordian III in A.D. 243 (A&R 21). Probably after an earthquake, Aphrodisias was asked to contribute money to the victims of the disaster. In reply to the protest of the envoys of the city, Gordian gave the following answer:

The resolution of Asia which associated you too with those assisting the victims of misfortune was not a command, but a good administrative act placing you among those who take part in beneficent activity of a type which you undertake also among yourselves when you help with preparations for the erection of a house for those in need. And for the future there is no necessity to fear; for among free men, and you have a very great share of freedom, the only law in such matters is what you are willing to do.

The Aphrodisians did not neglect to inscribe this letter too on the 'archive wall'.

Heidelberg, January 2003

³⁰ Reynolds, art. cit. (n. 16), 13.