



ELECTRYONE

ISSN 2241-4061



9 772241 406118

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΥΩΝΗ

**EMBASSIES OF GREEK FEDERATIONS TO
REPUBLICAN ROME:
INTELLIGENCE, DIPLOMACY, AND THE
LIMITS OF ALLIED INFLUENCE¹**

KONSTANTINOS FAKKAS

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

kostasfakkas@arch.uoa.gr

ABSTRACT: This article examines the embassies dispatched by the Greek federations (*koina*) to the Roman Senate during the Hellenistic period, with particular emphasis on their function as channels of information. While the declared purposes of these missions varied, from arbitration in local disputes to the negotiation of alliances, their deeper significance lay in the intelligence they conveyed about political and military developments in Greece. Drawing on literary evidence, especially Polybius, and supplemented by later sources, the study traces how the federations gradually adjusted their diplomatic aims to the realities of Roman hegemony. Case studies from the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues, as well as from the Acarnanian, Lycian and Cretan *Koina*, reveal both the ingenuity of envoys in framing their appeals and the Senate's growing skill in extracting useful information. Particular attention is given to the Senate's double strategy of welcoming embassies while increasingly relying on its own agents, thereby

¹ This article is a revised version of a seminar paper written during my doctoral studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Emeritus K. Buraselis, to Associate Professor S. Aneziri, who served on my PhD advisory committee, and to the participants of the graduate seminar for their invaluable comments.

reducing dependence on Greek testimony. The article argues that, although federal embassies did serve as informants, their informational value declined as Rome became more directly involved in Greek affairs. The analysis sheds light not only on the mechanics of interstate communication but also on the gradual transformation of Rome's allies into subjects of its political order.

KEYWORDS: Greek *koina*, Greek federations, federal embassies, Hellenistic diplomacy, Greco-Roman relations, Roman Senate, Aetolian League, Achaean League, Roman hegemony, Polybius

1. GREEK EMBASSIES TO ROME

The phenomenon of embassies dispatched by the Greek federations (*koina*) to the Roman Senate belongs to one of the most important political transformations of the Hellenistic age: the expansion of Rome in the Mediterranean. As Rome's influence spread, its role in Greek affairs changed, from arbiter between powerful federations such as the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues to regulator of their policies. Formally, these embassies sought arbitration, favors, or alliances. Yet beyond such declared purposes, they also served, often implicitly, as sources of information for the Senate, conveying reports on political and military developments in Greece. This study examines both functions, with particular attention to the ways in which federal ambassadors informed Roman decision-making and how this role was reshaped as Rome's own presence in Greece deepened.

The fundamental handbook for the study of this phenomenon during the Hellenistic period is Filippo Canali de Rossi's *Le ambascerie dal mondo greco a Roma in età repubblicana*.² This seminal work records all embassies from the Greek states to the Senate between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, listing approximately 780 known diplomatic missions. It divides them into four broad categories: embassies of cities and federations from Greece and the Balkans; embassies of cities and federations from Asia; embassies of monarchs; and embassies of Greek colonies. For the purposes of this study, the first two categories will concern us.³

Yet this categorization of embassies, useful as a guide in such an ambitious work as that of Canali de Rossi, should not create the impression that there was any substantive difference in the composition or arguments of the embassies of Greek states, whether federations or individual *poleis*. The general framework was common, although the objectives varied for each

² Canali de Rossi (1997) with later corrections in Canali de Rossi (2009).

³ For a commentary on the most important studies concerning embassies to Republican Rome, see Linderski (1995, repr. 2007) 41, n. 5.

state. Even the selection of ambassadors seems not to have differed greatly from that of a Hellenistic monarchy. Beyond the partially institutionalized procedure of selection within the federations, ambassadors were chosen primarily on the basis of subjective criteria. Factors such as personal contacts in Rome, wealth, and the office held at the given moment were decisive for one's selection.⁴ This study does not aim to compare the embassies of the federations with those of *poleis* or monarchies, a task that would broaden its scope excessively. Nevertheless, occasional reference to those embassies sheds light, to some extent, on the practice of the federations.

Each *koinon* had its own reasons for seeking an understanding with Rome. The information available to us is scant before the Macedonian Wars, but increases significantly immediately after the Peace of Phoenice. What each federation sought naturally depended on many factors. For example, the objectives of the embassies sent by the Achaeans to the Senate in 197 BC, during the war against Philip V, differed from those of the six embassies dispatched between 165 and 154 BC concerning the return of hostages, which they themselves had offered as a guarantee of their loyalty. Even if it is difficult to trace the full course of events, the historical development shows how the *koina* gradually adjusted their aims toward Rome. It also reveals the increasing difficulty faced by their ambassadors, who had to deal with an ever more imperialistic Senate.⁵

For our purposes here, this observation is important. Regardless of the formal declaration of an embassy's aims, these aims were little more than a pretext for communication between a *koinon* and the Senate. It is reasonable to suppose that ambassadors clarified to senators various ancillary issues, particularly those of concern to Rome. Thus, even unintentionally, they acted as informants. In reality, however, all embassies seem to have pursued a single underlying purpose, whatever their declared motives: to secure Rome's favor. This could only be achieved if the ambassadors provided the Senate with sufficient and, insofar as possible, accurate information.

From the second century BC onward, treaties of alliance increasingly transformed from agreements ostensibly between equals into arrangements that bore the character of dependence on Rome.⁶ This had a direct impact on how the Romans viewed the role of embassies from the *koina*, especially the stronger ones. The reason was that the Greek *koina*, once Rome's allies in its wars against external enemies, gradually became guardians of the peace Rome had imposed. Thus, they were obliged to keep Rome informed in much the same way as its own envoys

⁴ The same was true in Republican Rome. On the absence of "specialists", in the modern sense, in Roman policy toward Greece, see Gruen (1984) 203-249, esp. 231-244.

⁵ Polybius uses the term *ἀντιφιλονικεῖν*: Polyb. 32.3.16-17.

⁶ For this question, see the classic studies of Gruen (1984) and Ferrary (1988).

dispatched to Greece would have done. In such cases, the position of Greek ambassadors became even more difficult: they had not only to contend with the intransigence of the Senate but, as politicians rather than diplomats, also to secure an agreement that would not tarnish their standing once they returned home. If we trust the relative silence of our sources, it seems they succeeded in this respect: nowhere do we find an ambassador accused as a traitor to his homeland, even in the extreme case of Callicrates.

This ambiguous role of ambassadors is especially evident in embassies whose aim was to appoint Rome as arbiter in some dispute.⁷ Ambassadors had every reason to encourage Rome's involvement in their quarrels, and above all to win its favor. For, as arbiter, Rome did not merely propose a solution; it was also able to enforce it. This effort to secure Rome's goodwill often led to exaggerations. One such instance is reported by Polybius in an Achaean embassy during their interminable disputes with Sparta over the return of Spartan exiles to their homeland. On that occasion, the ambassadors did not hesitate to ask the astonished Senate to judge even the resolutions of their own federal assemblies.⁸

Gradually, the number of embassies to Rome increased, as did the logistical problems the Senate had to confront, such as the accommodation and reception of ambassadors and their retinues. In 183 BC, for example, the Romans summoned all Philip's neighbors to the Senate, clearly with the aim of ascertaining whether the Macedonian king was respecting the terms of the peace treaty. Not content with this, they also guaranteed the safety of all Philip's accusers, thereby persuading even the most reluctant to appear before the Senate. These neighbors included "all those bordering on Macedonia... some individually, some by city, and some by their federal organizations."⁹ The "federal organizations" here (*ἔθνικὰς συστάσεις*) refer to the *koina* of the Thessalians and Epirotes, as well as the Athamanians and Illyrians. Polybius emphasizes the extraordinary scale of the gathering, noting that "in the 149th Olympiad there assembled in Rome a multitude of embassies from Greece greater than ever before in living memory."¹⁰ We are told that Philip's accusers appeared, at the Senate's request, one by one before the council, and that the number was such that ambassadors presented their complaints over three days, leaving the Senate "at a loss as to how to handle matters in detail."¹¹

⁷ Cf. Just. *Epit.* 28.1.5; Paus. 7.12.4.

⁸ Polyb. 30.30 and especially 30.32. In modern terms, the Greek envoys relinquished both the sovereignty of their states and their right to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Senate, as Polybius relates, was naturally astonished at this decision of the Achaeans. Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 7.15.4-6, on embassies sent by distant peoples and states seeking Alexander the Great's arbitration in their internal disputes.

⁹ Polyb. 23.1.3-4. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Greek and Latin are my own.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 23.1.1.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 23.1.9-10.

A similar well-known case is that of the embassy of the *koinon* of the Cretans in 69 BC. On the advice of their eldest and most prudent men, the federation sent thirty of its most distinguished citizens to Rome “to respond to the charges brought against them and to attempt to conciliate the Senate with well-disposed arguments and pleas.”¹² This was a substantial number, which also highlights the representative character of the *koinon*: the number of ambassadors corresponded to the number of cities comprising the federation at the time. Indeed, this practice was neither rare nor unique, as we have already seen.¹³

Diodorus reports on the conduct of these ambassadors when they arrived in Rome, before appearing in the Senate chamber: “They went about privately to the houses of the senators, making every kind of supplication, and sought to win over those who controlled the council.”¹⁴ This passage shows that the ambassadors’ stay in Rome also included private visits to the homes of prominent senators, so as to secure their support before the formal session of the Senate.¹⁵ Naturally, these conversations extended beyond the particular issue for which they had been dispatched, encompassing many other current matters.¹⁶

The “flood” of embassies from the second century BC onward may have gradually wearied the Senate,¹⁷ particularly when information once valuable, such as reports of the movements of major opponents like the Macedonian kings, gave way to minor local disputes of comparatively powerless cities and *koina*. This does not mean the Senate ignored these embassies, but rather that the value of their intelligence had diminished, as Rome had fewer formidable adversaries in the East.¹⁸

Yet matters had not always stood thus for the Romans. Up to the first decade of the second century BC, they relied on the occasional, and often inaccurate, reports of their allies. This was not because they lacked the ability to send their own agents to Greece (something they would

¹² Diod. Sic. 40.1.1.

¹³ Canali de Rossi (1997) 165; Chaniotis (2015) 379-380.

¹⁴ Diod. Sic. 40.1.1.

¹⁵ Ferrary (2007); Battistoni (2015) 175-184. Cf. also the case of the embassy of Charops from the *koinon* of Epirus, who, together with his fellow envoy Myrton and their delegation, likewise held private conversations in the houses of senators prior to the Senate’s session: Polyb. 32.6.

¹⁶ The conversations of the envoys with the Romans were conducted, rather, on an informal and personal level. See, for example, an incident described both by Valerius Maximus and by Pliny the Elder, concerning the meeting of the Aetolian envoys with the consul Aelius Catus while he was taking his breakfast: Val. Max. 4.3.7; Plin. *HN* 33.142.

¹⁷ It appears that in the imperial period Vespasian issued a decree forbidding cities to send more than three envoys. The measure aimed both at safeguarding the finances of the cities and at easing the logistical burden such embassies created for Rome itself: Souris (1984) 235-244.

¹⁸ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 3.60 ff., where the Senate of the imperial period is shown examining and reaffirming the ancient privileges of Greek communities, privileges often rooted in decrees of federal assemblies and Hellenistic monarchs. Tacitus presents the occasion as an impressive display of senatorial authority. It is not difficult to imagine similar sentiments among senators of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, when Greek states, particularly the stronger *koina*, frequently appealed to Rome for arbitration and support.

do more systematically a few decades later), but simply because Greek affairs acquired significance for them only after 190 BC. The power vacuum and the need to safeguard the interests of their Greek friends gradually drew them into a more direct presence in Greece, as is evident from the increase in the number of senatorial missions to the East.

2. THE AETOLIANS AND THE ACARNANIANS UP TO 189 BC

The first people beyond the Adriatic with whom the Romans concluded a treaty of friendship were the Aetolians – at least this is what the Romans themselves declared in autumn 212 or 211 BC, prior to contracting a formal alliance with them against Philip V.¹⁹ This longstanding relationship with the Aetolians does not appear to have been for the Romans merely an interesting historical footnote. On the contrary, they seem to have been willing to base their Greek policy (insofar as we can claim such a policy existed at that time) on the perspective of certain Greek powers they felt they could trust. In this instance, historical memory served as a pledge for the future. Thus, the vindication of Aetolian claims in western Greece acquired an additional, and for them unexpected, aspect: their old friendship with the Romans. It was on this illusion, at least, that Rome's turbulent relationship with the Aetolian League appears to have begun.²⁰

Already by 240 BC, however, the Romans maintained friendly relations with the neighboring *koinon* of the Acarnanians (which implies that their agreements with the Aetolians antedated that year).²¹ The Acarnanians sent an embassy to the Senate requesting Roman mediation in a dispute with the Aetolians. In particular, they asked the Romans to intervene in removing Aetolian garrisons from certain Acarnanian cities. The episode is reported only by Justin, and its historical value has often been questioned.²² Nor do we know anything further about that embassy, beyond the fact that it persuaded the Romans to send their own delegation to the Aetolian League in support of the Acarnanians.

¹⁹ Liv. 26.24.4. Most of the text of the treaty is preserved in an inscription discovered at Thyrium, the chief city of Acarnania: *IG IX*,¹ 2, 241=Moretti, *ISE II*, 87=*SEG* 13, 832. See Mitropoulos 2025: 36-37 with n. 16 on bibliography.

²⁰ Not much later, in 195 BC, the Aetolians would claim that it was thanks to them that the Romans set foot in Greece: Polyb. 18.48.8. Yet not all Aetolian politicians shared this sentiment. As early as 217 BC, Agelaus of Naupactus had warned the Greeks of “the clouds now appearing from the West” (5.103.8-104.11).

²¹ On this topic, the study of S. I. Oost (1975) remains relevant. For the early contacts of Rome with Acarnania and Epirus, see *ibid.* 1-15.

²² Just. *Epit.* 28.1-2. Cf. Holleaux (1921) 5-22 who places the embassy during the Syrian (Aetolian) war. Following M. Holleaux, S. I. Oost is skeptical about Justin's dating of this embassy, though not about the Acarnanians' arguments from the Trojan War: Oost (1975) 92-97. For the historicity of the event, see Dany (1999) 98-119.

The Acarnanian embassy is interesting for two reasons. First, it may be the earliest recorded instance of a Greek *koinon* (if not a state in mainland Greece) formally seeking Rome's mediation. Second, the arguments the Acarnanian envoys seem to have used before the Senate display a certain ingenuity. They combined contemporary political developments with ancient legends shared by both peoples, stories that likely captured Justin's imagination, our sole source for the event. Thus, according to the historian, when the Romans sent an embassy to the Aetolian League, their envoys argued that the Acarnanians ought to be free for the additional reason that their ancestors alone among the Greeks had not taken part in the Trojan expedition.²³ Although Justin mentions the use of this argument with reference to the Roman embassy to the Aetolians, it is reasonable to suppose that, if the story was true and not the historian's invention, the point was first advanced earlier by the Acarnanian envoys themselves in their embassy to the Senate.²⁴

The use of the Homeric poems and especially the "Catalogue of Ships" in the *Iliad* was a common point of reference among all Greeks.²⁵ Both the ambassadors of the *koinon* and those of the Romans appear to have followed typologies of long standing. What is noteworthy in the Acarnanian case lies elsewhere: before the Senate, they could invoke an argument that would have been unusable before another Greek state, namely that they had not participated in the panhellenic expedition against Troy.²⁶ We may observe here a shrewd use of myth to ingratiate themselves with the Romans. At the same time, it reveals the desperate efforts of many Greek envoys to discover the right arguments to win the favor of the new power from Italy. Thus myth – common currency for the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean – became a plausible argument where historical evidence was entirely lacking. This transformation of an awkward

²³ Just. *Epit.* 28.1.5. The use of the Trojan War as a theme of tradition and imperial power among Greeks and Romans has been examined by Erskine (2001). For the Acarnanian incident, see *ibid.* 188-197.

²⁴ Even if we assume that the Roman senators knew the Homeric epics in detail (which is unlikely), it is hard to believe they would connect such a detail with contemporary politics. For the Acarnanians, however, their omission from the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* was a constant point of interpreting their distant past. This did not necessarily mean non-participation in the Trojan expedition: Homer mentions Meges, son of Phyleus, and the Acarnanian lands he ruled (Dulichium, the Echinades: *Il.* 2.625-30; cf. Strabo 10.2.24.36-42). Their ancestors' role was, therefore, a matter of interpretation, especially before the Romans, descendants of the fugitives from Troy.

²⁵ Hom. *Il.* 2.494-759. Cf. Plut. *Sol.* 10.

²⁶ Several cities of northwestern Asia Minor claimed kinship with the Romans to secure their favor, above all Ilium. Lampsacus too invoked such ties, sending an embassy under Hegesias in 197 BC to seek protection against Antiochus III (*SIG*³ 591; Frisch, *I. v. Lampsakos* 4; Canali De Rossi (1997) 195-198, no. 236e). On this kinship claim, see Curty (1995) 78-82; Jones (1999) 95-96, 172. More generally, Battistoni (2009) 73-97.

interpretation of a remote historical tradition of the Acarnanians into a point of national pride was striking,²⁷ though by no means unique in Greek history.²⁸

How empty this argument ultimately was is shown by the subsequent course of Acarnanian-Roman relations: in the First and Second Macedonian Wars, Acarnania found itself on the opposite side from that which might have been supposed by its Homeric past. The primordial friendship with the Roman people that the Acarnanians resurrected from prehistory had little value when set against the compelling reality that their principal rivals, the Aetolians, were already harnessed to Rome's chariot. Rome would never sacrifice its alliance with the far more powerful Aetolian League for the sake of that small country.

The Senate, to be sure, had significant reasons to suspect the Aetolians, especially after their unilateral actions that finally led to the Peace of Phoenice.²⁹ In 197 BC, however, the situation was different. Unlike the First Macedonian War, the Second was not merely a question of western Greece, where primarily the interests of Rome's old allies, the Aetolians, were at stake. The Second Macedonian War required from the Senate a more comprehensive approach to Greek affairs. In that context it requested that its most important Greek allies, and Philip himself, send envoys to Rome to present their positions in view of the then-possible conclusion of peace.³⁰ Naturally, the Senate's desire to be informed by both friends and enemies stemmed less from any sensitivity to the views of its Greek allies than from the fact that it still had an incomplete picture of Greek affairs.³¹

This embassy also provides information about the usual number of ambassadors sent by Hellenistic *koina* to the Senate.³² Polybius gives us the names and provenance of the envoys sent on that occasion by two federations, the Aetolian and the Achaean Leagues:

²⁷ A century later, the Acarnanians repeated the same argument in an embassy, again securing their autonomy. Strabo (10.2.25) is harsher than Justin, claiming they deceived the Senate with sophisms, citing the Aetolian catalogues, their own testimonies, and epic poetry. Whether they critically chose Ephoros as a source, as Strabo implies, we cannot know; what matters is that, even if sophistry, the Senate was persuaded, twice, by the weight of historical memory.

²⁸ Cf. the arguments used by Pelopidas before the Persians in 367 BC: Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.34.

²⁹ App. *Mac.* 4.2. Cf. also Flamininus' rebuke to the Aetolians: Polyb. 18.34.1-3.

³⁰ Livy claims, perhaps with some exaggeration, that the Senate was greatly impressed (*mouerunt eo maxime senatum*) by the lessons in Greek geography provided by the envoys (Liv. 32.37). See Eckstein (1987) 284.

³¹ Pausanias (7.7.7) remarks that Rome's involvement alongside the Aetolians in the First Macedonian War was mainly a way of acquainting themselves with Greek affairs and, more specifically, of observing conditions in Macedonia. Whatever its historical value, this view likely reflects reality.

³² The dispatch of at least two envoys often aimed to safeguard the community's interests in case one died *en route* to Rome. Envoys might also suffer shipwreck or fall captive to pirates. On deaths of envoys on their way to Rome, see Habicht (2001) as well as Linderski (1995, repr. 2007) 40, n. 3a with further bibliography.

“The ambassadors from Aetolia were Alexander Isius, Damocritus of Calydon, Dicaearchus of Trichonium, Polemarchus of Arsinoë, Lamius of Ambracia, Nicomachus the Acarnanian, one of those who had fled from Thyrium and settled in Ambracia, and Theodotus of Pherae, an exile from Thessaly, settled in Stratus; from the Achaeans, Xenophon of Aegium; from King Attalus, Alexander alone; and on behalf of the Athenian people, the envoys under Cephisodorus.”³³

Several of the figures listed by Polybius reappear in later embassies, such as Alexander Isius. What is striking is the size of the Aetolian embassy in contrast to the other three, a point Polybius indirectly notes: the Aetolians sent seven envoys, while the Achaeans, Attalus, and the Athenians each sent but one. In Attalus’ case Polybius remarks “Alexander alone,” as one might have expected more from the king of Pergamum.

The explanation for this paradox likely lies in the fact that each state assessed differently the importance of Roman mediation, and thus the aims of an embassy. For the Aetolians in particular, the war against Philip held out the prospect of territorial gains in western Greece, primarily at the expense of Acarnania and Pharsalus. The slogan of “Greek freedom,” as advanced by the other three powers and by Flamininus, was far easier to defend before the Senate than claims to annex territory.

The ingenuity of the Aetolians on that occasion amounts to a diplomatic stratagem which, as far as we know, is perhaps unique in Polybius. Seeking to present their own claims as the only legitimate ones in the region, the Aetolians brought to the Senate two exiles from two neighboring and scarcely friendly *koina*, the Acarnanians and the Thessalians. Among the seven Aetolian envoys were “Nicomachus the Acarnanian, one of those who had fled from Thyrium and settled in Ambracia,” and “Theodotus of Pherae, an exile from Thessaly, settled in Stratus.” Both were resident aliens dwelling in cities under Aetolian control. Theodotus is mentioned as an individual exile, whereas Nicomachus belonged to a group of Acarnanians who had left their homeland, Thyrium, and settled in Stratus, the former Acarnanian center.³⁴

On this occasion the Aetolians had the inspiration to practice a kind of “diplomacy of metics.”³⁵ These men presented Aetolian arguments as if they were the only interested party in the region, pushing aside the two other *koina* from which they hailed. In essence, the Aetolians attempted to nullify the claims of those two federations (which, it should be noted, were not among the embassies then present in Rome), with the ultimate aim of vindicating the Aetolians’

³³ Polyb. 18.10.9-11.

³⁴ On the fate of Acarnania and its partition between Epirotes and Aetolians, see Schwahn (1931) 1196.

³⁵ I am grateful to Prof. K. Buraselis for this remark.

longstanding claims in western Greece, namely, over the four Thessalian and Phthiotian cities.³⁶ It is doubtful, however, whether this Aetolian ingenuity had any real impact on Rome, given the course of events after Philip V's defeat.

All the Greek envoys nonetheless strove to make clear to the Senate that, so long as Macedonian garrisons remained in Chalcis, Corinth, and Demetrias, "it was impossible for the Greeks even to conceive of freedom," as Polybius says.³⁷ The ambassadors spoke of the famous "fetters of Greece," employing ringing phrases to describe their desperate situation: "they could not draw breath," "they did not dare to hope," and "it was in no way possible ever to taste freedom."³⁸ In all likelihood, Rome was for the first time grasping both the plight of its allies in Greece and the strategic importance of the strongholds held by the Macedonians.

Thus, when Philip's ambassadors were preparing to deliver their lengthy address, the Romans disarmed them with a blunt question: "Will you surrender Chalcis, Corinth, and Demetrias?" The Macedonian envoys admitted that they had no instructions regarding these points, bringing the negotiations to an abrupt end.³⁹ The incident is instructive, for it shows the capacity of certain embassies to influence Roman policy, especially when the Senate was divided between two factions, as it was then: whether to continue the war against Philip or not. Rather than taking as the basis of discussion the agreement of Nicaea, as the Macedonian envoys – and Philip himself – had expected, the Romans opposed to them the demands of their allies.⁴⁰ Effective briefing of the Senate (even if Flamininus and his circle stood behind the initiative) had managed to provoke second thoughts even among the warmest advocates of an understanding with the Macedonian king.

The lack of secure, direct information in the ancient world, and the propensity of some to credit any rumor that confirmed their expectations, could often deceive even the most seasoned envoys of the *koina*. An incident in an Aetolian embassy of 189 BC illustrates not only the limits of available intelligence but also the fluidity of negotiations at Rome when a war had not yet been decided in the field. In such circumstances, every development on the battlefield affected both the aims and the tone adopted by Greek envoys and by Roman senators. According to the annalist Valerius Antias, at the very moment when the war against Antiochus was being decided in Asia, the Aetolian ambassadors (among whom may have been their

³⁶ Polyb. 18.38.3; Liv. 33.13.5-9. No Acarnanian or Thessalian embassies are mentioned on that occasion. This does not, however, exclude their existence, or at least the possibility that some states were willing to defend the interests of these *koina*.

³⁷ Polyb. 18.11.4.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 18.11.5-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 18.11.13.

⁴⁰ Eckstein (1987) 281-282, 284-285.

experienced envoy Damoteles) fell victim to a rumor then circulating in Rome: that the Roman army had been utterly defeated in Asia.⁴¹

The Romans wished to learn more from the Aetolians, who, by virtue of their proximity, interests, and alliance with Antiochus, might have been better informed about events in the East. “Among other things,” however, they asked where the Aetolians themselves had obtained this information. The answer reveals both how limited the knowledge of a comparatively outward-looking koinon (thanks to its maritime activity) could be regarding developments that directly concerned it, and how credulous or perhaps reckless the Aetolian envoys themselves were. By claiming that the report had been supplied by their own agents accompanying the Roman consul Lucius Scipio in Asia, they were either attempting to mislead the Senate or mistaking rumor for fact. If, as there is no reason to doubt, Valerius’ story is substantially accurate,⁴² it is possible that the supposed Aetolian agents had themselves been deceived. Yet this possibility only strengthens the conclusion, since those informants were not in distant Italy but in Asia itself, the very theatre of operations.

The senators, as expected, were unmoved by the Aetolians’ Cassandra-like warnings. They likely possessed contrary information, and Valerius’ narrative gives the impression of continuous intelligence from Roman commanders in the East to the Senate.⁴³ More probably, the Romans were simply unwilling to let a rumor shape their decisions. As one would expect, given the distorted view the Aetolian envoys had of events in Asia, the embassy ended in complete failure: the Aetolians were ordered to leave Rome within a day and to quit Italy within fifteen days; and the Romans declared that henceforth any new embassy from the Aetolian *Koinon* would be regarded as hostile, unless a contrary recommendation came from Roman generals in the East.⁴⁴ Thereafter, the number of Aetolian embassies to Rome (so far as we know) declined dramatically.

3. ROME AS “OVERLORD”: THE CASES OF THE ACHAEANS, LYCIANS, AND CRETANS

The outstanding position and growing strength of the Achaean League in the Peloponnese did not escape the Senate’s notice, especially as this powerful Roman ally could turn into a

⁴¹ Liv. 37.48.

⁴² Livy, however, does not dismiss the claim (*ibid.* 37.48.7).

⁴³ *Ibid.* 37.48.5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 37.49.7-8.

potential obstacle to Rome's policy in Greece.⁴⁵ The Achaeans, however, perhaps having learned from the Aetolians' misfortunes, tried to limit any pretext that might make the Senate hostile to them. This effort shaped the League's relations with Rome throughout the second century BC and affected the conduct of its ambassadors before the Senate.

Yet, commonplace as it may sound, the problem for the Achaeans at that time was their very success. From the Roman perspective, the Achaean League was a particularly strong state at a moment when others – Aetolians, Epirotes, Thessalians – were in decline. Justin succinctly, if somewhat idealized, conveys the reason for Roman mistrust: the key word is the League's federal constitution (*conspiratio universa*).⁴⁶ To outsiders, the Achaeans appeared as a collection of cities that nonetheless acted as a single power in times of crisis. Polybius' account likewise suggests that the Achaeans themselves sensed the effectiveness of their federal organization.⁴⁷ Accordingly, in their embassies to the Senate they expected to be treated as equals. Here lay the seed of mutual misunderstanding: to be an *amicus* or *socius* of Rome did not entail equality with Rome, and Roman *fides* among allies was less a relationship between peers than a form of dependence.⁴⁸ This became a source of misreading on both sides, by Roman and Achaean politicians and envoys alike.⁴⁹

How empty that Achaean conviction could be is shown by the embassy of 184 BC, dispatched to mollify the Senate after it rejected the requests of its envoy Caecilius Metellus.⁵⁰ Apollonidas, speaking for the Achaeans, advanced before the Senate a time-honored argument later enshrined in international law as state sovereignty: the necessity that one state respect another's internal laws. The Achaeans, he said, had “done no wrong and were guilty of no offense” in not convening the assembly, because “among the Achaeans it is a law not to call the many together unless deliberation is required on alliance or war, or unless the Senate sends letters” – the latter a clause the Romans perhaps misunderstood.⁵¹ In Metellus' case, none of this applied: he had delivered neither “letters from the Senate” to the federal magistrates nor written instructions of any kind.

It should be noted that Apollonidas did not invoke a vague customary norm about sovereignty, long important in Greek political life; he explained concretely why the Achaeans

⁴⁵ After the deterioration of Rome's relations with the Aetolian League, the Achaean League appeared as the only body capable of replacing the once significant Aetolian influence on Roman policy in Greece. See Liv. 34.26.4-8 for Flamininus' reliance on the Achaean opinion during the conflict against Nabis.

⁴⁶ Just. *Epit.* 34.1.1-2.

⁴⁷ Polyb. 2.37.9-11.

⁴⁸ See Gruen (1982).

⁴⁹ Polybius (24.10.9) still speaks of a measure of equality between Achaeans and Romans in the time of Callicrates (*ισολογία*), but this semblance was soon shattered.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 22.11.6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 22.12.5-7.

could not comply with Metellus' demands, what internal laws prevented convening the assembly at that moment and under what conditions it could be called.⁵² Whether they were merely dressing up an awkward refusal in legalistic arguments cannot be known.⁵³ What is clear is that they aimed to set out the formal process required to convene the League's assembly, in order to forestall similar demands from future senatorial envoys. It is even possible that such Roman demands were not unique in 184; the embassy sought either to curb such spontaneous requests or to channel them into a legal framework, namely, prior receipt of formal senatorial letters.

The Senate, unsurprisingly, was not persuaded to set aside its envoys' requirements in favor of scrupulous adherence to Achaean law. It warned Apollonidas with a friendly advice: that the Achaeans should "pay heed and extend the fitting reception to the ambassadors whom they continually send out" just as, the Senate added, Romans themselves do for ambassadors who come to them.⁵⁴ In other words, the Senate would not endure further slights to its envoys: the League's laws were expected to yield to Roman whims. The tone verged on paternal: the senators urged the Achaeans to "pay attention," while asking them to take back to Megalopolis the message that Roman envoys should be treated as Rome treated others' envoys. Would the Senate, one wonders, have complied if an Achaean embassy had asked it to act contrary to Roman law?

In practice, the value of the Achaeans as a source of information for Rome was limited. One reason was that they generally avoided airing internal disputes before the Senate. When the actions of another power threatened their interests, however, they proved far less reluctant to do so. In such cases Achaean envoys strove to show that Rome's interests in Greece were likewise at stake. This is clear in the handling of the "Spartan question": Spartan actions before Sparta's admission into the League were treated as an interstate issue, but afterward as an internal Achaean matter.⁵⁵ Most Spartans would not accept Megalopolis' view, especially since the Senate was hardly opposed to Spartan aims. The incorporation of all Peloponnesian states

⁵² The same argument was unsuccessfully advanced by the Boeotians in 186 BC (Polyb. 22.4.7-9). When they ultimately ignored the senatorial decree, no reprisals followed, since the Senate showed indifference to the matter (22.4.16-17).

⁵³ Had the Achaeans granted the exception demanded by Metellus, they would have demonstrated their inability to act independently of certain Roman envoys. By comparison, even a far stronger monarch, Antiochus IV, did not hesitate to yield to the demands of the Roman envoy Popilius Laenas (Polyb. 29.27.4-7). See Μπουραζέλης (2005) 19-27.

⁵⁴ Polyb. 22.12.10.

⁵⁵ For example, in 192 BC the Achaean embassy presented the actions of the Spartan tyrant Nabis to the Senate as those of a state undermining peace in the Peloponnese (Liv. 35.13.3, 22.2).

into the League, a long-standing Achaean ambition since Aratus, was achieved at the price of Rome's growing distrust.⁵⁶

That distrust is evident in most embassies sent to Rome by the party of Philopoemen and his successors. One such case came in 182 BC, during the Messenian revolt.⁵⁷ Polybius reports that Quintus Marcius Philippus, the Senate's special envoy to Greece, had composed his own report on events. The senators' questions followed his report rather than the envoys' presentations.⁵⁸ In his *ἀποπροσβεία* (an ambassador's report), Marcius criticized the Achaeans for declining to submit their affairs to the Senate and for pursuing an independent course of action in the Peloponnese, a stance unlikely to have been well received in the curia.

This embassy is instructive for the Senate's procedure in hearing Greek envoys. It appears to have relied on confidential reports from its own agents in Greece, when available, treating them as more reliable baselines. On this basis, it questioned Greek ambassadors and assessed whether their accounts corresponded with Rome's own information. In this way, envoys could find themselves at a disadvantage before a Senate that was already comparatively well informed, as in the case of the Aetolian embassy of 189 BC, already noted, or that of the Cretans (*Κρηταιεῖς*) in 170 BC, to be discussed below. Such a procedure presupposed a genuine degree of senatorial interest, since only in exceptional cases did the Senate dispatch its own missions abroad.

In the Achaean case, most disputes that reached the Senate were in essence internal League matters. Yet every party, including the League itself, judged it prudent to keep the Senate informed, in hopes of winning its favor. They had little choice: Rome could, as Marcius' case shows, easily accuse them of acting without its acquiescence. Even so, Marcius' negative portrayal of Achaean policy in the Peloponnese likely stemmed from a misunderstanding of the League's federal organization and its relations with member cities. Unfortunately for the Achaeans, his report carried greater weight in the Senate than their ambassadors' explanations.

Paradoxically, the Senate's handling of Greek embassies could reinforce Achaean assumptions about the *ἰσολογία*, the supposed equality of their state with Rome.⁵⁹ It frequently issued ambiguous replies to Achaean (and other Greek) envoys, perhaps to avoid disappointing friends and allies while preserving flexibility. Such vague responses invited one-sided

⁵⁶ Cartledge, Spawforth (2002) 73-76.

⁵⁷ Polyb. 23.9.1, 12-14, 17.3; Liv. 40.2.7.

⁵⁸ Polyb. 23.9.4-5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 24.10.9.

interpretations by all *koina*, not only the Achaeans – interpretations shaped by what each wished to extract from a Roman *responsum*, without pushing Rome into open opposition.⁶⁰

Consequently, in 181 BC the Achaeans, especially the party of Lykortas, were readily persuaded by their envoys, sent to report on the settlement of affairs at Messene and related matters, that the Senate would not firmly oppose the League's handling of the Spartan exiles.⁶¹ They likely held this belief even before dispatching the embassy under Bippus, whose mission merely confirmed their expectations. They effectively discounted the counter-embassy from Sparta, which claimed to carry senatorial letters addressed to the Achaeans requesting the return of the Spartan exiles. The Achaean assembly therefore maintained its previous position after Bippus reported that these letters had been prompted not by any deliberate initiative of the Senate, but by the persistence of the exiles.⁶²

Viewed against Callicrates' subsequent claims in the Senate, this decision of Philopoemen's successors appears naïve. Yet for a federation accustomed to democratic procedure and public persuasion, such behavior is understandable. Polybius' language of counsel and admonition in describing interstate dealings, especially between the Achaean League and Rome, is revealing, even where it reflects his own interpretive framing: some Achaean politicians appear to have conceived of the Senate as a kind of "international court" before which parties to a dispute argued their case.⁶³ The Senate's ambiguity, coupled with the Achaeans' conviction that the entire Peloponnese was their internal affair, reinforced their intransigence.

Thus, according to Lykortas, the Achaeans needed only to explain to the Senate both the justice of their case and the likely consequences that a senatorial *responsum* would have for Rome's friends and allies. Such explanation was necessary, he argued, because the Senate might lack familiarity with Greek political balances. Polybius summarizes his father's position: if the Romans are shown that certain requests are impossible to fulfil, or would bring shame and harm to their friends, they are not inclined to insist upon them or enforce compliance. Likewise, if they are made to understand that obedience to senatorial letters would compel the Achaeans to violate their oaths, laws, and the inscribed conventions that hold the federation together, they will withdraw their demand and accept that the Achaeans are justified in refusing.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cf. the case of Charops, who, suppressing the Senate's non-committal response, falsely reported to his compatriots that the Romans approved of his actions (Polyb. 32.6.9).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 24.1-2.

⁶² *Ibid.* 24.2.4-5.

⁶³ On the role of morality in Polybius, see Eckstein (1995).

⁶⁴ Polyb. 24.8.2-5; the episode is described in more detail shortly afterwards (24.8-10). It is worth noting that Livy makes no mention of this embassy, despite the importance Polybius assigns to it.

In other words, Lycortas maintained that if Roman demands were shown to be incompatible with Achaean treaties, laws, and interests, they would be withdrawn, since Rome would not wish to provoke internal disorder in an allied state, especially by overturning established arrangements.⁶⁵ Lycortas may not have been entirely wrong; where he erred was in not foreseeing that his domestic opponents would cast such well-intentioned sidelining of senatorial dicta as outright defiance of Roman policy in the Peloponnese. The pro-Roman faction under Callicrates soon exploited this stance to advance its own aims, exposing to the Senate the actions of its rivals and their effects. In the long run, intra-Achaean strife supplied Rome with ample knowledge of Peloponnesian politics and of League policy.

The reversal of Lycortas' line is tied to the Achaean embassy of 180 BC, described in detail by Polybius. Its purpose was precisely to inform the Senate about the Achaeans' treatment of the Spartan exiles a year earlier. Lycortas' party opposed sending the mission, for the reasons just outlined; their opponents sensed that the League's independent posture had already provoked Roman resentment.

For Polybius, that embassy marked a turning point, owing above all to the conduct of one envoy, Callicrates.⁶⁶ It is a rare case of a federal ambassador standing apart from his instructions, even to the point of denouncing the very state he represented.⁶⁷ Callicrates sought to chart his own policy through the mission, to win the Senate's favor by echoing negative stereotypes it had likely already formed about his compatriots. What he divulged did not differ materially from Marcius' *ἀποπρεσβεία*, which he surely knew and which may have influenced him. His aim, rather, was to remind the Senate that the Achaean League was not only Lycortas' faction: there were men in Megalopolis who understood Rome's concerns and would appease them at any cost.⁶⁸

Callicrates portrayed Achaean Peloponnese as a region of lawlessness and impunity. His central claim was that the Achaeans disregarded senatorial decisions because the Senate failed to enforce them. As a result, they honored politicians who opposed Roman policy and discredited those who urged compliance. He urged the Senate to demonstrate active concern for Greek affairs, citing the Achaeans as a recent and widely known example: they had ignored Quintus Marcius' instructions that no decision be taken regarding the Messenian exiles without

⁶⁵ This, of course, led them to disregard the senatorial decrees presented by the Roman envoys. Cf. Derow (2015) 170-171, esp. n. 7, for cases where the Achaeans questioned the Senate without consequences.

⁶⁶ Polyb. 24.8-9. For Callicrates' policy, and more generally for that of the Achaeans during this period, Errington (1969) and Deininger (1971), remain essential studies.

⁶⁷ Cf. Paus. 7.12.2 on Menalcidas.

⁶⁸ Even if the price was the exile of many of their fellow citizens to Rome (Polyb. 30.13.8-11).

prior Roman judgment.⁶⁹ Instead, the Achaeans declared war, ravaged the country, and exiled or executed its leading citizens. With skill, Callicrates cast his opponents' policy as direct defiance of Rome (showing keen insight into Roman temperament). The Messenians' only crime, he argued, was to appeal to Rome for justice. In other words, Philopoemen's successors were plundering a people friendly to Rome and denying that people's right to Roman *clementia*. He closed in like manner on the question of the Spartan exiles, branding his rivals' line as essentially "anti-Roman."

The senators were impressed by Callicrates' speech, perhaps even surprised by such candor from an Achaean politician.⁷⁰ His arguments underscored the value of men of his type and the importance of supporting them. Yet the political consequences extended beyond the defeat of Callicrates' immediate rivals. As Rome increasingly accommodated the demands of centrifugal forces in the Peloponnese, the weakening of those who challenged Roman directives gradually came to affect the League itself. In this sense, Polybius was partly justified in describing his father's opponent as "the author of great ills for all Greeks, and most of all for the Achaeans."⁷¹ For the present study, the important point is that the informational value of individual politicians could carry significant political consequences. The contrast with the Senate's earlier practice, relying on occasional and fragmentary reports from allied embassies a generation earlier, is striking. Henceforth, Achaean envoys, and by extension Greek ambassadors more generally, were increasingly expected to be men of the "Callicrates type": figures whose reliability, from the Senate's perspective, was beyond question.

A similar appeal to the Senate against a powerful ally came from an embassy of Xanthos in 177 BC, acting on behalf of the Lycian *koinon*.⁷² Its purpose was to brief the Senate on Rhodian conduct following the Treaty of Apamea, which had placed Lycia and Caria under Rhodian suzerainty,⁷³ and to explain the reasons for Lycia's revolt.⁷⁴ Here we do not have intra-federal strife, but a *koinon* accusing its overlord of injustices. The Lycian envoy Nicostratus presented

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 24.9.12-13. Years later Marcius refused the offer of Achaean assistance in the war against Perseus (29.24.2).

⁷⁰ Polybius records the Roman sentiment, expressed in their official reply, that "there should be more men in states like Callicrates" (24.10.7). Yet he stops short of describing him as a "traitor", perhaps aware from personal experience that usefulness to Rome did not necessarily amount to betrayal of Greece.

⁷¹ Polyb. 24.10.8; cf. Hdt. 5.97; Thuc. 2.12.3 and Polyb. 9.37.10 for similar expressions in Greek history. The latter passage of Polybius recalls the concerns voiced in 210 BC by the Acarnanian envoy Lyciscus, echoing, no doubt, those expressed seven years earlier by Agelaus of Naupactus, on the advent of Rome in the West. See Erskine (2020) 71-74. For assessments of the embassy of Callicrates, see Ferrary (1988) 291-306; Derow (2015) 169-179.

⁷² For details of this conflict, see Wiemer (2002) 260-271, 277-288; more generally on the League, see Behrwald (2015).

⁷³ Polyb. 21.46.8; Liv. 38.39.13.

⁷⁴ Polyb. 25.4-5; Liv. 41.6.8-12; App. *Mith.* 254.

the conduct of the Rhodians, friends and allies of Rome, in terms the Senate may have been hearing for the first time.⁷⁵

Nicostratus succeeded in placing the Lycian question on the Senate's agenda by exploiting Roman suspicions of Rhodes. In describing conditions in Lycia, he employed an exaggeration, perhaps an unintended one, that touched a sensitive nerve: the Lycians, he claimed, had begun to long for the days of Seleucid rule, even describing their subjection under Antiochus III as a form of “honorable freedom”.⁷⁶ The suggestion that the Lycians preferred the rule of a king to Rhodian oversight reflected poorly not on Rome itself but on one of its principal eastern allies. To the senators, such sentiments may have appeared less as evidence of disloyalty than as a sign of Lycian desperation and of Rhodes’ inability to manage its dependencies effectively.

The Lycians appealed to the pity of many senators by vividly portraying both the oppressive conduct of the Rhodians and their own distress. The result was the dispatch of a Roman commission to Rhodes, instructed to make clear that the Lycians had not been handed over to the Rhodians as a gift but rather were for the most part friends and allies”.⁷⁷ In other words, this embassy drew the Senate’s attention to conditions in Lycia that had previously been imperfectly understood and viewed largely through the perspective of a trusted ally.

The Rhodian reply, conveyed through an embassy of their own, lies beyond our immediate scope, but it is worth noting. The Rhodians maintained that the Lycians had misled the Romans, who, in their view, did not fully appreciate the circumstances of the dispute. What particularly offended them was the Senate’s declaration that Lycia had not been granted to Rhodes as a “gift”, but stood in a relationship of alliance. Polybius adds that this distinction furnished the Lycians with a renewed justification for resistance, encouraging them once again to struggle for autonomy and freedom.⁷⁸ Whatever the Senate’s ultimate intentions, the Lycian embassy had succeeded in challenging the Rhodian interpretation of the settlement and in casting further doubt on Rhodes’ conduct in Lycia. At a time when suspicions of Rhodes were already beginning to circulate in Rome, this could only strengthen the position of those inclined to view the island’s growing power with concern.

Of course, nothing guaranteed that an embassy’s mission to Rome would succeed or translate into political advantages at home. Even envoys from allied states actively supporting

⁷⁵ This did not mean, of course, that the Senate had no further grounds for harboring suspicions toward Rhodes (Polyb. 25.4.7-10).

⁷⁶ Liv. 41.6.9. Nicostratus seems to have contrasted the constitutions of democracy and monarchy, but inverted their conventional meanings for both Greeks and Romans: democracy (Rhodes) as slavery, and monarchy (the Seleucids) as freedom, albeit an “honorable freedom” (*praeclara libertas*).

⁷⁷ Polyb. 25.4.5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 25.5.2-3.

the Roman war effort could not predict the Senate's reception, since the slightest suspicion might transform goodwill into distrust. Such was the experience of the embassy of the Koinon of the Cretans (*τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Κρηταίων*) in 170 BC, during the Third Macedonian War. Ostensibly, its purpose was to inform the Senate that an auxiliary corps of Cretan archers had been dispatched to Macedonia at the request of the consul Licinius.⁷⁹

The envoys probably did not anticipate the turn their mission would take when the Senate abruptly asked whether an even larger number of Cretan archers were simultaneously serving under Perseus. Rome attached little value to services rendered by an ally if the same services were also furnished to its enemy, particularly when a considerable number of Cretans were in fact fighting on the opposite side. Accustomed to the ambiguous loyalties often displayed by Greek allies, the Senate made it clear that its favor was not automatic. Even if the *koinon*, or at least a majority of its member cities, had formally aligned itself with Rome, it was still held accountable for the large number of Cretans serving in Perseus' army.⁸⁰ Even if these men were merely mercenaries – a point open to debate given the political fragmentation of Crete – the cities of the island had done little to prevent their departure.⁸¹

The broader question, whether the actions of private individuals could render a state answerable to a third power, was not unique to Polybius; it had been raised even more sharply in the case of Queen Teuta in 229 BC.⁸² Unlike Teuta, however, the Cretan envoys neither protested nor sought to justify their compatriots by appealing to tradition. They replied candidly that, in fact, a large number of Cretans were serving under Perseus.⁸³

Such ingenuous candor should not surprise us. The Senate's question whether a greater number of Cretan archers were serving with Perseus than with the Romans implied a degree of prior awareness, at least of the fact that Cretans were present in the Macedonian army. It also placed the envoys in an awkward position, forcing them to acknowledge the scale of Cretan involvement on the opposing side. Faced with a probing and evidently well-informed Senate, the envoys had little room to maneuver if they wished to avoid aggravating suspicions: they

⁷⁹ Liv., 42.35.6-7; 43.7.

⁸⁰ At the beginning of the war at least 3,000 Cretan mercenaries were in Perseus' camp (Liv. 42.51.7).

⁸¹ Griffith (1933) 92-93.

⁸² Polybius (2.8) reports that Queen Teuta agreed to restrain the aggressions of her officials against Rome, but not those of her subjects engaged in piracy, since, as she claimed, it was not lawful for kings to prevent the Illyrians from profiting at sea (2.8.8). The Roman envoys replied categorically that the Illyrians must either abandon such practices in favor of what they called the "noblest custom" (*τὸ κάλλιστον ἔθος*) of the Romans, or the Romans would take measures to suppress them. Appian, in his account of the war, does not mention this exchange (App. *Ill.* 18-19).

⁸³ Unlike most Greek *koina*, the cities of the *koinon* of the *Kretaieis* could belong to different alliances; see Chaniotis (2015) 379-380.

replied truthfully. Their answer suggests that they recognized the narrow corner into which they had been driven.

In any case, this information mattered little to the Senate. If anyone needed details about those reinforcements (or about Cretan mercenaries with Perseus), it was Licinius himself, not the senators in Rome. The motives for sending the embassy must therefore be sought elsewhere: in reconciling the *koinon* with Rome and briefing the Senate on the unrest then roiling the island.⁸⁴

What the Senate cared to know was, in effect, which side the Cretans ultimately supported. The question put to the envoys was less a request for a definitive answer than a challenge that required a collective response from the *koinon* itself.⁸⁵ The expectation was that the Cretan communities would demonstrate in practice that they preferred the friendship of the Roman people to that of King Perseus, which would entail recalling those serving in Macedonian pay.⁸⁶ Otherwise, Rome signaled that it would no longer regard them as reliable allies (*certi socii*), with all that such a designation implied. The episode illustrates how easily an embassy could be transformed into a vehicle for Roman expectations: returning from Rome with one's political standing intact could indeed prove a Herculean task.

4. CONCLUSION

As the foregoing discussion has shown, the primary aim of the Greek *koina*, in dispatching embassies to the Roman Senate, was above all to secure the Senate's favor for a policy they intended to pursue or, very often, to effect a reconciliation with it. This was achieved by briefing the Senate on current political developments in Greece. The embassies were rarely large, and individual member communities of a *koinon* could, and often did, send parallel missions to Rome. As we have seen, the individuals selected belonged to the political leadership of the federations, men who, by the nature of their office, maintained contacts with many Romans and were often quite familiar with senatorial politics.

⁸⁴ For these disturbances see Polyb. 28.14-15. Like all other embassies from Greece and Asia described by Livy (43.6), this mission formed part of the broader effort to conciliate or win over Rome during the Third Macedonian War. The dispatch of archers by the *koinon* was either a piece of military intelligence or, more simply, the pretext used by the *Kretaieis* to send an embassy to the Senate. Without being placed in the wider context of the Roman peace that was to follow the war, the embassy would have had no political significance at all.

⁸⁵ The general assembly of the *koinon* decided on the dispatch of military forces abroad (though probably not of mercenaries); see Chaniotis (1999) 289-290.

⁸⁶ Liv. 43.7.3-4.

Most of the information we possess concerns the strongest Greek states of the period, namely the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues. This is because the bulk of our Hellenistic evidence comes from literary rather than epigraphic sources; the latter often illuminate aspects that most ancient historians omit. From these references we may infer that certain envoys were sent from their homelands to the Senate at least twice, an indication that selection on the basis of one's political connections in Rome was a significant factor. Their mission in Rome did not end with their appearance before the Senate; it also included private visits beforehand to the homes of many senators, a sign of the envoys' relative familiarity with leading Roman political figures.

Communication with the Senate was reciprocal, in that the Senate sought to ascertain the views of its Greek allies and often invited the federations to send embassies to Rome. The information it received at this time concerned chiefly political and military events in Greece, the balance of power, and the influence of Rome's friends and enemies within the *koina*. While the Senate initially placed some trust in the reports of allied ambassadors, it gradually distanced itself from them. This development is evident from the fact that it began to distinguish ambassadors according to the political faction they represented within a federation. The main reason is that, from the early second century BC, Rome's interests brought it ever closer to Greek affairs, necessitating the dispatch of its own agents to Greece. This trend was accelerated both by the effective elimination of Rome's principal opponents in the East and by the tendency of the stronger *koina* to disengage from Rome's tight embrace.

The informational value of federal embassies was genuine but limited. There are two reasons for this. First, the Senate possessed its own intelligence system for developments around the Mediterranean, Greece included. Second, its willingness to trust certain federations diminished as its interests in Greece expanded. Some *koina*, such as the Aetolian and the Achaean, could potentially become dangerous to Rome's hegemony in Greece by virtue of their size, military capacity, and political influence. Even with respect to reports from less powerful federations, Rome usually sent a commission of its own after an issue had been presented. As Polybius observed, the Romans left no foreign matter unexamined and insisted on deciding every issue themselves.⁸⁷ The successful outcome of a federation's embassy, however often achieved in specific cases, always had to reckon with Rome's tendency (indeed, the tendency of any great power) to reserve for itself the last word in every political question.

LIST OF CITED WORKS

⁸⁷ Polyb. 23.17.4.

Battistoni, F. 2009. "Rome, Kinship and Diplomacy"; in C. Eilers (ed.) *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, Leiden: Brill 2009, 73-97.

———. 2015. "Une diplomatie informelle? Quelques remarques sur les affaires des ambassadeurs grecs à Rome"; in B. Grass - G. Stouder (eds.) *La diplomatie romaine sous la République: réflexions sur une pratique. Actes des rencontres de Paris (21-22 juin 2013) et Genève (31 octobre-1er novembre 2013)*, Besançon: Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité 2015, 175-188.

Behrwald, R. 2015. "The Lykian League"; in H. Beck - P. Funke (eds.) *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 403-418.

Canali de Rossi, F. 1997. *Le ambascerie dal mondo greco a Roma in età repubblicana*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per la storia antica.

———. 2009. "Le ambascerie dal mondo greco a Roma: omissioni, errori, novità e studi recenti", in *Veleia* 26: 13-46.

Cartledge, P. - Spawforth, A. 2002. *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities*. London - New York: Routledge.

Chaniotis, A. 1999. "The Epigraphy of Hellenistic Crete. The Cretan Koinon: New and Old Evidence"; in *Atti del XI Congresso Internazionale di Epigrafia Greca e Latina*, Roma 1999, 287-300.

———. 2015. "Federalism on Crete: The Cretan Koinon and the Koinon of the Oreioi"; in H. Beck - P. Funke (eds.) *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 377-385.

Curty, O. 1995. *Les parentés légendaires entre cités grecques*. Genève: Librairie Droz.

Dany, O. 1999. *Akarnanien im Hellenismus: Geschichte und Völkerrecht in Nordwestgriechenland*. München: C. H. Beck.

Deininger, J. 1971. *Der politische Widerstand gegen Rom in Griechenland*. Berlin - New York: De Gruyter.

Derow, P. 2015. "Polybios and the Embassy of Callicrates"; in A. Erskine - J. C. Quinn (eds.) *Rome, Polybios, and the East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015, 169-180.

Eckstein, A. M. 1987. *Senate and General: Individual Decision-Making and Roman Foreign Relations, 264-194 BC*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- . A. M. 1995. *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Errington, R. M. 1969. *Philopoemen*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Ersine, A. 2001. *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2020. “Changes of Fortune: Polybius and the Transformation of Greece”; in J. Klooster - I. N. I. Kuin (eds.) *After the Crisis: Remembrance, Re-anchoring and Recovery in Ancient Greece and Rome*, London - New York: Bloomsbury Publishing 2020, 71-74.
- Ferrary, J.-L. 1988. *Philhellénisme et impérialisme. Aspects idéologiques de la conquête romaine du monde hellénistique, de la seconde guerre de Macédoine à la guerre contre Mithridate*. Rome: École française de Rome.
- . 2007. “Les ambassadeurs grecs au Sénat romain”; in J. Caillet - M. Sot (eds.) *L’audience: Rituels et cadres spatiaux dans l’Antiquité et le haut Moyen Âge*, Paris: Picard 2007, 113-122.
- Griffith, G. T. 1933. *The Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gruen, E. S. 1982. “Greek πίστις and Roman fides”, in *Athenaeum* 60: 50-68.
- . 1984. *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*. 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Habicht, C. 2001. “Tod auf der Gesandtschaftsreise”, in *Studi Ellenistici* 13: 9-17.
- Holleaux, M. 1921. *Rome, la Grèce et les monarchies hellénistiques au IIIe siècle avant J.-C. (273-205)*. Paris: de Boccard.
- Jones, C. P. 1999. *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Linderski, J. 2007. “Ambassadors Go to Rome” (1995); in *Roman Questions II: Selected Papers*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 40-60.
- Mitropoulos, G. 2025. “Politics in the Aetolian Koinon at the Coming of Rome”, in *Veleia* 42: 33-42.

Μπουραζέλης, Κ. 2005. “Από την ελληνιστική στη ρωμαϊκή διπλωματία ή στον κύκλω των στενέματα”; in Σ. Πατούρα-Σπανού (επιμ.) *Διπλωματία και Πολιτική: Ιστορική Προσέγγιση*, Αθήνα: ΕΙΕ 2005, 19-27.

Oost, S. I. 1975. *Roman Policy in Epirus and Acarnania in the Age of the Roman Conquest of Greece*. New York: Arno Press.

Schwahn, W. 1931. “Sympoliteia”, in *Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, IV. Stuttgart, 1171-1266.

Souris, G. A. 1984. “Studies in Provincial Diplomacy under the Principate.” Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge.

Wiemer, H.-U. 2002. *Krieg, Handel und Piraterie. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des hellenistischen Rhodos*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.