

FROM INDEPENDENCE TO DEPENDENCE: THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS OF THE AEGEAN ISLANDS FROM 129 BC TO 294 AD

Marcin N. Pawlak

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

Abstract: The article is an attempt to find answers to the fundamental questions of which Roman province the individual islands belonged to and from when. The literature on the subject frequently presents the opinion that some of the Aegean Islands were incorporated into the province of Asia at the moment of its creation. The status of the other islands was, in turn, regulated by Augustus. After a meticulous analysis of sources, the author shows that such an image is oversimplified. The administrative affiliation of the individual islands changed depending on the political circumstances and the good or bad will of the Roman generals operating in the East. The efforts of the islanders themselves were also not without significance. The locations of the individual Aegean Islands were very different, and some of them formally became part of the Roman Empire only during the Flavian rule.

Key words: Aegean Islands in Roman times, Roman Greece, province of Asia.

In 1904 Victor Chapot published an extensive work on the history of the Roman province of Asia from the time of its creation to the Early Empire.¹ In the fragment about the borders of the province, the historian concluded that it must have also included the islands situated in the direct vicinity of the western coast of Asia Minor. Although he rightly noted that literary sources do not give us information indicating that this was the case, this did not prevent him from concluding that the islands were closely connected with the coast and that their incorporation into the new province was a political and, first of all, economical necessity.² Although Chapot's opinion was not received uncritically by later scholars, it is an incentive to analyse the changes in the formal and legal position

¹ Chapot 1904. The present paper was completed thanks to the support from the National Science Centre (grant: UMO-2012/07/B/HS3/03455).

² Chapot 1904, 82. The territories which certainly became part of the new province at the time of its creation are listed by Sherwin-White 1984, 89–92.

of the Aegean Islands in the period between 129 BC, i.e. the creation of the province of Asia, and 294 AD, i.e. the creation of the *provincia Insularum* by Diocletian.³

Writing about the islands which were supposed to be incorporated into the newly created province of Asia, Chapot made a general reference to a number of islands from Rhodes to Tenendos. Other historians, such as S. Accame, were more precise, naming Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios and Samos. However, this assumption is not consistent with the information we find in the sources. The example of Lemnos is already doubtful; the island was gifted to the Athenians based on the Roman Senate's decision in 166 BC and remained under Athens' control until the reign of Septimius Severus. There is no information indicating that it was attached to the province of Asia.⁴ The case of Lesbos is slightly more complicated, mainly due to a lack of information in the sources. We only know that during the First Mithridatic War Mytilene supported the King of Pontus, and after the war ended the city was punished and lost its freedom. It should therefore be concluded that at the point when Mithridates was given support the city was free, and the situation changed only after the war finished, when Mytilene became part of the province of Asia as part of the Roman repressions.⁵ We also know that another city located on Lesbos, Methymna, was allied with Rome from 129 BC.⁶ In the case of Chios, we also have no data indicating that the island was incorporated into the province of Asia as early as 129 BC. What we do know is that from the time of the Treaty of Apamea the island enjoyed the status of *civitas libera et immunis*, and during the First Mithridatic War it maintained an ambiguous position, for which it was punished by Mithridates (more on that below). The island of Samos, which later maintained good relations with Rome, received a similar status on the basis of the Treaty of Apamea. The patrons of the island were Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, *legatus pro praetore* in Asia in 129–127 BC, and C. Iulius Caesar, the father of the future dictator, in 91 BC. However, the island became part of the province of Asia only in the 90s or 80s BC.⁷

As we can see, there are no solid grounds for concluding that the islands situated off the western coast of Asia Minor, and thereby the Kingdom of Pergamon, were incorporated into the province of Asia at the moment of its creation, i.e. in 129 BC. None of these islands had belonged to this kingdom previously, and some of them had close relations with Rome. Clearly, the Romans had not taken the geographical factor which convinced Chapot into account when the province of Asia was created. After its establishment, the islands across the Aegean Sea became a free zone, stretching between the two Roman provinces of Asia and Macedonia.⁸ This does not change the fact that the entire Aegean territory was under Roman domination, which, even if it did not take on a formal and legal shape, still allowed the Romans to treat the insular communities in a very unrestrained and arbitrary manner. The example of Samos is rather illuminating.

³ Accame 1946, 232; Magie 1950, 147–158; Sartre 1995, 116; Drexhage 2007, 17–20; Wesch-Klein 2008, 267–270.

⁴ Polyb. 30.21.

⁵ Labarre 1996, 92. App., *Mith.* 21, mentions that Mithridates was supported by Mytilene, but he does not mention the other cities located on the island.

⁶ Labarre 1996, 82–83, 324–325.

⁷ Karvonis/Mikedaki 2012, 60–62 and the literature listed there.

⁸ Vial 1995, 127–128.

The island came into conflict with the governors of the province of Asia in the period between 126 and 123 BC. They wanted to deprive the islanders of the right to administer the sanctuary of Artemis, located on the nearby island of Icaria. The Samians appealed to the Roman Senate, where they received a favourable decision.⁹ This example is a good introduction to the political reality existing in the Aegean towards the end of the 2nd century BC, and shows that even independence did not guarantee protection against Roman officials having designs on them. In the turbulent period from 129 BC to 27 BC there were many more similar, or even more brutal, events. The ensuing political and military discords left their mark on the political map of the Aegean Sea.

From Mithridates to Sulla: the situation of the Aegean Islands during the First Mithridatic War

The Mithridatic wars had a considerable influence on the situation of the Aegean Islands – especially the first war in 88–85 BC, which had a direct impact on this region. The position towards the King of Pontus and towards Rome which the individual islands took during this conflict to a large extent determined their later situation. As we know, after signing the Treaty of Dardanos, which ended the First Mithridatic War, Sulla went on to reward those cities and communities which had stayed loyal to Rome, and to punish those which had, more or less enthusiastically, supported Mithridates.¹⁰ Rhodes was undoubtedly in the first group; its fierce resistance against Mithridates' army was described in detail by Appian. Mithridates was particularly set on taking over the Rhodian navy, which was the only significant sea power in the region after the Roman fleet surrendered to the King of Pontus. The island also gave shelter to the Romans and Italici, who managed to avoid the massacre in 88 BC and then flee to Asia (they included the proconsul of Asia, Gaius Cassius).¹¹ Prior to the outbreak of war Rhodes enjoyed independence and some freedom of action in the region. The city authorities must have wondered whether it would be possible to maintain this advantageous situation after subordinating the city to the King of Pontus. Doubts in this regard meant that Rhodes did not back Mithridates and became a *de facto* centre of resistance against him in the Aegean. After the war ended, Sulla rewarded Rhodes by confirming its freedom and accepting it in the circle of Rome's friends. An additional reward was some land on the coast of Asia Minor, the city of Caunos in Caria and some islands given to the city.¹² The latter fact was indirectly passed on by Cicero; in one of his letters to his brother Quintus, he mentioned the arrival in Rome of embassies from Caunos and from the islands given to Rhodes by Sulla. The legates were seeking permission to pay their contributions to Rome rather than to Rhodes in the future, so in effect they wanted Sulla's decision overturned. Unfortunately, we do

⁹ Vial 1995, 128.

¹⁰ Magie 1950, 233–238; Keaveney 1982, 230–233; Kallet-Marx 1995, 246–273; Santangelo 2007, 107–133.

¹¹ App., *Mith.* 24–27. See also Mayor 2010, 179–183; del Hoyo/Antela-Bernárdez 2011, 294.

¹² App., *Mith.* 61; Campanile 1996, 150–151.

not know which islands were meant.¹³ The insular location and the still significant fleet were undoubtedly factors which encouraged Rhodes to put up resistance to Mithridates. What might also have played a role was fear of the consequences of supporting Mithridates in the case of Rome's victory.¹⁴

Sulla also rewarded the island of Chios, although its position towards Mithridates was different from that of Rhodes. In the early stage of the war Chios actively supported Mithridates in the struggle on the sea, but the king quickly began to have doubts about the loyalty of the island's inhabitants. His displeasure was intensified after a seemingly small incident during the sea battle off the coast of Rhodes, when a Chios ship collided with the royal vessel in the tumult of the battle. Additionally, there was an active pro-Roman group of influential citizens on the island, some of whom fled to Sulla's camp. For these reasons, after the Battle of Chaeronea Mithridates ordered the confiscation of the property of those Chioters who had defected to Sulla, and then demanded, through one of his generals, that the Chioters surrender their weapons and send him the children of the most influential citizens of the city as hostages. Further, he accused the Chioters of not sharing the profit from the property which had previously belonged to the Romans, and imposed a fine of 2,000 talents on the city. This was not the end of the islanders' misfortune, as Mithridates decided to resettle them to the Black Sea in 86 BC. Their land was distributed to Pontic soldiers and colonisers.¹⁵ However, the Roman fleet arrived on the island just one year later, commanded by Sulla's quaestor, Lucius Licinius Lucullus, who removed the Pontic army from there.¹⁶ After the Treaty of Dardanos, which ended the First Mithridatic War, the Chioters who returned to the island received freedom from Sulla and became Rome's allies.¹⁷

Sulla not only rewarded the loyal islands but also punished the ones which had supported Mithridates. He did so in spite of the fact that one of the terms of the Treaty of Dardanos was the guarantee not to punish the Greek cities which had sided with Mithridates during the war. It follows from Appian's general remark that the most frequent punishment was to impose a tribute, but we do not know whether this kind of punishment was given to the inhabitants of any of the islands.¹⁸ However, it is worth noting, for example, that the island of Cos supported Mithridates but saved the Romans who were staying there from the massacre carried out by the king; later, encouraged by Lucullus, Cos left the alliance and sided with Rome. After signing the treaty with Mithridates, Sulla, disregarding the previous transgressions of the islanders, rewarded them by granting freedom.¹⁹

It should be remembered that all decisions made by Sulla in the East after the peace with Mithridates did not have the Senate's sanction and were, in fact, decisions of a pub-

¹³ Cic., *ad Q. f.* 1.33. Fraser/Bean 1954, 163–164, 172, considered whether Amorgos was one of the islands, but ultimately they rejected this supposition.

¹⁴ Gabrielsen 1997, 38–40; del Hoyo/Antela-Bernárdez 2011, 300.

¹⁵ App., *Mith.* 25; 46–47.

¹⁶ Plut., *Luc.* 3.4; Keaveney 1998, 35.

¹⁷ App., *Mith.* 61.

¹⁸ App., *Mith.* 61 and 118.

¹⁹ App., *Mith.* 92; Plut., *Luc.* 3.3; Bernhard 1971, 120–133 (a list of cities which maintained or lost freedom after the war against Mithridates).

lic enemy; accordingly, their legality must have raised doubts and caused uneasiness, especially among those communities which were rewarded by the general. It is not surprising, therefore, that after Sulla's return to Italy and taking over power, in 81 and 80 BC a wave of legates travelling to Rome started, sent by the cities which wanted to obtain the Senate's confirmation of Sulla's decisions. We know that, of the insular cities, such embassies were sent by Rhodes and Chios. The former was represented by Apollonios Molonos, who was originally from Alabanda, but was a citizen of Rhodes.²⁰ His mission went beyond obtaining the confirmation of Sulla's decision. We know that some time earlier the inhabitants of Caunos, which Sulla gifted to Rhodes, had turned to Rome in order to break this dependence. Apollonios, however, gave a speech which convinced the Senate, and Caunos remained in Rhodes' possession.²¹

The Chiotes also went to Rome to petition for the confirmation of Sulla's decision; additionally, they wanted to confirm the validity of their traditional rights. The appropriate *senatus consultum* was issued during Sulla's second consulship, i.e. in 80 BC. We know its provisions because they were quoted in the letter of the proconsul of Asia to the inhabitants of Chios dated to 5–14 AD.²² Apart from the confirmation of Sulla's decisions, the Chiotes also obtained confirmation of the validity of their laws, the right not to come under the decisions of Roman officials, and, surprisingly, an acknowledgement of the principle according to which the Romans residing on the island should obey the laws of Chios. A. J. Marshall proposed an interesting interpretation of this last decision many years ago. As we remember, the island's population was deported on Mithridates' orders, and after the Pontic garrison was removed, the islanders returned. Even this temporary deportation infringed on the previous property rights. We also know that the Romans owned property on the island. It is possible that it was they who invoked the decisions of the Roman officials when trying to recover their property. The Chiotes who went to Rome, however, managed to obtain a decision according to which all disputes between them and the Romans residing on the island should be settled according to the local law.²³

The people of Thasos also petitioned in Rome for the confirmation of Sulla's decisions. In 80 BC, legates from the island obtained a *senatus consultum* whose contents were quoted in a letter from Sulla to Thasos. It follows from the *scu* that during the First Mithridatic War the citizens of Thasos pledged that they would rather murder their families than be disloyal to Rome in the hour of need. Due to their resistance, they were treated very harshly by the enemy, i.e. by Mithridates' army. In recognition of the brave islanders' contribution, the Senate decided to give the island the status of friend and ally. The legates from the island were allowed to make sacrifices on the Capitol; all of Sulla's decisions in favour of the island were also confirmed. Some land in Thrace was also supposed to be returned to the island.²⁴ The legates returning from Rome stopped over in Thessalonica, where they met the proconsul of Macedonia, Cn. Cornelius Dolabella, and handed him the *scu*. Dolabella immediately wrote a letter to the citizens of Thasos, informing them of the steps which he had already taken or was going to take in order to

²⁰ Cic., *Brut.* 90 and 312; *ad Q. f.* 1.1.33; Plut., *Mar.* 45.7.

²¹ Strabo 14.2.3.

²² Sherk 1969, 351–353 (no. 70).

²³ Marshall 1969, 255–271; Kallet-Marx 1996, 269–273; Guerber 2009, 46–45.

²⁴ Dunant/Pouilloux 1958, 37–36 (nos. 174–175); Sherk 1969, 115–118.

comply with the Senate's will. He also wrote of sending letters to the inhabitants of two small islands, Peparethos and Sciathos, with the information that from this point on they would be under the control of Thasos, and some other letters, in which he ordered the return to Thasos of the lands it previously possessed in Thrace (which were lost during the war). The proconsul also added that the people of Thasos should turn to him in case of any doubts. Thasos obtained the right to use its own law and became a *civitas libera*.²⁵ Out of the mentioned resolutions, the decision to subordinate Peparethos and Sciathos to Thasos is of particular significance. It is known that during the war Sciathos played the role of a depot for Mithridates' army. Most likely, both these islands actively supported the King of Pontus, and for that reason after the war ended the Romans decided to punish them, giving them to their faithful ally, Thasos.²⁶ The islands remained in the possession of Thasos until 42 BC, when Marcus Antonius gave them to Athens (the reasons for this decision are provided below). In this way, after the First Mithridatic War Thasos found itself in a privileged position and significantly expanded its territorial possessions.

Previous scholarly reflections neglected the island of Delos, whose history during and immediately after the Mithridatic wars was so emblematic of the entire region that it is worth devoting some time to it (even at the cost of going beyond the timeframe of this part of the text). From 167 BC, the island belonged to Athens, which took Mithridates' side in 88 BC. However, Delos did not follow its example, and declared secession, undoubtedly persuaded by Italic *negotiatores*, who were numerous on the island. The Athenaiion sent a punitive expedition to Delos, yet this was fought off. The islanders' resistance was broken by Archelaos, one of Mithridates' generals; he captured the island and carried out a massacre of those Italici and Romans who had not managed to flee and find shelter on nearby islands. In total, a reported 20,000 people were killed. Mithridates' army also carried out considerable destruction (the port was demolished, among others).²⁷ For the next few years Delos, like the other Cyclades, was under Mithridates' rule. The Romans did not take control over Delos until after the Treaty of Dardanos, although we do not know when they returned it to Athens. According to Appian, they handed control over the island to the Athenians immediately after recapturing it. According to Strabo, on the other hand, Delos was under Roman control for a while, and was returned to the Athenians later.²⁸ Probably both authors are right, in that after removing Mithridates' garrisons from the Aegean Sea, Sulla decided (having visited the island) to return Delos to the Athenian administration. In economic and financial terms, though, it was controlled by the Romans. As indicated by the *lex Gabinia-Calpurnia* from 58 BC, Sulla abolished the fiscal privileges guaranteed from 167 BC and decided that the contributions from the island should go to Rome rather than Athens. This decision was reversed only in 58 BC by the law mentioned above.²⁹ Imposing contributions and directing them to Rome was a form of punishment for Athens for supporting Mithridates.³⁰

²⁵ Dunant/Pouilloux 1958, no. 175; Sherk 1969, 119–123.

²⁶ App., *Mith.* 29; Campanile 1996, 155–157.

²⁷ Strabo 10.5.4; App., *Mith.* 28; Paus. 3.23.3–4; Ferrary 1980, 35–44; Rauh 1993, 68–74.

²⁸ App., *Mith.* 28; Strabo 10.5.4.

²⁹ Nicolet 1980, 77–109.

³⁰ Phlegon of Tralles, *FGrH*, no. 257.

The ambiguous status of the island is also confirmed by the fact that Gaius Triarius, a legate of the proconsul of Asia responsible for protecting the islands from pirate attacks, resided there in 69–68 BC. Precisely in 69 BC Delos was ravaged by pirates; it was in response to this attack that Triarius, assigned to protect the region, surrounded the city of Delos with a defence wall.³¹ Triarius' intervention is a characteristic event showing the ambiguous status of the island, which belonged to the Athenian administration but remained under the actual control of officials of the province of Asia. Triarius was a legate of the proconsul of Asia, Lucullus, at least from 72 to 67 BC.³² The example of Delos shows, therefore, that the island could de facto have remained under Rome's close control regardless of its administrative status.

Marcus Antonius and Crete

The beginnings of Rome's contacts with Crete go back to 196 BC, but here we are mainly interested in the situation in the 1st century BC. The reason for Rome's military involvement on Crete was two Cretan specialities – piracy and mercenaries. During the Third Mithridatic War, Crete was accused of supporting the King of Pontus with its mercenaries and of harbouring pirates from Cilicia, who were also assisting Mithridates.³³ In 74 BC Marcus Antonius, the father of the future triumvir, received a special *imperium* to fight pirates, and three years later he was defeated by the Cretan general Lasthenes. According to Florus' account, the shackles which Antonius took with him, confident of victory, were used to bind his soldiers, and he himself had to sign a peace with the Cretans which was favourable to them.³⁴ The Senate did not reconcile itself with this decision; in 70 BC the war against Crete was resumed, and in 69 BC the island was transformed into a consular province on the basis of the *lex Sempronia*.³⁵

In 69 BC the Cretans, alarmed by this decision, hastily sent a legation to Rome, consisting of 30 outstanding citizens, with the task of restoring good relations with the Roman Republic. The legates, well-versed in the Roman political reality, personally visited the most influential senators with a view to winning back the status of friends and allies for the Cretans (they had probably received this status in the terms of the peace with Marcus Antonius). Ultimately, the Senate was ready to pass the appropriate decree in line with the hopes of the Cretan legates, but it was vetoed by P. Cornelius Lentulus Spinther, who would become consul in 57 BC.³⁶ The legates had to return to Crete empty-handed.

Some time after their return from Rome came an ultimatum with the demand to release 300 hostages, as well Marcus Antonius' conqueror Lasthenes and another general, Panares; additionally, Rome demanded 4,000 talents in damages, the handover of all pirate ships, and the release of Roman prisoners.³⁷ The demands were very high, and

³¹ Roussel 1916, 331–332.

³² Le Quéré 2015, 33–47.

³³ App., *Sic.* 6.1.

³⁴ Florus 3; Kallet-Marx 1995, 304–311.

³⁵ Cic., *Verr.* 2.2.76.

³⁶ Diod. 40.1.1–3.

³⁷ Diod. 40.1.3; App., *Sic.* 6.1–2.

Rome was probably trying to find a pretext for starting a war.³⁸ A war did break out, and Q. Caecilius Metellus commanded that the army be sent to Crete. In 68 BC he managed to block off the armies of Lasthenes and Panares. As a result of their defeat and facing the ultimate disaster, the Cretans sent a legation to Pompey, ready to surrender to him. They probably hoped that Pompey would offer them better terms than they could have expected from Metellus. Although Pompey agreed to their proposal, he was unable to come to the island. He did, however, order Metellus to cease the fighting, but the general refused to do so.³⁹ In 67 BC he finally broke the Cretans' resistance and imposed terms on them which actually put an end to their independence.⁴⁰ Probably in 67 BC, Crete was merged with Cyrenaica (which the last Ptolemaic king of Cyrene bequeathed to Rome in 96 BC) to form one province.⁴¹

We know very little about Crete's further history until Octavian assumed power, and the island's status changed at least a few times. After the Battle of Philippi Crete found itself under the rule of Antonius, who gave part of the island to Cleopatra. It is possible that he freed the rest of the island and handed control over it to Cydas of Gortyn.⁴² After Octavian took over power in the Empire, Crete became a province again, and in 27 BC it was again merged with Cyrenaica.

Pompey and the Aegean Islands

Further changes in the situation of the insular *poleis* came with Pompey, equipped with enormous power, appearing in the East in 66 BC. As we know, his main task was to stop piracy on the Mediterranean Sea.⁴³ At the same time, he also made many administrative changes. Returning to Italy in 62 BC, he stopped over in Mytilene on Lesbos, among other places. The Roman general's short stay was very beneficial to the city. After the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War, one of the Roman generals, Manius Aquillius, sought shelter in Mytilene. Like the other Romans in the city, however, he was delivered to Mithridates and cruelly executed in Pergamon.⁴⁴ Thus, Mytilene sided with Mithridates and, fearing the consequences of handing over Aquillius, continued to resist Rome until 80/79 BC, i.e. for four years after Sulla's army left the region. During this time it was besieged twice by Roman generals.⁴⁵ Defeated, it lost its freedom and was incorporated into the province of Asia (we cannot be certain whether the other cities on Lesbos, Methymna and Eresos, shared a similar fate).⁴⁶ The city's situation changed in 62 BC, when Pompey arrived there.

³⁸ Florus 3.7.

³⁹ App., *Sic.* 6.2.

⁴⁰ Livy, *Per.* 100.

⁴¹ The date of the creation of this province is contentious. I accept the date proposed by Chevrollier 2016, 13–15. A different view is presented by Anders 1982, 4–5.

⁴² Rouante-Liesenfelt 1984, 342–352.

⁴³ Plut., *Pomp.* 25.3–4; App., *Mith.* 11.31–32; 12.33–35; 18.54–57; Seager 2002, 53–62.

⁴⁴ Diod. 37.27; Vell. Pat. 2.18.3.

⁴⁵ Livy, *Per.* 89; App., *Mith.* 52; Plut. *Luc.* 4.1–3; Keaveney 1998: 39–40.

⁴⁶ Labarre 1996, 91–92.

Almost from the beginning of Pompey's campaign in Asia he was accompanied by Theophanes of Mytilene, who later wrote down the history of Pompey's eastern campaign. The work, whose title we do not know, survives only in two small fragments. For our purposes, it is more important that Theophanes became a friend and advisor of Pompey. His position at the general's side is best attested by the fact that he participated in the negotiations which preceded the creation of the First Triumvirate. Pompey granted him Roman citizenship, which was still a rarity at that time. For us, the most important fact is what the ancient writers emphasise, i.e. that it was because of Theophanes that Pompey restored freedom to the city and thus excluded it from the province of Asia.⁴⁷ As C. Vial pointed out, this is one of the first cases when a city owed its freedom not to its loyalty or the interests of great politics, but to the caprice of a mighty and influential Roman politician.⁴⁸ The grateful citizens of Mytilene honoured Pompey, as their saviour and founder (*sotera kai ktistan*), by erecting a statue in recognition of the fact that he had ended a war (on land and sea) which had been set to conquer the world.⁴⁹

The era of civil wars

The next stage of changes in the situation of at least some of the Aegean Islands came during the civil wars which started in 49 BC and ended with Octavian's victory at Actium in 31 BC. Successive Roman generals who appeared in the East during that time, following in the footsteps of Sulla and Pompey, tried to model the Greek world, including the world of the Greek islands, according to their own expectations or immediate political needs. As we know, the Greeks themselves, with few exceptions, usually supported the side which ultimately suffered defeat. They backed Pompey in his war against Caesar, and later they supported Marcus Antonius, who was finally defeated by Octavian. However, wrong choices did not always lead to the victors inflicting punishment on the insular communities. A good illustration showing that a city closely linked with a losing general could have won over the favour of the victor is Mytilene, which we mentioned above. During Pompey's war against Caesar, the city remained loyal to the former, which should not be surprising in view of the benefits it was given by him. Pompey was so sure of Mytilene's faithfulness that he left his wife and son there before the decisive battle. After the lost Battle of Pharsalos in 48 BC he went to Lesbos, intending to reunite with his family and continue his escape. The inhabitants of Mytilene suggested that he visit their city, but he declined; instead, he encouraged them to submit to Caesar. In those difficult times the general was accompanied by Theophanes, who was to ultimately convince him not to flee to the Parthians, as he had originally planned, but to go to Egypt.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Vell. Pat. 2.18.3; Plut., *Pomp.* 42.8–9. For Theophanes, see e.g.: Robert 1969, 42–64; Gold 1985, 312–327; Labarre 1996, 92–99.

⁴⁸ Vial 1995, 185–186.

⁴⁹ *IG XII*, 2.202; Labarre 1996, 274–275, no. 16.

⁵⁰ Plut., *Pomp.* 66.3; 74.1–4; 75.3–4; 76.7–9 and 78–3.

Mytilene followed Pompey's advice and endeavoured to win Caesar's favour. As soon as 48 BC the citizens, terrified of losing their freedom, sent a legation to him.⁵¹ Our information about this embassy comes from a letter which Caesar sent to the officials, council and *demos* of Mytilene.⁵² In the letter, he wrote about the arrival of the legates and receiving an honorific decree from them; he also announced that he would take steps to grant the city some tangible benefits. When he was dictator for the third time and appointed for the fourth time, i.e. between April 46 and January or February 45 BC, Caesar sent another letter to the officials, council and *demos*, in which he ensured them that the efforts of the citizens of Mytilene were successful. The letter cited the text of the *senatus consultum*, which renewed the friendship and alliance with Rome, and confirmed the privileges received earlier from the Senate, which should probably be understood as a renewal of the freedom granted by Pompey. Caesar attached an edict to the *senatus consultum*, in which he specified that none of the citizens of Mytilene were exempt from contributions. The dictator acknowledged the freedom given to the city by Pompey, but in the case of those citizens who were given the privilege exempting them from paying contributions and bearing the cost of liturgy as a result of close connections with Pompey, he probably revoked the privilege.⁵³ Thus, Mytilene was capable of taking advantage of Caesar's famous *clementia*. However, we do not know what the situation was with the other cities on Lesbos which, like Mytilene, had supported Pompey earlier.

Pompey was also supported by Rhodes, which had had an agreement with Rome since 51 BC.⁵⁴ One of its terms was the provision that the Rhodians would have the same enemies as the Senate and Roman people.⁵⁵ It is known that twenty Rhodian vessels were part of Pompey's fleet, but most of them sank during a storm on the Adriatic.⁵⁶ After Pompey's defeat the Rhodians quickly joined Caesar, and ten of their ships fought on his side in Egypt.⁵⁷ It is possible that the Rhodian fleet's support for Caesar was a result of the island signing an agreement with him already in 48 BC. Appian vaguely mentions a treaty. According to this writer, when Caesar's killers, Brutus and Cassius, met in Smyrna in 43 BC (early 42?) and debated their next move, they decided to attack Rhodes and Lycia, which were supporting Caesar, and which had a navy at their disposal, as a result of which they could have been a threat to the rear of Brutus' and Cassius' armies. Brutus took on Lycia, while Cassius offered to neutralise Rhodes, since he had grown up on the island. When the Rhodians realised that Cassius' attack was imminent, they sent legates to him, reminding him of the treaties between Rhodes and Rome, which forbid using violence in their mutual relations. At the same time they declared that they were ready to provide help if only the Senate would give such an order. The legates' words irritated Cassius, who noted that the Senate had to flee Rome. Soon the Rhodians decided to send another legate, Archelaos, Cassius' former tutor. In his conversation with his former student he cited the recently signed treaty with Caesar. The same treaty, as well

⁵¹ Sherk 1963, 150–153; Labarre 1996, 99–100.

⁵² Sherk 1963, 146–157 (no. 26); Labarre 1996, 277–284 (no. 20).

⁵³ Labarre 1996, 101.

⁵⁴ Schmitt 1957.

⁵⁵ Cic., *Fam.* 12.15.2.

⁵⁶ Caesar, *B.C.* 3.5.26–27; App., *B.C.* 2.59.

⁵⁷ Caesar, *B.C.* 3.106; *Alex.* 1.11.13–16; App., *B.C.* 2.89; Berthold 1984, 225–226.

as earlier ones, were also cited by Cassius, who emphasised that according to the agreements the Romans and the Rhodians were supposed to help each other if the need arose.⁵⁸ According to H. Schmidt, the treaty between Caesar and Rhodes was signed in 48 BC, when Caesar came to the island and received the support mentioned above, i.e. vessels, from its inhabitants. The price for this support was the new treaty, probably more favourable to Rhodes than the agreement of 51 BC. Although it did not call for the equality of the two sides, Rome at least pledged to support Rhodes if necessary.⁵⁹ The negotiations during which this and the earlier treaties were invoked ended in failure, and in 42 BC the island and the city were ravaged by Cassius, who left his garrison on the island.⁶⁰ From that moment onwards Rhodes was no longer in contention as a significant power in the eastern part of the Mediterranean.

Undoubtedly, the misfortune the island and the city experienced at the hands of Cassius had an influence on Marcus Antonius' decision to give Rhodes the islands of Andros, Tenos, Naxos and Myndos as a gesture of gratitude for the Rhodians' position towards Cassius.⁶¹ Appian, who gives us this information, immediately adds that these acquisitions were not permanent and were taken away from Rhodes because the Rhodian administration was too harsh. The relevant decision was probably taken by Octavian after the victory at Actium. It is worth noting here the words of Cicero quoted above, about Caunos and the islands given to Rhodes by Sulla turning to the Senate to overturn this decision. Clearly, the Rhodians had no scruples, and ruthlessly exploited the islands they received. In any case, paying taxes to Rome did not seem as burdensome to them as paying them to Rhodes.⁶² One thing – which was visible earlier in the conduct of Roman generals – is especially striking about Antonius' gesture: he gave Rhodes islands which had been independent up to that point. However, their freedom was not a guarantee that the Roman general would not treat them like objects. It is also difficult to see what drove Antonius to give Rhodes these particular islands, situated far away in the eastern part of the Cyclades.⁶³ We know from other sources that Rhodes was not the only state to be rewarded by Antonius. After the Battle of Philippi he gave the islands of Aegina, Icos (present-day Alonissos), Keos, and Sciathos and Peparethos (Skopelos – the latter name appears for the first time in this context) to Athens.⁶⁴ The latter two islands were thereby taken away from Thasos. The reasons for Marcus Antonius' decision are very important for explaining the position of the Aegean Islands in the last decades of the Republic. On the eve of the Battle of Philippi, Cassius and Brutus organised a depot for their forces as well as a bank on the island of Thasos.⁶⁵ After the battle and Cassius' death, his body was taken to Thasos and supporters of the defeated generals found shelter on the island.⁶⁶ Soon, however, Marcus Antonius arrived on the island, and all the supplies stored on the

⁵⁸ App., *B.C.* 4.66–70

⁵⁹ Schmitt 1957, 171. A different view: Ferrary 1990, 229–231.

⁶⁰ App., *B.C.* 4.72–73; Plut., *Brut.* 30.2.

⁶¹ App., *B.C.* 5.1.7.

⁶² Fraser/Bean 1954, 173.

⁶³ Le Quéré 2015.

⁶⁴ App., *B.C.* 5.7.

⁶⁵ App., *B.C.* 4.106.

⁶⁶ Plut., *Brut.* 44.

island (money, provisions, and military materials) were released to him. One outcome of supporting Cassius and Brutus was the loss of Sciathos and Peparethos.⁶⁷

Athenian acquisitions, granted by Antonius, turned out to be much more long-lasting than the Rhodian ones, and remained in the Athenian hands at least until the times of Septimus Severus' reign. It is also easier to show than it was in the case of the islands gifted to Rhodes what may have driven Antonius to give these islands to Athens: all of them were situated very close to the mainland. Antonius also most likely imposed a tribute on the islands; at least that is the conclusion based on Strabo's account. Writing about the island of Gyaros, which would become one of the places where exiles would be sent during the Empire, he mentioned a fisherman who had been chosen and sent to Octavian, who was visiting Corinth. The aim of the mission was to lessen the contribution imposed on the island. It took place in 31 BC, just after the Battle of Actium, which naturally leads to the assumption that the contribution on this small and rather poor island had been imposed by Antonius.⁶⁸ Coming back to Rhodes, it should be noted that neither after the island was captured by Cassius nor after the Battle of Actium was it deprived of its freedom, which it lost only in the times of the Empire, during Claudius' reign (see below).⁶⁹

The Aegean Islands in the times of the Empire

The Cyclades

With the conclusion of the civil wars in 31 BC and Octavian taking control over the Empire, a period of re-organisation of the provincial administration began. As we know, in 27 Augustus created the province of Achaea, which covered the southern part of Greece proper. It remains a contentious issue whether it also included the Aegean Islands, and if so, which ones.⁷⁰ There is no doubt that Euboea was incorporated into the new province.⁷¹ However, there is a debate among scholars as to whether the Cyclades were also attached. In his introduction to the third volume of the *CIL*, T. Mommsen concluded that the Cyclades were part of the province of Achaea. He based his opinion on the information of Ptolemy, who did indeed place the Cyclades in Achaea.⁷² S. Accame was of a different opinion; he believed that some of the Cyclades were incorporated into Achaea, some remained free for a long time, and others, like Delos, Sciathos, Peparethos, Icos and Keos, belonged to Athens; this, however, remained a free city, so the mentioned islands did not belong to the province of Achaea.⁷³ It seems that Accame was right and

⁶⁷ App., *B.C.* 5.7.

⁶⁸ Strabo 10.5.3.

⁶⁹ Fournier 2010, 186.

⁷⁰ Cortés Copete 2007, 105–134; Wesch-Klein 2008, 264–265.

⁷¹ Galimberti 2013, 271–284.

⁷² *CIL* III, 1301; Ptol. 3.15.

⁷³ Accame 1946, 241; Le Quéré 2015, 49–70.

the Cyclades never became part of the Roman Empire at the same time; they also never belonged to one province.

The Cyclades, a group of around two hundred islands situated in the centre of the Aegean Sea, owe their collective name to the fact that they surround Delos, Apollo's island, like a crown, i.e. *kyklos*.⁷⁴ Ancient writers, both Greek and Roman, never agreed on which islands should be classified as the Cyclades.⁷⁵ Even in the works of historians and geographers writing in the times of the Empire we can see the conviction that the entire archipelago was an area with fluid borders, oftentimes difficult to define precisely.⁷⁶ In this article, I use a list of islands belonging to the Cyclades which was drawn up by the editors of the *Tabula Imperii Romani*, devoted to the Aegean Islands.⁷⁷

Unlike such Aegean Islands as Euboea, Thasos, Lesbos or Rhodes, most of the islands classified as the Cyclades had a small area with little land suitable for farming. However, they were situated in a spot where various trade routes crossed and from where it was easy to access both Attica and further inland on the Balkan Peninsula, as well as Asia. It is also worth adding that for most of Antiquity only one city was located on the majority of the discussed islands.⁷⁸

During the First Mithridatic War, the Cyclades were captured by the army of the King of Pontus, and later freed by the Romans.⁷⁹ It cannot be ruled out that Sulla gifted some of them to the Rhodians in return for their loyalty to Rome during the war. During the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, the majority of the islands were allied with the latter.⁸⁰ Possibly, after the Battle of Pharsalos some of the Cyclades found themselves under the rule of the governor of the province of Asia, which does not necessarily mean that they were also part of this province.⁸¹ As we have mentioned above, for his part, Marcus Antonius gave some of the Cyclades to Rhodes and some to Athens.⁸² The divisions carried out at the end of the 1st century BC indicate that the Cyclades were not treated as an indivisible whole. On the contrary, they were treated as objects and used for the purposes of short-term politics.

Due to the very small number of sources it is very difficult to establish the administrative status of the Cyclades starting from Augustus' reign. They appear very rarely in literary sources. We know that some of them, e.g. Amorgos, Andros and Naxos, became places where exiles were banished.⁸³ After Nero's death, Pseudo-Nero was active on the Cyclades; he was either a slave from Pontus or a freedman from Italy, who led armed

⁷⁴ Strabo 10.5.2; Plin., *HN* 4.12.65.

⁷⁵ Neither Herodotus nor Thucydides explain what they mean by the Cyclades, or which islands should be counted among them: Hdt. 5.30.31; Thuc. 1.4.

⁷⁶ Counillon 2001, 21; Rutihauser 2012, 19; Étienne 2014, 279–290; Le Quéré 2015, 13–25.

⁷⁷ Strabo 10.5.2–11; Plin., *HN* 4.65–67; Ptol. 3.14.24; Karvonis/Mikedaki 2012, 139–201.

⁷⁸ Le Quéré 2015, 21.

⁷⁹ Strabo 10.5.2; Plut., *Sull.* 11.3.5; App., *Mith.* 12.28.

⁸⁰ Caesar, *B.C.* 3.3.

⁸¹ This seems to be indicated by the activity of P. Servilius Isauricus on the islands; in 64–44 BC he was a legate of the province of Asia appointed by Caesar: Mendoni/Zoumbaki 2008, 254–255; Le Quéré 2015, 49–50.

⁸² App., *B.C.* 5.7.

⁸³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.13.30; 14.71.6; 16.9.2; *CIL* VI 9540; Sweetman 2016, 46–61.

slaves in waylaying merchants, and he chose Kythnos as his base.⁸⁴ Fortunately, however, single pieces of information from literary sources can sometimes be supplemented with data from epigraphic or numismatic sources, which throws unexpected light on the situation of individual islands as well as the entire region.⁸⁵

Roland Étienne in particular has made his voice heard in recent years in the discussion on the administrative status of the Cyclades from the end of the 1st century BC. According to him, the turbulent events of the 1st century BC, the wars and the pirate activity, hastened the incorporation of the majority of the Cyclades into the province of Asia, to which they belonged at the end of the 1st century BC (with the exception of those which belonged to Athens or Rhodes). In his opinion, Augustus did not change the situation which had developed towards the end of the Republic, and the creation of the province of Achaëa had no impact on the Cyclades. To support his view, Étienne cited a number of testimonies, mainly epigraphic ones.⁸⁶ The first ones come from the times of Augustus and Tiberius. Between 7 and 12 AD the inhabitants of Andros honoured P. Vinicius, proconsul of Asia, as their euergetes and patron.⁸⁷ Another proconsul of Asia, L. Calpurnius Pison, was in turn honoured on Delos by the Athenians.⁸⁸ Since they were governors of Asia, the natural conclusion is that the inhabitants of the islands honoured them because they were under their power. This cannot be true in the case of Delos, however, for the reasons mentioned above. Additionally, Étienne quoted Tacitus' information that the Senate confirmed, on the orders of Emperor Tiberius, the right of sanctuary of some temples in 22 AD.⁸⁹ Due to places of sanctuary being opened more and more frequently in Greek cities, Tiberius ordered the Senate to verify the places which had previously enjoyed this privilege. One of the embassies which arrived from various Asian cities in connection with this matter was an embassy from the island of Tenos, petitioning to receive approval for the right of sanctuary for its temple of Poseidon. Tacitus mentioned the legates from Tenos after the ones from Pergamon and Smyrna, and before the representatives of Sardes and Miletus. The fact that the legates from Tenos found themselves among the embassies of cities which belonged to the province of Asia may indicate that the island was part of this province.⁹⁰

Contrary to Étienne's opinion, Octavian taking power over the Empire did mean a certain change in the situation which had developed during the last years of the Republic. Rhodes lost the islands gifted by Marcus Antonius, and thus Andros, Tenos and Naxos regained autonomy (if we were to accept the French historian's arguments, the island of Tenos would have been incorporated into the province of Asia after being freed from Rhodes' power).⁹¹ Athens most likely kept the islands received from Antonius (on

⁸⁴ Tac., *Hist.* 2.8–9; Gallivan 1973, 264–265.

⁸⁵ This is well illustrated by the case of Syros; this almost never appears in literary sources from the times of the Empire, but thanks to inscriptions found on the island we know that it was quite a dynamic economic centre at the time: Savo 2004, 27–38.

⁸⁶ Étienne 1990, 151–156.

⁸⁷ *IG XII 5,756*; Canali de Rossi 2001, 181–182 (no. 114); Eilers 2002, C 34; Mendoni/Zoumbaki 2008, 102–103 (no. 55).

⁸⁸ Durrbach 1921, 175.

⁸⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 3.63.

⁹⁰ Étienne 1990, 152, 155–156.

⁹¹ Nigdelis 1990, 220.

Keos even in the 2nd century inscriptions were dated according to Athenian *epimelets*), although it lost Aegina and Eretria.⁹²

Étienne's argumentation has a few weaknesses, which were pointed out by G.M. Kantor.⁹³ Firstly, the dedications from Andros and especially from Delos, an island which was never part of the province of Asia, founded in the times of Augustus for proconsuls of Asia, can in no way be treated as decisive in terms of the island's administrative status. Secondly, contrary to Étienne's opinion, there is no evidence that the Cyclades were already part of Asia at the end of the 1st century BC. Quite the opposite, epigraphic sources which do indeed indicate that the Cyclades belonged to Asia are from the 2nd century and do not resolve their earlier status. Kantor also noted Claudius Ptolemy's account concerning the situation in the early 2nd century AD. In Book V of his *Geography*, he listed the islands which belonged to the province of Asia. They included Tenedos, Lesbos with the cities of Mytilene and Mithymna, Icaria, Chios, Samos, Amorgos, Cos, Astypalaia, Rhodes, Karpathos, Syme and Kasos.⁹⁴ Of the islands listed by Ptolemy, only Amorgos undisputedly belongs to the Cyclades, which, according to Ptolemy, was part of Achaea.⁹⁵ Using Ptolemy's account in the discussion of the status of the Cyclades during the Empire, we must remember that the author gave a geographical rather than an administrative depiction.⁹⁶

The *Breviarium*, written by Sextus Rufus in the 4th century AD, included the following sentence: *Ita Rhodus et insulae primum libere agebant, postea in consuetudinem parendi Romanis clementer prouocationibus peruenerunt et sub Vespasiano principe Insularum provincia facta est.* This information, which is not directly confirmed by any other source, is surprising and intriguing, all the more so because the first province governor with this title – *praeses provinciae Insularum* – is not known until the times of Diocletian.⁹⁷ If Vespasian did indeed create such a province, this late appearance of the first mention about its governor in the sources should lead us to be very cautious about Festus' account. However, it is difficult to accuse this writer, who was governor of Syria and later proconsul of Asia in the 4th century, and therefore had access to the relevant archives, of a lack of information. Even so, historians do frequently question Festus' facts and assume that a separate province, incorporating the Aegean Islands, including part of the Cyclades, was created under Diocletian (more on the creation of this province below).⁹⁸ It is worth remembering, however, that Vespasian created new provinces in order to increase the state income, tightened financial control over them, and generally tried to strengthen central authorities. We know from Suetonius' mentions that he deprived Achaea, Lycia, Rhodes, Byzantium and Samos of freedom, which was undoubtedly motivated by tax reasons.⁹⁹ There are no solid arguments to support rejecting Festus'

⁹² Cass. Dio 54.7.2.

⁹³ Kantor 2009, 138–149.

⁹⁴ Ptol., *Geog.* 5.3.

⁹⁵ Ptol., *Geog.* 3.14.

⁹⁶ Berggren/Jones 2000, 5–6.

⁹⁷ Festus, *Brev.* 10.3. Festus' information is partially consistent with Suetonius' information about Vespasian stripping Rhodes of the status of *civitas libera* (Suet., *Vesp.* 8).

⁹⁸ Magie 1950, 1428; Étienne 1990, 151–152.

⁹⁹ Suet., *Vesp.* 8.6; Levick 1999, 145–146.

information, and therefore negating the creation of a unit called *provincia Insularum* by Vespasian.¹⁰⁰ However, this does not throw light on which islands were part of the province. If we link Suetonius' account, which was contemporary to the events, about Vespasian stripping Rhodes and Samos and others of freedom, with Festus' report, the most natural conclusion would be that the new administrative unit included these two islands; however, we know that they were incorporated into Asia. Epigraphic sources may help us to find an answer to the question of which other islands found themselves in the province.

Starting with Trajan's reign, there is attested activity of officials collecting inheritance taxes on the Cyclades. The first of them was M. Ulpius Aug(usti) lib(ertus) Stephanus, *proc(urator) XX her(editatium) regionis Cariae et insularum Cycladum*.¹⁰¹ We also know of M. Cosconius M. f. Poll. Fronto, *procur. Augg. ad vectigal XX her. per A[s]jiam, Lyciam, Phrygiam, Galatiam, insulas Cycladas*,¹⁰² from the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century. The titlature of these two officials indicates that in the 2nd century the Cyclades as a tax district were also part of a larger entity, within which inheritance tax (*vicessima hereditatium*) was collected, and which included at least a few provinces. Possibly, the appearance of such an entity resulted from Vespasian creating a region including the Aegean Islands, which one of the Emperor's successors incorporated into a larger structure.¹⁰³

We know the names of two special legates from the mid-2nd century who were tasked with regulating the situation in the Cyclades. The first one was C. Vettius Sabinianus Iulius Hospes, who was a *leg(atu)s Aug(usti) ad ordinandos status insularum Cycladum, legatus provinciae Asiae*. His mission is dated either to the end of Antoninus Pius' rule or to the beginning of Marcus Aurelius' reign.¹⁰⁴ The other legate was L. Saevinus L. f. Proculus, whose mission is dated to the joint reign of either Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus or Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.¹⁰⁵ Both officials were *correctores*, whose job was to solve problems, usually economic ones, in which a city or – as in this case – an entire region found itself. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact nature of their activities on the islands, which clearly found themselves in a difficult situation in the second half of the 2nd century.

Before we go on to analyse the data which follows from the above information, it is worth quoting two more testimonies, which will give us a more detailed picture of the situation. A very important inscription from Ephesus, containing a list of *conventus*, i.e. court districts into which the province of Asia was divided, is dated to ca. 75. In the case of three districts (Sardes, Pergamon, Apamea), the list is incomplete. However, no island appears in any of the districts which we could classify as one of the Cyclades. On the other hand, Samos (*conventus* of Milet), Chios and Mytilene (*conventus* of Pergamon), as well as Cos (*conventus* of Halicarnassus) are mentioned on the list.¹⁰⁶ Around 75, the

¹⁰⁰ Malavolta 2004, 209–211; Le Quéré 2015, 76–77.

¹⁰¹ Pflaum 1971, 66

¹⁰² *ILS* 1359 = *CIL* X 7584; Pflaum 1971, 66.

¹⁰³ Le Quéré 2015, 76–80.

¹⁰⁴ Pflaum 1971, 65; Corbier 1974, 268–277 (no. 54).

¹⁰⁵ *AE* 1924, 77; 1969–1970, 601.

¹⁰⁶ Habicht 1975, 64–91; Mitchell 1999, 29.

mentioned islands belonged to Asia, which is also confirmed by other sources; however, there is no indication that the Cyclades were also part of the province of Asia at that time.

Another testimony which indirectly concerns the administrative status of the Cyclades in the 1st century AD is the *lex portorii prouvinciae Asiae*, which includes a number of regulations related to tariffs in the province of Asia from its creation through successive modifications until 62 (the year to which the inscription from Ephesus with the texts of the regulations is dated).¹⁰⁷ The collection of regulations contains no references to the Aegean Islands, not just the Cyclades (with the one exception of Poroselene – strictly speaking not an island, but a peninsula). Earlier, however, a source was quoted according to which during the reign of the Flavii, Cos belonged to the *conventus* of Halicarnassus, Samos to Miletus, and Chios and Mytilene to Pergamon, i.e. they were part of Asia. M. Dreher proposed an explanation of this state of affairs, according to which when the province was created, Cos, Samos, Chios, Lesbos and Tenendos were free, and as such they were also free of tariffs and tariff collection points were not installed on them. S. Mitchell proposed another explanation for why the islands were, in the light of these regulations, a “tariff-free zone”. If the tariffs had been paid on the islands, ships could have easily reached the mainland and claimed that they had already paid or would pay on one of the islands. Control over this and verifying declarations would have required an extensive administration. It was more economical not to establish tariff collection points on the islands.¹⁰⁸

We can draw several conclusions on the basis of the information mentioned above. Firstly, we do not know what the situation of the Cyclades was at the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD. Dedications to governors of Asia found on some of the islands are not sufficient to determine their administrative status. It is possible, however, that – according to what Festus recorded – they were free until Vespasian’s reign, i.e. they were not incorporated into the Empire’s administrative structures. Secondly, the turning point in the history of the Cyclades during the Roman period is the reign of Vespasian, who, according to Festus’ information, took away their freedom and transformed them into something that Festus called a province. We do not know, however, whether the new structure included only the Cyclades, or some other Aegean Islands as well. Thirdly, the activity of Sabinianus and Proculus, legates in Asia, as special legates tasked with regulating the situation on the Cyclades, seems to indicate that the islands were one of the *conventus iuridici* into which the province was divided. The last list of those *conventus* known to us is dated to ca. 75 and does not contain the names of any of the Cyclades, which leads to the conclusion that a new court district was created after this date but, if we remember Festus’ account, still during the reign of Vespasian.¹⁰⁹ It would therefore follow that what the Emperor created was not a province but a court district belonging to the province of Asia, thereby incorporating the Cyclades into Asia (it is also possible that Vespasian created a province which was dismantled by one of his successors and incorporated into the province of Asia). Fourthly, at least since Trajan’s times, and perhaps even earlier, the Cyclades had been a financial district (*regio*) established for the collection of inheritance tax. The district, as the titlature of

¹⁰⁷ The text with a translation and commentary: Cottier et al. 2008, 16–164.

¹⁰⁸ Dreher 1996, 111–127; Mitchell 2008, 192–193.

¹⁰⁹ Habicht 1975, 64–91; Mitchell 1999, 17–46; Campanile 2004, 129–142; Fournier 2010, 62–87.

Q. Cosconius Fronto suggests, was part of a larger procuratorial territory, which included the Cyclades as well as Asia, Lycia, Phrygia and Galatia, i.e. at least several provinces.¹¹⁰ This picture is only seemingly complicated, and the main problem is the nomenclature used by Festus. It is worth remembering, however, that Festus lived and was active in an era when the meaning of terms such as “province” or “diocese” underwent some changes. In the new system, originating in the times of Diocletian, the word “province” became to some extent synonymous with the term *regio*, which in turn was translated into Greek as *eparchia*.¹¹¹

As we can see, the status of the Cyclades during the first three centuries of the Empire’s existence is very unclear, which does not mean that we cannot try to reconstruct it. However, the method which some historians use, which consists in accepting that some of the islands belonged to Asia only on the basis of the fact that officials active in the province were honoured on them, seems very dubious. The statues of Roman officials, including proconsuls of the province of Asia, were most frequently dedicated on Keos, Tenos and Andros, i.e. on those islands which were situated en route between Athens and Ephesus.¹¹² The fact that an official stopped over on an island and performed a euergetic act there, for which he was honoured by the inhabitants, does not necessarily mean that the island was under his jurisdiction. It seems, however, that the turning point in the history of the Cyclades and the other islands was Vespasian creating an entity which Festus described as a province. How significant this event was is best illustrated by the fact that only in the 2nd century did official documents start to mention the *insulae Cycladae/hai nisoī Kiklades* in the sense of a geographical as well as administrative unit. Inscriptions from the island of Syros are very important here. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries public banquets were organised there, in which not only the island inhabitants and residents but also people from the Cyclades were invited to participate. This may indicate that with the creation of an entity including the Cyclades came a sense of geographical and administrative belonging.¹¹³

In the 2nd century there are also testimonies which show a connection between the Cyclades and Asia, such as the mention of the proconsul of Asia, along with the local eponyms, in a decree of Thera.¹¹⁴ Some influential families from the Cyclades established close contacts with the capital of the province, Ephesus, where their representatives were pursuing a career.¹¹⁵ It is also telling that the sophists who originated from the Cyclades, such as Frontonianus of Melos, Aulus Plotinus Krateros of Thera or Onomarchus of Andros, studied and were active as orators and statesmen in Ephesus, rather than the geographically closer Athens.¹¹⁶ Philostratus, a biographer of sophists, described Onomarchus of Andros as a man “living as he did so near to the coast of Asia”, which is surprising considering that the island of Andros is closest to Attica and Athens, while also being

¹¹⁰ Pflaum 1971, 64–68; Étienne 1990, 153–154.

¹¹¹ Malavolta 2004, 214–216.

¹¹² A list of those statues: Le Quéré 2015, 58, note 52.

¹¹³ Savo 2004, 27–38; Mendoni/Zoumbaki 2008, 37–39; Le Quéré 2015, 61–66.

¹¹⁴ *JG* XII 3,325.

¹¹⁵ Le Quéré 2015, 248–250.

¹¹⁶ Puech 2002, 182–186, 248–259.

the Cycladic island which is furthest from Ephesus. Clearly, Philostratus meant cultural rather than geographical closeness.¹¹⁷

Large Aegean islands in the times of the Empire

The history of the large islands during the Empire is interesting, as their status changed several times under successive rulers. It is worth starting from Mytilene on Lesbos, whose history was to some extent emblematic of the manner in which the Romans treated the insular communities. In 25 BC, i.e. after Octavian Augustus had eliminated his rivals, a treaty was signed between Mytilene and Rome, which allowed the former to base its relations with the new hegemon of the Mediterranean world on much more solid grounds than just *amicitia*. The treaty was defensive in character and established on equal terms. Each side pledged not to let the enemies of the other state through its territory, not to provide any assistance to them, and to support its ally in the case of an attack. The treaty certainly belonged to the category of *foedera aequa*: both states were *de iure* equal, although it must have been obvious to everybody that the actual situation was somewhat different. However, for Mytilene, the most important thing was to keep its independence from the governor of Asia, and thereby to maintain the status of an independent state.¹¹⁸ The treaty also guaranteed Mytilene that it would keep its previous possessions, although it was not specified which land was meant.¹¹⁹ To sum up, it can be said that from 25 BC Mytilene was not under the jurisdiction of the governor of the province of Asia, on whose territory it was an enclave exempted from all contributions paid to Rome. The governor of Asia could intervene in the city, but only if the Mytileneans asked him to do so of their own accord.

Unfortunately, we cannot be certain about the situation of the other cities situated on Lesbos, i.e. Eresos and Methymna. In their case, we simply do not have the sources which would enable us to establish what their situation was in the early Principate.¹²⁰

From 23 to 22 BC Marcus Agrippa stayed on Lesbos; he held great power, described by Velleius Paterculus as *sub sepcie ministeriorum principalium*.¹²¹ Augustus gave him *potestas* formally equal to his own, or at least greater than anyone else in the East. For a few months, Agrippa ruled the East through his legates, while he remained in Mytilene, where he met Herod of Judea.¹²² The editors of the *Tabula Imperii Romani*, a volume devoted to the Aegean Islands, concluded that during Marcus Agrippa's stay Mytilene became the administrative centre of the province of Asia. It is likely that this was an exaggeration, and this opinion should be modified a little, in the sense that Mytilene could have been only a temporary centre for making decisions concerning Asia.¹²³ There might have been various reasons for Agrippa's stay in Mytilene on Lesbos in 23–22 (he later

¹¹⁷ Philostr. *VS* 1.23.

¹¹⁸ Sherk 1969, no. 26; Labarre 1996, 277–284 (no. 20 D).

¹¹⁹ Accame 1946, 97.

¹²⁰ Levang 1972, 146.

¹²¹ Vell. Pat. 2.93.

¹²² Josephus, *AJ* 15.350; Suet., *Aug.* 66.3; Cass. Dio 53.32.1; Roddaz 1984, 339–368.

¹²³ Karvonis/Mikedaki 2012, 24.

visited the island several more times). The island was an easy and quick point of departure to any place in Asia or Greece. However, the health benefits offered by the island's famous hot springs may have also played a part, since, as we know from Pliny the Elder, Agrippa suffered from rheumatism in his legs.¹²⁴

The situation of Lesbos and its cities is unclear in the next few decades. Most likely, Mytilene – and maybe the other cities as well – was attached to the province of Asia. In 1969 in Ephesus an inscription was found with a list of cities of the province of Asia grouped according to the *conventus*, i.e. administrative court districts. It follows from the list that the *conventus* of Pergamon included Mytilene and Kalleneis, along with Chios. It is usually believed that Kalleneis refers to a community living near the main bay on Lesbos.¹²⁵ It follows that Mytilene, and perhaps also the other cities on the island, lost their freedom and became part of Asia. This may have happened in the times of the Flavii. What is certain is that the island regained its freedom during Hadrian's reign.¹²⁶

We have much less information about Chios in the times of the Empire. As we remember, from 80 BC the islanders had their own laws, which the Romans residing on the island were supposed to obey as well. This law was renewed by Augustus in 26 BC.¹²⁷ Soon after, the island was hit by an earthquake, which brought economic problems. This did not change the fact, however, that the island minted its own coins until the second half of the 3rd century. In the second half of the 1st century, like Lemnos, it belonged to the *conventus* of Pergamon, which indicates that it was part of the province of Asia, although we do not know from when. The opinions of historians are very much divided, and a lack of direct information in the sources makes it impossible to find a definitive answer. Possibly, like a number of other islands, it was attached to the province by Vespasian.¹²⁸

We have a little more information about Samos, where Octavian stopped over particularly frequently during his visits to the East. As we have mentioned before, the island was part of the province of Asia probably from the 80s BC. Its status remained unchanged during the following decades. The change came after Octavian's victory over Antonius at Actium. Octavian spent the winter of 31/30 BC on the island after the battle, which became a reason for introducing a new era, beginning in September 31 BC.¹²⁹ Augustus spent three more winters on the island, the last one in 20/19 BC.¹³⁰ It was during this last visit that he gave Samos the status of *civitas libera et immunis*, and returned the giant statues of Athena and Heracles, taken by Marcus Antonius, to the island.¹³¹ Slightly later (between 19/18 and 14 BC) Samos was elevated to the rank of a Roman colony.¹³² After 14 BC Samos again had the status of *civitas libera et immunis*. We know that the islanders were given Roman citizenship by Augustus, and the island itself was chosen as

¹²⁴ Plin., *NH* 22.58 and 7.45; Roddaz 1984, 424–427; Labarre 1996, 117.

¹²⁵ Sherk 1969, no. 52; Habicht 1975, 64–91; Labarre 1996, 136–138.

¹²⁶ Dio Chrysost. 31.105–106.

¹²⁷ *SIG*³ 785.

¹²⁸ Karvonis/Mikedaki 2012, 46.

¹²⁹ Suet., *Aug.* 17.3; App., *B.C.* 4.176; *IGR IV* 991.

¹³⁰ Suet., *Aug.* 26.3; Cass. Dio 54.7.4.

¹³¹ Cass. Dio 54.9.7.

¹³² Transier 1985, 44–45, 101–104.

one of the places for banishing exiles.¹³³ The island enjoyed freedom until the reign of Vespasian, when it was attached to the province of Asia.

The island of Rhodes also experienced changing fortunes during the Empire. Generally, it can be said that it enjoyed autonomy, but the privilege was taken away many times. Establishing the exact chronology of these changes is difficult considering the considerably smaller number of sources on the history of Rhodes in the Empire compared to the Hellenistic times.¹³⁴ We know that, during Antonius' war against Octavian, Rhodes supported the former, who incidentally, as mentioned above, had gifted it a few islands. Appian, who gives us this information, noted that Rhodes quickly lost these acquisitions due to its excessively harsh policy. Although Appian did not say who made this decision, historians agree that it must have been Octavian. Most likely after Actium (the precise date is unknown), he took away from Rhodes what it had been given by Antonius, and this decision must have, in some sense, been a punishment.¹³⁵ We know that in 30 BC Octavian stayed on Rhodes, where he met Herod.¹³⁶ It is difficult to regard this visit, which was probably accompanied by military troops, as an honour for the island. Possibly, he made the relevant decision already then or a little later, when he had the time to deal with the affairs in the East.¹³⁷

From 6 BC to 2 AD Tiberius resided on the island, and Gaius Caesar, Augustus' adopted son, stayed there from 2 BC to 2 AD.¹³⁸ In 12 AD Augustus changed the law he had issued earlier, which forbid people sentenced to banishment from coming closer than 400 stadia from the coast. At that time, the islands of Rhodes, Cos, Samos and Lesbos were excluded from the law.¹³⁹ In 44 Claudius deprived the island of its autonomy in retaliation for its inhabitants crucifying some Roman citizens. Rhodes thus became part of the province of Asia, but not for long, since soon afterwards Nero convinced Claudius to restore the island to its former status.¹⁴⁰ This change also proved not to be permanent. Vespasian stripped Rhodes of its freedom, as he had with Achaea, Lycia, Byzantium and Samos.¹⁴¹ The Rhodians regained their independence during the reign of Titus or Domitian and retained it until at least the middle of the 2nd century.¹⁴²

The history of Cos during the Empire is also very interesting. Despite political turbulence in the 1st century BC, Cos managed to retain its independence. During the Empire, the inhabitants of Cos claimed that they had protected the Roman population during the First Mithridatic War, although when the King of Pontus arrived on the island, he had been greeted warmly.¹⁴³ We also know from Plutarch that when Lucullus needed the support of Cnidus, a *civitas libera*, and Cos, he tried to convince them rather than order

¹³³ Cass. Dio 56.27.2.

¹³⁴ The only exception is the period of Tiberius' stay on the island from 6 BC to 2 AD.

¹³⁵ Schmitt 1957, 186–187; Berthold 1984, 218; Erskine 1991, 274.

¹³⁶ Josephus, *AJ* 1.388–390.

¹³⁷ Erskine 1991, 271–275.

¹³⁸ Suet., *Tib.* 11–13.

¹³⁹ Cass. Dio 56.27.2.

¹⁴⁰ Revoking of autonomy: Cass. Dio 60.24. Nero's intervention: Tac., *Ann.* 12.58; Suet., *Claud.* 25; Nero 7.

¹⁴¹ Suet., *Vesp.* 8.

¹⁴² *IG XII* 1,58.9–11; Buraselis 2000, 143, note 100.

¹⁴³ Tac., *Ann.* 4.14.

them, which supports the conclusion that Cos was a free state.¹⁴⁴ Cos did back him, and in 84–82 BC it supported the Romans fighting against the pirates. Therefore, the island did not give Sulla a reason to interfere in its matters. During the Roman civil wars Cos first backed Pompey, but after his defeat it quickly showed goodwill to Caesar. During Marcus Antonius' domination in the East a certain number of islanders received Roman citizenship, which strongly suggests that the island sided with Antonius in his war against Octavian. This does not mean that the island was free of all danger brought about by the war. Antonius' general, Turullius, who needed wood for building ships, ordered that most of the cypress grove in the sanctuary of Asclepius be cut down. After the Battle of Actium Turullius found himself on the island again, where he was executed by Octavian's soldiers. This fact shows that in 30 BC the island was in Octavian's hands.¹⁴⁵

During Octavian's reign Cos was part of the province of Asia and paid contributions.¹⁴⁶ It was only in 53 that Claudius granted the island *immunitas*.¹⁴⁷ It is worth taking a closer look at the reasons which led Claudius to such a decision. It follows from Tacitus' account that C. Stertinius Xenophon from Cos had the biggest impact on Claudius' decision.¹⁴⁸ He was the Emperor's personal physician, which enabled him to accumulate an enormous fortune, but also led to suspicions that, together with Agrippa, he had contributed to Claudius' death.¹⁴⁹ His Roman career was not restricted to medicine. As *tribunus militum*, he participated in an expedition to Britain; later he became *praefectus fabrum*, and finally he held the influential office of *ab epistulis graecis*. Having reached a high position, he worked, among others, to benefit his homeland, for which the inhabitants of Cos expressed their gratitude.¹⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, his greatest achievement was obtaining *immunitas* for Cos. This is another example which illustrates how much a Greek who reached a high position in the imperial administration could do for his small homeland.¹⁵¹

From Augustus' times until 53 the islanders were obliged to pay contributions; however, it is worth considering whether the island also had *libertas* during this period, especially since *libertas* and *immunitas* did not go hand in hand during the Principate.¹⁵² In 12 AD Augustus took steps to tighten control over the people who had been banished, who frequently left their place of compulsory stay, and not uncommonly lived in luxury. In order to prevent the former violation, Augustus ordered for exiles to stay on the islands which were located at least 400 stadia (ca. 70 km) from the mainland. He excluded Cos, Rhodes, Samos and Lesbos from this regulation. Cassius Dio mentioned this, admitted that he did not understand why this exception was made.¹⁵³ According to K. Buraselis, Augustus simply considered these islands as reliable places of exile. He was sure of the islands' loyalty and did not allow the possibility that they might act

¹⁴⁴ Plut., *Luc.* 3.3.

¹⁴⁵ Cass. Dio 51.8.3; Val. Max. 1.1.19.

¹⁴⁶ Strabo 14.2.19.

¹⁴⁷ Tac., *Ann.* 12.61.

¹⁴⁸ Tac., *Ann.* 12.61.

¹⁴⁹ Sherwin-White 1978, 149–152; Buraselis 2000, 66–110.

¹⁵⁰ Sherwin-White 1978, 151–152.

¹⁵¹ A dispute between Cos and Cyprus concerning Cos' possessions on Cyprus is also dated to Claudius' reign: Sherwin-White 1975, 182–184.

¹⁵² Jones 1940, 131–132.

¹⁵³ Cass. Dio 56.27.2–3.

in a way which would necessitate punishing them. He therefore considered it natural that all the mentioned islands had the status of *civitates liberae/foederatae* in 12 AD.¹⁵⁴ Eleven years later, in 23 AD, Tiberius confirmed the right of sanctuary of the temple of Heracles on Samos and the temple of Asclepius on Cos. On the one hand, it was a sign of trust placed in the inhabitants of both these islands, and on the other hand, as Tacitus concluded, it was a reward for Cos for the loyalty shown earlier.¹⁵⁵ It is most likely that the island still enjoyed its freedom in the times of Tiberius.¹⁵⁶ It probably lost it during Vespasian's reign. Cos, along with Samos, Chios and Mytilene, appeared on the famous inscription from Ephesus with a list of Asian cities and communities arranged according to the *conventus/dioikeseis*.¹⁵⁷ Another clue indicating that Cos briefly lost its freedom in the times of the Flavii is provided by the letter written by priests of Apollo of Halasarna. The entry for year 106 on the list, i.e. 79 AD, notes the fact that the island regained its *patrioi nomoi*, which is usually interpreted as regaining freedom (the first year on the list is probably 27 BC). Therefore, Cos, like nearby Rhodes, lost its freedom in Vespasian's times, only to regain it already under Titus' reign.¹⁵⁸ It kept this status probably until the reign of Diocletian, when it was incorporated into the newly established *provincia Insularum*.¹⁵⁹

The creation of the *provincia Insularum*

In 294 Emperor Diocletian, as part of the administrative reform of provinces, created a new one, which he named *provincia Insularum*. It was headed by an official with the title of *praeses*, and its capital was Rhodes. The province was part of the *diocoesis Asi-ana*.¹⁶⁰ It seems that the territory of the new province was marked out quite arbitrarily. It did not include all the Aegean Islands, since some of them, e.g. Aegina, Salamina, Keos and Delos, became part of the province of Achaea. The new province included 53 islands, including Rhodes, Cos, Samos, Chios, Mytilene and Methymna (these names were probably meant to refer to the entire island of Lesbos), Tenedos, Porosolene, Andros, Tenos, Naxos, Paros, Siphos, Melos, Ios, Thera, Amorgos, and Astypalaia.¹⁶¹

Conclusions

Over the almost four centuries which separated the creation of the province of Asia from the establishment of the *provincia Insularum*, the Aegean Islands experienced mixed

¹⁵⁴ Buraselis 2000, 135.

¹⁵⁵ Tac., *Ann.* 4.14.

¹⁵⁶ Buraselis 2000, 136; a different view: Sherwin-White 1978, 146–148.

¹⁵⁷ Habicht 1975, 64.

¹⁵⁸ Buraselis 2000, 142–143.

¹⁵⁹ *CIL* III 1,460; Pflaum 1971, 64–68.

¹⁶⁰ Seston 1946, 141–143.

¹⁶¹ Hierocles, *Synecdemus* 686.1–3; 687.1–6; Étienne 1990, 154; Malvolta 2004, 207–208.

fortunes as well as changes in their formal and legal status. From independent states, which in the 3rd and 2nd century periodically found themselves under the influence of foreign hegemon or, like Rhodes, themselves aspired to and for a time played the role of hegemon, they became part of the Roman Empire.¹⁶² This did not occur all at once, on the basis of one decision, and the administrative status of some of the islands changed several times. In the 1st century BC the most frequent reason for the – often very arbitrary – changes introduced by Roman officials was the fact that a given insular community backed the wrong side during one of the numerous wars fought at the time. This is well illustrated already by the First Mithridatic War, after which Sulla punished and rewarded Greek cities. In the region in question, Rhodes, Chios, Cos and Thasos were granted freedom as a reward. We should also remember that freedom did not always mean the same thing. From the 2nd century BC and throughout the entire Early Empire it was granted, one-sidedly, by Rome. However, there were no general guidelines regulating the relations between Rome and *civitates liberae*; the terms were set individually in each case. A lot depended on the diplomatic abilities of a city's representatives, who were sometimes able to negotiate the best possible terms for themselves.¹⁶³ Consequently, the principles of the relations between Rome and the city receiving freedom varied, and cannot be defined in a general way. Some, however, were recurrent, such as the possibility to live according to the *suis legibus*, exemption from contributions (although, according to some sources, exemption from paying *foros* was a separate privilege, irrespective of the granted freedom – which is illustrated by Cos in the times of the Empire) and exemption from the obligation to quarter Roman soldiers. The most important consequence of freedom was the fact that the city did not fall under the jurisdiction of the governor of a Roman province. Out of the cities granted freedom by Sulla, the inhabitants of Chios received the most favourable conditions. They were given a rare privilege, according to which the Roman residents staying on the island were subject to the local tribunals and laws. Speaking of the decisions taken by Sulla which concerned the islands, we should also point out the case of Delos, which belonged to Athens, remained under Rome's financial control for some time after being freed from the hands of a Pontic garrison, and then returned to the full control of Athens.

The example of Sulla, who treated the insular communities in an arbitrary manner, had an impact on the successive generals who happened to conduct their activities in the Aegean. It is significant that, while they tried to obey certain principles in the case of larger islands, which perhaps resulted from their strategic importance, in the case of smaller islands belonging to the Cyclades they had no scruples when deciding their fate. This is especially conspicuous in the case of Marcus Antonius, who arbitrarily gave them to Athens and Rhodes, i.e. the states he wanted to reward.

Another important phenomenon visible during both the Republic and the Empire is the impact of outstanding citizens from specific communities, who – as a result of their good relations with Rome – were able to ensure many benefits for their homeland. One example is Theophanes of Mytilene, who persuaded Pompey to grant his home city freedom, even though it had seriously compromised itself during and after the First Mithri-

¹⁶² Reger 1994, 32–69.

¹⁶³ Guerber 2009, 37–44; Dalla Rosa 2014, 34–35.

atic War, when it stubbornly resisted the Roman army. During the Empire, C. Stertinius Xenophon, who was pursuing a career in the administration and at the imperial court, achieved a large amount for his island, Cos.

The end of the civil wars and Octavian taking over power did not mean that the Aegean Islands achieved anything close to stabilisation. As we saw, some of them became part of the province of Asia, others retained their independence, although on Rome's terms, and in some cases we are not certain as to their status. Moreover, the fact that the status of an island was decided under Augustus, for example, did not mean that the island would automatically retain it over the following centuries. Examples that illustrate this well are Lesbos, Rhodes or Cos. Mytilene on Lesbos and Rhodes signed a formal *foedus* with Rome, as a result of which their relations with Rome were closely regulated by the terms of the treaty. However, such a treaty could be broken, as was the case with Rhodes, which was deprived of freedom by Emperor Claudius in retaliation for the Rhodians executing Roman citizens.¹⁶⁴

Vespasian's reign seems to be the turning point in the history of the Aegean Islands. According to the sources, he stripped some islands of freedom, attaching them to the province of Asia; he also created an administrative entity which included the majority of the islands, and which was connected to Asia at some date which is impossible to pinpoint. This fact in itself is worth emphasising, considering that most of the islands were closer to Achaëa than to Asia. As an indirect consequence of Vespasian's reform, Diocletian created a separate province which included a considerable part of the Aegean Islands; those which did not belong there were incorporated into Achaëa, thereby completing the evolution of the islands' status.

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¹⁶⁴ Suet., *Claud.* 25.3; Cass. Dio 50.24.4.

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