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THE THRACIAN CAMPAIGNS OF PERSEUS

Abstract. – This study examines a little-studied aspect of the policy of the last Macedonian king, Perseus (179–168 BCE): his military campaigns in Thrace. Its starting point is a dedication from Amphipolis that refers to the king's "Thracian campaigns", an episode for which no direct parallel survives in the ancient literary tradition. By comparing this inscription with the Delphic inscription containing accusations against Perseus, as well as with the accounts of Livy and Appian, the study proposes a new reconstruction of these campaigns based on the convergence of distinct epigraphic and literary evidence. It argues that the "Thracians" whom the Delphic inscription states Perseus subdued can be identified with the Roman friends and allies in Thrace whom Livy reports in 172 BCE. The general designation "Thracians" may thus have encompassed several distinct tribal communities, potentially explaining the plural form of "campaigns" in the Amphipolis dedication. Appian's statement that Perseus "is conquering Thrace" further complements this evidence and may point to sustained military operations shortly before the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War (171–168 BCE). Taken together, the Amphipolis and Delphic inscriptions and the accounts of Livy and Appian provide mutually complementary evidence for a possible reconstruction of Perseus' military activity in Thrace. The evidence suggests that his "Thracian campaigns" may have comprised a series of operations against several Thracian communities around 173–172 BCE. This reconstruction may also help explain the disappearance from the historical record of Rome's allies in Thrace immediately before the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War.

Key words. – Hellenistic Age, Antigonids, Thrace.

Introduction

Many aspects of the reign of Perseus (179–168 BCE), the last king of the Antigonid kingdom of Macedonia[1], are poorly documented in the surviving ancient sources, including his military campaigns in the Thracian

[1] For details on the life and deeds of Perseus, see comprehensive overviews in: Meloni 1953, Pass.; Hammond & Walbank 1988, 488–557; Burton 2017, 56–77; Worthington 2023, 180–220; Marchand 2025, Pass.

lands. It is well known that, from childhood, he had participated in the wars waged by Macedonia against Rome and neighboring peoples, having been sent by his father, Philip V (221 – 179 BCE), on numerous and varied campaigns.[2]

One of the first challenges Perseus faced as an independent ruler was the attack by Abrupolis in the autumn of 179 BCE.[3] It ended with the defeat of the Sapaean ruler and his expulsion from his own kingdom. Between 174 and 172 BCE, a possible military operation in support of Byzantium is also thought to have taken place.[4] Modern scholars have not identified any other activities of Perseus in Thrace. The available fragmentary sources, however, suggest that he – like Philip V – pursued an active policy toward Thrace[5] and conducted campaigns there, the scope of which remains insufficiently clear from the available sources.

In a situation of limited source material, epigraphic evidence is particularly valuable; such evidence is, in principle, of exceptional importance for reconstructing aspects of the ancient history of the Balkans, especially in regions such as Thrace, which rarely received sustained attention from ancient authors. Sometimes inscriptions provide information about events that are missing from, or poorly represented in, the surviving ancient literary tradition. This study offers a reconstruction of such a case by comparing the information from two epigraphic monuments with a fragmentary account by Titus Livy and considering them alongside a brief report by Appian. To date, this interconnection has not been systematically explored.[6]

One of the inscriptions comes from Amphipolis and mentions – along with other important information – the Thracian campaigns of Per-

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[2] According to King Eumenes II's speech to the Roman Senate, as transmitted by Livy, Perseus had accompanied his father to military camps from childhood and had gained combat experience (Liv. 42.11.7). As for Thrace, his participation in the ascent of Mount Haemus in 181 BCE and the subsequent attack on the city of Petra in Medica is documented; during these operations, he also carried out independent missions (Liv. 40.22.1–14); see Iliev 2023a, 186–198. Immediately before his accession to the throne, Perseus found himself in Thrace once again: according to the ancient tradition, as a fugitive from his father, and according to some modern interpretations, in order to carry out certain field operations; see Iliev 2023b, 161–174 for details. For other actions of Perseus in Thrace, see Marchand 2025, 114–115.

[3] The information on Abrupolis is summarized as comprehensively as possible in Boshnakov 2024, 39–44.

[4] Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 234; Marchand 2025, 140.

[5] It is generally accepted that Perseus continued Philip V's policy toward Thrace; see Worthington 2023, 189, with references.

[6] A possible interconnection between all these sources is mentioned by Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 235, but is not further developed. The data from the inscriptions at Amphipolis and Delphi are considered to be interrelated by Hammond & Walbank 1988, 492.

seus[7]; such campaigns are not mentioned directly in other ancient texts. The second inscription is from Delphi and enumerates the charges against the Macedonian king that served to justify the Third Macedonian War (171–168 BCE)[8]; among these charges is the subjugation of some Thracians, who were likely Roman friends and allies. This study is based on the assumption that the Thracians in question can be identified with those mentioned by Livy; such an identification corresponds well with Appian's account of Perseus's conquest of Thrace. A comparison of these data from various sources suggests that the Macedonian king led campaigns in Thrace immediately before the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War. The following discussion evaluates the evidence for this interpretation, which makes it possible to propose a previously unrecognized phase of Perseus's Thracian policy.

The Amphipolis Inscription and the Question of Perseus's Thracian Campaigns

A marble slab was discovered at Amphipolis that was originally attached to the base of a now-lost dedicatory monument; the slab was subsequently reused in a later structure, the stylobate of a late antique basilica.[9] Despite these vicissitudes, the text of the inscription has been preserved almost in its entirety; only a few letters of one of the names at the end of the penultimate line remain uncertain.[10] The text reads as follows:

> *(I) βασιλεὺς Περσεὺς | βασιλέως Φιλίππου | ἀπὸ τῶν εἰς Θράικην στρατειῶν | Ἀρτέμιδι Ταυροπόλωι. (II) Ἀμφιπολιτῶν ὁ δῆμος | Ἀρτέμιδι Ταυροπόλωι | πολιταρχούντων Τιμωνίδου | τοῦ Ἀσκληπιάδου, Μεστ[ύλου] | τοῦ Μητροδώρου. / (I) King Perseus, (son) of King Philip, (made a dedication) to Artemis Tauropolos following his campaigns in Thrace. (II) The demos of the Amphipolitans (dedicated this) to Artemis Tauropolos when Timonides, son of Asclepiades, and Mest[ylos], son of Metrodoros, were serving as politarchs.*

These are two dedications to Artemis Tauropolos: one by King Perseus, the other by the citizens of Amphipolis. What the two have in common, apart from their placement one after the other on a single slab, is that they are dedicated to the same goddess. Beyond this, however, there are several significant differences:

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[7] The initial publication and interpretation of the inscription were carried out by Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 229–241, 375–378.

[8] Pomtow 1917, 195–199; Colin 1930, No. 75, 108–116; Bousquet 1981, 407–416; Sherk 1969, 233–239; Burton 2017, 79–91; Marchand 2025, 772–785.

[9] The circumstances surrounding the unveiling of the monument are described in greatest detail and illustrated with photographs by Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 229–233; 236.

[10] Marchand 2025, 715, not. 37, with references.

– The dedications are independent of one another, as each contains a separate address to the goddess;
– The institutional context of the two dedications is different: in the first, the dedicant is the king; in the second, it is the demos of Amphipolis;
– The style of the letters and their visibility differ clearly between the two dedications[11];
– The campaigns in Thrace are mentioned only in the first dedication.

The circumstances outlined above have sparked a debate in the historiography concerning several interrelated issues[12], of which only two are relevant to the present study: the dating of the inscription and the identification of Perseus's opponents in Thrace.

According to an interpretation first put forward by Chaido Koukouli-Chrysanthaki when the inscription was published, it is impossible to identify the specific Thracian campaigns to which the inscription refers. She nevertheless suggested that the reference encompasses all of Perseus's military activities in Thrace, from the defeat of Abrupolis in 179 BCE to the expedition in support of Byzantium in 174–172 BCE. On this interpretation, the inscription should be dated to 179–171 BCE.[13] This view was subsequently supported by Nicholas Hammond and Frank William Walbank, who argued that there must have been more than one campaign[14], and, consequently, that more than one enemy must be envisaged.

An alternative interpretation was proposed by Jean and Louis Robert[15]: they assume – without philological analysis or any particular example – that Perseus's campaigns were directed against Abrupolis and argue that the plural form does not necessarily refer to two separate wars, but may instead denote several battles of varying outcome in Thrace, apparently fought in 179 BCE. They also point to the possible chronological discrepancy of six to eight years between the actions against Abrupolis and the eventual expedition in support of Byzantium. The dual dedication is explained in connection with the attack by the Sapaean king: his actions directly affected Amphipolis, which led to the city's inclusion in the royal dedication. This interpretation was subsequently supported and further developed in other respects by Miltiades Hatzopoulos, although he

[11] The paleographic features are discussed in greatest detail in Voutiras 1986, 347-355. See also Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 231; Marchand 2025, 708.

[12] A summary of the various opinions and comments was provided most recently in Marchand 2025, 708–715.

[13] Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 235 – „[…] In any case, for the dating of the inscription we must accept as a *terminus post quem* 179 BCE (the ascent of Perseus to the throne) and as a *terminus ante quem* 171 BCE (the declaration of war with Rome)".

[14] Hammond & Walbank 1988, 492.

[15] Robert & Robert 1984, 452, No. 253.

provided no further details regarding the enemy or the dates of the campaigns.[16]

The prevailing view in later historiography is that the Thracian campaigns mentioned in the inscription refer to military operations against Abrupolis and that the monument itself dates to 179 BCE or shortly thereafter.[17] However, no clearly articulated arguments in support of this dating have been presented. It appears to rest primarily on information found in the ancient literary sources, according to which Perseus fought against Abrupolis at precisely this time. Another factor is undoubtedly the lack of direct evidence for other campaigns by the Macedonian king in Thrace. It is important to note that the philological arguments put forward by Hammond and Walbank have gone unchallenged by all scholars who have accepted this identification.[18]

In studies of the history of ancient Thrace, Perseus's Thracian campaigns are generally noted simply as a fact, without attempts at dating or further interpretation, although emphasis is placed on the significance of the plural form.[19]

On the basis of its paleographic characteristics, the dedication by Perseus could date to any year of his reign preceding the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War, whereas the second dedication, by the demos of the Amphipolitans, can be dated on the basis of the named politarchs. Unfortunately, this does not provide a chronological anchor, since the year in which the politarchs in question held office is currently unknown.[20]

The Thracian campaigns are mentioned in the inscription in the plural form (εἰς Θράικην στρατειῶν).[21] Here, στρατεία should be understood as referring to an independent military expedition[22] (march, campaign),

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[16] According to Hatzopoulos, Macedonian kings traditionally shared the spoils of war with their soldiers; the inhabitants of Amphipolis took part in the campaign against Abrupolis; and Macedonian cities enjoyed financial autonomy. Thus, after receiving its share of the spoils, the city prepared its dedication to Artemis Tauropolos and decided to combine it with the royal dedication, since a separate monument might have appeared to be an act of rivalry; see Hatzopoulos 1988, 448–449, No. 861. An alternative explanation might be the strategic location of Amphipolis, which appears to have served as a starting point and major logistical hub for Macedonian campaigns in Thrace, not only under Perseus but also earlier, under Philip V.

[17] Burton 2017, 58; Worthington 2023, 183; Marchand 2025, 708–715.

[18] Marchand 2025, 708–715, with references.

[19] Delev 2015, 67.

[20] According to some scholars, the office may have emerged after the Battle of Pydna; see Nigdelis & Anagnostoudis 2017, 295–324. According to others, it appeared as early as the reign of the last Antigonids; see Mari 2018, 190.

[21] See the note by Hammond & Walbank 1988, 492, not. 2, which cites Thuc. 2.11.1 as an example; cf. also App., Bell. Civ., 1.7.

[22] The meaning of the word is discussed in Liddell & Scott 1996, 1651, with examples drawn from ancient literary and epigraphic sources.

rather than simply to a single battle. The use of the plural form (στρατειῶν) therefore most naturally suggests two or more separate military expeditions, directed either against the same enemy in different campaigning seasons or against different enemies within the same season.

However, the available accounts of the Macedonian king's campaign against Abrupolis by ancient writers do not provide grounds for assuming that more than one expedition was launched against him. Admittedly, the surviving accounts are scarce and often limited to the statement that the Sapaean ruler was defeated and driven from his territory.[23] Nevertheless, they give the impression of a rapid sequence of events that took place between the death of Philip V and the renewal of Macedonia's alliance treaty with Rome – that is, between the end of summer or autumn 179 BCE and either the end of 179 BCE or spring 178 BCE.[24] The placement of the campaign within this period is based on the assumption that the actions against Abrupolis preceded the treaty and did not prevent its renewal.[25]

Piero Meloni has proposed an even more precise date for the clash between Perseus and the Thracian ruler, placing it around August or September 179 BCE[26], while Koukouli-Chrysanthaki gives the more general date of autumn of the same year.[27]

Only two of the surviving ancient texts provide further details about the nature of the conflict. Polybius writes that, after the death of Philip V, Abrupolis seized the mining regions around Mount Pangaeus, but Perseus, having rushed to the aid of his subjects, utterly defeated him and even drove him out of his own territory.[28] Livy, for his part, provides a lengthy defense of Perseus, in which he himself justifies his actions against Abrupolis by claiming that he had been attacked. Even in this account, however, there is nothing to suggest more than a single campaign; the available sources instead convey the impression of a swift and decisive victory.[29]

The facts and circumstances outlined above make it necessary to explore alternative possibilities for the chronological and geographical

[23] Liv. 42.13.6; Liv. 42.40.5; Diod. 29.33.1; App., Mac., 11.2; App., Mac., 11.6; Paus. 7.10.6.

[24] In recent scholarship, the renewal of the treaty is more often dated to 179 BCE; see Nicholson 2023, 235 and, most recently, Marchand 2025, 119, with references. There are also views that the treaty was renewed before spring 178 BCE or no earlier than 178 BCE; see, respectively, Burton 2017, 58; Worthington 2023, 184.

[25] App., Mac., 11.6.; cf. also Hammond & Walbank 1988, 492, not. 1.

[26] Burton 2017, 58, with references.

[27] Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1981, 233.

[28] Polyb. 22.18.1-3.

[29] Liv. 42.41.9-13; cf. also Errington 2020, 415 – „Unmittelbar nach dem Tode Philipps V. im J. 179 hatte Abrupolis das benachbarte Makedonien angegriffen und war von Perseus gleich zurückgeworfen und vertrieben worden".

placement of Perseus's Thracian campaigns. Such possibilities can indeed be found in the available ancient sources.

The Delphic Inscription and the Possible Outcome of Perseus's Thracian Campaigns

The inscription from Amphipolis discussed above recounts Perseus's Thracian campaigns and suggests that they may have ended successfully. The inscription from Delphi[30], discussed below, contains the Roman accusations against the Macedonian king and provides information that can be interpreted as indirect confirmation of the campaigns' successful outcome. In particular, it reports the subjugation of the Thracians – who were likely Roman friends and allies – and, furthermore, provides clues for dating the Thracian campaigns themselves.

The epigraphic monument from Delphi is the only contemporary document to contain an official Roman accusatory narrative against Perseus. Unfortunately, however, it has survived only in an incomplete form, consisting of two marble fragments. This fragmentary state limits the possibility of using the inscription without significant editorial intervention. To overcome the fragmentary nature of the particularly important second fragment, scholars have proposed reconstructions based on information from ancient literary sources. This approach inevitably raises the question of the extent to which the reconstructed text can be regarded as an independent source.[31]

The exact date of the inscription is uncertain, but it is of particular importance for the present reconstruction, since the inclusion of the Thracians in the list of charges can be used as a *terminus ante quem* for Perseus's relevant actions. On the basis of its content, modern scholars have proposed dates ranging from 172 to 168 BCE.[32] Research in recent decades has generally favored a date of 171 BCE[33], although there are also grounds for dating the inscription to 170 BCE.[34] In any case, based on its content, the inscription probably dates to 171/170 BCE.

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[30] The circumstances surrounding the discovery of the two fragments are discussed in greatest detail in Bousquet 1981, 407–416. The text of the inscription is discussed in: Pomtow 1917, 195–199; Colin 1930, 108–116, No. 75; Sherk 1969, 233–239, No. 40; Errington 2020, 414; and, most recently, Marchand 2025, 772–785.

[31] Burton 2017, 79.

[32] Hammond & Walbank 1988, 500, not. 3. The dating of the monument to after 168 BCE was based on Gaston Colin's opinion that the fragment formed part of the monument to Aemilius Paullus at Delphi; this possibility was categorically rejected by Bousquet 1981, 410–411.

[33] Marchand 2025, 772–785, with references.

[34] There are several arguments in favor of this date. First and foremost, the inscription mentions that Perseus had drawn barbarians from beyond the Istros. This is the only accusation for which there are no parallels in the surviving accounts from the eve of the war,

The document is a letter from a Roman envoy[35] to the magistrates and citizens of Delphi, which, through its public display, was also addressed to the Greek world as a whole. It presents a series of accusations against Perseus, thereby providing a justification for the waging of the Third Macedonian War.

The monument's connection to Thrace and the Thracians has been discussed primarily in relation to the possibility that the name of the Thracian ruler Abrupolis – a key figure in the Roman justification for declaring war – can be read in one of its lines.[36] The mention of the Thracians themselves, however, has often been overlooked, even though it is no less important. It raises a number of questions that can, to some extent, be clarified by combining the available evidence concerning these events from different sources.

Lines 15–17 of the second fragment of the inscription are particularly important for the history of Thrace and the Thracians. They can be read as follows[37]:

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namely those of Polybius (Polyb. 22.18.1-11), Titus Livy (Liv. 42.11.1-42.13.12; 42.40.1-42.41.14), and Appian (App., Mac. 11.1-2; 11.5-9). Accusations that Perseus had collaborated with the Bastarnae are, however, found in Callicrates' speech from 174 BCE (Liv. 41.23.12). Their inclusion in the inscription can be explained quite plausibly by Plutarch's account of events in 170 BCE, which mentions Perseus's interactions with the Bastarnae, as well as rumors of a possible campaign by them against Italy (Plut., Aem. Paul. 9.6). Second, in 170 BCE, the consul Aulus Hostilius Mancinus sent the former consul Gaius Popillius Laenas, accompanied by Gnaeus Octavius, on a diplomatic mission to the Greek allies (Polyb. 28.3.1-5.6; Liv. 43.17.1-10). Although there is no evidence that they visited Delphi during their mission, it is entirely possible that they did so while traveling from Thebes to Aetolia. Furthermore, Popillius Laenas was one of the consuls in office when Eumenes II presented his charges against Perseus to the Roman Senate; it may therefore be assumed that he was among those most familiar with the accusations. Moreover, both consuls of 172 BCE expressed their desire to wage war against Macedonia as early as that year. Thus, three arguments can be advanced for dating the inscription no earlier than 170 BCE: (1) that year, for the first time in some time, there were reports of Perseus's interactions with the Bastarnae; (2) the Roman position in the war was unfavorable; and (3) there are reports of Roman diplomatic missions throughout Greece.

[35] The previous note suggests that this may have been the former consul Gaius Popillius Laenas, whereas historiography has proposed that it may instead have been Publius Licinius Crassus, one of the consuls of 171 BCE, who fought against Perseus; see Bousquet 1981, 416.

[36] Boshnakov 2024, 39–44.

[37] At least three reconstructions of this part of the inscription have been proposed over the years: [κ]αὶ Θρᾶικας μέν ὄντας ἡμετέ[ρους φίλους καὶ συμμάχους καταπολεμήσας ἀναστάτους ἐποίησεν · Ἀβρού]|[π]ολιν δέ, ὃν ἡμεῖς περιελάβομεν τα[ῖς πρὸς αὐτὸν συνθήκαις φίλον ἡμῶν ὄντα καὶ σύμμαχον, ἐξέβ]|αλεν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας (Pomtow 1917, 197); [κ]αὶ Θρᾶικας μέν, ὄντας ἡμετέ[ρους συμμάχους, ἐκράτησε· Ἀβρού]|[π]ολιν δέ, ὃν ἡμεῖς περιελάβομεν [ταῖς πρὸς Φίλιππον συνθήκαις, ἐξέβ]|αλεν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας (Colin 1930, 110 = Bousquet 1981, 415); [κ]αὶ Θρᾶικας μέν, ὄντας ἡμετέ[ρους συμμάχους, ἐκράτησε· Ἀβρού]|[π]ολιν δέ, ὃν ἡμεῖς περιελάβομεν [τῆι φιλίαι καὶ συμμαχίαι ἡμῶν, ἐξέ]|[β]αλεν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας (Errington 2020, 414). The reading presented here is based on Errington's

[κ]αὶ Θρᾳικας μέν, ὄντας ἡμετέ[ρους φίλους καὶ συμμάχους, ἐκρά-τησε· Ἀβρού]|[π]ολιν δέ, ὃν ἡμεῖς περιελάβομεν [τῆι φιλίαι καὶ συμ-μαχίαι ἡμῶν, ἐξέ]|[β]αλεν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας / On the one hand, he subjugated the Thracians, even though they were our friends and allies; on the other hand, he expelled Abrupolis – whom we had accepted as a friend and ally – from his kingdom.

A significant portion of the quoted Greek text has been reconstructed, although neither the original dimensions of the monument nor the exact number of letters per line are known.[38] Consequently, any reconstruction remains largely hypothetical. The proposed reconstruction should therefore not be treated as independent evidence for identifying the Thracians with the tribes mentioned in Livy's account, discussed below. Its significance lies rather in its conjunction with independent chronological and historical arguments.

It is important to emphasize that, in this particular case, the reference to the Thracians is beyond doubt, while the restoration of the name Abrupolis appears convincing. Regardless of which reconstruction is accepted, neither affects the identification of these two elements in the inscription.

Of crucial importance for the interpretation of the quoted sentence is the construction μέν … δέ, which strongly suggests that Perseus was charged with two distinct offenses arising from actions committed against different allies of the Roman people.

According to the reconstruction of the lost text cited above, the Thracians are described as friends and allies of Rome (ἡμετέρους φίλους καὶ συμμάχους), while Abrupolis is likewise presented as a friend and ally of Rome (τῇ φιλίᾳ καὶ συμμαχίᾳ ἡμῶν). Of course, some uncertainty must remain regarding the proposed supplements to the missing portion of the text specifying the terms of these relationships. Nevertheless, the reconstructed text appears to distinguish between different diplomatic partners of the Romans: Abrupolis, whose name is clearly of Thracian origin[39], is presented in the inscription as an individual diplomatic partner distinct from the Thracians as a collective group, [40] even though Diodorus

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reconstruction, with an addition intended to yield the standard diplomatic formula φιλία καὶ συμμαχία, equivalent to the Latin *amicitia et societas*. This reconstruction is consistent with the available evidence and does not require more extensive supplementation than some of the other proposed reconstructions.

[38] The estimates for the total number of letters per line are approximately 75 (according to Pomtow), 55 (according to Colin), and 95 (according to Bousquet, who based his estimate on the first fragment); see Ferrary 1988, 170, not. 151.

[39] Boshnakov 2024, 39, with references. For the name, see also Dana 2014, 1, 14–15.

[40] Diod. 29.33.1 – „[…] ἡ σύγκλητος ὑπέλαβεν ἐκ τοῦ Περσέως γεγονέναι τὴν σύγ-χυσιν, καὶ ἀπελογίσατο τοῖς τοῦ Περσέως πρεσβευταῖς περὶ μὲν τῶν ἄλλων ἀπολύσειν

explicitly identifies him as a Thracian. Consequently, the inscription appears to distinguish between Abrupolis as an individual ruler and the group designated collectively as the "Thracians". This interpretation may find further support in Pausanias, who identifies Abrupolis as the king of the Sapaeans, one of the Thracian tribes.[41]

The situation described above is particularly interesting for two reasons: (1) the inscription mentions two distinct political groups in Thrace whose actions were invoked by the Romans as charges against Perseus, and (2) one of these groups is referred to by the general term "Thracians". The fact that the inscription distinguishes between the Thracians and Abrupolis has long been recognized[42], but no satisfactory explanation for this distinction has yet been proposed.

In this context, the use of the collective term "Thracians" to refer to the Romans' allies seems overly general. One might instead expect the inscription to mention one or more specific ethnonyms, particularly since some Thracians were also allies of Perseus.[43] One possible explanation for this lack of specificity is a desire to conserve space by using a collective term rather than listing several specific ethnonyms, especially given the recommendation of the anonymous Roman magistrate, stated in the letter itself, that the text be inscribed on stone.[44]

The two epigraphic monuments, from Amphipolis and Delphi, can thus be understood as referring to the same or related events from different perspectives: the former presents Perseus's actions as successes from the Macedonian perspective, whereas the latter presents the same events as charges within Roman diplomatic rhetoric.

αὐτὸν τῶν ἐγκλημάτων, περὶ δὲ τῆς Ἀβρουπόλιδος τοῦ Θρᾳκὸς ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβολῆς ἐκέλευσε διορθώσασθαι τὸν Περσέα τὸ γεγονός. / […] The Senate suspected that Perseus was behind the unrest [in Aetolia and Thessaly] and informed his envoys that, although it was withdrawing all other charges against him, the expulsion of the Thracian Abrupolis from his kingdom was an act that Perseus must rectify".

[41] Paus., 7.10.6 – „Περσεῖ τῷ Φιλίππου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἄγοντι εἰρήνην κατὰ συνθήκας, ἃς ὁ πατήρ οἱ Φίλιππος ἐποιήσατο, ἐπῆλθεν ὑπερβῆναι τοὺς ὅρκους καὶ ἐπί τε Σαπαίους καὶ Σαπαίων τὸν βασιλέα Ἀβρούπολιν στράτευμα ἀγαγὼν ἐποίησεν ἀναστάτους Ῥωμαίων συμμάχους ὄντας […] / Perseus, the son of Philip, who was at peace with Rome under a treaty concluded by his father Philip, decided to break his oaths and, leading an army against the Sapaeans and their king Abrupolis – allies of the Romans – laid waste to their country […]".

[42] Hammond & Walbank 1988, 500–501; Worthington 2023, 183.

[43] There is evidence for a significant number of Thracians in the Macedonian army, who must have been allies of Perseus, since they are listed separately from both the mercenaries and the Thracians living in Macedonia; see the summary figures in Worthington 2023, 205.

[44] This is stated in the first fragment of the inscription; see Bousquet 1981, 414.

Livy's Account and Perseus's Possible Enemies in Thrace

If, in fact, the general terms "Thracian campaigns" (Θράικην στρατειῶν) in the Amphipolis inscription and "Thracians" (Θρᾶικες) in the Delphi inscription do indeed refer to actions involving several separate Thracian communities, this would mean that, in the latter inscription, they are presented as a unified alliance. At the same time, it may be assumed that in both cases the reference is not to the Thracians in general, but to several specific tribes. A similar account finds a close parallel in the works of Titus Livy, who identifies three tribes as Thracians that formed an alliance with the Romans in 172 BCE. It is noteworthy that Livy initially refers to them by the general term "Thracians" and only later specifies that he is referring to three distinct tribes – a technique characteristic of ancient historiographical tradition. The passage reads as follows:

> [...] *et Trecum legatis – Sedis Cepnatisque et Satis – societatem amicitiamque petentibus et, quod petebant, datum est, et munera <binum> milium aeris [summae] in singulos missa. hos utique populos, quod ab tergo Macedoniae Threcia esset, adsumptos in societatem gaudebant [...] / Envoys from the Thracians – the Sedi, the Cepnati, and the Sati – also arrived, requesting an alliance and friendship. Their request was granted, and they were each given 2,000 asses as a gift. The Romans were particularly pleased that these peoples had been counted among their allies, because Thrace lies beyond Macedonia* […].[45]

The very fact that Roman allies are attested in Thrace is particularly important, since none are known to have existed during the reign of Philip V.[46] Under Perseus, however, the situation changed: first, Abrupolis is recorded as a Roman ally, followed by the Thracians mentioned by Livy.

It should be emphasized that, although these Thracians comprised three distinct tribes, they were represented before the Roman Senate by a joint diplomatic mission; that is, they traveled and negotiated together.[47]

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[45] Liv. 42.19.6-7.

[46] For example, during the Second Macedonian War (200 197 BCE), the Romans were unable to find allies among the Thracians, although Roman diplomats likely made efforts to win them over; see Iliev 2023a, 87–108. In the years that followed, there is no record of Roman allies in Thrace, and it appears that Philip V of Macedon (221 – 179 BCE) had a free hand in dealing with the Thracians, provided that he did not interfere with the Hellenic cities along the Thracian coastline; see Iliev 2023a, 163.

[47] Joint actions among individual Thracian tribes were not unusual during this period: in 188 BCE, a coalition of four tribes attacked Gnaeus Manlius Vulso in the region north of the Thracian Chersonesos (Liv. 38.40.7); for details of this incident, see Iliev 2023a, 145–162.

Whether this indicates that they were located in neighboring territories remains unclear, but it is entirely possible, given the degree of coordination they were able to achieve.

No less important is the strategic reason explicitly stated in the text for the Senate's decision to grant the Thracians' request for friendship and alliance: the location of Thrace in the rear of Macedonia. This consideration suggests that relations with these Thracian communities were neither casual nor purely formal, but rather formed part of a deliberate Roman strategy once war had become inevitable.

At first glance, identifying the Thracians mentioned here with those appearing in the Delphi inscription may seem rather speculative, primarily because of the scant information available about the political geography of Thrace during this period. This identification therefore represents the most conjectural step in the reconstruction. However, given the enthusiasm expressed by the Roman Senate for the Thracian allies, and particularly their aforementioned strategic position in the rear of Macedonia, it is reasonable to suppose that there were no other such allies at that time.

Furthermore, this section of Livy's text has been preserved in only one fifth-century AD manuscript (Codex Vindobonensis Lat. 15, fol. 35v)[48], in which the Thracian ethnonyms are clearly legible, but are unusual and have no parallels in other sources. The editors of Livy and scholars of Thracian history have attempted to resolve this problem by identifying the ethnonyms attested in the manuscript with those of Thracian tribes known from other sources.[49] Such identifications, however, are problematic: although they replace otherwise unattested ethnonyms with known ones, they raise the question of how these groups could have reached an agreement among themselves, given that the substituted ethnonyms are associated with different regions of ancient Thrace. The unusual manuscript readings should not automatically be regarded as corrupt merely because they lack parallels elsewhere. In any case, even if one accepts their identification with the Thracians mentioned in the Delphic inscription, the location of their territories remains uncertain. Southern and southeastern Thrace are among the possible areas in which these tribes may have been located, particularly given that the division of the Macedonian Kingdom into four parts after the end of the Third Macedonian

[48] There is nothing unusual in the manuscript's spelling of the three tribes: there are no corrections or damaged passages. The manuscript has been fully digitized and is freely available online: Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 15 [Livius. Ab urbe condita libri XLI-XLV (unvollständig)], https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.7460

[49] For instance: *Sedis* is replaced with *Maedis* or *Serdis*; *Cepnatis* with *Caenis*, *Odomantis*, or *Coelaletis*; and *Satis* with *Astis*, *Sapaeis*, or *Serdis*; see the commentary and bibliography in Briscoe 2012, 218–219; Errington 2020, 415–416; Parissaki 2021, 191.

War appears to have extended Macedonian territory toward the Hebros (Maritsa) River valley.[50]

Livy placed the account of the Thracian embassy within a thematic series of diplomatic missions, making it difficult to date the episode precisely. It undoubtedly took place sometime after Eumenes II's visit to Rome, perhaps during the second half of 172 BCE. The absence of Roman allies in Thrace during the reign of Philip V, as noted above, together with the lack of evidence for any direct diplomatic contacts – including during the previous Macedonian wars – suggests that the Thracians' mission is unlikely to have been simply an attempt to position themselves diplomatically on the eve of the war. Nor does it seem likely that the Thracians were encouraged to undertake the mission by Eumenes II, as has also been suggested.[51] Rather, Perseus's own actions may have prompted them to turn to Rome. Moreover, the treaty of alliance and friendship with the Thracians was concluded in 172 BCE, and by 171/170 BCE there was already an accusation against Perseus alleging that he had subjugated the Thracians. It is therefore possible that the Macedonian king had waged war against them in the intervening period, thereby providing Roman diplomats with a compelling argument for declaring war.

Appian's Account of the Conquest of Thrace

The limited source base provides several additional implicit arguments in support of dating Perseus's Thracian campaigns to the period immediately preceding the Third Macedonian War and of identifying the Thracians mentioned by Livy with those referred to in the Delphi inscription.

Several lists of charges against Perseus have been preserved in ancient literature.[52] A comparison of these lists shows that their number increased over time as new charges were added.[53] At the same time, the extant lists differ in both the composition and the order of the charges. The Thracians are mentioned only in the Delphi inscription, which is the latest surviving record, suggesting that they were included in the list of charges by that time at the latest.

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[50] Hammond & Walbank 1988, 611–612.

[51] Briscoe 2012, 219.

[52] These are: the fragments from Polybius (Polyb. 22.18.1–11); the accusatory speech by Eumenes II, King of Pergamon (197 – 160 BCE), before the Roman Senate in early 172 BCE, as presented by Livy (Liv. 42.11.1–42.13.12) and Appian (App., Mac., 11.1–2); the accusations made by Quintus Marcius Philippus personally to Perseus, to which the king responded, as recorded by Livy (Liv. 42.40.1–42.41.14); and the Roman accusations against Macedonian envoys and their defenses in the run-up to the war, as reported by Appian (App., Mac., 11.5–9).

[53] See the comparative table in Burton 2017, 80.

In Eumenes II's speech to the Roman Senate in early 172 BCE, as conveyed by Livy and Appian, alongside the broadly consistent accounts of the expulsion of Abrupolis and the provision of aid to Byzantium, Thrace is also mentioned. In Livy, the country is portrayed as a perpetual source of military recruits for the Macedonian king, which he could freely draw upon[54], whereas in Appian, it is presented as the object of his conquest and as a base for subsequent operations.[55]

In Quintus Marcius Philippus's indictment – which, according to Livy, he delivered in person to Perseus – Thrace is not mentioned, nor is it mentioned in the Macedonian king's replies.[56] According to Appian, however, the Romans accused Perseus, in the presence of the Macedonian envoys, above all of seeking to conquer Thrace.[57]

Although modern historiography relies primarily on Livy when reconstructing the course of events[58], the identical wording Appian uses to describe Perseus's actions in Thrace is significant. In both instances in which he mentions Thrace, he uses the same verb in the same form: κατακτῷτο. This repeated formulation suggests that Appian understood the conquest of Thrace as an ongoing or incompletely achieved objective in the Roman accusations.

Of course, Appian does not identify Perseus's specific opponents. His account is therefore significant here not as direct evidence for the campaigns themselves, but as independent confirmation that, during the period in question, the Macedonian king was undertaking actions connected with the conquest of Thrace.

Chronology and Historical Context of the Thracian Campaigns

Based on the evidence discussed above, the beginning of Perseus's Thracian campaigns can be placed before the arrival of Eumenes II in Rome, that is, before the beginning of 172 BCE. Taking into account the traditional campaigning season of the Macedonian army, from spring to fall, it is possible that the campaigns had begun several months before Eumenes II's speech. By later in 172 BCE, these campaigns were likely still

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[54] Liv. 42.12.10 – „iuuentutem, ut iam Macedonia deficiat, uelut ex perenni fonte unde hauriat, Thraciam subiectam esse / And as for his reinforcements – as if Macedonia were no longer enough for him – he keeps Thrace under his control as an inexhaustible source from which to draw".

[55] App., Mac., 11.1 – „καὶ Θρᾴκην κατακτῷτο, μέγα ὁρμητήριον / that he is conquering Thrace, which is a strong base of operations".

[56] Liv. 42.40.1–42.41.14.

[57] App., Mac., 11.5 – „καὶ μάλιστα ὅτι Θρᾴκην κατακτῷτο / and above all, that he is conquering Thrace".

[58] Erskine 2025, 31–32.

underway, since the Macedonian king was once again accused by the Romans of conquering Thrace.[59]

It is possible that Perseus's actions had caused the Thracians in question to fear for their security. They may consequently have sought friendship and an alliance with Rome during the second half of 172 BCE. Eumenes II, too, was probably not motivated solely by a sense of allied duty during his visit to the Senate, as Livy suggests.[60] Rather, his actions can also be understood in light of his own fears concerning the intentions and policies of the Macedonian king, as Appian attests.[61]

It is possible that the basis for such fears was the military support that the Macedonian king provided to Byzantium. This support has recently been dated to 173 BCE.[62] The sources provide no details whatsoever about the nature of this support, apart from Appian's indication that it was military in character.[63] If Polybius's account of the constant wars waged by the Byzantines against their Thracian neighbors was still applicable at that time[64], one possibility is that Perseus's campaigns were directed specifically against these neighbors.

The extent of Perseus's conquest of Thrace remains unclear, as does the question of whether the campaigns were connected with the aid provided to Byzantium. Insofar as the surviving versions of Eumenes II's speech treat the accusations concerning Thrace as a separate issue from the enigmatic assistance to Byzantium, the two may refer to different and unrelated events. It is also possible, however, that Perseus's Thracian campaigns were directed against several Thracian tribes, which would explain why the speech refers more broadly to the conquest of Thrace.

It is noteworthy that, in the accounts of the Third Macedonian War[65], there are reports of significant contingents of Thracians serving in the Macedonian army, but no Thracians are mentioned among Rome's allies. The absence of such information in the sources does not contradict the hypothesis that Perseus's campaigns against the Thracians, undertaken im-

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[59] App., Mac., 11.5.

[60] Liv. 42.11.3; 42.13.11–12.

[61] App., Mac., 11.2 – „ζήλου τε καὶ φθόνου καὶ δέους μᾶλλον ἢ ἐγκλημάτων οὐδὲν ὁ Εὐμένης ἀπολιπών, ἐκέλευε τὴν σύγκλητον ὑφορᾶσθαι νέον ἐχθρὸν εὐδοκιμοῦντα καὶ γειτονεύοντα / Eumenes, leaving nothing out, driven more by jealousy, envy, and fear than by accusations, urged the Senate to be on guard against the young enemy who was gaining fame and was a neighbor".

[62] Marchand 2025, 140, 949.

[63] App., Mac., 11.1; 11.7. See also Marchand 2025, 140.

[64] Polyb. 4.45.1–5. It is known that in 184 BCE, Philip V also undertook a campaign ostensibly to aid Byzantium but in reality to intimidate the Thracian rulers (Polyb. 22.14.12; Liv. 39.35.4); see Iliev 2023a, 181–183.

[65] The course of the war is traced in Hammond & Walbank 1988, 505–557; Burton 2017, 124–172; Worthington 2023, 203–238, with reference to earlier literature.

mediately before the outbreak of the war, were successful. The campaigns may have begun as early as 173 BCE, but in any case before the beginning of 172 BCE, and the evidence suggests that they continued at least into the second half of 172 BCE.

Conclusion

The reconstruction proposed here brings together four sources of different character – the inscriptions from Amphipolis and Delphi and the accounts of Livy and Appian – into a coherent historical interpretation in which the evidence provided by each source complements that of the others. No single source proves the reconstruction. Its plausibility instead derives from the fact that it offers a mutually compatible explanation for several otherwise disconnected pieces of evidence. Taken together, these sources suggest that Perseus did not campaign in Thrace solely against Abrupolis, but undertook a series of military operations that may have involved different Thracian communities.

This interpretation accounts simultaneously for four otherwise distinct features of the evidence: the plural "campaigns" (στρατείαι) mentioned in the Amphipolis inscription; the general designation "Thracians" (Θρᾶικες) used in the Delphic inscription; Livy's identification of three distinct Thracian peoples in connection with Rome; and Appian's inclusion of the conquest of Thrace among the charges brought against the Macedonian king. If the Thracians mentioned in the Delphic inscription are identified with the communities referred to by Livy, the general ethnonym in the Delphic text acquires a more specific meaning, while the plural form of στρατεία in the Amphipolis inscription is likewise given a plausible historical explanation.

There is therefore no need to assume that Perseus conducted several campaigns against the same tribe or ruler. The evidence is more naturally understood as pointing to a series of campaigns against different Thracian communities. On this interpretation, the "Thracian campaigns" cannot be reduced to the conflict with Abrupolis alone, which appears to have been relatively brief, but should instead be viewed against the background of more sustained Macedonian military activity in Thrace on the eve of the Third Macedonian War.

The same reconstruction also suggests a revision of the chronology traditionally assigned to these campaigns. Rather than dating them to 179 BCE or shortly thereafter, as is commonly assumed in modern scholarship, they can more plausibly be placed in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War. The evidence most securely situates them during 172 BCE, while an earlier beginning, perhaps in 173 BCE, cannot be excluded. It is possible that by the end of 172 BCE

Perseus had achieved the immediate objectives of his operations in Thrace. Such a chronology would help explain the absence of evidence for Roman allies among the Thracians during the subsequent war, while also providing a plausible context for the reference to the submission of the Thracians among the charges against Perseus in the Delphic inscription.

If so, the campaigns may be understood as part of Perseus's broader efforts to secure Macedonia's northeastern approaches before the anticipated conflict with Rome. His actions in Thrace would thus not represent isolated episodes, but rather a sustained attempt to consolidate his position in the regions adjoining Macedonia in the years immediately preceding the war.

The limitations of the evidence, however, require caution. The specific Thracian communities involved, as well as the precise route, scale, and duration of the campaigns, cannot at present be established with certainty. The absence of a direct account in the surviving literary sources may have resulted, at least in part, from the loss of Polybius's relevant books. More generally, the surviving narratives focus primarily on the relations between Rome and Macedonia, while Macedonia's relations with its neighbouring peoples receive considerably less attention.

Nevertheless, the evidence discussed above underscores the importance of Thrace and the Thracians in Perseus's policies and suggests that the history of the final years of the Macedonian monarchy should not be reconstructed exclusively through the prism of Roman–Macedonian relations. The interactions between Macedonia and its northern and northeastern neighbours also formed part of the political and military context in which the Third Macedonian War emerged. In this respect, the Thracian campaigns of Perseus, as reconstructed hypothetically here, add a further dimension to our understanding of the circumstances preceding the war and shed additional light on the role of Thrace and the Thracians in the events that ultimately led to the collapse of the Macedonian monarchy.

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