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Who Attended Achaian Assemblies?

By James L. O'Neil, Sydney

The question of the Achaian assemblies has long been a controversial one. In recent years the generally accepted view has been that of J. A. O. Larsen[1], based on Polybios' description of a *synkletos* held in Sikyon in 169: ἐν ᾗ συνέβαινε μὴ μόνον συμπορεύεσθαι τὴν βουλὴν ἀλλὰ πάντας τοὺς ἀπὸ τριάκοντ' ἐτῶν[2]. From this passage Larsen concluded that the regular meetings of the Achaian League were attended only by the council, but that extraordinary meetings on subjects of particular importance were also open to all men over thirty. This rule, he believes, was introduced in the late third century, when the Achaians instituted new regulations on the holding of special assemblies[3].

Larsen's view has now been challenged by A. Giovannini[4], who has argued that all assemblies were normally open to all adult male Achaians. This view has met with a mixed reception[5], partly because Giovannini does not consider Larsen's view that the Achaians changed their rules on assemblies, even though the Achaians did make a number of constitutional changes[6] and Aymard had shown the probability that the Achaians changed the rules governing the subject matter of their assemblies late in the third century[7].

The aim of this paper is to re-examine the evidence on who did attend the Achaian assemblies, both before and after the probable change in the rules governing the calling of *synkletoi.* The first question to be considered is the age at which an Achaian was eligible to attend the assembly. For the period before the late third century it seems clear that under-thirties did attend Achaian assemblies. Firstly, Polybios quite clearly tells us that Aratos was elected general for the second time when only twenty-eight[8]. One can only conclude that a person who can be elected general is eligible to attend the assembly which elects him. As Walbank has said[9] there is no good reason to amend Polybios' evidence on Aratos' age.

1 *Representative Government* 87sqq.
2 29, 24, 6.
3 Cf. A. Aymard, *Les assemblées de la confédération achaienne* (Paris 1938) 220sqq.
4 *Polybe et les assemblées achéennes,* Mus. Helv. 26 (1969) 1–17.
5 Accepted by G. Daux, BCH 93 (1969) 430, criticized by F. W. Walbank, Mus. Helv. 27 (1970) 129–143; J. A. O. Larsen, Cl. Ph. 67 (1972) 178–185. Accepted in part by Walbank, *Commentary on Polybius* III 406–414, which he has kindly allowed me to inspect in the proofs.
6 Larsen, Cl. Ph. 67 (1972) 183.
7 *Les assemblées,* l.c.
8 2, 43, 3sq.
9 *Aratos of Sicyon* 175.

Secondly, in 221 B.C. the Achaians resolved to assist the Messenians and further decided that any decision made by the soldiers in arms (τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις) would be valid[10]. It can be argued that this represents an unusual delegation of power to a group not normally entitled to make decisions[11]. But Walbank has shown that the army acted as the decision making body of Achaia on other occasions[12]. In no case is it suggested that only the over-thirties voted and it seems more natural to conclude that the whole army was entitled to vote.

This seems confirmed by the events of 217 B.C. The Achaians had just reformed their military organisation, placing part of their mercenaries and the picked corps of *epilektoi* in Western Achaia[13]. The Aitolian general in Elis, Euripidas, watched out for the *synodos* (τηρήσας τὴν τῶν Ἀχαιῶν σύνοδον)[14] and launched an attack on Western Achaia. The mercenaries were brought into action to repel him but there is no mention of any action by the *epilektoi.* The obvious inference is that the *epilektoi* had been temporarily disbanded to attend the assembly[15]. But this inference has been doubted[16] and Larsen remarks that this seems strange since "probably most of the soldiers under arms must have been under thirty"[17] and concludes that all soldiers must have been furloughed even though only some needed to attend the assembly.

But this interpretation is improbable for two reasons. The Achaians are unlikely to have weakened the new defence structure they had only just established any more than was strictly necessary. Also, Euripidas anticipated that the synodos would cause a weakening of Achaian defences. This is reasonable if he knew that all Achaian soldiers would be eligible to vote at Aigion, while it is less likely that he would have anticipated the dismissal of troops without such a reason.

The evidence for Achaian assemblies down to 217 B.C. indicates that those under thirty had the vote and there is no evidence from this period which supports a contrary view. The evidence for the later period is less straightforward.

Firstly in 181 Polybios informs us he was elected ambassador though under the legal age (νεώτερον ὄντα τῆς κατὰ τοὺς νόμους ἡλικίας)[18]. One might conclude from this that he was under thirty – and so that the passage favours the

10 Pol. 4, 7, 5.
11 Aymard, *Les assemblées* 222sq.; Larsen, *Rep. Govt* 80.
12 Pol. 4, 72, 5–7; 10, 22, 8–9; Livy 38, 33, 11; Plut. *Philop.* 21, 1; cf. Walbank, *Commentary* III 407.
13 Pol. 5, 91–92.
14 Ibid. 94, 3.
15 Aymard, *Les assemblées* 88–93; Giovannini, op. cit. 10.
16 Walbank, Mus. Helv. 27 (1970) 139.
17 *Rep. Govt* 169.
18 Pol. 24, 6, 3.

existence of such an age limit for the Achaian assembly. But one should remember that in 182 Polybios had still been young enough to be described as a child (παῖς)[19]. The date of Polybios' birth is uncertain but Walbank has shown that it is not likely to have been much earlier than 200 B.C.[20] In that case he would only just have turned thirty in 170 – the year in which he became hipparch of the Achaian League[21]. Therefore the age limit under which he fell in 181 could have been anything from twenty upwards. However one would doubt that men as young as twenty were normally appointed ambassador by the Achaians[22].

Therefore we cannot establish the normal age required by the Achaians for those elected to ambassadorships, but it does seem likely that Polybios was eligible to attend the assembly, and receive his extraordinary appointment, when not yet twenty.

This appointment as ambassador to Ptolemy was not the only official position Polybios held at a young age. A fragmentary inscription dealing with the boundaries between Megalopolis, Messene and Thouria lists among the commissioners from the first city the name Polybios[23]. Polybios himself remarked on the uniqueness of his name[24], so this must be the historian himself. The inscription does not give us a date directly, but it seems probable that it should not fall much later than 182 B.C. when Messene was readmitted to the Achaian League and Thouria was separated from it and also admitted to the federation[25].

We have no further information on Polybios' career until 170, but he must have been active as he was a prominent politician by that date.

He believed that he was one of the Achaians C. Popilius had intended to attack in 170[26] and played a major role in deciding the policy adopted by the patriot party during the third Macedonian War – even opposing his own father's views[27]: Now it is improbable that a man may have a distinguished and influential public career while he is still ineligible to attend the assembly. Polybios may have exaggerated his importance in Achaian politics at this time, but he is hardly likely to have invented an account he and any reader conversant with Achaian rules would know to be impossible. Polybios' career favours the interpretation that under-thirties could normally take part in Achaian political life.

19 Plut. *Philop.* 21, 5.
20 *Commentary* I 1, n. 1; 2, n. 1.
21 Cf. Pol. 28, 6, 9.
22 Cf. Walbank, *Aratos of Sicyon* 39 on the age of election as general.
23 *Inschrift. Olymp.* 46, line 6.
24 Pol. 36, 12, 5.
25 Dittenberger, *Inschrift. Olymp.* V col. 90; cf. Pol. 23, 17, 2.
26 Pol. 28, 3, 7.
27 Ibid. 6, 8.

This view is supported by Polybios' observation on the reasons for the ineffectiveness of hipparchs before Philopoimen. Some were lazy while others hoped to win the support of the cavalrymen for future attempts to be elected general: οἱ δὲ τῆς στρατηγίας ὀρεγόμενοι διὰ ταύτης τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐξεριθεύονται τοὺς νέους καὶ συναγωνιστὰς εἰς τὸ μέλλον[28].

Giovannini argued from this that under thirties were eligible to vote in elections[29]. His argument is weakened by the fact that Polybios uses the word νέοι to mean "soldiers"[30], and he need not be thinking of the age of the cavalrymen. Nevertheless one would expect most of the cavalrymen to be under the age of thirty[31], and so conclude that twenty-year-olds had the vote.

This passage has caused controversy for some time. Beloch[32] concluded that under-thirties could vote in electoral assemblies but not in other types of assembly. Aymard noted that Polybios referred to hipparchs seeking support for the future (εἰς τὸ μέλλον)[33] – but one would naturally assume that an ambitious hipparch planned to seek the generalship within a few years[34]. So Aymard's observation will still not cover those cavalrymen in their younger twenties. The most natural interpretation of the passage is that all cavalrymen had the vote in subsequent years.

Certainly in the suffect election in 183/2 B.C. all the Achaian soldiers seem to have voted. Unfortunately the passage of Polybios covering it is hopelessly corrupt[35], and we must rely on Plutarch. He says that those of age, together with the probouloi (οἱ δὲ ἐν ἡλικίᾳ μετὰ τῶν προβούλων)[36] came together at Megalopolis and elected Lykortas general.

The interpretation of this passage is open to dispute. It might just possibly mean "those of age to attend the assembly", but the more natural sense is "those of military age"[37]. Larsen concludes that "at first glance the meeting reported does not conform to Achaean law as we know it"[38], and suggests that the election may in fact have been conducted by the probouloi. Again this is not the natural interpretation of Polybios' words[39].

In fact there is a parallel case in 147/6 B.C., when the general Kritolaos was

28 Ibid. 10, 22, 9.
29 Giovannini, op. cit. 9.
30 Schweighäuser 289; Walbank, Mus. Helv. 27 (1970) 139.
31 Walbank, *Commentary* III 407.
32 *Gr. Gesch.*² 4, 2, p. 232.
33 *Les assemblées* 210sq.
34 Cf. Walbank, *Commentary* ad loc.
35 23, 12, 7. Unfortunately the surviving passage is so short that it is difficult to see whether Plutarch can have drawn his information from Polybios.
36 Plut. *Philop.* 21, 1.
37 Walbank, *Commentary* III 400; cf. Pol. 38, 15, 7.
38 *Rep. Govt* 178.
39 Walbank, *Commentary* III 408.

missing, presumed dead, after Skarpheia. According to the law his predecessor (in this case Diaios) took over until the next regular synod[40]. Shortly afterwards Polybios tells us that Diaios had been appointed general by the many (καθεσταμένου στρατηγοῦ διὰ τῶν πολλῶν)[41], which, as Larsen accepts[42], implies that Diaios had now been re-elected at a regular synod. In this case there is no reason to suggest that he was elected by the probouloi. The wording of the two passages taken together seems to indicate that generals were elected by the whole body of Achaian citizens.

Aymard concluded that the assembly which elected Lykortas was an extraordinary one – and so closer to a *synkletos* than a *synodos*[43]. But there seems no reason for summoning a special assembly, when the Achaians had a rule to provide for the control of affairs until the next regular assembly – and it is natural in the absence of evidence to the contrary to believe that rule was in force[44]. In fact a later passage of Polybios refers to decisions taken at the second synodos of the year[45], which implies that the meeting which elected Lykortas was the first[46].

The holding of a synodos at a time and place convenient to the needs of the war against Messene should not cause surprise. Aymard has shown that the times of *synodoi* were fixed, not to precise dates, but to a specified part of the year[47]. The second synodos of 183/2 was also held at Megalopolis – no doubt also for the convenience of the army which had been campaigning in Messenia.

Thus the evidence on Achaian assemblies other than the passage cited initially indicates that under-thirties voted in Achaian assemblies, and the last passage suggests that the *synodoi* were open to all men of military age, even after the reform of the rules governing the calling of *synkletoi.*

There is some other evidence on Achaian *synodoi* which supports the last conclusion. The most important case is the meeting at Corinth in 147/6 B.C. at which war was declared on Sparta[48]. Unfortunately Polybios does not state in the extant passages what sort of assembly it was. Aymard has argued that it was a *synodos*[49], since six months previously the general Kritolaos had informed Sex. Caesar that he could not summon the Achaians until the next regular *synodos*[50].

40 Pol. 38, 15, 1sq.
41 Ibid. 17, 1.
42 *Greek Federal States* 497.
43 *Les assemblées* 213.
44 Larsen, *Rep. Govt* 178.
45 Pol. 23, 16, 12sq.
46 Larsen, *Rep. Govt* 178.
47 *Les assemblées* 275sq.
48 Pol. 38, 12, 2.
49 *Les assemblées* 125–127.
50 Pol. 28, 11, 5.

One cannot absolutely rule out the possibility that Kritolaos may have summoned a *synkletos* after telling the Romans he would not. Kritolaos was not concerned about the feelings of the Romans (his remark to Sex. Caesar had been a deliberate insult). However one would have expected Polybios to have made some observation on the duplicity of a politician of whom he strongly disapproved, if he had done what he had said could not be done.

Larsen suggests that "it probably actually was, so to speak, a *synodos* and *synkletos* combined"[51]. This is not impossible, but one need not assume it, unless it can be shown that *synodoi* were not at this time full assemblies[52]. The presence of a full assembly is shown by Polybios' derogatory remarks about the presence of large numbers of working men, especially from Corinth: καὶ γὰρ συνηθροίσθη πλῆθος ἐργαστηριακῶν καὶ βαναύσων ἀνθρώπων ὅσον οὐδέποτε· πᾶσαι μὲν γὰρ ἐκορύζων αἱ πόλεις, πανδημεὶ δὲ καὶ μάλιστά πως τῶν Κορινθίων[53].

It is this unprecedented attendance by the working class that Polybios blames for the intemperate behaviour of the assembly, and its unwise decisions.

Now Polybios does say that all the Achaian cities contributed to this lower class "drivel", while singling out Corinth as the worst. Indeed one wonders how many men from workshops and artisans the rural cities of Old Achaia or Arkadia could have furnished – let alone what proportion of the poor from these remote rural towns would have come to Corinth for the assembly. It seems reasonable to understand Polybios to mean that the working class of Corinth, supported by similar elements from other cities, dominated the assembly.

But the Achaian *synkletos* could not be dominated by the citizens of one city, or even of a handful of cities. It is generally agreed that votes at *synkletoi* were taken city by city[54]. The workingmen of Corinth and, no doubt, a few neighbouring cities, could not have dominated an assembly where votes were taken by cities.

The authority for voting by cities is not Polybios but Livy[55], so it might be argued that Livy has mistakenly introduced Roman ideas of voting in groups into a Greek context[56]. However, as Livy indicates more than just once that the Achaians voted by cities[57], it seems better to conclude that he is reproducing

51 *Rep. Govt* 188.

52 Cf. Walbank, *Commentary* III 408.

53 Pol. 38, 12, 5.

54 E. A. Freeman, *Federal Government* 211sq.; Aymard, *Les assemblées* 377–394; Larsen, *Rep. Govt* 83sq.; Walbank, *Were there Greek Federal States?*, Scripta Classica Israelica 3 (1976/77) 40sqq.

55 Livy 32, 23, 1: *ceteri populi Achaeorum cum sententias perrogarentur*; 38, 32, 1: *omnium civitatum consensu.*

56 But as Walbank observes Scripta Classica Israelica 3 (1976/77) n. 66a voting by *cities* is not a Roman practice.

57 See also 32, 20, 7 and 22, 1, and for parallels from other federations 33, 2, 6 (Boiotia) 33, 16, 3 (Akarnania).

Polybios. In both cases the assembly concerned is a *synkletos* and it seems more likely that a cumbersome procedure like voting by cities was confined to *synkletoi* where the third day was set aside for voting and only one issue was voted on[58]. Therefore the dominance of the assembly by the Isthmian working class favours the view that this assembly was a *synodos.*

But the assembly declared war on Sparta. Under the rules governing assemblies in the second century, this should only have been done at a *synkletos,* which Larsen advances as a second reason for taking this assembly to have been a *synkletos*[59]. But a close examination of Polybios gives the opposite impression. Immediately after this declaration of war, Polybios says the assembly passed a second illegal proposal (ἕτερον ψήφισμα παράνομον)[60]. This probably indicates that Polybios felt the declaration of war was illegal, and the obvious reason for this is that it was passed at a *synodos*[61]. Therefore the passage of Polybios favours the interpretation that the assembly involved was a *synodos,* and that this assembly was still open to all Achaians, in 147/6.

Several other pieces of evidence support this conclusion. One is the appearance as speaker at a *synodos* in 188 B.C. of Kassandros of Aigina[62]. Now Aigina had been captured by the Romans in the First Macedonian War and the Aiginetans apparently retained their federal citizenship in exile in the Peloponnese[63]. It does not seem that local citizenships were exchanged among the Achaian residents who fell in the war against the Romans separately from the citizens and with the resident aliens (σύνοικοι)[64].

But recently, Giovannini has challenged the view that the Hellenistic Leagues were federations[65]. Rather, following Polybios' statement that the Peloponnese under Achaian rule differed from a city-state only in not having a common wall[66], he concludes that Achaia was a simple unitary state, with only a federal citizenship for political purposes (though the constituent cities remained as cultural and social entities). But Giovannini overlooks the fact that in the same passage Polybios refers to the member states of Achaia as *poleis* too, and that there is a considerable amount of evidence which presents these member states as political entities in their own right[67].

58 Walbank, Mus. Helv. 27 (1970) 135; Studia Classica Israelica 3 (1976/77) 41, n. 60; cf. Aymard, *Les assemblées* 388–394.
59 *Rep. Govt* 187.
60 Pol. 38, 13, 7.
61 Walbank, *Commentary* III 408, cf. 413sq.
62 Pol. 22, 8, 9. That it is a *synodos,* cf. Id. 7, 2.
63 Aymard, *Les assemblées* 104–117.
64 IG IV² 1, 28 lines 59sqq.
65 Giovannini, *Untersuchungen über die Natur und die Anfänge der bundesstaatlichen Sympolitie in Griechenland* (Göttingen 1971) esp. 31.
66 Pol. 2, 37, 10sq.
67 Walbank, Studia Classica Israelica 3 (1976/77) 39–45.

Moreover, even in a unitary state such as Macedon – to which Giovannini compares states such as Achaia[68] – there seem to have been local citizenships, not held by all members of the whole state. A letter of Philip V of Macedon to one of his officials named Archippos[69] refers to a *metoikos* in the town of Graia. The man's name was probably Korragos son of Perdikkas – which seems good reason to take him to be a Macedonian[70]. So it seems that even Macedonians did not automatically acquire local citizenship when moving within Macedonia.

The case seems even stronger for a state such as Achaia, which, unlike Macedon, was a union of previously independent communities many of which had had strong traditions of autonomy. So it is reasonable to accept Aymard's view that Kassandros was not likely to have been present as a deputy from some city other than Aigina, and therefore that the *synodos* reported in 188 was not an assembly of deputies[71].

In 208, Philopoimen addressed an assembly of the Achaians encouraging them to pay more attention to military virtues, and less to display[72]. Aymard has argued at length that this was a primary assembly[73]. However, the passage does not clearly establish what sort of assembly it was[74]. Larsen even goes so far as to say "Philopoimen, no doubt, wished to reach as many as possible, but if the *boule* was the only body available he would have to deliver his address before it"[75]. But there is no reason why it cannot have been a purely military assembly, and neither a *synodos* nor a *synkletos*[76]. If Larsen's suggestion that Philopoimen is addressing the *synodos* at which he was elected general[77] is correct, then the passage seems to support the view that the synod was open to all citizens of military age.

So far the evidence examined favours the view that Achaian assemblies were open to all adult males, though some passages can be explained on other hypotheses. There remains the passage mentioned at the outset, that the *synkletos* of 169 was attended "not only by the *boule*, but by everyone over thirty"[78]. It is generally agreed that these words indicate who was entitled to attend the assembly rather than who actually did[79] – the verb συμβαίνειν does not imply happening by chance but is merely a stylistic periphrasis[80]. But there are

68 Giovannini, *Untersuchungen* 77sq.
69 Ch. I. Makaronas, Ἀρχ. Ἐφ. 1934/35, 118.
70 F. W. Walbank, private communication.
71 *Les assemblées* 117–120.
72 Pol. 11, 9sq.
73 *Les assemblées* 95–102.
74 Larsen, *Rep. Govt* 170sq.; Walbank, *Commentary* ad loc.
75 Ibid. 171.
76 Aymard, *Les assemblées* 96sq.
77 Op. cit. 170.
78 Pol. 29, 24, 6.
79 Cf. Walbank, *Commentary* III 410.
80 Schweighäuser 422; Foucault, *Polybe* 219sq.

a number of different ways the passage may be meant to be taken[81]. It need not mean that the regular rule for attendance at assemblies is being given here. And we may wonder why Polybios should have felt it necessary to repeat the rule here if it were regular. We should consider the possibility that the composition of this *synkletos* was unusual.

Giovannini quotes a suggestion by Habicht, that the under thirties were kept at home in case of a military emergency at this late stage of the Third Macedonian War[82]. Now the Romans in fact had not required military assistance from the Achaians[83], but the pro-Roman party had alleged the need to be able to send reinforcements if the Romans requested them in order to block the proposed despatch of troops to Egypt[84], and the patriots were anxious to show that such aid could be provided[85]. In the circumstances it might well have seemed wise to leave the younger men at home, and so avoid any possible criticism of Achaian conduct by the Romans.

So it seems best to take the thirty year minimum to apply to the *boule*[86] and to this particular *synkletos,* and to conclude that normally Achaian assemblies, both *synodoi* and *synkletoi,* were open to all citizens of military age. In that case the Achaians did not adopt the representative form of Government as Larsen believed, but, as Giovannini and, more recently, Walbank have argued, kept the primary assembly as the main decision making body.

81 Walbank, *Commentary* III 410sqq.
82 Mus. Helv. 26 (1969) 16, n. 90.
83 Pol. 28, 13, 5.
84 Pol. 29, 23, 10.
85 Pol. 29, 24, 8.
86 Giovannini, Mus. Helv. 26 (1969) 7, n. 38; cf. Walbank, *Commentary* III 410.