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## **Hellenistic Rhodes, Rhetoric and Diplomacy: Molon Apollonius**

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**ABSTRACT:** During the Hellenistic Age the island of Rhodes stands at a superb economic and cultural and position in the Mediterranean, while Rome is the superpower that dominates the known world of the time, being an enormous empire state, an offspring of a realistic, enforceable legal and political thought. Quite apart from a naval, economic, political and cultural significant power the island of Rhodes becomes a land of education for many eminent Roman personalities. Molon Apollonius was a truly cult figure of Rhodes, a brilliant jurist, orator and teacher of diplomacy and rhetoric. He was recognized as a remarkably distinguished scholar of law, diplomacy and rhetoric even by the supreme Romans Julius Caesar and Cicero, who travelled to Rhodes exclusively in order to become his students. The Roman politicians acknowledging his skills and faculties offered him the *rostrum* to address the Roman Senate in Greek language, an unprecedented honour for a foreign diplomat from their provinces. And Cicero mentions: *Graeca leguntur in omnibus fere gentibus*.

**KEY-WORDS:** Molon Apollonius, Hellenistic Rhodes, Ancient Rome, Senate, Cicero, Julius Caesar, diplomacy, rhetoric, politics, Ancient Greek and Latin.

When the Roman Legions ruled the Greek world in the Hellenistic Age<sup>1</sup> (its start historically marked by the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC), the island of Rhodes given its utterly privileged geographical position in the Mediterranean, between East and West, became a true “*παίδευσις*” for the known world of the time, just like Athens in earlier times according to Thucydides (2.41.1).

Molon Apollonius was an eminent personality of that era regarding political skills, rhetoric, law, diplomacy and image-making of politicians. And it is in those times that the Roman military power highly correlated with the Roman Law along with a *sui generis* diplomacy which began to thrive in a new, truly international society. On account of the pursuit of power and worldwide dominance, the Romans take not to be the most ardent supporters of communicating with the conquered provinces, however this element was what seemed to enrich the fields of rhetoric and diplomacy with new “protocols” and customs.

The Roman Empire was a geographically immense state operating under the rule of the *ius gentium*<sup>2</sup> (The Law of Nations). In their overall legal and political thought the Romans, directly affected by Aristotle, accepted that any commonplace issue is a matter of prudence, not science. And prudence only aimed at welfare and prosperity, that is, the choosing and implementing of the most suitable solution accordingly<sup>3</sup>. In this sense there was *legislative prudence*, which sorts out issues in whole, as an architect; there was *political prudence* concerned with common practical matters either as deliberative or judicial, that is to say, the Romans did not view law as *scientia*, but as *iurisprudentia*<sup>3</sup>.

In this aspect the frame of Roman Law from the age of Cicero and Julius Caesar (1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC) took to be a political and administrative instrument as well as a means of laying the foundation for the proud *imperium* over the conquered provinces.

Greece became a Roman province after the conquering of Corinth in the year 146 BC and during the times of the *Res Publica* Greeks were mostly seen as a declined, rather “degenerate” conquered nation. *Graeculus* was the defining term

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<sup>1</sup> Berthold (1984) 59

<sup>2</sup> Domingo (2010) 3

<sup>3</sup> Σταμάτης (1986) 35, 36

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for a *Greek* used by Cicero, the famous Roman orator, jurist and politician. However, in terms of social and political semantics, the word *Graeculus* was not used with disdain and contempt. Cicero never gave the term the colour of scorn and it is noteworthy that Romans generally approached the conquered Greeks both with a supercilious manner and a feeling of inferiority as well<sup>4</sup>.

This explicitly sharp disapproval against the Greeks originated in the historic decline of Greece, especially when the Hellenistic kingdoms got into violent bloody confrontations fighting one against the other<sup>5</sup>, without hesitating to call the Roman Legions as coadjutant to their local civil wars. In these political conditions of serving interests of minor importance, as well as of cronyism and favouritism, Romans were without any doubt the winners who constantly faced Greeks with a peculiar kind of envy, which rather outperformed admiration, combined with an overflow of disdain and scepticism.

The powerful arrogance of the Romans in the core of their own reasoning was really dominated by a lot of particular elements directly related to the medley of peoples subordinated to the Empire, estimated nearly fifteen million persons in Italy only<sup>6</sup>. The mosaic of the nations in question composed by different cultures and conflicts of moods and mentalities created needs of communication. In this manner, hundreds of diplomatic missions flew to Rome, each one with a different goal, such as to sign a peace treaty, to become allies with the superpower, or even to ask for forgiveness for certain attitudes not acceptable by the Romans.

Diplomatic missions also used to ask the Roman Legions for a direct military intervention. In this context the Senate was charged with the determining and leading of all foreign affairs and policy, to declare war, to make peace and ratify treaties. Its emblem scripted SPQR for *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, stood as a stamp of approval, of conducting power and authority. The Roman Senate<sup>7</sup> had the ultimate authority to take diplomatically correct action and receive foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Nikitas (1998)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Syropoulos About the things after Alexander - The centrifugal potencies of the Hellenistic kingdoms (2005)

<sup>6</sup> Scheidel (2007) 7

<sup>7</sup> Bjola and Kiornprobst (2007) 15

ambassadors. The *Senatus* introduced diplomatic protocols in order to accept foreign special envoys for a hearing or to establish diplomatic relations. In this context and under these circumstances<sup>8</sup> ambassadors had to keep up with procedures, ethics and formalities necessary to successfully accomplish their missions.

The Senate would never accept ambassadors of enemy countries in the city of Rome. Allies, however, enjoyed a rather privileged generous reception with the possibility to develop true public relations with eminent personalities of Rome, who could affect certain crucial decisions of the Senate. It is noted that<sup>9</sup> the majority of diplomats came to Rome from the eastern Mediterranean and more than six hundred arrivals of foreign legations were recorded between the years 300 and 100 BC.

The overall aim of these various diplomatic legations<sup>10</sup> was to use their language power of persuasion or dissuasion, their eloquence and rhetoric skills before the Senate, in order to achieve their goals and to affirm the validity of their choices according to their various needs.

Delivering a speech before the Senate plainly meant that the language they ought to use was *-in principio-* Latin and, by reason of this, interpreters played a very important role as the “transporters” of notions from one language to the other. Latin was not just a language, but a true mark of dominance and imperial *potestas*.

According to Francisco Pina Polo “*Valerius 252 Maximus refers to Roman magistrates of earlier times for maintaining the habit of officially replying to the Greeks only in Latin, always compelling them to use an interpreter, not only in Rome but also in Greece and Asia*”.<sup>11</sup>

Mutti<sup>12</sup> states that “*The whole process of latinization tended to get more slow and difficult when Romans came into contact with those territories where the Greek language was spoken as an expression and a vehicle of a culture which enjoyed a superior prestige regarding the roman élite itself. Rome was in fact a bilingual empire. Latin and Greek: the former, served as the language of politics, of law, of the*

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<sup>8</sup> Polo (2013) 248- 249

<sup>9</sup> Eilers (2009) 1-2

<sup>10</sup> Gazzano (2002) 575-580

<sup>11</sup> Cicero 24 (Cic. Div. 2.131).

<sup>12</sup> Mutti (2013)

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*military and the latter of letters, philosophy and religion, both operating in a supranational manner towards the various local idioms of the imperial ecumene which could not serve and perform accordingly”.*

However, the Roman Senators were not eager to try to understand what they were told in a foreign language within their strict regulatory framework. Most of them were educated aristocrats who could talk fluently, read and write in Greek, but the majority of them insisted on using Latin in order to unceasingly display their caliber and quality of being superior to. Here is to mention that Aemilius Paulus used Latin in order to officially address the Macedonian aristocrats in Amphipolis announcing certain decisions of the Senate, however he expressed himself as a speaker fluent in Greek when he spoke to King Perseus before his *consilium* (Liv. 45.8.6). Cato, was also a fluent speaker in Greek, who used Latin when he addressed the people of Athens (Plut. Cat. Ma. 12.4).

The use of the Latin language was a pure political prestige for Romans. According to Valerius Maximus (*Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium, Lib. IX*), Latin as the language of power and glory, the official state language of the *imperium*, was enforced over Greek, the language of culture, a “difference” clearly and deliberately portraying who dominated and who was the submitted one, not only in terms of military and battle, but of language and politics and state of freedom as well. It is accepted that “*La lengua es compañera del imperio*”, according to Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1441-1522), i.e. language has always been a companion to power.

Nevertheless, a case which is recorded and verified as truly unique by Plutarch and Valerius Maximus regarding the use of Greek instead of Latin within the *Senatus Romanus* is the one of Molon Apollonius from Rhodes, being the head of a diplomatic mission in the Roman Senate, round the years 87 and 80 BC.

Molon Apollonius<sup>13</sup> was a historic personality descending from Alabanda, an ancient city of Caria (*Καρία*) in Asia Minor, famous for its black marble of excellent quality. The Romans gave the city to the domain of Rhodes.<sup>14</sup> He was a brilliant

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<sup>13</sup> Kennedy (1963) 326, 332

<sup>14</sup> Diodorus

rhetor (ῥήτωρ)<sup>15</sup>, famous for his absolute effectiveness as a jurist, a public speaker and a diplomat. He established in Rhodes one of the most widely known schools of rhetoric of all time in the Mediterranean and was especially noted for his skillfulness as a talented lawyer in courts, as well as for his special natural endowment in writing political speeches<sup>16</sup>. He was chosen by several eminent Roman personalities to become their teacher in building support for arguments and ideas<sup>17</sup>. Among them were Cicero, Julius Caesar and Pompeius, who came to Rhodes in order to learn the art of Rhetoric (Ῥητορική τέχνη), to become knowledgeable and skillful about political communication and, of course, to learn Greek. They came to Rhodes exclusively to be taught by Molon and left with Greek, Politics, Rhetoric and Diplomacy instilled into them.

Sometime later they made the most of their visit in writing, politics and diplomacy. According to Cicero, Molon was a really excellent tutor and mentor in each and every field of his study, the man who critically changed the flow of things in the manner politicians address the public. Cicero<sup>18</sup> taught by Molon freed himself by the spontaneous overflow in style, studied Demosthenes and obviously realized the mighty alliance of *ethos* (ἦθος) and *pathos* (πάθος).<sup>19</sup>

What made Molon even more special was that he did not speak Latin. In spite of this, Molon was historically recorded as the first, if not the only Greek diplomat who spoke Greek exclusively in a public hearing before the institutions of the Roman Empire. He was the Greek delegate from Rhodes to address the Roman Senate in Greek twice, *sine interprete*<sup>20</sup>, that is, without the mediation of an interpreter (legatus ad senatum), in two different diplomatic missions, most probably in the years 87 and 80 BC respectively.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Torzi (2000) 7, 20, 277

<sup>16</sup> Pauly-Wissowa (1895) II, col. 141

<sup>17</sup> Klingner (1961) 125

<sup>18</sup> Davies (1968) 303-314

<sup>19</sup> Jaeger (1938) 174

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Valerius Maximus (2,2,3) *quoniam summam uim Romanae eloquentiae adiuuerat* (because Molon helped a lot of Roman rhetors).

<sup>21</sup> Baldi, Cuzzolin (2009) 73

This rather short reference to Molon Apollonius stands as an *ad hoc* approach to an eminent personality of diplomacy and rhetoric of the Hellenistic period<sup>22</sup>. Although Molon was not the only teacher of Rhetoric in Rhodes, he was considered a unique master of rhetorical instruction by declamation. Cicero and Julius Caesar<sup>23</sup> were taught how to speak in public, that is, how to persuade or dissuade by means of rhetoric manners by Molon, the Greek ambassador of Rhodes and unique Greek speaking diplomat in the *Senatus Romanus*. The style and teaching of Molon's rhetoric and eloquence skills are evident throughout the works of Cicero. *Dicere ad persuadendum accommodare*, "speech tailored to persuade", is how he defines the art of Rhetoric. Moreover, the term "Rhodianism" concerning eloquence and the art of persuasion regarding Cicero's rhetoric is already academically introduced.<sup>24</sup> Molon's and Rhodes' influence in the Roman and modern world certainly need to be further researched. However, Molon's vow seems to be accomplished.

According to Plutarch, Molon addressed once Cicero telling him "Σὲ μὲν, ὦ Κικέρων, ἐπαινῶ καὶ θαυμάζω, τῆς δ' Ἑλλάδος οἰκτίρω τὴν τύχην, ὁρῶν ἅ μόνα τῶν καλῶν ἡμῖν ὑπελείπετο, καὶ ταῦτα Ῥωμαῖος διὰ σου προσγινόμενα, παιδείαν καὶ λόγον", that is, Cicero, I praise and esteem you. However, I am sad about the fortune of Greece, because I can realize you will transfer to the Romans the only good things left to us, that is Education and Rhetoric.

In the end, Horace's point was critically proved: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit arte intulit agresti Latium*. (Horace, Ep. 2, 1, 156): Greece having been captured by the Romans seized the savage conqueror and brought the arts into rustic Latium.

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<sup>22</sup> Susemihl (1892) 489,491

<sup>23</sup> C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divus*

Julius, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0132%3Alife%3Djul.%3Achapter%3D4>

<sup>24</sup> Cazacu (2013) 956-962

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