

ILLYRIAN PIRACY – ANCIENT ENDEMIC OR HISTORICAL CONSTRUCT?

“From the earliest times, piracy had had free play in these waters, and this profitable career had been assiduously followed by the inhabitants of the eastern shore”.¹

This statement, by the influential French historian Maurice Holleaux, is part of his theory that Illyrian piracy was a centuries old problem in the ancient Adriatic. He maintained that this manifestation was the primary reason why the Romans, whom he argues were supposedly indifferent to Greek affairs, were first forced to cross over from Italy into Greece in order to deal with this infestation, thus resulting in the two Illyrian wars of 229-8 and 219 BC. Later scholarship, however, brought aspects of Holleaux’s thesis into question, in particular his reliance on Polybius. This four-part study aims to bring together the various perceptions and approaches to the Illyrian wars in order to demonstrate their importance in Graeco-Roman relations of the late third century and in particular the Roman view of the Adriatic. First, it will focus on the modern factors that produced this construct of Illyrian piracy, secondly the ancient depictions of piracy, and, thirdly, the portrayals of the Illyrians. In the final section I will argue that the wars were motivated from within Rome by a combination of military, political and economic factors, in contrast to Holleaux’s more narrow approach.

The modern construct of Illyrian piracy

At this time, the event, of a tragic seriousness, which dominated and troubled Greece, was the frightening development of Illyrian piracy.²

This characteristic statement of Holleaux occurs within his study on Romano-Hellenistic relations, in order to emphasise the role of Illyrian piracy in causing Rome’s first involvement in Greek affairs. In addition, he writes emotively as if he himself had had personal experience of this supposed phenomenon from within Greek society. Holleaux drew on various sources to support his assertion. For instance he starts his subsection in the Cambridge Ancient History entitled “Illyrian Piracy” with this generalisation.

*Among the ancients the Adriatic had from earliest times a sinister reputation; at Athens in the fifth century, ‘to sail the Adriatic’ was a proverbial phrase meaning to undertake a dangerous venture.*³

This refers to a couple of Lysias’ speeches which comment on the concern of Athenian merchants when sending ships to the Adriatic.⁴ He builds on this by quoting a Livian passage about a Spartan naval expedition of 302 BC which describes the perils of the Adriatic, including “...the Illyrians, Liburnians and Istrians on his right, savage tribes and most of them notorious for their acts of piracy”.⁵ Holleaux also claimed that in the early fourth century the Syracusan tyrant “Dionysius the Elder had attempted to curb their activities”, but that with the wane of his power the Adriatic was again “delivered over to the Illyrians, and piracy, like an endemic disease, continued to be its scourge”.⁶ This image of the Illyrians being a type of

¹ Holleaux, 1928, 824.

² Holleaux, 1921, 22: “En ce temps-là, l’événement, d’une gravité tragique, qui domine et trouble l’histoire de la Grèce, c’est le développement effrayant de la piraterie illyrienne”.

³ Holleaux, 1928, 824.

⁴ Dell, 1967, 350; Lysias, 32.25; 13.612.

⁵ Livy, 10.2.4.

⁶ Holleaux, 1928, 825: his assertion is based on Diodorus (15.14.1-3 and 16.15.3) who says how the Syracusan tyrant set up colonies at Lissus and in Apulia against pirates and that in 384 BC the governor sent a naval force of triremes against the Illyrian *lemboi*, (the light fast boats manned by the Illyrians), which had been employed to attack the Greek colonists at Pharos.

vermin is maintained when Holleaux says how, during the late third century, “the Illyrians began to make a habit of infesting the Ionian Sea”.⁷ He argued that this renewed expansion occurred through the leadership of Agron and his successors Teuta and Demetrius of Pharos, as Illyrian piracy “became under them a public institution and a national industry”.⁸

It was as a result of this malevolent organisation that Rome became entangled in Greek affairs, first in 230-229 BC, when Illyrian ships attacked Italian traders and murdered one of the Roman envoys sent to investigate, and secondly in 219 BC, when Demetrius of Pharos dispatched squadrons of *lemboi* into the Ionian sea, thus breaking the Roman-Illyrian treaty of 228 BC. Holleaux neatly sums up Rome’s supposed policy, by saying that this “was for anyone who considers the facts without prejudice, no more than a piece of maritime police work, which had long been necessary”.⁹

Criticisms of the construct

Harry Dell in 1967 made a strong critique of this widely accepted view that Illyrian piracy was a long-standing phenomenon, by highlighting some serious flaws in Holleaux’s construct. For instance, he indicated that Lysias’ comments on the dangers of the Adriatic do not specifically mention the threat of piracy, but that Lysias was simply stating the fears of Athenian merchants when sailing in those waters.¹⁰

Dell made a strong counter-argument claiming the hazardous sailing conditions of the Adriatic arose more from geographical and meteorological conditions than piracy. Dell believed that it was necessary for ancient shipping to hug the coastline for safety and that this entailed sailing along the eastern side of the Adriatic to take advantage of the current and its numerous harbours, unlike the poorly harboured western side.¹¹ Furthermore the fierce easterly wind called the ‘bora’, which blows in both summer and winter, could catch a boat by surprise.¹² Therefore to prevent being shipwrecked the sailors would have tried to avoid the dangerous lee-shore on the western side, again hugging the eastern side. Horden and Purcell argue for a more complex picture of ancient shipping lanes though, emphasising the numerous options open to sea traders. They do not, however, dispute Dell’s argument about the physical dangers of the Adriatic.¹³

Dell also took issue with Holleaux’ employment of the Elder Dionysius’ Adriatic activities, as Diodorus’ account does not specifically mention any attacks by Illyrian pirate ships.¹⁴ In fact Diodorus’ account tells of Apulian pirates in the Adriatic, and later, Strabo mentions

⁷ Holleaux, 1928, 826.

⁸ Holleaux, 1921, 22: “...devenue sous eux une institution publique et une industrie nationale”.

⁹ Holleaux, 1928, 856.

¹⁰ Lysias, 32.25: mentions how Diogeiton was a scoundrel by risking his wards’ money in the financing a cargo dispatched to the Adriatic, thus pointing to the hazardous nature of the waters; Athenaeus, 33.612: refers to a Lysias’ speech, in which this comment on a well-known debtor is made: “the Peiraeus merchants are in such a state of mind that it seems much safer to them to send a ship to the Adriatic than to lend money to him,” thus again pointing to the Adriatic being seen as hazardous; Dell 1967, 350.

¹¹ Dell, 1967, 350.

¹² Dell, 1967, 350.

¹³ Horden & Purcell, 2000, 137-43.

¹⁴ Diodorus, 15.14.2: mentions a Pharos-Illyrian engagement, where the indigenous “old barbarian” inhabitants of the island of Pharos, on account of the Greek settlers, “called in the Illyrians from the opposite mainland. These, to the number of more than ten thousand, crossed over to Pharos in many small boats, wrought havoc, and slew many of the Greeks”. This highlights the grey area of how such actions are interpreted, with this action more a case of colonists fighting the indigenous peoples of Pharos and Illyria, than being the victims of a pirate raid.

Tyrrhenian pirates operating in the region, so pointing to other ethnic groups being involved in such naval raids.¹⁵

Dell's critique thus highlighted a number of key concerns about Holleaux's theory. Consequently it is important to identify what motivated this influential French scholar to place so much stock in the supposed centuries old phenomenon of Illyrian piracy.

Holleaux' approach and influences

Holleaux rightly saw Polybius as an extremely valuable source for his Roman-Hellenistic studies.¹⁶ He, however, adopted an unquestioning approach, which on occasion resulted in his acceptance of Polybius' prejudices. Linderski identifies the Illyrian wars as a prominent example of this.

He [Holleaux] slavishly follows Polybius and faithfully reproduces the anti-Illyrian bias; he makes no attempt to use the Polybian facts for a reconstruction of the Illyrian side of the story.¹⁷

This is demonstrated by his unquestioning acceptance of Polybius' description of Queen Teuta's interview with the Roman ambassadors, as he calls her behaviour "ungracious and haughty" without any comment about the hostile nature of the source.¹⁸ Holleaux on the Illyrian Wars provides this footnote comment on Polybius, which emphasises this unquestioning approach.

His account, incomplete or inexact on some points, but on the whole entirely trustworthy, is generally held to be based on Fabius Pictor.¹⁹

More recent scholarship has, however, questioned Polybius' account of both wars.²⁰ For example, Derow importantly points out that Polybius himself had doubts about the reliability of his sources for events before 220 BC, as they were outside his period.²¹

It seemed to me indeed if I comprised events of an earlier date, repeating mere hearsay evidence, I should be safe neither in my estimates nor in my assertions.²²

Another major reason for Holleaux' approach was his laudable aim to empathise with the ancients and thus assess their thoughts. In his inaugural lecture in Lyons in 1888 he told his audience of the pleasures that such a practice brings to the historian.

The men of the past move towards the historian; no more inert shadows, but people of flesh and life. He senses around him their light movement; he sees them, he hears

¹⁵ Strabo, 5.3.5: tells that, in the early third century, Demetrius I Poliorketes' captured some Tyrrhenian pirates and sent them back to Rome; Diodorus, 16.5.3: mentions that the Elder Dionysius, in the mid fourth century, set up bases in Apulia to counter Apulian pirates; De Souza, 1999, 51-2.

¹⁶ Holleaux, 1921, 18: "Les harangues politiques, peu nombreuses, que referme son ouvrage, gardent, dans leurs traits généraux, un caractère manifeste d'authenticité; elles reposent sur un fond d'histoire très précis. Polybe les a sans doute largement retouchées; il n'y a nulle apparence qu'il les ait fabriquées".

¹⁷ Linderski, 1984, 141.

¹⁸ Holleaux, 1928, 832.

¹⁹ Holleaux, 1928, 822.

²⁰ Badian, 1952, 72-93; Derow, 118-34; Eckstein, 1994, 46-59.

²¹ Derow, 1973, 123.

²² Polybius, 4.2.3.

*them. The Historian communicates with them not through long reflection and patient induction, but through immediate contact.*²³

Placing yourself in the shoes of the individuals that you are analysing is of value, since it is an attempt to appreciate their perspective and motivations.²⁴ This approach, however, is fraught with dangers particularly if you do not critically view the ancient authors with whom you are empathising. In addition one has to consider the immense differences between ancient society and that of our own, as the limited amount of evidence neither allows us to fully appreciate the everyday political climate in the Graeco-Roman society of 230 BC, nor rid ourselves of the modern influences that mould our thoughts.

As a result of this lack of critical restraint Holleaux allows his treatment of the Illyrian wars to follow a source which, as well as having embellishments, takes an overtly moralistic stance against the Illyrians. For instance, Polybius concludes his account of the First Illyrian War thus: “for the Illyrians were not the enemies of this people or that, but the common enemy of all”.²⁵ This was the type of polemic that doubtlessly influenced Holleaux’ supposed endemic of Illyrian piracy.

In an attempt to understand Holleaux’s acceptance of Polybius, Linderski looked at the 19th century French approaches to Roman Imperialism, and in particular their treatment of Polybius. Consequently, he argued that the work of Fustel de Coulanges was of considerable influence on Holleaux.²⁶ Fustel wrote an extended essay entitled “Polybius or Greece conquered by the Romans”, large sections of which were later incorporated into his widely studied book *The Ancient City*. Part of Fustel’s thesis included the argument that in Polybius’ time the landowning Greek aristocracy looked to Rome for salvation and security, and it was through their willing submission to Rome that they saved Greece from her own destructive revolutionary forces.²⁷ This argument fitted into Holleaux’s theory that the Roman elite was indifferent to events in Greece and that it was Greek affairs that drew Rome across the Adriatic.

Fustel’s approach to Polybius, like Holleaux’, was one of uncritical acceptance, with Momigliano providing this general warning about his treatment of ancient sources. “The reader of *The Ancient City* must be on guard at every step about what Fustel states as given in his sources”.²⁸ Momigliano also significantly points out how Fustel had a strong distrust of the German historiographical approaches of his day, in particular the source criticism promoted by Niebuhr and Pertz, and he sees this as influential on Fustel’s uncritical attitude to the sources.²⁹ Following this anti-German approach one wonders how much influence the First World War had on Holleaux’s construct of Illyrian piracy, which was part of the work which he completed in 1923. Holleaux does briefly mention the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914 (as a comparison to the supposed Illyrian murder of the Roman envoy in

²³ Roches, 1943, 66-7: “...et les d’autrefois montent vers l’historien, non plus ombres inertes, mais figures mobiles et vivantes. Il sent autour de lui leur frôlement léger; il les voit, il les entend; il communique avec eux non plus par l’intermédiaire des longues réflexions et des inductions patientes, mais par un contact immédiat”; Linderski, 1984, 145.

²⁴ Lee, 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 35: in the fictional world of a 1930s Alabama town, Lee promotes the idea that you can not gain a decent perspective of another person, “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it”.

²⁵ Polybius, 2.12.6.

²⁶ Linderski, 1984, 144.

²⁷ Fustel, 1858, 159-61; Linderski, 1984, 144.

²⁸ Momigliano, 1980, xi.

²⁹ Momigliano, 1977, 329-30; Hartog, 1988, 38-44: a distrust that was doubtlessly exacerbated in 1870-1 when Germany took control of Alsace-Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian War, an annexation which included Strasbourg at which Fustel had held a professorship in 1860-70.

229 BC), so indicating that the modern conflict was not wholly divorced from his work.³⁰ One wonders if he was simply continuing Fustel's and the other French academics' patriotic distrust of the German school.

One major weakness in Linderski's argument is the lack of a direct link between Holleaux and Fustel, as Holleaux's work on the Illyrian wars does not contain any reference to Fustel's work. This is significant as such a link might have pointed to the areas that Holleaux studied and employed in his construct, and more importantly provided the proof that Holleaux was directly influenced by Fustel.³¹

Ancient Piracy

The sources point to the prominent role played by the Illyrian ships in the run-up to both wars, as demonstrated by Polybius' emphasis on how Demetrius in 220 BC had sailed "beyond Lissus, contrary to the terms of the treaty, with fifty ships, [and] had pillaged many of the Cyclades".³² The Illyrian employment of their *lemboi* to transport troops and make coastal raids was an undoubted phenomenon; it is however the nature with which these irregular naval forces were labelled, perceived, and politically manipulated that requires attention, as this will shed light on the polemical treatment the Illyrians received.

In the ancient world piracy was a genuine threat. For example in the 360s BC a wealthy Sicilian, Lycon of Heraclea, after leaving Athens, was murdered by pirates in the Argolic gulf, and famously Julius Caesar was kidnapped by pirates near Miletos.³³ New Comedy moreover has characters, who were originally freeborn, then kidnapped and sold into slavery by pirates.³⁴ Such characterisations are a fair reflection of contemporary concerns, as epigraphic evidence demonstrates, with the following details from a mid-third century BC inscription from the Cycladic island of Amorgos:

*...pirates made an incursion into the countryside at night and captured a total of more than thirty girls, women and other persons, free and slave, and scuttled the ships in the harbour and captured the ship of Doreios, in which they sailed off with their captives and the rest of their booty.*³⁵

Demetrius' raid against the Cyclades in 220 BC thus can be understandably interpreted as piracy, since he was leading his warships in attacks against a region that had already suffered at the hands of seaborne raiders.

When analysing ancient piracy, however, we have to be aware of the negative labelling associated with it. De Souza emphasises the pejorative nature of the words that designated pirates and importantly how these labels were employed by their victims and enemies and not the pirates themselves.³⁶ During the mid third century the word *πειρατής* started to be used, which in its neutral sense means plunderer, and its translation to bandit or pirate was

³⁰ Holleaux, 1952, 29: "tel le crime de Saraïevo en 1914"; Linderski, 1984, 141.

³¹ Hartog, 1988, 396: a large number of Fustel's works were published or re-published soon after his death in 1889. For example his 1858 doctorate thesis on Polybius was included in the 1893 *Questions Historiques*, whose six articles included three on the ancient world; Roques, 1943, 26: these works by Fustel were being published in the formative years of Holleaux' career, in which he became a member of the French school of Athens, and started his research into the Hellenistic World.

³² Polybius, 3.16.3.

³³ Demosthenes, 52.5; Suetonius, *Iul.* 4; Plutarch, *Caes.* 1-2.

³⁴ De Souza, 1999, 60; Plautus, *Poen.* 896-7: the slave Syncerastus informs another slave of the background of the freeborn sisters Adelphasium and Anterastilis. "Well master brought 'em as tiny things in Anactorium from a Sicilian pirate".

³⁵ IG 12.7.386; Austin, 1981, no.87; De Souza, 1999, 61.

³⁶ De Souza, 1999, 1-3.

dependant on its historical context as frequently demonstrated by Polybius.³⁷ In addition, Polybius is the earliest surviving author to make major use of the word *πειρατής*, although in his description of the two Illyrian wars he does not employ the word, instead consistently referring to the Illyrian *lemboi*. One wonders why Polybius followed this less negative approach: perhaps because he recognised and associated *lemboi* specifically with the Illyrians.

The political manipulation of piracy

This pejorative labelling went hand in hand with the political manipulation of ancient piracy. For example in his *Res Gestae* Augustus claims: “I made the sea peaceful and freed it from pirates.”³⁸ This assertion refers to the Sicilian War of 42-36 BC between the Second Triumvirate and Sextus Pompeius, an internecine conflict that involved various engagements around Sicily between Roman naval forces. Thus Augustus concisely painted one of his rivals with the negative label of piracy.³⁹

Such rhetorical exploitation also frequently included a moralistic tenor about the threat of piracy to civilized society. Thucydides, in his view of the military-political evolution of Greek states, believed the practices of banditry and piracy were acceptable in less developed regions, but that these were practices were abandoned by Athens when she became civilized.⁴⁰ Cicero, within his work on moral philosophy *De Officiis*, more pointedly emphasises this uncivilized perception of pirates, when he places them outside legitimate warfare in his discussion of the vows sworn between opposing forces.

*For a pirate is not specified as belonging to the ranks of combatants, but is a foe in all men's eyes, and no pledge or oath should be taken with him.*⁴¹

This moral tone is similar to Polybius' concluding remarks to the First Illyrian War when he calls the Illyrians “the common enemies of all.”⁴² Polybius and Cicero, by marking out pirates as illegitimate fighters who threatened civilized states, made their eradication appear as a necessary and laudable act in order to maintain peace and prosperity.

As a result of this positive image of dealing with pirates, there was a long tradition within the Graeco-Roman world of military leaders who suppressed piracy. For instance the legendary King Minos of Crete was renowned for suppressing pirates in the Aegean, and in 67 BC Pompey famously dealt with the Cilician pirates.⁴³ Some commanders, moreover, exploited these campaigns to legitimise their personal power, and also the power of their respective states, as demonstrated by the iconographic, rhetorical and ceremonial publicity that resulted from Pompey's victorious campaign.⁴⁴ Thus the eradication of piracy legitimised imperialism and territorial expansion.⁴⁵ In the light of this culture of political manipulation it is

³⁷De Souza, 1999, 4; BC SEG 24, no 154, lines 21-3: the earliest employment of *πειρατής* occurs on an inscription from Rhamnous dated to 267 BC; for example Polybius, 4.3.8: describes how the Aetolian Dorimachos led a cattle-rustling band of brigands (*πειρατών*; 21.12: and later at the sea battle of Myonnesos he employs *πειραταί* to describe some of the vessels faced by the Romans.

³⁸ *Res Gestae* 25: “*Mare pacavi a praedonibus*”.

³⁹ De Souza, 1999, 185-95.

⁴⁰ Thucydides, 1.5; Braund, 1993, 196.

⁴¹ Cicero, *Off.* 3.107.

⁴² Polybius, 2.12.6.

⁴³ Thucydides, 1.8; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 26-30.

⁴⁴ RRC 426/4: *denarii* issued in 56 BC advertised a number of Pompey's military achievements and this included the iconographic symbol of the *apulstre* (an ornament on a ship's stern), which refers to his success over the pirates; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 45: describes Pompey's triumph of 62 BC, and this included a parade of pirates who have been captured during the campaign.

⁴⁵ Braund, 1993, 203.

understandable how the Illyrians, a people who successfully wielded their small fast ships, received such a bad press.

Ancient perception of the Illyrians

Wilkes points out how all the written records of the ancient Illyrians come from ‘external’ sources, which frequently paint them in a contemptuous manner.⁴⁶ For example, Appian tells how Apollo inflicted a fatal contagious plague on the Illyrians due to one of their tribes being involved in the Cimbrian attack on Delphi.⁴⁷ Thus the Alexandrian historian depicts them as a sacrilegious and polluted race. Alongside this general perception, there are also the detrimental portrayals of Teuta and Demetrius of Pharos, the respective leaders of the Illyrians in the first and second wars; and an analysis of these characterisations will demonstrate the depth of the sources’ anti-Illyrian prejudice.

Queen Teuta is seen by Polybius as the main instigator of the First Illyrian War. He perceives her supposed arrogance and folly as a product of her recent military victories against Greek coastal cities saying how “as with a woman’s natural shortness of view, she could see nothing, but the recent success and had no eyes for what was going on elsewhere”.⁴⁸ Then later when the Roman envoys, the Coruncanii, come to complain about the Illyrian raids, Polybius mentions how “Teuta during the whole interview, listened to them in a most arrogant and overbearing manner”.⁴⁹ Finally, Polybius alleges how “defying the law of nations...she sent emissaries to assassinate” the younger Coruncanus.⁵⁰

Polybius’ portrayal of Teuta is in stark contrast to his espoused historical approach of adopting a wide perspective of events, and it also goes against his criticism of historians who confused history and drama.⁵¹ Eckstein sees this portrayal as part of Polybius’ literary treatment of women. He points out how Polybius followed the male Greek elite view that women were a “force for disorder within society”, with this threat demonstrated by the inherent “hyperemotionality of women”.⁵² Eckstein applies this approach to the five elite women who stand out in the Histories in order to demonstrate that women in Polybius had a tendency to employ fierce and mindless violence and ultimately exhibit madness (*paranomia*).⁵³ Thus, Polybius’ image of Teuta may be seen as a product of Hellenistic male stereotyping.

The negative portrayal of Teuta could have also derived from the sources Polybius employed for the First Illyrian War. Errington suggests that it came from the Roman historian Fabius Pictor, a contemporary of the events that Polybius drew on for various parts of his Histories.⁵⁴ It might have also come from a Greek source. For instance, in Polybius’ description of the Illyrian victory over an Achaean naval force off the island of Corcyra in 229 BC, he says how one quinquereme sank with all hands “on board of which was Margus of Caryneia, a man who up to the end served the Achaeans most loyally”.⁵⁵ This description points towards an Achaean source, with Walbank saying that the superlative phraseology is typical of

⁴⁶ Wilkes, 1992, 3.

⁴⁷ Appian, *Ill.* 4.

⁴⁸ Polybius, 2.4.8.

⁴⁹ Polybius, 2.8.7.

⁵⁰ Polybius, 2.8.12.

⁵¹ Walbank, 1957, 8; Polybius, 1.4.1-7: he argues that one cannot get a decent perspective of past events, “by studying isolated histories”; 2.56: his criticism of tragic history.

⁵² Eckstein, 1995, 150-1.

⁵³ Eckstein, 1995, 153: the five women are Queen Teuta of Illyria, Apega the wife of the Spartan tyrant Nabis, Oenanthe the mother of Agathocles of Philotis the mother of Charops of Epirus and Orthobula wife the Aetolian Proxenus.

⁵⁴ Errington, 1971, 34-40; Eckstein, 1994, 48.

⁵⁵ Polybius, 2.9.5.

contemporary laudatory inscriptions.⁵⁶ In addition Aratus of Sicyon was the prominent Achaean leader in this period, and Polybius mentions how he employed Aratus' memoirs for Greek events prior to around 220 BC, a source that perhaps mentioned the Achaean naval deployment.⁵⁷ If Aratus or another Achaean account described the events, it might very well have taken an unfavourable stance towards the Illyrian leader whose forces had killed the loyal Margus.

In contrast to Polybius, Appian's account of the First Illyrian War is markedly different. First of all Appian makes Teuta only a minor figure in the events, only naming her as "the widow of Agron".⁵⁸ In addition Derow argues that Appian's account of the war is more plausible through its specific reference to the Issaian ambassador Kleemporus, which he believes points to a good source.⁵⁹ Such value is in contrast to the Polybian treatment of Teuta, thus further emphasising the elaborated nature of Polybius and his sources.

Polybius' negative perception of the Illyrians continued with his portrayal of the supposed instigator of the second Illyrian War Demetrius of Pharos. Again Polybius pushes the idea of Rome acting like a policeman in the Adriatic in order "to correct the errors of the Illyrians".⁶⁰ In a similar vein to Teuta, Polybius depicts Demetrius of Pharos as reckless, treacherous and arrogant, saying that "he was a man of a bold and venturesome spirit, but with an entire lack of reasoning power and judgement".⁶¹ Polybius moreover provides details of Demetrius' actions, such as his alleged instigation of Philip V of Macedon's massacre of the Messenians in 214 BC.⁶² So why did Polybius treat Demetrius so harshly?

The depiction of this Greek adventurer, in particular during the Second Illyrian War, could be a product of a Roman account. There is good circumstantial evidence that points to a pro-Aemilian source for the Polybian account of the war, since the campaign, which was led by the consuls L. Aemilius Paullus and M. Livius Salinator, involved Livius playing the silent partner. Paullus on the other hand demonstrated prominent generalship in the Polybian account, including an aggressive siege of Dimale and a clever ruse at Pharos, which tempted Demetrius out of his strong and well supplied position.⁶³ Demetrius' portrayal therefore might have come from such a source to which Polybius had access via his close links to Scipio Aemilianus grandson of Paullus who promoted his ancestor's virtue in contrast to the treacherous and reckless Demetrius.

Eckstein argues that Demetrius' negative character came from Polybius' respect for Aratus of Sicyon.⁶⁴ This derives in part from Polybius' Achaean patriotism; as demonstrated by his active service for the League.⁶⁵ Aratus is closely linked to Demetrius because they were both advisors to the young King Philip V of Macedon from 219 to 214 BC. Although Aratus' Memoirs stop after 220, Eckstein believes that Polybius' positive image of the Greek statesman derived from Achaean records, or even oral reports from within the Achaean

⁵⁶ Walbank, 1957, 160-1; Derow, 1973, 123.

⁵⁷ Polybius, 2.47; Walbank, 1933, 159: "Aratos directed the activities of Achaean from 250 to 213".

⁵⁸ Appian, *Ill.* 7.

⁵⁹ Derow, 1991, 127; Appian, *Ill.* 7.

⁶⁰ Polybius, 3.16.

⁶¹ Polybius, 3.19.9.

⁶² Polybius, 2.11; 7.11-14.

⁶³ Polybius, 3.18.4: states how at Dimale Paullus "erected batteries in several places", and that as a result the town fell in seven days; 3.18.8: describes how Pharos "the city was very strong" with "a large force of exceptionally fine troops assembled within it and that it was excellently furnished with supplies and munitions of war". This heightens Paullus' achievement of drawing out Demetrius.

⁶⁴ Eckstein, 1994, 53: "Polybius viewed Aratus as a wise man precisely because of Aratus' ability to foresee the consequences of political trends when the actions were unclear".

⁶⁵ Polybius, 28.6.9; Walbank, 1957, 3: Polybius served as Hipparch for the Achaean confederation in 170/169 BC.

aristocratic circles.⁶⁶ Whilst Aratus is frequently seen in providing cautionary advice to the Macedonian monarch, Demetrius of Pharos was deemed responsible for a number of Philip's reprehensible acts, such as the sacrilegious plundering of the temple-complex at Thermum.⁶⁷

Military perspective of the Illyrians

To provide a more balanced perception of the Illyrians, one should look at their various military activities in the period of the two Illyrian wars. For example in 232 BC 100 lemboi carrying 5000 men were dispatched by King Agron south, and this force, after making a night landing inland, defeated an Aetolian force besieging Medion.⁶⁸ Then in 230 BC Teuta sent out raids against Epirus and defeated an Achaean naval force off Corcyra.⁶⁹ Later in 220 BC Demetrius and Scerdilaïdas led 90 lemboi in raids against Pylos and the Cyclades.⁷⁰ The numbers of boats employed, and the high level of organisation required for these deployments, make them look like the actions of an ambitious city-state, and not the random small-scale operations one might associate with pirates.

In addition to these raids, the Illyrians also showed territorial ambitions. For instance, in 230 BC the Illyrians captured Corcyra and Pharos, and then attempted to besiege Issa and Epidamnus; and Appian mentions how the Illyrians established garrisons in the successfully captured towns.⁷¹ Such a strategy looks more like territorial expansion than the hit and run tactics of ancient piracy. Moreover, control of these towns in the southern Adriatic would provide better situated naval bases, since the Illyrians had ambitions for seaborne operations into the Ionian Sea and beyond, as demonstrated by Demetrius' moves into the Aegean in 220 BC.

One cannot ignore the economic benefits these naval operations brought to the Illyrians. For instance after the attack on the Aetolians at Medion, the Illyrian force "carried off to their boats the baggage and other booty".⁷² Later Polybius tells of "the quantity and beauty of the spoils they brought back" from their raid on the Epirote town of Phoenice.⁷³ The Illyrian operations were undoubtedly motivated in part by the material benefits, such as precious metals and prestigious plunder. One should also consider foodstuffs and slaves, all which had a ready market in the cities and hinterland of the Adriatic.⁷⁴

Such plundering could be interpreted as piracy and undoubtedly was by their enemies. "Legitimate" ancient warfare, as supposedly practised by civilized states such as Rome, was also in part motivated by the acquisition of booty, and as Gabrielsen rightly states "the difference between warfare and piracy is in the eye of the beholder".⁷⁵ In addition Gabrielsen points out how this ambiguous area is further blurred when "separating the application of violence as a means of enrichment ("booty-seizure") from its application as a means of securing or promoting "national"-political interests (warfare proper)".⁷⁶ Thus we should not

⁶⁶ Eckstein, 1994, 52-3.

⁶⁷ Polybius, 5.9-12; Eckstein, 1994, 53: Polybius overtly contrasts the two advisors after Thermum's sack: "we never find Aratus guilty of impulsiveness or want of judgement, while the contrary is true of Demetrius".

⁶⁸ Polybius, 2.2-4.

⁶⁹ Polybius, 2.10.

⁷⁰ Polybius, 4.16.6.

⁷¹ Polybius, 2.10; Appian, *Ill.* 7.

⁷² Polybius, 2.3.8.

⁷³ Polybius, 2.8.4.

⁷⁴ Wilkes, 1992, 127-8; highlights the goods and trade in which the ancient Illyrians were involved, including: wine, timber and livestock; Horden & Purcell, 2000, 158: "Pirates need to sell or exchange their booty in order to acquire whatever they cannot plunder. Markets are as useful as muscle".

⁷⁵ Gabrielsen, 2003, 399.

⁷⁶ Gabrielsen, 2003, 400.

consider Illyrian sailors as being solely motivated by plunder, but also by a loyalty to their leaders and people, and perhaps a willingness to demonstrate their bellicosity.

One should, moreover, consider another product from their recent naval activities; the spread of a distinctive Illyrian military reputation throughout Greece and Rome. This renown would have come firstly from their victims. For example Polybius tells how in 229 BC:

*the Corcyreans, in the utmost distress and despondency, sent, together with the peoples of Appollonia and Epidamnus, envoys to the Achaeans and Aetolians, imploring them to hasten to their relief and not allow them to be driven from their homes by the Illyrians.*⁷⁷

He also mentions that a representative approached the Senate in 230 BC after Italian traders were attacked by the Illyrians, and Appian tells how in that same year ambassadors from Issa “implored the aid of the Romans” on account of Illyrian aggression.⁷⁸ The Illyrian successes were, therefore, being disseminated on both sides of the Adriatic. In addition the sources show, I believe, an admiration for the vessels and seamanship of the Illyrians. For example, in the naval engagement off Coryca, Polybius states how “the Illyrians lashed their *lemboi* together in batches of four” in order to concentrate their numbers against the larger Achaean quadriremes and quinqueremes.⁷⁹

This widely disseminated reputation for seamanship and fast vessels, alongside a willingness to organise naval raids and secure territorial gains, is what brought the Illyrians to the notice of Rome; a reputation that was critical in generating the official motives publicised by the Romans in their justification of the two campaigns. The Illyrians became in effect victims of their own success.

Roman motives: naval power

The Illyrian campaigns came a few decades after the First Punic War, in which Rome deployed a considerable number of troops. She also built and manned large fleets of war galleys and transports to counter the Carthaginian navies, in the various blockades and engagements that occurred in the seas around Sicily and North Africa. Consider, for instance, the material and human resources required for the 330 ships employed by the Romans at the Battle of Ecnomus in 256 BC.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Senate that voted to dispatch the consuls across the Adriatic, would have included senators who had served in the conflict against Carthage both on land and sea, many doubtless as junior officers, and thus I believe appreciative of the importance of maintaining a strong navy, as well as good communication and supply points for Roman vessels.⁸¹

In the years preceding 229 and 219 BC the Illyrians mounted sizeable naval attacks against the Greek coastal cities to the south of them, and reports of these Illyrian raids reached the senate.⁸² Therefore, the Senate was aware, by exaggerated accounts no doubt, of the naval capabilities of the Illyrians. When 90 Illyrian *lemboi* in 220 BC headed south into the Aegean, it must have concerned the experienced senators that a neighbouring state had the resources, skills and audacity to mount such an operation. In addition, many senators would have

⁷⁷ Polybius, 2.9.8.

⁷⁸ Polybius 2.7.3; Appian, *Ill.* 7.

⁷⁹ Polybius, 2.9.3. A *Lembos* was crewed with about 50, a quinquereme by ca.200, hence the “lashing... together in batches of four,” to make roughly the same size and weight as the opponents.

⁸⁰ Polybius 1.26.7; Goldsworthy 2000, 110-1.

⁸¹ Hammond, 1968, 5: argues that the First Punic War made Rome aware of the importance of having a fleet and naval bases.

⁸² Appian, *Ill.* 7.

remembered the naval raids employed against Italy by Hamilcar Barca during the First Punic War.⁸³ Therefore, a fear or concern about these flotillas of lembos being stationed near the Italian coast might have influenced the Senate's decisions to dispatch forces to Illyria.

Another key factor, linked to Roman naval influence, was the strategic importance of the Otranto Straits, situated between Apulia and Epirus.⁸⁴ This was a key communications bottleneck, with considerable economic, diplomatic and military value, just as the channel between Dover and Calais was during the Middle Ages. It was not simply a question of passengers between west and east via Brundisium and Apollonia, but also trade going between the Ionian and Adriatic seas.⁸⁵ If one looks at the Roman actions in 229 and 219, the consuls did not head directly for the Illyrian forces at Issa and Pharos, but sailed straight across the straits to secure Corcyra and Apollonia.⁸⁶ Then at the end of both wars it appears that these strategic cities on the eastern side of the Otranto straits were bound to Rome by *deditio*.⁸⁷ Defeating the Illyrians was important, but the expeditions were also about establishing and maintaining Roman influence in this key military and economic region.

Roman motives: desire for *gloria* and booty

Another key motivation was the Roman aristocratic desire for conspicuous achievement. Although we have scant evidence of the senatorial decisions to cross the Adriatic, there was clearly a desire by two of the consuls to make a name for themselves, as demonstrated in Polybius' accounts of the wars. The first example is in early 228 BC when the consul L. Postumius Albinus, who, having wintered in Epidamnus, then agreed a peace treaty with the defeated Queen Teuta. As a result:

*Postumius dispatched legates to the Aetolian and Achaean leagues. On their arrival first explained the causes of the war and their reason for crossing of the Adriatic, and next gave an account of what they had accomplished reading the treaty they had made with the Illyrians.*⁸⁸

Considering that this information was dispatched by a consul who had led a successful military campaign it is likely to have included details of his actions, as Roman commanders liked to disseminate their martial deeds not only in Rome, but also to foreign powers. This is demonstrated by Scipio Africanus' letter to Philip V of Macedon in 190 BC, which informed the king of Scipio's achievements in Spain, "particularly the siege of New Carthage".⁸⁹ In addition to such self-promotion, the justification of the Roman actions would have furthered the contemporary negative perception of the Illyrians.

⁸³ Polybius, 1.56.1-2: says how Hamilcar organised naval raids against Locris and Bruttium in 247 BC.

⁸⁴ Hammond, 1968, 20.

⁸⁵ Crawford, 1978, 57: highlights the importance to Rome of controlling the Adriatic and he states how "the strategic threat posed by Illyria with its capital at Rhizon on the bay of Kotor should not be underestimated." He cites the 16th century French ambassador Saint-Gouard who said in 1572: "Whoever holds Kotor, I hold him to be master of the Adriatic and to have it within his power to make a descent on Italy and thereby surround it by land and sea".

⁸⁶ Polybius, 2.11.

⁸⁷ Hammond, 1968, 7 & 11-2; Polybius, 2.11; 3.19.

⁸⁸ Polybius, 2.12.4.

⁸⁹ Polybius, 10.9.3.

The other Polybian example of self-promotion occurs after the end of the Second Illyrian War in 219 BC, when Aemilius Paullus won a triumph.⁹⁰ The process of attaining this triumph would have involved an account by Paullus to the Senate, in order to convince his colleagues that his achievements were worthy of this honour. This was a fine opportunity for him to promote his military success and portray a difficult and worthy enemy, as evident in the Polybian account of the campaign, which might be derived from an Aemilian source that the Greek historian had access through his relationship with Scipio Aemilianus.

Beyond the search and display of gloria another key motivation behind the Roman campaigns against Illyria were the economic benefits.⁹¹ Although we have little detail of the booty from these campaigns, the sources still point to the potential for plunder, the accepted benefits of successful ancient warfare. For instance, in the first war the Romans seized a number of towns that could have been subsequently plundered, (unless they gave themselves in *deditio*, such as Epidamnus and Issa.)⁹² Polybius provides better details for the events of 219 BC. For example, he states how Paullus “took Pharos at once by assault and razed it to the ground”.⁹³ There is no direct reference to any plunder here, but if the Romans sacked the city, which was a wealthy Greek colony, I find it hard to believe that they did not make off with material and human goods.⁹⁴

The fact there is no mention of the booty and slaves taken by the Romans during the Illyrian campaigns is not surprising, as they were unlikely to be a feature of the oral and literary accounts that promoted expeditions sent to stop piracy. To Roman commanders and their troops, however, moveable booty was an important part of their military activities. Their attitude in the period comes across well in the Roman-Aetolian treaty of 211 BC, with some its provisions preserved on a fragmentary inscription in Acarnania.⁹⁵ It includes this proviso that

*if the Romans shall seize any cities of these people by force, as far as the Aetolian people is concerned it shall be permitted to the Aetolian people to possess these cities and their territory; but whatever the Romans seize other than the city and its territory, the Romans shall have it.*⁹⁶

This implies that any moveable property was liable to become plunder and it moreover points towards the Roman Senate officially sanctioning and possibly encouraging this practice. The Romans did not solely cross the Adriatic to prevent piracy; they themselves were doubtless motivated by the lure of similar material gain.

Conclusion

*Wars begin with complex situations, in which aggression, mutual fear, confusion, accident, bad communications, personal and political ambitions and the many other factors play a part.*⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Polybius, 3.19.12: “[Aemilius Paullus] returned to Rome late in summer and entered the city in triumph acclaimed by all for he seemed to have managed matters not only with ability, but with very high courage”; *De viris illustribus*: 50.1; Suetonius, *Tib.* 3.1: the other consul M. Livius Salinator won a triumph too through his actions in the Second Illyrian War, and this was probably another means by which the negative perception of the Illyrians was disseminated.

⁹¹ Harris, 1979, 54.

⁹² Polybius, 2.11.10.

⁹³ Polybius, 3.18.5; 3.19.12.

⁹⁴ Wilkes, 1992, 115: a coin hoard of fourth century Corinthian drachmae indicates possible trade, and inscriptions point towards a well established settlement.

⁹⁵ Walbank, 1981, 232.

⁹⁶ SVA 536; Walbank, 1981, 232-3.

⁹⁷ North, 1981, 2.

This is part of North's response to what he terms the "simple formula" that Harris applies to Roman Republican imperialism. It is a charge that can be equally applied to Holleaux' simplistic approach to the Illyrian Wars, as they resulted from a complex set of military, political and socio-economic motives. Above all we must be aware of the innate negative perception of the Illyrians, not only by the sources but, moreover, by Holleaux on account of his uncritical approach to Polybius. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the recent Gulf Wars, military leaders and commentators are willing to manipulate the reporting of events, sometimes overtly sometimes subtly, to further their personal and patriotic agendas, and thus we should believe that the Roman commanders, who led the expeditions against the Illyrians, demonised their opponents in order to justify their subsequent triumphs.

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