The Policy of Darius towards Thrace and Macedonia (499/8–492/1)

The ancient authors say nothing about Persian territorial possessions in Thrace during the decade preceding the Ionian Revolt. There is no information about either any new conquests or other revolts in the lands subjected by Megabazus. The lack of such information does not necessarily mean that the Persians encountered no difficulty in ruling over the newly annexed territories, yet it is an indication that the situation was relatively peaceful. In 498, the Ionians sailed for the Hellespont intending to separate Byzantium and the other cities situated there from Persian authority,1 an act which shows that at that time, at least, the region east of the Hebrus was under Persian control. There are no reasons why this particular conclusion should not be valid for the lands conquered by Megabazus west of the Hebrus River as well. It appears that until the Ionian Revolt, the territories belonging to the Great King remained intact. This means that in the last decade of the sixth century the tax incomes from Europe continued to reach the Persian treasury, as well as that the Persian garrisons, no matter their number and placement, went on functioning in European land. The Persian military presence in Thrace during the period probably earned the necessary respect of the Macedonian ruler Amyntas, who remained Darius’ loyal vassal.

Relations between Macedonia and Persia during the Ionian Revolt

Information about the policy Amyntas and Alexander carried out towards Persia during the Ionian Revolt is scarce. The only data is indirect, but it allows one to reach certain conclusions on the issue considered. Again, Herodotus is the main source. His statement that the Macedonians were enslaved (ἐδεδούλωτο) twice by the Persians—first by Megabazus and then by Mardonius—shows that at some time between these two expeditions, Darius lost his control over

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1 Hdt. v.103.1–2—"Ἰωνες δὲ τῆς Ἀθηναίων συμμαχίης στερηθέντες, οὕτω γάρ σφι ὑπήρχε πεποιημένα ἐς Δαρείον, οὐδὲν δὴ ἤσσον τὸν πρὸς βασιλέα πόλεμον ἐκειναύξοντο. πλώσαντες δὲ ἐς τὸν Ἐλλήσποντον Βυζάντιόν τε καὶ τὰς ἄλλας πόλις πάσας τὰς ταύτη ὑπ᾽ ἐσωτερικὴ ἐποίησαν ...
Macedonia. It is logical that this loss should be connected to the time of the Ionian Revolt, when, as will be discussed later, the Persians were driven away from their European territorial possessions.

Accepting this reconstruction of events raises some difficult questions: Did Amyntas or Alexander dare to reject the vassal status of Macedonia? And what was the reason for this act? The fact that after Mardonius’ campaign Alexander was allowed to rule may mean that it was not he, but his father Amyntas who had been responsible for breaking off relations with the Persians. For Amyntas, however, such an act would have been pointless, since his vassal status under the Great King secured his rule over Macedonia. Furthermore, no Persian garrisons were stationed in his lands and it appears that he was allowed to pursue a relatively independent policy—or at least his offer of Anthemus to Hippias leaves this impression. These same considerations are valid for the early years of his son Alexander’s rule.

Taking into account the fact that Amyntas would have realized no benefit in rejecting his vassal status before Darius, Heinrichs and Müller assume that he was forced to do so under pressure from Macedonian noblemen, who were not interested in strengthening his power. Thus, the authors conclude that when Mardonius reached Macedonia (492) there was no problem for Alexander in exculpating the actions of his predecessor. This supposition gives a satisfactory explanation of why Darius allowed Alexander to continue his rule over Macedonia. Another version of the events is also possible: during the Ionian Revolt Persia lost control over its territorial possessions in Thrace which resulted in the termination of the relationship with Macedonia. Later, Mardonius restored the status quo in Thrace and progressed with his army towards Macedonia, whose ruler Alexander, as his father Amyntas had done twenty years earlier, voluntarily submitted to the Great King. In this reconstruction of events, it is not necessary to accept that either Amyntas or Alexander rejected his vassal status and carried out visible anti-Persian policy, but simply that, due to the circumstances (the outbreak of the Ionian Revolt and the elimination of the Persian garrisons in Thrace), Macedonia temporarily disengaged from the Persian sphere of influence with all the consequences that followed, namely its second subjugation, which in accordance with Darius’ new policy was realized.

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3 Hdt. v.94.1.

4 Heinrichs, Müller 2003: 290n43; Müller 2011: 111.