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WHERE DID ARISTONICUS' REVOLT BEGIN?

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WHERE DID ARISTONICUS' REVOLT BEGIN ?

The revolt of Aristonicus, which played such an important role in the early organization of the province of Asia by the Romans, has often been discussed. But, one question that has not received the attention it deserves in these discussions is that of where his activity actually began. There is a general assumption that it was in the central region of the Pergamene kingdom and that the trouble spread north and south from there.¹ I suspect that this is incorrect. The evidence, both literary and epigraphic suggests that he invaded the Pergamene kingdom from Thrace.

The inscription honoring Menas the son of Menas at Sestos and that honoring Machaon the son of Asclepiades at Cyzicus both refer to the outbreak of the war in their region before Rome made any decision with regard to the kingdom. Machaon's first appeal was to Marcus Cosconius, the governor of Macedonia. Although Cosconius did not send troops to Cyzicus, it is said that Machaon did accomplish something (IGR IV 134,9-11): *πρεβεύσας τε πρὸς Μάρκον Κοσκώνιο[ν τὸ]ν ἐμ Μακεδονία τότε στρατηγὸν πάντα τὰ συμφέροντα* | τῆι πόλει διαπράξει. Despite its formulaic nature, it should not be assumed that the inclusion of the phrase *πάντα τὰ συμφέροντα* | τῆι πόλει διαπράξει is meaningless. If Cosconius had not done something for the Cyzicenes, reference to the mission could have been curtailed or omitted. The only thing that he was in a position to do was to attack the Thracians and this could only have been relevant to Cyzicus' problem if there was an important Thracian element in the forces harassing the city.² The decree in honor of Menas makes an explicit

¹ Cf. for instance A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Foreign Policy in the East 168 B.C. to A.D. 1* (London 1984), 84-5; E. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique (323-30 av. J.-C.)*² (Nancy 1982), 419; J. Hopp, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der letzten Attaliden* (Munich 1977), 142-147; D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century After Christ* (Princeton 1950), 147-54; 1033-43. This assumption appears to be based on a misreading of Strabo XIV 1,38: *μετὰ δὲ Κυμύρναν αἱ Λεῦκαι πολίχνην, ὃ ἀπέστησεν Ἀριστόνικος μετὰ τὴν Ἀττάλου τοῦ Φιλομήτορος τελευτήν, δοκῶν τοῦ γένους εἶναι τοῦ τῶν βασιλέων καὶ διανοοῦμενος εἰς ἑαυτὸν ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀρχήν.* This does not mean that Aristonicus "raised the standard of revolt" there (as in Magie, *Roman Rule*, 148), it means that Aristonicus made the place join him. The reason that there is so much on Aristonicus in this section of Strabo's work is that nothing else worthy of note happened at Leucae, and for this reason it was a convenient spot for Strabo to include a digression describing the result as a whole. For this feature of Strabo's composition cp. XVI 1,28 (history of Rome's relations with Parthia); XVII 1,43 (prophecies connected with Alexander).

² In commenting on this text Magie attempted to disassociate the embassy to Cosconius from the war with Aristonicus ("Rome and the City-States of Asia Minor," W.M. Calder & J. Keil [eds.], *Anatolian Studies Presented to William Hepburn Buckler* [Manchester 1939], 181; *Roman Rule* II 1038 n. 13). The πόλεμος in line 5 can only be that with Aristonicus. There would be

connection between trouble with the Thracians and the outbreak of the war with Aristonicus in the area around Sestos (*I. Sestos* 1 = *OGIS* 339,16-23): τῶν τε βασιλέων εἰς θεοὺς μεταστάντων καὶ τῆς πόλεως ἢ ἐν ἐπικινδύνῳ καιρῷ γενομένης διὰ τε τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν γειτνιόντων Θρακῶν φόβον ἢ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ἐκ τῆς αἰφνιδίου περιτάσεως ἐπιστάντων χαλεπῶν, Μηνᾶ[ς] ἢ καὶ λέγων καὶ πράσων διετέλει τὰ ἄριστα καὶ κάλλιστα, διδοὺς ἀπροφασίτως ἑαυτὸν εἰς πάντα τὰ συμφέροντα τῆι πόλει, τάς τε πρεσβείας ἀνεδέχετο προθύμως πρὸς τε τοὺς στρατηγοὺς τοὺς ἀποστελλομένους ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ τοὺς πεμπομένους πρεσβευτάς. This is probably also the context in which Byzantium made the contribution to Rome's welfare that it recalled in appealing for a remission of tribute in 53 A.D. (*Tac. Ann.* XII 62). The fact that the coinage of Aristonicus in the central portion of the ancient Attalid kingdom does not seem to begin before his second year might also suggest that he did not control the minting cities until that time.³

The literary sources, scant though they are, also suggest that Aristonicus came from outside the kingdom, and that the region from which he came was Thrace. Justin reports that Aristonicus invaded Asia after the death of Attalus (*XXXVI* 4): *sed erat ex Eumene Aristonicus non iusto matrimonio, sed ex paelice Ephesia ... genitus, qui post mortem Attali velut paternum regnum Asiam invasit.*⁴ The crucial point here is that the verb *invado* used with a place name in the accusative connotes movement into an area from outside. It is extremely unlikely that any of the neighboring kings, who later took strong action to help suppress the revolt, would have allowed him to build up his forces in their territory. Thus Thrace is the most likely area for him to have raised an army for his fight to control the kingdom which he claimed to be his by right of birth and it was an area with a long tradition of hostility towards the authorities both in Macedonia and the Attalid kingdom.⁵ In addition to this, Valerius Maximus records that Aristonicus' army included a great number of Thracians.⁶ It is

no reason to appeal to a Roman if Attalus was still alive, an appeal for help before his death would have been directed to the στρατηγός τῆς Χερρονήσου καὶ τῶν κατὰ Θράκιαν τόπων, cf. M. Holleaux, "Inscription trouvée a Brousse," *BCH* 48 (1924), 12-16 = *Etudes* II 83-87; H. Bengston, *Die Strategie in der hellenistischen Zeit. Ein Beitrag zum antiken Staatsrecht* II (Munich 1964), 227-233; R.E. Allen, *The Attalid Kingdom. A Constitutional History* (Oxford 1983), 86-88 for Attalid administration in this area; the στρατηγός is attested in *I. Sestos* I 13. Magie's objection is based upon his belief that the war must have started to the south. Earlier discussions assume that the war with Aristonicus is referred to in both places; cf. E.V. Hansen, *The Attalids of Pergamon*² (Ithaca 1971), 155 n. 131.

³ Cf. Hopp, *Untersuchungen*, 122-124 for a summary of the bibliography.

⁴ Cf. Livy, *Epit.* 59: *Aristonicus Eumenis regis filius Asiam occupavit.*

⁵ Cf. *FGrH* 244 F 18 (with Jacoby's note *ad loc.*); *Trog. prol.* 36; Strabo XIII 4,2; Hansen, *The Attalids of Pergamon*, 139-40; Hopp, *Untersuchungen*, 96-98; 111 n. 25; Hassall, M.; Crawford, M.; Reynolds, J., "Rome and the Eastern Provinces at the end of the Second Century B.C.," *JRS* 64 (1974), 213.

⁶ Val. Max. III 2,12: *Crassus cum Aristonico bellum in Asia gerens, a Thracibus, quorum is magnum numerum in praesidio habebat, inter Elaeam et Zmyrnam exceptus.*

usually assumed that these are "auxiliaries" or mercenaries in his service. This is not impossible, but even on that explanation it must be allowed that Aristonicus had access to Thrace as a recruiting ground while he was in the region around Pergamum. It is somewhat easier to explain their presence here if, as the inscriptions discussed in the previous paragraph suggest, he had actually begun his activity in Thrace. In this regard his actions provide an interesting parallel to those of Andriscus, who had raised an army in Thrace to invade Macedonia in 149.

The location of Andronicus' early moves on the north western fringes of the old Attalid kingdom is of some significance for understanding the revolt as a whole. While it is true that he was able to exploit local rivalries and economic discontent in the former kingdom of Pergamum, these need not be seen as the driving force behind his revolt.⁷ If Aristonicus had not been able to win support in Thrace for his plans, it is more than likely that they would never have been more than dreams.

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⁷ For a summary of the debate cf. Will, *Histoire politique*², 423; Hopp, *Untersuchungen*, 121 n. 1.