

## Looking for a Few Good (Provincial) Men: Friendship and Flattery in Dio's Kingship Orations

This paper analyzes Dio Chrysostom's treatment of friendship in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> "Kingship Orations", a series of four speeches generally agreed to have been written for the Emperor Trajan. On the surface, Dio's discussion of friendship is intended to demonstrate to Trajan why he needs good and true friends; and previous analyses of friendship in the "Kingship Orations" have focused primarily on this aspect (Konstan, 1997: 106-108; Moles, 1990: 315-316, 358-359). But Dio also presents friendship in a way that is beneficial to himself, by making himself an ideal candidate for Trajan's friendship, despite being of lower rank and a Greek at that. While this fact has also been noted in previous scholarship (Moles, 1990: 358-359), the methods by which Dio effects this personal benefit have not yet been fully explored.

First, Dio draws a distinction between flatters and true friends, insinuating that the Romans who currently make up the imperial court belong to the former category, while true friends can and must be sought farther abroad, i.e. in the provinces. Second, Dio reorients the dynamic of unequal friendships as found in Cicero's *De Amicitia* and Pliny's contemporary *Panegyricus* in which it is the responsibility of the superior friend, through his conduct and demeanor, to foster a congenial atmosphere that prevents flattery. Instead, Dio presents the tendency to flatter as inherent to certain people, not dependent upon the conduct of the superior friend. Thus no matter how good a friend Trajan is to his inferiors, he cannot avoid flattery unless he finds friends in the provinces who are already virtuous; men, as Dio implies, like Dio himself.

Dio's remarks in the "Kingship Orations" fit into a tradition of Greek and Roman discourses on friendship between unequals. In Republican Rome it had been customary for the socially inferior to offer advice and criticism to their superior friends (Habinek, 1990: 170-181).

But such an unequal relationship was recognized to spawn false friendships if the superior friend was not on guard against flattery and did not foster an environment that promoted honesty from the inferior partner. Thus, even though the flattery came from the person of inferior status, the primary Republican work that deals with this issue, Cicero's *De Amicitia*, puts the responsibility for preventing flattery in unequal relationships on the superior partner.

The issue was particularly vexing for monarchs, Greek and Roman, and the emphasis on true friendship as opposed to flattery in regards to the emperor and his close subordinates was an important *topos* in Trajanic Rome. Pliny in the *Panegyricus* distinguishes between the flattery of the Domitianic court and Trajan's capacity for true friendship (*Panegy.* 85.1-5; Noreña, 2011: 31). Trajan, in fact, fosters true friendship and discourages flattery by bringing himself down to the level of his subordinates. For Pliny, as in Cicero's *De Amicitia*, it is the superior partner who makes the relationship work.

Dio, on the other hand, though he adopts many of the traditional Roman attitudes about friendship found in Cicero and Pliny, changes the dynamic – the difference between a relationship based on flattery and a true friendship is not just dependent upon the actions of the emperor (the superior partner), but the character of his friends: some people were flatterers due to their personal character and simply had to be avoided. Furthermore, Dio claims that one is very likely to find such people among those already present at the imperial court, and thus the emperor must look abroad to men (like Dio in the east) who already have a good character and are fit for friendship. With this switch, Dio presented himself as an ideal friend for Trajan in an attempt to secure a position of importance for himself in the new regime.

## Works Cited

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