

The Macedonian *merides*, Andriscus, and the Fourth Macedonian War

Despite the significant implications of the “new Macedonian historiography” and the findings of Miltiades Hatzopoulos for the history of the four Macedonian states, or *merides*, after the Roman abolition of the Macedonian monarchy in 168 B.C., these have yet to trickle down to the study of the so-called “Fourth Macedonian War,” fought by Rome against the pretender Andriscus (the self-styled Philip VI) between 150 and 148. Scholars still unanimously regard Andriscus’ forcible restoration of the Macedonian monarchy as a predominantly lower-class phenomenon, arising from the majority of the Macedonians’ romantic, nostalgic longing for the glory days of the monarchy, and the conquests of Philip II, Alexander the Great, and Philip V. The *merides*, on this interpretation, were merely empty bureaucratic husks, hardly the focal points of loyalty the Romans designed them to be for the citizens of the new Macedonian states. They had failed miserably to defend themselves since the Romans had left them weak and isolated against outside aggressors, not just of Andriscus’ ilk, but the barbarians on Rome’s northern and western frontiers whose attacks they were perennially subject to. Polybius’ view that Andriscus was “the false Philip who fell from the skies” (ἀεροπετής Φίλιππος; Polyb. 36.10.2) can only mean one thing: it only required a mere nobody declaring to be descended from Macedonian royalty to sweep away the useless and weak *merides*.

But that is, of course, not what Polybius meant. What flummoxed him was how could such an unlikely character, part con artist, part huckster, possibly have been so successful so quickly? He put the whole sorry episode down to the mysterious workings of Fortuna, or the wrath of the gods. He could not figure out why the Macedonians fought so valiantly for Andriscus, who exiled, tortured, and killed so many of them, against the Romans, who had rescued them from servitude and granted them their freedom, among other benefits. “Nationalism,” or its nearest ancient Greek equivalent (φιλοπατρία), apparently did not occur

to him, nor did a nostalgic yearning on the part of the Macedonians for their kings. The new Macedonian historiography supports his thesis: the *merides* were not the problem; Andriscus' determination was. Polybius' criticism of the Macedonians is, in fact, a bit unfair: the Macedonians only supported Andriscus after he defeated them, and fear is a powerful motivator. In any case, the Macedonians of the *merides*, with their armies (the Romans had not, in fact, left them defenseless), resisted Andriscus as hard as they could before the Romans woke up to the crisis. This paper attempts to explain the reasons behind these phenomena.