

## THE PTOLEMIES VERSUS THE ACHAEAN AND AETOLIAN LEAGUES IN THE 250s–220s BC

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**Abstract:** In the 250s and 240s continental Greece found itself in a particularly complicated situation. The growth of the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues, as well as Sparta's awoken ambitions, presented the Ptolemies with favorable conditions to actively pursue efforts to weaken the Macedonian influence there. Initially, the partner of the Ptolemies became the Achaean League. In this way, the Ptolemaic fleet gained important footholds, including both Corinthian ports, Kenchreai in the Saronic Gulf and Lechaion in the Corinthian Gulf. This strengthened the position of the Lagids at sea, and it was the islands on the Aegean Sea and the coasts of Asia Minor that were in the centre of the Ptolemies' interest. However, the Aetolian League could continue to be seen as one of their possible partners in Greek politics. We should not exaggerate the Achaean-Aetolian conflict. After the death of Antigonos Gonatas in 239, the two conflicted federations were joined by an alliance. It cannot be excluded that Sparta also cooperated with the coalition, and the king of Egypt could have been a convenient link in this cooperation. There is no information whatsoever to suggest an Egyptian initiative to form the coalition. After the defeat of the Egyptian fleet at Andros in ca. 245, the position of the Lagids in the Aegean Sea was not as strong as it had once been. This was all the more reason for Ptolemies to closely observe the Aetolians' intense activity on the Aegean Sea. The Ptolemies and Aetolians concluded *symmachia*. Ultimately, however, alliances were reversed: Aratus pushed the Achaean League towards a coalition with Macedonia, but earlier, having learned about the Achaean-Macedonian negotiations, Ptolemy decided to cancel his financial support for the Achaeans and hand it over to Sparta. It is very likely that the situation in the whole Aegean region (especially the expedition of Antigonos Doson to Caria in 227) played a role in changing the Ptolemies' policy. The contacts which the Aetolian League established in the region were all the more reason for Ptolemy III to choose Cleomenes and the Aetolians at the expense of the Achaean League. At that time, the beginning of closer relations between the Aetolians and the Attalids could also be observed. It cannot be ruled out that the Ptolemaic diplomacy was a mediator, since up until then the Aetolians had no common interests with Pergamum. For the Lagids, on the other hand, the Attalids were a force worth supporting against the Seleucids, just as the Aetolians were a valuable partner in the rivalry against Macedonia.

**Keywords:** Aetolian League, Achaean League, Sparta, Athens, the Ptolemies.

In the 250s–240s<sup>1</sup> continental Greece found itself in a particularly complicated situation. The growth of the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues, as well as Sparta's awoken ambitions, presented the Ptolemies (the Antigonid dynasty's main rivals in Greece at the time) with favorable conditions for actively pursuing efforts to weaken the Macedonian influence there. The kings of Egypt, in turn, were able to seize the opportunity and go back to the policy which had already been conducted, with varying luck, at the end of the fourth century. As was the case before, the Peloponnese became the most important arena of political contest.

We may pinpoint the year 314 as the beginning of the Ptolemies' involvement in Greece, although at the time Ptolemy confined himself to declaring the freedom of the Greek *poleis*, like Polyperchon and Antigonus Monophthalmus.<sup>2</sup> This fact is often interpreted as an intention to counterbalance the policy of Antigonus and an attempt to neutralize his act related to the same issue. Certainly, this was the foremost reason behind using the popular slogan, but it can also be interpreted as an introduction to a much larger-scale Greek policy. His declaration, like that of Antigonus', was after all aimed against the interests of Ptolemy's ally at the time, Cassander, and at the same time could have opened much broader future prospects for the satrap of Egypt. As we know, Ptolemy's direct military involvement came about a few years later, in 308, and the expedition was preceded by diplomatic efforts and propaganda. It seems that the Lagid's main goal was to capture the Peloponnese, and it also cannot be excluded that he had plans to establish a *symmachia* of Peloponnesian *poleis* under Ptolemy's aegis. Ultimately, the campaign did not bring much success, but Sicyon and Corinth remained in the hands of the king of Egypt for several years, and his successors could refer to their predecessor's activity on the Aegean Sea in their policy.<sup>3</sup> In continental Greece, apart from Athens, it was the Peloponnese that became the Lagids' main object of interest. We may suppose that this was a deliberate political line of the dynasty, for which the Peloponnese had a significant strategic value in the face of competition in the Aegean and on Crete.

In the following period, the attention of Ptolemy I and his successor concentrated mainly on the Aegean Sea, where he steadily expanded his sphere of influence. However, he rarely became directly involved in the events occurring in Greece.<sup>4</sup> There, the first two Ptolemies mostly focused on Athens, with which they tried to keep close contacts and which they provided with money and grain.<sup>5</sup> The Lagids' activity in Greece increased

<sup>1</sup> All dates in this paper are BC.

<sup>2</sup> This probably took place in the winter of 314/313: Errington 1977: 497; Huss 2001: 150. An expedition led by Polykleitos was also sent to Greece, but he left Hellas very quickly (Diod. 19.62.5; 64.3–5), which confirms that at that time Ptolemy had little opportunity to act in the face of the threat posed by Antigonus Monophthalmus in Syria.

<sup>3</sup> *IG* V.2.550; XI.2.161; *I. Délos* 296; 313; Diod. 19.62.5; 64.3–5; 20.19.4; 37.1–2; Plut., *Demetr.* 15.1.3; Paus. 6.3.1; 6.16.3; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 8.58.f; Suda s.v. Δημήτριος ὁ Ἀντιγόνου. On Ptolemaic policy in Greece in these years see Moser 1914: 29–61, 76–94; Seibert 1969: 176–189; Huss 2001: 173–179; Grabowski 2008. Loss of influence in Corinth and Sicyon: Diod. 20.102.2–4; 20.103.1–3; Plut., *Demetr.* 25.1; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 4.7.2; 4.7.8.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. cooperation with Pyrrhus: Plut., *Pyrrh.* 5.1; 5.10–11; Iust. 17.2.13–15, support for Athens against Demetrius Poliorcetes in 287: *SEG* XXVIII, 60; Plut., *Demetr.* 33–34. Cf. Habicht 1979: 45–67; Osborne 1979.

<sup>5</sup> *IG* II, 650; 682; *SEG* XXVIII, 60, *I.14*–15.

in the 260s, when Ptolemy II started to forge an anti-Macedonian coalition, which ultimately led to the outbreak of the Chremonidean War. The dynamic Ptolemaic diplomatic campaign and propaganda covered, apart from the insular states of the Aegean Sea, mainly the *poleis* in southern Greece. Finally, the emerging coalition, whose most important element was the alliance between Sparta and Athens, mainly included Peloponnesian city-states: apart from Sparta, the *poleis* of Arcadia, Elis and Achaëa.<sup>6</sup> The Chremonidean War, despite the defeat, did not mean a complete loss of influence in Greece by the Ptolemies, and it brought them some important acquisitions on the Aegean Sea.<sup>7</sup> Having bases on the Aegean Sea and in Methana/Arsinoë on the Peloponnese, as well as considerable financial resources, enabled the Lagids to continue their active policy in Greece. The policy of Antigonos Gonatas, who based his strategy in Greece on keeping garrisons and enforcing pro-Macedonian tyrannies and oligarchies, could not calm moods in Hellas.

The events in continental Greece after the Chremonidean War opened up new perspectives to the Ptolemies. This period saw, on the one hand, an expansion of the Aetolian League, and on the other, rapid growth of a new power on the Greek political scene – the Achaean League. The Aetolian *koinon* continued the process of subordinating successive states in central Greece.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, at the end of the 250s the Aetolians already had nine votes in the Delphi Amphictyonic Council,<sup>9</sup> the increased significance and ambitions of the League were also reflected in the expansion of the *Soteria* festival at Delphi in the 240s, which commemorated saving the sanctuary during the Gallic invasion and the Aetolian contribution to this success.<sup>10</sup> The strengthened *koinon* decided to break the alliance with Acarnania and to divide its territory together with Epirus.<sup>11</sup> This period also saw the increased involvement of the Aetolians in the two regions which were particularly important for the Lagids: the Peloponnese and the Aegean Sea. On the Peloponnese, the Aetolians had closer relations particularly with the Eleans, who in turn sought expansion in Arcadia. Regardless of whether we consider the Aetolian interventions in Peloponnesian affairs to be a result of the League's activity or a more individual initiative of some Aetolians organizing pillaging raids, the facts remain that their interest in the region increased.<sup>12</sup> At an unspecified date, the Aetolians entered into an alliance

<sup>6</sup> On the Chremonidean War see Heinen 1972: 97–213; Gabbert 1983; 1997: 45–53; Huss 2001: 271–281; O'Neil 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ptolemy took over or extended his control of e.g. Miletus, Ephesus, several cities on Crete, probably also Thera and Lesbos, and even on the Peloponnese (Methana, renamed Arsinoë): *I. Milet* 139; *I. Cret.* III.4; *IG XII*, 5.1061; cf. Bagnall 1976: 141–145; van't Dack 1988: 146; Brun 1991; Hölbl 2001: 42–43.

<sup>8</sup> As regards the development of the Aetolian League see Larsen 1968: 195–215; Walbank 1984: 232–236; Grainger 1999: 29–129; Scholten 2000: 16–95; 2003: 141–144; cf. also Lefèvre 1995: 33–39.

<sup>9</sup> *CID* 4.45–48.

<sup>10</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 402. At that time, the programme of the games was expanded and a four-year cycle of organization was introduced, which characterised the most important Pan-Hellenic games. The distribution of seats on the Amphictyonic Council: *CID* 4.45–48.

<sup>11</sup> Schmitt 1969: no. 485. The alliance with the Acarnanians, formed earlier (Schmitt 1969: no. 480), was strictly instrumental and enabled the Aetolians to calm the situation on the western borders of the League, see Dany 1999: 69–97; Grainger 1999: 132–139; Scholten 2000: 77–93.

<sup>12</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 472; Polyb. 4.18.8–12; 4.34.9; 9.34.9–10; Plut., *Arat.* 31–32; *Cleom.* 10.11; 18.3; Paus. 5.6.1; Polyaeus, *Strat.* 8.59. Researchers vary in their evaluation of the nature of these operations; it cannot be excluded that some of them were private raids of individual Aetolian generals. The clearest case is that of an

with the Messenians.<sup>13</sup> After establishing close relations with Elis, the Aetolian League was elevated to the group of the most influential powers on the peninsula.

The Ptolemies' contacts with the Aetolian League had not been particularly close,<sup>14</sup> but there is an interesting document from the time of the Chremonidean War which confirms that the Delphi Amphictyonic Council welcomed the most important festival of the Lagid monarchy, the Alexandrian *Ptolemaia*, which thus gained the status of Pan-Hellenic games. This was reportedly in 262/261, i.e. when the war was coming to an end and the Macedonian victory was unquestionable.<sup>15</sup> As we can see, although the Aetolians could not be enlisted for the anti-Macedonian coalition during the war, Ptolemy II's intensive propaganda was not completely futile. Naturally, such a step could have been motivated solely by the opportunism of the Aetolians, who concluded that they should look for a counterbalance to the triumphant Antigonos Gonatas. However, we can also interpret this as a success of the Ptolemaic diplomacy, which gave Ptolemy a chance to play the Aetolian card in the future.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing the *Ptolemaia* festival was even more significant in view of the fact that the Amphictyonic Council was at the time dominated by Aetolians.

The antagonism between the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues (the two most promising partners in their anti-Macedonian policy in the middle of the second century) posed a significant problem for the Ptolemaic diplomacy. The Aetolians' expansion on the Peloponnese threatened the vested interest of the other federation. The rivalry between the Aetolians and the Achaeans reached its peak in 245, when the Achaean League backed the Boeotians in their war against the Aetolian League, which ended in the Boeotians' defeat at Chaeronea.<sup>17</sup>

It was easier for the Ptolemies to find common ground with the Achaean League, whose military operations had an anti-Macedonian slant almost from the start. Closer mutual relations were also facilitated by the League's contacts with Pyrrhus during his expedition to the Peloponnese in 272, since the Epirote's policy in Greece was also supported by the Lagids.<sup>18</sup> However, the main bridge between Egypt and the Achaean

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intervention in Laconia around 240, which should be considered an official campaign of the League. For that topic see Flacelière 1937: 239–244; Will 1979: 329–333; Grainger 1999: 157–164; Scholten 2000: 116–130.

<sup>13</sup> Polyb. 4.39; 6.11. Most likely the treaty was concluded around 244, cf. Roebuck 1941: 67.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Grabowski 2010: 192–205.

<sup>15</sup> *FD* III 4.357 = *CID* 4.40. This decision was made during Pleiston's archonate. Bousquet (1958: 77–82) dated this event to the year 269 or 265, but Pleiston was an archon in 262/261; Lefèvre 1995: 179. The Aetolians had the majority of votes on the council at the time. The Lagids' interest in Apollo's oracle can already be observed a few years before. In 279, Alexandria received the privilege of *promanteia*. The theory about a kinship of the Ptolemaic capital with Delphi was also propagated (*SIG*<sup>3</sup> 404; Bousquet 1991: 172).

<sup>16</sup> Grainger (1999: 142) seems to underestimate this decision of the Amphictyonic Council, emphasizing that at the time it was tied by *proxenia* with Megara and Cassandrea, i.e. cities under Macedonian control. Considering their situation in Hellas after the Chremonidean War, the decree of 262/261 should, after all, be interpreted as an intention to establish closer relations with the Lagids, who were still the only power that counterbalanced Macedonia.

<sup>17</sup> Polyb. 20.4.4–5.2; Plut., *Arat.* 16. Cf. Urban 1979: 46–48; Grainger 1999: 150–152; Scholten 2000: 83–92, 258–259.

<sup>18</sup> Plut., *Pyrrh.* 5.1; 5.10–11; Iust. 17.2.13–15. Livy's account (35.26.5) about the Achaeans seizing a Macedonian ship shows that they participated actively in these fights. Cf. Lévêque 1957: 287–288; Heinen 1972: 192–193; Urban 1979: 10–12.

League could have been Sparta – the Ptolemies' ally during the Chremonidean War. After all, the Achaeans also participated in the conflict, indeed as the Spartans' allies, although there is no source information about any specific military operations they conducted.<sup>19</sup> Starting from Aratus' journey to Egypt in the winter of 251/250, the cooperation between the Ptolemies and the Achaean League tightened, and subsequently the *koinon* were able to rely on the financial backing of the kings of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> The Lagids' choice seemed to be the right one, since the Achaeans, aptly led by Aratus, recorded a series of victories, including the crucial capture of Corinth.<sup>21</sup> In this way, the Ptolemaic fleet gained important footholds, including both Corinthian ports, Kenchreai in the Saronic Gulf and Lechaion in the Corinthian Gulf. Another important base of the Egyptian fleet was Arsinoe/Methana, held by the Ptolemies, whose convenient location in Argolis on the peninsula jutting out to sea gave control of the sea traffic in the Saronic Gulf.<sup>22</sup> Ptolemy III, maintaining correct relations with the Aetolians and supporting the Achaeans, had a right to think that he was close to seizing control over the Corinthian Gulf, which could have opened up completely new prospects in the context of the rivalry with the Antigonids in Greece, as well as strengthening the position of the Lagids at sea. From the perspective of the fundamentals of the Ptolemaic foreign policy, whose most important area of interest was the Aegean Sea, this second aspect could have played an even more important role in Ptolemy's eyes. The backing of the Achaean League was even more essential in view of the fact that Ptolemy's relations with Athens, which were dominated by the Antigonids until 229, became looser.<sup>23</sup>

Choosing the Achaean League as a partner was even more natural considering the fact that the Aetolians not only maintained proper relations with Antigonos Gonatas, but even enlisted his support. Polybius mentions an alliance between Gonatas and the Aetolian League, but he fails to provide any detailed information about the time when it was made.<sup>24</sup> It is valid to link the alliance with Aratus' seizure of Corinth, since at that

<sup>19</sup> Schmitt 1969: no. 476, ll. 23–26, 38–40.

<sup>20</sup> Plut., *Arat.* 9–15; 24.4; 34.5–6; 35.1–5; 41.5; *Cleom.* 19.4; Paus. 2.8.5.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the development of the Achaean League in this period see Walbank 1933: 29–49; Larsen 1968: 215–240; Urban 1979: 38–62; Polybius (2.43.7–8) clearly shows the overall aim of Aratos: μεγάλην δὲ προκοπήν ποιήσας τῆς ἐπιβολῆς ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ λοιπὸν ἥδη διετέλει προστατῶν μὲν τοῦ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν ἔθνους, πάσας δὲ τὰς ἐπιβολὰς καὶ πράξεις πρὸς ἐν τέλος ἀναφέρων: τοῦτο δ' ἦν τὸ Μακεδόνας μὲν ἐκβαλεῖν ἐκ Πελοποννήσου, τὰς δὲ μοναρχίας καταλῦσαι.

<sup>22</sup> L. Robert (1960: 159) aptly compared Methana to Gibraltar. It is unclear since when it had been in Ptolemaic hands, most likely since the Chremonidean War. Cf. also Meyer 1935: 1375–1379; Bagnall 1976: 135–136; Cohen 1995: 124–126.

<sup>23</sup> Even so, the symbol of continuing his father's Greek policy was Ptolemy III erecting a statue of Glaucon (an Athenian statesman, who together with his brother, Chremonides, found refuge in Egypt after the Chremonidean War): *SIG<sup>3</sup>* 462. Athens established close relations with Ptolemy soon after overthrowing the Macedonian domination in 229. On the place of Athens in Ptolemy III's policy see Habicht 1982: 105–117; 1997: 73–75; Beyer-Rothhoff 1993: 137–143.

<sup>24</sup> Polyb. 2.43.9–10; 45.1. According to Polybius, Antigonos Gonatas and the Aetolians supposedly agreed as to the division of the territory of the Achaean League between them, but this seems quite unlikely. However, this information fits perfectly this historian's large picture of this period and his opinion of the Aetolians (cf. e.g. Polyb. 4.3.1–2). In Polybius' vision, the Aetolians brought chaos to Greece and thwarted the Achaeans' policy aimed at freeing the Greeks from Macedonian domination. The Aetolians' behavior also served Polybius as an argument to explain the later agreement between Aratus and Antigonos Doson.

critical moment it would have been natural for Antigonus to look for a strong partner, and the coalition with the Aetolians was most probably his idea.<sup>25</sup> The friendlier relations between Ptolemy III and the Achaean League were likely a reaction of the other side to the closeness between the Aetolians and the Macedonians.<sup>26</sup> However, there is much evidence to suggest that earlier, during the rebellion of Alexander (Gonatas' nephew), who governed Corinth and Euboea, the Aetolians backed the king of Macedonia.<sup>27</sup> It seems that two camps formed at the time: on the one hand Alexander, the Achaeans and the Boeotians; on the other, Antigonus and his allies, including the Aetolians. Sources do not point out clear connections between the conflicts taking place at the time, but the sheer size of the military forces at Aratus' disposal indicates that the ongoing strife between the Aetolians and the Boeotians, supported by the Achaeans, was not just a local one; on the contrary, it was part of a much larger conflict.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, around 245, Alexander's death and the subsequent marriage of his widow, Nicaea, to Antigonus' son, Demetrius, enabled the Macedonian king to recapture control of Corinth for two years.<sup>29</sup> Even so, the situation in Greece continued to give the Ptolemies opportunities to pursue their anti-Macedonian policy on the Peloponnese. We may presume that after Alexander was eliminated, the Ptolemies became an even more desirable partner for the Achaean League, which lost its most valuable ally in Alexander and which was threatened from almost all directions by Macedonia and the Aetolians. Antigonus' relations with the Achaean League remained strained. Although some researchers<sup>30</sup> have concluded, based on Plutarch's account (*Arat.* 15), that the relations between Antigonus and the Achaean League improved, the account (which, incidentally, is marked by a strong rhetoric) more likely refers to an earlier period.<sup>31</sup> In Alexandria, it was certainly realized that the cooperation between the Aetolians and Macedonia was short-term and could not exclude the possible future alliance between the Aetolians and the Egyptians.

The years following Alexander's rebellion brought a sharpening of Antigonus Gonatas' policy towards Greek states. The king of Macedonia pushed tyranny in the Greek *poleis* even more frequently than before.<sup>32</sup> Installing this unpopular form of government proved to be a mistake, as it increased the Greeks' dislike of Macedonia. This was the grist to Aratus' mill, and the capture of Acrocorinth in 243 and the resulting removal of an important link in the chain of "the shackles of Greece" opened up new perspectives for the Achaean League. Corinth applied to join the League, followed by Epidaurus,

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<sup>25</sup> Tarn (1913: 400) assumes the Aetolians were the initiators of this alliance, but Polybius' account does not suggest this.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. also Flacelière 1937: 205; Schmitt 1969: no. 490. Scholten (2000: 93) doubts the conclusion of a formal treaty.

<sup>27</sup> Scholten 2000: 85–86. For Alexander's rebellion cf. Will 1979: 316–324; Buraselis 1982: 171–172; Walbank 1984: 246–250; Orsi 1987; Hammond/Walbank 1988: 297–303.

<sup>28</sup> According to Plutarch (*Arat.* 16.1), Aratus had 10,000 men during the campaign which ended in the battle of Chaeronea. This is probably an overestimated number (e.g. in comparison with the Achaean forces during the war against Cleomenes III), but it indicates that the scale of the conflict was larger.

<sup>29</sup> Plut., *Arat.* 17.1–5.

<sup>30</sup> Walbank 1933: 43, 178–179; Will 1979: 297; Erington 2008: 93.

<sup>31</sup> Urban 1979: 31, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Polyb. 2.41.10; 9.29.6. See Tarn 1913: 276–286; Walbank 1967: 233.

Megara and Troezen.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the Achaeans also signed a treaty with Sparta at that time.<sup>34</sup> The cooperation between the Lagids and the Achaean League also flourished during this period. In 243, Ptolemy III Euergetes was elected hegemon of the League, which was not just an honorary function.<sup>35</sup> We should also not overestimate the significance of Antigonos Gonatas' cooperation with the Aetolian League, as despite the tactical alliance the interests of the two sides were essentially conflicting. Therefore, we should not necessarily look for the influence of the king of Macedonia in the actions of the Aetolians, although their activeness on the Peloponnese was naturally against the Achaean League, and thus threatened the Lagids' interests. However, we should not exaggerate the Achaean-Aetolian conflict. In 241, the Aetolians attacked the Peloponnese.<sup>36</sup> It has been rightly observed that there is much to suggest the campaign was more of a small raid and its aim was not to destroy the Achaean League.<sup>37</sup> In any case, Plutarch, describing the events, refers to the Aetolian campaign as an attack against the Peloponnese, not the Achaean League, which did not have to be synonymous.<sup>38</sup> In this light, the behavior of Aratus becomes more understandable – he initially asked the Spartans for help, but eventually gave up their support and sent Agis IV back to Sparta.<sup>39</sup> This decision of the League's *strategos* is often explained by fear of social unrest, which was caused in the Peloponnesian cities by the reforms carried out by Agis IV in Sparta, mainly the abolition of debts and a new partition of lands.<sup>40</sup> However, this opinion does not have a strong basis in source material. Plutarch writes about the strong impression that the Spartan army made on the residents of the Peloponnese – their discipline and order, as well as Agis' simplicity of clothes and manners. On the other hand, according to Plutarch, the rich were worried that the example of the Spartan king would agitate the population. However, the Spartan army marched mostly across terrains which were on the Aetolian, not the Achaean-Spartan side, which – considering what the army behavior was usually like when it moved across enemy territory – may indicate that this passage has a rhetorical character.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, listing the motives which caused Aratus to give up Agis IV's help, Plutarch refers directly to the diary of the Achaean *strategos* and does not say a word about Aratus' fears related to Agis and his social reforms.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Plutarch clearly states that Aratus wanted to explain and justify his decision in his diaries. Aratus' reasoning – as relayed by Plutarch – indicates that the Achaean *strategos* did not regard

<sup>33</sup> *IG IV*<sup>2</sup>, 1 70; Polyb. 2.43. 5; Plut., *Arat.* 24.3; Paus. 2.8.5; cf. Schmitt 1969: no. 489.

<sup>34</sup> Plut., *Agis* 13. According to some researchers (Walbank 1933: 49; Will 1979: 302), it was only the enthronement of Agis IV in Sparta and his internal policy that made the Achaean-Spartan alliance possible, but it would be too hasty to reject the possibility of cooperation in different circumstances.

<sup>35</sup> Plutarch's account (*Arat.* 24.4) seems to suggest that Ptolemy's hegemony had a purely titular character, and many researchers accept this interpretation (e.g. Will 1979: 299; Green 1990: 153; Hölbl 2001: 51), but cf. Urban (1979: 53–54).

<sup>36</sup> Plut., *Agis* 13.5–15; *Arat.* 31–32.

<sup>37</sup> Scholten 2000: 124.

<sup>38</sup> Plut., *Agis* 13.6; *Arat.* 31.2.

<sup>39</sup> Plut., *Agis* 13.4–15.3.

<sup>40</sup> Plut., *Agis* 6–11. Regarding Agis IV's policy and his reform see Oliva 1971: 208–222; Shimron 1972: 14–27; Cartledge/Spawforth 1989: 35–43; Walbank 1984: 252–255.

<sup>41</sup> Urban 1979: 55 n. 255.

<sup>42</sup> Plut., *Agis* 15.2.

the Aetolian threat as a grave danger.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Aratus supposedly gave up not only the Spartan support, but also the backing of the other allies, at least a considerable number of them.<sup>44</sup>

Generally speaking, in favorable conditions the Ptolemies could count on a further increase of their influences and the Aetolian League could continue to be seen as one of their possible partners in Greek politics. Such conditions occurred after the death of Antigonos Gonatas in 239. The two conflicted federations were joined by an alliance. It remains an unanswered question who the initiator of this coalition was. We look back at the events at the time mainly through the eyes of Polybius and Plutarch, both of whom presented the facts from the point of view of the Achaean League and therefore did not doubt that it was Aratus' plan.<sup>45</sup> It cannot be excluded, however, that it was the Aetolians who proposed a change of alliances. It was at that time that their good relations with Macedonia began to crumble, which was caused by disagreements related to Epirus, where after Alexander II's death there was a clash of conflicting Aetolian and Macedonian interests.<sup>46</sup> In any event, the situation was very favorable for both leagues, since they could exploit the temporary weakening of Macedonia, which was natural after the change on the throne. This also presented Ptolemy III with a dream opportunity: for the first time he was able to work together with both of the Antigonids' most dangerous opponents. It cannot be excluded that Sparta also cooperated with the coalition, and the king of Egypt could have been a convenient link in this cooperation. Even though sources are silent on the subject of Sparta's formal cooperation with Ptolemy under Agis IV's rule, it was very likely, considering Agis' alliance with the Achaeans and Cleomenes III's later position. It is unlikely that in the interim, despite Agis' demise, there was a complete turnaround in the Spartan policy. In any case, it follows from Polybius' account that the animosity between Cleomenes and the Achaeans only started in 229,<sup>47</sup> and later it was Cleomenes who was the stronghold of the Ptolemaic anti-Macedonian policy. Therefore, everything points to the fact that in 239 a particularly strong coalition was born, which gathered together the most important Greek states at the time. We may presume, however, that Ptolemy was more of a beneficiary of Aetolian and Achaean efforts, since there is no information whatsoever to suggest an Egyptian initiative to form the coalition. Undoubtedly, though, it was to the Lagid's content; for him the Aetolians were a valuable ally not only because of the situation in continental Greece but – even more importantly for the dynasty's interests – also on the Aegean Sea.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The lack of the motive of fear of Agis IV in Aratus' explanation is all the more puzzling given the fact that after the statesman's experiences with the next king of Sparta, Cleomenes III, Aratus could have easily presented himself as a farsighted statesman who had seen a threat to the Achaean League in Agis: Urban 1979: 56.

<sup>44</sup> Plut., *Agis* 15.5; *Arat.* 31.2.

<sup>45</sup> Polyb. 2.44.1; Plut., *Arat.* 33.1.

<sup>46</sup> Justin (28.1) links the outbreak of war with events in Epirus: Olympias, the widow of Alexander II, feeling threatened by the Aetolians in Epirot, part of Acarnania, married her daughter Phthia to Demetrius II. With regard to the causes of Achaean-Aetolian *symmachia*; cf. also Larsen 1975; Beyer-Rothhof 1993: 134; Scholten 2000: 132–137.

<sup>47</sup> Polyb. 2.45.4.

<sup>48</sup> The fact that the relations between the Aetolian League and Ptolemy continued to be good may perhaps be illustrated by the Delphic dedications of the Aetolians, although they were private ones, for Ptolemy



The islands on the Aegean Sea and the coasts of Asia Minor were in the center of the Ptolemies' interest. This region was key for their position in the contemporary world. A strong presence in the region allowed them not only to maintain the naval power of the dynasty, but also to participate in the great political game of the Hellenic powers. After the defeat of the Egyptian fleet at Andros in ca. 245, the position of the Lagids there was not as strong as it had been.<sup>49</sup> This was all the more reason for Alexandria to closely observe the Aetolians' intense activity on the Aegean Sea. In the 250s and 240s, a network of connections began to tie the Aetolian League to many communities on the islands on the Aegean Sea and on the coasts of Asia Minor, such as Chios, Delos, Tenos, Miletus, Smyrna and Abdera.<sup>50</sup> At the time, the waters of the Aegean Sea also witnessed many pirate raids carried out by Aetolian commanders on their own.<sup>51</sup> The unstable situation and constant rivalry between the Antigonids and the Lagids on these waters created favorable conditions for such escapades, for which the Aetolians were well-known in the Greek world. Some of the activities undertaken by the Aetolian League on the Peloponnese were, in fact, connected to the Aetolian operations on the Aegean Sea. This followed from the fact that there were sea routes connecting Aetolia with the Aegean Sea along the coast of this peninsula, which provided a good opportunity to extend one's influence in a similar way as on the Aegean Sea.<sup>52</sup> The most important interests of the Aetolian League were, naturally, related to the Peloponnese. It was from there that danger was likely to come, as illustrated e.g. by the case of the campaign of the Spartan king Areus in 281 under the slogan of sacred war.<sup>53</sup> The Aetolians' involvement in Peloponnesian matters was certainly also intended to protect them from this side. This is how the 240 intervention in Sparta can be interpreted.<sup>54</sup> The Aetolians, summoned by the supporters of the murdered Agis IV, did not reach their goal of imposing friendly authorities in Sparta. Eventually, the intervention ended in plundering Laconia, but at least this raid somewhat restored the Aetolians' prestige, damaged by the defeat at Pellene at Aratus' hands the previous year.

Sources contain no information as to Ptolemy's direct military involvement in the war against the new Macedonian king, Demetrius II, started by the coalition of both Leagues. They are even silent on any possible financial support. However, it is difficult to imagine that Ptolemy, who had generously backed the Achaeans thus far, would have stopped providing help at such an opportune moment. What is more contentious is the

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and his family: IG IX, 1<sup>2</sup> 1.202; 203. However, perhaps they only date back to the 220s. Habicht (1982: 11 n. 148; 1997: 177) connect it with the year 228 or 224–221; similarly Hölbl 2001: 52 (228 BC); Hammond/Walbank (1988: 325 n. 2; 340 n. 1) with the 220s.

<sup>49</sup> On the situation in the region see Buraselis 1982: 164–179; Hölbl 2001: 50–51.

<sup>50</sup> IG IX 1<sup>2</sup> 1.185; 1.191; ISE II 78; FD III 1.482; 1.483; Schmitt 1969: no. 564. The Aetolians even offered Chios one of the seats on the Delphi Amphictyonic Council.

<sup>51</sup> SIG<sup>3</sup> 520; 521. Such raids were extremely profitable. In this period, there was an increase in the number of private dedications in Delphi, often very expensive and massive (IG IX 1<sup>2</sup> 1.181; 200; 202; 203; 185; SIG<sup>3</sup> 514). One of the Aetolians, Nikolaos of Proscheion, even founded a festival bearing his name (*Nikolaieia*) at Delos, following in the footsteps of Macedonian and Egyptian kings, who had established their own festivals there (IG XI 2.287B, ll. 126–128).

<sup>52</sup> Scholten 2000: 129.

<sup>53</sup> Iust. 24.1.2–8.

<sup>54</sup> Polyb. 4.34.9, 9.34.9; Plut., *Cleom.* 10.11, 18.3; Scholten 2000: 128–129.

matter of such help for the Aetolians, and the key to answering this question is the dating of a statue of Ptolemy III and his family, erected by the Aetolians at Thermon.<sup>55</sup> Some phrases lead us to believe that the time in question is the period of war against Demetrius (239–229), rather than the clashes against Antigonos Doson in the 220s, as some researchers claim.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it seems that erecting such a statue would be more advisable after a victorious war rather than one which was a failure, which the war against Antigonos Doson must have been from the viewpoint of the Aetolians, since they lost control over Thessaly as a result.

On the contrary, the Demetrian War brought considerable success to the coalition. The Aetolians took advantage of the end of the Aeacidae dynasty in Epirus and captured the southern part of this state; most importantly, immediately after Demetrius' death, they tore away part of Thessaly (crucial for the Antigonids) from Macedonia.<sup>57</sup> The Achaean League gained the support of one of Demetrius' most important followers, Lydiadas the tyrant of Megalopolis.<sup>58</sup> Following in Lydiadas' footsteps, other Arcadian *poleis* joined the Achaean federation. Aratus also managed to strengthen his League by including such important cities as Argos, Megara and Aegina.<sup>59</sup> In the unanimous opinion of Polybius and Plutarch, this was when both the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues reached the peak of their powers.<sup>60</sup> The hegemony of the Antigonids in Greece was crushed. As Plutarch's account shows, getting Megalopolis to join the League also had some negative consequences from the Ptolemies' point of view.<sup>61</sup> Lydiadas turned out to be a very ambitious politician, who subsequently competed against Aratus for the position of the League's strategos, which could have had consequences for the effectiveness and cohesion of the Achaean League's actions, particularly due to a difference of opinion between Aratus and Lydiadas with regard to political strategy. Aratus tried to keep peaceful relations with Sparta, undoubtedly encouraged to do so by the king of Egypt, who had a vested interest in this. Megalopolis' conflict with Sparta posed, in turn, the most danger for the Ptolemaic interests,<sup>62</sup> particularly since in the same year that Lydiadas

<sup>55</sup> *IG IX*, 1<sup>2</sup> 1.56. Habicht (1982: 111 n. 148 and 1997: 177); Beyer-Rothhoff (1993: 166 n.143), and Hölbl (2001: 52) relate this inscription to the times of the war against Antigonos Doson, placing it between 228 and 221. Huss (1975) and Urban (1979: 64 n. 302) connect it with the war against Demetrius II. Volkman (1959: 1673) opts for 225/224.

<sup>56</sup> The ending of the inscription (ἀρετᾶς ἔνεκεν καὶ εὐεργεσίας τᾶς εἰς ἔθνη[ος καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνας]) matches the events of the war against Demetrius, during which the strongest Greek states jointly opposed the Macedonian hegemony, cf. Huss 1975: 320.

<sup>57</sup> *Iust.* 28.3.13–15. Part of Thessaly joined the Aetolian League (Scholten 2000: 165–170, *contra* Grainger 1999: 234–243). Scholten also suspects that the Thessalians and the Phthiotian Achaeans, who also joined the Aetolian League at the time, may have been inspired by Ptolemy. However, there is nothing to indicate that, and their actions may be explained by the opportune situation due to the great crisis in Macedonia. Cf. also Hammond/Walbank 1988: 338–339.

<sup>58</sup> Polyb. 2.44.5; Plut., *Arat.* 30.1–2.

<sup>59</sup> Polyb. 2.44; Plut., *Arat.* 34.5–35.5; *Iust.* 28.3.13–15; cf. Urban 1979: 63–96.

<sup>60</sup> Polyb. 2.45.1; Plut., *Arat.* 34.7.

<sup>61</sup> Plut., *Arat.* 30.3; *Cleom.* 4.1.

<sup>62</sup> Megalopolis' enmity towards Sparta had its origin in the establishment of this *polis* (Diod. 15.72.4; Paus. 8.27.1–8). Megalopolis, established at the time the Arcadian League was formed and with the participation of the Boeotians, was supposed to play the role of a stronghold protecting Arcadia against the Spartans. On the situation in the Achaean League at that time, see Oliva 1984.

joined the Achaean League with his *polis*, Cleomenes III became the king of Sparta. Like Agis IV, he had ambitions of restoring the Spartan hegemony on the Peloponnese. The Achaean-Aetolian-Spartan bloc, which had required so much effort to form, might crumble. Nevertheless, for the time being the Ptolemaic diplomacy was enjoying great success, even more so when the Athenians overthrew the Macedonian rule in 229 – the same Athenians who, impressed by the fleeting Macedonian success on the Peloponnese, had given honorary citizenship to Bithys, a general in Demetrius II's service, just a few years earlier, in 233.<sup>63</sup> Considering the prestige of Athens in the Greek world, and the role it played in the Lagids' policy, this was an event of great propagandist significance. Even though the initiative came from the Athenians, undoubtedly Ptolemy supported their efforts, at least financially.<sup>64</sup>

Ptolemy III then supported the Aetolians during the war against Antigonos Doseon, who, after taking over power following Demetrius' death, instantly attacked in order to regain control of the whole of Thessaly.<sup>65</sup> Despite Ptolemy's backing, which this time undoubtedly took the form of *symmachia*,<sup>66</sup> the Aetolians did not succeed in defending their position in this region, and even suffered Antigonos' invasion of Doris and Phocis.

What was a much more serious problem for the Ptolemaic policy was the growing antagonism between the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues. Combined with the ambitions of the Spartan king Cleomenes III, this eventually led to a "reverse of alliances" and a collapse of the anti-Macedonian coalition. Ancient authors blamed the outbreak of war against Cleomenes III on the politicians of the Achaean League, unfriendly to Sparta, on Cleomenes or on the Aetolians.<sup>67</sup> According to Polybius, the latter, together with Sparta, were plotting an alliance with Antigonos Doseon, but were outsmarted by Aratus, who thwarted their intentions. However, there is nothing to suggest such a course of events, and one of the clues may be the fact that the Aetolian League and Sparta maintained close relations with Ptolemy III, who was in conflict with Antigonos. Moreover, during the Achaean League's war against Sparta, which soon followed, the Aetolians remained neutral. Polybius' account can most easily be explained by saying that he tried to justify the choices made by Aratus, whom he admired, or that he found such an explanation in

<sup>63</sup> *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 808; cf. Osborne 1981–1983, I: 185–187, no. D 87; II: 172–177; Hammond/Walbank 1988: 331 n. 4–6; Green 1990: 253, *contra* Henry 1990: 179–189, who identifies Bithys as one of the Lysimachus' *philoï* in the 280s).

<sup>64</sup> Possibly through Aratus, who handed over 20 or 25 talents to Athens (Plut., *Arat.* 34.6; Paus. 2.8.6), *contra* Habicht 1997: 174. In any case, Athens' relations with the Lagids quickly became close, cf. n. 78.

<sup>65</sup> *Iust.* 28.3.14.

<sup>66</sup> *P. Haun* 1.6.18. Habicht (1980: 1–2) connected the account about the cooperation between Ptolemy and the Aetolians in this papyrus with the already mentioned statue of the Lagid king's family put up at Theron, and so concluded that it was only in 229/228 that the two sides cooperated. However, there is no reason to discount the possibility that the statue and the papyrus are connected to two different events. On the other hand, Schwartz (1978: 98) arrives at the (not very valid) conclusion that Ptolemy supported the Aetolians only after the war finished. Possibly, it was at this time that the city of Ptolemais was established in Aetolia (*SIG*<sup>3</sup> 545.6, cf. Cohen 1995: 118–119).

<sup>67</sup> Polyb. 2.45; Plut., *Arat.* 30.5; *Cleom.* 3.6–4.1; cf. Urban 1979: 97–158; Beyer-Rotthoff 1993: 144–150.

Aratus' diaries.<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, the policy of the Achaean *strategos* led to signing an agreement with the king of Macedonia and to wasting the League's previous achievements.

In an atmosphere of growing tension between the hitherto allies, Ptolemy probably tried to mediate, although we have no source information on this subject. It is difficult to believe, however, that the Ptolemaic diplomacy did not try to save the anti-Macedonian coalition. After all, there are many indications that Aratus also tried to avoid an open conflict, at least to begin with. In the first phase of the Cleomenean War, the Achaean League continued its alliance with the Lagids. Ultimately, however, alliances were reversed: Aratus pushed his *koinon* towards a coalition with Macedonia, but earlier, having learned about the Achaean-Macedonian negotiations, Ptolemy decided to cancel his financial support for the Achaeans and hand it over to Cleomenes.<sup>69</sup> Euergetes' decision is usually explained either by his discovery of the talks between Aratus and Antigonos, or by the general line of Ptolemaic policy in Greece, which involved supporting anti-Macedonian forces. As Polybius himself admits, there is no doubt that Alexandria recognized Cleomenes as a much more effective partner than the Achaean League.<sup>70</sup> It is very likely, however, that the situation in the whole Aegean region also played a role. It was this region that attracted the most attention of the Ptolemies, and the worrying events happening there at the time must have been noticed in Alexandria. In 227, Antigonos Doson organized an expedition to Caria, which was an important link in the chain of Ptolemaic properties in the region. He managed to obtain several footholds there (such as Mylasa, Alinda and Priene in Ionia).<sup>71</sup> The contacts which the Aetolian League established in the region were all the more reason for Ptolemy to choose Cleomenes and the Aetolians at the expense of the Achaean League.<sup>72</sup> The Aetolians also signed a treaty with Knossos,<sup>73</sup> and Crete also occupied an important spot in the Lagids' policy, both due to the possibility of recruiting excellent mercenaries and as a foothold for the fleet operating on the Aegean Sea.<sup>74</sup> At that time, the beginning of closer relations between the Aetolians and the Attalids could also be observed.<sup>75</sup> It cannot be excluded that the Ptolemaic diplomacy was a mediator, since up until then the Aetolians had no common interests with Pergamum.<sup>76</sup> For the Lagids, on the other hand, the Attalids were a force worth supporting

<sup>68</sup> Polybius (2.56.2) points to Aratus' *Diaries* as the main source which helped him to relay the course of the Cleomenean War.

<sup>69</sup> Polyb. 2.51.2–4; Plut., *Arat.* 38.9; *Cleom.* 22.4; Schmitt 1969: no. 505–506.

<sup>70</sup> Polyb. 2.51.2.

<sup>71</sup> *I. Labraunda* 1.4–7; Pomp. Trog., *prolog* 28. Bengtson (1971: 24–25) suggests that Doson and Attalos planned to divide Caria, but the cooperation of the king of Pergamum with the Aetolians, Doson's opponents, contradicts this theory.

<sup>72</sup> Naturally, we cannot speak of friendship between Sparta and the Aetolians, but at that time the Achaean *koinon* was the main rival of the Aetolian League.

<sup>73</sup> Polyb. 4.53.8; 55.5. Epigraphic sources indicate Aetolian increasing interest in Crete, cf. Scholten 2000: 193–194, 195–196.

<sup>74</sup> Ptolemy III's close contacts with Cretan cities are confirmed by many inscriptions, cf. Spyridakis 1970: 76–77; Bagnall 1976: 117, 121–122; Beyer-Rothhoff 1993: 219–220; Huss 2001: 360–362.

<sup>75</sup> Attalos founded the *stoa* in Delphi (*SIG*<sup>3</sup> 523). Polybius (4.65.6) mentions that Attalos sponsored the fortification at Elaos in western Aetolia in 219. Considering the scale of these reinforcements mentioned by Polybius, their construction must have begun earlier.

<sup>76</sup> Scholten (2000: 194) believes that the Aetolians and the Attalids became closer as a result of a sense of common threat from Macedonia, but Antigonos Doson's campaign to Caria was most likely not an act aimed against the Attalids. On the place of Pergamum in Ptolemy III's policy, see Beyer-Rothhoff 1993: 76–80.

against the Seleucids, just as the Aetolians were a valuable partner in the rivalry against Macedonia. In Greece, Ptolemy's response to the Achaean-Macedonian alliance was to tighten their relations with the Aetolian *koinon*<sup>77</sup> as well as Athens.<sup>78</sup> This was also natural from the Aetolians' point of view, especially in view of Doson forming the Hellenic League, gathering the majority of Greek states around him.<sup>79</sup> In this way, the position of the Aetolian League in central Greece came under threat.

In the end, it turned out that Cleomenes was unable to face the coalition built by Antigonos Doson. Even before the decisive battle of Sellasia, Ptolemy III decided to stop his financial support for the king of Sparta, which sealed the ambitious king's fate. It was probably understood in Alexandria that without direct military involvement it would be impossible to keep up Sparta's resistance. Such an intervention went beyond Ptolemy III's political strategy in Hellas up to this time. Besides, Euergetes' attention began to be drawn to the affairs of a land which was key to his dynasty – Coele-Syria, where the Seleucid threat was growing.<sup>80</sup> Cleomenes was the victim not only of a level-headed evaluation of the situation by the Lagid, but also of his agreement with Doson. In the face of an increasing Seleucid threat, the king of Sparta was worth sacrificing for the normalization of relations with Macedonia, also in the Aegean. One of the fundamentals of the Ptolemaic policy in the region was not to let the two greatest rivals, the Seleucids and Antigonids, cooperate. The experiences of the Second Syrian War proved that it was hard to find success fighting against the two states at once.

These events also brought an end to such an active anti-Macedonian policy of the Lagids in Greece. However, the Ptolemies still had good relations with Athens and the Aetolian League; maintaining the latter in particular was beneficial due to the situation in the Aegean and the value of Aetolian mercenaries.

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<sup>77</sup> *IG IX*, 1<sup>2</sup> 1.202–203; cf. also n. 48.

<sup>78</sup> In Athens, a new *phyle* of Ptolemais was created, as well as a *deme* called Berenicidae; the cult of Ptolemy and Berenice was established and the king's statue was erected on the Athenian agora and in Delphi; the king in turn financed the construction of a *gymnasion* called the Ptolemaion. Finally, from 224/223, the festival of *Ptolemaia* began to be held: *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 836; Paus. 1.5.5; 10.10.2; St. Byz., s.v. Βερενικίδα.

<sup>79</sup> Polyb. 2.54.3; Schmitt 1969, no. 507.

<sup>80</sup> Polyb. 5.41.6–42.4; Walbank 1967: 572.

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