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A NOTE ON THE SUPPOSED PEACE TREATY BETWEEN THE ANTIGONIDS AND THE AIAKIDS AFTER THE DEATH OF PYRRHOS*

Abstract. – It is usually considered that some time after the defeat and death of Pyrrhos in Argos in 272 his heir Alexander II signed a peace treaty with Antigonos Gonatas, despite the fact that no information about a such treaty has been preserved in the sources. But if a supposed treaty was ever concluded, it could have been signed by Gonatas and Helenos, another son of Pyrrhos, who was captured in Argos and later released with honors. Helenos was sent by Gonatas to Epeiros, but his later fate is unknown since he is never again mentioned in the very scattered sources. Alexander II's invasion of Macedonia in the second half of the 260s suggests that he had no personal obligations to Antigonos Gonatas.

In memory of Pierre Cabanes

During his final invasion of Macedonia in 274, Pyrrhos defeated Antigonos II Gonatas, who had recently re-established the Antigonid dynasty there.¹ However, even after a second defeat—by Ptolemy, Pyrrhos' eldest son, who had been left in charge of his Macedonian possessions—Gonatas kept some parts of his realm, in Macedonia and abroad. When some time later Pyrrhos left Macedonia and Epeiros for the Peloponnesian campaign against Sparta as well as the Antigonid allies in the region, Gonatas regained control of the parts of Macedonia and Thessaly he had previously lost (Paus. 1.13.7). The final clash be-

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¹ On the Macedonian and Peloponnesian campaigns of Pyrrhos in 274–272 see e.g. Lévêque 1957, 557–571, 583–627; Hammond – Walbank 1988, 259–267; Lane Fox 2011, 503–505; Waterfield 2021, 124–131.

tween Gonatas and Pyrrhos, which resulted in the death of the Molossian king, took place in the streets of Argos in the autumn of 272. Earlier, Ptolemy, the eldest of Pyrrhos' three sons, had fallen in a skirmish with the Spartans (Ptolemy was the son of Pyrrhos and Antigone, the step-daughter of Ptolemy I).

After the defeat and death of Pyrrhos his army capitulated. Among the prisoners of war taken by the Macedonians in Argos was the younger son of Pyrrhos, Helenos, whose mother was the Illyrian princess Birkenna.² Gonatas and his elder son Halkyoneos treated the royal captive with kindness. Soon, Gonatas released Helenos and sent him to Epeiros with the ashes of his father as well as with a part of Pyrrhos' former army. The most detailed accounts of Helenos' capture and release are those of Valerius Maximus (5.1, ext. 4) and Plutarch (*Pyrrh.* 34.10–11), and there is also an abbreviated version in Justin (25.5.2).³ Only Valerius Maximus mentions that Helenos was sent to his “brother Alexander” in Epeiros (*Helenium ... ossaque ei Pyrri aurea inclusa urna Epirum in patriam ad Alexandrum fratrem portanda dedit*).

Helenos is never again mentioned in the sources,⁴ though they are very scarce for Epeirate history during the last four decades of the Aiakid monarchy. The older half-brother of Helenos, Alexander II, whose mother was Lanassa, daughter of Agathokles, the Syracusan tyrant and king, became the heir of Pyrrhos and reigned until *c.* 240.⁵

Usually, it is considered that some time after the defeat and death of Pyrrhos Antigonos Gonatas and Alexander II signed a peace treaty, and even that the release of Helenos was a part of the peace negotiations.⁶ It must be noted that no information about a such treaty has been

² On Helenos see Sandberger 1970, 107–109; Heckel 2021, 513 (no. 511).

³ Hieronymos of Kardia is probably a common source for the narratives of Valerius Maximus, Plutarch, and Justin (Trogus) concerning the death of Pyrrhos and the fate of Helenos. Pausanias (1.13.9) explicitly states that Hieronymos, who was the close associate of the first Antigonids (Monophthalmos, Poliorketes, and Gonatas), described the final campaign of Pyrrhos (see for the details Hornblower 1981, 102–106; cf. Lane Fox 2011, 504–505). Valerius Maximus complements Plutarch's account of the last fight and death of Pyrrhos with valuable additional information (e.g. about *kausia* of Gonatas, with which he covered the head of Pyrrhos, or the golden urn for his cremated remains).

⁴ Cf. Sandberger 1970, 109. The statement that “Pyrrhus received a royal burial, and his surviving son Helenus was sent back to Epirus, where he reigned without interference from Antigonos” (Gabbert 1997, 31) is absolutely unfounded.

⁵ On the early life and activity of Alexander II, see Sandberger 1970, 23–25; Cabanes 1976, 75–76; Heckel 2021, 33 (no. 54).

⁶ E.g. Droysen 1955 (1878), 142; Tarn 1913, 287; Beloch 1925, 578–579; Lévêque 1957, 630; Cabanes 1976, 77; Nederlof 1978, 274; Vershinin 1988, 99–100; Hammond 1989, 307; Lévêque 1997, 79; cf. Hammond – Walbank 1988, 267; Gerogiannis 2022, 112.

preserved in the sources⁷ and its conclusion as well as its supposed terms are only inferences and speculations.⁸

But if a such treaty was ever concluded, there is another possibility. It is possible that it was Helenos, as the son of Pyrrhos and a member of the Aiakid dynasty, who signed a peace treaty with Gonatas at Argos before his honorable release.⁹ We note that, as Valerius Maximus attests, Gonatas treated Helenos as a prince (*quin etiam filium eius Helenum captivum ad se pertractum et cultum et animum regium gerere ...*).

An additional argument for such a hypothesis can be put forward. Around ten years after the death of Pyrrhos Alexander II invaded Macedonia during the Chremonidean War (c. 268–262), but after first successes he was defeated.¹⁰ The invasion of Alexander suggests that he had no personal obligations to Gonatas after the conclusion of the supposed Antigonid and the Aiakid peace treaty. Justin (26.2.9) claims that the campaign of Alexander was revenge for the death of Pyrrhos, but that probably only echoes his son's propaganda.

It has been suggested that by honoring Helenos Gonatas planned to create turmoil, or waited for one, between the surviving sons of Pyrrhos.¹¹ The character of the relationship of Alexander and Helenos during the lifetime of Pyrrhos is unknown. But the bad feeling and jealousy felt by the Syracusan Lanassa for the barbarian wives of Pyrrhos—among them was the Illyrian Birkenna—mentioned by Plutarch (*Pyrrh.* 10.7), might have spilled over into the relationship between the step-brothers.¹² Both Alexander and Helenos accompanied Pyrrhos

⁷ The supposed peace treaty between the Antigonids and the Aiakids was not included by H. H. Schmitt in the third volume of “Die Staatsverträge des Altertums” (SVA III [1969]), covering the period from 338 till 200.

⁸ See Cabanes 1976, 77: “La tâche la plus urgente pour le nouveau souverain est de mettre un terme aux hostilités avec la Macédoine d’Antigone Gonatas. Notre tradition, bien pauvre, ne parle pas des négociations et de la paix qui a été certainement conclue entre le vainqueur de Pyrrhos et le nouveau roi épirote. Hélénos a été probablement libéré après que son adversaire Antigone eût reçu des garanties sérieuses. Privée de son chef prestigieux, l’armée épirote, isolée à Argos, n’était d’ailleurs plus un danger pour le roi de Macédoine; elle capitula et on peut penser qu’une partie importante de cette troupe, mercenaires et peut-être Macédoniens et Thessaliens, rejoignit le camp du vainqueur, tandis que le contingent épirote regagnait avec Hélénos la terre natale. Mais ce sont les conditions territoriales de la paix qui restent difficiles à déterminer. Il est certain qu’Alexandre II dut renoncer à toutes les conquêtes récentes de son père, dans le Péloponnèse, en Thessalie et en Macédoine”.

⁹ Cf. Garoufalas 1979, 141.

¹⁰ Just. 26.2.9–11; 3.1; Euseb. *Chron.* 1.243 Schoene. See for the details Heinen 1972, 175–177; Cabanes 1976, 85–91; Hammond – Walbank 1988, 285–286.

¹¹ Vershinin 1988, 100; Grainger 1999, 117.

¹² I owe this note to W. Heckel.

during his campaigns in the West. Since no sources for the fate of Helenos after 272 are available it is better to avoid speculation.¹³

One of the first acts of Alexander II as king was the withdrawal of the garrison from Tarentum which Pyrrhos had left in the city before he departed from Italy in 275.¹⁴ This signaled the abandonment by Alexander of his father's western policy. Probably at the beginning of his reign, Alexander waged war against the Illyrian ruler Mytilos (Trog. *Prol.* 25; Front. *Strat.* 2.5.10), obviously defending the southern Illyrian territories previously conquered by Pyrrhos. Apparently, Alexander II preserved most of his father's Balkan realm.¹⁵ Later, Alexander initiated an aggressive military policy: in the second half of the 260s he invaded Macedonia, and he also divided Akarnania with the Aitolians (at some point between the 260s and 243).¹⁶

Even after Alexander II's unsuccessful invasion of Macedonia and the temporary banishment of the king from Epeiros by the victorious young son of Gonatas, Demetrios (the future king Demetrios II), Alexander's realm after the king's restoration remained an important regional power in the Balkans.

After the victory of Antigonos Gonatas in the Chremonidean War against the coalition of Athens, Sparta, some other Greek states, and Ptolemy II, as well as the defeat of Alexander II,¹⁷ Macedonia became one of the Great Powers in the Hellenistic world, alongside with the Seleukid and Ptolemaic empires.

Justin (26.3.1) asserts that a certain "allies", with the consent of the Epeirotes, restored Alexander to his realm. They can be identified with the Akarnanians, who, according to Justin, gave refuge to Alexander, and with the Aitolians,¹⁸ who were probably allies at that time (SVA III 480). On the other hand, it is possible that Akarnania was already divided between Alexander and the Aitolians and that the king sought refuge in his external possessions. If so, the "allies" who hel-

¹³ Long ago J. G. Droysen denied the possibility of conflict between Helenos and Alexander after the death of Pyrrhos (Droysen 1955 [1878], 142, n. 135).

¹⁴ SVA III 475; cf. Euseb. *Chron.* 2.120–121 Schoene. See also Cabanes 1976, 77, 81.

¹⁵ Cabanes 1976, 78–81. In 294, in the course of his first intervention in Macedonian affairs, during the strife of Kassandros' sons Alexander V and Antipater, Pyrrhos took over Tymphaia and Parauaia from Macedonia (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 6.4). Under Perseus Tymphaia and probably also Parauaia (as a single administrative unit) were a parts of the Antigonid realm (Liv. 45.30.6). The time of their return to Macedonia is not attested in the sources. It could be connected with the death of Pyrrhos or the aftermath of Alexander II's unsuccessful invasion of Macedonia, but other occasions are also possible (see Fine 1932, 126–130; Cabanes 1976, 78).

¹⁶ See SVA III 485; Cabanes 1976, 91–93.

¹⁷ There is no reason to suppose cooperation or alliance between Alexander II and the anti-Macedonian coalition, though it has sometimes been suggested (e.g. Hammond 1967, 588; Cabanes 1976, 86–87; Waterfield 2021, 172).

¹⁸ Cf. Scholten 2000, 78.

ped in restoration of Alexander to Epeiros were only the Aitolians. But the restoration of Alexander would probably have been impossible without Gonatas' approval, and it is even possible to suppose one more peace treaty between the Antigonids and the Aiakids around the end of 260s.¹⁹

It is probable that, after the restoration of Alexander II in Epeiros and until the end of his life, a form of “cold war” was in force between the Aiakids and the Antigonids during the 250s and 240s. However, the death of Alexander *c.* 240 and the subsequent encroachment of the Aitolians on Aiakid possessions in divided Akarnania induced Olympias, the widow of the king, who acted as regent for their sons, Ptolemy and Pyrrhos II, to resort to a rapprochement with Macedonia, where Demetrios II (239–229) had become the successor of Antigonos Gonatas.²⁰ But a decade after the death of Alexander II and the subsequent deaths of his descendants, the Aiakid monarchy, weakened by struggle against the Aitolians and possibly Illyrians, as well as by internal dynastic problems, fell after the rebellion of the Epeirotes in the late 230s.²¹

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¹⁹ Cf. Gerogiannis 2022, 112.

²⁰ See for the details Kuzmin 2019, 71–72.

²¹ See for the details Cabanes 1976, 97–101.

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