CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THIRD WAR, THE ‘WAR OF LAODIKE’

Ptolemy III, called Euergetes, the eldest surviving son of Ptolemy II, was crowned pharaoh the day after his father’s death, that is, on 29 or 30 January 246.¹ From this it would seem that the death was not unexpected. Euergetes was obviously present at the court, and the full ceremonial of the transfer of power was ready to be performed as soon as the old king was dead. Even though no challenge to his succession was made Ptolemy Euergetes must have been apprehensive. He was as yet untried in administration so far as we know, not having had the experience of being joint king which had helped his father to power. On the other hand, his father had not had such a messy family life as Ptolemy I; although Ptolemy II was notorious for his many mistresses and concubines, he had ensured that few of his children other than those of his first marriage survived.² His marriage to his sister had been childless, and he did not remarry after her death in 270—judging by his numerous mistresses, he had no need to.

Ptolemy III will have been concerned at the three regions of possible trouble he inherited. In Syria there was no disturbance. But Antiochos II had by this time returned to Laodike—she is referred to as his ‘wife’ in a Babylonian document of 248.³ Berenike stayed in Antioch with her child. Antiochos was living in Ephesos in 246,⁴ and the implication of these junctions and separations was that Laodike’s sons would soon be reinstated as heirs to the kingship, if in fact Antiochos and the court had ever had any doubt over the matter. The eldest son, Seleukos, was now about eighteen years old, and so he was old enough to be an active and ruling king.

¹ Holbl, Ptolemaic Empire 46, and note 71.
² His descendant Ptolemy VIII made a list of these ladies in an account he compiled, called Hypomnemata: FGrH 234, F 4.
³ Sachs and Hunger –247. The diary is fragmentary, and the words ‘Laodike, the wife’ are all that exists on that particular line. It may be that the diarist did not understand the exact marital situation, or perhaps he believed that no divorce had occurred, but the wording is indicative nonetheless.
⁴ App. Syr., 65
The greatest problem, of course, was that the death of Ptolemy II obviated any political agreements with Antiochos, and war with either Antiochos or Antigonos must have been thought likely, possibly with both, since Antigonos and Ptolemy II had been contending at some distance from each other in the Aegean and Greece. It is here that we should locate the battle of Andros, a naval conflict in which the Ptolemaic commander, Opron, was defeated by Antigonos, who is referred to as ‘the old man’ in the main source. The date of this battle is another notorious problem, but 246 is the least unlikely of all the several suggestions. There was no actual war between the two kings at the time that we know of, but it may be that it was a clash which happened because Opron was attempting something off his own bat. The actual supreme commander was Ptolemy Andromachou, perhaps a half-brother of Ptolemy III, under whom Opron was probably the tactical commander. It is unlikely that either side had a fleet of any size; and it is probable that the battle was brought on partly by accident, perhaps by the Ptolemaic force pushing forward to try to assist Alexandros. It may also be that Antigonos, who was certainly in command, was taking the opportunity of the death of Ptolemy II and the accession of Ptolemy III to strike quickly; given the date of Ptolemy III’s accession, in the winter, if 246 is the correct year for the battle, it was certainly against Ptolemy III’s fleet that Antigonos fought. The result of the battle seems to have been minimal; the extinction of the small Ptolemaic influence in the Kyklades may well be the only one. (The concentration of conditionals and speculatives in this paragraph is an indication of the problems of this subject.)

Here was a problem which could therefore be ignored. Antigonos was preoccupied with Corinth and recovering his control of central Greece, while Ptolemy III lost nothing essential by the defeat, annoying though it probably was. It had little or nothing to do with his relations with the Seleukid state; this was much a more important matter, and by the summer of 246, much more urgent.

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5 Trogus, Prologue 27; Plut. Pelopidas, 2.
8 Plut., Pelopidas 2.