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Editorial

The finished product is not always indicative of all the work that goes into its production, and academic journals such as this *Melita Classica* are no different. The papers contained within this year's volume are, no different to others in previous editions of the *Melita Classica* and those in other works and publications, the product of hours of research, study and hard work by authors dedicated to producing a work representative of their broader dedication to their subject and craft, through which they hope to introduce a broader public to an area of study they have found to be interesting and of value.

To this work by the authors is added the commitment and work of my colleagues on the Editorial Board, our blind reviewers (whom I thank especially for their selfless service since they must remain nameless and unrecognised) and all those who have contributed in small or great ways to the publication of this work, including our returning and generous sponsors, the Farsons Foundation.

The *Melita Classica* remains the most tangible proof of the MCA's commitment to fostering and promoting the study of Classics in Malta and abroad, and of making it as widely accessible to as many people as possible.

This ninth volume of the *Melita Classica* is once again representative of the broad scope of Classics as a field of study. The papers contained within are concerned with the study of history, literary study and criticism, translation and transmission of texts, and reception. We hope that you will find them intriguing and informative. Our hope is that reading through these pages may quicken your own passion for Classics and set your mind alight with inspiration, ideas, and insights.

Samuel Azzopardi

Editor

The *Publicani* and the Governors of Asia: A Power Struggle on Financial Exploitation (123-41 BCE)

Tom Zhuohun Wang¹

Introduction: Roman Tax System and the Rise of the *Publicani*²

The *publicani*, referred to in primary sources as τελώναι by the Greeks and *publicani* by the Romans, were private contractors responsible for organizing public games, performing public duties, and providing supplies for military expeditions.³ Most of them were from the *equites* class, whose social and political status gradually increased during the Roman Republic, especially after the Second Punic War.⁴ With the informal consent of Roman officials, they formed partnerships known as *societates publicanorum* to increase their financial gains and securities.⁵ With the Republic acquiring more and more provinces, the government conceived a new fiscal system for lowering costs and increasing efficiency. The censor would hold auctions for a five-year contract to outsource tax collection in the provinces.⁶ The bid winners would pay the government upfront for their bid, and all the public revenues collected from a province would belong to them. This auction-bidding system ensured that the government received money upfront and saved it the

1 Tom Zhuohun Wang is currently a PhD student at Yale University in the department of History and Classics.

2 I am extremely grateful to Alain Bresson and Clifford Ando for providing invaluable feedback and advice on this paper. Their input was indispensable for the shaping of this paper. My gratitude also goes to Samuel Azzopardi, president of the Malta Classics association, who organized a conference in which this paper was first presented. My last thanks go to the editor and the anonymous peer-reviewers.

3 During the late Republic, the *publicani* became major suppliers of the Roman army; see Livy 23.48.5, 45.18.4.

4 The *equites* experienced gradual elevation after the Second Punic War; see Philip (2014) 1–18.

5 For information on and the role of the *societates publicanorum* during the second century BC, see Nicolet (1971) 164–167. The stress on “informal consent” is because Poitiras and Willeboordse suggested that there is no legal source recounting the *publicani*’s activities in supplying the army or constructing public works during the Republican period; Poitiras and Willeboordse (2019) 20.

6 The tax-farming contracts lasted the same number of years that the censor was in office. The two terms overlapped so that the censors could reign in malpractice: Hin (2013) 268, Brunt (1990) 377, and Udoh (2020) 50.

manpower and resources needed to maintain a tax-collector network. For the *publicani*, however, there was no guarantee that the taxes they were about to collect would be worth more than the cost of their bid, although the contracts were most likely to result in the *publicani* making profits.

The exploitation of Asia can be dated back to the time when the province of Asia was initially created in 133 BCE. When Attalus III died and his will reached the Roman Senate, the newly elected tribune, Tiberius Gracchus, immediately saw the wealth of Asia as exploitable. Tiberius soon brought forth a bill exacting the revenue from Asia to fund his land reform (Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 14.1). Although Tiberius was later assassinated, his brother Gaius took up this legacy and eventually implemented a land reform, first in Italy, then eventually in the entire dominion of the Roman Republic (Plut. *C. Gracch.* 5.1, 6.1–2). The Gracchan reform elevated the influence of the *publicani* in the provinces to a new height. The *lex Acilia repetundarum* of 123 BCE allowed the equites to act as jurors in courts.⁷ This allowed the *equites* to judge cases concerning corruption by proconsuls in the provinces.⁸ At the same time, the *equites* who won tax contracts would also be protected from extortion prosecution.⁹ Though this new law received strong opposition from the Senate, it nonetheless was legislated due to the popularity of the Gracchi brothers. Such policy established the knights as a political rival and equals to the senators and in turn elevated the status of the *publicani* as tax-gathering contractors.¹⁰ Besides the *lex Acilia repetundarum*, the *lex Sempronia agraria* and the *lex Sempronia de censoria locatione vectigalium provinciae Asiae* also created immeasurable financial opportunities for the *publicani*.¹¹ The province of Asia became a frontier for land reform since it was undertaking its initial land arrangement for the Roman

7 This is very important for the power of the *publicani* since there were several occasions where the *publicani* were reigned in, see Livy 25.3.13–19

8 One account of the equestrian order dominating over the senate order can be found in Plut. *C. Gracch.* 6.1–2, where Fabius got convicted by Gaius Gracchus due to his extortion of grains in some Spanish cities.

9 One inscription survived from the period, but due to the damage of the stone, the subject of this section remains debated. For the inscription, see *CIL* I.2 583, section 12. For the full translation, see Coleman-Norton and Bourne (1961) 45. Coleman-Norton and Bourne suggested that this is a law made for the misdemeanor of the knights, in which their properties, money, and tribe were protected. This could be a legal reference to the protection of *publicani* by the Acilian law since all of them were from the knight's order.

10 The authority responsible for the extortion court were knights, which due to the political climate of the time, were more likely to convict senators and collude with the *publicani*: see Kallet-Marx (1996) 138.

11 Brunt (1990) 357.

government to calculate and regulate its tax system.¹² The impact of *lex Sempronia* on Asia persisted until the Empire and became the foundational tax law of Asia.¹³

During this period, Rome had many different types of taxes that would be auctioned out to the *publicani* in other provinces. A tribute tax (*tributum*), for example, was typically decided by conducting land surveys and property evaluations. The tithe, on the other hand, as its name suggests, was a tax paid based on one-tenth of income, typically in grain but it could be also in the form of properties and lands. This type of taxation was prevalent in frontier provinces or regions with a strong military presence during the Roman Republic.¹⁴ The amount of money collected as tithe was usually unreasonable, and often incalculable due to its arbitrary nature of “one-tenth” (Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.168). Tribute and tithe commonly served as a basic form of land and property tax in each given province. This is not to say they were the only form of indirect taxation in the provinces; taxes such as custom tax (*portoria*),¹⁵ service tax (*collatio iustralis*), and manumission tax (*vicesima libertatis*) were all included in the contract of the *publicani*.¹⁶ The *publicani* would make tax assessments themselves and collect taxes with their own staff. They would station agents in custom houses and send agents to lands to collect taxes.¹⁷ This gave the *publicani* authority in collecting all the taxes in the province of Asia, making their contract ubiquitous and extensive.

The annexation of the province of Asia provided new opportunities both for the Gracchi brothers and the *publicani*. Following the initial exploitation in Gaius’

12 Broughton (1938) 535, 540.

13 Corbier (2008) 203.

14 Taylor (2017) 147. Taylor gives examples of Roman collecting a great deal of grain taxed in kind, also recorded as “tithes”. And on many occasions where there was heavy military deployment, the Romans also demanded “double tithes” from Sardinia and Sicily. For a detailed comparison of tax money: see Taylor (2017) 177.

15 From an operational level, the *publicani* would hire large numbers of slaves to run the operations within each custom house to collect custom tax: Corbier (2008) 217.

16 McLeister (2016) 22.

17 The *publicani* had a highly organized group of staff responsible for collecting taxes. The *manceps* acted on behalf of the other members and bid on contract, and would also use their personal belongings as collateral guarantee to the completion of the terms. The *praes*, who could sometimes just be the *manceps*, provided sufficient collateral to act as security against valuable contracts. The *socii* were the partners of the *manceps*, who could also be *praes* by giving their belongings as collateral guarantee. *Manceps* and *socii* usually appear on the contract. *Magistri* were responsible for executive duties on behalf of the company in Rome. The *promagistri* had a similar role in the provinces. Custom agents were the lower ranks of the company and engaged in the actual collection of taxes. Besides these core roles in the company, most of the tasks were performed by hired slaves and freedmen: McLeister (2016) 16–17, 27–32, 98, Badian (1972) 69, France (2021) Chapter 8 section I. Shaw suggests that the organization of the *publicani* provides us with a Roman example of company-state model: see Shaw (2022) 118–123. Jones suggested that the *publicani* were also in charge of maintaining registers of letters sent and received in Asia and collected fees accordingly: Jones (2015) 234.

proposal, the province later established a complex and unsustainable tax system where multiple political factions collected taxes simultaneously in the form of tribute, tithe, and military donative without a clear consensus or cooperation. This constant extraction of wealth from Asia reveals the military tension and political turmoil at the time and presented a political conflict between the *publicani* and the governors. This paper analyzes the role of the *publicani* in the Roman exploitation of Asia from 123 BCE until the beginning of Antony's control of the region to draw attention to the unsustainable fiscal system in the province of Asia, as a consequence of both military tensions and the political-economic rivalry between the *publicani* and the governor.

Section 1: Taxation System of Asia

After the Gracchi brothers introduced the *lex Sempronia agraria*, the Republican government began to redistribute and re-evaluate public lands. Broughton argued extensively on the deeds of the *publicani*, that “as a result of the Sempronian law the *publicani* soon tried to bring under their tithing system every possible bit of property, public land, city or other, even salt pans, from which some profit might be squeezed.”¹⁸ Broughton used a variety of evidence showing that Asia was under a tithe system monopolized and dictated by the *publicani*. They could therefore manipulate the tithe system to incorporate an extensive dossier of economic activities.¹⁹ When the Romans initially took over the region, they adopted the Attalid structure of taxation.²⁰ The original Attalid system was composed of direct taxation on agriculture and land, which local magistrates assessed. It was a flexible system that allowed for “negotiation over the annual rates.” Indirect taxation was composed of customs and usage taxes for coastal lagoons, mines, or royal forests. The Attalids did not employ tax farmers directly but “relied on the subject communities to collect royal taxes as they wished”, and as a growing political dominion, “efficiency was gained by leaving the civic fiscal apparatus in place.”²¹ The delegation of power between royal fiscality and civic fiscality probably would have contributed to the economic growth and successes of the region, since as

18 Broughton (1938) 535.

19 A few pieces of evidence utilized by Broughton are provided here, which shows the influence of the *publicani* ostensibly. The *publicani* demanded the inclusion of the fisheries toll of Ephesus into the tithing system. They also demanded sacred land in Ilium be considered taxable as well as the sacred land and salt works of Athena Polias of Priene and the sacred lands in Pergamum: see Broughton (1938) 535, n. 3–5.

20 Crawford argued that Roman took a non-interventionist approach when taking over and initially establishing the province of Asia: Crawford (1985) 160. De Callataÿ also provides a similar assessment with regards to the Roman monetary system: de Callataÿ (2011) 56.

21 Kaye (2012) 3–4 and Kaye (2022) 112.

stated by Cicero the richness and fertility of Asia were superior to all other areas (Cic. *De imp. Cn.Pomp.* 14). Accompanying this tax system was the closed currency system of Asia, which established a unique monetary standard that was meant to keep silver circulation within its economic sphere.²² Asia was both internally and externally well connected in terms of trading activities. Agricultural surplus and a well-established trade network reveal a rich consumer culture.²³ These studies showed that although the Attalid indirect tax system was relatively less centralized compared to the Roman one, it created a very affluent and robust economy through its control over monetary policy and trade.²⁴ The silver currency did not leave the economic sphere, and the government's demand for money was less frequent and intense. But the Attalid system, though relatively sustainable, did not meet the financial expectations of the Romans.

The late Republic period was a period of constant military conflicts. Both Roman politicians and businessmen desired swift and exhaustive extraction of money from frontier provinces and enemy polities.²⁵ Due to this desire, the established tax system authorized the *publicani* to collect public revenue in place of the republican government.²⁶ From the legal perspective of censors and the senate, Asia's tax was officially contracted out to the *publicani*. Yet Roman generals and proconsular governors continued to demand separate tributes for their military expenditures. The tax money was channeled from the people of Asia to two different recipients, the *publicani* and the Roman army. The complexity of this system in Asia is not well recognized in the current scholarship. It is natural to treat the taxation system of Asia holistically rather than an intermixed system with internal conflict. Scholars such as de Callataÿ, Magie, Delrieux, and Ferriès tend to mainly focus their analysis on the quantifiable data, which is the "fixed" tribute tax assigned to cities.²⁷ Magie, in his comprehensive work on Asia Minor, discussed

22 For more details and evidence for Asia being a closed currency system, see Bresson (2018) 67–73, Kleiner and Noe (1977) 120–125. Scholars such as Meadows (2013) 201–205 and Carbone (2020) 235 are still uncertain whether the currency system in Asia is a closed system. Kaye, on the other hand, suggests that regardless of intentionality of the Attalids, the unique weight standards of the cistophoric coinage ensured itself to be a closed system; Kaye (2022) 166. For metrology and metallurgy evidence; see Walker (1976) 26–30.

23 Hanson (2011) 248.

24 Kaye (2022) 122–125

25 This is evidenced by Cicero in Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.12, and *De imp.Cn.Pomp.*14, but also in Cass. Dio 36.53.5, 47.31.3, 49.31.4; App. *B Civ.* 2.102.1; Plut. *Ant.* 24.5.

26 Dig. 39.4.12, quoted by Bresson (2016) 308.

27 De Callataÿ provides an extensive chart of the Roman tribute taxes collected during the late Republic by governors, de Callataÿ (2006) 43–46. For Delrieux and Ferriès' discussion of the taxation of Asia, see Delrieux and Ferriès (2004) 64–66. Delrieux and de Callataÿ also explored the relationship between the *publicani* and the governor in another paper, but it focused more on Caria, and only on the period from Cicero to Pompey.

the role of *publicani* as tax collectors but attributed most of the exploitation to military extortion.²⁸ This argument certainly has its merits since most tribute was collected as military expenditures, yet it does not acknowledge the fact that the governors and the populace recognized these expenditures as a form of up-front annual tax.²⁹

Scholars such as Carbone, Broughton, France, and Mitchell discussed the role of the *publicani* alongside the Roman officials. Carbone suggests that the tribute and tithe were collected simultaneously on a provincial scale, implying that the *publicani* and the governor were acting uniformly.³⁰ Broughton and Mitchell, on the other hand, acknowledged the existence of the two parties, but both treated the topic of taxation holistically, belying the conflicts between the two.³¹ France approached this topic as the differences between magistrates and the *publicani*, but treated their relationships as superior and subordinates.³² These scholars have contributed significantly to the subject with a comprehensive dossier of evidence. Building on top of the current literature, this paper seeks to address the two parties' parallel existence regarding their fiscal role in Asia. Such an approach focuses not only on the taxation and its impact but also on the power struggle between the *publicani* and the governors.

Section 2: Early *Publicani*'s Activities in Asia (123 BCE – 89 BCE)

It is vital to address the lack of evidence on the specific amount of taxes set by the *publicani* in their contracts in Asia. As stressed in Broughton with epigraphical evidence, the *publicani* were always actively looking to expand taxes, making an estimation of the amount even harder to construe. But we do have accounts of these *publicani* lending money to the locals to pay their taxes. This is evidenced by many accounts mentioning that a large portion of the populace of Asia was in debt to the *publicani*, and most of them were unable to pay back their debts.³³ To collect these debts, the *publicani* eventually resorted to the confiscation of properties, lands, and sometimes even people. An account of *publicani* kidnapping people into slavery can be found in Diodorus. When Marius requested men to fight the

28 Magie acknowledges that the *publicani* abused their power in tax-farming but most of the economic exploitation in the province he attributed to the Roman war efforts in the East; see Magie (1950) 166–176, 249–255.

29 The governor demanding for military payment as tribute tax: see Plut. *Ant.* 24.5; App. *B Civ.* 5.4.1.

30 Carbone (2020) 232–233.

31 Mitchell (2009) 25–27, Broughton (1938) 535–561, Badian (1972) 82–100

32 Frances (2021) Chapter 8 Section I.

33 Vell. *Pat.* 2.13.1-3; App. *Mith.* 4.22; Livy *Per.* 70.8; Diod. *Sic.* 36.3; Strabo 14.1.26; also see Broughton (1938) 535–537, footnotes 1–5, 8, 11–14.

Cimbrian Wars, the Senate permitted him to recruit men from Asia Minor. But when the Bithynian king received Marius' envoys, he informed the Romans that most of the populace had been taken away as slaves by the tax collectors and were sold throughout the region. To recruit more men, the Senate was forced to pass a decree forbidding kidnapping freedmen and even sent out praetors to ensure that they all be set free (Diod. Sic. 36.3).³⁴

An account from Strabo, which dates approximately to the early establishment of the province, testifies an event of an embassy in Rome pleading a case against the tax-gatherers about the taxes (τέλη) they wanted to levy:

μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκβολὴν τοῦ Καῦστρου λίμνη ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ πελάγους ἀναγεομένη καλεῖται δὲ Σελινουσία καὶ ἐφεξῆς ἄλλη σύρρους αὐτῇ μεγάλας ἔχουσαι προσόδους, ἃς οἱ βασιλεῖς μὲν ἱερὰς οὐσας ἀφείλοντο τὴν θεόν, Ῥωμαῖοι δ' ἀπέδσαν: πάλιν δ' οἱ δημοσιῶναι βιασάμενοι περιέστησαν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς τὰ τέλη, πρεσβεύσας δὲ ὁ Ἄρτεμίδωρος, ὡς φησι, τὰς τε λίμνας ἀπέλαβε τῇ θεῷ καὶ τὴν Ἡρακλεῶτιν ἀφισταμένην ἐξενίκησε κριθεῖς ἐν Ῥώμῃ: ἀντὶ δὲ τούτων εἰκόνα χρυσοῦν ἀνέστησεν ἡ πόλις ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ. (Strabo 14.1.26).³⁵

34 Diod.Sic. 36.3. Broughton has suggested that the reasons why these people were kidnapped and sold into slavery was because they were all in debts to the *publicani* and unable to pay back. The *publicani*, as a measure of punishment and money collection, forced these people into slavery and distributed them throughout the region. This passage is also covered by Vitucci (1953) 101, Badian (1968) 73, Kallet-Marx (1996) 140, and Fernoux (2004) 115. Quoted by Fernoux, Vitucci and Badian have argued that this episode in Bithynia was a testimony of the *publicani* of Asia, who organized raids from Mysia and Phrygia kidnapping people into slavery in the name of debt collecting. Kallet-Marx stressed on the unprecedentedness of this event but did not dispute the authenticity of this account. Fernoux, on the other hand, argued that this claim is indemonstrable considering that kingdom of Bithynia is a client kingdom rather than a province. The *publicani's* action would have posed a threat to the sovereignty of the kingdom of Bithynia, and Nicomedes III Euergetes would have had no choice but to intervene. Fernoux suggested that this story was an excuse told by the king to refuse aiding the Romans. But even if this event was construed by Nicomedes III Euergetes to reject sending Marius aid, the Senate, nonetheless, officially recognized this excuse and passed a decree.

35 All the translations provided are my own unless otherwise specified. Tr: "After the river-mouth of the Kaystros, there is a lake running from the sea called Selinusia and after is another lake which confluent to it, bringing the state great amount of revenue, of these which are sacred, kings had forcefully taken them away from the goddess, and the Romans have given them back. But again, the tax-farmers seized the money and turned it to their own pocket. Artemidorus was sent as an ambassador, who says he took back the lake for the goddess and also secured a favorable decision in Rome for Heracleotis, which was undergoing a revolt. In return for his deeds, the city erected a golden statue of him in the temple."

The *publicani*, in this narrative, seized the tribute for a lake goddess and some lands belonging to the territory of Heracleia (the Ἡρακλεώτις).³⁶ The exact dating of this event is uncertain but based on the description of Ῥωμαῖοι δ' ἀπέδοσαν, and the act of *publicani* seizing money, it helps date this event to the early time of the Roman administration of Asia. The *publicani*, despite having no military *imperium*, were capable of forcefully taking the land and properties of the locals. The people had no choice but to send an embassy to Rome to plead for the return of their money and properties. Artemidorus was sent by the city as πρεσβευτής, and since πρεσβεύω usually refers to the role of an ambassador, we can infer that the locals did not approach this event as a court case for corruption and extortion, but rather as a case of diplomatic protection. Naturally, such a case would be examined by the Senate. Considering the background of Roman social conflict between the Senate and the knights, it would seem logical for the locals to appeal to the Senate rather than bring it up in court.³⁷ As a result, the appeal was approved, and the *publicani* were ordered to give back the properties and land they took. In celebration of such an achievement against the *publicani*, the city erected a golden statue in their temple honoring Artemidorus (the ambassador). This is also one of the earliest accounts suggesting a conflict between the *publicani* and the senators in Asia.

The conflict reached its first height when a renowned statesman was punished for carrying out measures against the *publicani*. This event is referred to by Livy, Cassius Dio, and Velleius Paterculus.³⁸ The event dates to 93/2 BCE, when Quintus Mucius Scaevola was the governor of Asia. Scaevola and his staff member Publius Rutilius Rutilius tried to govern the province with moderation. This inevitably thwarted the malpractices of the *publicani*.³⁹ The *publicani* called in their equestrian allies in Rome and filed a charge against Rutilius for corruption. Despite the irony of such an accusation, Rutilius was swiftly condemned by the equestrian jurors and sentenced to exile. The conviction of Rutilius was regarded by Livy, Cassius Dio, and Velleius Paterculus as shameful and unjust. Livy states that Rutilius was *vir summae innocentiae*, yet because of the *invisus equestri ordini penes quem iudicia erant*, he was *repetundarum damnatus* (Livy. *Per.* 70.8). Rutilius was then

36 It is very common for the *publicani* to take control of the taxes and revenue of lake and fresh water source, Vitruvius testifies to this when stating that fresh waters sources are often controlled by contractors: Vitr. 8.6.2. *Publicani* could also collect fees from people who wanted to access water, see: Bannon (2017) 81.

37 Velleius Paterculus mentions that the corruption court at the time was controlled by the knights and was protecting other fellow knights. For this reason, to bring up an extortion charge to the corruption court would be likely to have been in vain: Vell. Pat. 2.13.1–2

38 Cass. Dio. fg.97; Livy. *Per.* 70.8; Vell. Pat. 2.13.1–3

39 Cassius Dio states that Rutilius ended many of the *publicani*'s irregular activities in connection to collecting taxes and showed justice and fairness to the local populace: Cass. Dio. fg.97

stripped of his property and exiled from Rome. He later spent his life in Smyrna and there he was visited by Cicero in 78 BCE.⁴⁰ The Senate and Scaevola, while disagreeing with the jurors, failed to protect Rutilius. The misfortune of Rutilius showed that the connections of the *publicani* in Asia extended far beyond the province, and their political influence could remove a provincial statesman who was closely related to the governor.

In Cicero's speech against Verres, we learn that the *publicani* could make a detrimental impact on the cities' legal privileges as well. This event took place in 95 BC when the Roman quaestor Scaurus failed to enter the temple of Artemis in Ephesus and forcefully recover a slave running from the *publicani* who was brought under sanction. The temple of Artemis had the legal privilege of asylum, thus the Ephesians barred the Romans from entrance (Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.85). The consuls summoned Pericles, the alleged offender who rejected Scaurus, to Rome for punishment. Scholars such as Kallet-Marx and Ferrary associate Scaurus' action and the consuls' summon to the influence of the *publicani* for the purpose of retrieving their runaway slaves.⁴¹ It was speculated by Ferrary that the *publicani's* abuse of power probably trampled many cities' privileges, causing them to become rebellious when Mithridates invaded Asia. The *publicani's* abusive money-gathering was probably hindered during the war, but they re-asserted their positions after the Sullan settlement. Alongside Sulla, the *publicani* formulated new ways to make a profit for themselves and the army. The province of Asia, as a result, plummeted into a long period of economic devastation.

Section 3: The Sullan Settlement Era (89-84 BCE)

The abuse of power and the exploitation of the *publicani* may have also contributed to the infamous Asiatic Vespers in 88 BCE.⁴² The populace of Asia had long been suffering from the extreme taxation of the *publicani*, making Mithridates VI

40 Cicero, *Brutus*. Orator. Index LCL 342: 524–525. Loeb.

41 Kallet-Marx (1996) 130, and Ferrary (1991) 573. Ferrary also suggested that because the *publicani* were intruding on different cities' privileges, it made the cities such as Ephesus believe that their privileges were no longer respected by the Roman authority, thus pushing them into siding with Mithridates.

42 Many of the Italians killed during the Asiatic Vesper were Italian landowners, and it is speculated that much inscriptional evidence of these Italians' activities was destroyed as part of the revolt: Eberle and Le Quéré (2017) 36. Kirbihler, also quoted by Eberle and Le Quéré, provides a map of attested Roman activities in Asia before 91 BC: see Kirbihler (2007) 22–3. Kirbihler's map of Roman activities could also attest the role of *publicani* as Roman tax-collectors. Kallet-Marx suggests that this event was the result of hatred pent up over one generation of exploitation by the governors and *publicani* on the local communities. The contemporary Roman accounts, however, recognized these crimes as due more to the fear of Mithridates than to the hatred against the Romans: Kallet-Marx (1996) 155.

Eupator a much more welcome ruler than the Romans. Following Mithridates VI's initial invasion, a large-scale genocide was organized against the Romans and Italians residing in Asia. Appian explains that Mithridates made many offers to the people of Asia. He allowed slaves to be set free from Roman masters and debts owed to the *publicani* to be mitigated:

ἐπεκήρυξε δὲ καὶ ζημίαν τοῖς καταθάπτουσιν αὐτοὺς ἢ ἐπικρύπτουσι, καὶ μήνυτρα τοῖς ἐλέγχουσιν ἢ τοὺς κρυπτομένους ἀναιροῦσι, θεράπουσι μὲν ἐπὶ δεσπότηας ἐλευθερίαν, χρήσταις δ' ἐπὶ δανειστάς ἡμισυ τοῦ χρέους. τάδε μὲν δὴ δι' ἀπορρήτων ὁ Μιθριδάτης ἐπέστελλεν ἅπασιν ὁμοῦ, καὶ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐπελθούσης συμφορῶν ἰδέαι ποικίλαι κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν ἦσαν. (App. *Mith.* 4.22).⁴³

The offer of χρήσταις δ' ἐπὶ δανειστάς ἡμισυ τοῦ χρέους probably would have been very appealing to the people of Asia. As we discussed in previous sections, the *publicani* were the biggest group of δανεισταί during this period in Asia, and the offer of killing tax-gatherers was likely to be directly targeted against them (App. *Mith.* 4.22). What comes next is a list of Asian groups that partook in the killing. The Ephesians hunted down the Romans, killing those who had taken refuge in the temple of Artemis (App. *Mith.* 4.23). The Pergamenians, Adramyttians, Caunians, Trallians, and people of many other cities all participated in this massive killing, the goal being to drive all the Romans and Italians out of Asia (App. *Mith.* 4.23). According to Plutarch, at least 150,000 Romans were massacred in Asia during the four years of the Mithridatic Wars (Plut. *Sull.* 24.4). This marked the first major backlash of the locals against the *publicani*.

The taxation of Asia was probably hindered since even the *publicani* could become the victims of the massacre. This does not mean that the Romans levied no taxes from Asia in the period 88–84 BCE. We have an account of revenue collection during this period that dates to 86/85 BCE, when Roman senator Gaius Flavius Fimbria was fighting against Mithridates in the heartland of Asia. According to Appian, when Fimbria campaigned in Asia, he devastated, pillaged, and sacked cities and farms to pay for his army. He was fighting against Sulla and Mithridates at the same time, making his need for money more urgent (App. *Mith.* 8.53–54). We do not know the exact amount of money collected by Fimbria, but we know that he was highly disliked by the people of Asia. Sulla's soldiers once complained about Fimbria's extortion in the province, pleading to Sulla that such a large sum of money should not go unpunished (App. *Mith.* 4.22). Numismatic

43 Tr: "He proclaimed fines to those who bury the deceased or help concealing the living, and a price to those who inform or kill the ones in hiding. To slaves, he grants them freedom from their master. To debtors, he releases them from one half of the debts owed to tax-farmers. Mithridates sent this secret order to all cities, and when the day came, all kinds of misfortunes fell upon Asia."

evidence suggests that Fimbria had military mints while his army was marching over Asia. Considering that extortion was the only source of money for Fimbria at the time, it is very likely that his demands from the populace were not only in kind but also in silver.⁴⁴

After Mithridates was defeated in 84 BCE, the province of Asia was re-established under the military control of Sulla. It was during this period that Asia experienced an unprecedented level of exploitation, not only in taxation, but also in billeting, war reparations, and usurious loans. Sulla performed several massacres of both free men and slaves who revolted against the Romans, demolished the town walls of cities that sided with Mithridates, and sold their inhabitants into slavery to pay for the war. Amongst these cities were Pergamon, Tralles, and most famously Ephesus (App. *Mith.* 9.62). Upon arriving in Ephesus, Sulla, demanded new tribute taxes to be paid directly to him and his army: ... μόνους ὑμῶν ἐπιγράψω πέντε ἐτῶν φόρους ἔσενεγκεῖν αὐτίκα, καὶ τὴν τοῦ πολέμου δαπάνην, ὅση τε γέγονέ μοι καὶ ἔσται καθισταμένω τὰ ὑπόλοιπα.⁴⁵

The money Sulla demanded was five years of taxes to be paid in one installment, along with all the war costs. He also apportioned these taxes to each city and fixed the term of payment. Such settlements revealed some unique aspects of taxation in Asia during this time. This is the first account of a governor in Asia collecting taxes directly from the populace in place of the *publicani*. Before the time of Sulla, the responsibility of taxation in Asia lay solely in the hands of the *publicani*. Consequently, the system was interrupted by the “Asian Vespers”. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Sulla decided to assert taxes by himself. Unlike the *publicani* who were there to stay, Sulla’s requirement for money was far more urgent. This probably motivated him to demand five years of tax payable in one installment. The nature of this five-year tax was likely to be a tribute tax.⁴⁶ The original tax system used by the *publicani* included a variety of industries and economic activities, making the tax collecting process more cumbersome than fixed tribute. As to the specific amount of this five-year taxation, we have a specific number provided by Plutarch: 20,000 talents.⁴⁷

44 Witchonke and Amandry (2005) 87–92.

45 Tr: “... I only demand you all to pay five years of tribute immediately, and the cost of war, as much as the expense expended by me, and however much the remaining amount required to re-establish the province.”

46 Broughton (1938) 563, but see also Delrieux & Ferriès (2004) 64–66, for a similar demand made by Brutus, Cassius, and Antony. These taxes were recorded to be of similar annual proportions to that of Sulla’s demand and also were explicitly stated by ancient authors as tribute tax.

47 Plut. *Sull.* 25.2: Σύλλας δὲ κοινῇ μὲν ἐζημίωσε τὴν Ἀσίαν δισμυριοῖς ταλάντοις.

Acknowledging that this number probably also included war reparations, the annual tribute tax during the period was probably around 3,000 talents.⁴⁸ On top of this taxation, Sulla also billeted his army throughout the rebellious cities of Asia. All hosts had to give their guest four tetradrachms each day, furnish him, and accept as many friends as he wished to invite for supper. Military tribunes would receive 50 drachmas a day and two suits of clothing (Plut. *Sull.* 25.2). Sulla's army stayed in the province for six months, and this billeting of soldiers undoubtedly turned into a massive financial burden to the local populace.⁴⁹ In order to pay for the taxes and the billeting, the people of Asia were forced to borrow money from money lenders:

τοσάδε εἰπὼν ἐπιδηῖρει τοῖς πρέσβεσι τὴν ζημίαν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ χρήματα ἔπεμπεν. αἱ δὲ πόλεις ἀποροῦσαι τε καὶ δανειζόμεναι μεγάλων τόκων, αἱ μὲν τὰ θέατρα τοῖς δανειζουσιν, αἱ δὲ τὰ γυμνάσια ἢ τεῖχος ἢ λιμένας ἢ εἴ τι δημόσιον ἄλλο, σὺν ὕβρει στρατιωτῶν ἐπειγόντων, ὑπετίθεντο. τὰ μὲν δὴ χρήματα ὧδε τῷ Σύλλᾳ συνεκομίζετο, καὶ κακῶν ἄδην εἶχεν ἡ Ἀσία. (App. *Mith.* 9.63).⁵⁰

Such large moneylending allowed the *publicani* to re-assert themselves back into profit (Plut. *Luc.* 4). Sulla left the province in 84 BC, but the *publicani* would continue to collect the loan interests until the time of Lucullus.

Section 4: Lucullus's Opposition Against the *Publicani* (84 – 70 BC)

When Sulla returned to Rome, he left Lucullus to oversee Asia. According to Plutarch, Lucullus was ordered by Sulla to collect the money and re-coin it (Plut. *Luc.* 4).⁵¹ This re-coining of money from *cistophori* into *denarii* resulted in a

48 This estimation was calculated based on parallel comparisons to other Roman taxations and extortions during the late Republic. For the tribute of Asia were 2,400 talents under the era of Caesar, and 1,600 talents during Brutus and Cassius: Plut. *Caes.* 48 and Plut. *Ant.* 24.

49 Broughton did a calculation of this amount using the soldier number provided by Appian. Sulla, in the aftermath of the Mithridatic Wars, had an army of 40,000 men, with 8 legions of officers. The army stayed in the province for 6 months. The calculation amounts to an astonishing amount of 120,000,000 drachmae: Broughton (1938) 517.

50 Tr: "After he had spoken this much, he [Sulla] assigned the new demands of tribute to the ambassadors and sent them over to collect money. The cities, without the means to pay due to poverty, borrowed great amounts of money at usury. To acquire this usury, they mortgaged their theaters, their gymnasiums, their city wall, their harbor, and every property belonging to the people. All of which took place while they were being oppressed by the soldiers with insolence. Thus, the money collected was brought to Sulla, and Asia was filled with misfortune."

51 This process of re-coining money was likely a process of turning silver into Roman *denarii* rather than minting *cistophori* for local circulations. For there were more incentives for the Romans to pay

massive net loss of silver in the region, evidenced by the metallurgical studies conducted by David Walker.⁵² This re-coining of money and silver debasement resulted in a distrust of local currency, with both the Romans and the people of Asia showing discontent in using them.⁵³ The consequence of this debasement continued to impact the monetary policies until the arrival of Mark Antony, but this merits its own separate study. Despite Lucullus' act of extorting money in the name of Sulla, he was very popular amongst the locals. The people of Asia praised him for being honest and just, and he was mild in carrying out a task so oppressive and disagreeable (Plut. *Luc.* 4). Lucullus cracked down on the *publicani*, forbidding them to extort people's taxes and even going as far as trying to stop them from their practices. Lucullus' policy quelled the uprisings in many cities against the *publicani*, but many *publicani* continued their practices and Lucullus's measure was not fully carried out (Plut. *Luc.* 7.5–6). Lucullus later left the province in 80 BCE, but he returned to Asia again serving as governor in the period 73–69 BCE.

After Sulla and Lucullus left Asia, the *publicani* restored the old system and were placed in charge of taxation again. Two accounts from Cicero testify the presence of *publicani* as tax-collector of Asia during 80–70 BCE. The first testimony of the *publicani* was written in 43 BCE in his letter to his brother Quintus. Although the letter itself dates forty years after the period in question, its content pertained to the aftermath of Sulla's taxation (Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.33). In the letter, Cicero expressed his empathy for the enormous tax the Greeks of Asia were obligated to pay, but he also defended the Romans for being the protectors of the Greeks. Thus, he speaks in support of the *publicani*, believing that the taxes of Sulla were fair (*aequaliter*). He then states that the Greeks should be grateful that the *publicani* lend them money to pay for the taxation.

Cicero's speech against Verres also provides testimony for the restoration of the *publicani*'s tax authority during the 70s BCE (Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.12). This speech was written in the year 70 BCE, which serves as contemporary evidence for the tax system of Asia. Cicero states that Asia's tax system of Asia is administered "by the censor's renting contract, as a result of the Asian Sempornian law". When Lucullus

their troops in *denarii* rather than *cistophori*. This has to do with the *cistophori*'s unique monetary standards as well as its overvaluation in tariff. Also, for a Roman to be able to turn *cistophori* into *denarii*, there was also the need to pay the moneyer's *collybus* (also known as *agio*), which would cost an around 5–7% conversion fee. For information on the *cistophori*'s monetary policy, see Kleiner & Noe (1977) 17. For information on the overvaluation, see Walker (1976) 35. For information regarding the *collybus* and *agio* on non-Roman currency, see Bresson (2017) 294–298. The 5–7% here is an approximate estimation based on the epigraphic evidence provided by Bresson.

52 During the governance of Lucullus, *cistophoric* coinage in Asia suffered a huge silver debasement. The original silver content of *cistophori* is around 98–95%, but it decreased to around 79.75% under Lucullus: Walker (1976) 26–34.

53 For people rejecting the *cistophori*, see Cicero, *Att.* 42 (A II, 16), 32 (A II, 6).

returned to Asia as governor in 73 BCE, he realized that the entire province was extremely indebted to the *publicani*. The people of Asia at this time were still paying the loans borrowed during the Sullan settlement. The initial 20,000-talent tax in 84 BCE had now been increased to 120,000 talents in 70 BCE. As Broughton suggested, such a large amount of debt makes it evident that Servilius Isauricus, the former governor, had permitted the *publicani* to collect more tax and raise more interest rates.⁵⁴ Undoubtedly, such a large sum of debt put Asia in a very desperate financial predicament. The designation of Lucullus as governor, on the other hand, was unwelcome to the *publicani*, for Lucullus was very popular when he oversaw Asia during 84–80 BCE. Plutarch provided us with a very grim glimpse of the economic situation in Asia under the *publicani* (Plut. *Luc.* 20.1–2). According to Plutarch, the people of Asia had suffered ἄρρητοι καὶ ἄπιστοι δυστυχίαι from the deeds of τῶν τελωνῶν and τῶν δανειστῶν. They were plundered and robbed by the *publicani* into extreme poverty. Households were selling their sons and daughters; cities were robbed of their sacred offerings and statues. When there was nothing left to give to the tax-gatherers, men sold themselves as slaves to the creditors to pay their debts.⁵⁵ Such was the economic reality Lucullus faced when he arrived in Asia.

Potentially developing a more sustainable method of governing Asia, Lucullus decided to implement a series of measures to bring law and order back to the province. The first measure addressed the monetary policy. To increase currency circulation, he further debased the *cistophori* coinage and increased its production. Mints such as Tralles, Laodiceia, Apameia experienced a drastic decrease in production during this period as well, possibly responding to over thirty years of silver extortion from the province.⁵⁶ Ephesus, where Lucullus resided as governor, produced the most debased *cistophori*: its silver content ranges somewhere between 75–80%.⁵⁷ Lucullus also implemented measures on interest rates to directly restrain the *publicani* from extorting more money. From our previous discussion, we learned that by the year 70 BCE, the people of Asia have owed the *publicani* 120,000 talents of silver. Most of the 120,000 talents owed to the *publicani* were not through tax collections since it is unlikely that the tithe could be 10,000 talents per year, but rather through the interest rate.⁵⁸ Assuming that the *publicani* loaned out 20,000 talents of silver to the people in order for them to pay

54 Broughton (1938) 561, n. 199. The Latin text quoted was Cic. *Att.* VI, 1, 16: *usuras eorum quas pactionibus ascripserant servavit etiam Servilius*

55 The same passage is also analyzed by Delrieux and de Callataÿ (2010) 511.

56 See coin hoard IGCH 1464, also Carbone (2020) 236.

57 Walker (1976) 26

58 Plutarch directly stated that the origin of all these debts started with Sulla when he collected 5 years of tribute tax in one single installment.

Sulla's tax and using 14 years as the loan term, we can calculate that the interest rate was set around 43%, or around 3.6% per month. This calculation makes the total 168 monthly payments amount to 120,000 and the total interests owed would be around 100,000 talents. The monthly payment the *publicani* supposedly collected from the province was an astonishing amount of 720 talents. Ostensibly, no province at the time could afford such high debts, thus explaining the tragedy of giving away everything and even selling families into slavery.⁵⁹

Lucullus ordered that the monthly rate of interest be capped at 1% and no one was allowed to raise this rate. He also ordered that all interests that exceeded the principal be forfeited and the *publicani* needed to cut off these demands. He ordained that the *publicani* should receive no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the debtor's income, thus mitigating the damage of the ongoing extortion (Plut. *Luc.* 20.3–4). The result of these measures was fruitful, the province was able to pay off all the loans in four years under Lucullus' conditions. In the end, 40,000 talents were paid back to the *publicani* (Plut. *Luc.* 20.4). Lucullus' popularity amongst the populace became unparalleled, but the *publicani* were incensed by his transgression. For even though Lucullus was the governor of Asia, the authority of taxation still lied in the hands of the *publicani*.

In response to Lucullus' policies, the *publicani* called in their political allies in Rome. They charged Lucullus with corruption and bribed several tribunes to proceed with further accusations against him. The direct consequence of these charges remained uncertain because Lucullus was in Asia preparing for war and unable to attend the court in Rome. But his political career and war effort seem to have been impacted negatively. Quintus, a well-renowned praetor, spoke publicly against Lucullus and voted to send another senator to replace Lucullus in command of Asia. The vote also included releasing Lucullus' soldiers from the army (Plut. *Luc.* 33.5). Lucullus also encountered much opposition from others in Rome. Though there is no direct evidence for the *publicani* instigating these oppositions, the accusation of the knights likely contributed to these political hostilities.⁶⁰ Although this power struggle eventually ended with Lucullus leaving Asia, some of his measures on taxation and loans proceeded into the successive governorship; Quintus Minucius Thermus consolidated Lucullus' reform into an edict during 50/51 BC. The edict states that debts and interest rates must be fixed at 12% per year, contracts must be subject to Greek law or the governor, and the *publicani* could not violate the Greeks according to these laws.⁶¹

59 Broughton calculated the interests' rate for Brutus' tribute in 43/42 BCE: around 48% for the ten years of tribute tax Brutus and Cassius demanded, about 4% per month: Broughton (1938) 561.

60 For the enmity Lucullus faced in Rome after the charge of the *publicani*, see Tröster (2008) 392.

61 Delrieux and de Callatay (2010) 514, quoting Cic. *Att.* 6.1.15.

Section 5: *Publicani* during the Era of Pompey and Cicero (70-52 BCE)

The province of Asia was further affected by wars and extortions during the 60s and 50s BCE. Asia during this period was devastated by the Third Mithridatic War and the military extortion of Pompey. We learned from Cicero in 66 BCE that Asia was so severely impacted by military activities, piracy, and raids, that the province generated no revenue at all (Cic. *De imp.Cn.Pomp.* 6.15). The people of Asia, as Cicero stated, were constantly in fear of raids. Whenever Mithridates' troops were reported to be near, even if there were no actual intrusion of the army, the people would flee from their homes and fields. Lands were left behind, cultivations were halted, and the trade routes through the sea were abandoned (*tamen pecua relinquuntur, agri cultura deseritur, mercatorum navigatio conquiescit*). The results were apparent, for *ita neque ex portu neque ex decumis neque ex scriptura vectigal conservari potest*. They were unable to collect any taxes from customs, tithe, and agricultural lands. This level of poverty in Asia cannot be treated in a vacuum. Asia was a very affluent and wealthy province when Attalus III died. However, after almost half a century of extortion through taxation and usurious loans, the wealth was turned upside down. The people could easily abandon their homes and fields now since they no longer had properties to protect. The fiscal system, on the other hand, could be easily rendered obsolete by a single *rumor periculi*.

Cicero, as a prominent Roman lawyer and later the governor of Cilicia, provides us with accounts pertaining to the *publicani* of Asia that date to the 60s and 50s BCE. In the year 61 BCE, the Senate and the censor received a very peculiar request from the *publicani* (Cic. *Att.* 1.17.9). The case was brought up by the *publicani* of Asia for they had requested to the Senate and the censor that their contract should be annulled for the year 61/60 BCE. This is the first record of *publicani* trying to annul their contract. The reason for the *publicani's* appeal was that they believed they had paid way too much for the bid of the contract. Asia was deemed no longer lucrative. Thus, they wanted their contract to be annulled. The case was supported and brought up by Crassus, the famous politician in the first triumvirate.

Cicero, on the other hand, was extremely insulted by this case. He saw it as an invidious matter, a shameful petition, and an audacious confession (Cic. *Att.* 1.17.9).⁶² However, Cicero's political concern eventually outweighed his personal attitude. The knights and the *publicani* had become so integrated within the governance of the Republic that if they got no concession from the Senate, they would be alienated from the government. This consequence, according to Cicero, would be of the greatest danger to the Romans (Cic. *Att.* 1.17.9).⁶³ Cicero eventually

⁶² *invidiosa res, turpis postulatio et confessio temeritatis.*

⁶³ *summum erat periculum*

concluded with Crassus, bearing the harmony and stability of the Republic in mind. Observably, the *publicani* were a group that they needed to appease. But their subject, the province of Asia, had been devastated to the point that the censor's bidding prices were no longer fair, keeping in mind that when the system was first introduced, the bidding price was significantly lower than the net gain of the *publicani*. Similar accounts show up again in Cicero's speech given between 61–59 BC.⁶⁴ This is another account that testifies that Asia was under constant raids from the enemies and that it could no longer pay any taxes.⁶⁵ Because of *hostili incursione vexati*, the *publicani* lost their money in the bidding. To mitigate losses, they filed a request to the Senate for a remission of a great amount of money (*remissionis tantum fieret de summa pecuniae*).⁶⁶ The Senate, seeking to appease the *publicani*, agreed to this request.

The next account took place in 51 BCE, after Pompey's re-settlement of Asia, when Cicero traveled to Asia in 52 BCE when he was appointed to the governorship of Cilicia. At Ephesus, the local people of Asia requested an audience (Cic. *Att.* 5.13.1). The Ephesians thought that Cicero was the governor in Ephesus (*Ephesio praetori*). The request surprised Cicero, and he believed that his many years of oratory skills were now put to test. The Greeks pleaded with Cicero to settle their plea against the *publicani* (*decumani*). Cicero decided to honor this request, thus writing to Atticus saying that he would try his best to give satisfaction to everyone. Later, in the same year when Cicero was in Tralles, we learn that the case was successfully settled (Cicero makes a direct reference to *publicani's* contract: Cic. *Att.* 5.14.1).⁶⁷ No more information is provided by Cicero on this event other than this brief mention. Broughton argued that this shows that the *publicani* were under the supervision of the governor during this period, since Cicero was able to convince them to restrain their extortion. This episode provides us with a glimpse of the power dynamics between the *publicani* and the governor. As Delrieux suggests, the tax collection was not within the control of the Roman magistrates, and the people had no legal channels to file their discontent. The governors, due to the political influence of the *publicani*, were forced to give way, producing an intense fiscal pressure on the populace.⁶⁸

64 Cic. *Planc*, accounted by Bobbio Scholiast in his writing of Cicero's *Pro Plancio*. 31

65 It is unclear from the account of Bobbio Scholiast who the enemies mentioned here are, some possible hypothesis can be bandits or unnamed rebellious insurgents.

66 Kay argues that this is an exercise in risk mitigation by the state, since the tax auction system transferred the risk of taxation to the *publicani*, thus the state would be purporting possible losses when the bidding price was too high; Kay (2014) 82.

67 *dein confectae pactiones publicanorum*

68 Delrieux (2010) 509.

Section 6: Caesar and Antony

The relationship between the *publicani* and the governor was less hostile in the 60s and 50s BCE. However, the *publicani*'s unscrupulous authority and interest-driven attitude remained a big concern to the Senate and to the people. Cicero expressed such sentiments in his letters. When giving advice to his brother Quintus, Cicero states that the *publicani* were the biggest obstacle in provincial governance, but no senators would risk offending them. Offending the *publicani*, according to Cicero, would be to estrange the knight's order from the republic and the people. But if the *publicani* remained unchecked, the senate was not living up to its duty of looking after the people's interests, even their survival (Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.32). The *publicani* problem had long plagued Asia. Contrary to his verdict and notwithstanding his disdain of them, Cicero urged his brother to satisfy the *publicani* (*publicanis satis facias*), but also try to prevent them from ruining the province. He praised his brother stating that "such a task seems to require virtues of a divinity, yet such task is yours (Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.32)."⁶⁹

The system soon underwent a drastic change with the fiscal reform of Caesar and the monetary reform of Mark Antony. Caesar's reform was foreshadowed at the beginning of his consulship. In 59 BCE, he reprimanded the *publicani*'s request for annulment, compromising to only one third of their obligation, and openly admonished them for bidding too recklessly (Suet. *Caes.* 20.3). Caesar implemented many reforms in the early to mid-40s BCE. One of the most important changes was to shift from tax-farming back to direct tax collection (Cass. Dio 42.6.3).⁷⁰ In 48 BCE, Caesar declared an end to the tax collection of *publicani* and asked the locals to pay direct tax to Caesar's officials, who would transport the money directly to Rome.⁷¹ It is unclear whether similar practices were implemented in other provinces, but this was certainly the method adopted later by Brutus, Antony, and Augustus.⁷² By removing the *publicani*, Caesar was also able to reduce the total tax collected in Asia by one-third (Plut. *Caes.* 48.1).⁷³ According to de Callataÿ and Delrieux, the act

69 *et socios perire non sinas divinae cuiusdam virtutis esse videtur, id est tuae.*

70 Wallace recounted this episode in detail with discussion of Caesar's action on returning the salt-pans back to the locals and also punishing the *publicani* for their transgression: Wallace (2014) 50. De Ligt also traces the establishment of direct taxation system in Asia back to Caesar: De Ligt (2002a) 56, and De Ligt (2002b) 78.

71 Plut. *Caes.* 48.1, Cass. Dio 42.6.3, Cic. *Fam.* 15.15.2, App. *B Civ.* 2.13.92, also quoted by Delrieux (2010) 501.

72 For Brutus and Cassius, see n. 94. For Antony, see App. *B Civ.* 5.1-6.1. Plut. *Ant.* 24.5.

73 Whether this reduction is genuine is still under debate. Badian suggested that this was another record of Julian propaganda. Badian 1972:116. But it was argued by McLeister that this can be a genuine amount since the *publicani* probably made more than one-third of the profit: see McLeister 2016: 98–99.

of marginalizing the *publicani* was a sign of Roman provincial authorities adopting moderation over abuse.⁷⁴ But such moderation was short-lived as well. Following Caesar, Brutus and Cassius also took the approach of direct taxation, and although they demanded taxes directly from the people of Asia, their demands were more extreme if not on par to those of the *publicani*.⁷⁵ Antony, similarly, took the same approach, for he apologized to Hybreas at Ephesus when his soldiers recklessly collected more taxes than previously agreed (Plut. *Ant.* 24.5).⁷⁶

Antony's more centralized monetary policy may have also contributed to the removal of the *societates publicanorum*. After arriving in Asia in 42 BCE, Antony implemented a series of monetary changes. He collected nine years of taxes upfront, roughly amounting to 14,400 talents in 41 BCE (App. *B Civ.* 5.1–6.1). He later reorganized the mints in Asia, halting all of them except for Ephesus.⁷⁷ He increased the silver content of the cistophori while maintaining the coin's monetary standards, all for the purpose of revitalizing the silver circulation within the province and preventing a net loss of silver.⁷⁸ This goes against the purpose of the *publicani*, which was to extract money from the province, thus further cementing Caesar's reform in marginalizing the *publicani*. The *publicani*, however, were not completely removed from the government, but they became subordinates to magistrates, who were now appointed directly by the government and levied taxes directly.⁷⁹ During the Imperial period, the *publicani* were occasionally re-introduced back to Asia as tax contractors (most notably in 42, 47 and 62 CE), but they were then commissioned directly under the senate and the taxpayers had direct access to the tax law (*Monumentum Ephesenum*) keeping malpractices at bay.⁸⁰ Epigraphic evidence in Ephesus shows that *publicani*'s activities in Asia persisted into the Imperial period, but by then they were from the locals of Asia rather than of the knights.⁸¹

74 Delrieux (2010) 526.

75 App. *B Civ.* 4.60.1, 4.62.1, 4.81.1. Plut. *Brut.* 32.2–4. In these episodes, Cassius and Brutus demanded 10 years of tribute tax paid in one installment.

76 Antony demanded 9 years of taxes paid in two installments.

77 RPC I 2201, 2202.

78 Walker (1976) 29.

79 One example of this can be found in Suetonius, where Vespasian's father was a tax collector in Asia and received accolades for his honest tax-collecting practices. Suet. *Vesp.* 1.2

80 Corbier (2008) 203, 215. Augustus later would assign the duty of raising taxes to Greek cities, and directly collect taxes from each city: Dmitriev (2005) 201. The Antonine emperors also employed the *publicani* for contracting gold mines: see Saller (2022) 93.

81 For the funerary inscription of Ias at Ephesus showing the *publicani* in charge of levying taxes in Ephesus, see Bresson (2016) 315. It is uncertain whether this is a general tax or custom tax. The *publicanus* mentioned in this inscription is named "T. Flavius Asklepas", which suggests it was a local who received citizenship under the Flavian period. The role of the *publicani* here, as discussed by

Conclusion: The *Publicani* in Republican Asia

Beginning from 123 BCE, Asia was taxed by *publicani* and its governors for nearly 70 years. The province's economy, as has been shown, was ruined. The *publicani*, while making a fortune at the beginning, were no longer profiting as much as they would have liked in the end. Their conflict with the senators resulted in Caesar construing more efficient and cost-effective methods of taxation. During this process, we can observe the gradual decrease of the influence of the *publicani* accompanied with the emergence of military leaders. Scaevola and his staff would treat the *publicani's* actions as a disgrace but eventually failed to regulate them. Sulla, with the army in his hand, ignored the *publicani* and collected tribute tax on his own. Lucullus, seeing that the *publicani* had ruined Asia, barred them from malpractices. Later governors such as Globulus (63/62 BC) indulged the *publicani's* action for profit only for his own benefits.⁸² By the time of Cicero, the *publicani* had become an abomination to the Republic.

The irony behind this system is self-evident. The tax system manipulated by the *publicani* was by no means sustainable. We can observe a decline in the economy of Asia when more and more people were deprived of their property. The "Asian Vespers" were a direct response to the oppressive tax system, yet the *publicani* were already too entrenched in this system for it to be barred. The period between the 120s and the 80s BCE marked a period of political tensions between the knights and the Senate. In this period, the court was controlled by the Gracchan juries who actively sought out opposing senators for indictment. Lucullus' reform marked a major conflict between the *publicani* and the governor, with the two fighting for authority over fiscal policies. Such political struggle eventually reached a temporary peace during the era of Cicero. The wealth of Asia had been badly exploited, and the currency was significantly debased. This was also a period of rising military tension as three consecutive Mithridatic Wars were all fought in the province or in its immediate proximity, making it a turmoiled military frontier. The struggle with the *publicani* ended when a series of military leaders took full control of the province and re-shaped its political and fiscal structure. For military leaders such as Caesar, Brutus, and Antony, it was more effective to collect taxes themselves for the army rather than contracting it to the *publicani*. The taxation system of Asia during the late Republic reveals a lack of planning on the side of the Romans. The Roman Republic was expanding rapidly, yet its tax system was neither unified nor sustainable. The diverse and unorganized structure gave agency to the

Bresson, is very peculiar. Asklepas was the administrator (ἐπίτροπος) and a farmer of the revenue (δημοσιώνης). This would mean that he was not a member of the *societates publicanorum*, but rather of the local tax farming institution.

82 Publius Servilius Globulus, when serving as the governor of Asia, tried to profit money with the *publicani*, collecting taxes while also exchanging political privilege: Broughton (1938) 542.

publicani. Their responsibility in Asia was meant to be a relief to the Republican government, saving the state manpower and cost. The result, however, was the creation of a powerful political entity that stayed unchecked for decades.

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