

Courting the Associations: Cooperation, Conflict and Interaction in Roman Egypt

Philip F. Venticinque

1. Introduction

After enjoying some initial success as governor in Egypt, Aulus Avilius Flaccus made one mistake after another, at least according to Philo's less than flattering account.¹ During the final year of his difficult time in Alexandria, Philo characterized Flaccus as someone unable to navigate the mine field of local groups and their concerns successfully. Alexandria in the first century CE certainly was a complicated place on any number of levels. Civil unrest was a reality. Relations between Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian populations were tense. Alexandrian Greeks in particular had developed a reputation for feelings of cultural, social, and political superiority. So much so that Dio could poke fun at the lofty esteem and high regard in which they held themselves.² Beyond the account of social, political, and religious strife, in his narrative Philo indicates what difficulties might confront a governor and has painted a portrait of what an ideal governor would be in negative relief: essentially, all that Flaccus was not. Forced to deal with conflict and competition between vocal and influential elite and non-elite constituencies drawn from

1. Philo discusses Flaccus and the events that occurred during his term in two works: *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*. Philo himself, as a prominent member of the Jewish community in Alexandria, and a member of a prominent and well connected family, was involved in the matters he discusses. On Flaccus and his term, see Alston 1997 and on unrest in Alexandria, see Harker 2008, 9-47; on riots and unrest in general, see B. Kelly 2007.

2. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.

all corners of the Alexandrian community, Flaccus managed to satisfy no one – including the emperor.³

Couched in the language of propriety, duty, and justice, the jurists describe the task of any governor as keeping the peace and preventing unlawful activities or the misappropriation of goods and services by any party.⁴ The larger concern of facilitating the extraction of tax revenue and resources from a province perhaps looms in the background.⁵ To succeed, governors and other officials needed to manage the different elite and non-elite groups like those Flaccus faced and somehow deal with conflict between these groups.⁶

The various associations organized around common professional or religious activities were influential constituencies not only in Alexandria but also in cities and villages throughout Egypt and the Roman world. Among the actions taken by Flaccus that garnered praise from Philo was his decision to disband the associations – groups that counted among their numbers some of the more influential members of the Alexandrian Greek elite. Philo asserted that, in his view, associations only held feasts and sacrifices as a pretext to cover up the intrigue, and drunkenness, that emanated from their regular meetings.

ἔδικαζε τὰ μεγάλα μετὰ τῶν ἐν τέλει, τοὺς ὑπεραύχους καθήρει, μιγάδων καὶ συγκλυδῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄχλον ἐκώλθεν ἐπισθνήσασθαι τὰς τε ἑταρείας καὶ συνόδους, αἱ ἄει ἐπὶ προφάσει θυσιῶν εἰσιτιῶντο τοῖς πράγμασιν ἔμπαροινουῶσαι, διέλθε τοῖς ἀφηνιάζουσιν ἐμβριθῶς καὶ εὐτόνως προσφερόμενος.

He judged important cases with the help of those in authority, humbled the arrogant and prevented any motley promiscuous horde of

3. On provincial mismanagement, see Brunt 1961.

4. Among other examples discussing the role of governors excerpted in the *Digest*, see Ulpian, *Opinions*, book 1 (*Dig.* 1.18.6) and Ulpian, *Duties of Proconsul*, book 7 (*Dig.* 1.18.13). The handbook for governors and proconsuls became a popular genre among the jurists, see Burton 2001, 256-7.

5. Sharp 1999.

6. Kokkinia 2004; on administration of provinces in general and the role of governors see also Burton 2001 and 2004.

people from combining in opposition. The sodalities and clubs, which were constantly holding feasts under pretext of sacrifice in which drunkenness vented itself in political intrigue, he dissolved and dealt sternly and vigorously with the refractory.⁷

Philo and Flaccus were not alone in their attitude towards these groups. Associations were often viewed as sources of unrest and discord in ancient communities.⁸ Roman attitudes expressed in literary texts indicate as much. Cicero, Tacitus, and Suetonius linked associations with unrest and sedition during the late republic and first century CE.⁹ Trajan's reported response to requests for sanctioning an association voiced concerns about potential violence and conspiracy.¹⁰ The jurists also laced their discussions of associations with similar feelings of anxiety.¹¹ In his *Institute*, for instance, Marcian reminded governors that they were 'directed by imperial instructions not to tolerate secret social *collegia*'. Marcian went on to suggest that if such groups existed for the benefit of *homines tenuiores*, individuals should be limited, ideally, to membership in a single group.¹²

Based on these texts, it would seem that the relationship between associations and the authorities was fraught with difficulty, complications, and conflict on all sides. Interactions between associations and the Roman government has been a focus of intense interest and debate since the earliest studies of associations.¹³ Literary texts and juristic commentaries with their language of anxiety and fear have set the tone, producing a top-down history of legal and economic relations between associations, local elites, and imperial officials. Conflict with elites and strategies to compensate for exclusion from society on the basis of elite fears have dominated the discussion. Perhaps the debate focused on the juristic categories of licit and illicit *collegia* in which scholars since Mommsen have been engaged

7. Philo, *In Flacc.* 4; trans. F. H. Colson, Loeb 1941.

8. MacMullen 1992.

9. Cicero, *Pis.* 9; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.17; Suetonius, *Aug.* 32.

10. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.33, 10.34.

11. *Dig.* 3.4.1 and *Dig.* 47.22.

12. *Dig.* 47.22.1, trans. Watson, et al.

13. Mommsen 1843; Waltzing 1895-1900; Poland 1909; on the historiographical traditions of the study of associations, see Perry 2006 and in this volume.

illustrates this point. Parsing associations into these categories as a way of understanding relations between a given association and the authorities only goes so far as an interpretive tool. Relying on a dichotomy between licit and illicit associations – the sober and the disruptive – as a lens through which to interpret their activities limits our understanding of the complex relationships associations developed and maintained with local elites, imperial officials, and other constituencies.

While recent studies of associations in Asia Minor, Italy, and Egypt have begun to probe the place associations occupied in their communities, questions remain.¹⁴ How associations interacted, cooperated, or competed with other groups and members of the local elite, and the role imperial officials and Roman legal structure might have played has been less of a concern. Given the nature of the evidence these are hard questions to answer. Even honorific inscriptions that document connections between elites and associations obscure the details that lie behind a statue saluting a *gymnasiarch* for his generous supply of oil or dedications by merchants thanking an official for efforts to secure market space.

Taken together, inscriptions and papyri provide insight into the various stages of what were ongoing relationships and offer a counter-point to the literary and legal sources. In what follows, I will examine several examples of how cooperation and conflict between associations, individual craftsmen and merchants, and local elites and imperial officials played out in contracts, receipts, petitions, and other documents to help understand the view from below (see also Gibbs in this volume). These texts document, at least in part, moments when craftsmen and merchants chose to cooperate with or to challenge individuals, other associations, local elites, and imperial officials in different ways. A good deal was invested from the associations' perspective, in the choice of cooperation or conflict, as economic activities were embedded in larger networks of social, economic, and political obligations. As a result, associations and local elites had to make choices based on a number of factors. Both

14. Van Nijf 1997; Harland 2003; Hawkins 2006; Gibbs 2008 and 2011; Liu 2009; Venticinque 2009 and 2010; Arnaoutoglou 2011.

sides risked and wagered a certain amount of social, economic, and political capital when deciding to cooperate or not; those lower on the social and economic pyramid likely wagered more. Documentary evidence invites us to investigate the nuance that existed in these relationships and provides an opportunity to study how associations and the elites managed cooperation and how associations used law, legal rhetoric, and reputations for usefulness and past cooperation to their advantage when conflict occurred.

2. Coordination and Cooperation

Whether or not action against the associations of Alexandria proves that Flaccus desired to impose a Roman policy of control is unclear. If Flaccus had been acting on a specific policy, it would seem to have had little effect during his term or after. Papyri and inscriptions from the first century and beyond attest to the presence of associations in communities large and small throughout Egypt.¹⁵ References to official restrictions on groups and their activities in Egypt are few. Nothing exists in Egypt quite like the prohibition for people to ‘take part in an assembly (*coetus*) in that *municipium* or to form a society (*sodalitium*) or a college (*collegium*)’ contained in the *lex Irnitana*, a copy of the Flavian municipal law from Spain.¹⁶ Besides Philo’s report, a second-century copy of the *Gnomon of the Idios Logos* (*BGVV* 1210) mentioned associations (*sunodoi*) in a single section.¹⁷ The text stipulates a fine of 500 drachmas imposed either upon associations or potentially only on their officials; it is not clear.¹⁸ There is no indication of what would cause such a fine, nor does the *Gnomon* make evident under what circumstances officials or the association would be fined. Failure to meet tax requirements seems a likely guess, in light of the fiscal focus of the *Gnomon*, but there is no way

15. For information about associations in Egypt and Asia Minor, specifically during the first century CE, see Arnaoutoglou 2002 and Arnaoutoglou 2005; for a discussion of associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt, see Venticinque 2009.

16. *lex Irnitana*, §74; for text and translation see J. Gonzalez and M. Crawford 1986.

17. On the *Gnomon* see Swarney 1970.

18. *BGVV* 1210 (*BLXI*, 26), section 108 (after 149 CE): ο[ἰ] σ[υ]νοδοὺν νέμοντες κατεκ[ρίθ]ησ[α]ν ἐκ (δραχμῶν) φ, ἐνίστε μόν[οι] οἱ [π]ρο[σ]τάται.

to be certain.¹⁹ The inclusion of associations in the text does indicate that interactions between associations, their officers, and the authorities could become complicated (and costly), but there does not seem to have been any unilateral restriction or elimination of these groups in Egypt during this period.

Like everywhere else in the Roman world, groups in Egypt tended to be organized around a common trade or merchant activity. Others organized themselves around a specific deity or religious activity, like the association of Harpocrates operating in first-century Tebtunis, but groups like these probably had some larger economic focus as well.²⁰ A typical Egyptian association, referred to most commonly as a *sunodos*, *koinon*, or *plethos* was not necessarily large. Groups usually had membership of 10 to 25 individuals, although some elsewhere, like the builders or caulkers in Ostia during the second century boasted membership numbers of 200 or 300.²¹ But as in other locations numerous associations were active. Tebtunis, a village of a few thousand in the Fayum, had associations of dyers, fullers, weavers, builders, wool-dealers, goldsmiths, and salt-merchants in the mid-first century. Associations were an important constituency in larger communities as well. A set of price-declarations from the early fourth century indicate that Oxyrhynchus was home to at least 33 different groups.²²

Local notables may not have approached these groups with the same anxiety as members of the Roman elite projected in their writings. Steep costs of membership excluded participation by many of the nameless, faceless, rabble rousing crowd, the *homines tenuiores* mentioned by Pliny and Marcian, who they assumed relied on associations for social and economic support. An association charter from first-century Tebtunis (*P. Mich.* V 243) indicates monthly dues totaled 144 drachmas a year. Such a sum would have potentially supported grain provisions for a family of four (depending on a

19. Liu 2005, 291.

20. *P. Mich.* V 246 (I CE); *P. Oslo.* III 143 (I CE).

21. On group composition and make up in general, see Gibbs 2008 and Venticinque 2009.

22. See *P. Oxy.* LIV, Appendix II, 230-232 for a list of price declarations.

number of seasonal and regional variables in price, not to mention variations on consumption across age and gender lines).²³ Other first-century receipts and accounts suggest that groups spent large sums on regular banquets in addition to dues. The head of a group of weavers in Tebtunis paid 92 drachmas for one celebration, and the association of Harpocrates collected 235 drachmas from its members.²⁴ To say the least, membership in associations was probably not an option for the truly poor and marginalized members of society.

Some influential individuals on the local level may have even belonged to or maintained relationships with associations. Kronion, who managed the *grapheion* in Tebtunis and filled his days with preparing contracts, copying leases, and cataloging transactions, seems also to have been engaged in association activities.²⁵ Kronion's personal records show that if he did not belong to an association he at least had ties to one. Payments to a man identified as the *hegoumenos* of an association (*sunodos*) and another to an association for wine might have been his regular association contributions.²⁶

23. For estimates on the cost of grain in first-century Egypt, see Duncan-Jones 1990, 144-145.

24. *P. Mich.* II 121, Recto IV, vi, preserves a copy of an agreement between the *hegoumenos* and *grammateus* of the weavers of Kerkesoucha Orous to pay 92 drachmas for the cost of beer, presumably for association banquets, to five other members listed here within three months; *P. Mich.* V 246 is a list of contributions, perhaps for a banquet, made by the members of the association of Harpocrates in Tebtunis during the first century.

25. On the management of the *grapheion* see Husselman 1970.

26. *P. Mich.* II 127, col. I, line 20 records a payment to a man identified as Patron the *hegoumenos* of an association (*sunodos*). There are other payments of four drachmas to a Patron, son of Tyrannos, at *P. Mich.* II 127, col. II, line 13 and 33, including a 'contribution for the sixth year' of four drachmas. Whether or not these are the same individuals showing repeated interaction with the association is unclear. *P. Mich.* II 127, col. I, lines 20 and 30 (CE 45/46); line 30 records a payment or contribution of two *keramia* at 36 obols, not specifying what it might be. If it was wine, the price would seem to be in line with other entries recording the cost of wine at 14, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 22 obols per *keramia*, although the price of one *keramion* of wine is listed as four drachmas at *P. Mich.* II 127, col. I, line 21.

Associations also maintained a public presence in cities and towns throughout the Hellenistic and Roman world. Some associations possessed meeting houses (*scholae*), others managed spaces and stalls in marketplaces, and paid taxes for the access.²⁷ Associations also engaged and participated in the wider social, economic, and political community through honorific inscriptions praising local elites as detailed in Onno van Nijf's excellent study of these practices in Asia Minor.²⁸ During the first and second centuries, for instance, the dyers of Thyatira honored market officials, civic priests and priestesses, the *prytanis* and members of the council, and a provincial imperial high priest.²⁹ The wool-workers in Ephesos honored Publius Vadius Antoninus, a Roman senator and member of a prominent local family, in the second century.³⁰ Honorific activities such as these indicate civic participation by associations and suggest that relationships of some sort developed between associations and local elites. Such a public display also may have signaled, or tried to lay claim to, an increased level of esteem based on their ties to influential individuals, who also likely reaped some positive benefits from the affiliation. While a lack of trust towards association members, and craftsmen and merchants in general, was the rule in literary texts, some associations may have occupied positions of influence, if not trust, on a local level.

Statues and inscriptions erected by an association honoring the efforts of a local official on their behalf represent the seemingly successful conclusion of a social, economic, or political transaction. Craftsmen and merchants contributed to the successful endeavors of officials honored by local councils and other bodies, even if not explicitly mentioned in the inscription as one of the groups bestowing honors. The people and local officials of Oxyrhynchus, along with the resident Alexandrian and Roman citizens, honored a gym-

27. On *scholae*, see Bollmann 1998; Hermansen 1982; on market taxes see *SB XVI* 12695 and discussion in J. R. Rea 1982.

28. van Nijf 1997, 73-130; see also Harland 2003 and now Arnaoutoglou 2011. Waltzing 1895-1900 remains a useful compendium of inscriptions documenting the honorific activity of associations as well.

29. Harland 2003:143-147; see also Arnaoutoglou 2011, 265-270.

30. *I.Eph* 728; On Vadius Antoninus and his family, see Kalinowski 2002.

nasiarch with a statue, full size portrait, and three shields for his efforts to repair the baths, supply oil for the gymnasium, and provide funds for shows.³¹ The formulaic language of honorific inscriptions and decrees can obscure the complexities that went into earning that statue, as well as the economic, and contractual, relationships that developed between officials and associations during the process. Without the help or coordination of efforts by craftsmen and merchants this gymnasiarch in Oxyrhynchus might have been less successful.

As mentioned in the honorific decree by the people of Oxyrhynchus, upkeep of baths and maintenance of buildings were major concerns. Local magistrates relied on associations to complete this work. In order keep the baths operational, officials entered into contracts with various associations. Repairs called for coordination among a number of craftsmen, such as the group of lead workers hired by the *prytanis* of Oxyrhynchus during the third century.³² According to the contract, an uncertain number of men supervised by two lead workers worked on the pipes at the baths. Bronzsmiths and glass workers also completed work on the local gymnasium.³³

In order to fulfill large orders for garments and linen needed by local temples or the military, the local officials routinely entered into contracts with groups of weavers and linen merchants.³⁴ This was the situation in the Fayum village of Philadelphia where an association of weavers was contracted to produce military garments in 138 CE. The weavers received an advanced payment of 24 drachmas out of 148 total through a banker from four officials to help offset costs related to producing one white tunic, four white Syrian cloaks, and one white blanket for the hospital at the military camp.³⁵ Minutes of a late third-century council meeting in Oxyrhynchus also

31. *P. Oxy.* III 473 (138-160 CE).

32. *P. Oxy.* XLIV 3185 (III CE); see also *P. Oxy.* XLIV 3173 (222 CE), *P. Oxy.* XLIV 3176 (222-234 CE), and *P. Oxy.* I 84 (316 CE).

33. Bronzsmiths: *P. Laur.* IV 155 (late III CE); for glassworkers: *P. Coll. Youtie* II 81 (326 CE) = *P. Oxy.* XLV 3265.

34. On the supply and production of military clothing see Sheridan 1998.

35. *BGU* VII 1564 (138 CE); see also *P. Ryl.* I 189 (128 CE). On military clothing, requisition, and payments, see Sheridan 1998, 82-86.

mention work undertaken by weavers and merchants to provide linen for local temples at the behest of the council.³⁶

Maintaining the food supply also required some negotiation. Cooperation, defined contractually though it may have been, between elite and non-elite was necessary. An agreement between six local officials (*eutheniarchai*) in Oxyrhynchus provides an example.³⁷ According to this text, each official agreed to pay for grain, animals, and presumably other costs for bakeries and milling workshops to assure a certain amount of production for the month. This contract represents one of what would have been many interactions throughout the year and records the type of cooperation that existed between local elites, bakers, and millers.

Despite evidence of cooperation, conflict did exist between associations, local elites, and imperial officials. Conflict did not always lead to riots, however; sometimes tension might not even be readily apparent. Often what was left out of a document or an inscription can point the way towards conflict in a community and the role that associations may have played as influential constituencies. Certain groups, for instance, may have felt differently than the dyers in Thyateira about the numerous people they honored. Other associations may not have considered Vedius Antoninus or his family so praiseworthy. Letters indicating imperial support and approval for Vedius' public building projects addressed to the council, magistrates, and people of Ephesos have been interpreted as a response to tensions in the community regarding his plans.³⁸ If this was the case, Vedius Antoninus was not alone. Dio claimed that he fell afoul of certain members of the elite and associations in his hometown over his civic improvement plans.³⁹

Whether there was tension or not, associations like the woolworkers that honored Vedius clearly asserted a connection to a powerful and influential person and faction in local politics. Vedius An-

36. *P. Oxy.* XII 1414 (270-275 CE).

37. *P. Oxy.* VI 908 (199 CE).

38. *I. Eph* 1491-1493; on these texts see Kalinowski 2002, 109-121, Burton 2001, 257-8, Eck 1998, 369-71; for an alternate reading of *I. Eph* 1491 removing the tension between Vedius Antoninus and the council see Kokkinia 2003, 203-206.

39. Dio, *Or.* 40.8-9.

toninus and his family supported and may have appealed strategically to specific groups of craftsmen and merchants in their dealings with the local elites as Kalinowski has suggested.⁴⁰ Honorary activity in this sense signals more than a passive acceptance of a dominant social and political order. Associations like those in Ephesos or in Prusa, even in a small way, appear to have been part of the larger political process and negotiations taking place on the ground. They could be important factors for local elites like Vedius or Dio in establishing their own power and influence, something which probably caused tension with other elites and non-elites alike.

3. Conflict, Tensions, and Strategy

When tensions escalated, negotiations became complicated, or contracts were broken, craftsmen and merchants had a number of options to make their voice heard. Although open conflict and violence was not the norm, even in Egypt, groups of craftsmen did take to the streets in displays of displeasure and dissatisfaction.⁴¹ It is Ephesos and Asia Minor, however, and not Egypt that has become the *locus classicus* of violence and unrest sponsored by associations (see also Perry in this volume).⁴² The occupation of the theater in Ephesos by the silversmiths reported in the Acts of the Apostles has been one of the usual starting points.⁴³ Spurred to action by a leading craftsman named Demetrius, said to have employed many others, the silversmiths apparently seized two supporters of Paul and occupied the theater in response to perceived attacks on their livelihood and the cult of Artemis. Paul and his followers had been too good at convincing people to turn away from traditional cult at Ephesos, at least according to Acts. Religion and the spread of Christianity aside, the actions of the silversmiths were provocative and potentially dangerous.

The decision Demetrius and his apparently belligerent and nu-

40. Kalinowski 2002, 128-135.

41. *P. Bremner* 63 (117 CE).

42. MacMullen 1963; on Roman responses to unrest and riots see now Kelly 2007.

43. *Acts* 19: 23-41.

merous friends made was deliberate and called for weighing a certain amount of risk and uncertainty. A response from the Roman authorities could have been brutal. Any stored up capital with the local elites might also have been lost, especially if Roman intervention became a reality. The local elites occupied a precarious position too. They had to deal with the silversmiths and their complaints (and likely those of other groups), preserve order, and, hopefully, prevent Roman involvement. The craftsmen probably knew how difficult they were making it for the council. The council member called on to address them makes this clear in his comments: we all are in danger of being charged with *stasis* and we will not be able to give a proper account of this gathering.⁴⁴ In other words, this will be hard to explain if the Romans find out. The silversmiths and the elite must have both understood this. In that case, associations probably used disruptions and public displays sparingly and strategically as part of managing their ongoing social, political, and economic relationships with local elites.

The silversmiths likely pushed the questions of Artemis' importance and their own importance versus other groups (Christian or otherwise) as far as it could go. Although they left after several hours without any definitive resolution, the silversmiths perhaps went away more than empty handed. Demetrius and the silversmiths may have been trying to gauge what support and influence they had amongst the local elites in a real-time way – not measured in honorary inscriptions or favorable responses to petitions. By their actions and choice not to refer the matter to the Romans, the council may have signaled that they agreed with the silversmiths who had been shouting 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' in the theater. Not only did the councilors also think that Artemis was, in fact, great, but they might have thought that the silversmiths could not be dismissed unilaterally, at least at this point in time. The proconsul who settled the disturbance the bakers caused in Ephesus in the second century may have been operating in a similar fashion.⁴⁵

44. Acts 19:40, και γάρ κινδυνεύομεν ἐγκαλεῖσθαι στάσεως περὶ τῆς σήμερον μηδενὸς αἰτίου ὑπάρχοντος, περὶ οὗ οὐδὲν δυνησόμεθα ἀποδοῦναι λόγον περὶ τῆς συστροφῆς ταύτης.

45. *I.Eph.* 215, with SEG 28.863.

He maintained that although he could punish the bakers severely, in light of their importance to the welfare of the city, he would not do so. If this was the case, the silversmiths might have gotten the response they wanted, and managed to avoid any punitive measures or involvement of the Romans.

The secretary of the council's statement acknowledged their presence and suggests that they had some standing. More than this, the secretary's warning to take their complaints to the imperial courts or the local council before, essentially, everyone gets in trouble is also illuminating.⁴⁶ Going to the courts or to the council were the other two options associations could make use of, and likely made use of more often than occupying the theater. In fact, the jurists seem to suggest that the right of an association to petition and have their complaints heard was and should have remained a given.⁴⁷

I am less interested in the specifics of the uproar than in the decision made to occupy the theater and the response offered by the secretary of the council for how this episode can inform our reading of the papyrological evidence. Going to the council or the courts was exactly what craftsmen, merchants, and associations did in Egypt. A third-century transcript of council proceedings in Oxyrhynchus offers an example of associations taking their complaints and concerns to the local elites.⁴⁸ The council had contracted the linen merchants and weavers to produce garments for the local temples. Problems arose during production. The associations claimed that initial funds allocated by the council would not cover increased costs for labor and materials. Rather than march through the streets, both the weavers and linen merchants went to the council and asked for more money, where advocates spoke on their behalf. The weavers may have made a better case (or had more influential advocates) because the council allocated the full amount requested. The merchants, on the other hand, received only half.

When associations of dyers and fullers in the Arsinoite nome

46. *Acts* 19: 38-39.

47. *Dig.* 3.4.1.1

48. *P. Oxy.* XII 1414 (270-275 CE).

were unhappy with their tax assessment, they also chose not to start a riot. Instead, protesting what they deemed an unfair and incorrect tax assessment, the fullers and dyers took full advantage of the legal process and petitioned for a review.

[- ca. 60 - έτους] Αντωνίνου καὶ Οὐήρου τῶν [κυρίων Σεβαστῶν - ca. 31 -] νυν[
 ἀπὸ] τοῦ Ἀρ[σινοίτ]ου καὶ προσελθόντων Λονγεῖ- [νος ρήτωρ εἶπεν· - ca. 23
 - οἱ μὲν] εἰ[σὶ] γναφεῖς οἱ δὲ] βαφεῖς τὴν ἐργασίαν, δίδονται δὲ ὑπὲρ τέλους
 [- ca. 13 -] χειρω[να]ξί[ου] ὑπὸ μὲν τῶ]ν γναφέων ἐτήσια δραγμαῖα χίλια
 ἐνεήκοντα δύο ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν βαφέων [διακόσια ὀγ]δοήκοντα ὀκτὼ κατὰ τὸν [γν]
 ὥμονα καὶ τὴν συνήθειαν. Μαξίμου δὲ τινος κατασταθέντος ἐξεταστοῦ [ἐν
 πλέονι αὐ]τοῦς ἢ ἔδει παραγράψαντος ἐνέτυχον τῷ ἡγεμόνι καὶ ἀνέπεμψεν
 αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ Κράσσον τὸν κράτιστον [διοικητ]ήν, ὃς μεταπεμψάμενος τὸν τοῦ
 νομοῦ ἐγλο[γ]ιστὴν ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὸν εἰκοσαετ[ί]αν τὴν ὑπὸ χεῖρα
 [ἐπισκέψασθαι,] προσφωνήσαντός τε αὐτοῦ μηδὲν πλέον δεδῶσθαι τοῦ κατὰ
 τὸν γνώμονα κατὰ ταῦτα ἠθέλησεν αὐ [τοὺς τὴν ἀ]πόδοσιν ποιήσασθαι καὶ
 οὕτως μέχρι τούτου ἀπέδωσαν. ἐπεὶ οὖν νῦν κατ[α]σταθεῖς τις ἐπιτηρητῆς
 ἰο[τέλους χειρωναξί]ο(?)ν βούλετα[ι] πλέον ἢ κατὰ τὸν γνώμονα αὐτοὺς
 ἀπαιτεῖν ἐνέτ[υ]χον τῷ στρατηγῷ π[α]ρατιθέμενοι [- ca. 11 - καὶ ἐπε]ὶ μηδὲν
 ὑπὸ τοῦ [στρατη]γοῦ ἐπ[ο]ύθη ἐδέησεν αὐτοὺς ἐντυχεῖν σοι. Πρώταρχος ρή-
 [τωρ εἶπεν· κα]τὰ τὰ δόξαντα Κρ[ά]σσω - ca. 9 -]τ. [. . . . ἐ]ξετάσεως
 ἦχθη περὶ τούτου εἶδος τῷ κρα [τίστῳ Λιβε]ρ[ά]λι καὶ ὑπέγραψεν μὴ ἀπ[αιτεῖν]
 Σευηρ]ιανὸς εἶπεν· παρόντος τοῦ ἐγλογιστοῦ ὄ[ς] καὶ ἐντυξε[- ca. 14 -]ν τὸν
 ἐγλογιστῆ[ν] (hand 2) ἀνέ]γγων. 15[(hand 1) - ca. 18 -]. [. . . . τῶν [. . .]ξ[
 βαφέω]ν καὶ γναφέων ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀρσινοεῖτου παρόντος Ἑρμί[ου] τοῦ
 ἐγλογιστοῦ τοῦ Ἀρσινοεῖτου [Λονγεῖ]νος ρή[τ]ωρ εἶπεν· ἐχθρὸς ἐν[έ]τυχόν σ[οι]
 οἱ συνηγορούμενοι [- ca. 12 - ἥ]ερὶ ὧν ο]ὐ δ[ε]ῖ ὄντως ἀπα[ι]τοῦνται ὑπὸ ἐ]
 πιτηρητοῦ ἀσχολήματος χειρωναξίου καὶ ἐπὶ ε- [- ca. 15 - ἦ]χθαι τῷ [κρ]α[τ]
 ἰστ[ῳ] Λιβεράλι καὶ ὑπογεγ[ρά]φθαι περὶ π[λ]έονος πρὸς αὐτοὺς μὴ ζητεῖσθαι
 [- ca. 27 -]. [- ca. 15 -] τὸ ἀκριβὲς μάθης, δεόμεθα οὐ[ν] παρ[ο]ντα αὐ-20[τὸν]
 (?) - ca. 30 - Ἑρμίου ἀναγνόν[τ]ος τὸ ἀχθὲν εἶδος Λιβεράλι Σευηριανὸς εἶ]πεν·
 [- ca. 17 -]. [. . . .]. [. . . .]. τ. [. . . .]. νν[- ca. 14 -]ος τοῦ ἐπιτηρητοῦ τῷ κρατίστῳ
 ἐπιστρ[α]τήγῳ. [- ca. ? -] (hand 2) ἀνέγγων.

in the ... year of Antoninus and Verus the Lords Augusti, the fullers and dyers from the Arsinoite nome having been summoned and having appeared, Longinus, advocate, said: 'Of these men some are fullers and other dyers by trade, and for the tax on trades 1092 drachmas yearly are paid by the fullers and 1088 by the dyers ac-

ording to tariff and custom. A certain Maximus who was appointed inspector having wrongly entered a larger sum against them than was due they appealed to the prefect, who referred them to his highness the *epistrategos* Crassus. The latter summoned the *eklogistes* of the nome and ordered him to verify the accounts of the last twenty years, and, when he reported that no more had been paid than was sanctioned by the tariff, decided that they should pay on this scale, and they have done so up to the present time. A superintendent of the tax upon trades has now been appointed who wishes to demand from them a larger amount than that of the tariff, and they therefore petitioned the strategos, adding a statement ..., but as nothing was done by the strategos they were obliged to appeal to you.' Pro-tarchos, advocate, said: "... in accordance with the decision ... a report on the subject was laid before his highness Liberalis, who made an endorsement that they should not be required to pay." Severianus said: "When the *eklogistes* is present ..."49

Attempts by local officials to collect exorbitant amounts was a common complaint. Several petitions by individual craftsmen allege similar overzealous tax collection and seek relief.⁵⁰ These associations, again represented by an advocate, appear to have brought their dispute to the highest levels of provincial government on different occasions. At one point their case prompted the *epistrategos* (one of three regional officials with oversight of multiple nomes) to order a review of twenty years worth of financial records. While within the purview of provincial officials, any sort of review was likely burdensome and speaks to some of the influence these associations and their advocates had. On the basis of the review and past precedent, the fullers and dyers once again seem to have won the day, although the precise outcome is difficult to ascertain due to the state of the text. Precedent, conforming to established norms, a reputation for fulfilling tax requirements, and perhaps friends more influential than the tax collectors seem to have been on their side.

The weavers of Philadelphia might have found themselves in a similar situation. When last we met this group, they had been con-

49. *P. Tébt.* II 287, *BLX*, 276 (161-169 CE; trans. Grenfell and Hunt).

50. *P. Oxy.* LXXIII 4953 (48 CE); see also *P. Oxy.* II 284 (50 CE) and 285 (50 CE).

tracted by local elites to complete a number of items for the military. Things have become more complicated in the intervening time. The following year (139 CE), this same group claimed that they did not have enough weavers to fulfill new orders. It appears that four of their number had been tasked with other duties. In response, they sent a petition to the *strategos* of the nome (an official chosen from wealthy local elites but serving as the ranking civil official in a nome other than his own) seeking exemptions and relief from what might have been efforts by local elites to over burden them.

Δίῳνι στρατηγῷ Ἀρσινοεῖτ[ου] Ἡρακλειδ[ου μερίδος] παρὰ γερδίων κόμης Φιλαδελφεία[ς. ἐπειδὴ εἰλήφα-] μὲν ὑπογύως ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου ἀργυρίῳ[υ (δραχμὰς) -ca.?- , ἵνα ἴμα-] τισμὸν δημοσίων κατασκευάσωμεν. [-13-14-] μὲνοι ὄντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἐρ[γ]ασ[ια]ς ἀνδρῶν [-12-13-] τηκότες ἀπαρτίσαι τὸ κεκελευσμέν[ον -10-11-] τούτων τέσσαρες ἐδόθησαν εἰς ἐπι . [-13-14-] ἔνεκα τῆς χρείας ἀφηρέθησαν ἀφ' ἡμῶν καὶ εἰς Ἀλεξάν-]δρειαν ἐπορεύθησαν καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐ[-8-10-] εἰγενό-μεθα, ἀναγκαιῶς ἐπὶ σὲ κατεφύγαμεν [καὶ αἰτ]οῦμεν. ἐάν σοι δόξῃ, ἐπιτρέψαι ἐαθῆναι ἡμᾶς τοὺς [κατα]λειπομέ-νους ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης ἀπερισπάστο[υς] ἀ[πὸ πασῶν] χει-ῶν, ὅπως τὸν ἐγδεδομένον ἱματισμὸν . . . τελ]έσωμεν καὶ παραδῶμεν καὶ μάλιστα ὅτι ἐπῖκε[ιται ἡ]μῖν ἐτέρου δη-μοσίου ἱματισμοῦ ἔγδοσις, ἣν πάλιν ἡμεῖς ἀπαρτίσαι δεή-σει, ἵν' ὄμ(εν) πεφύλανθρωπημένοι. ἦμεν δ[ὲ] πρότερον ἄνδρες] δεκαδύο, ἐξ ὧν οἱ τέσσαρες ἀπεσπᾶσθησα[ν, ὥστε ν]ῦν [εἴν]αὶ ἡμᾶς ἄνδρες ὀκτώ.

To Dio, *strategos* of the Arsinoite nome, division of Heraclides from the weavers of the villiage of Philadelphia. There was recently sent us from the public treasury a sum of money with orders for us to make clothing for the state, and our group of artisans, reduced as it is to a small number, considered it an answer to its prater to be able to execute the orders received. But now four among us have been assigned to escort duty [on the grain boats]. They have been taken from us to perform compulsory public service and have departed for Alexandria; thus our appeal to you and to beg you, if you deem it proper, to give orders that we, who have hitherto been left to our trade, be left alone and undisturbed by other public service, so that we may make and deliver the clothing ordered (especially as we expect a further order to fill for the state), and so that we may thus be the beneficiaries of your benevolence. We were twelve

men in number, of whom four have been removed, so that we now remain only eight.⁵¹

This petition indicates some of the strategy that might have been involved in disputes with local elites. Local elites were not the only ones that could turn to the Roman authorities. If associations were unable to negotiate as the delegate of the council implored at Ephesos, they could use their rights to petition, just as the weavers have done here. This may have involved a certain amount of risk – not of violent repression as the silversmiths risked, but economic and legal risks (see also Perry in this volume). Responses from officials, in theory bound by law, precedent, and custom (κατὰ τὸν γνώμονα καὶ τὴν συνήθειαν) as the advocate of the fullers and dyers asserted, could be random and unpredictable.⁵² To shield themselves as much as possible, associations like the weavers made use of rhetoric, precedent, and reputation for past services when making their case. The weavers reminded the *strategos* of their utility and service to the state, and the expectations that they will complete even more this year once they receive this small boon. In doing so, they challenged the local elites, and emphasized their participation in the process of administration – not their opposition to it.

The rhetoric of utility was a common theme.⁵³ A man named Isidorus, who claimed to be a weaver and a proprietor of a large workshop staffed by many people, asserted his usefulness and past services to avoid what appears to be an official post in Alexandria. During a hearing to extricate himself from this service held before an imperial official, his advocate Eudaemon invoked past precedent and claimed that people like Isidorus had received exemptions because of their ‘usefulness’ (οἱ δὲ τοιοῦτοι ἀφείθησαν διὰ τὸ χρησιμο[ν] εἶναι τῷ ταμε[ί]ῳ).

ἔτους λβ Λουκίου Αἰλίου Αὐρηλίου Κομμόδου Καίσαρος τοῦ κυρίου Φαμενώθ
ιζ ἐντυχόντος· Ἰσιδώρου Εὐδαίμων ῥήτωρ εἶπεν· Ἐπίμαχος Γαίου ὑποστράτηγος
δέλτα γράμματος ἀνέδωκεν τὸν ἡμέτερον ἀνθ’ αὐτοῦ ἐργαστηριάρχην ὄντα

51. *BGUV* VII 1572 (139 CE), lines 1-18; trans. Lewis and Reinhold, vol. 2, 373-4.

52. *P. Tébt.* II 287, line 5. 161-169.

53. Callistratus cites public utility as a justification for exemption from *munera* (*Dig.* 50.6.6.12); for further discussion of law and public utility see Liu 2009, 97-124.

λινούφρον πολλοὺς ἐργαζομένους ἐν τῇ ἐργασίᾳ ἔχοντα. οἱ δὲ τοιοῦτοι ἀφείθησαν διὰ τὸ χρησιμο[ν] εἶναι τῷ ταμει[ί]ῳ καὶ παρακαλῶ [δὲ] κελεῦσαί σε τῷ [Ἐπιμ]-
 ἄχῳ ἕτερον [ἀνθ' αὐτοῦ] ἀναδ[οῦναι κ]αὶ ἀναγν[ώσομαι ὑπό]μνημ[α Μακρίν]-
 ου κε[χρ]ο[ν]ισμένον εἰς τὸ κβ Φαρμουῦθι. Ἱππίας ῥήτωρ εἶπεν· ὁ Ἐπίμαχος φησιν
 μὴ εἶναι αὐτὸν λινούφρον ἀλλὰ μυροπώλην εὐσχήμονα ἄνθρωπον. Τουλιανὸς
 εἶπεν· κατὰ τὰ ἔφ' ὁμο[ί]ων κριθέντα εἰ ἐστὶν ἐργαστηριάρχης λινούφ[[ων]] τῷ
 αὐτῷ παραδείγ[μ]ατι χρῆσασθαι δύναται κα[ὶ] ἀξιοῦν ἀ[ν]τ' αὐτο[ῦ] ἕτερον
 ἀν[α]δοθῆναι[.]

On the petition of Isidorus, Eudaemon his advocate, said: ‘Epimachus son of Gaius, assistant *strategos* of the fourth district, has nominated my client in place of himself. My client is a foreman weaver who has many workmen in his factory, and men in his position have in the past been exempted because they are useful to the Treasury and now I urge you to order Epimachus to nominate someone else in place of himself and I will now read a report of Macrinus dated to the twenty-second year, Pharmouthi.’ Hippias the advocate said: ‘Epimachus asserts that Isidorus is not a weaver but a perfumer and a well-to-do man.’ Julianus said: ‘According to decisions given in similar cases if he is a foreman weaver he can use the same precedent and in turn nominate someone else instead of himself.’⁵⁴

Tension between local elites and wealthy craftsmen may have resulted in Isidorus’ nomination to a post in the first place. Craftsmen sometimes received immunities that local elites craved, potentially leading to enmity. It seems possible that in this case Epimachus, clearly someone influential, might have been trying to foist an onerous burden upon Isidorus. How he may have upset Epimachus is unclear, as is the nature of the relationships both advocates, Eudaemon and Hippias, presumably also members of the local elite, had with the others involved.

The text provokes interesting questions that will likely remain unanswered, including whether or not Isidorus was actually a perfume merchant or a weaver. Whether Isidorus had belonged to an association also is uncertain, although he matches the profile for membership: not just a weaver but one who employed many other

54. *P. Oxy* XXII 2340, lines 3-24 (*BLV*, 81 and *BLVII*, 148), trans. Roberts, adapted according to the suggestions of Youtie 1964, 316-318.

craftsmen, not unlike Demetrius in Ephesos. Isidorus' economic capacity does not appear to be in question, however, nor does he seek relief because of poverty. Instead, Isidorus made use of precedent and the rhetoric of utility to the state and the public treasury in an attempt to secure his exemption.

Finally, *P. Ryl.* IV 654 preserves evidence of an early fourth-century dispute between the weavers and the builders, who had tried to impress a weaver into their association.

[. . .] pago . civitat[is Oxur]unch[i]tarum [A]polinar[i]us dix(it):
 [λινούφο]ς τὴν τέχνην ἐστίν, σύνδ[ικον] δὲ εἶναι δεῖ τοῦ τὴν ἐργασίαν πληροῦν-
 [τος· ἔσ]τιν γὰρ αὐτῷ συνεργὸς Παῦλο[ς] οὗτος μαθητὴς μὲν τυγγάνων, εἰς
 5[ἄσκησιν] δὲ τῆς τέχνης ἀφικόμενος, οὗτοι δὲ καθ' ἑαυτοὺς ὡς οὐκ ὀλίγα [ταῖς
 δημ]οσίαις τυγγάνουσι χρεῖαις χρήσιμοι [[ο]] καὶ σὺ ὁ ἐμὸς δεσπότης συν-
 [οῖδας. τ]ῷ γὰρ ἀναβολικῶ πλείστα συντελοῦσι, καὶ ὅσα περ ἀπὸ τούτων ἀπερ-
 [γάξεσθα]ι δεῖ. ἀλ<λ>' οἱ οἰκόδομοι δικαιοῦσι τῆς τοσαύτης ἐπειγούσης χρεῖας
 [ὡς ἀργούς] τούτους μόνον συνορᾶν. τὸν γὰρ δὴ βοηθούμενον οἰκ[ό]δομον
 10[ποιῆσ]αι σπουδάζουσι λινούφον τυγγάνοντ' ἀπράγμονα τολμοῦντες
 παρα[ν]ομώτατον. τῆς μὲν γὰρ τέχνης ἦν μεμάθηκεν ἀποσπῶσι, ἑτέρα[ν] δὲ
 τὴν τῶν οἰκοδόμων ἐκδιδάξαι βούλονται. ἐπὶ γυναιῶν τῇ οἰκίᾳ φυλαχθῆναι δεῖ
 αὐτὸν {προσῆκει} ἵνα μηδεμίαν ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκοδόμων πάσχει βίαν. προνοεῖσθαι
 τούτου τὸν στρατηγὸν καὶ τὸν λογιστὴν ἀξιοῖ.

15Maximianu[s] v(ir) p(erfectissimus) iuridicus Aeg(ypti) dix(it):
 λογιστὴς καὶ σ[τ]ρατηγὸς προνοήσονται εἰς τὰ ὑπ[ὸ] τοῦ]τ[ων] κατηγορημένα εἰ
 τὴν] τέχνην ἐκμεμάθηκεν καὶ ἤδη ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἐργασίᾳ ἐστὶν εἰς ἑτέραν
 μῆμεταφέρεσθαι τέχνην.

...of the city of Oxyrhynchus, Apolinarius said: 'He is a linen weaver by trade, and he is bound to be a *sundikos* in court for a man plying the same trade. For he has as fellow worker this Paul who, although an apprentice, has come to him for practice of the weaving trade. These men are in their own right of no small usefulness to the public services, and you, my lord, know—for they contribute abundantly to the *anabolicum*—how very much they have to produce. But the builders think it right, in a time of such pressing need, always to discuss only their own interests. For they are bent on making my client into a builder although he is a peaceful linen weaver, daring to perpetrate a very great wrong in the process. They are taking him

away from the craft that he has learned, and they wish to teach him another, the builders' craft. Inasmuch, therefore, as he must be preserved for his own craft, it is fitting, in order that he suffer no violence from the builders, that the *strategos* and the *logistes* make provision for him. This is his request.'

Maximianus, *vir perfectissimus, iuridicus Aegypti*, said: 'The *strategos* and the *logistes* will make provision, in respect of his charges, that if he has learned the craft and is already in this trade, he is not to be transferred to another.'⁵⁵

While some have suggested that this text provides evidence of the government's desire to restrict social or economic movement, this dispute came to the attention of the local authorities on the basis of a petition alleging violence by the builders.⁵⁶ The builders' perspective is not known, but Paul the young and peaceful weaver might have found himself in the middle of a larger conflict between what were likely both influential, and useful, associations. In order to carry the day, however, the weavers and their advocate had to make sure that they appeared more useful, and peaceful, than the useless and violent builders, and they employed familiar rhetoric to do it.

4. Conclusions

The texts considered here suggest that Roman officials were confronted with a complex fabric of factions and special interest groups, including local elites and associations. Decisions made to disband or take action against associations may have had repercussions. While Philo praised the association-busting measures of Flaccus, it will be remembered that some of the members of the associations he disbanded happened to be influential and wealthy members of the Greek elite who contributed to his downfall. According to Philo's account, as everything began to fall apart for Flaccus, two figures helped lead the charge in opposition – the same people he

55. *P. Ryl.* IV 654 (302-309 CE), *BLX*, 171 and XI, 191; trans. Roberts and Turner; on text see Youtie 1958: 397-401.

56. van Minnen 1987, 80; see also Carrié 2002, 319.

blamed for spurring the governor onto his lawless ways: Lampon and Isidorus. Philo depicted both as unsavory characters who enjoyed some significant standing in Alexandria's Greek community. Lampon was apparently wealthy and had served as a *gymnasiarch*. Isidorus, on the other hand, seems to have had a great deal of influence with the associations.⁵⁷ In any context, disbanding associations may have amounted to taking action against the very people that local elites and imperial officials relied upon: people who occupied a relatively more powerful position than anonymous agricultural laborers, merchants, or craftsmen.

The unrest in Alexandria or the occupation of the theater in Ephesos would seem to confirm Roman anxiety about the influence these groups could wield. But it is difficult to match up any of these stories or anecdotes of repression with a legal policy enforced in Egypt, Asia Minor, or throughout the empire. If not an actual uniform Roman policy, the approval of actions taken against associations found in the writings of Philo, Pliny, Suetonius, and the jurists may at least suggest an underlying historiographical point: good governors and rulers were supposed to keep an eye on associations. As reported by Suetonius, among the actions Augustus took to restore order upon assuming power included dissolving *collegia* not recognized by law or tradition.

Pleraque pessimi exempli in perniciem publicam aut ex consuetudine licentiaque bellorum civilium durauerant aut per pacem etiam extiterant. nam et grassatorum plurimi palam se ferebant succincti ferro, quasi tuendi sui causa, et rapti per agros uiatores sine discrimine liberi seruique ergastulis possessorum supprimebantur, et plurimae factiones titulo collegi noui ad nullius non facinoris societatem coibant. igitur grassaturas dispositis per oportuna loca stationibus inhiuit, ergastula recognouit, collegia praeter antiqua et legitima dissoluit.

Many pernicious practices militating against public security had survived as a result of the lawless habits of the civil wars, or had even arisen in time of peace. Gangs of robbers openly went about with swords by their sides, ostensibly to protect themselves, and

57. Philo, *In Flacc.* 125-140.

travelers in the country, freemen and slaves alike, were seized and kept in confinement in the workhouses of the land owners; numerous leagues, too, were formed for the commission of crimes of every kind, assuming the title of some new guild. Therefore to put a stop to brigandage, he stationed guards of soldiers wherever it seemed advisable, inspected the workhouses, and disbanded all guilds, except such as were of long standing and formed legitimate purposes.⁵⁸

In characterizing these measures in this way, Suetonius' account made a connection with Julius Caesar who he maintained had dissolved certain associations as part of his reforms (*cuncta collegia praeter antiquitus constituta distraxit*).⁵⁹ What we see in the works of Philo, Pliny, Suetonius, and the jurists may be literary short-hand for painting an official, governor, or emperor as effective in upholding or re-establishing Roman order, and not necessarily a description of a strict Roman policy regarding associations. Good Roman rulers set things right, follow tradition, and maintain order. Control of associations in communities, rhetorically at least, was part of this idea of rule. In reality, these anecdotes may suggest that there was in fact good reason to appeal to and cultivate ties with associations depending on circumstances.

This is not to say that it was all historiographical convention. Restrictions or limits imposed on associations discussed by the jurists and examples of conflict initiated by craft and merchant groups should not be entirely discounted when discussing interactions between associations, local officials, and imperial authorities. Conflict, however, may not have been the defining feature of their relationships. Resorting to conflict and causing unrest was a strategic decision and employed sparingly. Associations and their members instead relied on the rhetoric of utility to the state and reputations earned from previous successful service in attempts to get their way. Some associations were also likely more influential than others: weavers in Egypt, a famed center of linen production, probably had

58. Suetonius, *Aug.* 32.1; trans J. C. Rolfe, revised and updated by D. W. Hurley, Loeb 1998.

59. Suetonius, *Iul.* 42.3.

a certain amount of clout they did not have elsewhere. Such extensive use of the legal system and of advocates (who may or may not have been members of the association) might also suggest an elevated level of status for certain groups.

Ultimately associations and local elites operated and transacted their business within a certain number of constraints. In many respects a particular association (and its network of members) was one of a few suppliers of a particular service or product, if not the only one. Those associations that realized their influential position may have capitalized on it. Similarly, local elites, whether members of distinguished families like Veditius Antoninus or village scribes like Kronion, may have benefited from their ties to associations or association members. When there was a need for garments or construction, local elites by necessity had to deal with the weavers and builders they knew. Whether this prompted something akin to a prisoner's dilemma is worth considering, but the limited amount of choices on all sides contributed to the complexity of the relationship, the need to compromise, and the potential for conflict. Robert Axelrod's study of cooperation has shown that basic reciprocity (tit-for-tat) is the most beneficial for all involved in iterative scenarios - defecting on the part of the local elites or association members may have had a short term benefit, but may have not proven successful in the long run.⁶⁰

Roman provincial officials and their reactions to and interpretation of a particular situation added a level of complication to the equation that elites and associations had to take note of as well. Defecting (however construed) carried risks; the silversmiths in Ephesos could have been dealt with more harshly, the weavers of Oxyrhynchus could very well have been disappointed with the outcome of their negotiations with the council, and the fullers and dyers may not have had their tax burden alleviated. Associations employed the rhetoric of utility, legal precedent, and potentially influential advocates acting on their behalf to help mitigate risks of defection. It is important to remember that the texts considered here only describe a brief snap-shot of the negotiations between the

60. Axelrod 2006.

parties involved in a particular transaction, and often only one side at that. These situations must have played out over the course of interactions between professional groups and other local constituencies in a larger context, asymmetrical though the power relations were, in which all sides stood to benefit and could be useful in protecting mutual interests.

Associations participated actively in the economy and society of their local communities in a number of ways, not limited to the symbolic realm of honorific exchange. Even in this respect, an economic and political relationship existed beyond the formulaic language. Associations were not always in agreement either. The dispute between the weavers and the builders indicates that while there is a tendency to see these groups as an undifferentiated mass, tensions existed. Associations may also have taken sides in disputes with other groups and influential factions, and were likely courted to do so by the parties involved. In this sense, more than passively accepting a dominant social or political order imposed from above, associations played a part of the process, even in a small way, by forging alliances with elites, working with them to support their own projects, and likely receiving preferential treatment. Part of the process until a letter arrived from the governor, or in the case of Vedus Antoninus, the emperor. Vedius Antoninus and the emperor helped make the dominant political and legal order clear to everyone.

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