

Peripheral Aftermath of the Treaty of Apameia in the Black Sea

The second century BCE began with a major geopolitical shift in the Mediterranean and Hellenistic world, one that has been studied extensively, though with a concentration on one of its aspects: the interconnectivity between the Roman and the Hellenic political spheres. This paper seeks to discuss the aftermath of the settlement of Apameia (188) as regards the Black Sea area. The Roman victory over Antiochos III triggered several new opportunities but also challenges for the powers in Anatolia and adjacent territories. Freed from Seleukid control, many kings and dynasts actively reshaped the geopolitical order over the following decades. Their rivalries involved the control of the Black Sea, the southern shores of which belonged to the Pontic and Bithynian kingdoms, while the control of the Marmara Sea was disputed by the Attalids, Rhodians and Bithynians. These rulers entertained diplomatic relations with some cities of the Black Sea, such as Sinope, Herakleia or Tioion on the southern shore, but also Chersonesos Taurike and Mesembria on the northern and western shores. At the same time, the Bosporan Kingdom as well as several Thracian and Scythian dynasties had their own diplomatic networks and political agendas, although positive evidence for this is lacking. All of these authorities had to respond to the retreat of the Seleukid armies.

The war which opposed the Attalid king and his Bithynian and Cappadocian allies to the Pontic king and his Galatian and Armenian allies (ca. 182-179) was of prime importance in this period. This conflict ended with the victory of the Attalid king Eumenes II, assuring a relative supremacy over Anatolia, and saw the participation of a Sarmatian dynast, as well as the conquest of Sinope and the conclusion of an alliance with Chersonesos Taurike for Pharnakes, the king of Pontos (Polybios 25.2). Among the contextual factors may have been major nomadic movements in the region, but this theory has been challenged and the archaeological evidence needs further

examination. The barbarian peoples called ‘Sarmatians’ or ‘Scythians’ in civic decrees which mention attacks against the polis territories may well have been subjects of neighbouring states rather than nomadic tribes acting independently. The conclusion of the Pontic War made it clear that Roman hegemony was still a distant political factor, in spite of secondary diplomatic accomplishments by the representatives of the Senate during the peace negotiations.

All in all, the kings of Pontos, Bithynia and Pergamon pursued different strategies as regards the control of the area. As it stands, Eumenes’ efforts targeted Thrace and inland-Anatolia, while his influence on the Black Sea relied on diplomatic relations with cities opposed to Bithynia, particularly Herakleia. The Bithynian king expressed a relative disinterest for the northern Pontos Euxeinos, despite the reconquest of Attalid Tieion, which he received as a reward for his alliance in the war. Pharnakes had to withdraw from central Anatolia after his defeat, but he could keep Sinope. This led to a new maritime orientation for his kingdom, in which he was not challenged by his rivals. The most important long-term outcome of this new direction was the later conquest of the Black Sea basin by Mithradates VI Eupator of Pontos.

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