ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

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Summary :

Institution of a mainly religious as well as political character, based on the union of the cities of Pontus. At first it aimed at honouring Rome and later at worshipping the emperor. In fact, it was an attempt towards the political control over the cities of Pontus.

Date

1st-3rd (?) c. AD

Geographical Location

Northern Asia Minor, Pontus

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1. Introduction

The Koinon of Pontus was one of the several Koina formed in the Roman period aiming at the homogeneity and cohesion of the provinces established according to the Roman administrative system. It suited the Roman spirit, contrary to the tradition of autonomy governing the Greek world.[1] But unlike other Koina, the Koinon of Pontus is not reported by literary sources, while the epigraphic and numismatic evidence certifying its existence is limited and often puzzling to researchers. Some historians believe that there were two Koina, with the city of Amastris serving as their link, if not their base.[2] However, there is little evidence and, therefore, this assumption is not sound.

2. Structure and Activities

The Koinon of the cities of Pontus is reported in some inscriptions dated to the period between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD. It was an institution of the Roman era. Going back to the history of the Kingdom of Pontus as well as the formation of the province of Pontus-Bithynia by Pompey (63 BC), it becomes evident that there was need for such an institution.[3] When Pompey conquered the region of Pontus, he created eleven “states” under the cities of Amastris, Sinope, Amisos, Pompeiopolis, Neapolis, Magnopolis, Diospolis, Nicopolis, Zela, Megalopolis and Abonuteichos (or Amaseia). It is possible that the two Bithynian cities of Heraclea and Tieium were incorporated into the province of Pontus in that period.[4] Bithynia was similarly structured, but was not easy to command.

Pompey introduced a law, lex Pompeia, on the administration of the regions he had conquered. This law aimed to integrate those regions into the Roman system of administration. However, the previously loose structure and the low number of cities (in a geographical framework based on agriculture and stock breeding, including mainly rural settlements and presenting high percentages of nomad populations) made Pompey change the system of administration in the regions of Pontus and place a large part of the responsibility for the administrative structure on the cities, several of which were proclaimed free. In this way, rural areas, which depended directly on the monarch in Mithradates’ state, became part of the chora of the cities, which were also responsible for tax collection.[5]

The institution of the Koinon of the cities of Pontus,[6] which is reported by both inscriptions[7] and coins,[8] was introduced so that those cities could be closely connected to and offer the proper honours to deified Rome and the deified emperor. Two official posts of the Koinon are reported, which may coincide: the high priest of Pontus[9]and the *Pontarches*.[10] The latter is earlier and existed since the period of the Roman Republic, which suggests that the Koinon of Pontus was established in 63 BC, that is, immediately after Pompey annexed Pontus (64 BC).

In Pontus, unlike with other provinces, there is evidence about two women holding the post of the high priest. In another case, according to Lucian, Lepidus of Amastris, an Epicurean philosopher, became a high priest.[11] Finally, there were quite a few cases

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when the same person held the post of the lord and master of Pontus (Pontarches) and the lord and master of Bithynia (Bithyniarches), the head of the Koinon of Bithynia. Therefore, the two Koina are thought to have been very closely connected.[12] There is also a case of a Pontarches and Lesbarches (head of Lesbos island).[13]

The only known activity of the Koinon was the athletic games held in Neocaesarea.[14] This shows that it was a rather inactive Koinon. Besides, the institution started to decline in the 3rd century and was not so popular with the eminent citizens of Pontus, as evidenced by the special honours, according to an inscription, conferred to Aurelius Alexander Timotheou, who voluntarily became a Pontarches.[15]

3. Evaluation

It is obvious that the institution of the Koinon was less structured and durable in Pontus than in other regions of Asia Minor and the Roman world, which is explained by the absence of firm political structures in the region, which had previously been an eastern kingdom. Apart from holding athletic games and some official posts, the Koinon of Pontus neither stood out as a political entity nor influenced the developments in the political life of the region.

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1. The institution of the Koinon was not invented by the Romans. On the contrary, Greece had its own religious and political Koina already from Antiquity. They directly aimed to serve a common cult among cities or populations of the same origin or geographical location, while they indirectly pursued the political stability and alliance of those communities. See Beck, C., *Polis und Koinon* (Historia Einzelschriften 114, Stuttgart 1979).

2. The main supporter of this view was Chapot, V., “La frontière nord de la Galatie et les κοινά de Pont”, in Buckler, W.H. – Calder, W.M. (ed.), *Anatolian studies presented to Sir William Ramsay* (London 1923), from p. 93 onwards.

3. About the formation of the province of Pontus and its administration, see Marek, C., *Stadt, Ära und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord-Galatia* (Tübingen 1993), pp. 36-37.

4. Strabo, 12.6, reports that Heraclea was part of the province of Pontus, although it may have been annexed in a subsequent period.

5. See Wilson, D.R., *The Historical Geography of Bithynia, Paphlagonia and Pontus in the Greek and Roman Periods. A New Survey with Particular Reference to Surface Remains still visible* (Diss. Oxford University 1960), and Marek, C., *Stadt, Ära und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord-Galatia* (Tübingen 1993).

6. See Deininger, J., *Die Provinziallandtage der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (München und Berlin 1965), and Mitchell, S., *Anatolia* I (Oxford 1993), p. 162.

7. See Kalinka, E., “Aus Bithynien und Umgegend”, *ÖJ* 28 (1933), pp. 45-112, pl. 73, no. 21 and pl. 96, no. 67.

8. Bosch, C., *Die Kleinasiatische Münzen der Römische Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart 1935), p. 77; see also *RE* 4 (1924), column 932, see entry “Koinon” (E. Kornemann).

9. See *IGRR* III, no. 79, 87, 90, and Kalinka, E., “Aus Bithynien und Umgegend”, *ÖJ* 28 (1933), pp. 45-112, pl. 73, no. 21.

10. See *BCH* 33 (1909), p. 410, no. 410; *CIG*, no. 4183; *IGRR* III, no. 69, 87, 90, 95, 97, 115, 116, 1427.

11. Lucian, *Alex*. 25, 43, and *IGRR* III, no. 86.

12. An inscription reports the “Bithyniarches and Pontarches elected to the offices of the hierophant and sebastophantes at the temple where both mysteries were held”, *IGRR* III, no. 69.

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13. *IGRR* III, no. 87.

14. See Moretti, L., *Iscrizioni Agonistiche Greche* (Roma 1953), no. 69 = *SEG* XIII 540; reviewed by Bean, G.E., “Victory in the Pentathlon”, *AJA* 60 (1956), pp. 361-368.

15. See Kalinka, E., "Aus Bithynien und Umgegend", *ÖJ* 28 (1933), pp. 45-112, pl. 96, no. 67.

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Glossary :

chora, the

The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.

koinon, the

The term koinon pertains to every confederacy of ancient cities.