

A New Look at Roman Indifference Towards Cyprus in the Late Republic  
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The common perception that Cyprus was annexed to Rome by Cato Uticensis in 58 BCE is erroneous. In this paper I will argue that the surviving evidence suggests that Cyprus was in fact never organized as a province under the Republic. Though Cato was sent, through Clodius' maneuvering, to depose the king of Cyprus and abrogate his wealth for the Roman treasury, Badian (1965) has convincingly proven that Cato lacked any sort of legal or military authority to annex the island and establish it as a province; Plutarch (*Cat. Min.* 34-40) too says nothing about provincial organization. Though Strabo (14.6.6) says that after Cato's commission Cyprus became a separate praetorian province, there is no record of a permanent Roman magistrate for the island between the deposition of Ptolemy and arrival of the quaestor C. Sextilius Rufus in 48 (*Cic. Fam.* 13.48).

P. Lentulus Spinther, governor of Cilicia from 56-53, is often credited with establishing a *lex provinciae* for Cyprus, based on of a single mention of a *lex Lentuli* in *Fam.* 13.48. Cicero does address Lentulus as *qui Ciliciam Cyprumque teneas* in *Fam.* 1.7.4; this alone does not prove that Cyprus was an organized province. Marshall (1964, 211) has posited that the *lex Lentuli* of *Fam.* 13.48 had the force of a *lex data*, which, in the provinces, was the type of legislation that granted cities the status of being *liberae civitates* (Berger 1953, 545). If Lentulus had indeed granted free status to the cities of Cyprus, they would have been, strictly speaking, outside of the *provincia* of the governor's jurisdiction (Greenidge 1901, 111). Furthermore, there is no evidence for Cyprus of the traditional deputation of senators which oversaw the actual organization of a new province, nor of any ratification by the Senate of a *lex provincia* for Cyprus, which would have been required if the traditional deputation had not been sent (Broughton 1946, 40ff).

While Cyprus may have been joined in an administrative sense to Cilicia, and Cicero's involvement with Brutus' loan to the Salaminians is proof enough of this, the Roman control of the island likely did not extend farther than judicial jurisdiction. The legal issues that Cicero mentions when he sends Q. Volusius to Cyprus as his legate (*Att.* 5.21.6) are clearly related only to the adjudication of proceedings involving Roman citizens who live on the island; in fact, Volusius had to be sent *ne cives Romani pauci qui illic negotiantur ius sibi dictum negarent; nam evocari ex insula Cyprios non licet*. This arrangement appears similar to a clause of the *lex Rupilia* for Sicily, which states that in suits between Romans and Sicilians the *iudex* shall be from the defendant's city (*Cic. Verr.* 2.13), but the *lex Rupilia* borrowed heavily from the *lex Hieronica* already in place when the Romans took control of the island; it is thus not, by itself, indicative of provincial status for Cyprus.

The cities of Cyprus, even under Egyptian domination, had maintained a strong tradition of independence. There is evidence that they had formed a league among themselves, and the lack of any mention of *ager publicus* on the island suggests that it was left mainly to its own devices (Jones 1937, 373). The acquisition of Cyrene provides a useful precedent. When this former Egyptian possession fell into Roman hands in 96, Rome, which had no closer proconsular authority than that at Ephesus, chose instead to declare the communities of the region free, to add the royal properties to the *ager publicus* (*Livy Ep.* 70), and leave the area to govern itself. It would be nearly a quarter-century before a governor would arrive, and Appian (*BC* 1.111) in fact dates the acquisition of Cyrenaica to the arrival of the unnamed governor.

As Sherwin-White (1983, 270) has noted, Cyprus was probably targeted simply because it was available. It was of little monetary or military cost to depose Ptolemy, and the monies liquidated by Cato generated a substantial return on the expedition. With no further gains to be made, it would have been a waste of manpower to garrison and administer an island which served no strategic purpose; indeed, it was returned to Egyptian control by Caesar in 47 (*DC* 42.35.5). It appears that under the Republic Rome left the island to self-administration, and until the reign of Augustus, never made Cyprus an official part of the Roman *imperium*.