

The Size of Embassies in Ancient Greek Diplomacy

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From an examination of the practices of the diplomacy of the Greek cities before 338 B.C. it is apparent that the position of envoys was not a regularly constituted *arché* in the way that the ephorate, for example, was at Sparta or the *strategia* was at Athens. No regulations governed the size of delegations which states could send or receive, and a clause in the agreement for a truce between Athens and the Peloponnesians in 423 guaranteed free passage to heralds, embassies and attendants in any numbers (Thuc. 4.118.6). Furthermore, both the methods of selection and the composition of embassies reveal inconsistencies in diplomatic procedures.

Delegations commonly consisted of two, three, five, or ten men, and no state is known to have adhered strictly to the employment of any one set number of men on embassies; and since regular magistracies had a constitutionally determined number of personnel employed in them, one might well ask if there was any regular pattern in the determination of the size of embassies. It has been the accepted belief that the size of embassies, especially at Athens, varied with the importance of the business in hand,¹ and one also finds the statement that Athenian embassies usually were composed of ten men.² A simple count, however, of the known embassies shows that Athenian embassies did not usually consist of ten men, although several did, and also this count shows that it is not possible to demonstrate that the size of embassies varied according to their importance.

A fairly large number of instances is needed in order to make statistically valid inferences or conclusions, and so it is only in the cases of Athens and Sparta that any proper examination can be made of the practices adopted by individual states. Sparta was

¹ F. Poland, *De Legationibus Graecorum Publicis* (Leipzig 1885) 63; M. Heyse, *De Legationibus Atticis* (Göttingen 1882) 32.

² A. M. Andreades, *A History of Greek Public Finance* (trans. C. Brown, Cambridge [Mass.] 1933) 226.

fairly consistent in sending three men on embassies of varying importance in the fifth and fourth centuries and only on rare occasions were two, five, or possibly ten men employed. The Athenians, on the other hand, sent three, five, and ten men on many occasions, and the determination of the numbers seems to have been quite capricious.

I. SPARTAN EMBASSIES

The evidence for the composition of Spartan delegations before 338 is entirely literary, and when Spartan delegations are mentioned we often find the names of only three envoys. Now it cannot be taken absolutely for certain that where we have a list of three envoys only three were sent, but Thucydides and Xenophon, unlike Diodorus Siculus, frequently enumerate the envoys of Sparta even when they do not treat the envoys of other states in the same way.

No fewer than nine Spartan delegations to a variety of destinations on a variety of missions appear to have consisted of three men, and are listed below together with the description of their mission and the source of information.

1. 431: To present Peloponnesian demands to Athens. (Thuc. 1.139.3)
2. 430: To seek financial and military aid from Persia. (Thuc. 2.67.1)
3. 423: To conclude the truce with Athens. (Thuc. 4.119.2)
4. 421: To order acceptance of terms of peace in Thrace. (Thuc. 5.21.1)
5. 421: To order acceptance of terms of peace in Thebes. (Thuc. 5.42.1)
6. 420: To preserve Peace of Nicias with Athens. (Thuc. 5.44.3)
7. 408/7: To secure repatriation of prisoners from Athens. (Androtion, *FGH* 324, F 44)
8. 396: To take oaths for agreement between Agesilaus and Tissaphernes. (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.6)
9. 378: Despatched to Athens. (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.22)

There can be little doubt that three was the standard number of envoys sent on Spartan embassies, whether for the ceremonial taking of oaths or for engaging in important discussions. Other figures, however, are mentioned; only Lichas and Ampelidas, for example, are said by Thucydides (5.22.2) to have gone to Argos in

421, and only one envoy is mentioned, namely Antalcidas, in relations with Persia in 392/1,³ 387,⁴ and ca. 370,⁵ and Euthycles in 367;⁶ on all these occasions the position of Sparta in Greece was vitally involved.

Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.33) gives the names of five envoys who were sent with full powers from Sparta to Athens in 370/69 concerning the implementation of the alliance. Now although a college of five men is not a number without parallel in Spartan institutions—since in addition to an ephorate of five men, five Spartans had been appointed to act as arbitrators in the dispute in the sixth century between Athens and Megara over Salamis (Plut. *Solon* 10.4), five judges were appointed in 427 to assess the conduct of Plataea after its surrender (Thuc. 3.52.3), and each year, according to Herodotus, five *agathoergoi* were chosen to serve wherever the state should send them (Herod. 1.67)—the episode of 370/69 is the only known instance of the appointment of five envoys in Sparta. It can be argued that the delegation consisted of three envoys in the first place, corresponding to the three envoys of 378, with the addition of two military specialists, Pharax and Aracus, since the discussions on the implementation of the alliance involved devising a method of sharing the command by land and sea.⁷

On only two occasions are the Spartans said to have employed ten men. The first was in the unusually complicated negotiations preceding the conclusion of the Peace of Nicias in 421, when both Sparta and Athens employed commissions of ten men (Diod. Sic. 12.75.4). The second occasion was some twenty years later when the Spartans attempted to impose their definition of autonomy on Elis (Diod. Sic. 14.17.5).

II. ATHENIAN EMBASSIES

Whereas the evidence for Spartan envoys is almost entirely literary, that for Athenian envoys is derived to a much greater

³ Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.12; Philochorus, *FGrH* 328, F 149.

⁴ Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.25; Diod. Sic. 14.110.2.

⁵ Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.12; Plut. *Artax.* 22.3–4.

⁶ Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.33.

⁷ On the composition of this embassy, see D. J. Mosley, "Pharax and the Spartan Embassy to Athens in 370/69," *Historia* 12 (1963) 247–50.

extent from inscriptions. In the lists tabulated below there are fourteen clear cases of the Athenians employing groups of three men on a variety of types of business with a variety of other states; at least seven delegations of five are found, and eleven groups relating to nine episodes and composed of ten men are found.

A. Embassies of three men.⁸

1. 479: To secure greater Spartan co-operation against Persia. (Plut. *Ar.* 10.8)
2. 479/8: To maintain the Athenian case at Sparta for the reconstruction of fortifications. (Thuc. 1.91.3)
3. 429: To make known at Macedon Athens' decision on Perdiccas' dispute with Methone. (*IG* 1² 57 = Tod 1².61)
4. 423: To conclude the truce with Sparta. (Thuc. 4.119.2)
5. 422: To gain support for Leontini against Syracuse. (Thuc. 5.4.1)
6. 411: To make peace with Sparta.⁹ (Thuc. 8.86.9)
7. 411: To make peace with Sparta.⁹ ([Plut.] *X orat.* 833F: Antiphon)
8. 386/5: To take news to King Hebryzelmis of the Odrysae of the decision made upon the request of his envoys. (*IG* 11² 31 = Tod 2.117)
9. 377: To achieve whatever good they could in Thebes. (*IG* 11² 43 = Tod 2.123)
10. 367: To reassure the people of Lesbos of Athenian intentions. (*IG* 11² 107 = Tod 2.131)
11. 356: To administer the oaths for the alliance with King Cetriporis of Thrace. (*IG* 11² 127 = Tod 2.157)
12. ca. 354: To remonstrate with Mausolus for interfering with Greek islands. (Dem. 24.12)
13. 344/3: To counter the influence of Philip in the Peloponnese, especially in Messene and Argos. ([Plut.] *X orat.* 841E: Lycurgus)
14. 343/2: To counter the influence of Philip in the Peloponnese, especially in Corinth and her dependencies. (Dem. 9.72)

⁸ It is not clear from [Dem.] 7.38 whether three envoys, together or separately, or three embassies were despatched to Macedon concerning the recovery of the Carystian proxenos, nor can it be ascertained from *IG* 11² 175 whether on one occasion in the fourth century three or five men were sent to administer the oaths of alliance in Thessaly.

⁹ Despatched by the revolutionary oligarchic regime.

B. Embassies of five men.¹⁰

1. ca. 449: Twenty men to be elected to go in four groups of five to issue invitations to a pan-Hellenic conference, in the Hellespont, Thrace, Boeotia, and the Peloponnese. (Plut. *Per.* 17.2)
2. 446/5?: To administer oaths at Chalcis. (*IG* 1² 39 = Tod 1².42)
3. 422: To administer oaths in Bottiaean cities. (*IG* 1² 90 = Tod 1².68)
4. 384: To administer oaths on Chios. (*IG* 1² 34/5 = Tod 2.118)
5. 378: To administer oaths at Byzantium. (*IG* 1² 41 = Tod 2.121)
6. 361/0: To administer oaths in Thessaly. (*IG* 1² 116 = Tod 2.147)
7. 341: To administer oaths at Eretria. (*IG* 1² 230)

C. Embassies of ten men.¹¹

1. 445: Sent with full powers to Sparta to conclude the Thirty Years' Peace. (Andoc. 3.6)
2. 421: To conclude peace with Sparta. (Diod. Sic. 12.75.4)
3. 405/4: Sent with full powers to Sparta to obtain the best possible terms for peace. (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.17)
4. 394: To administer oaths of alliance at Eretria. (*IG* 1² 16 = Tod 2.103)
5. 392/1: Sent with full powers to Sparta to agree on terms for peace. (Philoch. *FGrH* 328, F 149)

¹⁰ Five men may also have been despatched to administer the oaths for the treaties with Amyntas in 375 or 373 (*IG* 1² 102) and with Carystus in 357 (*IG* 1² 124). Five men were also mentioned in connection with an agreement with Miletus in 450/49 (*IG* 1² 22 = *SEG* 10.14) and with Perdiccas of Macedon and Arrhabaeus of Lyncestis in 436 (*IG* 1² 71 = *SEG* 10.86; 12.16). Five men were elected in connection with Thasian affairs early in the fourth century (*IG* 1² 24), and five men may also have been sent to Ceos concerning the supply of ruddle in the middle of the fourth century (*IG* 1² 1128). The five men despatched in 409/8 to seek Persian aid against Sparta may have been envoys of the fleet rather than of the State (Xen. *Hell.* 1.3.13), and Xenophon's account of the despatch of five counter-envoys to Persia in 392 against the Spartan interests (*Hell.* 4.8.13) is not above suspicion. More than the three envoys Epicrates, Telesegorus, and Hagnias were arrested by the Spartans on the embassy to Persia early in the fourth century (*Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* 2.1; Androtion *FGrH* 324, F 18).

¹¹ It is likely that ten men were employed to administer the oaths for the alliance with Segesta in 458/7 (*IG* 1² 19 = *Hesperia* 17 [1948] pp. 58–60, ed. A. G. Woodhead). In 411 the Athenian oligarchs sent out ten men in addition to Peisander to make the best arrangements which they could with Alcibiades and Tissaphernes (Thuc. 8.54.2), and they also sent Antiphon and Phrynichus with ten men to Sparta to arrange any tolerable terms of peace (Thuc. 8.90.2).

6. 383?: To administer oaths of alliance at Olynthus. (*IG* II² 36=Tod 2.119)
7. 358: To Thrace to affirm agreement, or if Cersebleptes was recalcitrant to make plans with Berisades and Amadocus. (Dem. 23.172)
8. 346: To agree on terms for peace with Macedon. (Aesch. 2.18; Dem. 19.163)
9. 346: To administer oaths for peace in Macedon. (Aesch. 2.82, 97; Dem. 19.17)
10. 346: To secure observance of the peace with Macedon. (Aesch. 2.139 ff.; Dem. 19.121 ff.)
11. 339: To persuade Thebes to join the cause against Macedon. (Dem. 18.178)

As in the case of Sparta, the Athenians also seem to have sent smaller numbers at times; in 430/29 two envoys were sent to Sitalces, the Thracian king (Thuc. 2.67.2), and in 393 two envoys went to obtain the co-operation and good will of Syracuse (Lysias, 19.19); two embassies of two men went to Persia, one perhaps in 394 (Plut. *Pel.* 30.7), and the other in 367 (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.33; Dem. 19.191), and the latter embassy was of great importance. In about 359 two men, Antiphon and Charidemus, were apparently used to conduct negotiations with Philip of Macedon.¹²

III. DISCUSSION

The Athenians, as did the Spartans, seem to have sent smaller embassies to Persia than to other destinations, and Athens seems to be the only Greek state which made regular use of embassies of ten men, or even of five.

As far as other states are concerned it is difficult to observe any set procedure in operation. Three embassies of four men from Rhegium (*IG* I² 51), Chios (*IG* I² 34/5) and the Iulietae (*IG* II² 111) are known to have been sent to Athens, and several of two are found, from Amphipolis to Athens (Dem. 1.8), from the Bosphorus to Athens (*IG* II² 212), from Argos to Sparta (Thuc. 5.40.3), from Thebes to Athens (*IG* II² 40), and from Corinth, Sicyon, and Megara over the truce of 423 (Thuc. 4.119.2).

¹² Theopompus fr. 165 (Oxford Text)=*FGH* 115, F 30. On their role see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, "The Alleged Secret Pact between Athens and Philip concerning Amphipolis and Pydna," *CQ* 13 (1963) 110-19.

By far, however, the most widespread number was that regularly used by Sparta, namely three, a number which remained in use from Homeric times¹³ until later in Greek history.¹⁴ In the fifth century Leontini sent three envoys to Athens for alliance (*IG* 1² 52), the Aetolians sent three to Corinth and Sparta (Thuc. 3.100.1), and in 342 Callias of Chalcis sent three envoys to Athens (Aeschines 3.91). Furthermore, the Ten Thousand, who frequently reflected in their organization the best constitutional practices of the Greeks, sent out three envoys on no less than three occasions (Xen. *Anab.* 5.6.14; 6.2.7; 7.1.32).¹⁵

It can readily be seen from the embassies mentioned, especially in the case of Athens, that no general assertion can be made that the size of an embassy increased in proportion to its importance or even the complexity of the matter in hand. The embassies of ten sent from Athens to Sparta with "full powers" in 445, 405/4, and 392/1, to Thrace in 358 and to Macedon in 346 were all on important matters, yet it need not have taken ten men to administer the oaths of an alliance already agreed upon, as was the case with Eretria, Olynthus, and Macedon, for five men were quite sufficient for the administration of the oaths at Chios and Byzantium, and three for the oaths of the Thracian Cetruporis in 356. It cannot be argued that Athenian embassies varied in size because the Athenians were accustomed to despatch a number of men similar to that which had been sent to them by another state, for in 384 Chios sent four envoys to Athens and the Athenians sent five to Chios; and in 375-3 Amyntas seems to have sent three envoys to Athens and at least five Athenians were sent to him.

If diplomatic practices varied not only from state to state, but also from year to year within a particular state, that should cause no surprise. For not only did the size of embassies fluctuate in a state such as Athens, but, as has been pointed out elsewhere, the domestic authorities who were detailed to swear the oaths for treaties varied even when the parties to the treaties remained the same.¹⁶ Perhaps it is all a reflection of the extent to which

¹³ E.g. *Iliad* 9.168-9.

¹⁴ E.g. Cicero *De Or.* 2.153.

¹⁵ A faction of the Samians also employed three representatives (Herod. 9.90).

¹⁶ See D. J. Mosley, "Who 'Signed' Treaties in Ancient Greece?" *Proc. Camb. Philol. Soc.* 7 (1961) 59-63.

the Greek communities and constitutionalists gave attention to the organization of the internal affairs of their states but did not regularize the machinery for dealing with external affairs.

It cannot be denied that Athenian practices, at least, were inconsistent, but that is not to say that the organization of Athenian diplomacy was whimsical, and there were probably very good reasons for such apparent inconsistencies: at Athens political life was dynamic and there was a constant variety of groupings of politicians and it would have been only natural if that factor influenced the size and composition of embassies. Theoretically there was a greater reserve of able men who were available for service on embassies than for most political appointments in Greek states, for there were no restrictions to prevent repeated election of a man as envoy or to prevent a man who already held a regular appointment from being elected in addition as envoy. Occasionally at Athens the restrictions on the tribal distribution of appointees were lifted, as in the case of the envoys to Sparta in 445, to King Hebryzelmis in 386/5, to Byzantium in 378, to Neapolis in 355, to Macedon in 346, and to Thessaly (*IG* II² 175). Conversely, however, further restrictions were from time to time imposed on the composition of an embassy. For example, when Pericles proposed to send envoys to issue the invitation for a pan-Hellenic conference, the envoys were to be over fifty years of age, as were those sent to Macedon in 429. Of the ten envoys to Eretria in 394 five had to be Councillors and five men who did not hold public office.

The imposition of such restrictions could lead one to suspect that it was not always necessarily the prime intention to elect the best men available, although in Athens, where there were so many competent orators and politicians, it would not always be obvious who the 'best' men were or who were the best two, three, five, or ten men. Most Athenian statesmen seem to have served as envoys in the course of their political careers, but Pericles and Eubulus are not known to have been so elected.

At Sparta, by comparison, where political life was less rich and where there was a tendency to employ men who were experienced in a particular field and to preserve the continuity of the relationship between particular statesmen and specific states, it would be possible to predict with some certainty, before election, who

would in fact be elected to an embassy.¹⁷ So long, for example, as Antalcidas was available he was despatched to Persia. However, of all the known Athenian embassies to Persia before 338, only in the case of Callias can it be claimed, however tenuously, that one envoy served on more than one occasion (Diod. Sic. 12.4.5; Herod. 7.151); and the Callias who went for the third time to Sparta in 371 and who was the Spartan proxenos at Athens (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.4) did not participate in the negotiations of 392/1, although he was experienced enough to serve as general in 391/0.

It would be perverse, even if only on account of the gaps in our prosopographical knowledge of identifiable Athenian envoys (of whom almost one half are little more than mere names to us), to assume that the Athenians despatched inferior or incompetent men on embassies; but it is reasonable to suppose that—just as we know that on certain occasions influential statesmen were not sent on important missions—there were occasions when the tasks involved did not demand men of the highest calibre. Androtion, who was an important figure in the fourth century (and who nevertheless was not sent to Macedon in 346), was an ideal envoy to Mausolus of Caria ca. 354 to protest against Mausolus' interference in Greek communities, yet his two colleagues, Glaucetes and Melanopus, were not politicians of the foremost rank in Athens.

There are grounds for supposing that the composition and size of Athenian embassies was determined not only by the nature and intrinsic importance of the issue concerned but also in part by the number and variety of the political elements involved, and the current political groupings could be reflected in the selection of an embassy. A fine tale, for example, was concocted in antiquity to the effect that Aristides and Themistocles made a pact to lay down their differences before leaving the borders of Attica on their way as envoys to Sparta (Plut. *Mor.* 186B); they had had their political differences, but they had been able to co-operate in face of the Persian threat before serving as envoys to Sparta (Thuc. 1.91.3; Herod. 8.79). The differences between Leon and Timagoras in 367/6 (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.33) and between Aeschines and Demosthenes in 346, as between Democles and his fellow Syracusan envoys

¹⁷ For continuity in Spartan diplomatic representation see article cited in note 7 above.

(Athenaeus 6.250B), have attracted notice, but are not known to have been particularly evident until they had been chosen as envoys; but there are instances where men who had previous grounds for rivalry or opposition served together as envoys. Cimon, for example, was a fellow envoy of Xanthippus from Athens to Sparta (Plut. *Ar.* 10), despite the fact that Miltiades, the father of Cimon, had been prosecuted by Xanthippus ca. 489 (Herod. 6.136). But an analysis of the Athenian embassies to Sparta in 371 and to Macedon in 346 is most revealing for the present purpose.

The embassy to Sparta in 371 is probably the best example of how various political groupings and shades of opinion might be combined for diplomatic purposes.¹⁸ Of the envoys Autocles is represented as making a speech which was not sympathetic in tone to the Spartans (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.7) and he came from a distinguished family which was noted for activity against Sparta. Melanopus was probably one of those who were of a more friendly disposition to Sparta, but Callias was more significant than Melanopus, both as Spartan proxenos and as an envoy who had twice before served on successful missions to Sparta. He was not, however, necessarily over-sympathetic to Sparta, for he was not apparently politically embarrassed by the compromising circumstances of 378 at the time of Sphodrias' raid, when the Spartan envoys were discovered at his house (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.22); but a difference undoubtedly did exist between Callias and Autocles. The three speeches attributed to Callias, Autocles, and Callistratus were respectively friendly, frank and trenchant, and compromising—and they probably represented the gist of current arguments. Callistratus had previously favored alliance with Thebes to maintain the balance of power against Sparta, and he and Melanopus were said to have been politically opposed,¹⁹ but he was not addicted to a pro-Theban policy for its own sake. On account of financial difficulties and as a result of Theban policy it was obvious to all, whatever their predilections, that the war against Sparta would have to finish. The part played by the Athenian politicians who had previously been opposed to Sparta did not represent approval of Sparta so much as a recognition of where Athenian interests lay, and in that there could have been little basic

¹⁸ See D. J. Mosley, "The Athenian Embassy to Sparta in 371 B.C.," *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* 8 (1962) 41–46.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.1374B; Plut. *Dem.* 13.2; Athenaeus, 12.553D.

difference among the various groups, who were nevertheless severally represented.

Of the Athenian envoys to Macedon in 346, four had had previous dealings with Macedon. Phrynon had sent his son to Macedon when he was young (Dem. 19.230), and in 348 he himself was seized by Macedonian pirates. When he had been freed the Athenians sent out Ctesiphon to recover the ransom from Philip (Aesch. 2.12–13; Dem. 19.10 ff.). At about the same time Olynthus fell to Philip, and resident there were two Athenians, Iatrocles and Everatus; on their behalf Aristodemus the actor was sent out (Aesch. 2.15–16). Phrynon, Ctesiphon, Iatrocles, and Aristodemus all brought back favorable reports of Philip's intentions toward Athens,²⁰ and so their appointment as envoys together in 346 was eminently suitable—not only since it was likely to be conducive to cordial relations with Philip, but also as an encouragement to Philip to live up to his professions. Politically, however, the four men were “light-weights,” and it is easy to see that, by the time they had been appointed along with two or three leading politicians and their supporters, a large embassy of ten was soon constituted. The most important of the envoys was Philocrates, and he was chiefly responsible for the policy of trying to reach agreement with Macedon. It was he who had earlier proposed that Philip be permitted to send a delegation to Athens (Aesch. 2.13, 109; 3.62) and that Athenian envoys be sent to Philip (Aesch. 2.18); also Philocrates nominated for the embassy Demosthenes, who had co-operated with him in seeing to the welfare of the captives at Olynthus (Aesch. 3.15, 18). Aeschines was probably the second most influential figure at the time of the election of the first embassy. He was a member of the group of Eubulus, and it was on the proposal of the latter that he had gone as envoy to Arcadia (Dem. 19.304 ff.). In addition Aeschines was a friend of Nausicles, also an envoy, and was proposed by him for the embassy to Macedon (Aesch. 2.18).

In view of such considerations in the election of envoys it is likely that the size of embassies varied not merely according to their importance, so far as we are in a position to judge that, but also in part according to their political significance at the time. The considerations of importance and political significance would often,

²⁰ Dem. 19.10, 315. Aesch. 2.17.

but not necessarily always, amount to the same thing; for the significance would depend on how delicate or controversial the subject was in which politicians were involved and interested, both in private and public discussions, and would depend on how many politicians and groups were involved; and at Athens, it must be remembered, several groups were often involved in matters of policy, since political dynamism did not stem so much from differences in policy and political outlook as from personal rivalry.²¹

²¹ My thanks are due to the Research Fund Committee of the University of Sheffield for its support.