

SULLA AND SMYRNA

Discussion starts from Tac. *Ann.* 4.56, where in A.D. 26 ambassadors from Smyrna, with those of other communities in Asia, present their city's case for selection as the site of the province's cult of Tiberius, and plead a lengthy record of loyalty and past *officia* to Rome, dating back to the foundation at Smyrna of a temple to Urbs Roma in 195 B.C. amid the tensions with Antiochus III of Syria. Tacitus proceeds:

Simul et L. Sullam testem adferebant, gravissimo in discrimine exercitus ob asperitatem hiemis et penuriam vestis, cum id Zmyrnam in contionem nuntiatum foret, omnis qui adstabant detraxisse corpori tegmina nostrisque legionibus misisse.

Two questions arise. What is the historical context of the episode in question? What is the nature of Sulla's testimony?

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tacitus gives no date. The standard reading of the passage, however, has been the obvious one, that Sulla's army in Asia in the winter of 85/4 B.C. found itself in severe conditions and seriously short of suitable clothing, and that in this emergency Smyrna gave every possible assistance. This view of the matter is all but destroyed by a generally neglected passage of Aelius Aristides' *Ἐπιστολή περὶ Σμύρνης* (41.766 Dind.), which almost exactly matches Tacitus. It reads:

Ἀξία δὲ οὐ μόνον τῆς ὀφειωσ χάριν ἡ πόλις σωθῆναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς εὐνοίας ἣν παρὰ πάντα τὸν χρόνον εἰς ὑμᾶς παρέσχετο, συναραμένη μὲν τοῦ πρὸς Ἀντίοχον πολέμου, συναραμένη δὲ τοῦ πρὸς Ἀριστόνικον, πολιορκίας τε ὑπομείνασα καὶ μάχας οὐ φαύλας ἀγωνισαμένη, ὧν ἔτι νῦν ἐν πύλαις ἦν τὰ ὑπομνήματα. ἔτι δὲ ἐσθήτος δεῖσαν ὑμετέρῳ στρατοπέδῳ καὶ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ διεφθαρμένου, τὸν μὲν στρατηγὸν κομίσαντες εἰς τὴν πόλιν θάπτουσι εἴσω τῶν νῦν πυλῶν, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς στρατιώτας τοὺς χιτῶνας ἐνείμαντο ἀνὴρ ἀνδρὶ δούς.¹

From other evidence it is quite clear that this refers to an incident in 130/129 B.C., when P. Licinius Crassus Mucianus Dives (cos. 131) confronted the pretender Aristonicus in battle near Leucæ, between Pergamum and Smyrna, and was defeated, captured and subsequently killed – and the very end of the year (130), according to Justin.² Whether or not that winter was severe, at all events the army, especially if it had lost its baggage-train in defeat, was certainly in far greater difficulties than Sulla's victorious and all-dominant force was ever likely to be in the autumn of 85 B.C. Neither is there any need to doubt the readiness of Smyrna, then unquestionably a staunch ally of Rome, to render prompt assistance in the sudden emergency of 130/129 – though perhaps not quite in so dramatic a fashion as that depicted by her envoys in A.D. 26. It seems all but certain that it was this act of loyalty to which the Smyrnaean envoys of A.D. 26 referred, with Sulla's testimony to its authenticity, as part of their plea for the favour of the Tiberian senate.³

¹ Noticed, to my knowledge, only by C. J. Cadoux, *Ancient Smyrna*, 147; 157, without drawing the conclusions set out below. On taking a Roman corpse into the city, there is no necessary inconsistency with Cic. *Flacc.* 75.

² Justin 36.4.7 ... *extremo anni tempore*; Florus 1.35; Strabo 14.1.38; Gell. *NA* 1.13.11; Val. Max. 3.2.12; Oros. 5.10; Eutrop. 4.20; Liv. *Per.* 59; Vell. 2.4.

³ Note that Tac. *Ann.* 4.55, somewhat disparagingly, has all the competing Asian cities, presumably Smyrna included, claiming past loyalty in the war against Aristonicus. But Smyrna could adduce Sulla's evidence in proof (and if even Sulla conceded the point, it must be true!).

Caution requires us to consider the possibility that the episode of 130/129 was repeated in its essentials in 85/4 B.C. It is not an attractive suggestion. For one thing, it is hard to believe that Sulla's legions were in fact threatened with any catastrophe, and even harder to imagine that there was any need of Smyrna's generosity to prevent it. Whether we suppose that in winter 85/4 severe weather suddenly struck the western sea-board of Asia Minor or even that Sulla's troops in that season unwisely ventured into the bleak uplands for some purpose – perhaps to punish towns that had backed Mithridates, to collect fines, tax-arrears or loot – and unexpectedly found themselves ill-equipped in dangerous conditions, it is impossible to believe that they would not simply have taken what they needed, at swordpoint if need be, from the luckless Asiatics. If then we try to insist that the Smyrnaean envoys of A.D. 26 were referring to an incident in 85/4, we have to suppose that they used the events of 130/29 to embroider or disguise it as a second emergency. It is not in the least likely that Sulla himself maintained such a patent implausibility, especially since it implied his own incompetence as a commander. It might nevertheless be true that he (and the envoys) represented as voluntary generosity what was in fact a forced exaction. If so, in Sulla's case at least, it would be irony rather than apologia, for which he had little or no use in this context: if he felt the need for any justification at all, it would be, fairly or unfairly adduced, simply Smyrna's submission to Mithridates. But then, what reason is there to think that there was any exaction or 'gift' of clothing at all from Smyrna in 85/4 B.C.? If the passage from Tacitus is set aside, as to avoid circularity it must be, no worthwhile evidence remains. Plutarch, it is true, does say that after the treaty of Dardanus Sulla punished Asia as a whole and his victorious troops whilst billeted there lived at the provincials' expense in the lap of luxury, which for the military tribunes included two sets of clothing. He does not say that clothing was supplied to the rank and file, and to infer from the allocation to tribunes that the *gregarii milites* of the whole army were provided with at least a tunic (or whatever) per man is hazardous in the extreme.⁴ If we abandon that idea, nothing more remains but the pure conjecture that in 85/4 the Smyrnaeans, remembering the episode of 130/129 B.C., may have repeated that act of voluntary generosity in the hope of avoiding Sulla's wrath. Since it is unsupported and otiose, that hypothesis too is best abandoned.

II. SULLA'S TESTIMONY

Why should Sulla have mentioned the incident of 130/129 B.C., and where did he mention it? While there is unfortunately no explicit and direct evidence for Sulla's attitude to Smyrna, various considerations suggest that he may have allowed her at least some degree of privilege. Chief among these is the likely influence of her new citizen, the Roman exile P. Rutilius Rufus. Sulla had already made some use of him, and doubtless hoped to make more.⁵ Besides, although briefly and probably under

⁴ Plut. *Sull.* 25.2 ἐτέτακτο γὰρ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας τῷ καταλύτῃ τὸν ξένον διδόναι τέσσαρα τετράδραχμα καὶ παρέχειν δείπνον αὐτῷ καὶ φίλοις, ὅσους ἂν ἐθέλη καλεῖν, ταξίαρχον δὲ πεντήκοντα δραχμὰς λαμβάνειν τῆς ἡμέρας, ἐσθῆτα δὲ ἄλλην μὲν οἰκουρῶν, ἄλλην δὲ εἰς ἀγορὰν προερχόμενος. Cf. App. *Mith.* 61. There is no sign of any emergency or particular mention of Smyrna – yet the story in Tacitus would certainly have appealed to Plutarch, had he found it in Sulla's autobiography, which was known to him.

⁵ Rutilius had moved from his place of exile at Mytilene in 88 when Mithridates' forces overran the place, was made welcome in Smyrna and took local citizenship there (Cic. *Rab. Post.* 27; Dio Fr. 97.3). He next appears as Sulla's envoy to Fimbria at Thyateira in 85 (App. *Mith.* 60), but refused Sulla's offer of repatriation (Sen. *Dial.* 1.3.7; *ben.* 6.37.2; *Ep.* 24.3; Quintil. 11.1.12; Dio 38. Fr. 97.4; Val. Max. 6.4.4), which was doubtless meant to lend more respectability to Sulla's cause, but which Rutilius deemed illegal.

duress Smyrna had fallen to Mithridates, before that she had a long and impeccable record of loyalty to Rome. There is no sign that like Ephesus, Pergamum, or Tralles she had joined in the massacre of 88, and she had at least attempted revolt from Mithridates in 86/5 B.C.⁶ There is a good chance that whether or not Sulla inflicted any punishments for Smyrna, he confirmed her status as a *civitas libera*, just as he probably did at Lampsacus and certainly did in the very similar case of Athens.⁷ Against this lies only a somewhat dubious argument from Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 71. Attacking the accuser Decianus, Cicero scorns his rare and offensive appearances in Rome, and proceeds:

Verum esto, negotiari lubet: cur non Pergami, Smyrnae, Trallibus, ubi et multi cives Romani sunt et ius a nostro magistratu dicitur? Otium te delectat, lites, turbae, praetor odio est, Graecorum libertate gaudes. Cur ergo unus tu Apollonidensis amantissimos populi Romani, fidelissimos socios, miseriores habes quam aut Mithridates aud etiam pater tuus habuit umquam? Cur his per te frui libertate sua, cur denique esse liberos non licet?

From this it might be argued that the free status of Apollonis is contrasted with that of Pergamum, Smyrna and Tralles, and that their loss of *libertas* is confirmed by the presence there of Roman officials dispensing justice.⁸ This however misses the tenor of Cicero's argument and the subtlety of his rhetorical technique. The thrust is that Decianus (allegedly) dislikes any milieu where his activities may readily be constrained by the supervision of Roman magistrates and prefers the freedom of action (*libertas* in a non-constitutional sense) enjoyed by a purely Greek community – and yet stifles the *libertas* of Apollonis (which, as a loyal ally of Rome, probably had won it in the technical, constitutional sense from Sulla for resistance to Mithridates). Secondly, the presence and jurisdiction of Roman officials in Smyrna need not indicate her loss of

⁶ Apparently by expelling his garrison (Oros. 6.2.8), on the strength of which, together with non-participation in the massacre (unlike Ephesus, which also revolted, but had taken part), D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* 1.234; 2.1112 n. 7 believes that Smyrna was left free – which is likely enough, if he is also right that Cos was freed (ibid. 1112 n. 8; *Riv. Fil.* 66, 1938, 253; contra A. W. Lintott, *Historia* 25, 1976, 490 n. 7, who however is also convinced that Smyrna remained free – but largely because of her (supposed) gift of clothing to Sulla's army. Smyrna's surrender to Mithridates' forces is apparently attested by the coins found there (Magie, op. cit. 2.1103 n. 34; C. J. Cadoux, op. cit. 156), and perhaps by initial support for Mithridates from the Smyrnaeans Mynnio and Philotimus, if they were not exiles (App. *Mith.* 48). Participation in the massacre by Ephesus, Pergamum and Tralles: App. *Mith.* 23, who also adds Adramyttium, Caunus. Mytilene had also offended and lost her freedom; so too did Clazomenae and perhaps Phocaea (Magie, op. cit. 1.215; 2.1115 n. 14; Liv. *Per.* 89; Plut. *Lucull.* 4.2–3).

⁷ Lampsacus' freedom under Sulla's dispensations is inferred, a little riskily, by D. Magie, *RRAM* 2.1111 n. 5 from Cic. *II Verr.* 1.78–81 (contra A. W. Lintott, *Historia* 25, 1976, 490 n. 7); Rome's tutelage of her (along with Smyrna) went back to the 190s B.C. (Liv. 33.38.3–7; 35.16.3–6; 17.7; 42.2; 37.35.2), and enrolment as an ally to 170 (Liv. 43.6.10). Punishment of the guilty at Athens: Plut. *Sull.* 14.4–5; App. *Mith.* 38; 59; Gran. *Lic.* 24F1; Paus. 1.20.5 & 7; nevertheless, Sulla's confirmation of her free status, persuaded by well-disposed senators: Plut. *Sull.* 14.5; Strabo 9.1.20; App. *Mith.* 39 (but cf. 38); Liv. *Per.* 81; Flor. 1.40.10; Vell. 2.23.3 (cf. Plut. *Sull.* 12.1); Memnon F 22.11J (an order of the Roman senate, presumably conflating Sulla's decision in 86 with an SC confirming it in 81/0 B.C.). E. Badian, *AJAH* 1, 1976, 105–28, esp. 115f. suspects with reason that the ultimate source was Sulla's autobiography, here mendacious in that his dispensation at Athens was not a restoration of a previous (oligarchic) constitution, but a newly devised and imposed one of his own. For the influence of senators, perhaps compare Rutilius at Smyrna, which had in the past harboured other Roman exiles of whom Sulla would have approved – Q. Caepio (cos. 106, despite his son's clash with Scaurus: Cic. *Balb.* 28); Q. Metellus Numidicus (*Vir. Ill.* 62.2; but Liv. *Per.* 69 (Rhodes); Val. Max. 4.1.13 (Asia)).

⁸ This view is aired, without firm commitment to it, by C. J. Cadoux. op. cit. 158; A. Keaveney, *Sulla* ..., 233.

freedom.⁹ It is part of Cicero's point that these towns housed large communities of Roman citizens, clearly mostly businessmen whose dealings among themselves and with local persons and communities would from time to time, and perhaps often, require jurisdiction under Roman law by a Roman magistrate or his duly appointed deputy, which might take place in any city where such a community existed, regardless of that city's status.

If after his Mithridatic war Sulla confirmed Smyrna's long-established ranking as a free city, there is nothing improbable in the notion, especially in view of her recent surrender to Pontic forces, that in some written record or other to which the envoys of A.D. 26 could appeal he set out his reasons – and among them the episode of 130/129 B.C., more or less as Tacitus has it. But where? Hermann Peter, without comment, assigned the item to Sulla's autobiography.¹⁰ That was perhaps unduly hasty. In A.D. 22 ambassadors from Magnesia had almost certainly founded their plea on archival records of decisions by L. Scipio Asiaticus and Sulla.¹¹ Among the relatively rare chance survivals of Roman documents which regulated the status of Greek communities under the Republic, there are no fewer than five showing confirmation by *senatus consultum* in 81/0 of Sulla's decisions taken in 85/4 B.C. In all cases the inscriptions had been erected by the cities concerned on local sites for public display, and were copies or translations of senatorial decrees kept on record in the *aerarium* at Rome, while two of them are prefaced by Sulla's own accompanying letter.¹² Sulla's grants and confirmations of freedom, privilege and immunity were not confined to the places, two of them rather obscure, which produce our inscriptions (Tabae, Stratoniceia, Cormi, Thasos): Appian adds among those whom Sulla 'let go free and enrolled as friends of the Romans' Ilium, Chios, towns of Lycia, Rhodes, Magnesia 'and certain others' (καί τινας ἄλλους), and Smyrna could easily be one of them.¹³ It is perhaps slightly more likely that a review of the city's past services to Rome would appear in a letter of Sulla's sent out with the decree, rather than in the text of the decree itself. That Sulla also said something similar in his autobiography remains perfectly possible, but regrettably that is quite beyond proof.

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⁹ Cicero brackets Smyrna with Tralles and Pergamum, both of which had probably been deprived of free status by Sulla, but Cicero's point is not their common status, but that they are all centres of commerce for large numbers of Roman citizens who require Roman jurisdiction.

¹⁰ H. Peter, *HRR* i² Sulla Fr. 17A; pp. 202; cclxxx.

¹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 3.62. Clearly Magnesia on the Maeander, rewarded by Sulla for resistance to Mithridates, not Magnesia-by-Sipylos, despite Pausanias 1.20.5.

¹² R. K. Sherck, *Roman Documents of the Greek East*, nos. 17–21 (note textual improvements to No. 17 suggested by M. H. Crawford and J. M. Reynolds in *GRBS* 15, 1974, 289–93); Sulla's letters preface nos. 18; 20. A. W. Lintott, art. cit. 490 n. 7 affirms without discussion (but rightly, on the present view) that Sulla's testimony would be a letter or SC, without however considering the possibility of his Memoirs.

¹³ Appian, *Mith.* 61, which allows inclusion of renewals as well as grants *de novo*. On Magnesia, cf. Strabo 13.3.35. Add Rhodes (*ILS* 8772); Chios (*SIG*³ 785); probably also Apollonis (Cic. *Flacc.* 71) and perhaps Termessus (Bruns, *FIRA*⁷, 92–5); Alabanda (H. Willrich, *Hermes* 34, 1899, 305f.); Lampsacus (Cic. *II Verr.* 1.78–81); Metropolis (App. *Mith.* 48); conceivably Colophon, Cos, Sardis, Hypaepa, Cnidus (Oros. 6.2.8; App. *Mith.* 48; Plut. *Lucull.* 3.3; Magie, *RRAM* 1.237; 2.1112 n. 8; 1115 n. 13). See further above, n. 6.