

Peloponnesian politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Roman world ventured into the Greek world in 229 BC during the First Illyrian War to stop Illyrian pirates sabotaging trading routes across the Adriatic, which led the Republic to establish a protectorate over Greek cities in southern Illyria and Epirus.

Roughly eighty years and four Macedonian wars later, the Romans had established hegemony within Greece proper. From such humble beginnings, with a desire to protect Greek autonomy, the situation had turned itself on its head when L. Mummius Achaecus sacked the city of Corinth, defeating the Achaean League in the eponymous war of 146 BC. Over the course of those eighty or so years, the Roman Senate and its legates in the field embarked upon many diplomatic embassies within the Peloponnese, arbitrating between many disputes that arose from there, involving powers like Sparta as well as the Achaean League. I should like to explore Rome's aims behind its diplomatic interventions in the Peloponnese between the Achaean League and the rest of the Peloponnese, the aims of the Achaean League and the other Peloponnesian polities' response to Roman and analyse discrepancies in Polybius' account of the events. Rome's aims in the Peloponnese for the Achaean League: Contact between the Achaean League and the Roman Republic was first established after the demise of the Illyrian War in 228 BC.

Roman envoys were sent to the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues respectively to announce this victory with another envoy sent to Athens after the swearing of the peace treaty (Polybius 2. 12. 4-8; Eckstein 2008: 41).

However, these initial contacts were not followed up; no permanent treaties were signed (Eckstein 2008: 74). Presumably, the purpose of these envoys

was to seek approval and recognition of their endeavours against the piratical Illyrians.

Nothing more is heard between these two until the Macedonian wars. The Achaean League threw its lot in with Philip V of Macedon during the First Macedonian War (Eckstein 2008: 113). By the Second Macedonian War in 200 BC, Rome had freed up its forces by defeating Hannibal in the Second Punic War and thus could exercise more force against Philip, which did not just include using its armies, but diplomacy too. The Romans actually managed to convince the Achaean League to change sides and to support Rome (Eckstein 2008: 285). This was a masterstroke; in one fell swoop, Macedon was alienated of allies and Philip was surrounded. The addition of the Achaean League to its alliance meant that Greece in 197 BC was ‘friendly’ – a good position to be in (Eckstein 2008: 285).

The alliance with the Achaean League was made official when Achaean envoys visited Rome in the winter of 198/7 (Livy 32. 23. 1-2; Polyb. 18. 10. 11, 42.

6). Roman foreign policy seems to have been conducted by those commanding legions during this period. The Romans, or more specifically Pro-consul Flamininus and a decemvir, rewarded allies in the war with territory – the Achaean League was given possession of Corinth, making it the most powerful state in the Peloponnese; simultaneously many polities formerly under Macedonian influence were ‘freed’ (Polyb. 18. 47.

6-7; Eckstein 2008: 288). The idea behind this was to create a balance of power – though the Achaean League seems to have become Rome’s main

ally in Greece at the time, and profited from it via Corinth, Rome must have recognised the danger of giving one state too much power whilst celebrating Greek freedom at the Isthmian games of 196: interstate freedom was to be backed by Rome (Eckstein 2008: 289). Despite this, Roman forces withdrew from the region in 194 BC, which has been interpreted by many scholars to mean that they exhibited a lack of interest in Greek affairs but really it was just a continuation of policy (Eckstein 2008: 285, 292). In appointing Flamininus as pro-consul, the senate opted to view Greece as a sphere of interest (Eckstein 2008: 298), yet maintaining a loose alliance towards friendly Greek states which Flamininus viewed as the best way to gain Greek support for any future conflicts (Eckstein 2008: 299, citing Eckstein 1987: 311-15). This appeared to work with the Achaean League who appealed to Rome for help against Spartan aggression under Nabis.

Flamininus called a conference of Greek states in 195 BC to gain support for Roman military intervention against Nabis (Eckstein 2008: 286). The Roman-Syrian War of 192-188 BC saw the Romans call upon Achaean help again as Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire marched an army through Greece, forcibly persuading states to his cause (Eckstein 2008: 332). This was understandable, since Rome's former allies in the Hellenes were being recruited under duress by Antiochus. That said, Achaean forces spent more time conquering the Peloponnese than helping Rome against Antiochus. Flamininus complained about the Achaean League's actions against Elis, Sparta and Messene but ultimately the League went unpunished and was even rewarded with a permanent treat of alliance in 192/1 BC (Eckstein 2008: 332-3). These territorial gains were formally accepted by Rome at the

Peace of Apamea in 188 BC, which marked the ending of the war with Antiochus.

Presumably, this was done in return for Achaean assistance (Livy 36. 31. 5-9; 36. 35. 7; Errington 2008: 219). Once again, Rome found itself at the head of a coalition of Greek states, but the treaty with the Achaean League must have implied that the Achaeans would fight alongside Rome.

The alliance was practical, since a number of Greek states fell to Antiochus during the previous war, at least Rome could ensure one power remained loyal in the region; hence putting up with Achaean aggression was a small price to pay for a guaranteed ally in Hellas. Hereafter follows a series of attempts by the senate and visiting embassies in the 180s BC to intervene in Achaean aggression. For example, the senate refused to aid the Achaean League in its suppression of a Messenian revolt in 182-1 BC. The result of Roman intervention in Greece and of Achaean aggression in the Peloponnese meant that the senate and its various embassies became the de facto receiver of complaints from Messenian and Spartan diplomats. Over time, the Roman senate and the legates viewed themselves as having the right to mediate and modify Achaean actions (Eckstein 2008: 351).

The senators urged the League to return Spartan exiles and to stop executions after they had occupied Sparta, which Eckstein has interpreted as the Romans attempting to advise the Achaeans so that they might lead to better relations between the Spartans and Achaeans (2008: 351). The senate often urged the League to refer such disputes to them instead of acting on their own. However, during this decade, Roman advice was largely ignored

and Achaean actions went mostly unpunished, again (Eckstein 2008: 351-2).

A demonstrable example was the crushing of a Messenian revolt, where Roman attempts at mediation failed yet again and were even covered up when the senate assured the League that they had done their job as allies by preventing Messenian rebels from accessing anti-war materials (Polyb.

23. 17. 3; Eckstein 2008: 352). The senate wanted to solve disputes between Greek states, but upon receiving representatives from the Greeks, the senate deferred the matter to a select few senators or Greek mediators.

Rome seemed to be far more interested in Greek states recognising their status rather than exercising control (Eckstein 2008: 359). Thus Rome's ineffectual arbitration in the Peloponnese must have led leading Achaean League members to think that they had a right to do what they want and Rome was maintaining their status quo; this was altogether not surprising since Rome had effectively forged the status quo. The 170s BC marked a different approach in Roman diplomacy in Greek affairs. The long-standing aim of Rome was to maintain a balance of power in the Greek sphere and to prevent one power from being too powerful. In 171 BC, Rome deemed Macedon to threaten stability in the area and once it was beaten, Rome split it up into four client republics (Eckstein 2008: 365-6). Like the last Macedonian war, foreign policy was dictated by those using the sword! Roman commanders actively supported the creation of pro-Roman factions in polities (Polyb.

24. 10. 3-7; Eckstein 2008: 365-6). The new, post-war hard-line did produce a type of Greek politician who would pledge support to Rome in order to

dominate their states, which is exactly what happened to the Achaean League (Eckstein 2008: 381). Indeed, following Macedon's defeat, evidence of Rome's new approach can be seen in the decision to deport a thousand leading Achaean men with suspected anti-Roman leanings (including Polybius) to Rome (Paus.

7. 10. 11; Gruen 1976: 48). It is likely that this was done to ensure stability in the area rather than to control Achaean affairs (Gruen 1976: 50), and, as such, allowed pro-Roman politicians like Callicrates of Leontion to become influential in local politics (Errington 2008: 250-1). However, during the 160s BC, these pro-Roman factions disappeared in Greek states (Eckstein 2008: 365-6).

Events reverted to type: between the years of 167-150 BC, there were no break-downs in the relations between the Roman Republic and the Achaean League; Rome continued to recognise Achaean dominance in the Peloponnese. In 166 BC, when Delian residents who sought refuge and citizenship in Achaea were subject to law suits by the Athenians who had annexed the island, they asked to be treated under the *simbolon* as Achaeans, which the Athenians refused. When the case was referred in Rome seven years later, the senate ordered in favour of the League, the Athenians had to acknowledge Achaean law and treat the refugees as Achaean citizens (Gruen 1976: 51). It appears to have been the issue of Spartan autonomy which undermined the League's position with Rome. Sparta had detached herself from the Achaean league in 149/8 and the Achaean general Damocritus was preparing to intervene. A Roman legion under Q.

Metellus had arrived in Macedon in 148 BC to head off a new Macedonian threat under Andriscus – it was imperative that Rome kept her allies in the region and so Metellus did not take umbrage when the Achaean council declined his request via envoy to delay action against Sparta (Gruen 1976: 56). Later in the year, Metellus sent another envoy to the League, requesting it to call off action against Sparta until a senatorial embassy had arrived but once again, it was rebuffed (Gruen 1976: 56). Even when, in the summer of 147, the Roman envoy Orestes delivered a message to the Achaean council, who were preparing to go to war with Sparta again, threatening them with war if they did not secede certain cities (Heraclea), the senate followed it up by another envoy preaching cordiality (Gruen 1976: 61); the contradictory envoys possibly implies that opinion in the senate was divided on what action to take. The Achaean strategos Critolaus asked for a six month delay on another Roman embassy on the matter, which the senate honoured (Gruen 1976: 63). However, the League convened and declared war on Sparta. At the same time, the city of Heraclea, which wished to separate from the League and had appealed to Rome, came under siege by Critolaus.

Metellus, who had defeated Andriscus in the Fourth Macedonian War, maintained a legion in Greece and thus was in a position to march against Critolaus to check the Achaeans (Gruen 1976: 65). Critolaus fled and was then defeated by Metellus at Locris. Metellus offered terms of peace in the spring and autumn of 146 but they were rejected both times by the Achaeans (Gruen 1976: 67). Eventually, an army under L.

Mummius defeated the Achaean army at the Battle of Corinth in the same year, sacking the city and putting an end to the war; the League was then

broken up (Numismatic evidence attests that the League's bronze coinage was stopped around 146 BC, which supports the breaking up of the League: Warren 2008: 96). The question that remains is why the dramatic change in attitude from Rome? Many scholars have argued on that the Senate had impatient, tiring of the Achaeans constantly disobeying their attempts at mediation in Peloponnesian affairs on the grounds that there is an absence of any other explanation (Gruen 1976: 69; McGing 2003: 79). This must have been true to a certain extent – Roman demands and generous treatment of the League had failed to prevent conflict in the Peloponnese (Gruen 1976: 69). Here, I might also add another suggestion: despite the on and off uprisings by Messene and Sparta, the League had come to control the entirety of the Peloponnese (see Fig. 1), which was a huge landmass (The region of Elis alone was near 2660km² alone (Roy 2008: 263)) and made the Achaean League more than just a second tier power (Eckstein 2008: 362). Though Macedon had now been pacified, perhaps Rome had realised the League would continue to expand and would continue to be bellicose, thus threatening the balance of power in the region.

If it was not checked, it might have even threatened Rome. Rome's aims in the Peloponnese for other Peloponnesian identities: The first evidence of dialogue we hear between Peloponnesian powers and Rome comes during the First Macedonian War. In its attempts to prevent further Macedonian hegemony in Greece, the Romans sought allies in their war against Philip V. A treaty with Aetolia allowed further informal agreements (*amicitia*) with the poleis of Sparta, Messene and Elis (Polybius 18. 42).

7; Livy 26. 24. 9; Eckstein 2008: 90; Gruen 1984: 20). Peace was established in 205 BC and Rome withdrew its forces from the region.

Yet, for the next five years until the outbreak of the Second Macedonian War, Rome did not pursue any more agreements with Sparta, Elis or Messene (Eckstein 2008: 123); the agreements reached with these powers were informal and did not specifically tie Rome to any last guarantee – Sparta even dropped out of the war a year later (Gruen 1984: 77). Rome was already embroiled in another conflict, the Second Punic War and therefore it made sense for Rome to seek any ally or friend it could to deal with Philip. The senate certainly considered Greece as an important theatre but it could not commit to it because of the war against Hannibal (Eckstein 2008: 90). Rome also displayed its obligations for ‘ friends and allies’ during the saga of Nabis. He had originally allied with Rome during the First Macedonian War (Livy 29.

12; 34. 31). During the Second Macedonian War, Nabis switched sides from supporting Macedon to Rome in order to gain control of Argos; T. Quinctius also asked him to stop attacking the Achaeans (Livy 32.

38-9). Later, Nabis claimed after refusing to liberate Argos, that he had never violated his ‘ friendship and alliance’ with Rome, but the Romans refused him the status of ally because of his maltreatment of Sparta (his own polis) and Messene (Sherwin-White 1984: 62-3). Considering Rome allowed the Achaean League to usurp power in the Peloponnese just a few years later, this demonstrates a remarkable difference in opinion; the League could effectively do what they want and get away with it, Nabis could not. The

League had 'earned' their status as 'friend and ally' by fighting alongside Rome; those who were considered only as 'friends' were those who were considered inferior to free-states (Sherwin-White 1984: 66). In 195 BC, Sparta was even invaded by Flamininus and stripped of Argos, which was given back to the League (Livy 34.

22-40)! Moreover, perhaps the disparity in treatment is explained by the fact that Rome simply thought that Nabis threatened stability in the Peloponnese (Eckstein 1987: 305). However, the peace settlement remarked that Sparta should remain independent (Eckstein 2006: 303). Antiochus II, the Seleucid king began the Roman-Syrian War of 192-188 BC by marching his army through Greece and forcing states to join his side. We are told that some states in the Peloponnese, like Elis switched sides to support Antiochus (Eckstein 2008: 325-6). Though helping Rome in the war, the Achaean League used the situation to conquer Sparta, Elis and Messene – despite Flamininus raising objections to this.

Nothing was done to prevent the League from doing so bar ineffectual reasoning (Livy 36. 31. 4-6; Eckstein 2008: 332). Flamininus even supported the inclusion of Messene in the Achaean League (Errington 2008: 240). It would appear that Rome was tolerating their actions, despite having proclaimed 'freedom' for Greece in 196 (Polyb. 18.

47. 6-7), and thus was sending out the wrong message (Eckstein 2006: 302-3). In 191 BC, a Spartan delegation arrived in Rome asking for the return of hostages taken by Rome after Nabis' defeat in 195, as well as the restoration of perioikic towns to Sparta (Polyb. 21.

1. 1-2). This request was initially brushed off by the senate (Polyb. 21.

1. 1-4), who told them to seek satisfaction with the Achaean council, which clearly shows a Roman deference to the League in local politics at the time. However, acknowledging the appeal on behalf of the Spartans was effectively went against the League's constitution. It was supposed to be the League's remit to deal with its own constituents and the effect of this promoted fragility in the Peloponnese. Over the course of time, the continual pleading to Rome just made its hand more powerful (Derow 2003: 66).

The senate did send back the hostages in 190, though keeping Nabis' son behind (Polyb. 21. 3. 4).

For the most part of the early 180s BC, Roman embassies that passed through the Peloponnese preached a similar line to the Achaean League: they criticised the League for excessive violence against Sparta (Gruen 1984: 485). Q. Metellus did exactly this in 185 BC at a meeting of League magistrates (Polyb. 22. 10. 1-2).

Rome continued to seek for moderation of Achaean oppression of Sparta after 188 BC (Eckstein 2008: 348). An excuse for intervention was there, but it was never acted upon by Rome (Gruen 1984: 486). Another embassy under Appius Claudius Pulcher in 184 BC chastised the League for its recent massacre at Compassium and for 'obliterating the Lacedaemonian constitution' (Livy 39. 36.

3-4). However, Appius delivered another message warning the Achaeans of future action (Livy 39. 37. 18-9).

A Messenian envoy under Deinocrates in 183 BC, asking again for secession from the League was rebuffed by the senate yet again and as a consequence, the Messenians revolted anyway (Plut. Phil. 18. 3).

Yet again, an envoy under Q. Marcius Philippus advised the League to consult Rome before taking action (Polyb. 24. 9. 12).

The year 164 BC saw a territorial dispute arise between Sparta and Megalopolis, which was a member of the Achaean League. An embassy under C. Sulpicius Galus was chosen to decide on the case, and Sulpicius followed a familiar line in deferring to the League by appointing Callicrates, a famous Achaean statesman to preside over the case (Pausanias (8. 1. 1-3))! The issue of Sparta's membership in the League arose again around 150/49 BC when a Spartan embassy to the senate raised the issue over the territorial dispute with Megalopolis and it challenged the League's jurisdiction (Gruen 1976: 55). The senate's reply was consistent enough, deferring the dispute as a matter of League jurisdiction; the status quo was still being upheld to the detriment of the Spartans.

The issue was raised again the following year by Sparta under Menalcidas, a former strategos of the League who used his position in the League's hierarchy to push for Spartan independence. Once again, the senate deferred on the issue, but instead of making a decision to one side or the other, they opted to give a reply which was ambiguous, hence making the Achaeans think they had control of Sparta and the Spartans think they had a right to withdraw from the league (Gruen 1976: 55-6). There was a dramatic shift in approach to regional Peloponnesian independence in 147 BC when

the legate L. Aurelius Orestes requested that Sparta, amongst other poleis be omitted from the Achaean League (Paus.

7. 14-15). However, this envoy was followed up with another in short succession explaining that the previous warning was just to scare them into behaving (Polyb. 38. 9. 6), but the change in tactic does appear to suggest that Rome could make Sparta and other poleis independent if it wanted to (McGing 2003: 79).

It comes therefore as no surprise that real change in the Peloponnese came in the form of a Roman army, the head of which was able to dictate foreign policy on the march (Sherwin-White 1984: 2). The defeat of the Achaean League by Metellus and Mummius finally allowed Spartan, Elean and Messenian independence as the League was broken up; they were also awarded compensation by way of fines levied on the Achaean League (Paus. 7. 16. 10; Kallet-Marx 1996: 91-2).