

In the same year twelve famous cities in the province of Asia were overwhelmed by an earthquake. Its occurrence at night increased the surprise and destruction. Open ground - the usual refuge on such occasions - afforded no escape, because the earth parted and swallowed the fugitives. There are stories of big mountains subsiding, of flat ground rising high in the air, of conflagrations bursting out among the debris. Sardis suffered worst and attracted most sympathy. Tiberius promised it ten million sesterces and remitted all taxation by the Treasury or its imperially controlled branches for five years. Magnesia-by-Sipylus came next, in damage and compensation. Exemptions from direct taxation were also authorized for Temnus, Philadelphia, Aegeae, Apollonis, Mostene (the Macedonian Hyrcanians), Hierocaesarea, Myrina, Cyme, and Tmolus. It was decided to send a senatorial inspector to rehabilitate the sufferers. The choice fell on an ex-praetor, Marcus Aletius. The governor of Asia was a former consul, so the embarrassments of rivalry between equals were avoided.

Pliny, Epistles Book 10.

31. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

You may stoop when necessary, Sir, to give ear to my problems, without prejudice to your eminent position, seeing that I have your authority to refer to you when in doubt.

In several cities, notably Nicomedia and Nicaea, there are people who were sentenced to service in the mines or the arena, or to other similar punishments, but are now performing the duties of public slaves and receiving an annual salary for their work. Once this was told me I have long been debating what to do. I felt it was too hard on the men to send them back to work out their sentences after a lapse of many years, when most of them are old by now, and by all accounts are quietly leading honest lives; but I did not think it quite right to retain criminals in public service; and though I realized there was nothing to be gained by supporting these men at public expense if they did no work, they might be a potential danger if they were left to starve. I was therefore obliged to leave the whole question in suspense until I could consult you.

You may perhaps want to know how they came to be released from the sentences passed on them. I asked this question myself, but received no satisfactory answer to give you, and although the records of their sentences were produced, there were no documents to prove their release. But people have stated on their behalf that they had been released by order of the previous governors or their deputies, and this is confirmed by the unlikelihood that any unauthorized person would take this responsibility.

32. *Trajan to Pliny*

Let us not forget that the chief reason for sending you to your province was the evident need for many reforms. Nothing in fact stands more in need of correction than the situation described in your letter, where criminals under sentence have not only been released without authority but are actually restored to the status of honest officials. Those among them who were sentenced within the last ten years and were released by no proper authority must therefore be sent back to work out their sentences. But if the men are elderly and have sentences dating back farther than ten years, they can be employed in work of a penal nature, cleaning public baths and sewers, or repairing streets and highways, the usual employment for men of this type.

33. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

While I was visiting another part of the province, a widespread fire broke out in Nicomedia which destroyed many private houses and also two public buildings (the Elder Citizens' Club and the Temple of Isis) although a road runs between them. It was fanned by the strong breeze in the early stages, but it would not have spread so far but for the apathy of the populace; for it is generally agreed that people stood watching the disaster without bestirring themselves to do anything to stop it. Apart from this, there is not a single fire engine anywhere in the town, not a bucket nor any apparatus for fighting a fire. These will now be provided on my instructions.

Will you, Sir, consider whether you think a company of firemen might be formed, limited to 150 members? I will see that no one shall be admitted who is not genuinely a fireman, and that the privileges granted shall not be abused; it will not be difficult to keep such small

34. *Trajan to Pliny*

I have received your suggestion that it should be possible to form a company of firemen at Nicomedia on the model of those existing elsewhere, but we must remember that it is societies like these which have been responsible for the political disturbances in your province, particularly in its towns. If people assemble for a common purpose, whatever name we give them and for whatever reason, they soon turn into a political club. It is a better policy then to provide the equipment necessary for dealing with fires, and to instruct property owners to make use of it, calling on the help of the crowds which collect if they find it necessary.

37. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

The citizens of Nicomedia, Sir, have spent 3,318,000 sesterces on an aqueduct which they abandoned before it was finished and finally demolished. Then they made a grant of 200,000 sesterces towards another one, but this too was abandoned, so that even after squandering such enormous sums they must still spend more money if they are to have a water supply.

I have been myself to look at the spring which could supply pure water to be brought along an aqueduct, as originally intended, if the supply is not to be confined to the lower lying parts of the town. There are very few arches still standing, but others could be built out of the blocks of stone taken from the earlier construction, and I think some ought to be made of brick, which would be easier and cheaper.

The first essential is for you to send out an engineer or an architect to prevent a third failure. I will add only that the finished work will combine utility with beauty, and will be well worthy of your reign.

38. *Trajan to Pliny*

Steps must be taken to provide Nicomedia with a water supply, and I am sure you will apply yourself to the task in the right way. But for goodness' sake apply yourself no less to finding out whose fault it is that Nicomedia has wasted so much money up to date. It may be that someone has profited by this starting and abandoning of aqueducts. Let me know the result of your inquiry.

39. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

The theatre at Nicaea, Sir, is more than half built but is still unfinished, and has already cost more than ten million sesterces, or so I am told – I have not yet examined the accounts. I am afraid it may be money wasted. The building is sinking and showing immense cracks, either because the soil is damp and soft or the stone used was poor and friable. We shall certainly have to consider whether it is to be finished or abandoned, or even demolished, as the foundations and substructure intended to hold up the building may have cost a lot but look none too solid to me. There are many additions to the theatre promised by private individuals, such as a colonnade on either side and a gallery above the auditorium, but all these are now held up by the stoppage of work on the main building which must be finished first.

The citizens of Nicaea have also begun to rebuild their gymnasium (which was destroyed by fire before my arrival) on a much larger and more extensive scale than before. They have already spent a large sum, which may be to little purpose, for the buildings are badly planned and too scattered. Moreover, an architect – admittedly a rival of the one who drew up the designs – has given the opinion that the walls cannot support the superstructure in spite of being twenty-two feet thick, as the rubble core has no facing of brick.

The people of Claudiopolis are also building, or rather excavating, an enormous public bath in a hollow at the foot of a mountain. The money for this is coming either from the admission fees already paid by the new members of the town council elected by your gracious favour, or from what they will pay at my demand. So I am afraid there is misapplication of public funds at Nicaea and abuse of your generosity at Claudiopolis, though this should be valued above any money. I am therefore compelled to ask you to send out an architect

to inspect both theatre and bath and decide whether it will be more practicable, in view of what has already been spent, to keep to the original plans and finish both buildings as best we can, or to make any necessary alterations and changes of site so that we do not throw away more money in an attempt to make some use of the original outlay.

40. *Trajan to Pliny*

The future of the unfinished theatre at Nicaea can best be settled by you on the spot. It will be sufficient for me if you let me know your decision. But, once the main building is finished, you will have to see that private individuals carry out their promises of adding to the theatre.

The poor Greeks all love a gymnasium; so it may be that they were too ambitious in their plans at Nicaea. They will have to be content with one which suits their real needs.

As for the bath at Claudiopolis, which you say has been started in an unsuitable site, you must decide yourself what advice to give. You cannot lack architects: every province has skilled men trained for this work. It is a mistake to think they can be sent out more quickly from Rome when they usually come to us from Greece.

21. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

Gavius Bassus, Sir, the prefect of the Pontic Coast, has called on me with due ceremony and respect, and has been here several days. As far as I could judge he is an excellent man who merits your kind interest. I told him that you had given orders that he must limit himself to ten picked soldiers, two mounted soldiers, and one centurion from the

troops which you had assigned to me. He replied that this number was insufficient and that he would write to you himself; so I thought it best not to recall for the present the soldiers he has in excess of that number.

22. *Trajan to Pliny*

I have also heard from Gavius Bassus direct that the number of soldiers assigned him by my order was inadequate. I have ordered a copy of my answer to him to be sent with this letter for your information. It is important to distinguish between the needs of a situation and the likelihood of his wishing to extend his privileges because of it. The public interest must be our sole concern, and as far as possible we should keep to the rule that soldiers must not be withdrawn from active service.

75. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan*

Julius Largus of Pontus, Sir – a person whom I have never seen nor heard of, but presumably relying on your opinion of me – has entrusted me with the duty of administering, so to speak, his loyal sentiments towards you. He has left a will asking me to take formal possession of his estate and, after deducting 50,000 sesterces for my own use, to pay over the remainder to the cities of Heraclea and Tium, either for the erection of public buildings to be dedicated in your honour or

for the institution of five-yearly games to be called by your name, whichever I think best. I thought I should bring this to your notice, as I very much hope that you will guide my decision.

76. *Trajan to Pliny*

Julius Largus chose you for your sense of duty as if he had known you personally. Consider what will suit the conditions of both places, and also what will best perpetuate his memory, and make your own decision; you can adopt whichever plan you think best.

