

Summary

One of the instruments which allowed Roman emperors to influence the letter of the law in the times of the principate was that of a rescript. A rescript was essentially an answer issued in response to a question asked by municipalities, inhabitants of the province, administrators, judges and private persons. Fragments of imperial rulings or commentaries to them have been preserved to a large degree in the emperor Justinian's Digest. Others survived on inscriptions or in the papyri.

Against this backdrop, the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan is of an exceptional character. In the year 111 AD Pliny became the governor of the province of Bithynia and Pontus. He was charged with the duties of mainly improving the effectiveness of the administration of the province and controlling municipal finances. Thus the emperor's delegate, well acquainted with the realities of the capital and Italy, found himself in a new environment, where he was to be confronted with unfamiliar problems. Due to the fact that he had a good relationship with the emperor, he never hesitated to address him with numerous questions.

In recent years, scrupulous studies on the structure and form of the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan have been conducted. As a result, the traditional view that the text can be treated as a reliable historical source has been rejected. However, there are academics who disagree with this stance. Thus, we have decided that the Latin text and its translation should be preceded by selected articles by different authors presenting divergent views on this matter.

The collection of texts of a propaedeutic nature starts with a fragment of a monographic study by the British academic Julian Benett. In the chapter entitled *Optimus princeps* the author attempted to reconstruct a "constitution" in force in the times of the Roman Empire during the reign of the emperor Trajan. The first part of his analysis is devoted to the political system and its instruments in the city of Rome and it starts with a rather bold statement that from the constitutional perspective the Early Roman Empire was an anomaly. This view, albeit brilliant and insightful and thus worth appreciating, can hardly be deemed significant enough

for the exegesis of Pliny's letters to quote it in full. However, the reader of Pliny's correspondence may find invaluable importance in the second part, in which the author discusses administrative reforms carried out during the reign of Trajan in the provinces. The author also attempts to outline the key elements of imperial policy in the provinces as envisioned by Nerva's successor on the emperor's throne.

An exemplary methodological approach amidst the findings of the "traditional" school of studies on the letters of Pliny the Younger can be found in a brilliantly erudite essay by Gustaw Przychocki. The text, which originated as a draft of lectures delivered by the Professor at the Warsaw University in the academic year 1924/1925, appeared in a printed form for the first time in the journal *Meander* in 1984, mainly due to the efforts of Lidia Winniczuk. The study conducted by the eminent Polish academic surprises the reader with its insightful analysis of Pliny's letters. Although Przychocki belongs to the group of scholars who treat Pliny's correspondence as a material facilitating a reconstruction of the life of the author of the letters and the socio-political climate of his epoch, yet he maintains a considerable distance in his approach to the subject matter.

One of the main continuators of Przychocki's work in Poland became the above-mentioned Lidia Winniczuk, who devoted a number of studies to Pliny and her readerly monographic study entitled "Pliny the Younger in the light of his letters and speeches" [Pliniusz Młodszy w świetle swoich listów i mów] is the effect of many years of hard work. In opposition to her illustrious predecessor, she shows less scepticism towards information handed down for the future generations by the emperor Trajan's friend and collaborator. She also chooses to see Pliny only in pastel shades, which is, in fact, in accordance with what Pliny himself wished. As this approach is still quite common in the academic world, we decided to "single out" a few thoughts on Pliny's mission in the province of Bithynia and Pontus from Winniczuk's monographic study.

Studying the literature on the subject, an academic will immediately notice that over the span of several centuries the perspectives on the person of Pliny and his work showed some fluctuations. Never has his correspondence, especially the 10th book of his letters, however, been subject to such radical critique, as has been the case in the last several years. The most eloquent propagator of the stance that consists in showing an utmost distrust towards Pliny's message is Greg Woolf, from the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London. Even though not all of his theses can be readily accepted, we have decided that in line with the rule *audiatur et altera pars*, he should also be given voice and that should be done to a large degree possible. Thus, the present study contains as many as two texts by this author: *Pliny's Province*, published as part of conference proceedings and *Pliny/Trajan and the Poetics of Empire*, first published in *The Classical Philology*.

Woolf's perspective on Pliny's works and his method of approaching antique texts may undoubtedly prove to be a source of inspiration for many, even though they may also raise controversy at times.

The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan as seen from the perspective of the positions the authors of the letters occupied in the hierarchy of imperial administration provides a real treat for romanists and legal historians. An interest in specific "cases" recorded in individual letters, as well as "precedents" that were worked out on their basis should be even greater inasmuch as many of the texts collected in Book 10 concern – according to the still prevailing opinion – "the living matter". The situations described by Pliny, as Paul du Plessis from *Edinburgh Law School* rightly observes, are not merely fossils of true stories deprived of their original context by Justinian compilers. Pliny's letters contain rather succinct reports on situations and cases, which are further pursued after the emperor's decisions. A relatively simple language used by the correspondents makes the task at hand easier (yet the language steers away from the dogmatic coherence that contemporary jurists are trained to rely on since the beginning of their studies). Paul du Plessis tries to turn the attention of his Polish colleagues to that and other research nuances.

The attention of romanists and legal historians may be caught by the numerous problems which were raised in the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan and also the way in which they were solved. No other matter, however, did provoke so many discussions and expert analyses as the question of trials of Bithynian Christians. Practically every detail pertaining to those tragic events, such as the date, place, procedure, *modus operandi* of the judge, behaviour of the defendants, means of evidence, etc. has attracted, and is still attracting academic interest. On the other hand, the question of moral assessment of Pliny's behaviour has been pushed into the background. The rehabilitation of Trajan which occurred in the Middle Ages, together with placing Pliny's statue on the façade of the Como Cathedral caused that the responsibility of the latter for state-sanctioned killing of many innocent people has been reduced to minimum. Maciej Jońca in his text describes the course of events and attempts to bring back the right proportions in their evaluation.

After almost 220 years after the publication of Pliny's letter in Roman Ziomecki's interpretation, we are publishing the present translation. Albeit still a great work, the translation of our predecessor at times sounds archaic. That is why we have undertaken a translation which would fulfil the demands of the modern language, in accordance with the theory that every generation needs a new translation of a given work. The present rendering is based on a critical edition from the series *Bibliotheca Teubneriana*. In dubious cases, the translators took into account different variations of the text included in the critical apparatus.