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Models of Hellenism in the Bithynian Orations of Dio of Prusa

This paper explores the use of appeals to Hellenism as a persuasive technique in certain key passages of the Bithynian Orations of Dio of Prusa, especially in Orations 43, 44, 48 and 47. In these orations, Dio is trying to get his fellow-citizens to support him as a person and certain plans he has made for buildings and civic improvements. Through his repeated use of allusions and paradigms from the classical Greek past, Dio is suggesting to his fellow-countrymen not that they simply imitate the classical Greeks, but rather that, by support of him, they choose to adopt a cultural identity whose most important feature is the proper understanding and enjoyment of references to classical models. The Bithynian orations (38 to 51 in modern editions) have generally been seen either as important biographical data (Von Arnim 1898) or more recently in terms of Dio's relationship with Roman authority (Moles in *Ethics and Rhetoric* 1997 177-93; Salmeri in Swain ed. *Dio Chrysostom* 2000; Swain in *Hellenism and Empire* 1996). This paper will see these orations mainly as a Greek talking to other Greeks about what it means to be Greek.

The paper starts by examining a few key instances in which Dio uses Hellenic paradigms for his home-town audience. Dio consistently calls on his audience to be "Hellenic," but this does not mean simply being more like the inhabitants of fifth-century Athens. As will be seen from the examples discussed in this paper of his encomium of Prusa in Oration 44 and his deprecation of Athenian civic monuments in Oration 48, all of the virtues Dio is advocating are of a highly abstract nature, and often as not the ancients themselves fail in his examples to practice them. What he is looking for is not direct imitation: instead the goal is that his audience should embrace their "classical heritage" and take their place in a wider cultural context.

Dio frequently uses this idea of choosing a cultural heritage as part of his own self-portrait as an orator. This paper will examine in particular Dio's extended self-comparison to Epaminondas and Socrates in Oration 43, his defense in the same oration of the use of classical models in general and, in Oration 47, Dio's digression on Aristotle's attempt to re-found Stagira, and later his dialogue between himself and an imagined Prusan opponent. In all of these instances, taking Dio's side is portrayed as choosing to be part of a broad cosmopolitan Greek identity that is opposed to the parochialism and pettiness with which Dio taints his opponents. Hellenism is seen not as an innate national characteristic but as an ethical and even aesthetic state that one must choose to enter. Within that state, a great value is placed on the ability of a figure like Dio to see the past as fragmentary and manipulable. The actual deeds or speeches of Pericles or Xenophon are less important than what a figure like Dio can do with them to amuse and educate a contemporary audience.

This view of Hellenism has important implications for the idea that the cultural stance of Dio and his Greek contemporaries represents either backward-looking nostalgia or some form of resistance to or reaction against Roman political domination. In these speeches, the most important opposition is not between past and present or between Greece and

Rome. Rather it is between cosmopolitan and provincial, between a world-view that is capable of making the Hellenic past useful in the present and one that is not. Thus in fact Rome and the Roman Empire are on the positive side of the main opposition, as representatives of a wider cultural world of which Dio is a part. Dio's reaction to Rome is not to exclude it, but to include it on distinctly Hellenic terms as opposed to customary Roman stereotypes.