

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I

Discourse, International Relations, and International Relations theory

THE NATURE OF ROMAN REPUBLICAN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The history of Rome's interstate relations began, in Roman national mythology, with a striking example of the interplay between what can be loosely termed "domestic" and "international" *amicitia*. According to Livy, when Aeneas first arrived on Italian shores and entered the aboriginal kingdom of Latinus, the two leaders immediately established friendly relations. Latinus "by extending his right hand [to Aeneas], sanctified the good faith of the friendship that would be" (*dextra data fidem futurae amicitiae sanxisse*). The two then added a domestic treaty (*foedus*) to the public one, says Livy, when Latinus gave Aeneas his daughter in marriage (Livy I.I.8–9; cf. Dion. Hal. I.59.1–2).

A millennium later, again according to Livy, the Numidian chieftain Masinissa traveled from his kingdom in North Africa to Spain in order to meet the Roman commander P. Cornelius Scipio (the future Africanus) in person and shake his hand (*Numida cum ipso utique congredi Scipione uolebat atque eius dextra fidem sancire*). The two leaders met and Masinissa, whose admiration for Scipio was already well established because of the Roman's great accomplishments (*ceperat iam ante Numidam ex fama rerum gestarum admiratio uiri*), was awestruck by his majesty, manliness, and military bearing (*maiestas . . . uiriliter uere ac militaris*). For his part, Scipio was impressed by the Numidian commander's youthful high spirit and courage (*ipse iuuenis specimen animi prae se ferret*). Masinissa told Scipio of his eagerness to perform a kindness (*beneficium*) for both Scipio and the Roman people since the Roman commander had recently returned to him his nephew, whom the Romans had earlier captured in battle against the Carthaginians and their allies; now that the gods had provided him the opportunity, said Masinissa, no other foreigner would prove as energetic or helpful to Scipio and the Roman people than himself. The two commanders then exchanged pledges of loyalty (*fide data acceptaque*).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and Scipio allowed Masinissa to plunder the surrounding fields, so that he should not return to his kingdom empty-handed (Livy 28.35; cf. App. *Hisp.* 37).

These anecdotes, to which many more could be added, demonstrate the pervasiveness of the discursive and physical vocabulary of *amicitia* in the Roman literary tradition. Nor is this simply a figment of the Roman historiographical imagination: numerous Roman coins and frescoes depicting the physical aspects of establishing international friendship survive, and several extant inscriptions attest to international *amicitia* as historical fact, as do the famous early treaties between Rome and Carthage, which the second-century BC Greek historian Polybius famously transcribes in the third book of his universal history.¹ In a field rife with controversy, one incontrovertible fact about Roman international relations during the Middle Republic stands out: while the Romans struck relatively few extra-Italian formal and binding treaties of alliance during this period,² and repeatedly exhibited a marked reluctance to enter into such pacts, they entered into literally hundreds of informal pacts of friendship during this same time.³ *Amicitia* was the primary means by which the Roman state enmeshed itself in the affairs of other states during the first phase of Republican transmarine imperial expansion, thus laying the groundwork for a large and enduring world empire. The language of friendship, moreover, was the chief discursive framework whereby the Romans constructed their relationships with their international partners overseas. Despite this, however, international *amicitia* has yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves.⁴ The focus, traditionally, has been on Rome's foreign *clientela*.

¹ Pictorial representations: Hölkeskamp 2000: 240–48; inscriptions (Republican examples): *Syll.*³ 591 (Lampsacus and Massilia, 196/195 BC); *IG* II.4.756 (Delos, ca. 192); *Syll.*³ 646 (Thisbae, 170); *SEG* 16.255 (Achaean League, ca. 170); Carthaginian treaties: Polyb. 3.22 (509), 3.24 (ca. 348).

² Nine in the Greek East, one with the Jews (Gruen 1984: 13–53, 731–51), and three in Sicily (Sicilian Tauromenium, perhaps Netum, and Messana) (Pinzone 1978: 353–79). Later treaties include those with the Greek Lycian League (46 BC; discussion: S. Mitchell 2005), Cnidus (45; Blümel 1992), Mytilene (25; *RDGE* 26d–e; Ferrary 1990: 231–35), and Spanish Gades (Brunt 1982; Gruen 1984: 29–30; Rich 2008: 57, 60).

³ Sixty-seven (or perhaps fifty-two) in Sicily during the first year of the First Punic War alone: Diod. Sic. 23.4.1 (67 BC); Eutrop. 2.19 (52); cf. Polyb. 1.16.3; Zonar. 8.9; below, Chapter 3, pp. 134–36.

⁴ Exceptional is Gruen 1984: 54–95, but his main concern is to demonstrate the connection between Roman *amicitia* and Greek φιλια. Altay Coskun and Heinz Heinen have recently undertaken a major research project entitled “Roms auswärtige Freunde,” dealing principally with the Late Republic and Early Empire, and focusing on the Black Sea region, but the results are only beginning to appear (for a preview, see Coskun and Heinen 2004; as of this writing, two edited volumes have appeared, Coskun [ed.] 2005; Coskun [ed.] 2008, as well as a study of the extension and withdrawal of Roman citizenship rights, Coskun 2009). Burton 2003 is a distillation of the view presented here. Friendship in ancient Greek international relations has lately received greater attention: L.G. Mitchell 1997a; 1997b; Low 2007.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Foreign clientela and international amicitia*

3

This study seeks to rectify this oversight, and in particular to explore the interconnections between the meanings and dynamics of Roman interpersonal and international friendship. It will offer alternative interpretative paradigms to those current in the study of Roman international relations, in particular outlining a processual theory of friendship-exchange dynamics, in addition to examining and documenting Rome's international relations using the theoretical framework of International Relations (IR) Constructivism. The purpose of the remainder of this introductory chapter is to account for why scholars have traditionally overlooked the *amicitia* language used by the ancient sources themselves to describe Rome's Republican-era international relationships, and to suggest reasons why the predominant IR Realist and Neorealist readings of Roman diplomacy and imperialism may profitably be supplemented or altered in order to accommodate the apparent power and importance of the ancient discursive frameworks and mentalities that underlay ancient diplomatic interactions.

FOREIGN CLIENTELA AND INTERNATIONAL AMICITIA

In 1958, Ernst Badian published his brilliant and enormously influential study of Roman imperialism and diplomacy, *Foreign Clientelae*. The most significant and enduring contribution of Badian's book is its successful replacement of the traditional legalistic interpretations of Roman international relations with one that emphasizes the informality and morally grounded nature of these ties. Badian writes: "The relationship presided over by [the goddess] Fides [sc. *clientela*] is of a moral and political rather than a legal kind: where there are legal foundations, it is the superstructure that is the realm of Fides . . . that matters."⁵ Badian's concept of Roman interstate *clientela* built on the work of Theodor Mommsen, Percy Cooper Sands, and Matthias Gelzer,⁶ all of whom used the language of clientship ("client kingdoms," "client states," etc.) in order to describe Rome's international partners, despite the ancient sources' overwhelming preference for *amicitia* terminology. For Badian, the *ipsisima verba* of the sources themselves was less important than what he believed to be the undeniable political reality at the heart of Roman foreign relations: because, in Badian's view, interpersonal *clientelae* "comprise relationships admittedly between superior and inferior," while *amicitiae* were "typical of relationships between equals,"⁷ and because Rome's relations with other

⁵ Badian 1958a: II.⁶ Cf. Mommsen 1887: 65–66, 667–68, 652, 717–18; Sands 1908; Gelzer 1969: 86–101.⁷ Badian 1958a: II.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Mediterranean states were by definition asymmetrical, many having been established in the context of war, and some even constituted through *deditio*, or the complete surrender of foreign states to Roman commanders, *clientela*, as a “habit of mind and a philosophy of society,”⁸ was the more precise social analogue than *amicitia*, and thus more worthy of study in order to gain a proper understanding of Roman international relations.

In Badian’s view, the explanatory power of *clientela* gains momentum as Rome’s power increased over the course of the second century BC and into the Late Republic, when no credible challengers to Rome’s predominance in the Mediterranean world remained; *amici*, *amicitia*, and the language of equality in international relations had simply become by then polite euphemisms for the language of dependence, including *cliens*, *patrocinium*, and *clientela*. “By the second century (and perhaps earlier),” Badian argues, “there is . . . no question of equality: just as, in private usage within Rome, ‘amicus’ can . . . be a polite term for an inferior (or, conversely, a superior) – i.e. a client or patron – , so in the wider sphere, where there are no equals left to Rome as a great power – or to a Roman senator as an individual – , *amicitia* necessarily becomes another term for clientship.”⁹ And again: *clientela* “was probably the way in which educated Romans in the second century considered the relations of Rome with at least some other states: the avoidance of the term in official documents may be due to a desire to spare their feelings.”¹⁰

Badian’s book sparked controversy and debate from the very beginning. Two of his conclusions are not in dispute: first, that Rome’s relationships with extra-Italian states were largely informal and extra-legal, the expectations and obligations arising from them being governed by morality (*fides*) rather than law; and second, that the foreign *clientelae* of individual Roman aristocrats played an increasingly important role in the domestic political life of Rome over the course of the last two centuries of the Roman Republic. However, Badian’s corollary notion that the Roman state *as a state* exercised a patronal role over these foreign communities, analogous to the patronal role assumed by the “Roman senator as an individual” or the victorious Roman general over defeated communities, has been variously criticized.¹¹ Scholars have long taken exception to the previously noted

⁸ Badian 1958a: 42 n. 2. ⁹ Badian 1958a: 12–13.

¹⁰ Badian 1958a: 6–7; cf. Sands 1908: 8 (“Rome seems to have been careful not to offend her dependents by laying stress upon their subordination”).

¹¹ Although Badian himself was careful to distinguish the (literal) patronage exercised by individual Romans over foreign communities and the (metaphorical) patronage exercised by the Roman state (cf. Badian 1958a: 156–57), the overall thrust of his thesis encourages a distorting conceptual slippage

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Foreign clientela and international amicitia*

5

problem that the *clientela* analogy ignores the *amicitia* language of Roman interstate relations that the sources themselves use (and thus attempts to make the metaphorical, literal, and the literal, mere euphemism); it further misrepresents the extent to which the uniquely Roman concept of *clientela* was misunderstood by Rome's international partners; it fails to define *clientela* adequately or to distinguish it with precision from other informal social relationships, including *amicitia*; it exaggerates the inferior status of Rome's international partners and the constraints on their freedom to act; and it confuses the end point (Roman supremacy) with the process of Rome's gradual acquisition of power over its international competitors.¹²

Despite the accumulation of legitimate criticism of the patronal aspect of Badian's thesis, the notion that the Roman state as a state exercised a form of patronage over other states, conceptualized as clients, remains a fixture of modern scholarship. Badian himself has occasionally reasserted its validity (with some qualification and clarification),¹³ it has never lacked for serious scholarly support,¹⁴ and its continued influence is apparent in the ubiquity of such terms as "client state" and "client kingdom" in textbooks of Roman history.¹⁵

The present study is concerned less with restating the criticisms of this aspect of Badian's thesis than with shifting the discussion of Roman imperialism and diplomacy in the Middle Republic to new discursive ground: international *amicitia*, or "friendship" (rather than foreign *clientelae*), will be the focus, Roman diplomatic methods and style (rather than the nature of Roman imperialism), the emphasis. The position adopted here, broadly speaking, is that greater understanding of the nature of international relations in the crucial third and second centuries BC in the Mediterranean

between the two; see Eilers 2002: 186–89; Burton 2003: 351 n. 90. For the patronage of individual Roman senators and commanders over foreign individuals and communities, see Harmand 1957: 5–116 (with the distinction Badian draws fully blurred at 20–21); Gelzer 1969: 86–101; Gruen 1984: 162–72; Ferrary 1988: 117–32; 1991; 1997; Eilers 2002.

¹² Bleicken 1964; Dahlheim 1968: 2–3; Lintott 1981: 61–62; Braund 1984: 7, 23, 29–30 n. 1, 185; Sherwin-White 1984: 52; Gruen 1984: 158–200; Ferrary 1988: 118; Rich 1989; Nörr 1989: 69–70, 81, 84–85; Lintott 1993: 33–34; Ferrary 1997: 113–17; Eilers 2002: 186–89; Burton 2003; Eckstein 2008: 43–45. For a summary of these and other criticisms, see Coskun and Heinen 2004: 52–57.

¹³ Badian 1968: 14, 93 n. 1; Badian 1983: 408 ("it is useful to see Rome's developed foreign policy as patronal"), 412 (qualification: "not . . . all foreign states were regarded in the light of clients. It would obviously imply that in the case of states manifestly weaker than, and dependent on, Rome, and in their case only").

¹⁴ Dahlheim 1968: 269–74 (*amicitia* becomes *clientela* after Pydna in 168 BC); Errington 1971; Wallace-Hadrill 1989: 74–75; Rich 1989 (an "attempt to defend and reformulate" Badian's thesis); Coskun 2005: 1–9 (with minor reservations). Other references in Eckstein 2008: 44 n. 64.

¹⁵ Cf. Le Glay et al. 2009: 93; Sidebottom 2007: 4, 10, 26. This is in spite of the attempt of Braund 1984 to replace Sands' (see n. 10) notion of "client princes" with that of "friendly kings."

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

world – its particular stresses, strains, uncertainties, and dangers – can be arrived at only by examining Roman diplomatic concepts on their own terms, and by maintaining the focus of analysis on the prevailing discourse of friendship that emerges from the ancient sources themselves.¹⁶ One of the basic aims, in other words, will be to do for *amicitia* what Badian did for *clientela*: to ground the application of its international relations analogue in a comprehensive understanding of its operation and ideology in Roman domestic life. In addition, just as Badian himself attempted to free the study of Roman international relations from the rigidities of traditional legalistic interpretations, so this study endeavors to replace the similarly constraining Roman *clientela* paradigm for Roman international relations with the more flexible *amicitia* model.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE DEBATE: THE IMPACT OF REALISM
AND THE REALM OF LANGUAGE

Another purpose of this study is to anchor the analysis of Roman interstate relations in the conceptual frameworks developed by scholars in the Political Science discipline of International Relations (IR) during the second half of the twentieth century. Despite IR's long-established status as an academic discipline in its own right, it was many years before ancient historians began to avail themselves of its insights. The major studies of Roman imperialism under the Republic by William Harris and Erich Gruen in the 1970s and 1980s were informed by various early theorists of imperialism, which they both studied and to which they both refer, albeit briefly, in their works.¹⁷ In the 2000s Arthur Eckstein was the first to apply thoroughly and consistently the language and concepts of IR Realist theory to the international environment of the Hellenistic Mediterranean.¹⁸ On the Greek side, Polly Low grounded her study of Classical Greek international relations in a post-positivist, post-Realist framework.¹⁹ Low urges a

¹⁶ On this approach, cf. now the important “biography” of the terms *imperium* and *provincia*, Richardson 2008: esp. 7–8: “in order to understand Roman imperialism and the Roman Empire, it is necessary to grasp what the Romans thought they were doing as well as what they did. The best, perhaps the only way of doing this is to examine the language they used to describe that empire.”

¹⁷ Harris 1979: 259–60 (an “Additional Note” on Joseph Schumpeter); Gruen 1984: 3–5 (on John Hobson, V.I. Lenin, and Schumpeter – a mere two pages of text in a book of 730 pages, excluding backmatter).

¹⁸ Eckstein 2006; 2008. Kallet-Marx 1995a also cites IR theory, but only intermittently (cf. 3, 11, 29, 337). Although my intellectual debts to Eckstein will be clear in what follows, our theoretical approaches are poles apart (Eckstein characterizes himself as an “offensive” Realist: Eckstein 2006: 6–7 n. 9). A short account of our interpretative disagreements has recently appeared in the pages of *International History Review*: Burton 2009; Eckstein 2009.

¹⁹ Low 2007.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Contextualizing the debate*

7

greater critical understanding of the discursive contexts in which historians of ancient international relations do their work, and suggests that the predominantly Realist readings of the ancient evidence of the twentieth century were driven more by contemporary modes of thinking about international relations than by an objective appreciation of what the ancient evidence actually says.²⁰

Low's insight is well taken. A significant part of the reason that the foreign *clientela* thesis continues to resonate with scholars of Roman interstate relations may indeed have to do with the prevailing IR *mentalité* of the period when it was first formulated and found its most lasting expression. As a study of imperial power and its exercise, *Foreign Clientelae* was a product of its time. Written well into the post-Second World War period, as the era of the old European empires was ending (expiring abruptly, at Suez, in 1956), and just before the first serious crises of the Cold War were about to flare up (Sputnik, the Cuban missile crisis), Badian's book was perforce influenced by the IR Realist paradigms that dominated contemporary debates about Cold War international relations. Thus, for example, Badian likens Rome's demand in 200 BC that Philip V of Macedon not wage war on the Greeks to a doctrine of containment, in that it resembles "present-day demands that certain powers should stop their policy of aggression [in an attempt] to confine the powers concerned to their frontiers of several hundred years ago."²¹ Badian also characterizes the Roman redistribution of seized Seleucid land in Asia Minor to the kingdom of Pergamum and the island republic of Rhodes following the defeat of the Seleucid king Antiochus III as an attempt to create a "balance of power" in the region.²² The important article on the diplomatic stand-off between Rome and Antiochus III during the 190s BC, which Badian was working on at the time *Foreign Clientelae* appeared, was subtitled, significantly, "A Study in Cold War."²³ As will be seen shortly, Badian's attitude towards the language of the sources for Roman international relations may have been unconsciously (or subconsciously) informed by the predominant patterns of thought and discursive practices and strategies of the Cold War era.

The attractions of IR Realism for ancient historians in particular should occasion no surprise. The Realist approach, after all, was alleged to have its roots in antiquity in the work of Thucydides, "the founding father of realism."²⁴ Shortly after the end of the Second World War, political scientists and the politicians who listened to them began to discern in

²⁰ Low 2007: 30, 31. ²¹ Badian 1958a: 67. ²² Badian 1958a: 104–05, III. ²³ Badian 1959.

²⁴ Nye 1988: 235. Rahe 1995/1996: 105–17 and Low 2007: 2, 4, 19–21, summarize the intellectual history of this idea.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the harsh new bipolar world of US–Soviet antagonism significant parallels with Thucydides’ analysis of the similarly bipolar Aegean world of the fifth century BC, which was comparably dominated by two (regional) super-powers (Athens and Sparta), each supported by its own (unequal) alliance system (the Delian League and the Peloponnesian League respectively).²⁵ Realists highlighted such maxims of supposedly Thucydidean *Realpolitik* as “might makes right” and “the strong do what they will, the weak suffer what they must” in order to lend their theories an aura of ancient authority and timelessness.²⁶ Thucydidean analysis was everywhere deployed and regarded as prophetic of the new realities of the Cold War international environment, in which the US and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies sought security and protected their own interests against the similarly self-interested and security-conscious Soviet bloc. By this time theoretical Realism had become so well entrenched that its status as the cornerstone of American foreign policy was practically unassailable. It was under Realism’s sway that George Kennan, first as US ambassador to Moscow and then as chief policymaker at the State Department in the post-Second World War years, developed the influential “containment doctrine” and a balance-of-power conception of US–Soviet relations that remained the *idées fixes* of American policymaking – and American IR studies – from the 1940s right through to the Nixon and Reagan eras.²⁷

Dissatisfied with “classical” Realism of the Thucydidean type, and its focus on human nature and state-level (“unit-attribute”) factors, some scholars of international relations began looking for deeper patterns in the mechanics of interstate phenomena and to develop theoretical approaches to their field of study based more on systems and structures. The first great

²⁵ For an extended comparative analysis by a Political Scientist, see Fleiss 1966. Connor 1984: 1–2, a Classicist, provides an interesting, first-person reminiscence on the apparent relevance of Thucydides in the 1950s Cold War environment (citing Secretary of State George Marshall’s 1947 Cold War–Peloponnesian War comparison). In the same era, Sir Ronald Syme noted, “war and disturbance . . . bring men to Thucydides in different ages, for recognition, instruction, and grim comfort” (Syme 2002: 52, a book that first appeared in 1964 but was based on lectures delivered in Berkeley in 1959).

²⁶ In recent times, Thucydides’ status as Realism’s founding father has come under increasing criticism by ancient historians and international relations scholars alike: Connor 1984; Garst 1989; Bosworth 1993; Bagby 1994; Rahe 1995/1996; Crane 1998; Morrison 2000; Bagby 2000; Lebow 2001; 2003: 41, 57, 65–167; Welch 2003; Low 2007: 4–6, 19–22, 222–33; Lebow 2008: 12. Doyle 1991 and Eckstein 2006: 49, 52 are reassertions of Thucydides’ Realist credentials, but see also Eckstein 2003, a critique of Political Scientists who cannot read Greek, and thus have been misled by faulty English translations of Thucydides.

²⁷ See Kennan’s infamous “long telegram” to Washington (published under the pseudonym “X”): X 1947. On American IR studies after the Second World War, see now Low 2007: 13–14; Lebow 2008: 19–26.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Contextualizing the debate*

9

theoretical statement of this so-called “Neorealist” approach was Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*.²⁸ In this work, Waltz argues that the state of the world is determined not by individual state actors but by deeper structures inherent in the international system, that states are self-regarding, security-seeking entities competing in a harsh and brutal international system, which itself is devoid of any effective international law or the means to enforce it, and is thus characterized by a formal state of brutal anarchy. In this system self-help is the only recourse for the self-regarding, security-seeking state (since no state behaves altruistically, or selflessly, in its pursuit of power), and the price of weakness is destruction. Thus weak states cluster around more powerful (and mutually antagonistic and mistrustful) imperial metropolises, whose conflicts are fought out on the weaker periphery. Succinctly, “the state among states . . . conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence. Because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so – or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbors.”²⁹

The significance, for the present purposes, of Neorealism’s denial of explanatory power to unit-level factors (or “nonstructural supplementary variables”³⁰) is that such factors as ideas, ideals, and, most importantly, the language of international diplomacy – how states converse with, think about, and describe each other – are alleged to have only a minimal impact on the structure of the international system. Language is subordinated to the larger project – survival – and becomes meaningless or euphemistic in proportion. According to Waltz, because the stakes of the US–Soviet antagonism of the Cold War were so high (nuclear annihilation being one possible outcome of the competition), “ideology,” including language, “was subordinated to interest in the policies of America and Russia [and] ideology became a prop to national policy.” Superpower behavior, furthermore, bore little relationship to the language used by both sides.³¹

This is the intellectual background against which the foreign *clientela* thesis must be read. The peculiarly dangerous conditions of the Cold War era with its ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation resulted in an extremely slippery discursive environment, one in which “doublespeak” – saying one thing while meaning another – became habitual, almost instinctive practice. The immediate post-1945 period witnessed, on an unprecedented scale, a pervasive and cynical manipulation of language and

²⁸ Waltz 1979.²⁹ Waltz 1979: 102; cf. Sterling 1974: 336 (quoted in Eckstein 2006: 15; 2008: 9, 232 n. 6): “states must meet the demands of the political eco-system or court annihilation.”³⁰ Eckstein 2006: 68 and n. 130 (citing Christensen 1993: 333). ³¹ Waltz 1979: 172–73.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19000-8 - Friendship and Empire: Roman Diplomacy and Imperialism in the Middle Republic (353–146 BC)

Paul J. Burton

Excerpt

[More information](#)

its meaning(s) by policymakers, the press, and IR academics. It is therefore unsurprising that the most famous modern statement of the deleterious effect of warfare and politics on language, George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language," appeared during the early days of the Cold War. In this essay, Orwell connects the unprecedented perversion of language to the unprecedented threats to human security:

In our time political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.

The logic of Orwell's conclusion is irresistible: modern political language "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."³²

This is not to say that the degradation of language was unique to the Cold War era. So Thucydides famously wrote of the civil *stasis* at Corcyra in 427 BC:

καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξιῶσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοῦσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προθυμῆς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνητὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἀργόν· τὸ δὲ ἐμπλήκτως ὀξύ ἀνδρὸς μοῖρα προσετέθη, ἀσφαλεία δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλεύσασθαι ἀποτροπῆς πρόφασις εὐλογος.

The Corcyreans altered the usual meaning of words in relation to the facts at will. Thoughtless aggression was called partisan courage; cautious delay, cowardice veiled under a fine name; moderation, a cloak for unmanliness; an ability to see all sides of an issue, an unfitness to act on any; fanatical passion became the attribute of manliness; plotting to secure one's own safety, a reasonable pretext for betraying one's own party. (Thuc. 3.82.4)

³² Orwell 1970: 166 (emphasis in the original) and 170.