

THE TWO LETTERS OF PERSEUS TO THE GREEKS

The ancient literary sources which provide our traditional knowledge about Perseus, the last of the Macedonian kings are at first glance both meagre and various. But it is quite obvious that in one way or another all such citations, whether from Livius, Diodoros or Appian, rely upon Polybius. The cumulative impression derived from those writers is decisive and unequivocal. Ever since Perseus ascended the throne of Pella, he made a major effort to improve his war machine in order to attack the Romans. A basic feature of his foreign policy was the drawing of Greeks into his camp by all means in order to strengthen it before launching a decisive battle against the Romans (cp. Polyb. 25. 3. I.) He renewed friendship with Rome only in order to gain vital time "until he could strengthen his position" (Liv. 40. 58. 8.). His political aims were aggressive, as had been those of his father Philip, against Rome. He had hoped to outwit the Romans when he sent his legates to renew his father's treaty with them. (Diod. 29. 30.).

Nevertheless, the annihilation of the Macedonian kingdom and dynasty by the Romans have provoked more questions than the official statement of the Romans were able to answer. Greek conventional moral and concern for political justice, whatever it may have been, as formed by their traditional *paideia*, could hardly have accepted the utter extinction of a centuries-old kingdom and its rulers. It was Polybius who, under the aegis of Rome, had formed the standard attitude still prevailing towards Perseus in historiography. Polybius presented Perseus as a king determined upon war with Rome, in a manner wholly similar to that whereby Alexander the Great set out against the Persians. Roman potentates could have felt relief at such a presentation of Perseus, which Roman historiography adopted willingly. Yet even modern historiography is much closer to Polybius's anti-Macedonian attitude than to a fair analysis of Perseus's modest efforts to preserve his

independence and kingdom.¹ A more detailed examination of the circumstances under which the two letters of Perseus were sent to the Greeks would seem to raise the necessary doubts concerning the validity of old and renewed Polybian suggestions.

At the time Perseus obtained the crown of Macedon, Roman hegemony was already well-established, even in the Balkan peninsula. Fewer than ten years had passed since the Roman senate had dictated its intentionally destructive terms of surrender to Antiochus the Great, the most prominent of Hellenistic Kings.² The Romans disarmed him almost completely; they imposed very heavy payments upon his kingdom, and compelled him to withdraw his forces and political involvements from as far away as east of the Taurus.³ The king, princes and courtiers of Pella, as those of every place in the whole of Greece, could not have failed to comprehend this epoch-making shift of powers which occurred before their very eyes.⁴

¹ Cp. B. Niese, *Geschichte der griechischen und makedonischen Staaten seit der Schlacht bei Chaeronea* III (Gotha, 1903) 93, who states somewhat fatalistically that "Perseus became perforce, against his own will, the rival of Rome for the hegemony over Greece and the world, . . ."; G. De Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani* IV. I (Torino, 1923) 270, sees the Romans as the supporters of stability and order, supporting the propertied classes, and so inevitably tending to "turn the eyes of the lower classes towards Macedon"; E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique (323-30 av. J.-C.)* II (Nancy, 1967) 218. viewed Perseus as exploiting social distress in Greece in order "to strengthen the prestige of the Macedonian kingdom and to undermine Roman popularity there"; close to this notion is A. Giovannini, *BCH* 93 (1969) 860, concluding "Il est clair que le Sénat devait agir."; H. H. Schmitt, *Rom und Rhodos*, (München, 1957) 134, believed that the concern of the senate was justified; E. Badian, *Foreign Clientelae* (Oxford, 1958) 95 described the Roman decisions as cumulative, moving from hesitancy at the beginning of the war towards elimination of the Kingdom at the end; L. De Regibus, *Repubblica Romana e gli ultimi re di Macedonia* (Genova, 1951) 175 is convinced that Perseus's ambitions caused the Romans to react with force and "sfumava così ogni possibilità di compromesso"; H. Berve, *Griechische Geschichte* II (München, 1952) 350, described Perseus as a "kriegslustigen Makedonen."

² Cp. Polyb. II. 34.14-16; E. Bickermann, *Hermes* 57 (1932) 69 sq., H.H. Scullard, *Roman Politics* (Oxford, 1951) 128 sq.; E. Badian, *Class. Phil.* 54 (1959) 81 sq.; H.H. Schmitt, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Antiochos' des Grossen und seiner Zeit*, (*Historia Einzelschrift* 6, 1964) 92 sq.; F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* II (Oxford, 1967) 315 sq.

³ A.H. McDonald, *JRS*, 57 (1967) 3 sq.; H.H. Schmitt, op. cit. (n. 2) 44 sq., 278 sq.

⁴ Vid. F.W. Walbank, *Philip V of Macedon* (Cambridge, 1940) 217 sq., 233 sq.

The changing of the kings on the throne of Pella did not arouse any unnatural inquisitiveness, either in Greece or in Rome (179 B.C.). The rumors which had accompanied the accession of Perseus were of the most conventional type of court gossip. People told stories about the unhappiness of Perseus's younger brother Demetrius who, after having been incited by some Roman senators, tried to seize their father's crown.⁵ There was a rumor about a certain Archikrates, a kinsman of the king, contriving to gain supreme power over Macedon by exploiting the feebleness of mind which befell the aged king Philip in his last days (Liv. 40. 54. I.).

Perseus was nearly thirty-two years old when the Macedonians under arms hailed him as their king. The first and foremost concern of the new king was the renewal of the treaty his father had made with Rome. In those days a treaty with Rome already had a greater importance than that of a political agreement on matters under discussion. For the king of Macedon it represented the necessary approval of Rome for keeping the crown of his father on his head. It is reasonable to think that Perseus felt much relieved after the Roman senate agreed to his occupying his father's throne.⁶ In Greece attention was drawn to some of the enactments of the new king. "He relieved all who were in debt to the crown," and consequently released those who had been imprisoned for debt-offences against the crown. Moreover, the royal chancery posted lists of now-amnestied subjects in three different places outside Macedon, at Delos, Delphi and the shrine of Athena at Ithonos in Achaia Phthiotis, promising to those previously convicted safety and the recovery of the property they had left behind them (Polyb. 25. 3. 3.). Because of its superficial similarity to the much-disputed "cancelling of debts" within the various Greek states, this edict of Perseus aroused great excitement even outside Macedon.⁷ Yet those of some political experience throughout Greece could not have been surprised by this

⁵ Vid. Polyb. 23.7.1-7; Liv. 40.20.3-6; 21.7-11; 23.1-5; 24.1-8; Diodor. 29.25.

⁶ Liv. 48.58.9; 41.24.6; Diodor. 29.30; Zonar. 9.22.2.

⁷ Cp. R. Werner, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* I (Berlin, 1972) 560, "Da die Oligarchie Anschluss an Rom suchte, sah die Schicht der Armen und sozial Schwachen ihre Rettung in Philipp V., und nach dessen Tode in dem Rom nicht genehmen Perseus ..."; Cl. Préaux, *Le monde hellénistique* I (Paris, 1978) 164.

magnanimity of Perseus. It was quite customary for a Hellenistic king, and almost a gesture expected by his subjects, that after the reins of his realm were in his hands he should demonstrate some goodwill and generosity. It is beyond doubt that a king's amnesty had different aims than did the socio-economic reforms bruited about in the Greek cities at that time.

Yet Polybius, fettered to his anti-Macedonian principles, was ready to discover anti-Roman wiles in any of Perseus's initiatives, whether domestic or foreign. Thus, Polybius leads his reader to think, even before supplying him with substantial information about the amnesty of Perseus, that all the king had in mind was "aiming at cheap popularity amongst Greeks" (=ἐλληνοκοπεῖν *ibid.*, 25. 3. 1).⁸ While summing up that reference, Polybius again stressed the notion that by promoting "high expectations" among "all the Greeks" Perseus had come, although indirectly but intentionally, into collision with the Romans. Polybius's strong suspicions of Perseus were linked to the "high expectations" that the Greeks fostered during the political lethargy forced upon them by the Romans. Polybius did not specify them, speaking as if they were self-evident and by general agreement. Two score and more years after these occurrences Polybius implied to his reader that Macedon of Perseus had intended to abolish the Roman presence in Greece even at the price of social reforms so far reaching, and radical that he had never dreamed to introduce into his own country. It seems that Polybius had in mind only readers having his own frame of mind and status. These people, he was convinced, who were bound to the spirit of their properties, would instinctively despise the base intentions of Perseus and consequently would justify his benefactors, the Romans. They, who helped to maintain the right order in Greece,

⁸ The account of Polybius is unclear as to whether the debtors of private creditors were included among those entitled to amnesty, or only debtors of the crown. For a select variety of interpretations cp. B. Niese, *op. cit.* (n. 1) 99; T. Frank, *Roman Imperialism* (New York, 1914) 202; G. De Sanctis, *op. cit.* (n. 1) 170; P.V.M. Benecke in *CAH*, VIII (Cambridge, 1930) 255 sq.; P. Meloni, *Perseo e la fine della monarchia macedone*, (Roma, 1953) 74 sq.; L. Bivona, *KOKALOS*, 2 (1956) 57; D. Asheri, *Leggi greche sul problema dei debiti* (Pisa, 1969) 63 sq.; J. Deininger, *Der politische Widerstand gegen Rom in Griechenland 217-86 v. Chr.* (Berlin, 1971) 134 sq.; D. Mendels, *Ancient Society* 9 (1978) 56 sq.

according to Polybius, and who ignored the dreams of "cancelling of debts" and "redistribution of land", could justifiably render the scheme of Perseus ineffectual, by waging a "just war" (*bellum iustum*) of total destruction against Macedon and its king.⁹

But reality was less artful and cunning than Polybius had imagined. Perseus, through all these years, did not dare to act contrary to Rome's formal interests or intrude into its spheres of authority. On the contrary, even the conventional acts of Perseus as king played into the hands of those Roman potentates who were continuously searching for power, glory and plunder.¹⁰

A.

Perseus married Laodice, the daughter of Seleucus IV, in the summer of 178. The father of the bride hired a Rhodian vessel to dispatch his daughter and her dowry to the new home in Macedon.¹¹ Energetic Rhodian sailors, who set sail westward at that time, steered close to the ship of Laodice as if they were sailing in a convoy of honour. Perseus rewarded these sailors for the respect and goodwill they demonstrated towards Laodice. A worthy king could not have ignored such a gesture even when he suspected a Roman motive. Among Greeks aware of such episodes, Perseus began to be portrayed as a decent and benevolent king. No doubt, his personality contributed positively to the confidence he won gradually in Greece. After a certain absence, we meet again in the autumn of 178, two Hieromnemes sent "by king Perseus"

⁹ Vid. F.W. Walbank, *JRS*, 31 (1941) 85 "... once the Romans had decided on war with Perseus, their first and most obvious step was to dispatch a propaganda mission to Greece, as they had done in preparing for their wars with Philip and Antiochus".

¹⁰ Cp. U. Kahrstedt, *Klio*, 11 (1911) 415 sq.; T. Frank, op. cit., (n. 8) l.c.; T. Walek, *Rev. de Philologie* 49 (1925) 28 sq.; P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 451, "Era un dissidio profondo et intimo che non poteva sanarsi al tavolo di una conferenza diplomatica con concessioni anche notevoli da parte macedone, giacché investiva tutto il sistema di sicurezza che Roma aveva faticosamente e sanguinosamente costruito in oriente".

¹¹ After the peace treaty of Apamea (188 B.C.), ships of Seleucids were prohibited to sail "beyond the Calycandus and the Sarpedonian promontory (Polyb. 21.42.14), i.e. approximately 34° longitude.

(*Sylloge*³, 636.5) to the Delphic council.¹² This even was certainly the major political news of the day, and it did not escape the notice of Roman legates east of the Adriatic sea. These agents of the senate, under cover of various missions, had remained continuously in Greece. One of their main objects was to provide information from Greece. Yet even the counsellors of the court in Pella were fully aware of the meddling of the Romans in Greece. The positive response of Perseus to the Amphictyonic authorities is therefore instructive. Perseus was careful, no less than his father Philip had been after the battle of Cynoscephalae, about avoiding a second crushing war with the Romans. The efforts invested by Perseus to normalize the relations of Macedon with the various Greek states were, at least in his own eyes, legitimate acts which did not contradict any of Macedon's obligations to Rome. The Greeks who had renewed the membership of Perseus in the Amphictyonic council of Delphi were obviously not inimical to the king of Macedon and had not conspired to mislead him.

The fame of Perseus's honesty and balanced judgment spread constantly over Greece. The two main parties of Aetolia, who had reached bloodshed and every sort of violence as a result of their ruined socioeconomic background, agreed to invite Perseus to act as arbiter and mediator.¹³ Perseus won yet more personal acclaim in a similar effort made some time later in the region of Dolopia. Here, several of the local potentates had demanded that their case be entrusted to Roman arbitration, although that district was habitually under Macedonian influence. Perseus, escorted by an impressive military guard, appeared in the trouble-shaken country. It seems that without using arms or force Perseus was able to pacify the area and appease the discontent.¹⁴ Perseus decided to exploit this success by prolonging his sojourn. It was

¹² The calling back to activity of the Hieromnemones παρὰ βασιλέως Περσέως (*Syll.*³ 636 1.5) required a formal majority decision of the Amphictyonic council; it implies that the six votes supervised by the Aetolians and a substantial part of the "neutrals" were in favour of Perseus. Cp. W. Dittenberger, *Hermes* 32 (1897) 189; P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 95 sq.; A. Giovannini, *Ancient Makedonia* (Thessaloniki, 1970) 141 sq.

¹³ Cp. Liv. 42.12.7; 40.7; Appian. *Maced.* 11.1.7; A. Passerini, *Athenaeum*, 11 (1933) 309 sq.; D. Asheri, op. cit. (n. 8) 64 sq.

¹⁴ Liv. 41.22.4 (argumentum ex silentio), and cp. id. 41.23.13 sq.; 42.13.8, 41.13; Appian. *Maced.* 11.1.6.

formally announced that the king had decided to consult the oracle of Delphi.¹⁵ It is clear that Perseus was convinced that a peaceful march by his soldiers through Central Greece, while demonstrating strict discipline and decent behaviour, would contribute effectively to his reputation all over Greece. Perseus, consequently, paraded all the way to Delphi and back, a distance of several hundred kilometres, demonstrating both presence and goodwill. The visit of Perseus to Delphi had aroused not only friendly reactions (Liv. 41. 22.5). But after summing up the credits and debits of his venture, Perseus found the situation fitting on the whole for a special appeal to a large number of Greek states in the summer of 174. His dream of restoring the political relations with Greece, which had deteriorated so greatly during the life of his father, was now approached.

Perseus wrote a well-formulated letter and sent it simultaneously and openly to various Greek states.¹⁶ He sent the letter in this way in the hope of creating an equal interest in his proposals in most of the capitals of Greece. All that Perseus asked for in his letter was the reestablishing of mutual political relations, rather than any binding commitments — including any against Rome. The court of Pella had no intention of starting a campaign to undermine the position of Rome in Greece, and no effort was made by the king to conceal his actions. It was clear to Pella, that the smaller *Poleis* and tribal organizations were accustomed to follow in the wake of the stronger ones. Therefore the responses of Athens, Thessaly, Boeotia, and the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues were awaited in Pella with particular alertness.¹⁷

From the outset the Athenian authorities dissociated public opinion from the proposals of Perseus.¹⁸ It would appear that they did not even put them on the agenda. In Aetolia the troubles caused by socio-economic distress left no room for etiquette in foreign relations.¹⁹

¹⁵ Liv. 41.22.5; cp. B. Niese, op. cit. (n. 1) 103, P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 104.

¹⁶ Vid. Liv. 41.22.7, 23.3 sq.

¹⁷ Cp. Liv. 41.22.8: "*cum Achaeorum maxime gente reconciliandae gratiae viam quaerebat*".

¹⁸ vid. W.S. Ferguson, *Hellenistic Athens* (London, 1911) 312: Athens "was not misled by anti-Roman feelings in Greece to enter into negotiations with Perseus".

¹⁹ Diodoros 29.33., describes the difficulties of the Aetolian league in those days and a struggle concerning a "cancellation of debts" (χρεωκοπία); cp. Liv. 42.5.7; B. Niese, op. cit. (n. 1) 102; A. Passerini, op. cit. (n. 13) 320; D. Asheri, op. cit. (n. 8) 64 sq.

Although Perseus had for some time acted there as mediator, no substantial support for his proposals was won in Aetolia. The Aetolians apparently reacted like the Athenians; they did not officially consider the king's proposals at all.²⁰ Theassaly was, at that time, shaken by socio-economic difficulties similar to those in Aetolia. Disagreement there soon turned into violent civil strife (στάσις 29. 30.), perplexity, and constitutional confusion (παραχαί).²¹ Apparently no legal forum there could be summoned to consider thoroughly the letter of the neighbouring king.²² Of great importance to Perseus therefore was the answer of the Achaean League.

The royal chancellery of Pella prepared a special version of the king's letter for dispatch to Achaëa. Particular additions of local interest were inserted in it in order to make its basic contents more acceptable to the Achaean authorities (Liv. 41. 23. 4.).²³ The beginning of the negotiations seemed promising. It was Callicrates, the most prominent of Achaëans devoted to Rome, who prevented their successful conclusion.²⁴ Callicrates vigorously accused Xenarchos, the strategos of the League, of violating the law of the League simply by referring the king's letter to the council (ibid. 6). The pleadings of Callicrates were entrenched in the

²⁰ Cp. B. Niese, op. cit. (n.1) 105; P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 105.

²¹ Cp. P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 108; D. Asheri, op. cit. (n. 8) 65 sq.; E. Gruen, *Amer. Journ. of Ancient Hist.* I (1976) 29 sq.; D. Mendels, op. cit. (n. 8) 57 sq.

²² The institutional organizations of Thessaly had been arranged some twenty years earlier by Flamininus. He delivered them to all "*Potentiores*" (Liv. 35.51.6). The outburst of harsh creditor-debtor strife in the middle of the seventies should not be linked with any crisis of political orientation in that country. This becomes even clearer after one consults the instructions delivered by the Roman senate to Appius Claudius (id. 42.5.7-10) before leaving to Greece: to rebuke impartially both parties and their leaders (*utriusque partis principibus castigatis*). From the point of view of Rome both disputing parties were one — pro-Roman.

²³ Perseus stated firmly in his letter that formal and friendly relations between Macedon and the league "could and should" (*potuerint ac debuerint*) be implemented. Yet, the liability-bound in whose name Perseus appealed to the Achaean authorities was too obscure, whether as a political promise or as a moral obligation rooted in a common past and future. Cp. G.A. Lehmann, *Untersuchungen zur historischen Glaubwürdigkeit des Polybios* (Münster, 1967) 297 sq.

²⁴ Vid. Polyb. 24.8 sq.; Liv. 41.23.5 sq.; G. De Sanctis, op. cit. (n. 1) 247; A. Passerini, op. cit. (n. 13) 309 sq.; H.E. Stier, *Roms Aufstieg zur Weltmacht und die griechische Welt* (Opladen, 1957) 179 sq.; G.A. Lehmann, op. cit. (n. 23) 284 sq.; J. Deininger, op. cit. (n. 8) 177 sq.

political norms observed for a generation by the Achaean oligarchs, including Xenarachos the strategos.²⁵ The principle argument of Callicrates was that the alliance of the League with Rome "is the whole on which we depend" (*nostra omnia continentur*, *ibid.* 9), as well as the supreme expression of its liberty (*ibid.* 8.). Callicrates underlined the prevailing lack of interest of the league in renewing any sort of relationship with Macedon. More than he convinced his audience, he warned it of danger. Callicrates, speaking as if for Rome, threatened his countrymen by saying that any rapprochement with Macedon would only entangle the League in a war not its own against the Romans. And even worse, he said Xenarchos was undoubtedly pushing the Achaean League into the camp of the loser, in spite of Perseus's assiduous preparations for war against Rome. Callicrates succeeded in rendering Xenarchos's supposed advice ineffectual, and suspicious. Callicrates presented his political opponent as one endangering the common well-being of the League for his own personal benefits and advantages.²⁶

Perseus had therefore to suffer the rejection of his proposals. But the rest of the comments, made at that peculiar meeting of the Achaean League, were very instructive for Perseus. Livius, while abridging Polybius for his chapters in Greek history, handled somewhat exceptionally the report of this Achaean council. He reproduced his source to a considerable extent, presenting his reader with the main features of the attitudes adopted by Xenarchos and his supporters. Archon, the brother of Xenarchos, took up the burden of refuting Callicrates's accusations (*Liv.* 41. 24. 1-18). Archon made every effort to convince his audience that he and his brother Xenarchos should be regarded as above any suspicion concerning the Romans. He alleged that Callicrates intended to slander a distinguished rival in the struggle for primacy within the

²⁵ A. Aymard, *Les premiers rapports de Rome et de la confédération achaienne* (Bordeaux, 1938) 128 sq.

²⁶ Polybius (30.6.5-7) leads his reader to the conclusion, that an established pro-Macedonian faction within the ruling circles of the Achaean league no longer existed at that time. Several potentates seem to have been strongly alarmed by the harshness demonstrated by the Romans against Perseus — lest they suffer similar treatment in the future. But cp. J. Deininger, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 143 sq.; P. Meloni, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 112, points to growing sympathy within the Achaean league for Perseus. But this was never transformed into meaningful political support.

League as well as in the eyes of their senior allies, the Romans. Archon declared that he and his brother were loyal to Rome, as the Achaean League had always been on the whole. So, no less now than in the past, did they support whole-heartedly the peace-making policy of Rome (ibid. 24. 7.). About the stand taken by them Perseus could not have been but well informed. If a war were to break out between Macedon and Rome, said Archon, "we will follow the Romans" (*Romanos secuturi simus*, ibid. 24. 18.). Thus no one (such as Xenarchos) advised the League to sign a treaty of friendship (*societas*) or to contract a military alliance (*foedus*, ibid. 24. 16.) with Perseus. All that his brother, Xenarchos the strategos, intended, said Archon, was to settle the relations of Achaea with Macedon to the point of facilitating the return of runaway slaves (from Achaea) from Macedonian territory to their Achaean owners (ibid.). This "slight and open matter" had been converted maliciously by Callicrates into a grave political defamation. By these arguments Archon hoped to clarify and justify the position of his brother and his brother's faction.

Xenarchos was not a novice in Achaean politics. He had already won renown in the eighties of the second century B.C. as a champion of the isolationist policy for the Peloponnesos. This, the prevailing political attitude among the Achaean potentates, was very convenient for the Romans, and actually depended upon a Roman alliance with the Achaean League. Xenarchos even headed a special delegation of the league to Rome for securing a renewal of the alliance with the Romans.²⁷ The Achaean oligarchs were most concerned with their common aim of preserving the leadership of the league in their own hands. Yet, while competing among themselves for supreme power within the league, they outlawed no means employed for their personal benefit. Perseus could not have avoided learning of those predispositions when he was looking for confidants in the Achaean ruling class. He could therefore not have been much surprised by the negative results of his appeal to the Achaeans. The assertions of Callicrates concerning the future of the Roman policy toward Perseus and his kingdom must have

²⁷ Vid. Chr. Habicht, in *RE*, IX.2, col. 1420; G.A. Lehmann, op. Cit. (n. 23) 297 sq.; R.M. Errington, *Philopoemen* (Oxford, 1969) 206; J. Deininger, op. cit. (n. 8) 144 sq.; as to the date of the alliance vid. E. Badian, *JRS*, 43 (1952) 76 sq.

sounded very serious in Pella. Some of the statements made by Callicrates were crucial. He announced at the council of the Achaean League, that the Romans would inevitably fight a war against Perseus (*bellandum Romanis cum Perseo*, *ibid.* 23. 9.). No less worrisome for Perseus was the affirmation of Callicrates that Perseus “has already begun the war” (*iam incohavit bellum*”, *ibid.* 23. 13.). It was thereby hinted to men all over Greece that, in the leading circles of Rome to which Callicrates had some access, it had already been determined to launch a war against Perseus. Its presentation as a *bellum iustum* was to be arranged in collaboration with their Greek allies. Whether Callicrates was following Roman orders when threatening his fellow citizens and the Macedonians with Roman might (*imperium Romanum*, *ibid.* 12.6.), Perseus obviously was unable to clarify. Yet in the light of his father’s experience with the Romans, Perseus must certainly have felt alarm at Callicrates’s professions on behalf of Rome.²⁸

B.

The Boeotians reacted differently to the appeal of Perseus. The prospects of a positive answer were much higher there from the beginning. Among the potentate families of that country, the house of Neon had maintained, for at least three successive generations, good relations with the Antigonids.²⁹ Boeotia, led by this house, tended for years to follow a pro-Macedonian policy — notwithstanding social and constitutional changes in the country.³⁰ The more forceful intervention of Rome in the local politics of mainland Greece had encouraged leading personalities, even in Boeotia, to side with the Romans. The

²⁸ Cp. F.W. Walbank, *Philip V* 191, 238–41, and 255: “Philip, though passionately hostile to Rome, pursued a policy of loyal co-operation with the senate in the face of numerous insults and injustices”.

²⁹ The house of Neon seems to have established amicable relations with the Antigonids of Macedon in the days of king Demetrius (appr. 236 B.C.), the grandfather of Perseus; *vid.* K.J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte* IV.1 (Strassburg, 1927) 631.

³⁰ Cp. Polyb. 20.6.1 sq. (*locus classicus*): “Public affairs in Boeotia had fallen into such a state of disorder that for nearly twenty-five years justice, both in civil and criminal, had ceased to be administered there...”; M. Feyel, *Polybe et l’histoire de Béotie au III^e siècle avant notre ère* (Paris, 1942) 15 sq.; P. Cloché, *Thèbes de Béotie* (Namur, c. 1952) 257; A. Passerini, *op. cit.* (n. 13) 312 sq.

house of Neon had to face new, strong rivals who enjoyed the open as well as the concealed support of Rome in achieving sway over the country. But the pro-Roman faction which Zeuxippos was able to organize in Boeotia faced strong opposition. Strife became harsher and more acute. Zeuxippos and his men were compelled to leave the country. But Rome had not given up hope. After the Romans dictated conditions of surrender to Antiochus the Great in 188 B.C., they directed more pressure against the pro-Macedonian leadership of Boeotia. The return of Zeuxippos and his following to Boeotia seemed to be near (Polyb. 22. 4.4.). Roman politicians were convinced, that after Apamea no reasonable Greek authorities could afford defiance of their will. The Romans even instructed the submissive leaders of the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues to join their efforts against Boeotia.³¹ Yet the Boeotian authorities did not flinch. Time and again the main indictments concerning sacrilege and the murder of Brachylles son of Neon, the father of Neon, by Zeuxippos and his men were confirmed.³² The authorities of Boeotia deliberately delayed the return of those convicted while ignoring the demands of Rome. More indications of common agreement can be traced in Boeotia in those days. We read that quarelling factions in various cities of that country had come to terms by the use of arbitration (Inscr. Gr. VII. 21).

Nevertheless, the Boeotian authorities did not dare to overlook the Roman memorandum which demanded the return of Zeuxippos and his men. They even considered it too provocative to deliver their negative response in an official letter. A certain Callicritos, whom they trusted, was sent as the head of a delegation to Rome in order to explain their refraining from allowing Zeuxippos to return. They believed that a negative answer accompanied by proper oral explanations would appease the Roman senate and end its unjust demands concerning Zeuxippos. However, during his visit to Rome Callicritos had completely changed his position. He met Zeuxippos in Rome and had long

³¹ Cp. R.M. Errington, *op. cit.* (n. 27) 152, "The Achaeans and the Aetolians had been urged by the Senate to act as dutiful clients, and to insist that the Boeotians comply with senatorial policy and restore Zeuxippos, another of Flaminius' friends". J. Deininger, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 131 sq.

³² Cp. Liv. 33.29.1: "This murder roused the Thebans and all the Boeotians to a frenzy of hatred against the Romans".

conversations with Roman senators. Some time after his return, Callicritos became the leader of the pro-Roman faction in Thebae, and began troubling his former faction-mates in the name of Rome. Nevertheless, Callicritos was unable to mobilize much support for his cause, and the Boeotian authorities agreed upon an alliance with Perseus, the king of Macedon.³³

Perseus, no doubt, would sooner or later have summed up the results of his letter to the Greeks. The achievements were very moderate indeed. It was clear to Pella as to everyone in mainland Greece, that it was not enmity to Perseus, but rather the fear of Rome which quashed the hopes fostered recently in the Macedonian court. Perseus had many reasons to feel disappointed. Yet, it is very questionable whether in the court of Pella the gravity of the situation was wholly apprehended. Our sources have not preserved direct evidence of the semi-official meetings, where ambitious Roman senators pressed for early war against Macedon.³⁴ To conform with the demand of the Romans for unconditioned obedience in the Balkan area was already at that time a precondition for any political entity in mainland Greece to assure its untroubled existence. The Romans had no reason to feel troubled by the political successes of Perseus in Greece. But powerful Romans had succeeded easily in making a major issue of Perseus' letter to the Greeks in the winter session of the senate in 174/3 B.C. These senators pretended to have discovered in the letter of Perseus the ultimate proof of his aggressiveness against Rome, and consequently indicated the necessary cause for launching a *bellum iustum* against Macedon.³⁵ The results of such a war were much too predictable to curb the lust of these Romans for glory and plunder. Official Roman policy had in fact taken in the next spring (173) a crucial turn towards a war against Macedon. The quiet diplomacy previously exercised against Perseus was abandoned, and Marcus Marcellus was dispatched to make known Rome's new stand in Greece.³⁶

³³ Vid. Liv. 42.12.6, 38.5.

³⁴ H.H. Scullard, *op. cit.* (n. 2) 196 sq.; J. Briscoe, *Latomus* 27 (1968) 148 sq.; E. Badian, *Tit. Quinc. Flaminius, Philhellenism and Realpolitik* (Cincinnati, 1970) II sq.

³⁵ Vid. F.W. Walbank, *JRS*, 31 (1941) 90 sq.; J. Briscoe, *JRS*, 54 (1964) 64 sq.

³⁶ By that time a solemn affirmation of the senate stated that no Roman magistrate was empowered to summon an assembly of Greeks unless explicitly permitted to do so (184

C.

Marcellus, after careful calculation, had selected the assembly of the Achaean League as his proper audience (Liv. 42.6.1.). Unsurprisingly, Marcellus prized the Achaeans for their having rejected all sorts of Macedonian efforts aimed at a rapprochement with the league. Yet, the main point of his assertions was a solemn statement of Roman hatred, *odium Romanorum*, for Macedon and Perseus. It seems that not only Perseus, but also the Achaeans present at that assembly as well as the rest of the Greeks misinterpreted the *odium Romanorum* declaration. Their *lectio difficilior*, obviously, had not foreseen an outcome much harsher than another Roman war of extortion against Macedon. That this *odium Romanorum* was the harbinger of the elimination of Macedon and the Antigonid dynasty did not occur to them. The failure of the Greeks to decipher accurately the Roman code of *odium Romanorum* was due to their way of weighing Roman politics on Greek scales.³⁷ It was only six years later that they witnessed the horrors of this *odium*. The Romans made no efforts to disillusion them.³⁸ Moreover, the Romans had intentionally presented a misleading policy towards Macedon and Perseus, clearly enough in order to capture their prey more easily.³⁹

B.C.) (Liv. 39.33.8). No doubt Marcellus carried with him from Rome the necessary permission to deliver the fatal message (*odium Romanorum*) of the Roman senate to the Achaeans and the rest of the Greeks.

³⁷ Cp. W. Capelle, *Klio*, N.F. 7 (1932) 104 sq.; C.B. Welles, *J. of Juristic Psychology* 15 (1965) 44 sq.

³⁸ Perseus was threatened with war — not extinction — “unless he offered satisfaction in these matters” (Liv. 42.30.11), i.e.: “he invaded allies of Roman people, he devastated their land and seized their cities”, then “he entered on plans for preparing war against the Roman people, and assembled arms, soldiers and fleet for the said purpose” (ibidem); cp. *Sylloge* 643, commented by R.K. Sherk, *Roman Documents From The Greek East* (Baltimore, 1969) 237 sq.: “If it is a piece of propaganda, and I believe it is . . .”; A. Fuks, *Ancient Society* 5 (1974) 69, “The gist of the text (sc. *Sylloge* 643) is: justification of Roman policy in Greece and condemnation of the Greek policy of Perseus”.

³⁹ Several of the senators, possibly of the older generation, had felt a strong uneasiness because of the eagerness of their colleagues for war, total war, against Perseus. Even the base political methods adopted and practised by their fellow-senators appeared to them as missing their own target, “however, that part of the senate prevailed, to whom the pursuit of advantage was more important than that of honour” (Liv. 42.47.9); cp. H.H. Scullard, *op. cit.* (n. 2) 198 sq.

News of the *odium Romanorum* soon reached Boeotia. To the pro-Roman faction there, it signalled the reopening of the campaign against the alliance of their league with Macedon. Gaius Valerius, one of the Roman potentates who were sent to prepare the Greek battlefield for the war against Macedon (Liv. 42.5.6; 17.1), seems to have met the leading men of the pro-Roman faction in Boeotia by that time. His instructions were obviously unequivocal; the pro-Romans were told to do all they could and even more, to bring down the pro-Macedonian government of their country. Notwithstanding the heavy Roman support, and perhaps because of it, the pro-Macedonian faction won. Neon was elected again Boeotarch, and the other prominent magistracies fell into the hands of the pro-Macedonians. The pro-Romans overlooked their setback in the elections and continued rather more vigorously their pleadings against the alliance with Macedon. Indeed, the flow of information through Greece made it clear gradually even in Boeotia that the Romans were succeeding in strengthening the ranks of their supporters in mainland Greece (ibid. 42.19.6-7; 39.4), while the ranks of pro-Macedonians shrank considerably (ibid. 41. 24.18).

Our sources do not specify the reasons which had brought the house of Ascondas-Neon-Brachylles-Neon to keep faith with the Antigonids for almost four generations. It seems reasonable to suppose, that profitableness was presented as being political wisdom and the fruit of realistic deliberation. The total shift of power recently caused by the Romans brought Neon, the Boeotarch, though not without hesitation, to abandon his own and his family's long-lasting ties to Macedon. While still in office as Boeotarch of the current year, Neon sent one of his confidants, Ismenias (Polyb. 27.1.1), to the Roman legates acting in Greece with a proposal "to place all the cities of Boeotia together at the discretion" (πίστεις ibid. 27.1.2; sc. *fides*) of Rome. The decision of Neon to turn his back on Macedon for the sake of a Roman *clientela* did not arouse much excitement in Boeotia. The prevailing opinion in Boeotia about the alliance with Macedon was far from one evaluating it as a holy covenant aiming to realize the most noble ideals of Greek political thought. Thus, the whole of Boeotia with the exception of three poleis (Coroneia, Thisbe and Haliartus) conformed with Neon's political somersault, indifferently or halfheartedly and demonstrating almost no open discontent (Poly. 6.27.5.3-4). Neon had probably worked out this

political shift along with other local potentates of Boeotia who were troubled about the foreign power supporting their rival faction. The populace followed the traditional leadership even at that time, as it always had been accustomed to do.

D.

The court of Pella had analyzed thoroughly the news brought from Boeotia. After further consideration the Macedonian court decided upon a major diplomatic effort of a type unprecedented in its range and content. The conclusion was drawn in Pella that their king's letter to the Greeks two years ago, and the attempt to revive pro-Macedonian factions had provoked an intensified pro-Roman activity all over Greece supported openly by Rome (Polyb. 27.10.7). In this contest, Perseus learned from his own experience, but the Romans won the field. The new scheme born in Pella had linked new prospects for political success in Greece with substantial concessions by the Macedonian king. Perseus decided upon a total renunciation of traditional claims to hegemony over Greece, and granted full recognition of the right of the Greek states and cities to real independence (ἐλευθερία). From this new base of honest political relations on equal terms, Macedon was to exhort the Greek leadership to a thorough rearrangement in their common political theatre. Macedonians and Greeks were supposed to collaborate as equals, in mutual confidence, for their common cause, the Greeks for the sake of their liberty and Perseus for the salvation of his kingdom. The dialogue Perseus held shortly before (autumn 172) with Q. Marcius Philippus (Polyb. 27.4.1) could only have strengthened his suspicions of Rome. The king could no longer deny the urging of his court for unconventional undertakings. A new and revolutionary appeal to the Greeks was designed in the chancery of Pella. No copy of this document has found its way into the surviving sources. Yet a fragment of Polybius (27.4.1 sq.) and a passage in Livius (42.46.3 sq.) do preserve some features of that letter despatched by Perseus to a wide range of Greek political authorities. This new appeal of Macedon to the Greeks recognized the latter's rights for total political freedom. Macedon had asserted its new policy of goodwill towards Greece by refraining from any political compulsion or hegemonical pressure. For Greeks to side

with Macedon would no longer mean an exchange of protectors, but rather the taking of a firm stand for a renewed free political arena in Mainland Greece. In these new circumstances Macedon could look forward to cooperating on an equal base with all the Greek states "in the interest of all" (cp. Polyb. 27.4.6 *τοῦτο γὰρ πᾶσι συμφέρειν*). These and similar arguments completed the second letter of Perseus to the Greeks. Perseus attached to this appeal a brief report concerning his recent negotiations with the Romans, and pointed out their seriousness and grave consequences for Greece. Perseus pointed out Roman ambitions, which were inspired by "the opposite principle" (ibid. 7; *τὴν ἐναντίαν προαίρεσιν*), and endangered not only Macedon but the whole of Greece and of its liberty. It seems that Perseus sealed his appeal with a warning. This warning was intended to become the slogan of the new political order prevailing in the whole of central and southern Balkans, that "the right and power over all the political entities might not pass into the hands of a single people" (*ne omnium rerum ius ac potestas ad unum populum perveniat*" Liv. 42.46.4). There is no doubt that by this "single people" the Romans were meant.⁴⁰

The Macedonian court centered great hopes around this letter, their last real chance to acquire a substantial number of allies in Greece as well as considerable public support. The first reactions to the appeal were seen in Pella as promising. The Macedonian envoys who carried the letter to Rhodes and provided its authorities with further explanations, could soon report to their senders that "everybody felt pleased" (Polyb. 27.4.8) with the king's new political scheme. The rest of Greece had, like Rhodes, accepted the leading motives of Perseus's appeal. Some sort of non-binding talks started between Macedonian envoys and various local authorities in Greece. The Romans, who had already made up their minds about the fate to be visited on Macedon, reacted rapidly. The senate immediately sent new legates bearing new directives to Greece. They were instructed to make any effort needed in order to "renew friendship" (*renovare amicitiam*, Liv. 42.19.8) with all the important Greek states, even those which only potentially could have

⁴⁰ Cp. J. Deininger, op. cit. (n. 8) 186, who considered "Dies entsprach genau den Gedanken des Lykortas bzw. der 'tertia pars' in Griechenland überhaupt ..."; H.H. Schmitt, op. cit. (n. 2) 141 sq.; P. Meloni, op. cit. (n. 8) 199 sq.

intended joining Perseus. It was Roman alertness and swift action that minimized the success of the Macedonian letter-appeal and almost nullified it before it bore its first fruit.

Of all the political moves made during that time in Greece in response to the letter of Perseus, we are most fully informed about the occurrences in Rhodes.⁴¹ The ἀρχαί received the envoys of Macedon hospitably, and granted them permission to plead their case before the βουλή (cp. Polyb. 27.4.4). For some time the prospects seemed favorable, but Roman pressure soon changed this. While negotiations were still going on, Rome's protégés in the Rhodian senate influenced their colleagues. Antenor and Philippus, the envoys of Perseus soon felt the change of opinion in the Rhodian senate concerning the revolutionary suggestions of their king. They had to give up hopes of reaching an agreement of any kind with Rhodes. Not much was left them to achieve there. Nevertheless, they entreated the local senate at least to maintain neutrality in the war the Romans were about to launch against Macedon and its king. And, if the Romans would indeed open war against Macedon "in violation of the treaties" (παρὰ τὰς συνθήκας, *ibid.* 5), Antenor and Philippus asked that the Rhodian senators "attempt to effect a reconciliation" (πειρᾶσθαι διαλύειν, *ibid.*). The informal expressions of sympathy towards Macedon and Perseus which the envoys had no difficulties in receiving (*ibid.* 10), could not compensate Antenor and Philippus for the formal answer of the Rhodian authorities which was wholly negative. Perseus was requested by the Rhodian authorities to dissuade his envoys from taking any action "which might seem to be in opposition to the wishes of the Romans" (*ibid.* 9), and what the wishes of the Romans were the Rhodians knew as well as did the Macedonian envoys and all of Greece. A passage in Livius (42.46.2) provides additional evidence of those unhappy negotiations for Perseus and Macedon, in which a successful opening turned into a total set-back. This happened after "the influence of the better party began to be the stronger" (*potentior esse partis melioris auctoritas coeperat*, *ibid.*). It is quite clear that the *meliores* of Rhodes had dictated the anti-Macedonian decision taken by the state authorities.⁴²

⁴¹ Cp. E. Gruen, *CQ*, 25 (1975) 69 sq.; J. Deininger, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 184 sq.

⁴² Cp. J. Briscoe, *JRS*, 54 (1964) 69 sq.; J. Deininger, *op. cit.* (n. 8) 186 sq.

The negotiations between Macedon and Rhodes could not have escaped the notice of the other classes on the island. The unwillingness of a wider range of Rhodian citizens to act effectively to promote a treaty with Macedon is instructive. Evidently, the proposals of Perseus, with their lofty phrases about political freedom, did not convey a message able to arouse excitement and action. The prospect of full independence for the Greeks and Macedonians did not appear to be worth the price of war to the masses. The lower classes in Rhodes — as did their counterparts in the rest of Greece — had quite different expectations than those embodied in the well-known slogan, ἐλευθερία (Polyb. 27.4.7), now revived by the envoys of Perseus. Presumably, Perseus and his advisers were able to foresee the political apathy of the lower classes. Yet, it would have been a violation of the political convictions of Perseus to promise to the populace of Rhodes socio-economic improvements of any kind over the heads of the local authorities in order to gain support. Thus, the initial interest his proposals aroused in Rhodes was easily overcome by the pro-Romans of the upper class, the *meliores*.

The prevailing assessment in Pella was reverified in the light of the Rhodians' answer to the king's appeal. As in days past, the smaller Greek states, when at political crossroads, followed the path of the greater states. The rejection of the "New Deal" of Perseus by Rhodes set the example for all Greece.

As a means of gathering support, the second letter of Perseus to the Greeks was even less successful than the first two years earlier had been. No Greek government was ready to join the camp of a loser, however just his case. It is therefore very questionable whether Perseus in this depressing political isolation initiated a war against Rome. On the contrary, Perseus felt and behaved as if defeated long before his first soldier was felled by Roman arms.

The praiseworthy properties generally attributed to Polybius' historical work are less visible in his account of and attitude towards Macedon and Perseus than in most other parts of his writings.