The Size of Athenian Embassies Again

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P. Briant in his perceptive and illuminating article on the council and the election of ambassadors at Athens in the fourth century B.C.[1] accepts recently stated conclusions that the number of envoys elected for an embassy was not determined merely by the importance of the diplomatic issues concerned.[2] He is not inclined, however, to accept that Athenian customs in determining the size of embassies were inconsistent, and suggests that the greater the confidence in the envoys and the proposer of the embassy, the smaller the size of the embassy was. As examples to support his interesting theory he cites the embassies of ten men sent to Sparta in 371 and to Macedon in 346, both of which contained members of diverse political groupings, and the embassy of three men to the Peloponnese in 343/2, consisting of Demosthenes, Hegesippus and Polyeuctus, men of similar outlook.

There are other embassies of three men, such as that of Themistocles, Aristides and Habronichus to Sparta in 478 (Thuc. 1.91.3) and that of Aristoteles, Pyrrhander and Thrasybulus to Thebes in 377 (*IG* II² 43), where powerful political figures with an obvious identity of policy and suitability for the task in hand were sent out to expedite a policy which was beyond challenge at home. We know, however, too little of most embassies and their personnel to argue conclusively. But the experience of Leon and Timagoras, who went as envoys to Persia in 367,[3] should warn us not to accept too readily a relation between the small size of an embassy, public confidence in it, and the lack of controversy; for although it cannot be demonstrated that differences existed between the two before their departure, differences between them were exposed on their mission and led to the

[1] P. Briant, "La Boulè et l'élection des ambassadeurs à Athènes au IV^e siècle," *REA* 70 (1968) 20f.

[2] D. J. Mosley, "The Size of Embassies in Ancient Greek Diplomacy," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 263ff.

[3] Xen. *Hell* 7.1.33f; Plut. *Pel.* 30; Dem. 19.191.

capital sentence of Timagoras, charged with misconduct by Leon. Furthermore it is clear that at the time Athens had to choose a policy in accord with either Sparta or Thebes, and both alternatives had their supporters who fought each other hard.

From the evidence which we have I believe that no simple or dogmatic explanation can account for the variations in size of Athenian embassies. In the fourth century B.C. the administration of oaths in ratification of treaties was most commonly undertaken by five men, and the despatch of five men on an embassy seems to have involved ratification of treaties more often than any other purpose.[4] The four certain instances of the despatch of five envoys to administer oaths involved treaties with Chios in 384 (*IG* II² 34/5), Byzantium in 378 (*IG* II² 41), Thessaly in 361/0 (*IG* II² 116), and Eretria in 341 (*IG* II² 230). Two other likely instances involved treaties with Amyntas of Macedon in 375/3 (*IG* II² 102), and Carystus in 357 (*IG* II² 124).

From those embassies the names of only eight envoys are known, but the embassies were not, so far as we know, subject to greater political controversy than that of three men sent to swear oaths of alliance with Cetriporis of Thrace in 356 (*IG* II² 127); this was the first instance when it is known for certain that three men swore oaths, for the exact details of the conclusion by three men of the One Year's Truce between Athens and Sparta in 423 are not known (Thuc. 4.119. 2). Where precise details are known of the arrangements for the oaths in treaties of the fifth century, five envoys were sent to Chalcis *ca.* 446/5 (*IG* I² 39) and to the Bottiaean cities in 422 (*IG* I² 90); but neither of those two treaties is likely to have been the subject of greater political controversy at Athens than was the One Year Truce, which was concluded by only three men after considerable political debate.

A decree of 394 provided for the election of ten men, five from the council and five from the citizen body, who were to ratify the treaty with Eretria (*IG* II² 16). Yet in 341 only five envoys were sent to Eretria (*IG* II² 230) to ratify a treaty. It would not be easy to show that the political and diplomatic situation was less contentious or hazardous in 341 than in 394. Ten men were sent to administer the oaths for the alliance with Olynthus in 383 (*IG* II² 36). It is likely that the Olynthian

[4] For a convenient tabulation of the principal Athenian embassies from 479 to 339 B.C. see *op.cit.*, *supra* n.2.

appeal for alliance created a difficult situation for the Athenians, for there was a risk of a clash with Sparta, whose policy was to break up established federations by insisting on a narrow definition of autonomy. Concerning the political issues, however, and the men involved, we have insufficient detail for a close examination of the composition of the embassy.

Of other known embassies of ten men, the delegations to Sparta in 445 (And. 3.6), 421 (Diod.Sic. 12.75.4), 405/4 (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.17), and 392/1[5] were sent when significant changes in policy were recognized, achieved or contemplated in making treaties to end a period of war. It may certainly have been politically and diplomatically useful to demonstrate the solidarity of the various political factions in Athens and their common consent to the new policies by accommodating them together on one large embassy; such seems to have been the case with the composition of the embassy, probably composed of ten men, which was sent to arrange peace with Sparta in 371.[6] Certainly in 405/4 there was difficulty in securing acceptance in Athens of terms of peace and alliance reported by Theramenes and his fellow envoys on their return from Sparta. For it was only after a second embassy and three months of privation that the dictated settlement was accepted by the Athenian assembly. Even then Cleophon continued his opposition to the peace, for which the council condemned him to death (Lys. 13.2), and the general Strombichides went into exile rather than acquiesce in the terms (Lys. 13.13; 34). But information on the identity and policies of Theramenes' diplomatic colleagues is lacking.

Athenian policy in relation to Sparta and Persia in 392/1 was certainly the subject of controversy in Athenian politics, for Andocides and his nine diplomatic colleagues on the embassy to Sparta were all condemned to death for their conduct as envoys and for their public advice given to the Athenians on their return in 391.[7] We do not know if political controversy preceded their election and departure. But whereas unanimity prevailed in foreign policy on the alliance with Boeotia in 395,[8] the failure of the alliance to defeat Sparta is likely to

[5] F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 328 (Philochorus) F 149.

[6] Xen. *Hell* 6.3.2f. See D. J. Mosley, "The Athenian Embassy to Sparta in 371 B.C.," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 8 (1962) 41–46.

[7] See n.5 *supra* and And. 3 *passim*.

[8] *IG* II² 14; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.11.

have created political tension. The time had come for fundamental reappraisal of Athenian foreign policy, even if only as a result of Spartan and Persian diplomatic initiatives, but the Athenians were not ready to make it. Again, however, little can be said of the constitution of the embassy, of which the names of only four men, Andocides, Epicrates, Cratinus and Eubulides, are known. From their known background it is fair to suppose that Andocides and Epicrates were suited for negotiations involving relations with Sparta and Persia,[9] but they were successfully prosecuted by Callistratus, who was noted in the earlier part of his career for a policy of co-operation with Thebes and did not participate in the negotiations in 392/1.[10] It is significant that all the envoys were charged and condemned, and anticipated condemnation by flight into exile.

Although there was no universally established doctrine of the collective and collegiate responsibility of Athenian boards of officials, as Demosthenes cogently argued, Aeschines disputed that (Dem. 19.188), trying to implicate his co-envoys to Macedon in 346 (Dem. 19.167; 174). Consequently it is not surprising that public displeasure was vented on all the envoys alike in 391, irrespective of their individual political status. On the other hand, it would not be unlikely that they were all of the same political complexion, for in spite of any notion of collegiate responsibility, when a diplomatic crisis occurred Leon was quick to prosecute his colleague Timagoras in 367 and Demosthenes lost little time in accusing his colleague Aeschines of misconduct in 346. The background of the ten negotiators employed by Athens for the Peace of Nicias with Sparta provides interesting material for analysis; but it is significant that two men, Lamachus and Demosthenes, who disagreed with the policy of *rapprochement*, were included among the seventeen commissioners for the oaths, although their policy was not represented in the composition of the ten negotiators.[11]

The composition of the embassy of ten sent to Thrace in 358 (Dem.

[9] Andocides' maternal uncle Epilycus had been envoy to Persia in 424 and his grandfather had been envoy to Sparta in 445 (And. 3.6). Epicrates had been to Persia on an earlier embassy marked by personal goodwill (Athen. 6.229f; Plut. *Pel.* 30.6; Dem. 19.137; *ib.* 191). See K. J. Dover, "Plato Comicus, *Πρέσβεις* and *Ἑλλάς*," *CR* 64 (1950) 5–7.

[10] See n.5 *supra*.

[11] A. Andrewes and D. M. Lewis, "Note on the Peace of Nicias," *JHS* 77 (1957) 177–80. Diod.Sic. 12.75.4; Thuc. 5.19.5.

23.172) is otherwise unknown. Their instructions, involving some discretion, were to concert plans with Berisades and Amadocus in the event of Cersobleptes' recalcitrance. Athenian policy in Thrace was at that time the subject of failure and controversy, but no more can be said of politics and the embassy.

The embassy of ten men sent to Thebes to secure co-operation against Philip of Macedon in 339 (Dem. 18.178) was vitally important if effective resistance were to be organized against Philip. The significance of the embassy in formally reversing Theban policy away from support of Macedon and reversing Athenian policy in order to co-operate with Thebes was probably exaggerated by Demosthenes to magnify his initiative and diplomatic success, for Aeschines pointed out the growing estrangement between Thebes and Macedon (Aeschin. 3.141). According to Demosthenes' account the alignment of Athens and Thebes was the subject of a lively debate at Athens (Dem. 18. 211–14), but we have no indication that a large embassy was sent on account of the need to accommodate differing political viewpoints. Demosthenes appears to have taken an unusually powerful and single-minded initiative in putting through the policy and exploiting his position as Theban *proxenos*, but the name of none of his nine colleagues survives. The need for a large embassy may have arisen less from considerations of political faction than the need for co-ordination of diplomatic and military action with speed and in detail, for it seems that the envoys took with them a sum of eight talents for distribution in the military effort (Din. 1.80) and were instructed to consult with the generals (Dem. 18.178).

In 423, however, there had been a good deal of controversy in Athens over the policy to be pursued towards Sparta. Overtures for peace had been made by Sparta and rejected by Athens in the hope of pressing further gains, but Sparta skilfully proposed an arrangement for one year only, hoping that such an arrangement was politically feasible at Athens. The arrangement of the truce was left to only three men, the generals Nicias, Nicostratus and Autocles, who had worked together in the attack on Cythera in 425/4 (Thuc. 4.53.1) and of whom Nicias and Nicostratus worked together again in 422 against the Spartan commander Brasidas (Thuc. 4.129.2). Furthermore, the acceptance of the truce was proposed in the Athenian assembly by Laches (Thuc. 4.118.11), who also attacked the Peloponnese in concert with Nicostratus in 418/7 (Thuc. 5.61.1). The controversy was tempor-

arily diminished in Athens by the death of Cleon (422), but was renewed with vigour by Alcibiades immediately after the Peace of Nicias (421).

No discernibly consistent practice seems to emerge from the diplomatic dealings of the Athenian oligarchic regime of 411, for it sent out two embassies of three men to Sparta to make peace,[12] and then in the same year, according to Thucydides, Antiphon and Phrynichus went with ten men to seek terms of peace with Sparta (Thuc. 8.90.2). The oligarchic regime also despatched Peisander with ten envoys to negotiate with Alcibiades and the Persian satrap Tissaphernes (Thuc. 8.54.2). Whereas we are told merely that the two smaller embassies went to make peace, the two larger embassies appear to have been endowed with an unusual latitude; for the instructions of the embassy of Antiphon and Phrynichus were to arrange any tolerable terms of peace, and Peisander's embassy was sent to make the best terms which it could arrange.

The grant of discretion to an embassy to exercise its own judgement, as in the case of the ten envoys to Thebes in 339 who were to act in concert with the generals in deciding the timing of the entry of Athenian troops into Boeotia (Dem. 18.178), did not necessarily affect its size. It is true that the embassies sent from Athens to Sparta in 445 (And. 3.6), 405/4 (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.17), and 392/1 (And. 3.33) were all given "full powers" and consisted of ten men, and that the ten envoys to Macedon in 346 were not only given specific instructions but also told to do whatever else beneficial which they were able to do—an instruction hazardous to envoys, according to Aeschines, who received it (Aeschin. 2.104). Yet the embassy to Thebes in 377, which was instructed to persuade the Thebans of anything beneficial which they could, consisted of only three men, Aristoteles, Pyrrhander and Thrasybulus (*IG* II² 43), who were instrumental in organizing the Second Athenian Confederacy.

The circumstances of the embassy of Leon and Timagoras to Persia in 367 were among the most controversial in Athenian diplomatic history.[13] The situation was of critical importance in determining the inter-state power structure in Greece. For Athens, Sparta, Thebes and Persia had between them the capacity to determine the diplomatic

[12] Thuc. 8.86.9; [Plut.] *X orat.* 833f (Antiphon).

[13] See n.3 *supra*; Suda *s.v.* *Τιμαγόρας*.

pattern of Greece until the rise of Macedon, and the three Greek powers always recognized the necessity of considering Persia's ability to turn the balance of power in the Greek world. Accordingly they all sent envoys to petition Artaxerxes in 367, before his notorious rescript was composed in favour of Thebes and to the detriment of Athens and Sparta. The Athenians had a difficult political choice to make, for if they wanted the diplomatic ear of Artaxerxes then they had to be prepared to back Thebes and jettison their relationship with Sparta.[14] On the embassy the differences emerged quite clearly between Leon, who was not prepared for such a switch, and Timagoras, who undertook to abandon Sparta in return for Persian favours elsewhere. On their return Leon won a political victory by securing the condemnation of Timagoras on a capital charge for misconduct of the embassy; and that was not the only case that came to the courts in the political fighting over the issues of the time, for Leodamas similarly attempted to discredit Callistratus (Aeschin. 3.139). In spite of the controversiality of the issues and the difficulties which the Athenians had in determining their policy, only two envoys seem to have been sent.

If in determining the size of embassies decisions were taken arbitrarily and apparently inconsistently, it should not occasion surprise, and perhaps the historian should not be conditioned to seeking order where none existed. The nature of service on an embassy was not that of a magistracy (ἀρχή) but of a special commission (ἐπιμέλεια), and so it was likely that decisions would be made in the light of current circumstances. Particular regard was not paid to formal precedents, nor was it expected, for even in the administration of law the force of precedents was not established. Even less did any etiquette demand that any state should rate the despatch of any particular size of embassy. A variety of special provisions was made in the election of envoys by the insertion of rubrics relating to qualifications of age and status for appointment for particular embassies, an indication that the appointment of each embassy could be properly considered without reference to other instances.

Both small and large embassies were appointed for what appear to have been significant and minor issues alike, and also it seems that

[14] On the conflict in Athenian politics over policy towards Thebes and Sparta, see G. Cawkwell, "The Common Peace of 366/5," *CQ* N.S. 11 (1961) 80f.

there was room for dissentients on large and small embassies. It was not likely that consistent decisions would result when practices were influenced by political considerations rather than constitutional prescription.[15]

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