



[Livy, History of Rome XXXIII.33](#)

In 196 BCE, Titus Quinctius Flaminius proclaims “the Freedom” of the cities in Greece and in Asia Minor.

Name of the author: Livy

Date: 20 BCE to 12 CE

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: History

Title of work: History of Rome

Reference: XXXIII.33

Commentary:

This text is an excerpt from book XXXIII of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (*History of Rome*), a book dealing with the period from 197 to 195 BCE (for a general presentation of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, see [Livy, History of Rome, Preface 6-9](#)). Among the crucial events recorded in this book there is the episode when at the beginning of 196 BCE, after Rome's final victory over Philip during the Second Macedonian War, ten legates came from Rome to Greece so as to assist Titus Quinctius Flaminius in his task of reorganizing Greece. About Titus Quinctius Flaminius' career, see *RE* 24 (1963) s. v. “T. Quinctius Flaminius” n° 45, col. 1047-1100 (Gundel). These ten legates brought the *senatus consultum* which announced that before the Isthmian games, Philip had to give to the Romans all the Greek cities which were still under his power and that he had to free all the cities outside Greece in which he had some garrisons. This *senatus consultum* is the first Roman official document which incorporates the theme of the freedom of Greeks (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 81). Another crucial event of the book is when Titus Quinctius Flaminius proclaimed the freedom of all the Greeks during the Isthmian Games held at Corinth during the summer of 196 BCE. Both Polybius and Livy recall, in direct mode, the content of this proclamation: “The senate of Rome and Titus Quintius the proconsul having overcome King Philip and the Macedonians, leave the following peoples free, without garrisons and subject to no tribute and governed by their countries' laws – the Corinthians, Phocians, Locrians, Euboeans, Phthiotic Achaeans, Magnesians, Thessalians, and Perrhaebians” (Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.46.5; all the translations of Polybius used are that of W. R. Paton in the Loeb edition, freely available [at](#)); “The Roman senate and Titus Quinctius, imperator, having conquered King Philip and the Macedonians, declare to be free, independent, and subject to their own laws, the Corinthians, the Phocians, all the Locrians, the island of Euboea, the Magnesians, the Thessalians, the Perrhaebians, and the Phthiotic Achaeans” (Livy, *History of Rome* XXXIII.32.5). As Jean-Louis Ferrary recalls, the *senatus consultum* and the proclamation made at Corinth appear as complementary texts, however, the proclamation made at Corinth remained a declaration of intent until all the Roman legions actually went out of Greece in 194 BCE (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 81).

The factors which motivated Rome to take such a position towards Greek cities after Philip's defeat were various. First, it fitted in with a larger plan of the Romans which consisted of making Greeks their allies against the Attalid king Attalus I and the Aetolians, who did not accept the content of the peace treaty concluded between Rome and the Macedonians (Livy, *History of Rome* XXXIII.31.1-6). Second, Livy also mentions more profound and ideological motivations, such as that of extending peace on earth and of ensuring friendship and unity among Greeks (see Achard, *Tite-Live*, p. xxxvii).

The text presented here is placed just after the narrative of the moment when Titus Quinctius Flaminius proclaimed the freedom of the Greeks at the Isthmian Games. It is an interesting passage because it shows how this proclamation was instrumentalized so as to present Rome as a generous and respectful power.

Livy's narrative of the way in which and conditions by which the Romans – or at least those following the views of Titus Quinctius Flaminius – settled Greek affairs after having put an end to Macedonian domination in Greece gives the impression that the Romans were very deferential to Greeks customs. The choice of Corinth as the place of the proclamation is highly symbolic for the Greeks, since various famous meetings and declarations of freedom of the Greeks already took place here (for precedents, see the declarations against Xerxes, the Persians or the Aetolians; Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 86-88). Second, for what concerns the choice of the moment of the proclamation, the Isthmian Games were also a relevant time. Organised every two years by Corinth, they were among the most famous games in Greece, and were a concrete manifestation of panhellenism, so a real expression of Greek unity and identity. Third, the model of the proclamation of Corinth (more particularly, that transmitted by Polybius and quoted above), which refers to the four kinds of guarantee granted to Greek cities,



seems clearly based on the shape of a previous Greek declaration, namely the charter of the Symmachia of 223 BCE in which the Macedonians – who presided over the Symmachia – promised the same kinds of guarantee to the peoples who had been forced to join the Aetolian League (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 83-86). Finally, the idea that the Romans would have made special efforts to reassure Greek populations that they would not replace Philip and submit them under their yoke is confirmed by the Romans' reuse of a slogan which originally was that of the Greek communities themselves, namely the defence of freedom. According to Sviatoslav Dmitriev, the Romans would have borrowed from the Greeks the slogan of Greek freedom and used it as a political motto only since the defeat of Philip in 197 BCE during the battle of Cynoscephalae (Dmitriev, *The Greek Slogan*, p. 166-199). In this perspective, Jean-Louis Ferrary thus writes that, at the point when Macedonian rule in Greece ended, the Romans utilised the rhetoric of "freedom" to tap into what had become a tradition for the Greeks: "Mais l'essentiel était que, le jour même où prenait officiellement fin toute domination macédonienne en Grèce, les anciens sujets de Philippe se vissent, non pas seulement 'rendre leur territoire, leurs villes et leurs lois', selon la vieille formule romaine, mais solennellement garantir cela même qui, depuis l'hiver précédent, était devenu le mot d'ordre de tous les Grecs: la liberté; et qui plus est, en des termes et dans des circonstances qui leur étaient familiers, et qui évoquaient pour eux des traditions bien précises" (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 82-83).

The fact that the Roman Senate, and more particularly Titus Quinctius Flamininus, chose to use Hellenistic precedents and the theme of freedom in their relations with the Greeks, after the withdrawal of the Macedonians, is of course an important element of the strategy they used to rally them to their cause. However, the most original aspect of the policy led by Titus Quinctius Flamininus is that he succeeded to conciliate the principle that Greek cities should remain free, with the Romans behaving themselves in Greece at that time as an hegemonic power. This hegemony was evident due to the presence of Roman troops in Greece until 194 BCE, to the fact that it was the Roman authorities who had the upper hand in the reorganisation of Greece, and that it was the Romans who decided to exclude Philip from Greece and to contain the ambitions of Antiochus (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 99-101). The text of Livy presented here is a good illustration of the duality of this policy, but also of the fact that this mission of bringing freedom to Greek cities was also reused as a practical ideological tool which enabled the Romans to justify their hegemony.

Before analysing the portrayal of the Romans by Livy as both masters of the world and liberators of the Greeks, it is important to recall that a large part of Livy's narrative of the proclamation of freedom of Greek cities is influenced by Polybius's narrative of the same event (Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.44-48). More particularly, in many passages of the text presented here, Livy seems to have rearranged, with more or less freedom and sometimes in disorder, passages taken from Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.46.11-15. This appears first with the narrative of the expressions of joy and of adulations of the Greeks towards Titus Quinctius Flamininus. In both texts, the authors insist on the jubilation around the Roman general, on the fact that people grasped or touched his hand; that he received crowns and ribbons and that the jubilation was so intense that he was in danger (in Livy's text, § 1-2; Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.46.11-12). Then, Livy proposes some kind of general ideological justification for Rome's intervention in Greece. First, he presents the Romans as a people ready to make sacrifices and to fight for the freedom of foreign peoples: "... there was one people on earth which, at its own expense, effort and peril, would fight for others' freedom (*pro libertate aliorum*), and which did not provide this service to neighbours or to men of the immediate vicinity, or to inhabitants of its continent..." (§ 5-6, Loeb's translation slightly modified). This reflexion about the fact that Rome made many sacrifices and faced many dangers is clearly influenced by Polybius's narrative (Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.46.14: "For it was a wonderful thing, to begin with, that the Romans and their general Flamininus should entertain this purpose incurring every expense and facing every danger for the freedom of Greece..."). However, Livy may have been influenced by another source when he adds the short reflexion about the fact that Rome did not take such risks for the defence of their own neighbours. After having presented the Romans as the only people on earth ready to take risks and to make sacrifices for the defence of the freedom (*libertas*) of remote foreign communities, Livy goes further in his praise of Rome by presenting the Romans as the best defenders of justice: "[the Romans] ready to cross the sea that there might be no unjust empire (*iniustum imperium*) anywhere and that everywhere justice, right, and law might prevail (*ubique ius, fas, lex potentissima sint*)" (§ 7). If Rome's aim was actually to defend the freedom of Greek communities and make it so that they could get back their own independence, territories and laws, Livy's portrayal of the Romans as upholders of the law seems quite contradictory, as it implies that in the legal field, Romans decided, instead of these foreign communities, what they considered as just or not. Such an idea fits in with a message which plays a central role since the opening books of the *History of Rome*, namely that "it was the Romans' task to bring about the rule of right and law on the earth" (Tränkle, "Livy and Polybius," p. 493-494; in this perspective see also the passage in the *Aeneid* when Virgil writes: "Remember, O Roman, to rule the nations with your sway—these shall be your arts—to crown Peace with Law, to spare the humbled, and to tame in war the proud!"; [Virgil, Aeneid VI.851-853](#)). Next, Livy recalls the main point of the proclamation of Corinth: "By the single voice of a herald, they [the Romans]



said, all the cities of Greece and Asia had been set free; to conceive hopes of any such thing as this required a bold mind; to bring it to pass was the proof of immense courage and good fortune as well" (§ 7-8). Such a statement clearly echoes Polybius's narrative: "... and greatest of all was the fact that no mischance of any kind counteracted their design, but everything without exception conduced to this one crowning moment, when by a single proclamation all the Greeks inhabiting Asia and Europe became free, ungarrisoned, subject to no tribute and governed by their own laws" (Polybius, *Histories* XVIII.46.15). In both narratives, there is the same rhetorical exaggeration over the fact that the freedom of all Greeks would have depended on the proclamation during the Isthmian games (Briscoe, *A Commentary*, p. 312). Moreover, both authors end the chapter dealing with the immediate aftermaths of the proclamation during the Isthmian games with a brief development about the role of *virtus/aretē*? or of *fortuna/Tychē*? of the Roman people and of Titus Quinctius Flamininus in this process of the freeing of all these Greek communities. It thus appears that, unlike Polybius who explains the successful outcome of Rome's operations in Greece in particular by the absence of any harmful *Tychē*? acting against Rome, Livy chooses to highlight the positive role of *fortuna*, which, in association with *virtus*, helps Rome to fulfil its project of spreading peace and freedom (see Achard, *Tite-Live*, p. lii-liii). A similar favourable conjunction of virtue and fortune explaining Rome's successes appears also later in Plutarch's essay, *On the Fortune of the Romans*. Thus, the influence of Polybius's narrative on Livy's narrative of the proclamation of Corinth is obvious. However, the Roman historian may have wanted to make this narrative of the immediate outcomes of the proclamation of Corinth a general pro-Roman development justifying Rome's hegemonic power with the idea that Rome would be some kind of "global policeman," driven by the desire to establish freedom and justice everywhere.

To conclude, the freeing of cities of Greece and of Asia served at least two objectives: that of providing a significant counter-weight to the resistances of the Aetolians and to the ambitions of Attalus, and to reassert Rome's control over a large part of the Greek world under the cover of the leitmotiv of giving back their freedom to these Greek cities. The originality of Titus Quinctius Flamininus's strategy after the defeat of Philip was real. It is attested by the fact that in 195 BCE, when Titus Quinctius Flamininus organised an expedition against the Spartan king Nabis, the Greek cities were free to decide if they took part in the war or not. It is also attested by the departure of all the Roman legions from Greece from 194 BCE onwards. With such original choices, and by presenting himself as the defender of the freedom of the Greeks, Titus Quinctius Flamininus must have wanted to appear as a great philhellenist commander. This quality is highlighted in Livy's portrayal of Titus Quinctius Flamininus, which is globally laudatory – it differs from Polybius's portrayal, who sometimes accuses him of using dubious methods and of not keeping his words (Briscoe, *A Commentary*, p. 22-23; Briscoe, "Livy's Sources," p. 468-469; Eckstein, "Livy, Polybius," p. 410-411). But eulogistic depictions of Titus Quinctius Flamininus do not appear in Roman or pro-Roman sources only. Many Greek communities may have welcomed the action of the Roman general, or at least may have chosen to praise him to serve their interests. Actually, we know that special honours were paid to Titus Quinctius Flamininus in many Greek cities. These honours are mentioned in narrative or epigraphic documents, and are more particularly attested in Delphi, Chalcis, Cos, Gytheum, Delos, Argos, Corinth and Scotoussa (see Briscoe, *A Commentary*, p. 28, n. 1). Finally, if this leitmotiv of the liberation was used by the Roman Senate and by Titus Quinctius Flamininus to reassure cities from Greece and Asia Minor that after the defeat of Macedonia Rome would not behave as a new inflexible master, it is clear, however that, after 196 BCE, Rome did not limit itself to ensuring the freedom of Greek cities only by keeping a certain level of balance between the various peripheral powers. From the moment they defeated Philip, Rome acted obviously as an hegemonic power which staged itself as the restorer and the protector of the freedom of Greek cities. Such a policy was not led by philhellenic ideas. By acting in such a way, the Romans may have wanted to prevent the re-emergence of the Macedonian power, but also the emergence of any new city-state, league or kingdom which would become too powerful and could be a dangerous rival (Ferrary, *Philhellénisme*, p. 99-104).

Keywords in the original language:

- [Asia](#)
- [bellum](#)
- [corona](#)
- [fax](#)
- [fortuna](#)
- [gens](#)
- [gloria](#)
- [Graecia](#)



- [imperator](#)
- [imperium](#)
- [ius](#)
- [labor](#)
- [lemnicus](#)
- [lex](#)
- [liberatus](#)
- [libertas](#)
- [ludus](#)
- [mare](#)
- [orbis terrarum](#)
- [periculum](#)
- [potentissimus](#)
- [terra](#)
- [turba](#)
- [urbs](#)
- [vicinitas](#)
- [virtus](#)
- [vis](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Fortune](#)
- [freedom](#)
- [games](#)
- [Greeks](#)
- [justice](#)
- [Panhellenism](#)
- [philhellenism](#)
- [Roman hegemony](#)
- [Roman law](#)
- [Roman power](#)
- [Roman virtue](#)
- [T. Quintius Flamininus](#)

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