

The senatorial delegation that brought the Magna Mater to Rome in 205/4 B.C. was an act of cultural diplomacy in which the Romans made a public gesture to their Aitolian allies at Delphi as part of an effort to reinvigorate interest in the moribund war against Philip V of Macedon. Previous interpretations of the Magna Mater affair have followed some of the ancient testimonia in viewing this mission primarily in the context of the war with Carthage, although disputing whether the goddess was introduced to a Rome in mortal fear (Graillet 1912, 30-32; Burton 1996) or on the brink of victory (Gruen 1990, 5-33; Orlin 1997, 109-10). When scholars have considered the Hellenic cultural context of the episode, King Attalos' role in both the Roman embassy and the recently completed war has been highlighted. A major debate has arisen over whether the goddess was brought from Pessinus, as most sources indicate (Burton), or the Troad, which would make this an early example of Rome's exploitation of Trojan legend in Hellenistic kinship diplomacy (Gruen; Roller 1999, 263-285). One aspect of the legation not adequately explored in prior scholarship is the role of Delphi in the affair.

Control of the Amphictyonic council that ruled the sanctuary at Delphi had during the latter half of the third century B.C. become the most visible international sign of the growth and power of the Aitolian League (Flacelière 1937; Grainger 1999; Scholten 2000). Amphictyonic decisions were now subject to Aitolian goals, and many Aitolians had even acquired property at Delphi. When two Roman legations arrived at Delphi in 205 B.C., first with spoils from the Metaurus and later seeking the Magna Mater, the Hellenistic world must have viewed this as a gesture of respect not only to Pythian Apollo, but also to Delphi's Aitolian masters. Furthermore, the composition and timing of the Magna Mater legation suggest a diplomatic purpose complementary to a new military commitment to the war. The legation was unusually large (five members) and senior (a *consularis* and a *praetorius*) and included both M. Valerius Laevinus, the first Roman commander in the war against Philip V who had negotiated the Aitolian alliance and Ser. Sulpicius Galba, probably the brother of the other commander who had fought alongside the Aitolians and King Attalos since 211 B.C. The war had been essentially neglected during the years 207 and 206, drawing complaints from the Aitolians, who were forced to fight alone since Attalos had returned to Anatolia when his territories were attacked in 208 (see Rich 1984; Eckstein 2002). The Romans finally sent more men and ships under a new *proconsul*, P. Sempronius Tuditanus, at about the same time as the legation to Delphi and Attalos. These new troops must have been a Roman attempt to assuage Aitolian complaints and keep them in the war, and it may have worked had they not arrived just after the Aitolians signed a peace treaty with Philip. Surely the synchronicity of military reinforcement and the Magna Mater legation shared the common purpose of reviving their two allies' fading appetite for the war. Thus the advent of the Magna Mater, though the prophecy it fulfilled referred to Rome's war against Carthage, should be interpreted in the light of Rome's cultural and military involvement in the Hellenistic East.