

Pliny the Elder and the Problem of Regnum Hereditarium*

MELINDA SZÉKELY



Pliny the Elder writes the following about the king of Taprobane¹ in the sixth book of his *Natural History*: “*eligi regem a populo senecta clementiaque, liberos non habentem, et, si postea gignat, abdicari, ne fiat hereditarium regnum.*”² This account escaped the attention of the majority of scholars who studied Pliny in spite of the fact that this sentence raises three interesting and debated questions: the election of the king, deposal of the king and the heredity of the monarchy. The issue concerning the account of Taprobane is that Pliny here – unlike other reports on the East – does not only use the works of former Greek and Roman authors, but he also makes a note of the account of the envoys from Ceylon arriving in Rome in the first century A. D. in his work.³ We cannot exclude the possibility that Pliny himself met the envoys though this assumption is not verifiable.⁴

First let us consider whether the form of rule described by Pliny really existed in Taprobane. We have several sources dealing with India indicating that the idea of that old and gentle king depicted in Pliny’s sentence seems to be just the oppo-

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¹ Ancient name of Sri Lanka (until 1972, Ceylon).

² Plin. *N. H.* 6, 24, 89. Pliny, *Natural History*, Cambridge–London 1989, [1942¹], with an English translation by H. Rackham.

³ Plin. *N. H.* 6, 24, 85–91. Concerning the Singhalese envoys cf. F. F. Schwarz, *Ein Singhalesischer Prinz in Rom*, Graz 1974. To our knowledge none of the Latin authors visited India, in contrast to the Greeks in the Classic and Hellenistic ages. Greek authors used their own travel experiences as well in the works they wrote. Roman authors followed Greek sources, Pliny’s account of Taprobane is an exception. Cf. P. Dafiná, *Le relazioni tra Roma e l’India alla luce delle piu recenti indagini*. Roma 1995.

⁴ According to Pliny the Singhalese envoys arrived to Rome during the reign of Claudius. Pliny himself was in Rome in the first years of Claudius’ reign where he studied as a young man. After that in 46 he began a military career and went to *Germania*. If the envoys had been in Rome between 41 and 46 Pliny could have heard of that and could have listened to their account.

site of the general ideal of kingship in India. According to traditional sources the classical Indian ruler is a warrior king traditionally from the *Ksatriya* order. The democratic form of election described by Pliny – that the king is elected by the people – is not characteristic of Indian society, either.⁵ We find only exceptional occasions of king-making in India. A stone inscription mentions that Rudradaman was elected by all the castes together around 130 A. D.⁶ There is another inscriptional evidence which reports about Gopala, the excellent warrior, who was elected by his subjects in the eighth century.⁷ This event is considered by historians to be unique in medieval India. The throne descended from father to son in India which does not support Pliny's remark that only childless rulers were tolerated by subjects and kingship was not hereditary. The above mentioned facts are corroborated by several sources. The question arises to what extent the Indian circumstances are applicable to Taprobane. The island can be regarded as part of India because of its geographical vicinity and also on linguistic, religious and cultural grounds. Indian and Ceylonese tradition also underline this assumption.⁸ Yet there are local characteristics, for example the ancient, conservative, form of Buddhism taken to Taprobane in the third century B. C.⁹ The Singhalese envoys arrived in Rome in the first century A. D. Unfortunately there are no contemporary Singhalese sources referring to this period of Taprobane. *Mahavamsa*, "The Great Chronicle" composed in the fifth century contains valuable material concerning earlier rulers.¹⁰ This source does not suggest that kingship in Taprobane was elective. We can state that, as opposed to Pliny's description, kings succeeded by hereditary right.¹¹ Thus Pliny's statements are supported either by the Oriental sources or by the local tradition.

In their basic work André and Filliozat tried to harmonize this sentence of Pliny with the Buddhist tradition saying that the Buddhist bodhisattvas of Taprobane were obviously childless monks so the envoys' report may refer to them.¹² This explanation is not persuasive on the basis of context. According to others the envoys' data do not pertain to Taprobane but Sumatra: data with reference to the size of Taprobane, its distance from India, the size of the lake in the island, changes of shadows and constellations may indicate rather a larger, commercially significant island.¹³ It also has to be taken into consideration that the understand-

⁵ Information kindly provided by Gy. Wojtilla.

⁶ *Epigraphica Indica* (E. I.) VIII, 43; A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*. Delhi 1992 [1949¹], 83.

⁷ E. I. IV, 248; Altekar, *State and Government*, 84.

⁸ Cf. W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Mediaeval Times*. Stuttgart 1986², 111–163.

⁹ The only maintained school of "orthodox" Hinayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism is the state religion of Sri Lanka even nowadays. Cf. R. F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*. London–New York 1994 [1988¹], 137–171.

¹⁰ *The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. tr. W. Geiger, London 1964.

¹¹ Cf. J. Boisselier, *Ceylon*. München–Geneva–Paris, 1979, 18–24.

¹² Pline L'Ancien, *Histoire Naturelle*. Livre VI, Texte établi, traduit et commenté par J. André et J. Filliozat, Paris 1980, (henceforth: André–Filliozat) 162.

¹³ Viewpoints referring to Sumatra is summed up André–Filliozat, 154–155; 161.

ing of the envoys' report may have been distorted by the work of the interpreter. The interpreter definitely was the freedman who drifted to the island on a ship by chance. According to Pliny's narrative, the freedman learned the local language in six months so he was able to answer to the king of Taprobane.¹⁴ It is likely that this freedman arrived back to Rome with the Singhalese mission of four and he became the interpreter for the envoys. On the basis of the above mentioned issues it is questionable if the freedman's translation was precise and reliable. Ch. G. Starr maintains that Pliny's short description about the monarchy of Taprobane has to do more with the Roman aristocracy's way of thinking than with the early Singhalese conditions.¹⁵ Starr emphasizes that those arguments were used as a philosophical opposition to the Roman emperors of the first century.¹⁶ One of the most significant philosophical doctrines states that the most eminent man should be elected to be ruler,¹⁷ a refusal of the hereditary principle. André and Filliozat do not agree with Starr's opinion. They assert that there are no proofs of Pliny's opposition to the emperors in his work.¹⁸ This viewpoint has been taken by several researchers who allege that Pliny was loyal to the emperors, except for Caligula and Nero and was a committed follower of the political programme of the Flavian dynasty.¹⁹ I do not question Pliny's loyalty and friendliness towards rulers but I think that on the basis of his *Natural History* we could gain a more detailed picture about his doctrines, thoughts and idols. I partially concur with Starr in that there are thoughts criticizing the emperors in Pliny's sentence about the election of the king in Taprobane. As opposed to Starr's opinion I do not emphasize the Claudian period and his dynastic plans but I will examine the seventies of the first century A. D., the time Pliny wrote his *Natural History*. We can observe that the most serious problem and the keenest debate arose around making the rule hereditary in Rome in this period. In this manner Pliny might have been particularly involved in the question of *regnum hereditarium*.

After the death of Nero, the last member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, there was a civil war-like situation in the Empire in 68–69 A. D. Three emperors suc-

¹⁴ Plin. *N. H.* 6, 24, 84.

¹⁵ Ch. G. Starr, "The Roman Emperor and the King of Ceylon." *Classical Philology* 51 (1956), 27.

¹⁶ Starr, "The Roman Emperor," 27, 29.

¹⁷ Epictetus; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 6; 62; Cf. Ch. G. Starr, "Epictetus and the Tyrant." *Classical Philology* 44 (1949), 20–29; F. Millar, "Epictetus and the Imperial Court." *Journal of Roman Studies* 55 (1965), 141–148.

¹⁸ André-Filliozat, 118.

¹⁹ W. Kroll, Plinius der Ältere, in A. F. v. Pauly et al., hrsg. *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 21, 1, Stuttgart 1951, col. 419; G. Serbat, "Pline l'Ancien. Etat présent des études sur sa vie, son oeuvre et son influence." in H. Temporini–G. G. W. Haase, hrsg. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 32, 4, Berlin–New York 1986–1994, 2069–2200; S. Franchet d'Esperey, "Vespasien, Titus et la littérature." in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 32, 5, Berlin–New York 1986, 3064; S. Citroni Marchetti, "Filosofia e ideologia nella *Naturalis Historia* di Plinio." in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 36, 5, Berlin–New York 1992, 3249–3306.

ceeded each other in a few months: Galba, Otho and Vitellius; all of them were murdered. In 69 A. D. the Eastern legions decided to make Vespasian emperor who was a member of the equestrian rank, which had been unthinkable before. The new emperor never concealed or felt ashamed of his low descent. He lived modestly as an emperor, he was little fond of external ornaments,²⁰ he was genial and benevolent. According to Suetonius the state must have been satisfied with him.²¹ Cassius Dio mentions that Vespasian disapproved of *laesa maiestas*, which caused so much damage in the age of Tiberius and Claudius.²² He made it evident that he regarded his sons as heirs from the beginning of his reign. He gave Titus every rank he was empowered to grant, while Domitian received a share of privileges.²³ Titus had already become joint consul with Vespasian in 70 and he soon held the joint Tribunitian power in 71. On coins from the year 71, which display the figures of Titus in military uniform, he is described as Caesar and *DES[ignatus] IMP[erator]*.²⁴ In 73–74 Titus was given a joint censorship as well, moreover, he quickly became *praefectus praetorio*. In spite of heavy protest of certain senators Vespasian clung to the dynastic policy. Even after several conspiracies against him, he had the courage to tell the senate, that either his sons would succeed him, or nobody.²⁵ He held his own in this question and did not shrink from capital sentence, which was not characteristic to his reign. The most critical senator, Helvidius Priscus, was exiled in 71, the year when the followers of the most radical philosophical trends were also expelled; between 71 and 75 he gave direction to Helvidius' execution.

Helvidius Priscus, leader of the opposition in the senate, follower of Stoicism, and the main opponent of the dynastic principle, was a contemporary of Pliny the Elder. Consequently the person of Helvidius gets particular significance concerning the question of the *regnum hereditarium*. Helvidius Priscus was a prominent senator of the age not only because of his determined attitude and his stance against the emperor but also because of his family relations. Thrasea Paetus, the eminent member of the opposition of Nero's senate, selected him to be his son-in-law. He had held only the quaestorship.²⁶ According to Tacitus he derived everything in the spirit of freedom from the character of his father-in-law, he was consistent in every field of life, he held affluence in contempt, he was determined in

²⁰ Suet. *Vesp.* 12: *Adeoque nihil ornamentorum extrinsecus cupide appetiuit.* Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum*. rec. M. Ihm, Lipsiae 1908.

²¹ Suet. *Vesp.* 1: *Rebellionem trium principum et caede incertum diu et quasi uagum imperium suscepit firmiterque tandem gens Flauia, obscura illa quidem ac sine ullis maiorum imaginibus, sed tamen rei publicae nequaquam paenitenda.*

²² Cass. Dio 65, 9, 1. *Dio's Roman History*. tr. E. Cary, London–Cambridge 1961 [1925¹].

²³ Domitian among others was consul, got the title of Prince of Youth (*Princeps Iuuentutis*) and ample attention on the coinage. M. Grant, *The Roman Emperors*. London 1985, 60.

²⁴ Grant, *The Roman Emperors*, 56.

²⁵ Suet. *Vesp.* 25: *Post assiduas in se coniurationes ausus sit adfirmare senatui aut filios sibi successuros aut neminem.* Cf. Cass. Dio 65, 12.

²⁶ Tacitus, *The Histories*. tr. C. H. Moore, 2 vols. London–Cambridge 1962 [1925¹], Tac. *Hist.* 4, 5: *Quaestorius adhuc a Paeto Thrasea gener delectus.*

the right, unmoved by fear.²⁷ Thrasea Paetus was forced to commit a suicide by Nero in 66, Helvidius was killed by the command of Vespasian; Helvidius Priscus the Younger, son by his first marriage, had been put to death by Domitian in 93.²⁸ A tragic history of a prominent family in opposition. Suetonius says that Thrasea Paetus had to die because Nero did not like his melancholy features, and looked like a school-master.²⁹ The reason of Helvidius Priscus the Younger's death is not less easily seen through: Domitian claimed that he wrote a farce, in which, under the character of Paris and Oenone, he reflected upon his having divorced his wife, that is why he was put to death.³⁰ Suetonius' remark clashes with the above mentioned – so to say ridiculous – accusations stating that Iunius Rusticus was put to death by Domitian for publishing a treatise in praise of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, and calling them both "most upright men."³¹

The figure of Helvidius Priscus occurs in several historiographers' and poets' work, in a favourable light. He is often mentioned together with his father-in-law, their brave behaviour and honest character put them in company of the most illustrious men. Marcus Aurelius respected Thrasea and Helvidius; rendered full homage to them in his work.³² It is hard to gain a correct picture about Helvidius' figure and historical role since the most important source Tacitus' *Historiae* survived only in pieces. His biography was written by Herennius Senecio,³³ who himself later became a victim of Domitian. Further, we learn from a reference of Suetonius, a laudatory work was written about him by Iunius Rusticus.³⁴ Unfortunately, the works of these authors, whom Pliny the Younger mentioned as his friends, did not survive.³⁵ We are able to reconstruct certain periods of his life

²⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 5: *E moribus soceri nihil aequae ac libertatem hausit, ciuis, senator, maritus, gener, amicus, cunctis uitae officii aequabilis, opum contemptor, recti peruicax, constans aduersus metus.*

²⁸ Suet. *Dom.* 10, 4.

²⁹ Suet. *Nero* 37, 1: *Paeto Thraseae (obiectum est) tristior et paedagogi uultus.*

³⁰ Suet. *Dom.* 10, 4: *Occidit et Heluidium filium, quasi scaenico exodio sub persona Paridis et Oenones diuortium suum cum uxore taxasset.* Pliny the Younger commemorates in his letter the acts of his friend, Helvidius Priscus the Younger: *Plin. Epist.* 3, 11; 4, 21; 7, 30; 9, 13.

³¹ Suet. *Dom.* 10, 3: *Iunium Rusticum, quod Paeti Thraseae et Heluidi Prisci laudes edidisset appellassetque eos sanctissimos uiros.* Upon the occasion of the trial of Iunius Rusticus' case Domitian banished all philosophers from Rome and Italy in one of his orders. Suet. *Dom.* 10, 3: *cuius (Iunii Rustici) criminis occasione philosophos omnis urbe Italiaeque summouit.*

³² Marc. Aur. 14.

³³ Cass. Dio 67, 13, 2.

³⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 10, 3.

³⁵ *Plin. Epist.* 3, 11: *Septem amicis meis aut occisis aut relegatis, occisis Senecione, Rustico, Heluidio, relegatis Maurico, Gratilla, Arria, Fannia.* Pliny, *Letters*. Vols. 1–2, tr. W. Melmoth. London–Cambridge 1961, 1915].

from some historiographers' notes and inscriptions.³⁶ He was *quaestor Achaiae* in 49–50, he became *tribunus plebis* and *quaestor aerarii* in 56. That year he took a wife again and married Thræsea Paetus' daughter, Fannia. After his father-in-law's death he was exiled in 66. After Nero's death Galba made him *praetor designatus* in 69. We do not know anything about his relation to Otho, the next emperor, but we suspect from his personality features that most likely he did not belong to those senators who were in Otho's favor. That is why we suppose that he was given his title of *praetor* either from Galba or Vitellius.³⁷ The latter is supported by Tacitus' second book of *Historiae* in which Helvidius is first mentioned taking part in a session of the senate gathering under the chairmanship of Vitellius.³⁸ The rebellious nature of Helvidius manifested itself even at this session; Vitellius was upset as Helvidius Priscus expressed a view which was opposed to his wishes.³⁹

We know Helvidius' relation to Vespasian only to some extent. The historiographers say hardly anything about this and most of them present it as if it had been a one-sided opposition to Vespasian whereas the *princeps* was freed of from all of his charges.⁴⁰ Suetonius emphasizes that Helvidius Priscus was the only man who presumed to salute him on his return from Syria by his private name of Vespasian, and, when he came to be praetor, omitted any mark of honour to him, or even any mention of him in his edicts, and spoke to him in a humiliating way when they were debating.⁴¹ Suetonius does not write about either the emperor's or Helvidius' thoughts and personality in detail. He tries to show and prove Vespasian's goodness with prejudice; so he claims that Helvidius invited the emperor's anger with his behaviour and deserved death.⁴² There are several remarks on the relationship of the emperor and the senators of the opposition in Cassius Dio's work. Dio presents Vespasian's despotic rule in which he declared the philosophers' exile from Rome in 71.⁴³ Like Suetonius, Dio also highlights Helvidius' words criticizing Vespasianus by which the emperor was so exasperated that he broke out in tears.⁴⁴ At another place we find that the emperor hated Helvidius because of his subversive speeches to the public and republican doctrines.⁴⁵ Cassius Dio, like Suetonius, states that Helvidius' personality and behaviour was re-

³⁶ C. Helvidius Priscus, A. F. v. Pauly et al., hrsg. *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 8, Stuttgart 1912, cols. 216–221. "C. Helvidius Priscus." in *Der Neue Pauly*, Vol. 5, Stuttgart–Weimar 1998, 339.

³⁷ J. Malitz, "Helvidius Priscus und Vespasian. Zur Geschichte der 'stoischen' Senatsopposition." *Hermes* 113 (1985), 231–246.

³⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 2, 91.

³⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 2, 91: *Ac forte Priscus Heluidius praetor designatus contra studium eius censuerat.*

⁴⁰ Malitz, "Helvidius Priscus," 238–239.

⁴¹ Suet. *Vesp.* 15: (*Heluidius Priscus*) *qui et reuersum se ex Syria solus priuato nomine Vespasianum salutauerat et in praetura omnibus edictis sine honore ac mentione ulla transmiserat...*

⁴² Franchet d'Esperey, "Vespasien, Titus," 3056–3057.

⁴³ Cass. Dio 65, 13; Cf. Malitz, "Helvidius Priscus," 241.

⁴⁴ Cass. Dio 65, 12.

⁴⁵ Cass. Dio 65, 13. Cf. Franchet d'Esperey, "Vespasien, Titus," 3057.

sponsible for the emperor's anger and the fact that he was exiled and executed.⁴⁶ Tacitus, unlike the authors above, is much less critical of Helvidius. His description of Helvidius is positive while we get a much more negative picture of the emperor's attitude in the fourth book of *Historiae*.⁴⁷ Tacitus' works are based on different sources. It is possible that he met Thræsea's wife, Arria, and Helvidius' widow, Fannia, and so gained some personal impression of the opposition in Nero's and Vespasian's senate.⁴⁸ The acquaintance was possible as Pliny the Younger also knew them, showed his appreciation of them in his letters⁴⁹ and Tacitus and Pliny the Younger belonged to the same company.

Tacitus emphasizes that in his early youth Helvidius devoted his extraordinary talents to higher studies;⁵⁰ the doctrines of Stoic philosophy were very dear to him. Pliny the Elder also was a follower of the most important intellectual trend of his age.⁵¹ Roman Stoicism was established by Panaitios, who moved from Rhodos to Rome in the second century B. C.⁵² Panaitios changed the passive view of life of the early Stoa and put it into the service of the Roman ideal of conduct declaring that men who lead a moral life, were useful for their homeland, family and themselves.⁵³ Members of the Scipio-circle conformed to traditional Roman ethics; they emphasized the significance of self-control, fearlessness and fulfilment of duties.⁵⁴ Later, under the influence of the years during Caligula's and Nero's autocracy, when one's property and life were not secure, this conception was transformed. Fear of death, uncertainty and suppression of individual characteristics led people to Stoicism. Stoicism rose over every other philosophical trend in the Roman Empire; it affected politics, education and everyday life. Among philosophical works Seneca's prosaic works, Musonius's studies and Epictetus' writings were the most influential. Epictetus paid utmost attention to Helvidius because of the latter's relation to Stoicism. Epictetus and his friends regarded Helvidius as a new Socrates.⁵⁵ Stoic philosophy also influenced literature of the first century A. D. Particularly Seneca's tragedies, Lucanus' *Pharsalia* and Persius' satires.⁵⁶ If we compare Flavian Stoicism and its version under Nero we notice changes. Taking into consideration the differences between the rules of the emperors it is not surprising at all. The basic principles of the opposition of the

⁴⁶ Cass. Dio 65, 13, 3.

⁴⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 8. Cf. Franchet d'Esperey, "Vespasien, Titus," 3059.

⁴⁸ Malitz 232; Cf. O. Murray, "The 'quinquennium Neronis' and the Stoics." *Historia* 14 (1965), 41-61.

⁴⁹ Plin. *Epist.* 3, 11, 3; 3, 16, 2; 7, 19; 9, 13, 3.

⁵⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 5.

⁵¹ Plin. *N. H. Praef.* 2; 2, 27; 156; 174. 7, 73, 28, 9.

⁵² Panaitios was admitted to the company of Scipio Africanus the Younger. He acquainted his new friends with the basics of Stoicism.

⁵³ M. Billerbeck, "Stoizismus in der römischen Epik neronischer und flavischer Zeit." in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 32, 5, Berlin-New York 1986, 3117.

⁵⁴ Billerbeck, "Stoizismus," 3119.

⁵⁵ Epict. 4, 1, 123.

⁵⁶ Billerbeck, "Stoizismus," 3116-3117.

Roman senate in the first century A. D. were provided by cynic and Stoic philosophers who often referred to the difference between monarchy and *tyrannis* in their orations. They said that the main difference was the fact that the power of the king was given by Gods; Gods chose them as being the most eminent. Their capability was emphasized over their descent, consequently they declared that the rulers' power could not be hereditary. By this principle the opposition wanted to nominate the new emperor among the most qualified. By this they took a strong line against the hereditary nature of the throne and dynastic plans.

The senate's claim, namely that they wanted to influence the nomination of the new emperor, was present from the beginnings of *principatus* and was strengthened by Caligula's and Nero's autocracy.⁵⁷ The first *princeps* supported by the senate was Galba after Nero's death: *me deorum hominumque consensu ad imperium uocatum*.⁵⁸ Though his reign was short and unsuccessful, it was a precedent of election of the ruler by the senate. After Vitellius' death, while Vespasian was still away from Rome,⁵⁹ the senate could have enhanced its power. In this era Helvidius dealt severely with broadening the senate's authority by orders and advocated for the independence of the senate. Vespasian's low descent seemed to support the senate's feeling that they could revive their old power. Tacitus described a case when Helvidius had an altercation with another senator, Eprius Marcellus, on the issue of whether members of the senate's deputation should have been elected by drawing or by nomination.⁶⁰ Helvidius supported the latter option. Several senators were afraid of that because some of them could have been ignored. Speeches of both sides seemed to exert such an influence on Tacitus that he described them in his work. Helvidius was defeated by voting because the uncertain senators also voted for drawing. If Helvidius' idea had been victorious, prominent senators could have been elected to the deputation of the senate and this could have strengthened the senate against the emperor. Helvidius' other basic idea was the rebuilding of the Capitol burnt down in the civil war by the senate's measures in which Vespasian should have played a minor role. In this way the responsibility of the senate, consequently its power, would also have been enhanced.⁶¹ Helvidius' purpose, dividing power equally between the emperor and the senate, failed because of the emperor's strong will and determined conduct. The Restoration of the Capitol later became crucial in Vespasian's propaganda, and this event appears on his coins. Suetonius emphasizes that the emperor "resolved upon rebuilding the Capitol, and was the foremost to put his

⁵⁷ L. Wickert, *Principes*, A. F. v. Pauly et al., hrsg. *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 22, 2, Stuttgart, 1954; L. Wickert, "Neue Forschungen zum römischen Principat." in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 1, Berlin-New York 1974, 3-76.

⁵⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 1, 15, 2.

⁵⁹ Vitellius was murdered December 20, A. D. 69 in Rome. First Primus, then Mucianus governed for Vespasian being away.

⁶⁰ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 6-8.

⁶¹ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 9. Cf. D. Wardle, Vespasian, Helvidius Priscus and the Restoration of the Capitol, *Historia* 45 (1996), 208-222.

hand to clearing the ground of the rubbish, and removed some of it upon his own shoulder."⁶²

Pliny the Elder does not mention the significant Stoic oppositional senator, Helvidius, and does not take a stand on the fact that Vespasian, with whom Pliny was on friendly terms, exiled and put Helvidius to death. Pliny did not qualify the emperor's dynastic plans either, though he must have been influenced by the ideas of Stoic philosophers, ideas that were also employed by the opposition of the senate. Pliny was never an explicit critic of emperors or their politics, rather his work was definitely praising.⁶³ The learned author's friendship with Vespasian and Titus is well known, he clearly indicates it in his work. His friendship and appreciation towards Vespasian must have been genuine as for those who lived and survived Caligula's and Nero's reign Vespasian's rule seemed to be quite positive. He also learned that only careful criticism could be exercised against a *princeps* or it was better to remain silent to maintain his friendship with the emperor. From the context of Pliny's *Natural History* arise his world view and ideals. Pliny regarded Cato, Pompeius and Cicero as the most worthy models.⁶⁴ On the basis of his remarks elsewhere it is also obvious that he was a republican.⁶⁵ Most often he cites the Catos as his pattern.⁶⁶ The Catos became idealised paragons of the Romans.⁶⁷ Cato the Elder's simple lifestyle, strictness and aversion to luxury were particularly current issues at the age of Pliny the Elder, in the era of luxury, wasting and desire for oriental products. Cato the Younger, the great-grandson of the former the enemy of Caesar the republican politician the undismayed protector of justice and freedom, became the idol of the opposition towards the dictator. He, "surpassing every human measure" and embodying the Stoic wise man, had a role in Lucanus' *Pharsalia*.⁶⁸ Cato's perfect ethics, temperateness, strictness and suicide after the failure of the fight for the republic serve as

⁶² Suet. *Vesp.* 8, 5: *Ipse restitutionem Capitolii adgressus ruderibus purgandis manus primus admouit ac suo collo quaedam extulit.* C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Lives of the Caesars*. ed. A. Thomson, <http://perseus.uchicago.edu>

⁶³ Plin. *N. H. Praef.*; 2, 18; 89, 33, 41. In the preface the work is offered to Titus getting the throne and he is praised very much. Cf. Th. Köves-Zulauf, "Die Vorrede der plinianschen 'Naturgeschichte'." *Wiener Studien* 86 (1973), 134–184.

⁶⁴ G. Grüniger, *Untersuchungen zur Persönlichkeit des älteren Plinius. Die Bedeutung wissenschaftlicher Arbeit in seinem Denken.* Diss. Freiburg 1976, 67. Cf. Serbat, "Pline l' Ancien," 2092.

⁶⁵ F. Della Corte, "Plinio il Vecchio, repubblicano postumo." *Studi Romani* 26 (1978), 1–13.

⁶⁶ Plin. *N. H. Praef.*; 3: 51, 98, 114, 116, 124–125, 130, 133, 134; 7: 100, 112, 113, 171; 8: 11; 14: 44, 52, 86, 90–91, 104, 110, 129; 15: 20, 24, 33, 44, 50, 56, 72, 74–76, 82, 84–85, 122–123, 127; 16: 92, 139, 141, 173, 176, 193, 230; 17: 33 et passim; 18: 22, 30, 31, 229, 243, 260; 19: 24, 57, 93, 136, 145, 147; 34: 92.

⁶⁷ Cicero, Cornelius Nepos, Sallustius, Livius, Horatius, Velleius Paterculus, Valerius Maximus, Lucanus, Petronius, Seneca, Tacitus, Florus their names were mentioned several times in their works. Their biographies were written by Plutarch.

⁶⁸ M. von Albrecht, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur.* München 1997, 2: 729–733.

an example.⁶⁹ According to Lucanus it is not the case that Cato lost his life but life was made poorer by his death.⁷⁰ Petronius writes about Cato in his poem,

*Bellum ciuile: Pellitur a populo uictus Cato; tristior ille est, / qui uicit, fasces-
que pudet rapuisse Catoni. / Namque – hoc dedecoris populo moremque ruina – /
nam homo pulsus erat, sed in uno uicta potestas / Romanumque decus.*⁷¹

Cato's unbreakable manner was a great virtue also for Seneca, who wrote about Cato with appreciation in several works.⁷² He emphasizes Cato's inconsistency in one of his letters to Lucilius:

*Accipe hunc M. Catonem recentiorem, cumquo et infestius fortuna egit et pertinacius. Cui cum omnibus locis obstitisset, nouissime et in morte, ostendit tamen uirum fortem posse inuita fortuna uiuere, inuita mori. ... Nemo mutatum Catonem totiens mutata re publica uidit; eundem se in omni statu praestitit, in praetura, in repulsa, in accusatione, in prouincia, in contione, in exercitu, in morte.*⁷³

In the Roman literary works from the first and second centuries we can observe that the venerable supporters of the republic – Cato the Elder who embodied the old Roman virtues –, the paragons of the opposition against the dictator – Brutus, Cassius and Cato the Younger – were connected with the brave and moral oppositional figures of the first century A. D., Thrasea and Helvidius. Therefore, in Tacitus' *Historiae* Helvidius Priscus was mentioned with Cato and Brutus in firmness and courage.⁷⁴ Tacitus also cites virtues and noble examples after the sad images from the first century in another part of this work. He includes that there were "wives followed their husbands into exile; relatives displayed courage, sons-in-law firmness, ... eminent men met the last necessity with fortitude, rivalling in their end the glorious deaths of antiquity."⁷⁵ Helvidius Priscus' wife, Fannia, followed her husband into exile two times, in 66 under Nero and in 71 under Vespasian. Her example is highlighted by Tacitus; the firm son-in-law is Helvidius Priscus, the hero leaving by glorious death is Cato the

⁶⁹ Lucan. 2, 380–391: *Hi mores, haec duri inmota Catonis / secta fuit, seruare modum finemque tenere / naturamque sequi patriaeque impendere uitam / nec sibi sed toti genitum se credere mundo. / huic epulae uicisse famem, magnique penates / summouisse hiemem tecto, pretiosaque uestis / hirtam membra super Romani more Quiritis / induxisse togam, Venerisque hic usus, / progenies: urbi pater est urbiq; maritus, / iustitiae cultor, rigidi seruator honesti, / in commune bonus; nullosque Catonis in actus / subrepsit partemque tulit sibi nata uoluptas.* Cf. Billerbeck, "Stoizismus," 3123–3126.

⁷⁰ Lucan, 6, 311: *Nec sancto caruisset uita Catone.*

⁷¹ Petr. 45–49. Petronius. tr. M. Heseltine, London–Cambridge 1961 [1913].

⁷² Sen. Epist. 71, 8; ep. 104, 29–31. 118, 4. dial. 1, 3, 14, 2, 2, 12, 13, 5.

⁷³ Sen. Epist. 104, 29–30. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*. tr. R. M. Gummere, 3 vols. London–Cambridge 1958–1962.

⁷⁴ Tac. Hist. 4, 8: *Denique constantia fortitudine Catonibus et Brutis aequaretur Heluidius.*

⁷⁵ Tac. Hist. 1, 3: *Non tamen adeo uirtutum sterile saeculum ut non et bona exempla prodiderit. ... secutae maritos in exilia coniuges: propinqui audentes, constantes generi, ... supremas clarorum uirorum necessitates fortiter toleratae et laudatis antiquorum mortibus pares exitus.*

Younger. Iuvenalis writes about Thræsea and Helvidius in his satire as they used to drink with chaplets on their heads upon the birthdays of Cassius and the Bruti.⁷⁶ The poet implies the oppositional senators' republican feelings. Pliny the Younger lists the most famous Romans who should have been respected because of their virtues: Bruti, Cassii, Catos in one of his letters.⁷⁷ Marcus Aurelius cites paragons in his work and writes that it was due to his brother that he got into acquaintance with Thræsea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion and Brutus.⁷⁸

Therefore, I think that though Pliny the Elder does not mention the name of Helvidius but particularly emphasizes and praises the Catos' character and we find several remarks for his being republican and Stoic, his attitude to Helvidius was understandable. Also when Pliny does not oppose the emperor's debated dynastic plans but approves the fair life of the people of the distant island, Taprobane, where the ruler was elected by people and the throne did not descend from father to son, he expresses his resistance to the practice of his own age and imperial ambitions. This viewpoint could not have been ineffective on later authors, since after the extinction of the Flavian dynasty this standpoint reoccurred in Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* in which he refuses heredity of the monarchy and proclaims the correctness of the practice of *adoptio*:

*O nouum atque inauditum ad principatum iter! ... suscepisti imperium, postquam alium suscepti paenitebat. Nulla adoptati cum eo, qui adoptabat, cognatio, nulla necessitudo, nisi quod uterque optimus erat, dignusque alter eligi, alter eligere. ... Imperaturus omnibus eligi debet ex omnibus.*⁷⁹

Pliny the Younger's thought recalls what his stepfather and model, Pliny the Elder, wrote about the elective king-making in Taprobane.⁸⁰ Solinus, living in the third century, uses Pliny the Elder's work when he wrote about Taprobane:

*In regis electione non nobilitas praeualet, sed suffragium uniuersorum. ... Sed hoc in eo quaeritur cui liberi nulli sunt; nam qui pater fuerit, etiamsi uita spectetur, non admittitur ad regendum, et, si forte, dum regnat, pignus sustulit, exiit potestate; idque eo maxime custoditur ne fiat hereditarium regnum. Deinde, etiamsi rex maximam praeferat aequitatem, nolunt ei totum licere.*⁸¹

In these words we can find that Solinus connects Pliny's sentence and the Roman opposition's main thought from the first and second century, namely that the election of the king should have been decided not on the basis of descent but with everybody's approval; the ruler should not have had a child because then there would have been a danger of *regnum hereditarium*.

⁷⁶ Iuv. Sat. 5, 36: *quale coronati Thræsea Heluidiusque bibebant / Brutorum et Cassi natalibus.*

⁷⁷ Plin. *Epist.* 1, 17, 3.

⁷⁸ Marc. Aur. 14.

⁷⁹ Plin. *Paneg.* 7.

⁸⁰ *Ex omnibus* and *a populo* referred to the members of the senate.

⁸¹ Solin. 53, 14–16. J. André–J. Filliozat, *L'Inde vue de Rome, Textes latins de l'Antiquité relatifs à l'Inde*. Paris 1986. Cf. Mart. Cap. 6, 698.

On the strength of all the above it is rightly supposable that Pliny the Elder, a devoted champion of republican ideals, played a significant role in the intellectuals' and senate's opposition's fight for the restriction of imperial autocracy by his works, thoughts and judgement. The result of this fight was the fact that after Domitian's death the senate nominated the new ruler, which means that the senate managed to preserve its role and reputation within the framework of *principatus*. As opposed to the emperors' dynastic plans the senate was able to enforce the concept of *adoptio*. I, agreeing with the cited researchers, do not question Pliny the Elder's loyalty and friendship towards the dynasty, but I contend that being an intelligent and independent thinker, he also developed a critique of imperial politics, and since he could not express his opinion openly did so in an abstract way in the imperial era.