

# Acque, terre e spazi dei mercanti

Istituzioni, gerarchie, conflitti e pratiche  
dello scambio dall'età antica alla modernità

a cura di

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**ROMAN TRADING AND TRADERS ACROSS  
THE IONIAN AND ADRIATIC SEA.  
THE EVIDENCE  
FROM SETTLEMENTS AND COINS**

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**1. Romans and traders across the Adriatic**

The waters of the Ionian and Adriatic seas were always of crucial importance for Rome's eastwards expansion. Even myth and tradition were appointed to assure this idea and prove clearly that the bonds between the two regions were strong and permanent<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of politics the involvement of Rome at that region traditionally starts with the Illyrian wars, the first dating at 229 BC<sup>2</sup>. It is well understood that these wars meant to be the first of a series of political acts taken by the Romans in order to proceed further East<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> J. Rougé, *La place de l'Illyrie méridionale et de l'Épire dans le système des communications de l'empire romain* and J.-L. Lamboley, *Le canal d'Otrante et les relations entre les deux rives de l'Adriatique*, in P. Cabanes (ed.), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité - Actes du colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand, Octobre 1984*, Paris 1987, pp. 195-202 and 255-261.

<sup>2</sup> S.I. Oost, *Roman Policy in Epirus and Acarnania in the Age of the Roman Conquest of Greece*, Dallas 1954, pp. 9-13, and especially pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> M. Šašel Kos, *Appian and Illyricum*, Ljubljana 2005, for the whole history of Roman interference until the age of Augustus.

secondly, in all probability, to secure the sailing across the Adriatic, in favor of their traders, who had already started to impose their presence well outside the Italian peninsula<sup>4</sup>.

From there on we can follow a step by step increasing oppression to the people across the Adriatic, where Illyria, Epirus and finally the Macedonian Kingdom were the first to feel it. These wars, ending by the total submission of Greek cities to the Romans, were the first of a long series of military events which would take place in Greece thereafter. From there on (end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century) until 45 BC, when Caesar overruled his enemies, a great number of armies would invade in the Greek regions, marching, triumphing, pilling and devastating.

These wars accumulated a severe amount of wealth at the Roman state as well as at the pockets of the Roman generals. But these same events also brought a remarkable change in the traders' society<sup>5</sup>.

We can presume that a lot of Italian merchants traveled alongside the Roman troops providing to the soldiers with what they needed; wine, extra food, clothes, women or entertainment. Moreover, it seems that, in a major scale, food and other products-supply contractors were 'firmly' established in every war theatre, as it, always and everywhere, happened<sup>6</sup>.

We can only deduce their presence from the contemporaneous sources, or from texts referring to parallel tactics followed by the Roman army, although not

<sup>4</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy in the Republican Age of Rome*, New York 1966, pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, E. Badian, *Publicans and Sinners. Private Enterprise in the service of the Roman Republic*, New York 1983, p. 28.

consisting to the period and place under discussion<sup>7</sup>. For instance, a very eloquent Egyptian papyrus reveals the common practice among soldiers to buy goods they needed, and their anxiety to get money from home<sup>8</sup>.

## **2. The circulation of *denarii* in Greece**

Nevertheless, it is supposed that to that special 'internal' economy is due a part of the absence of Roman *denarii* from the numismatic circulation observed in the Greek regions<sup>9</sup>.

In fact and despite that Greece was the war theatre for almost two centuries, we cannot find a great number of Roman coins either in the hoards or as excavation finds, until the 1<sup>st</sup> century. And even then it seems that the coins found do not truly reveal the economic character of the finds but the anxiety of Romans to protect their valuable things in the eve of military conflicts, since most of the hoards, which are connected to the battle of Philippi and Aktion (pl. 1)<sup>10</sup>, are thought to be

<sup>7</sup> P. Middleton, *The Roman Army and Long Distance Trade*, in P. Garnsey, C.R. Whittaker (eds.), *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 79-81. For more recent times: A.H.M. Jones, *The Roman Economy*, in P.A. Brunt (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History*, Oxford 1974, p. 128 note 65, and p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> M. Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, London 1975, p.VVXI, and H.M.D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, Chicago 1980<sup>2</sup>, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> According to the numismatic material provided by the hoards as well as the excavation finds.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *Le trésor de 'Délos 1905'* (*RRCH 465*), «Revue Numismatique», 159, 2003, pp. 291-306, where the whole problem is discussed.

the wages of the Caesarian or Marc Antony's troops, who tried to protect their humble fortune by unearthing their money<sup>11</sup>. If this is the case it is really very strange why their predecessors only scarcely felt that same fear before the battle. In any case, we must keep in mind that not all the hoards can be interpreted in the same way. In fact, we can not be sure for the identity and the purpose of each hoarding, but we can at least suspect that finds from places away from the battle scenes, such as the hoards from Petres in Macedonia<sup>12</sup>, or Vyrra in Euboia<sup>13</sup> and Delos<sup>14</sup> are of totally different character.

Considering all the above mentioned factors, we could suppose that is more plausible that in fact the Roman coins played a more important role in the local economies than we can imagine by traveling from hand

<sup>11</sup> We must always have in mind that these hoards could also be the accompanying traders' savings, as suggested at the above mentioned article, or sums deposited to the savings-bank of the legions, if this practice really existed in the first years of the Roman military organization. For this practice, H.M.D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, cit., p. 219.

<sup>12</sup> P. Adam-Velenis, *Νομισματικοί θησαυροί από τις Πέτρες Φλώρινας*, in *Το Νόμισμα στο Μακεδονικό Χώρο*, Οβολός 4, Thessalonica 2000, pp. 133-139, where the unusual large span of the minting dates of the coins is noted and interpreted as the result of an ancient coin collection, or a heritage from father to son.

<sup>13</sup> E. Tsourtis, Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *Ρωμαϊκός θησαυρός από την Εύβοια*, in *MNHMH Martin Jessop Price*, Bibliotheca of the Hellenic Numismatic Society No.5, 1996, pp. 161-172.

<sup>14</sup> See above, note 9, where it is suggested that since Delos by 31 BC was almost ruined, the hoard could be hidden there by anyone, a merchant in all probability, who already knew that place.

FINDS	DATE	GM	RA	RC
Macedonia '80, CH VII, 102	mid.2 <sup>nd</sup>	70+	1	1 semis
Grammeni, CHVIII, 386	187-168	21		1 as
Veroia, CH VII, 97	2 <sup>nd</sup> c.	21		1 semis
Thessalonica '76, CH V, 55	75(?)		40	500
Macedonia '80, CH VI, 139	54		10	91
Platania 1959, IGCH 663 / RRCH 358	after 51	38	2	3
Thes., Agora, QTic 1984	50			51
Kerasia 1959, IGCH 653 / RRCH 283	c.78/76-49		1	47
N. Karvali 1963, IGCH 660 / RRCH 336	78-49		14	100
Petres, Ovolos 4	42			125
Macedonia, CH III, 127&131	35			66
Xerias 1996, RRCH 509	27-2			170
Maced/Thrace '62, RRCH 402	44-27			79(?)
Makrakomi, IGCH 214	3 <sup>rd</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup>	12		1 as
Aidona, IGCH 35/ RRCH 376	49/44-45	4		4
Nekyomanteio, CH VIII,530	50	40+		2
Preveza 1960, RRCH 473	44-27			38
Preveza 1981, CH VII, 226	32/31	2		122(+103)
Preveza 1982, CH VIII, 542	31	2		18
Thiva 1965, IGCH 233/ RRCH 233	168	57		1
Vonitsa 1993, CH VIII, 431	168	148		1
Agrinio 1959, IGCH 271/ RRCH 158	145-135/150-125			39
Naupaktos 1967, IGCH 317	end 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1		3
Euboia 1948, RRCH 467	44-27			97
Peiraias 1927, RRCH 242	91-79			42
Delos 1905, RRCH 465	44-27			649
Kalauria 1894, RRCH 121	208-150			8
Lechaina, CH VIII, 417	175-150	550		1

Plate 1. GM = Greek Mints; RA = Roman Authority; RC = Roman Coins.

to hand to the merchants, of every origin and then, when arrived to the 'Greek' state they were gathered in order

to be paid back as taxes, or fines and penalties to the Roman government<sup>15</sup>. We could thus presume the existence of a circling circulation starting from the 'Roman state', through the soldiers, who paid in *denarii* from their salaries the accompanying merchants, while these in their turn had to pay, using the Roman coins mostly, their local suppliers (fresh food, wine, etc.). Given that *denarii*, as silver coins, had a real value, they were used for large payments, as taxes for instance, and so on. Therefore they arrived at the Greek authorities, who, in their turn had to pay the Roman state, in Roman coin again by all probability, for logistic reasons<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the Roman state, closing the circle, could pay back the salaries of the troops, naturally in *denarii*. This coin fluctuation in circles is not unknown in the ancient world and especially for the Romans. As Michael Crawford has pointed out referring to an opposite flux of money: «much of the tribute which the East paid to Rome [...] was regularly returned in exchange for slaves, and works of art, whereby the individuals who sold these commodities acquired the wherewithal to pay the next round of tribute, and so on»<sup>17</sup>. It is not absurd therefore to assume a similar movement for periods when the *denarii* were not so abundant while the need for paying

<sup>15</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *Θεσσαλία και ρωμαϊκή νομισματική πολιτική*, in *Το νόμισμα στο Θεσσαλικό χώρο*, Οβολός, 7, Atene 2004, pp. 54-63.

<sup>16</sup> In this case the Greek states did not loose money during the exchange of the local coin to the Roman and what is more important, they did not strain their local mint supplies.

<sup>17</sup> M. H. Crawford, *Coinage and Money under the Republic. Italy and the Mediterranean Economy*, London 1985, p. 195.



FINDS	DATE	QUANT.	Years' Span
Agrinion, IGCH 271	140-129	39	60
Peiraias, RRCH 242	88	41	61
Kerassia, IGCH 653	76+	47	61
Macedonia, CH VII, 139	54	91	102
Kavala, IGCH 660	55-50	100	dispersed
Thessalonika, CH V, 55	50	540	dispersed
Thess. Agora, QTic 84	50	51	80
Ierapetra, IGCH 352	44-42	200	dispersed
Petres, Ovolos 4	43-42	125	63
Macedonia/Thrace, RRCH 402	43-42	109	115
Delos, RRCH 465	31	649	116
Pantokratos, Aktion, CH VII, 226	31	122+	80
Aktios, RRCH 473	31	38	88
EuBoia, RRCH 467	31	97	94

Plate 2.

troops in that coin was still very oppressing. It is well indicative the figure given by the hoards themselves, which contain coins the minting date of which seldom cover a span of 100 years, meaning that a great number of older issues were still in use for many years (pl. 2).

### 3. Italian and Roman entrepreneurs in Greece

Returning to the accompanying the troops merchants of 'Italian' origin<sup>18</sup> we must suppose that they were not

<sup>18</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., pp. 88-92 and J. Hatzfeld, *Les trafiquants Italiens dans l'Orient Hellenique*, Paris 1919 (*passim*).

alone. Excepting for the locals, they probably preferred to cooperate with those who were already installed in the Greek cities<sup>19</sup>, looking for new places for their investments, or to take part to serious enterprises. In any case, they prepared the installation of a critical number of negotiators in most parts of Greece. The 2<sup>nd</sup> century the former humble societies of Italians became more and more prosperous and the Roman state took a series of measures to assure their well being, the most important among them being the establishment of the free harbor at Delos in 167 BC, which secured the economic privileges for a lot of traders, Italians and Orientals, who sailed through the Aegean to their destinations eastwards. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century the *Ρωμαίοι*, as they were called, had increased in the East in considerable numbers. Excepting for being strictly involved with the commerce<sup>20</sup> they were also occupied with general economic enterprises, as the banking and money lending. Such communities were found in almost every Greek city<sup>21</sup>.

In the same time some upper class Romans spread their land interests away from Italy; Atticus and his vast land property at Epirus, being the first and most prominent example, while others can be found in Asia as well as in Greece, at Macedonia or Messene<sup>22</sup>.

It is well attested that all these Romans had a strong presence, even as citizens<sup>23</sup>, and an important interference in the economic life of the, mostly impoverished

<sup>19</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., pp. 95-111.

<sup>20</sup> Mostly informations about their occupations known from Delos.

<sup>21</sup> J. Hatzfeld, *Les trafiquants Italiens*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., pp. 156-160.

<sup>23</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., pp. 147-151.

Greek cities. The sources are also very eloquent about their lending money to severely suffered communities, as Aufidii at the people of Tenos<sup>24</sup>, Cloatii at Gytheion<sup>25</sup>, or providing a series of different *euergesies* to the locals<sup>26</sup>.

As Sherwin-White states out describing clearly the whole situation:

a third class to benefit from conquest comprised the Roman men of business (*negotiatores*), who functioned either as bankers, moneylenders and commercial importers of foodstuffs, raw materials and slaves, or as state contractors (*publicani*) for military supplies and the farming of taxes [...] As businessmen they had scope for investment, trade and the acquisition of land in the new provinces<sup>27</sup>.

It can be firmly deduced that from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC onwards the major and most important part of the economy of the Greek cities was at the hands of the Romans. The Roman military operations brought a lot of sums to the Roman treasury, while the commanding officers gained a lot from the spoils of war. In addition, war penalties, heavy taxes and other money extractions

<sup>24</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., pp. 169-170.

<sup>25</sup> A.J.N. Wilson, *Emigration from Italy*, cit., p. 170.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed description of the relations between the Romans and the local societies of Cyclades, according to the texts, see P. Nigdelis, *Πολίτευμα και κοινωνία των πόλεων των Κυκλάδων κατά την ελληνιστική και αυτοκρατορική εποχή*, Thessalonica 1990.

<sup>27</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, *Foreign Policy in the East. 168 BC to AD 1*, London 1984, p. 16.

impoverished the local states. On the other hand Roman businessmen and officers had undertaken the hole of the economic activities.

#### 4. Greek coinage in circulation

The absence from the Greek soil of the Roman *denarii* during the time of wars or of smaller or greater military operations has already been discussed. But the problem of its absence in periods of 'peace' is an intrigue question. As Crawford had asked: «How did Rome pay for her presence in the East?»<sup>28</sup>. It is true that by that date Roman *denarii* show an enormous increase in their minting and circulating all over Italy but it is equally true that they did not have the same acceptance outside Italy and they never succeeded to replace the many local coinages. It is also true that after the 'provincialization' of Greece at 146, a lot of new issues appeared. The Macedonian *merides*, the Leagues, Achaean and Aetolian, Boiotia, Thessaly, Chalcis and Histiaia in Euboia, Thasos and Maronea in northern Greece and especially Athens, refreshed their mints or started a totally new production. «The Republic had both perpetuated existing coinages to serve as the coinages of newly acquired provinces and had also created coinages *ex novo*»<sup>29</sup>. It seems that Roman authorities not only allowed but even more, persisted, in a way, in their production<sup>30</sup> in order to fill the gap created by

<sup>28</sup> M. H. Crawford, *Coinage and Money*, cit., p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> M. Crawford, *Coinage and Money*, cit., p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> It is even suggested that Athenian coinage was produced according to the Romans' demands: A. Giovannini, *Rome et la circulation monétaire en Grèce au II<sup>e</sup> siècle avant Jesus Christ*, Basle 1978, p. 100.

the ending of the tetradrachm issues of the Macedonian kingdom. Among them the Athenian New Style or *stephanephora* tetradrachms (dating to 196/Thomsom or 164/Lewis) is the most known and prolific coinage, covering all the circulation needs not only in the Helladic regions, but even eastwards, for a long time. By the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the figure changes as the Athenian mint slows its production down, while coins of Thessaly, Thasos and Roman Macedonia with the issues of Aesillas (75-65) are the last specimens of the so-called local mints. From there-on any production of Greek mints was in fact a Roman issue, like the *cistophori* of Thessalonica, or the Thessalian silver struck during the Civil War by the pro-Pompeian *praetor*<sup>31</sup>. In addition, Roman *denarii* started to circulate in a major rate but they never became the main silver currency in use, except for the region of Macedonia after 50 BC<sup>32</sup>.

As the Romans never were strongly interested in imposing their own coinage, especially since the denarius was equivalent to the Athenian drachm, a fact which facilitated the commercial transactions, the mixture of Roman and local character in Greek coins can be followed up to the first years of Augustus' government. According to the sources there was an arrangement of the eight-obol *eisphora* (paying of taxes) at Messene, where talents and *chalkoi* were still in use, but now as fractions of the *denarius*<sup>33</sup>. In addition, the total sum

<sup>31</sup> M. Crawford, *Coinage and Money*, cit., pp. 209 and 245.

<sup>32</sup> For the rather unusual situation at Macedonia, see A. Burnett, *The Coinage of Roman Macedonia*, in *Το νόμισμα στο Μακεδονικό χώρο*, Οβολός, 4, Thessalonica 2000, pp. 89-101.

<sup>33</sup> L. Migeotte, *La date de «l'oktobolos eisphora» de Messène*, Τόποι 7.1, 1997, pp. 51-61.

to be paid was calculated in *denarii*. A similar discrepancy can be shown at the *diorthoma* inscription from Thessaly, ordering the change from drachms to *denarii*, where an equivalence of 15 staters to 22.5 *denarii* is given<sup>34</sup>.

These are the last references to local coins and fractions. From there on the Roman metrical system will prevail and the Roman coin will be the unique specimen to circulate. Certainly many of the Greek cities reopened their mints but this was done strictly as part of the imperial mint production.

## 5. Roman colonies in Greece and commerce

While historical events changed the picture of the coinage and minting, the businesses of the merchants installed in Greece did not change at all. Even more, during the last years of the Republic and the first ones of the Imperial Ages serious steps were done for the Romanization of the commerce.

As one of them must be taken the foundation of colonies away from Rome; an idea of Gaius Gracchus, followed by Caesar and his successors.

In Greece the purpose for these foundations was two-fold: to secure Rome's new acquisitions and the roads through which the troops could move. But having in mind that these same roads were also used by the merchants for their interests, it is obvious that the colonies

<sup>34</sup> B. Helly, *Le "diorthôma" d'Auguste fixant la conversion des statères thessaliens en deniers. Une situation de passage à la monnaie unique*, *Τόποι* 7.1, 1997, pp. 63-91. For the Roman monetary policy at Thessaly, see also, Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *Θεσσαλία και ρωμαϊκή νομισματική πολιτική*, *cit.*, pp. 51-64.

also secured the roads of commerce<sup>35</sup>. Bouthrotos, the place where Atticus had made a fortune and for which a lot was written by Cicero, can be served as a good example, since it was a crucial point on the Egnatia road<sup>36</sup>.

Augustus carried on the same idea by creating or recreating new colonies, not only for military, but also for economic purposes<sup>37</sup>. A series of political and commercial centers were created or flourished along three axes linking the West to the East. The first one is located to the North along the Via Egnatia, starting from Dyrrachion or, Bouthrotos, and comprising Pella and Philippi (while Dion, the other colony, lays on the route linking Thessalonica to southern Greece, via the Peneus valley)<sup>38</sup>. A second axe can be discerned to the South, at the northern Peloponnesian coast, where Dyme at first and Corinth and Patras later, were founded, securing one of the most frequent sea routes of those

<sup>35</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *The Numismatic Iconography of the Roman Colonies in Greece. Local Spirit and the Expression of Imperial Policy*, MELETHMATA 39, Athens 2004, with the relevant bibliography.

<sup>36</sup> E. Deniaux, *Atticus et l'Épire*, in P. Cabanes (ed.), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire*, cit., pp. 245-254. E. Deniaux, *Cicéron et les hommes d'affaires romains d'Illyrie et d'Épire*, in P. Cabanes (ed.) *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité, II, Actes du IIe Colloque International de Clermont-Ferrand, Octobre 1990*, Paris 1993, pp. 262-270.

<sup>37</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *The Numismatic Iconography of the Roman Colonies in Greece*, cit., pp. 89-91.

<sup>38</sup> M. Fasolo, *Viae Publicae Romanae 1. La via Egnatia I. Da Apollonia e Dyrrachium ad Herakleia Lynkestidos*, Roma 2003, and Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *The Numismatic Iconography of the Roman Colonies in Greece*, cit., p. 23 and 97.

ages<sup>39</sup>. A third axe can be seen, uniting the two previous one, extending at the West, from North to South, starting from Boutrhotos, passing from Nikopolis which, although not a colony<sup>40</sup>, was another centre, founded by Augustus, controlling Epirus, and ending at Patras. It is worth noting that, either by chance, or in purpose, all these centers are situated in almost equal distances, of nearly 112 kilometers. This net of settlements covered in the better way not only the military, but mainly the economic needs of the Roman government in Greece, providing a perimeter properly arranged for the exploit and the facilitating of the commerce<sup>41</sup>.

Moreover, these civic creations, conceived as being 'a Rome away from Rome' developed an economic dynamic of their own, although of different character among the Helladic provinces. In Macedonia, the colonies did not play an important role either in the political or financial organization of the region and were meant as being lands to be given to the veterans<sup>42</sup>. In contrast,

<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, we must note that Patras, was always used as a secure stopover on the frequent and safe, even longer road passing through it to Creoussa, Chalkis, and Thessaly. Especially for Patras, see A. Rizakis, *Le port de Patras et les communications avec l'Italie sous la République*, in «Cahiers d'Histoire» 33, 1988, no.3-4, pp. 453-473.

<sup>40</sup> TH. Sarikakis, *Nicopolis d'Épire était-elle une colonie romaine ou une ville grecque?*, «Balkan Studies» 11,1, 1970, pp. 91-96, and especially 93-95, for the reason why Tacitus referred to Nikopolis as a colony.

<sup>41</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, et al., «Οι ρωμαϊκές αποικίες στην ελληνική Μακεδονία», *Το νόμισμα στο Μακεδονικό χώρο*, Οβολός, 4, Thessalonica 2000, pp. 167-168.

<sup>42</sup> That means that they were agglomerations of rural character mostly, aiming to the compensation of the veterans on the one hand and the defense of the province on the other.



in Achaëa the colonies flourished as commercial centers well established on the trade routes to the East<sup>43</sup>.

It seems that, although during the Principate, the centre of the commerce had moved even eastwards and Greece was turned to a commercial stop of lesser value<sup>44</sup>, the Roman state and the Roman traders kept their strongholds<sup>45</sup>, which were still of importance for the economic organization of the Empire. It is clear that the merchants did not abandon the Greek cities, even those who had lost all their previous importance. It is worthwhile to mention the presence of wealthy Roman citizens not only in flourishing cities, but even in the impoverished Cycladic islands<sup>46</sup>, traditionally conceived as nothing more than places of exile. In fact, these people of Italian origin also continued the philhellenic policy of their predecessors, by providing to the indigenous people *euergesies* of any kind. It seems that the traditional commerce of local products did never stop, even in a lower and lesser degree, and the geographic position of the Greek centers still provided a useful stopover in the trade routes.

<sup>43</sup> Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *The Numismatic Iconography of the Roman Colonies in Greece*, cit., p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> M.P. Charlesworth, *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire*, Chicago 1974<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Although J. Hatzfeld, *Les trafiquants Italiens*, cit., p. 191, states: «Ainsi le trafic entre l'Italie et l'Orient ne se faisait plus que dans un seul sens, et encore était-il de plus en plus aux mains des Asiatiques, des Alexandrins et des Syriens».

<sup>46</sup> P. Nigdelis, *Πολίτευμα και κοινωνία*, cit.; Ch. Papageorgiadou-Banis, *Η νομισματική δραστηριότητα στις Κύκλάδες κατά τους αυτοκρατορικούς χρόνους*, in *Το νόμισμα στα νησιά του Αιγαίου*, Mytilene 16-19 september 2006, in press.

## 6. Commerce and politics

It seems therefore that the Roman merchants played always an important role in the tracing of the Roman policy. Although belonging, in the beginning at least, to a lower social class they had found their way to persuade the Roman state<sup>47</sup>, although governed by land owners<sup>48</sup>, to stand by them and fight for their interests. We know for sure that towards 170 BC the *publicani* increased severely their power, and they certainly acquired an important decree of influence<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, the senators, could afford a lot amount of capital to invest, and thus we could assume that at least in the first years the Roman aristocracy took an, even hidden one, part to these enterprises<sup>50</sup>. The merchants' influence seems to increase simultaneously with the further expansion of the Roman state to the east, the case of Delos being the climax of their high estimation during the Republican Age. The importance of the trade was felt so strongly that even during the Imperial Ages the policy of the government gave a lot of attention to the wills of the people involving with it and the needs of the state. Thus, the organization of the conquered lands followed the paths that not only secured the defense, but also, if not mostly, facilitated the trade.

<sup>47</sup> For the reluctance of the Roman senate to profit of any economic expansion, see E. Badian, *Roman Imperialism in the Late Republic*, Ithaca, New York 1976<sup>2</sup>, pp. 16-28.

<sup>48</sup> For the influence of the *negotiatores* and *publicani*, as well as the weak power of the Senate to influence the economic policies, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c., see A.N. Sherwin-White, *Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 16-17.

<sup>49</sup> E. Badian, *Publicans and Sinners*, cit., p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> J. H. D'Arms, *Commerce and social standing in ancient Rome*, Harvard 1981.