

ANDREW ERSKINE

RHODES AND AUGUSTUS

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 88 (1991) 271–275

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn



## Rhodes and Augustus

The battleground for Rome's civil wars in the last half of the first century B.C. was frequently the Greek east. This may have been convenient for the Romans, but clearly it caused much suffering for the Greeks. Apart from the international upheaval it generated it left a legacy of tension and suspicion among the Greek states. Those states who chose to back the wrong side would be left anxious about their position in relation to the new power. This would be anxiety not merely about any immediate action that could be taken against them, but also about the nature of their long-term relations with the victor.

Rhodes like so many other Greek states was caught up in these wars, though its history, location, wealth and maritime strength<sup>1</sup> made it more attractive to the Roman protagonists in this succession of wars. The case of Rhodes helps to show the complexity of the situation for a Greek state at this time.<sup>2</sup> It began by supporting Pompey but made a timely transfer of allegiance to Caesar immediately after Pharsalus. Staying loyal to the assassinated Caesar and his political successors it was besieged and captured by Cassius in 43 B.C.<sup>3</sup> But Caesar's political successors split and choices had to be made; along with much of the Greek east the Rhodians appear to have given their support to Antony in the war with Octavian.<sup>4</sup> But from Actium onwards, our knowledge of Rhodian relations with Rome, in particular with Augustus, is very poor, with the exception of Tiberius' well-known but enigmatic retirement on the island from 6 B.C. to A.D. 2.

Some illumination, however, can be gained from an inscription recently published by Vassa Kontorini.<sup>5</sup> It is an honorific inscription from a statue base found in the excavation of the sanctuary of Helios at Rhodes:

[Ε]ὐπόλεμον Βασιλείδευς  
 πρεβεύσαντα ποτὶ Αὐτοκράτ[ορα] Καίσαρα  
 θεὸν θεοῦ [υ]ἱ[ὸ]ν Σεβαστὸν τετράκ[ις καὶ ἄπο]-  
 4 σταλέντα θεωρὸν εἰς τὸ Ἴακτιον καὶ εἰς [Ἰ]αλ-  
 ξάνδρειαν καὶ π[ρ]εβε[ύ]σαντα ποτ[ὶ - -]

<sup>1</sup> On Rhodian naval activity and strength in the civil wars, R. Berthold, *Rhodes in the Hellenistic Age* (Ithaca 1984), 224-27. On Rhodian wealth in 1st C. A.D., Dio Chrys. 31.100.

<sup>2</sup> For Roman/Rhodian relations in this period, H.H. Schmitt, *Rom und Rhodos* (Munich 1957), 180-89, Berthold, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 213-32, F. Hiller von Gaertringen, 'Rhodos', *RE Supp.* V (1931), 801-10, H. van Gelder, *Geschichte der alten Rhodier* (The Hague 1900), 162-73.

<sup>3</sup> Berthold, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 215-17 suggests that the Rhodian policy may be one of neutrality rather than loyalty.

<sup>4</sup> Berthold, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 218-19. Antony bought Rhodian support with a gift of islands, App. *BC* 5.7, see below, while Antony's ally, Herod, contributed large sums to building up the Rhodian fleet, Jos. *BJ* 1.423, cf. Hiller, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 807-8.

<sup>5</sup> V. Kontorini, 'Ἀνέκδοτες ἐπιγραφές Ρόδου' (Athens 1989), 153-55.

Here Eupolemos, son of Basileides, is honoured for his extensive activity on behalf of his city abroad, four embassies to the Emperor Augustus, acting as *theoros* to Actium and Alexandria, and at least one other embassy. Eupolemos is known from another Rhodian inscription, *AD* 18 (1963) *Mel.*, p. 12, no. 17, which records an honorific inscription set up by Eupolemos and other members of his family, including his brother Euphranor and his father Basileides. Eupolemos has been dated to the first century B.C.<sup>6</sup> and this inscription confirms that he was active in the latter part of the first century B.C.

Augustus is referred to as *Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα θεὸν θεοῦ υἱὸν Σεβαστόν*. This titulature indicates that he was still emperor when Eupolemos was honoured but more important is the epithet which is applied to Augustus, *θεός*. In the Greek world the living emperor could and often was termed *θεός*; there are many examples of the word being applied to Augustus in his lifetime, for instance at Pergamum, Cyme, and Priene.<sup>7</sup> *Θεός Σεβαστός* was not a translation of the Latin *divus Augustus*, whereby the Romans deified their dead emperor. The Greek phrase, which precedes the Roman one, should be understood in the context of the Greek cult of the living emperor, although of course that cult could continue after the emperor's death.<sup>8</sup> The application of the epithet *θεός* to Augustus here shows that the Rhodians already had some form of cult of the emperor in the period of Augustus' supremacy. F. Hiller von Gaertringen long ago suggested that the famous Laocoon sculpture by the Rhodian sculptors, Agesander, Polydorus and Athenodorus, may have originally sat in a temple of Roma and Augustus, although no cult of Augustus on Rhodes was known at that time (*op. cit.* [n. 2] 808f.).

Rhodes was nominally a 'free' state (and thus a place of exile), but even so the imperial cult was clearly present from a very early date as this inscription shows. Other epigraphic evidence reveals imperial priests at Lindos and Camirus, but at a considerably later date than this inscription; none can be dated earlier than Titus in the last quarter of the first century B.C.<sup>9</sup> That the Rhodians should have given cult honours to the emperor as early as this is not altogether surprising. There had been a cult of Roma on Rhodes since the second century B.C., which included a priest of Roma and a festival of the Romaea, and Caesar is also known to have merited a festival, the Caesarea.<sup>10</sup> So the Rhodians were already accommodating Roman power within their religious framework. Religion and politics cannot be divorced here. Cult honours for Augustus reflect a concern on the part of the Rhodians to win the favour of the emperor and establish good relations with him.

<sup>6</sup> P.M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, vol. 1 (Oxford 1987) (= Fraser/Matthews), *Εὐπόλεμος* no. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *IGRR* IV 309-11, 314 (Pergamum); *IGRR* IV 1302 (*I. Kyme* 19), lines 54-57; *I. Priene* 222; cf. also *IGRR* IV 201 (*I. Ilion* 81), *SIG<sup>3</sup>* 778 (Hypata).

<sup>8</sup> See S.R.F. Price, "Gods and Emperors: the language of the Roman Imperial Cult", *JHS* 104 (1984), 79-95, esp. 79-85, for an important discussion of *θεός* in this context, cf. also C. Habicht, 'Die augusteische Zeit und das erste Jahrhundert nach Christi Geburt', in W. den Boer (ed.), *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire romain* (Entretiens Hardt XIX, Geneva 1973), 83-84.

<sup>9</sup> Lindos: *I. Lindos* 449, 454; Camirus: *IGRR* IV 1139 (*ASAA* 27-29 [1949-51], 218, no. 80); *Clara Rhodos* VI-VII (1932-33), 433, no. 53 (*ASAA* 27-29 [1949-51], 225, no. 89).

<sup>10</sup> R. Mellor, *ΘΕΑ ΡΩΜΗ: the worship of the goddess Roma in the Greek world* (Göttingen 1975), 34-36 with evidence on p. 215. For Caesarea *ASAA* 30-32 (1952-54), 253, no. 4.

This concern is apparent not only in the establishment of some form of cult of Augustus, but also in the diplomatic activity of the honorand, Eupolemos. First there are his embassies to Augustus (lines 2-3); four embassies by a single man are a considerable number, especially when taken in conjunction with his other activities of which we have only a very limited knowledge.<sup>11</sup> What these embassies were about must be a matter for speculation, but some suggestions about Rhodian concerns at this time will be made below.

Secondly there is Eupolemos' role as a *theoros* to Actium and Alexandria (lines 3-5). Following immediately after the reference to the embassies to Augustus and yet before the unknown embassy, this too looks as though it is related to Rhodian relations with Augustus. Θεωρός was a word used to describe an ambassador to a god, for instance someone who was going to consult an oracle or who was attending a festival as a state representative. It is not known to have been used of ambassadors to an emperor, even a divine one<sup>12</sup> and this example is no exception. Eupolemos must have been the Rhodian *theoros*, or one of them, to festivals at Actium and Alexandria, the sense in which it is commonly used in the hellenistic period (cf. *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 537.54, 629.8, 23-4, 697B).

The Actian games were famous. Augustus had celebrated his victory at Actium by founding a city, Nicopolis, on the site of his camp there and by turning the Acamanian Actian games into a major festival with Olympic status. So *theoroi* to Actium would have been attending these games, but what were the games at Alexandria? Here again Augustus had established a festival to celebrate his victory over Antony and Cleopatra. These Egyptian games took place at another Nicopolis, which Augustus had founded just outside Alexandria.<sup>13</sup> According to P.M Fraser these are the only games known in Egypt at this time.<sup>14</sup> By sending *theoroi* to both these games which celebrated Augustus' victory over Antony, the Rhodians were giving their official state approval to the games and to the celebration and thus emphasising their loyalty to the new regime. The Rhodian dispatch of *theoroi* to games that had been developed or established by Augustus provides an interesting glimpse of the way in which Rome and Augustus became incorporated into the hellenistic context.

Thus this new inscription reveals Eupolemos, son of Basileides, to have been a figure of some importance in Rhodian society, whose dealings with Rome would have enhanced his status at home. Such a man is likely to have come from a family which already had links with Rome. It is known that his brother was called Euphranor (Fraser/Matthews [n. 6] no. 166), this man may be identical with the Euphranor who commanded the Rhodian ships under Caesar in the civil war and won great praise from Caesar, though his chances of any reward for such service were diminished by his death in a battle off Canopus before the end of the

<sup>11</sup> On men like Eupolemos, see G. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford 1965), 86-87.

<sup>12</sup> S.R.F. Price, 'Between Man and God: sacrifice in the Roman imperial cult', *JRS* 70 (1980) 37. In non-epigraphic sources it is occasionally found used of ambassadors to the kings of the early hellenistic period, e.g. Plut. *Dem.* 11; Ath. 13.607c.

<sup>13</sup> Dio. Cass. 51.1, 51.18, Strabo 17.1.10, M. Rheinhold, *From Republic to Principate an historical commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History books 49-52 (36-29 B.C.)* (Atlanta 1988), 119-20, 226, cf. also Reisch *RE* I 1213-14, s.v. 'Aktia'; G. Bowersock, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 93-94

<sup>14</sup> P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972), vol. 1, 809.

war.<sup>15</sup> Some years earlier in the First Mithridatic War a certain Damagoras, son of Euphranor, had distinguished himself commanding the Rhodian ships under the Romans.<sup>16</sup> If there are family ties between Eupolemos and one or both of these men, it would explain why he is thought to have influence with Augustus, particularly given Euphranor's impressive service with Augustus' adoptive father, Caesar. The father of Eupolemos and Euphranor was Basileides, son of Euphranor, and it is possible that this man was in fact the brother of Damagoras, son of Euphranor. This hypothesis would be consistent with the known dates for these individuals<sup>17</sup> and produce a family with strong Roman connections into which Eupolemos' diplomatic activity would neatly fit. In many Greek cities there were families such as this with fairly long-standing connections with leading Romans and later with members of the imperial household. These connections were used to benefit their native city and for their own political and social advancement. For instance, there is the family of Theophanes at Mytilene, of Iollas at Sardis and C. Julius Apollonius at Miletos.<sup>18</sup>

This inscription is of course only concerned with honouring Eupolemos and not all of it survives, so it will only reveal to us a small part of the interaction between Augustus and Rhodes. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the inscription that an important preoccupation of the Rhodians at this time was their standing with Rome. Consequently they were determined to establish good relations with the new regime or at least to reassure themselves of Roman goodwill. They did this by establishing cult honours for Augustus, by means of formal embassies to the emperor, by officially sanctioned participation at major festivals celebrating Augustus' victory and of course by honouring friends of the Romans such as Eupolemos. The exact circumstances of any of this activity is difficult to determine, partly because our knowledge of Rhodes at this time is so poor, but also because it is not possible to fix a date for Eupolemos' honours within Augustus' reign. It is less likely, however, that they were given during the later years (cf. note 17 above).

The most probable cause of Rhodian anxiety would have been their support for Antony in the civil war. Antony had made the Rhodians commit themselves to him by offering them some islands, Andros, Tenos, Naxos and Myndos, which they accepted (App. *B.C.* 5.7). According to Appian the Rhodians had been deprived of these islands not long afterwards, because they had treated them too harshly. Augustus was probably responsible for this and part of the reason at least would have been punitive.<sup>19</sup> In 30 B.C. Augustus, or Octavian as he was then, actually stayed on Rhodes where he had a meeting with Herod (Jos. *BJ* 1.387, *AJ* 15. 187). In the aftermath of Actium Octavian would not have been bestowing a favour on

<sup>15</sup> Caesar *Alex.* 15, 25; *RE s.v.* Euphranor # 4; Fraser/Matthews no. 107.

<sup>16</sup> App. *Mith.* 25, Plut. *Luc.* 3; *RE s.v.* Damagoras.

<sup>17</sup> Euphranor, son of Basileides was old enough to appear in a subscription list c. 68 B.C. (*IG XII* 1.46.213) and his brother, Eupolemos, was still alive and active in the reign of Augustus, post-27 B.C. Consequently this Euphranor would have been of the right age to have been commanding a group of ten Rhodian ships in the early 40s as Euphranor *RE* # 4 was. Their father, Basileides, would have been a member of the same generation as Damagoras who was active in the 80s against Mithridates.

<sup>18</sup> On these families and their role, Bowersock, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 86-87.

<sup>19</sup> Berthold, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 218, suggests the action was punitive; cf. Schmitt *op. cit.* (n. 2), 186-7, van Gelder, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 173 and P.M. Fraser and G. Bean, *The Rhodian Peraea and Islands* (Oxford 1954), 172-3, who all agree that it was probably Augustus who deprived the Rhodians of the islands.

Rhodes by visiting it, especially as he was presumably still accompanied by a sizeable body of troops whose presence could only have caused problems for the island. So the tension and insecurity of this period which would have continued for some years would have given the Rhodians sufficient reason to seek to appease Augustus. It is not known when the Rhodians lost control of the islands which they had acquired from Antony, possibly when Augustus visited Rhodes in 30 but possibly later when Augustus had more time to consider the settlement of the east. Some of Eupolemos' embassies may have been concerned with softening any action Augustus took against Rhodes, such as over the loss of the islands.

It is against this background of uncertainty that the Rhodian attempts to win Augustus' favour should be understood. There is, however, another later factor that also deserves attention in any examination of the relationship between Rhodes and Augustus. From 6 B.C. to A.D. 2 Rhodes was the place of residence of the emperor's estranged son-in-law and stepson. His presence in the east, which was a cause of tension there and at Rome, must have been a great embarrassment to the Rhodians in their efforts to secure good relations with Augustus. This tension was even worse when the emperor's adopted son Gaius Caesar was in the east from 2 B.C. to A.D. 2<sup>20</sup> and the Rhodians were careful to make their position clear. In order to counter the presence of Tiberius and emphasise their loyalty to Augustus and Gaius they bestowed honours on Gaius the young heir-apparent.<sup>21</sup> So this too provides another period in which the Rhodians would have been concerned to assure Augustus of their goodwill. Tiberius' stay on Rhodes may be later than Eupolemos and his honours, but even so it would have been a cause of unease in Rhodes and exacerbated the stresses in the relationship between Rhodes and Augustus which the Rhodians had earlier sought to cure.

This honorific inscription proves to be valuable for illuminating a rather shadowy period of Rhodian history. Eupolemos, son of Basileides, about whom previously little of significance was known, is revealed to have been an important intermediary between his native city and the emperor. Furthermore the inscription helps to show how a Greek state such as Rhodes coped with Augustus' victory. Rhodes sought to repair its relations with Augustus through its establishment of cult honours for the emperor, by means of embassies to the emperor and by giving official recognition to games celebrating his victory. As the emperor became more clearly incorporated into the Greek world in this way, so his control of it was reinforced.

University College Dublin

Andrew Erskine

---

<sup>20</sup> G. Bowersock, 'Augustus and the East: the problem of the succession' in F. Millar and E. Segal (ed.), *Caesar Augustus* (Oxford 1984), 169-88.

<sup>21</sup> *Clara Rhodos* VI-VII (1932-33), 432, no. 52 (Camirus); *I. Lindos*. 388.