Roman Thrace: Diplomacy and the Greek Cities of the Aegean Coast

Domna TERZOPOULOU

Abstract: Roman diplomatic arrangements in Aegean Thrace are usually reconstructed through literary sources and epigraphic documents. Sometimes coins corroborate the evidence, but archaeological data can rarely be of any help. The main focus of this paper is to combine the existing literary, epigraphic, numismatic and material testimonies related to the diplomatic means used by Abdera and Maroneia, the leading Greek cities of the Aegean coast, from the 2nd century BC until the reign of Hadrian, in order to establish their position in the Roman world (fig. 1).

Key words: Abdera, Maroneia, diplomacy, Aegean Thrace.

Introduction

Rome was active in the area of Aegean Thrace already in the 2nd century BC, trying to extend its hegemony in the Balkan Peninsula and to protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean basin against the great Hellenistic monarchies (Danov 1979; Sullivan 1979; Walbank 1981; Kallet-Marx 1995, 196-199; 223-227; Loukopoulou 2011, 471-476; Delev 2015; Lozanov 2015, 75-78; Iliev 2015). Apart from warfare and military interventions, the construction of Via Egnatia during the third quarter of the 2nd century BC constituted a development of immense importance for southern Thrace, as the area became part of the transportation network that connected the Adriatic Sea with Byzantium (Lolos 2007).

Despite the overwhelming military power of Rome, diplomacy never ceased to constitute a very ‘delicate’ parallel mechanism that secured stability and peace. Various strategies were implemented by the Romans in the Eastern Mediterranean basin in accordance with the geopolitical reality, the loyalty of the involved ruler or city to Rome, and the concept of amicitia, which formed a characteristic pattern of Roman politics from the 3rd century BC onwards (Gruen 1984, 54-93).

It is interesting to note the differentiated practices applied by Rome during the Republic when dealing with the Thracian tribes of the interior or with the Greek cities of the coast. The constant armed conflicts with the Thracian tribes, the military recruitment, the granting of Roman citizenship and the gradual transformation of the Thracian rulers into friendly kings ended up with the annexation of Thrace in the Roman Empire in AD 46 (Braud 1984; Parissaki 2013c; Baltrusch/Wilker 2015). On the other hand, the policy of the Romans towards the cities of the Aegean coast is better understood within the frame of the strategy developed by them in the Greek East (Gruen 1984; Kallet-Marx 1995; Derow 2003; Eckstein 2006; Gruen 2006).
At the dawn of the 2nd century BC, the rivalry between Philip V, Antiochus III, Eumenes II and the Romans determined the fate of the Aegean littoral Thrace. After the battle at Kynoskephalai in 197 BC, the Greek cities of Thrace were declared free by the Romans (Polyb. 18.48.2; Liv. 33.30-31). Soon afterwards (195/194 BC), Maroneia and neighbouring Ainos passed under the rule of the Seleucids, but the interventions of Philip V in the area did not come to an end. In 183/2 BC the town of Maroneia was seriously damaged by Philip V of Macedon (Liv. 39.34; Polyb. 22.13-14). During the Third Macedonian War, Maroneia, Ainos and Abdera were on the side of the Romans. Although the first two cities managed to avoid the attack of the Roman fleet, Abdera was plundered by the Roman praetor Lucius Hortensius in the summer of 170 BC (Liv. 43.4.8-13; Diod. Sic. 30.6.1).

The battle of Pydna in 168 BC and the end of the Antigonid dynasty was followed by the division of the Macedonian Kingdom into four administrative districts (merides). The area between the rivers Nestos and Hebros was annexed to the first, the easternmost meris, but the large Greek cities of the coast Abdera, Maroneia and Ainos retained their state of freedom (Diod. Sic. 31.8.8; Liv. 45.29.5-7; Loukopoulou 1987, 63-64).

Archaeological research in Abdera and Maroneia has not managed so far to produce sufficient evidence on the changes that occurred in the urban development of the two cities during the Roman period. Late Hellenistic and Roman pottery, coins, public buildings, houses inside the walls and agricultural establishments in the chora, as well as excavated parts of the cemeteries, form a rather blurry picture about the life in the two cities, as they have not been thoroughly studied. In Abdera, a colony that was founded near the river Nestos by the Clazomenians in the 7th century BC and was re-established in the 6th century BC by the Teians, excavations have revealed the Roman phases of the residential city blocks, roads and parts of the city’s Roman cemeteries, but the public buildings and the town planning of the period

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**Fig. 1. Map of Aegean Thrace**
(Ephorate of Antiquities of Rhodope – Ch. Sismanidis)
are scarcely known (see Kallintzi’s article in the present volume). In the case of Maroneia, the situation is rather different. Maroneia was founded by Chians, probably in the 7th century BC, opposite the island of Samothrace. Although excavations inside the walls of the city are very limited, there is some archaeological proof for the events of a very troubled period, i.e. the 2nd century BC. A complex of public buildings, which surrounded the temple of Dionysos, was constructed during the 4th century BC and was abandoned in the beginning or at least, before the middle of the 2nd century BC (Αναγνωστοπούλου-Χατζηπολυχρόνη 2012). Archaeological research conducted in other buildings of the wider area of the theatre and in Hellenistic houses of the city confirms this date of abandonment (Karadima 2008, lxi). The theatre, on the other hand, built in the late 4th century BC, seems to remain constantly in use until the Late Roman era (Karadima et al. 2015). Apart from the above, a monumental gate (propylon) with three openings near the harbour has been identified as the entrance of the city’s Forum. Close to the propylon a large storage building with two rectangular rooms (probably a horreum of the 2nd–3rd century AD) and parts of a paved road to the north of it have been excavated (Κοκκοτάκη 2003).

Research on the onomasticon of the Roman period in Aegean Thrace recorded 428 persons (Parissaki 2007, 267). The names can be assigned to three groups: The first one consists of the ones that testify to the Roman citizenship and the Italic origin of their possessors. The names of Roman citizens with a non-Italic origin are included in the second group, and those of persons without Roman citizenship are in the third. The majority of the names of Italic origin dates to the early stages of the Roman presence in the area and is concentrated in Abdera and Maroneia. Their existence is examined within the broader context of the financial activities performed by immigrants from the Italian peninsula in the Greek East. The limited number of imperial nomina attested in Aegean Thrace until the Constitutio Antoniniana in AD 212 indicates that the Romans were either reluctant or indifferent in using the diplomatic tool of granting Roman citizenship to the inhabitants of Aegean Thrace (Parissaki 2007, 282-288). This conclusion is strengthened by the synthetic study on the names of male Roman citizens that resided in Thrace, excluding the city of Byzantium and the islands of Thasos and Samothrace (Camia 2013). The 401 Roman cives identified inhabited Thrace from the 2nd century BC until the 3rd century AD. The highest percentage of them dates in the 1st and the 2nd century AD and is concentrated in Philippopolis, Perinthos and Augusta Traiana. Apart from the negotiatores, active in Aegean Thrace and the Thracian Chersonessos (Camia 2015), most of the Roman citizens present in Thrace during the Republic and the early Principate were members of Thracian aristocratic families. The diffusion of Roman citizenship increased from the middle of the 1st century onwards, but the total number of Roman citizens in Thrace until the 3rd century AD remained limited.

A major change occurred in the numismatic history of Maroneia during the late 2nd century BC, when the city started for the first time to mint silver tetradrachms on attic standards. They depicted the head of Dionysos on the obverse and a standing Dionysos on the reverse. At the same period Thasos, the other ‘great power’ of the Northern...
Aegean coast, minted also tetradrachms according to Attic standards (Prokopov 2006). The extensive circulation of these two coin series in the interior of Thrace, especially in the first decades of the 1st century BC, may be related to the needs of the Roman army, which was present in the area on many occasions due to the aggressiveness of the Thracian tribes and the battles against Mithridates VI Eupator (Psoma 2013, 289-294). The city of Abdera was unable to follow the same dynamic monetary policy. Only bronze coins were minted during the last period of the city’s civic coinage (after 167 BC until the first half of the 1st century BC) with the head of Poseidon on the obverse and a griffin on the reverse (Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 305-319).

One small stone altar of the 2nd century BC, dedicated to Zeus and Roma (IThrAeg E 187) indicates that the Maronitans were eager to use any existing method in order to flatter Rome. The early introduction of the worship of the Goddess Roma was nothing more than a disguised diplomatic act (Mellor 1975; Fayer 1976; Mellor 1981; Gruen 1984, 177-180; Raycheva 2015). It is interesting to note that later, during the imperial era, the combined worship of Dea Roma, Zeus, Dionysos and Maron, the mythical founder of the city, was very popular in Maroneia (IThrAeg E 188-198). The combined cult of the Goddess and Zeus is attested also in Ainos (Martínez Fernández 1999, 66-67) and in Abdera. In the latter, Zeus bears the epithet Eleutherios (IThrAeg E 21-22).

A set of epigraphic documents comprises by far the most enlightening source of information about the course of diplomatic and military events in Aegean Thrace during the Roman period.

A decree of Abdera honouring the demos of Teos in Asia Minor was found in the sanctuary of Dionysos in Teos (Marek 1997; IThrAeg E 6). According to the text, the Teians, who are called by the Abderitans fathers of the city, supported their colony in a very critical situation which is not clearly stated. Christian Marek, the first editor of the inscription, dated it to the 2nd century BC (166-160 BC) and proposed that it should be interpreted within the context of the destruction of the city in 170 BC. According to Livy, in 170 BC, when the Third Macedonian War was close to its end, Abdera, an ally of the Macedonians, was plundered by the Roman praetor Lucius Hortensius with the help of Eumenes II. The leading citizens of the city were executed and many Abderitans were sold as slaves. According to Livy’s description (43.4.8-13), the city of Abdera tried to prevent the Roman attack using diplomatic means and for this reason a deputation was sent to Rome. The Roman Senate decided to sentence Hortensius for this unjust war, proclaimed the freedom of the city and ordered that the Abderitans who had been sold as slaves should obtain again their freedom. Although Livy’s account does not mention the intervention of Teian ambassadors in this particular case, the interpretation proposed by Christian Marek seems well documented, if the century-long close bond that existed between Abdera and the mother city of Teos is taken under consideration (Hermann 1981; Graham 1992; Βεληγιάννη-Τερζή 1997; Loukopoulou / Parissaki 2004).

A second honorary decree of the city of Abdera was also found in Teos (Pottier / Hauvette-Besnault 1880; SyllP 656; Robert 1935; Herrmann 1971; Erskine 1994; Ager 1996, # 169; IThrAeg E 5; Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 313-316; Camia 2009, 160-163). In this particular inscription, two
Teians are honoured because they went as ambassadors to Rome and defended Abdera when their ancestral territory was threatened by the Thracian King Kotys, a former ally of Perseus. The envoy from Teos faced in Rome a demanding challenge and succeeded to convince their Roman patrons to support Abdera. The inscription has been traditionally dated to immediately after the Third Macedonian War (168 or 166 BC) but the historical context is not clear and the date of the events has been greatly disputed. The later dating that has been proposed places the conflict of the Thracian king and Abdera between 93 and 87 BC (Chiranky 1982; Манов 2002). According to some scholars, the Latin loanwords patronus and atrium, which appear transliterated in the text, attest to a later dating, as they are not common in the 2nd century BC (Eilers 2002, 114-118, 238-239; Bloy 2012).

An important epigraphic text of Maroneia is revealing concerning the methods used by Rome when dealing with the Greek cities of the Thracian coast in terms of amicitia. In the year 167 BC Maroneia and Ainos, made a treaty of alliance (foedus) with Rome (fig. 2) (Τριαντάφυλλος 1983; Gruen 1984, v. 2, 738-740; Loukopoulou 1987, 100-110; Stern 1987; Derow 1988, 269-270; Canali de Rossi 1999; IThrAeg E 168; Clinton 2003, 408-410; Gladhill 2016, 62-63). According to the text, the demos of Maroneia and the demes of Ainos signed an agreement with the demos of Rome that prevented the war between Rome and the Greek cities and ensured that between them there shall be friendship and good alliance by land and by sea for all time. There shall not be war (lines 10-12, translation: Bagnall / Derow 2004, # 49).

From 120 BC until his death in Pantikapaion in 63 BC, the King of Pontos Mithridates VI Eupator, threatened the Roman supremacy in the East. Knowledge about the fate of the Greek cities of the Thracian coast during the period that the troops of Mithridates crossed this area in 88 BC is limited (Gaggero 1978; IThrAeg E 166, 327; Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 316-317). One letter of the governor of Macedonia Gnaeus Dolabella addressed to the Thasians (80 BC) (Dunant / Pouilloux 1958, # 175; RDGE, # 21; IThrAeg E 166; Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 316; Clinton 2003, 385-388; Sherk 1984, # 64) informs that the Roman Senate renewed friendship and alliance with the island and granted privileges to the Thasians because they had resisted to the enemies of Rome. In the fragmentary text, envoys from Abdera are also mentioned, probably because the city was also an ally of Rome1. During the same period Maroneia must had suffered a terrible destruction by the troops of Mithridates. This is deduced by the text of a decree of Maroneia found in the sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samothrace (Clinton 2003; Clinton 2004; Wörre 2004; IThrAeg E 180; Wörre 2005; Thornton 2007)2. When Claudius was inaugurated Emperor in AD 41, or later in AD 46, when Thrace became a province, the Maronitans tried to defend their rights and sent an embassy to the Emperor. The inscription refers that in the past, immediately upon introduction of their (sc. the Romans) hegemony in this region (line 8), a treaty was concluded between the two parts, confirming in this way the dating of the treaty of alliance between Maroneia and Rome (167 BC), proposed by its first editor Diamantis Triantaphyllos. It also offers three very interesting pieces of information: first of all that the decision to send ambassadors to Rome was taken not only by the leading citizens, but also by the Roman residents and all other citizens. Secondly, it mentions a complete

1 Granious Licicianus (35.70) mentions that Abdera was sieged by the troops of Mithridates in 86 BC.
2 According to Clinton, the remaining two inscribed fragments should be attributed to two decrees. On the contrary, the editors of IThrAeg estimate that the two inscribed stones are parts of the same decree.
destruction that the city suffered in the past because Maroneia was a friend and an ally to Rome. Kevin Clinton, the first editor of the inscription, believes that this destruction should be related to the troops of the Pontic King Mithridates being in Aegean Thrace around 88-87 BC. Thirdly, the inscription explains in detail the mechanism through which the embassies would be sent to Rome in the future.

Two honorary inscriptions with the names of Thracian kings, one probably from Abdera (IThrAeg E 83 honouring Rhoemetalkes III, AD 38-46) and one from Maroneia (IThrAeg E 207 honouring probably Kotys, son of of Rheskouporis, 42-31 BC) date from the 1st century BC to the first half of the 1st century AD and prove that the cities of Aegean Thrace tried to secure stability in their area by achieving a balanced relationship with the Romans and with their neighbours in

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3 Compare also IThrAeg E 458 (from Plotinopolis, votive inscription to Hercules Saviour probably mentioning Kotys, son of Rhaeskouporis (42-31 BC) and an inscription from Perinthos, Sayar 1998, # 5 mentioning Rhometalkes II (AD 19-38). See also: Μπακαλάκης 1935 for a votive monument to Zeus Hypsistos honouring Rhometalkes III from Eastern Macedonia. On the relations between the Greek cities of the coast and the Thracian client kings see: Loukopoulos 1987, 86-91; Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 379-380; Parissaki 2013, 110-111.
ner Thrace. The fact that a significant amount of coins of the Thracian King Rhoemetalkes I (11 BC–AD 12) was found in Abdera is also suggestive for the contacts between the city and the client kingdom of Thrace (Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 379).

After the annexation of Thrace in the Roman Empire in AD 46, Claudius followed a different policy towards the territories controlled by the Thracians and the Greek cities of the Aegean, the Propontis and the Black Sea. He left the administration of the inner territories to the strategoi, preserving an older administrative system (Gerov 1970; Parissaki 2009; Delev 2009; Parissaki 2013b), but he declared the Greek cities free (Danov 1979; Αβραμέα 1994; Wilkes 1996; Kolendo 1998; Bechert 1999, 73–76; Ivanov / von Bülow 2008; Parissaki 2013a; Lozanov 2015; Iliev 2015).

An edict of Emperor Hadrian (fig. 3) illustrates the continuing efforts of Maroneia and Abdera to gain the favour of Rome. When Hadrian passed through the area in the year AD 132, Maronitans and Abderitans appealed to him because Roman officials demanded unjust financial privileges concerning their sea travel to Samothrace and the imperial transport system (vehiculatio). As it is clearly stated in the Edict, the Emperor supported the Greek cities against the arbitrary actions of the Roman officials (IThraEg E 185; Jones 2011). Two inscriptions from Abdera (IThraEg E 78–79) demonstrate that Hadrian also resolved the boundary disputes of the city (Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 352; Boatwright 2000, 105). The fact that in both inscriptions the term Ἀδριανέων is added to the name of the city is indicative of the gratitude expressed to the Emperor. The same term is found in some of the

Fig. 3. Edict of Emperor Hadrian (Ephorate of Antiquities of Rhodope; photographer: S. Stournaras)
coins struck in Abdera during the reign of Hadrian (Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 352). Emperor Hadrian is named soter in an honorary inscription found in Maroneia, probably because of the help he provided to the city at the time of his visit (IThrAeg E 210). During the reign of Hadrian, Maroneia started again to mint coins after an interval of fifty years (Schönert-Geiss 1987, 87). Even the construction of the marble propylon that led to the city’s forum (Kokkorák 2003) may be related to the visit of the Emperor, for whom the fostering of the cities was always a priority.

Conclusions

The Greek cities of the Aegean coast retained their state of freedom and the privileges derived from it throughout the Republic and the Imperial Period, although the historical conditions were not in their favour any more. The epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological testimonies document the existence of all the patterns usually encountered in the eastern part of the Roman world: diplomatic acts, imperial cult, festivals, gladiatorial games and the issue of provincial coinage. Topeiros, Traianopolis and Plotinopolis, the new cities founded in the area by Trajan, were situated on the axis of Via Egnatia or close to the road that led to inner Thrace and began their Roman life with many advantages. Unlike that, the Greek cities of the coast never again experienced their older ‘days of glory’.

Bibliography


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