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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

THE DOMINATION OF THE PTOLEMIES IN THE AEGEAN

*Florian Olteanu**

Abstract

The main purpose of article is represented by the description of the steps in which the Ptolemaic Dynasty (or Lagid Dynasty) imposed as one of the most powerful during the Hellenistic Age.

We proposed to present the activity of kings Ptolemy I Soter, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, Ptolemy III Euergetes, Ptolemy IV Philopator, Ptolemy V Euphrosyne and Ptolemy VI Philometor. The main authors which studied the problem are Kostas Buraselis, Vincent Gabrielsen, Katja Mueller, Alexandru Avram, Paul McKechnie, Philippe Guillaume, Zofia Halina Archibald, Tomasz Grabowski.

Key words: *Ptolemies, Aegean Sea, Black Sea, domination, Hellenistic Age, Egypt*

Historical background

After the death of Alexander the Great, in 323 B.C., the absence of an official succession system opened a period of alliances, crisis and wars, having as main object the imperial heritage of Alexander the Great. Soon after the moment 323 B.C., we can observe that the “Successors” of the Alexander had to choose between trying to preserve the “imperial idea” and to have a most important part of the Macedonian Empire.

The Successors

At the first meeting, held in Babylon, the main “Successor” was Perdikkas, appointed in 324 B.C., as *chiliarchos* by Alexander the Great which was an equivalent of that of “prime-minister”. He might exercise regency on the name of Philip Arrhidaios and the son of Alexander Alexander IV, who Was just born at that moment. It was accredited the idea that Crateros which led 10 000 veterans from Orient in Macedonia after their dismissal ordered by Alexander had the chance to replace Antipatros in Europe and to become regent, but because of is march to Macedonia, he had lost the position in the favor of Perdikkas (McKechnie, 2008).

Another “successor”, Antigonos Monophthalmos received the Great Phrygia, Lycia, and Pamphylia. Ptolemy was proclaimed satrap of Egypt. Eumenes of Cardia (he was the only Greek from the successors), former secretary-in-chief of Alexander received Paphlagonia and Cappadocia. Leonnatos received Phrygia-Hellespont, Pheiton received Media. Lysimachos received the provinces of Thracia and Pont. In Europe, the authority of Antipatros, “strategos” of Europe was reconfirmed.

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Antipatros, Perdikkas, Eumenes, Antigonos were supporters of the “imperial idea”. The others would to extend their positions by conquering territories from others successors. Antigonos fought for the idea that the “imperial heritage” might belong to him and to his successors.

The 321-317 period

In 321, Ptolemy refused the order of Perdikkas to send the body of Alexander from Alexandria to Macedonia and executed Cleomenes, a treasurer named on position by Alexander the Great. Ptolemy was accused on insubordination by Perdikkas who led an expedition against him. Perdikkas failed to enter on the Nile, facing a case of revolt from the part of his soldiers. Peithon from Media and Seleucos, commander of the cavalry had killed Perdikkas in his tent, in July 321 B.C. Peithon will take the command of all troops of Perdikkas. Eumenes from Cardia, allied with Perdikkas succeeded to defeat Crateros soon after crossing the Hellespont Strait.

At the end of 321 B.C., the successors decided to have a new meeting in the Northern Syria, at Triparadeisos to decide how to manage the situation generated by the death of some successors (Grabowski, 2013).

The regency and the tutelage of the minors Philip and Alexander were entrusted to the strategos of Europe, Antipatros. Antigonos Monophthalmos became *strategos autocrator* of Asia. Seleucos entered in the “main category” obtaining Babylonia. Ptolemy was again recognized in Egypt. The allies decided to eliminate Eumenes, but Antigonos failed in the action to capture him at Nara after a one year siege.

In 319, after the death of Antipatros, this successor decided to entrust the power to Polyperchon because his son, Cassandros had no political and military experience. Cassandros made an alliance with Antigonos against Polyperchon. Polyperchon introduced a political practice used also by others successors, “the proclamation of freedom of Greek cities” starting from 318 B.C. Cassandros succeeded to occupy a lot of parts from Macedonia and Greece. In this conflict was involved also Olympiada, mother of Alexander the Great and former wife of Philip II, as an ally of Polyperchon. Cassandros had the victory and became the tutor of Roxana and to his son Alexander IV. He built a solid political basis by marrying Thessalonike, daughter of Philip II, who gave her name to the actual city of Thessaloniki, capital of Macedonia (McKechnie, 2008).

The 316-307 period

In 316 B.C., the map of the Hellenistic world knew the same position of Ptolemy in Egypt, that of Cassandros in Macedonia and Greece, the authority of Antigonos in Asia, the authority of Seleucos in Babylonia, Lysimachos in Thracia and Pont, that of Peithon in Media. Polyperchon had the symbolic quality of regency. He decided to impose Eumenes as autocrator of Asia, against Antigonos, condemned by his discretionary powers. Peithon was executed after trying to perform an independent attitude and Seleucos fled to Ptolemy in Egypt to save his life. Antigonos tried to eliminate Eumenes who was executed after he was left on the battlefield by its on army. The political relations started to be difficult after the assassination of Philip III (317) and Alexander IV (311).

During 315-311 B.C., Antigonos Monophthalmos had to resist against a coalition formed by all successors, who accused him by authoritarianism and by the attempt of reconstruction of the Empire of Alexander for him and his family. Antigonos used

“Greek states freedom” as an expression of his political domination. In 312 B.C., Seleucos succeeded to come back in Babylonia. In 311 B.C., after failing to defeat Antigonos, the other successors recognized his authority in Asia. At the peace from 311 B.C. Ptolemy had gained territories in Lybia and Arabia, Lysimachos extended his conquests in Thrace, Cassandros obtained the confirmation of his status in Europe. In 310/309 B.C. Cassandros succeeded to eliminate another son of Alexander, Herakles, helped by Polyperchon. The death of Alexander IV in 311 B.C. closes a first period in the history of the Hellenistic world (Mueller, 2006).

The peace of 311 B.C. will not last for a long time. Ptolemy, using the concept of “Greek cities freedom” started a campaign by occupying Megara and Corinth. After that, he turned in Egypt. Between 307-304 B.C. a new war was started. Antigonos sent his son Demetrius in Greece in front of a great fleet. At Athens, Demetrius of Phalero, a ruler helped by Macedonian party (and also by a Macedonian garrison) fled in Thebes, Macedonia, and finally in Egypt.

The 306-280 period

The success of Antigonos and Demetrius enraged Ptolemy. Ptolemy had started the conflict with Antigonos for hegemony in the Aegean area. The decisive battle took place in the spring of 306 B.C., near Salamina (in Cyprus island, under the authority of Ptolemy) and the Egyptian fleet was destroyed by the fleet of Demetrius.

In 306 B.C., Antigonos and Demetrius became “kings”, understanding by this title that they claimed the imperial heritage of Alexander the Great. For enforcing this quality they started a war with Ptolemy. At Pelusion, in the delta of the Nile, the Ptolemaic fleet succeeded to stop the advance of Antigonos who decided to turn back in Syria in the autumn of 305 B.C. After this victory, Ptolemy proclaimed himself as a king, as Ptolemy I Soter, but only king of Egypt, having no interest for the “imperial idea”. Until 304 B.C., Lysimachos, Kassandros, Seleucos became also kings. It was the moment of the appearance of Ptolemaic Kingdom, Macedonian Kingdom (Macedonia and some Greek cities), Thracian Kingdom (Thracia and Pontus), Antigonid Kingdom (Anatolia, Palestina), Seleucos Kingdom (Iran, Mesopotamia, parts of India).

The domination of Aegean Area by Antigonos was a reality after the victory of Salamina. Ptolemy had an alliance treaty with Rhodes the main island of the area. Demetrius tried to make a siege over Rhodes which resisted and the siege was stopped.

Demetrius decided to come back over Greece. In 303 B.C., he succeeded to force the retreat of Cassandros back the Thermopylae strait and the retreat of Polyperchon from Peloponessus. The old general will die at 90 years. Demetrius tried to rebuild the former League of Corinth in 302 B.C. on similar basis as “the league of Filip II”. The main aim of this league was to maintain “the generally state of peace” and to ensure military force for Antigonos (Mueller, K., 2006).

The new successes of Antigonos and Demetrius (“surnamed Destroyer of Cities”) created a state of fury for Ptolemy, Lysimachos, Seleucos, Cassandros. Seleucos had a success in ensuring peace in India, having treaties with local kings.

The reunited forces against Antigonos made the main junction in Phrygia. The battle of Ipsos, in 301 B.C. was the last for the old king Antigonos who died on the battlefield. Ptolemy had got a lot of territories in Syria, Palestine. Lysimachos extended in Asia Minor. Cassandros obtained territories in Cilicia and Caria. A part of Syria was given

to Seleucos. Between Seleucids and Ptolemies will be a lot of wars, named the “Syrian wars”.

The new relations between the successors included also the “marriage politics”. Lysimachos had the daughter of Ptolemy as wife. Demetrius had as wife the daughter of Seleucos. In 297 B.C. after the death of Cassandros, the Macedonian Kingdom was a good opportunity for the rest of successors.

Demetrius became king of Macedonia in 293 B.C., having an authority on the important part of Greece. Ptolemy, Seleucos and Lysimachos had a new alliance and they succeeded to defeat Demetrius who fled in exile at Seleucos, between 287 and 283 B.C., when he died at 54 years.

His son, Antigonos Gonatas will become king in an important part of Greece. In 283 B.C. Ptolemy I Soter had died, being followed at the Egyptian throne by his son Ptolemy II Philadelphos. Lysimachos will be a victim of the dynastic interests of his court. Lysandra had married Agathokles son of Lysimachos. They were defeated at Hellis by Dromichaïtes a Getian king. After they were released, in 293 B.C., Lysimach had to fight in his kingdom with the interests of Arsinoe, his wife who would ensure the throne to his major son against Agathokles, the major son of Lysimachos. Seleucos entered in conflict and Lysimachos was defeated at Kourupediond in 281 B.C. After the death of Lysimachus, Seleucos I Nicator had the way opened in Europe. The brother of Lysandra, Ptolemy Keraunos, upset that Ptolemy I preferred his brother Ptolemy II as successor decided to eliminate Seleucos, who was murdered in the Hellespont Area at Lysimacheia.

The Hellenistic state with a unitary rule and structure will be the Egypt conducted by the dynasty of Ptolemies (Mueller, 2006).

In 276, Ptolemy Keraunos died and Macedonia will become again an Antigonid kingdom, generally in the limits of the state during the rule of Philip II. From the Seleucid Kingdom, the Iranians will separate, creating the Parthic state, ruled by Arsacyde dynasty. The Southern Cappadocia will be an independent kingdom conducted by Ariarates (a descendant from the Achemenid family). The Pontic Cappadocia will form the basis of the Pontic Kingdom under Mithridates, after the death of Lysimachos. Ziboetes will form the Kingdom of Bythinia and Philetairos will form the Kingdom of Pergamon (Gabrielsen, 1997).

In conclusion, between 323 and 301 B.C., we can consider that the “imperial idea” subsisted until the death of Antigonos Monophtalmos who died in the battle of Ipsos in 301 B.C. until 280 B.C., all the “successors” which had participated at the meeting of Babylonia died.

After this important date, the “imperial idea” had lost its importance. The Hellenistic state of Egypt, under the authority of Ptolemy, son of Lagos was the most united and well-built Hellenistic state. The main explanation is that of the ethnic homogeneous conformation (the majority of population was Egyptian followed by Greeks and Macedonians) and to the stable internal organization.

The Ptolemaic Dynasty tried to expand its authority on territories situated in Syria, Greece, Asia Minor, even in Thrace Aegean and Black Sea regions.

The Ptolemaic domination over the Aegean Area represents the main key of the Ptolemaic external politics during all the Hellenistic Era.

The Aegean Area in the Hellenistic Age

The Aegean Sea, named after the father of the founder of Athens, Theseus, named Aigeos makes the separation between continental Greece and Asia Minor. It has a surface of 214000 square kilometres. In the Aegean Sea are located more than 2000 islands divided in seven groups: North Eastern Aegean Islands, Euboea, Northern Sporades, Cyclades, Saronic Islands, Dodecanese, and Crete. Most important of them are: Delos, Naxos, Paros, Samos, Lesbos, Crete, Rhodes, Keos, Kos, Thera (Santorini) the Archipelago of Cyclades. Seen as a bridge between Asia and Europe, the Aegean represented a main interest for Greeks from the ancient times of colonization, classical period of Greek history until the Hellenistic and Roman ages (Cummings, 2014).

In the Hellenistic Age, all the successors of Alexander the Great tried to have an influence on the Aegean basin: Antigonides, Ptolemies, Seleucides. The Aegean Sea represented the main connection with the Hellespont and to the Black Sea.

The Aetolian League had encouraged the activity of piracy, the pirates making troubles for all the kingdoms which tried to control the area.

The evolution of the Ptolemaic domination in the Aegean Area

The Dynasty of Ptolemies ruled Egypt until 31 B.C., when Kleopatra VII Philopator committed suicide after being defeated by the Roman fleet at Actium. It is necessary to consider that in the Aegean area, the Ptolemies were active during the reigns of Ptolemy I, Ptolemy II, Ptolemy III and Ptolemy IV. After the last reign, we can consider that the decline of the Ptolemies forces was started. There is difficult to present a complete chronology and an image of the territories placed under the Ptolemaic domination on the Aegean Area, because of the discontinuity of sources.

The expression used to designate the power of Ptolemies in the regions outside the territory of Egypt is the “thalassocracy”. The main representatives were Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphos (Buraselis, 1982).

In 313 and, especially after 295 Ptolemies succeeded to occupy Cyprus a very rich island which could ensure a basis for the next step, the advance to the Aegean region.

During the actions from 310-308 B.C. Ptolemy I performed actions in Caria, Cilicia, Lycia. Proclaiming the freedom of the Greek cities he attempted an expedition in Greece promoting an intensive propaganda in the archipelago of Cyclades, considered a liaison bridge between Greece and Minor Asia, and in the same time the “key” of the Aegean basin. For showing the interests of Ptolemies for the Aegean Area, the headquarters of Ptolemy in Aegean basin was established in the Island of Kos.

After the defeat and the death of Antigonos at Ipsos in 301 B.C., Ptolemy I decided to get involved in the conflict with Demetrius. After 287 B.C., he succeeded to ensure the command of the League of Islanders (founded initially by Antigonos to control the Aegean Sea), the most efficient political instrument in controlling the Aegean basin (Buraselis, 1982).

The successor of Ptolemy I, Ptolemy II Philadelphos had a major success in establishing a basis in the island of Samos. Between 267-261 B.C., and 260-253 B.C. Ptolemy II involved in the “Chremonidian War” and in the Second Syrian War. The battle of Kos was a moment in which the domination of Ptolemies was seriously threatened, but generally speaking, the Ptolemies succeeded to maintain the majority of their points of resistance in the Aegean basin. In this situation, for example, from Rhodes to Cyprus it

was a distance for more than 600 km by sea, in the condition of no island to stop. It is very clear why Ptolemies tried to control some coastal territories (especially in Lycia) on this way from Cyprus, by Aegean Sea to the continental Greece.

Practically, there were three major Ptolemaic bases on Aegean Area: Keos in Crete, Ithanos and Methana/Arsinoe in Argolida. An explanation concerning the small number of new settlements on Ptolemaic origin, is given by the fact that Ptolemies tried to ensure a cooperation with the cities already existent trying to avoid the new foundation because of the difficulties caused by the relief.

During the Third Syrian War (246-241 B.C.), Ptolemies (reign of Ptolemy III) succeeded to ensure a domination especially in Thrace and Hellespont.

The Ptolemaic control remained generally in these lines until the times of Ptolemy V. During the entire time of their domination the Ptolemies tried to ensure the domination by a dynastic unification by giving names from their family of the existent and new settlements as an expression of a dynastic unification (Cummings, 2014).

In the Aegean area, the expression of the thalassocracy was accomplished by two means: establishing new settlements and having the alliance of the existing settlements. For example, in Thracia the new settlements founded by Ptolemies are practically inexistent. The military force which ensured the “thalassocracy” was the Ptolemaic fleet.

The presence of the Ptolemies in the Aegean Area was a prestige problem. All the rulers of the Egypt tried to ensure a communication point in the south of Syria and also in the Minor Asia. Having the key control of the Aegean, the Lagid Dynasty could have an influence in the continental Greece, Thrace and even in the Black Sea region.

According to the first mean, that of establishing new settlements, the Ptolemies founded 2 colonies in Crete, 2 in the Greece (Methana in Argolida at the Saronic Gulf) and in the Aegean Islands (Keos, Thera). We can observe that the Ptolemies had a good relation with the Aetolian League. There in Aetolia were founded two colonies with Ptolemaic name. The historical explanation is that of the cooperation between Egypt of Ptolemies and the Aetolian League in the context of domination in the Aegean Area.

At the half of the III-rd century B.C., the Aetolian League an allied of Ptolemeies had established relations with a lot of settlements from the Aegean Sea and Minor Asia coasts: Delos, Chios, Miletus, Smyrna, Tenos and Abdera. The interests of Ptolemies in having the control over the islands or over the sea shores of the continental areas could be explained by the technique of sailing in the Antiquity (sailing in the neighbourhood of the coasts).

In 245 B.C. the Ptolemaic fleet was defeated in the battle of Andros and the main consequence was a diminution of the Ptolemies force in the Aegean area.

The end of the Ptolemaic influence in the Aegean Area

As a generally image, in the case of the first three Ptolemy kings, they preferred to delegate representatives in the dialogue with the city-states where they had political and military interests. On the other side they imposed another type of communication establishing some permanent diplomatic residences of second or third rank officials, helped usually by a military garrison.

We must consider that the Ptolemaic strategy in the Northern Aegean region was rather different that in the rest of the region. In the monumental dedication from Samothrake, it is presented the “patronage” of Ptolemies as official policy, extended even