

PLINY AND THE IDEOLOGY OF EMPIRE:
THE CORRESPONDENCE WITH TRAJAN

1. Introduction¹

The death of Domitian, the short reign of Nerva, and the accession of Trajan marked a new beginning at Rome. “Now at last our spirit revives”, wrote Tacitus, “day by day Trajan enhances the happiness of the times” (*Agricola* 3.1). Both Tacitus and Pliny began writing works which examine the nature of public service and the senator’s obligations in society: Tacitus in his life of his father-in-law *Agricola*, Pliny in his collection of *Epistles*². With the accession of Trajan, a new spirit seems to have been born in the Roman upper class. It was necessary to rebuild the sense of integrity and justice in the magistracies of the Roman people, a sense of duty toward one’s fellow citizens and the subjects of the empire.

The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan preserved in the tenth book of Pliny’s *Epistles* is a well-known source for imperial administration, but despite its significance, has been neglected as a source for Trajanic ideology. Several factors have contributed, among which one could cite a tendency to patronize Pliny as boring and self-satisfied, the indirection and rhetorical cunning of his letters, and the survival of two obvious statements of advice to Trajan on the role of a *princeps*, Pliny’s *Panegyric* and Dio Chrysostom’s ‘Kingship Orations’ (*Or.* 1-4). In this paper I would like to redress this neglect and explore some aspects of the purpose and underlying ideology of Pliny’s Bithynian correspondence. In the first part I will argue that Pliny composed this book for political and literary purposes. In the second, I will examine from this point of view his presentation of benevolent justice as an aspect of imperial administration.

¹ This paper had its beginning in the exchange of professors and students in Richard Talbert’s stimulating seminar on Flavian Rome at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in spring 2002. Different versions have been presented in Salerno to the Italian section of the International Plutarch Society in October 2005 and to the graduate colloquium of the Dipartimento di Scienze antiche of the University of Florence in November 2005. I am grateful to the helpful criticism of those present on these occasions, especially Profs. Elio Lo Cascio and Paolo Desideri, and to Prof. Talbert’s comments on a draft of this paper.

² There has been a revival of interest in Pliny’s *Letters* in the last decade, stressing Pliny’s literary artifice, self-glorification, and longing for immortality. See e.g. Ludolph 1997, Gibson 1998 and three articles in a special issue dedicated to Pliny, “Arethusa” 36 (2), 2003: Gibson 2003, Riggsby 2003, and Henderson 2003.

2. The nature of Pliny's correspondence with Trajan³

Pliny's correspondence from Bithynia, preserved in the tenth book of his *Epistles*, offers remarkable testimony concerning the administration of the provinces under Trajan⁴. But how should we interpret it? For many years there has been a consensus that the book preserved an almost complete collection of the letters exchanged between Pliny and the emperor⁵. It has been assumed, with more or less confidence, that the collection falls silent abruptly because of the death of Pliny while still in his province. The obvious corollary was that the letters were edited for publication by a third party after Pliny's death, using copies in an archive – whether Pliny's, Trajan's, or both is not clear. Suetonius, a protégé of Pliny's and later secretary *ab epistulis* for Hadrian, has often been suggested as a possible editor. This understanding of the origin of the tenth book has meant that we have considered the correspondence an invaluable glimpse into the fundamental workings of the empire. The letters have been analyzed for the information they give us on the administration of the province: the importance of the imperial *mandata*, the role of the *lex Pompeia*, the freedom of Roman colonies from interference from the provincial governor, the financial status of the Bithynian cities, the restrictions on clubs and social groups, treatment of Christians, and so on. In particular, Trajan's letters have been carefully studied for clues to the workings of the imperial secretariat, and to establish how much of these letters should be attributed to Trajan, how much to his staff. These letters can be made to reveal Trajan's own character, his priorities, and his satisfaction or dissatisfaction with Pliny, his representative in Bithynia. The fact that a few letters seem to be missing has not deterred scholars from assuming that these constitute an incredibly useful, unadulterated excerpt from the imperial archives.

Recently, however, Gregory Woolf and I have come separately to a reading which sees this correspondence not as an archival treasure trove, but as a text carefully edited by Pliny himself, written for the same audience as the

³ As I was working on this article, I was pleased to hear that Gregory Woolf had also been working in a similar direction. I am grateful to Prof. Woolf for sharing with me before publication two excellent articles which I have found very helpful: Woolf forthcoming A and B, and in addition an unpublished paper delivered to the Roman Society in January 2000, *Imperial Plinies*. In the first article, *Pliny's Province*, Woolf begins from the thesis "that this text is not an administrative archive, that its arrangement is shaped by rhetorical and panegyric ends..." (p. 1). My view is similar, but develops in a different direction.

⁴ The fundamental work remains Sherwin-White 1966, 525-731. See also Williams 1990 (a historical commentary on 10.15-121).

⁵ Cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 535: "The book only makes sense as intended to be the complete publication of Pliny's letters to Trajan of all sorts, as far as these survived, including the Bithynian letters".

rest of Pliny's letters, and following many of the same principles⁶. Let me set out this argument as I see it.

Book 10 is unique: it is the only collection of such an exchange between an imperial official – a provincial governor – and the emperor⁷. Other sorts of letter collections did exist, but differ in various ways. Fronto's exchanges with Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, and Antoninus Pius is a private correspondence of a tutor and friend of the imperial family. Cicero's letters from Cilicia tell us much about his term as governor, but are personal, written to friends, represent only Cicero's side of the exchange, and moreover are divided into different books according to their correspondent. The Cilician letters are not gathered and edited as a unity⁸. Nor is Pliny's book a collection of rescripts like those mentioned by the jurists, but an active correspondence, combining smoothly the personal and the public⁹. Pliny implies this blend of personal and official in the very first letter, *fortem te et hilarem, imperator optime, et privatim et publice opto* (10.1.2) and the mix continues until the last exchange of letters, where Pliny and Trajan smoothly blend discussion of Pliny's private preoccupations about his wife's return to Italy and his public obligation not to misuse the imperial diplomata for personal travel (10.120-121)¹⁰.

Given the personal side of this imperial correspondence, the publication of these letters certainly required the approval of the emperor¹¹. Several of

⁶ See note 2.

⁷ Cf. Williams 1990, 3, contrasting the collection with Cicero's letters from Cilicia, Fronto's exchange of letters with the Caesars who were his pupils, and imperial epistles preserved on inscriptions and papyri, or in the jurists.

⁸ On the editing involved in forming a book of Cicero's letters, see Beard 2002. Cicero, of course, is not reporting to a superior, as Pliny is.

⁹ For Trajan's rescripts, of which the jurists cite forty-four, see Gualandi 1963, 17-23. Henneman 1935, 3-19 gives a less complete collection of those quoted in the jurists, but includes those preserved in papyri or inscriptions. See also Smallwood 1966, no. 450 = *IGRR* 4.336. We know of a collection of Marcus Aurelius' rescripts, entitled *semestria*, and Papirius Iustus produced twenty books of constitutiones of the *divi fratres* and of Marcus Aurelius alone: see Schulz 1967, 128-29. The imperial edicts and letters quoted by Eusebius in his *Life of Constantine*, if genuine, were public documents. Cf. the summary account in Cameron and Hall 1999, 16-21. On imperial correspondence in general, see Millar 1992, 213-28; for rescripts, see Honoré 1994.

¹⁰ Trajan is precise on this: *an iter uxoris tuae diplomatibus, quae officio tuo dedi, adiuvandum esse*. Cf. also 10.13, *ut iure sacerdotii precari deos pro te publice possim, quos nunc precor pietate privata*. There are other personal references in 10.2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 17a, and 51. The collection also includes Pliny's letters of recommendation: 10.4-6, 10-12, 26, 86B, 87, 94, and 104. The two testimonials at 10.85-86 seem official.

¹¹ This would be true even if, contrary to my hypothesis, they were published under Hadrian. Note that Pliny felt the need to ask for approval even to erect a statue of the em-

Trajan's letters are not legal rulings, as were the rescripts, which often were displayed in public places, but friendly exchanges, e.g. on Pliny's wisdom in traveling by the best means available (10.16) or his health on the trip (10.18)¹², or Trajan's responses to Pliny's commendations. Whoever edited these letters for publication would have had to demonstrate to the emperor why he should allow these to be circulated. Pliny himself would be in an excellent position to do so¹³.

3. An editor at work

There are many signs of an editor's hand at work, whether he was Pliny or another. Most obviously, the letters from Pliny have been paired with the responses of Trajan. Fergus Millar has recently reminded us of the long delays involved in correspondence between Bithynia and Pontus and Rome. Pliny's letter to Rome would take perhaps six or eight weeks, and even if it were answered at once, another equal period would be required for Pliny to receive the reply. "None of the replies listed under year one [i.e. 10.16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28, 30, 32, 34: nine letters] will have actually reached Pliny until year two", Millar writes¹⁴. The editor would have to put a reply from Trajan together with a letter of Pliny written perhaps four months before. Perhaps this work had already been done, if Pliny had regularly filed the replies with a copy of his original letter, looking back through his correspondence to find the right one, or if the emperor's staff had kept Pliny's letter with a copy of the emperor's reply. But the decision to include Trajan's replies, and to link them to Pliny's letters, is an editorial one.

In addition, the editor carefully removed what we would consider extremely valuable, the place and date of each letter, which we know must have been there. The imperial rescripts that we possess on inscriptions and papyri regularly preserve the date and place¹⁵. Nor is there a formal greeting, with proper nomenclature, or a closing salutation¹⁶. These deletions are consistent with Pliny's practice in his earlier books of letters, which give a bare saluta-

peror, *Ep.* 10.8.4. Josephus presented his *Jewish War* for the approval of Vespasian and Titus, as well as Agrippa, and Titus supported its publication, *Josephus Vita* 361-66.

¹² Lucian mentions that the first item of the imperial mandata was that the governor should care for his health (*Pro lapsu in sal.* 13). If this item was already present in Pliny's day, this would give an official facet to Pliny's report of his health and Trajan's comment. But Pliny had already spoken of his health in the pre-Bithynian letters (10.5, 11).

¹³ Note that the tenth book of Symmachus' letters, which contains letters and *relationes* addressed to the emperors, does not contain the imperial responses.

¹⁴ Millar 2004, 40.

¹⁵ See e.g. Hennemann 1935, 12-15, frg. 29, 31, and 34.

¹⁶ Contrast the full nomenclature of the emperor in Hennemann 1935, 9-15, frg.s 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, and the final good wishes in frg.s 31-34.

tion, and no place or date. The effect in both cases is to remove these letters from the historical moment of their writing, and place them in a timeless literary world.

From the surprising lack of specifics in many letters, it appears also that the editor has removed many other names and details from the original letters. When the letters speak of the mess in finances at Nicomedia and Nicaea (10.37, 39), or the abuses of earlier officials at Nicomedia (10.31), they name no names. This is especially significant because Trajan asks particularly that Pliny send him the results of his investigation at Nicomedia (10.38): Pliny's reply is not included in the correspondence. Bithynians are rarely named¹⁷. The particular case of Flavius Archippus is a noteworthy exception¹⁸. On the other hand, some letters preserve trivial but interesting detail. There is a full report on Callidromus, an escaped Roman slave, who was captured in Moesia, was sent by the Dacian king Decabalus as a gift to the Parthian king Pacorus, then escaped again and returned to Roman territory with a gem stolen from Pacorus and a nugget of gold from a Parthian mine. Such a story provided relief and variety from the usual administrative preoccupations (10.74)¹⁹. However, while it is exceptional to name provincials, Roman officials are named freely. We find all ranks in the letters from the governor of Lower Moesia, earlier governors of Bithynia, the prefect of the Pontic shore, and various imperial procurators, right down to individual soldiers such as Appuleius (10.74). Taken together, these facts indicate that the details of the letters have been chosen for a larger public, not for Trajan alone.

¹⁷ Only Claudius Ptolemaeus (10.70), Julius Largus (75), Valerius Paulinus (104-105), Julius Piso (110) and those mentioned in 10.58-60, 81-82: see the following note.

¹⁸ Archippus had had prior correspondence with Trajan and earlier emperors (10.58.3). Pliny in 10.58 presents the dossier on his request for an exemption as a philosopher, including two letters of Domitian and an edict and letter of Nerva (other items are omitted: Velius' judgement, Archippus' petition, the resolution of Prusa, and Trajan's letters are missing [see Williams to 58.4]), then writes an additional letter forwarding *libelli* of Archippus and of Furia Prima, his accuser (10.59, neither *libellus* is included). Archippus reappears in another letter (10.81) in which Pliny reports his accusations against Dio Cocceianus (Dio Chrysostom). In this case he names also the magistrate Asclepiades and Archippus' advocate Claudius Eumolpus. One speculates that Archippus' close connections with earlier emperors and the fame of Dio are the reasons they are mentioned. Did Pliny wish to show that even imperial favor and fame did not affect imperial justice? Archippus must defend himself, and Dio present his accounts.

¹⁹ This practice of recounting charming stories is common in *Ep.* 1-9. Note the example cited by Syme 1958, 79, referring to Pliny's activity as Curator of the Tiber: "Pliny has not chosen to say anything about operations carried out under his supervision: he did not wish to burden his letter with technicalities. Instead, a vivid and ornate description of the devastation ensuing when the river overflowed its banks [*Ep.* 8.17]".

Each letter, with few exceptions, is concerned with only one subject. Five of the first seven letters of Pliny from Bithynia, for example, treat single arguments: Pliny's trip (15), the use of public slaves as guards (19), the visit of Gavius Bassus (21), the Prusians' wish to rebuild their bath (23), and the arrival of Pliny's legate, Servilius Pudens (25). The remaining two combine two related topics: his arrival and immediate plunge into work (17A) and the loyalty of the province to Trajan and the need for the emperor to send an impartial *mentor* to straighten out building accounts (17B). This restriction of content is surprising, considering the difficulty and expense of sending letters. Cicero's correspondence from Cilicia is quite different, as he often takes the opportunity of a letter to discuss several points at one time²⁰. However, it follows the practice of Pliny's literary epistles as seen in books 1-9.

In addition, the tenth book is remarkable for the variety of topics treated, usually only once. Travel regulations, civic associations and groups, the status of a Roman colony, relations of the Pompeian code for the province with standard Roman law, buildings of various sorts (theaters, bath, gymnasium, aqueduct), a grand canal project to be built with imperial support, dealings with foreign kings and imperial procurators, congratulations for imperial anniversaries all appear and disappear again. Apart from the repeated anniversary messages and the canal project (10.41-42, 61-62), a specific topic does not reappear²¹.

We can identify particular letters that are missing. Commentators have noted these gaps, but usually argue that the absences are accidental, or that no letter was in fact written. Nevertheless the work of an editor seems more likely. Twice Trajan writes that he will respond to Pliny later, after either consulting a former proconsul or receiving a document from Pliny (10.57, 73), but neither response is found in the collection, nor is there Pliny's letter forwarding the requested document. Sherwin-White and Williams think Trajan and Pliny simply forgot; it seems more likely that the editor has deleted the letters as not useful to his purpose. As has already been mentioned, there is no letter from Pliny furnishing the results of his inquiry at Nicomedia, though a full report was explicitly requested by Trajan (10.38.2). There is a favorable response to Pliny's request for a favor for Suetonius (95), but no response to two other requests (26, 87). It appears that Pliny has suppressed refusals. Nine other letters have no reply (25, 51, 63, 64, 67, 74, 85, 86A, 86B). It is possible that none were sent, but Trajan's polite

²⁰ *Ad Att.* 6.1 is unusual, treating 26 separate items, almost all in responses to Atticus' notices or queries, but for there to be ten subjects in a letter is not uncommon.

²¹ This variety has allowed Durry (1947, p. ix), e.g., to suggest that the book is a kind of handbook for governors.

replies to Pliny's annual greetings from Bithynia suggests that he answered every letter punctiliously, and Pliny in the *Panegyric* praises Trajan's rapid responses to letters (*Paneg.* 79.6).

Finally, there is the extraordinary presence of the fifteen letters at the beginning of the book, all of which precede Pliny's governorship. They begin with Pliny's congratulations to Trajan on his accession (1), and treat a number of issues: his thanks for honors (2), requests for advice (3a), recommendations of friends (4, 12) and those who have assisted him in his illness (5, 6, 10, 11), a request for permission to erect a statue of Trajan, and for leave (8), a request for a priesthood (13), and congratulations on a victory (14). Only three of Trajan's replies are preserved (3b, 7, 9)²². This set of letters seems quite irrelevant to the provincial correspondence if that is considered an archive. However, they were quite relevant to Pliny's relations with the emperor: as a group, they establish both Pliny's loyalty and gratitude to the emperor, and his influence with him²³.

The parallels of the Trajan-Pliny correspondence with the earlier volumes of Pliny's letters and the interventions in terms of restriction of topic, omission of names, omission of whole letters, and inclusion of the pre-Bithynian letters point to the conclusion that the editor was Pliny himself. Both sets follow the same editorial practices: they remove particularizing features, concentrate on one item, include trivial letters with the serious. The style of course is quite different, but here Pliny plays a different role: not a cultivated litterateur, but a hard-working administrator, assisting the equally indefatigable *princeps*.

4. Pliny as editor of his correspondence with Trajan

We should not be surprised that Pliny undertook this editorial project, with its dual literary and political purposes. When Trajan appointed Pliny as governor of Bithynia, the ex-consul was noted for several accomplishments. He was experienced in financial matters, having served as a prefect of both the *aerarium militare* and the *aerarium Saturni*. He had been for many years a brilliant lawyer practicing before the centumviral court, had prosecuted several returning proconsuls for extortion, and recently was a successful advocate in defending two earlier provincial governors of Bithynia. He had served

²² No replies are preserved for 10.1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, including several letters of recommendation (10.4, 5, 11, 12, 13). It goes beyond our evidence to presume that no answer was ever written or received.

²³ Pliny of course recognizes Trajan's superior position, and is grateful for his *indulgentia*: see Cotton 1984. See on this group of letters Woolf forthcoming A (*Pliny's province*).

on the *consilium principis*, an advisory body to Trajan²⁴. His *Panegyric*, a masterpiece of encomiastic rhetoric, had demonstrated, if it were needed, that he was a loyal supporter of the emperor. All these qualified him for a special mission to sort out the financial and other irregularities in Bithynia²⁵. In addition, however, he was author of nine books of brilliantly composed letters, letters which set out an image of public service, cultural refinement, and social graces²⁶. I believe that Trajan was as aware of Pliny's qualities as an epistlographer as he was of the others, and that the unique nature of this correspondence arises from that fact.

I suggest that Pliny decided, with the approval of Trajan, either at once or early in his term as governor, that he would try to use the actual letters exchanged with the emperor as the basis of a model correspondence, one which would represent both emperor and governor to a larger audience of senators and other educated readers, both Roman and provincial²⁷. This correspondence would be constructed on the same basic principles as his previous collections, but with the changes appropriate for the two new factors: his own role as governor, and the inclusion of the emperor's replies (note that Trajan never initiates an exchange in this correspondence).

With the support and approval of Trajan, Pliny would present the very best of the imperial system, illustrating the many ways in which emperor and governor attempted to rule the provinces justly and honestly. Examples could be offered of various types of decisions and interventions, financial, legal and personal. The letters would reflect a model protocol for such exchanges²⁸. At the same time, other letters would indicate the personal bonds between the emperor and the senatorial aristocracy, and between the various branches of the imperial administration such as the imperial procurators and other provincial governors. Throughout deep mutual respect would reflect the admiration of the governor for the *princeps*, and of *princeps* for governor.

²⁴ For a review of his career, see Syme 1958, 75-85 and the introduction of Sherwin-White 1966; more briefly, Champlin 1982, 1036. For his trials, see Syme 1958, 76-79 and Sherwin-White 1966, 56-62; for service on the *consilium* of Trajan, cf. *Ep.* 4.22 and 6.22 and 31.

²⁵ Cf. Talbert 1980, 412-19.

²⁶ The ninth book may not have been completed yet.

²⁷ That the emperor closely followed the activity of the provincial governors through their exchange of letters was something of a *topos*: cf. Pliny *Panegy.* 70.4-8, 79.6; Aelius Aristides *To Rome* 31-33.

²⁸ Farnsworth 1996 notes the use of deliberative rhetoric, including the employment of *captatio benevolentiae* and arguments from pathos and ethos. He compares Pliny's careful presentation and evaluation of alternatives and Trajan's response to them (e.g. 10.54-55, 61-62) to exchanges of memos between subordinates and an executive in a modern corporation.

If this hypothesis is true, Pliny's tenth book is not a raw dossier, but a sophisticated exercise in imperial self-representation, on a par with that of the earlier books, but functioning in a quite different mode. Whereas the previous books present an idealized view of senatorial life, the tenth book, through selection and omission, presents the Trajanic ideology of rule²⁹. It serves equally as a standard and an incentive to governors and other imperial administrators in the performance of their office and as evidence to those in the provinces of the Romans' care for them. I do not believe that many or even some of the letters are invented out of whole cloth, creating a kind of epistolary novel. But the correspondence cannot be treated as an excerpt from the imperial archives. Pliny's editorial work, his shaping of what we see and how we see it, is pervasive³⁰.

As to the question whether the collection is truncated and that Pliny must have died in office, the burden of proof, I think is on those who think so. There is clear evidence that Pliny died before Trajan's death in 117, but none that he died before returning from his province³¹. The abrupt cessation of the correspondence is usually taken to imply his death in Bithynia³². The letters do not in fact cease abruptly, but grow steadily more sparse: the high point is January of the second year, 10.37-53, with 9 letters of Pliny, an average of one every three days; the low the following January, with only one³³.

²⁹ At least: Pliny may have made other editorial changes as well, adjusting the letters to his purpose.

³⁰ Cf. Woolf forthcoming A.

³¹ The inscription which records bequests left by Pliny refers to Trajan as alive (*CIL* 5.5262 = Smallwood 1966 no. 281, cf. Sherwin-White 1966, 82). Champlin 1982 is cautious about the date of death (1036), though firm that the tenth book was published after Pliny's death (1037).

³² E.g. Syme 1958, 81: "The governor's correspondence with the Emperor ceases abruptly. Death may be surmised". Pliny did not hold another office after Bithynia, although he might have hoped for one. He could have died any time between his last letter (now usually dated to sometime in 111 A.D.) and several years later.

³³ In tabular form, the frequency is as follows:

	Date	letters	months	Pliny letters	letters per month
Year 1	9/18-11/24	17-25	2	6	3
	11/25-1/1	26-36	1	6	6
Year 2	1/2-1/28	37-53	1	9	9
	1/29-9/18	54-89	8	23	3
	9/19-1/1	90-101	3.5	6	1.7
Year 3	1/2-1/28	102-103	1	1	1
	1/29-? (before 9/18)	104-121	<8	9	>1

Moreover, there was no reason for Pliny to have created a complete dossier of his Bithynian correspondence, down to a final letter reporting his imbarcation for Italy. The last two letters in our manuscripts, with the exchange between Pliny and Trajan on the propriety of Pliny using imperial *diplomata* for private purposes, are quite suitable for the conclusion of an epistolary book³⁴. They effectively recall the private-public mix found in the first letter of the book and which continues as a theme throughout. In addition, his wife's return to Italy effectively foreshadows Pliny's own return. By this point, after 121 letters, a large variety of topics had been covered, and the book was already much longer than normal. Pliny could fairly feel that he had done enough³⁵.

5. Pliny's correspondence with Trajan and imperial justice

Read in this light, the correspondence reveals what Pliny sees, or wishes to project, as the priorities and underlying assumptions of the regime. Pliny's decision to transform this correspondence into a book edited for publication means the reader must always consider two audiences for each letter: the recipient of the letter, whether Pliny or Trajan, and Pliny's reading public, made up of the educated upper-class who also would have read his earlier books of letters. In editing the correspondence, Pliny will have redirected emphases to attract and inform his larger audience. Of the many observations that could be made regarding these letters, let me pick out a few which touch upon the just administration of the province.

First, the letters place the relation between Trajan and Pliny in an atmosphere of respect and friendship³⁶. Trajan appears as a ruler who conducts himself as a citizen, as in the *Panegyricus*. The emperor usually addresses Pliny as *mi Secunde carissime*, a warm greeting which asserts a bond which goes beyond the purely official and administrative³⁷. Pliny's letters, instead,

³⁴ Pliny's earlier books do not have strongly marked endings. Although thematic resonances can be detected, formally the letters simply stop.

³⁵ There exists the possibility that our unique archetype for book X, the *Parisinus*, may have lost one or more folios. However the three witnesses of this manuscript for book 10, the editions of Avantius (1502) and Aldus (1508) and Budé's manuscript supplements to the printed texts in Bodleian cod. Auct. L.4.3, taken from Iucundus' lectures in Paris, show no signs of truncation.

³⁶ On friendship generally in Pliny, see recently Borgognoni 2001.

³⁷ *Carissime* appears only six times in Cicero's letters, three times addressing his brother Quintus (*Ad Quint. fr.* 2.6.4, 3.4.6, 3.6.6). The younger Seneca uses it fifteen times, four times in the *Dialogi*, eight in the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, and three in the *Naturales Quaestiones*. It is most common, twenty-five times, in Fronto's correspondence. Contrast the less committal *mi Maxime* of Domitian in 10.58.6. Trajan's attachment to Pliny

regularly use the simple *domine*, without any of the elaboration which a more vainglorious monarch might demand – as Domitian required that he be addressed as *dominus et deus*³⁸. Trajan several times praises Pliny, citing the respect that he has for Pliny's judgement and the extent to which he relies on him (10.16, 44, 115, 117, 121). Moreover, when Pliny makes an exception to a standard rule to allow his wife to return to Italy to console her aunt, trusting Trajan's *indulgentia*, Trajan writes back approving his decision (*merito habuisti, Secunde carissime, fiduciam animi mei*) and sympathizing with the need for speed. Even Trajan's mild reproofs are really assertions of his equitable temperament. Thus at 10.82.1, after Pliny had inquired about an accusation of *majestas* against Dio of Prusa, Trajan replies: "you needn't have hesitated, my dear Pliny, about the issue, ... since you know well my thinking, that I don't wish the respect for my name to be obtained by fear and terror, or by charges of treason". In this case, Trajan uses Pliny's inquiry to make a statement about his own mild policy, or more precisely, Pliny the editor uses this exchange to present imperial policy³⁹.

This warmth extends beyond the circle of the emperor's friends. Trajan in his letters from the first demonstrates a paternal care to protect the interests

is reflected also in his expression *querela corpusculi tui* of Pliny's ills in the journey: compare Pliny's reference to his wife's health at 6.4.2 *quid corpusculo apparatus*.

³⁸ The first letter of the series, written immediately after Trajan's accession, has the salutation *imperator sanctissime* and uses *imperator optime* in the closing (10.1-2); two other early letters address him as *imperator* (10.4.1 and 14.1). All others use *domine*, which, as Sherwin-White notes (p. 557), "was a common form of polite address between inferiors and superiors of free birth". (Fronto wrote of Antoninus Pius as *dominus meus*.) Pliny's grand proposal for a canal omits *domine*, perhaps because the whole first section is especially flattering (41.1). It is also omitted in his letters forwarding a petition (10.59), Sauromates' information (10.64), his report of the celebration of Trajan's *dies imperii* (102), and a query on money distributions (10.116).

³⁹ Talbert 1980, 422-23 suggests "certain signs of inexperience" in Pliny, though Sherwin-White 1966 had attempted to defend him from many of these charges (pp. 546-55). It is important to recognize that Trajan himself does not criticize Pliny for asking questions. The criticisms which are sometimes ascribed to him are, in my mind, rather opportunities for the correspondence to indicate the emperor's opinions more directly. Thus for example 10.45, inquiring whether *diplomata* can be used after their expiration date: it is obvious to us and surely was to Pliny that they should not be; equally surely the fact must have been that they frequently had been so used. Pliny's innocent query allows Trajan to make a firm and clear ruling – also very useful to produce for importunate officials. Again 10.116 is an unusual case, not fitting the normal rules for associations. Pliny clearly knows what should be done and his own discretionary powers to restrict abuse, but solicits the reinforcement of the emperor's directive. His inquiry plays a double role, both to convince wealthy provincials, who were always seeking ways to display their wealth and increase their influence, and via this book to establish a principle throughout the empire.

of provincials (cf. 10.18.2 *provinciales, credo, prospectum sibi a me intelligente*). This concern is an aspect of the “justice of the age” which Trajan associates with his reign. Many of Pliny’s letters concern legal questions, especially on the application of the Pompeian provincial law and on special privileges granted over the years. In applying the law Trajan regularly insists on fairness rather than coercion or imperial interests. Concerning investment of public money, Trajan asserts that it would be wrong to force the wealthy to borrow at high interest rates: *non est ex iustitia nostrorum temporum* (10.55). Considering treatment of the Christians, he states a basic principle rejecting anonymous accusations: *sine auctore vero propositi libelli in nullo crimine loco habere debent. Nam et pessimi exempli nec nostri saeculi est* (10.97.2). On relocation of tombs, *durum est iniungere necessitatem provincialibus pontificium adeundorum* (10.69). When a recent order of Trajan’s is interpreted by the city of Amisus as requiring the repayment of a grant made to a benefactor twenty years before, the emperor insists that his rule should not be applied retroactively, *ne multorum securitas subruatur* (10.111). We can only imagine the kind of political infighting among the leading citizens of Amisus which produced their demand. Trajan artfully avoids the possibility of discord at Amisus, stressing his care for all citizens. He wishes to protect private finances as well as public: *non minus enim hominibus cuiusque loci quam pecuniae publicae consultum volo* (10.111). Again, when Pliny has discovered a long-standing but irregular practice in the appointment of civic senators, Trajan suggests a compromise (*mihi hoc temperamentum eius placuit*), to allow those currently senators to continue, but in the future to follow the law. Insisting on absolute fidelity to the law would be too disruptive: *multa necesse est perturbari* (10.115). When Pliny finds a long-standing abuse in the treatment of men sentenced to forced labor, he hesitates to return to the correct sentence for those condemned who are now quite old (*nimis severum arbitrabar*), but still does not wish the practice to continue (*non satis honestum putabam*). Trajan decides that those sentenced more than ten years ago need not return to forced labor, but still should be given a demeaning job (10.31-32)⁴⁰. It is significant that many of these considerations had already been raised by Pliny, and were then approved (as here, *merito haesisti*) and stated as principles by Trajan. The two, emperor and governor, work together to ensure just government. While severe toward malefactors, both men approach the business of government

⁴⁰ Talbert 1980, 422 suggests that this case may reveal Pliny’s inexperience or ignorance. I take it rather as projecting the combination of mildness and severity which Pliny desires in the exercise of justice.

with a flexible attitude which gives special attention to the needs and situations of the governed.

An important part of Pliny's role in Bithynia was to bring order and restraint to the cities' chaotic finances⁴¹. Justice for all required clear, honest, and responsible accounting. The rivalries of individuals and cities had led them to overextend themselves. A firm rule of Trajan's was that the cities should pay for their own buildings, and given the situation, he seems to have required in his *mandata* that Pliny consult with him before permitting any building project. He shows great interest in the cities' building plans and encourages Pliny to approve various projects – so long as the money is available⁴². He reacts strongly to the report that in Nicomedia enormous sums had been spent without result and is sure that some have been profiteering: *sed medius fidius ad eandem diligentiam tuam pertinet inquirere, quorum vitio ad hoc tempus tantum pecuniam Nicomedenses perdiderint, ne, cum inter se gratificantur, et inchoaverint aquae ductus et reliquerint. Quidquid itaque compereris, perfer in notitiam meam* (10.38.2).

On the other hand, Trajan is responsive to the proposal to run a canal from a large lake near Nicomedia (the Sabandja Göl) to the sea, a grand project beyond the competence or finances of any individual city, yet of use to all of them, as to the empire as a whole. Pliny in suggesting the project appeals especially to Trajan's self-image as a benefactor and his desire for glory: *intuenti mihi et fortunae tuae et animi magnitudinem convenientissimum videtur demonstrari opera non minus aeternitate tua quam gloria digna quantumque pulchritudinis tantum utilitatis habitura* (10.41.3)⁴³. Trajan is immediately enthusiastic, and promises to arrange for Pliny to have a surveyor from another province, *Moesia inferior* (10.42)⁴⁴.

Not infrequently Trajan's paternal goodwill is rather patronizing. He reminds Pliny that much in the province needs correcting: *idcirco te in istam provinciam missum, quoniam multa in ea [provincia] emendanda apparuerint*

⁴¹ Talbert 1980, 424-35 illustrates the "forceful nature" of Pliny's approach to his duties, which apparently addressed such casual practices much more thoroughly than earlier governors.

⁴² Pliny treats building projects in 10.23 (bath at Prusa), 37 (aqueduct at Nicomedia), 39 (theater at Nicaea), 41 (canal), 61 (canal), 90 (aqueduct at Sinope), and 98 (covered sewer at Amastris). For Trajan's building projects outside Rome, including the canal advocated by Pliny, see Boatwright 2002.

⁴³ Cf. in a second letter discussing at length the canal project, Pliny's enthusiastic words, *est enim res digna et magnitudine tua et cura* (10.61.5). For the formidable engineering problems, see Moreaux 1961.

⁴⁴ Trajan later puts the responsibility for obtaining a surveyor on the governor of Moesia and on Pliny himself, 10.62.

(10.32.1) and elsewhere affirms that Pliny should change the provincials' customary practices: *sed ego ideo prudentiam tuam elegi, ut formandis istius provinciae moribus ipse moderareris ea constitueres, quae ad perpetuam eius provinciae quietem essent profutura* (10.117). Pliny should be tolerant of the provincials' needs: *gymnasiis indulgent Graeculi* (10.40.2), but it is necessary that they be satisfied with what will suffice (and they can afford). The *princeps*' solicitude must on occasion oppressively limit the action of the provincials in his charge. After all, a father must guide and direct his children.

6. Conclusion

Plutarch, in his collection of anecdotes prepared for Trajan, which he suggests will provide "a brief overview of many memorable men" (172E), preserves a saying of Augustus, one of the emperor's models. When he heard that Alexander at thirty-two was at a loss what to do in the future, since he had conquered most of the world, Augustus expressed surprise: "did he not consider it a greater task," he asked, "to administer an empire (ἡγεμονίαν διατάξαι) than to win it?" (207D). Plutarch and Pliny both treat how this work of administration must be performed.

Pliny could consider the work of empire philosophy in action: he recalls the opinion of the Syrian philosopher, Euphrates: "anyone who holds public office, presides at trials and passes judgement, expounds and administers justice, puts into practice what the philosopher only teaches, and has a part in the philosophic life, indeed, the noblest part of all" (*Ep.* 1.10.10). He presents the administration of Trajan as *princeps* and of himself as governor as just through an artful construction of the correspondence between the two of them. The exchange is filled with Roman qualities: the rule of law, administrative detail, the tight social world of the senators, and the patronage system. It exudes absolute confidence in Roman rule. There is no hesitation concerning Pliny's right to judge the Bithynians, no qualms about the empire or his role in it, no conflict between Romans, or with them, and very little even among the Bithynians, with the exception the accusations against Archippus and Dio⁴⁵. In Pliny's ideology, the work of bringing order, whether in relations among friends, among cities, or in a whole empire, demonstrates the justice of Roman rule.

Pliny's tenth book is paradigmatic rather than propagandistic, and indirect rather than explicit. Foregoing a preface, the author gives no stated expression of its purpose or the principles upon which it has been formed. At the surface level, it is simply a collection of letters, between Pliny and Trajan, with no indication of completeness. The general effect of the book, however,

⁴⁵ On these, see note 18 above.

is to present the exemplary behavior of *princeps* and governor. The specifics of the paradigm – Pliny, Trajan, the province of Bithynia – are present, but the suppression of detail creates a timeless text, good for all times, all rulers, all places. It was important that the reader not reject the examples as extraneous to his own interests, put off by excessive specificity⁴⁶. Like the *Panegyric*, the tenth book praises the emperor, and Rome, by describing an ideal which Pliny wished to believe fundamentally true, and held out a model for himself and others to follow.

This view of the Pliny-Trajan correspondence leads us to draw four conclusions. First, it is highly unlikely that Pliny died in Bithynia. More probably, he had at least a year to rework his correspondence. Second, the possibility of omissions is much greater than has been thought. The letters do not preserve all the interaction of governor and emperor. Third, the preserved letters may not be very different from their originals, apart from various omissions. Their rhetoric and focus reflect both the needs of the province and the respective roles of the writers. Finally, the correspondence should be treated as a significant witness to Trajanic ideology, as Pliny and the emperor wished to project it.

Pliny's book affirms the emperor's, the senate's and his own personal dedication to just rule and a regeneration of the imperial system. His exemplary presentation of Roman administration was circumstantial enough to have convinced generations of historians that the correspondence is close to a raw archive. Pliny succeeded at his task: to transform the ideal into fact.

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⁴⁶ This is the source of the fundamental problem of the term of Pliny's governorship: Pliny refuses to provide the information we consider essential. Woolf, forthcoming A, notes the easy comprehensibility of the letters, in contrast to those of Cicero, which contain many allusions to information known to the correspondents but not mentioned in the letters.

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