

Divine Honours for King Antigonos Gonatas in Athens

Christian Habicht

For a long time, ancient historians were almost unanimous in thinking that king Antigonos Gonatas of Macedon (277-239 BC) had never been worshipped, in contrast to most other kings at the time. Many even argued that in fact he discouraged any attempts to bestow such honours upon him. Let me quote a few representative statements. William Scott Ferguson wrote in his *Hellenistic Athens* of 1911: "Within Macedon ... Antigonos ... continued to refuse apotheosis".¹ William Woodthorpe Tarn followed two years later in his monograph on the king: "It may be recorded of Antigonos, to his honour — and of him almost alone among the kings of Macedonian blood — that, so far as is known, he was never worshipped by anybody".² The same statement recurs more recently in these words of Peter Fraser: "Gonatas ... is nowhere recorded as being the object of worship by a city".³ With special concern for the situation in Attica after the Chremonidean War, Charles Edson observes that it would have been easy for the king, had he so wished, to be granted divine honours by the Athenian state. He concludes: "The existing opinion that Antigonos Gonatas discouraged the worship of himself seems entirely justified".⁴ Susan Sherwin-White sees little merit in recognizing Gonatas in "King Antigonos" who received worship at Cos, given "Gonatas' discouragement of cult honours".⁵ Frank Walbank gives a different reason for what is considered to be a fact: "The fact that there is so far no firm evidence of any cult for Antigonos Gonatas in Greece must surely link with his reputation there, not as a liberator, but as the sponsor of tyrants".⁶ That is to say, Walbank does not find the reason for the absence of such evidence in the king's unwillingness to accept divine honours but rather in the cities' unwillingness to grant them to him. This is a thought that I brought into the discussion forty years ago.⁷ Most recently, Peter Green clings to the traditional interpretation, albeit

1 p. 190.

2 *Antogonos Gonatas*, 1913, 250.

3 *CR*, n.s. 8, 1958, 154.

4 *CP* 53, 1958, 63 n. 16.

5 *Ancient Cos*, 1978, 116.

6 *CAH*² VII.1, 1984, 92.

7 *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*, 1956, 241: "Man kann sich auch fragen, ob nicht der Grund für das fast völlige Fehlen beglaubigter Nachrichten über Kulte des Antigonos Gonatas darin zu suchen ist, daß der König allenthalben zu dem Mittel griff, die Städte Griechenlands durch ihm ergebene Tyrannen zu beherrschen, einem Mittel, das sich mit dem Freiheitsbegriff und der Autonomie der Gemeinden schlechterdings nicht vertrug".

with a personal nuance: “Antigonus Gonatas ... never sought divinization, whether for self-aggrandizement or as an instrument of political propaganda ... Gonatas modestly argued that he lacked the charisma for such a step”.⁸

Against the prevailing dogma that Gonatas never received worship, I tried long ago to show that an inscription from the Cycladic island of Ios did not refer to king Antigonus the One-Eyed, as had been thought, but meant in fact Antigonus Gonatas, referred to as “Savior” (*Soter*) and, in all likelihood, made the recipient of sacrifices.⁹ Reaction was mixed, with more critics disagreeing than agreeing; in fact, the above quotations from Fraser and Edson (notes 3 and 4) are taken from their reviews of my book. In that book’s second edition I briefly reviewed the reaction, and somewhat mitigated my opposition to recognizing in the king Antigonus I, without, however, dismissing Gonatas altogether as a strong candidate.¹⁰

While there are no new elements to decide this case, indisputable evidence now exists that Antigonus Gonatas was the recipient of godlike honours (ἰσόθει τιμαί) bestowed upon him by the Athenian state, some time after the Chremonidean War, when he was master of the city and of Attica. In 1992 Basil Petrakos published a new decree of the Attic deme Rhamnous that begins as follows:¹¹ ἐπειδὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀντίγονος καὶ σωτὴρ τοῦ δήμου διατελεῖ εὐεργετῶν τὸν δῆμον τὸν Ἀθηναίων καὶ διὰ ταῦτα αὐτὸν ὁ δῆμος ἐτίμησεν τιμαῖς ἰσοθέοις, δεδόχθαι Ῥαμνουσίοις θύειν αὐτῶι τεί ἐνάτει ἐπὶ δέκα τοῦ Ἑκατομβαιῶνος, τῶν μεγάλων Νεμεσίων τῶι γυμνικῶι ἀγῶνι καὶ στεφανηφορεῖν. Regulations on how to care and pay for the sacrifice follow, and then the order to inscribe the decree and to put it next to the altar of the king, [παρὰ τὸν βωμὸν τοῦ] βασιλέ[ως].¹²

It is obvious that the δῆμος that voted the godlike honours is the δῆμος of the Athenians (not the deme of Rhamnous), and that the king is recognised by the Athenian people as Savior of the Athenian people. However, the sacrifice mentioned later was a sacrifice by the deme of Rhamnous which no doubt followed the example of the state and perhaps the state’s more lavish act. All of this seems quite clear from the text and has been clearly stated by Petrakos (n. 11) and Gauthier (n. 12). Moreover, the new document illuminates another decree of the deme of Rhamnous, moved by the very same demesman, Elpinikos, son of Mnesippos, in honour of Dikaiarchos of Thria, Athenian citizen and general in the services of kings Antigonus Gonatas and his son and successor Demetrius II.¹³ Dikaiarchos has, among other things, “donated from his own money animals for the sacrifice of the Nemesia and the king”, ἔδωκεν

⁸ Alexander to Actium, 1990, 143.

⁹ *Gottmenschentum* (n. 7), 65-73, discussing *IG XII Supplement* 168,

¹⁰ *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte*², 1970, 256-257.

¹¹ *Praktika* 1989 [1992], 31-34, no. 15, lines 2-10 (*SEG* 41, 75).

¹² This restoration is suggested by Ph. Gauthier, *Bulletin épigraphique*, who quotes the close parallels.

¹³ P. Roussel, *BCH* 54, 1930, 268-282; J. Pouilloux, *La forteresse de Rhamnonte*, 1954, 129-132; L. Moretti, *ISE* 25.

δὲ καὶ ἱερεῖα εἰς τὴν θυσίαν τῶν Νεμεσίων καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων.¹⁴ He did so after these sacrifices had been neglected for some time “because of the war”, ἐγλειπουσῶν τῶν θυσιῶν διὰ τὸν πόλεμον.¹⁵ This decree is dated by the Athenian archon Ekphantos to 236/5 BC. The war that interrupted the ritual at Rhamnous was therefore the “war of Demetrius” that had begun three years earlier, in the year of the archon Lysias.¹⁶ Since hostilities began almost at once after the death of Gonatas and the accession of Demetrius II, the sacrifices temporarily halted by the war must have been sacrifices to Nemesis and Gonatas. As Ludwig Deubner acutely observed when the decree honouring Dikaiarchos was published, the worship of the king was combined with that of Nemesis.¹⁷ The new document now gives Hekatombaion 19 as the date for the festival and for the sacrifice to the king.

The cult in honour of Antigonos Gonatas must have been established when he was master of Athens, *viz.* in one of the years following the Chremonidean War. A date around 255 BC, when he withdrew his garrison from the city and restored some kind of “liberty” to Athens, was already proposed by Gauthier (n. 12) and may well be right.¹⁸ Worship was interrupted somewhat later when war broke out after the king’s death, and then reintroduced in or before 236/5 for the new king, Demetrius II.¹⁹ It was undoubtedly discontinued in 229 after Athens had shaken off Macedonian rule for good and cancelled all manifestations of loyalty to the Macedonian royal house.²⁰ Demetrius’ successor, Antigonos Doson who received godlike honours in Sparta, in the realm of the Achaean League and in cities on Euboea,²¹ was certainly never worshipped within Attica.

The new evidence here discussed does not entirely disprove the view that Gonatas may have discouraged worship of himself here or there, but considerably weakens that widely held opinion, because the Athenian assembly that granted him godlike honours would hardly have done so without having secured at least his tacit approval. Whether or not the king cared much about them is a different question, and doubts on that score seem entirely legitimate. On the other hand, the new evidence greatly increases the chances that Gonatas (and not his grandfather or Antigonos Doson) might be the “King Antigonos” honoured

¹⁴ Lines 27-28.

¹⁵ Lines 29-29.

¹⁶ *IG II² 1299*, lines 56-57: [ἐ]πὶ Λυσίου ἀρχοντος ἐν ᾧ ἐνιαυτῷ ὁ πόλεμος ἐνέστη. F.W. Walbank in N.G.L. Hammond and Walbank, *A History of Macedonia III: 336-167 B.C.*, 1988, 321-326.

¹⁷ *Attische Feste*, 1932, 219 n. 3: “Vielleicht war die Verehrung des Königs mit der der Nemesis verbunden”.

¹⁸ Habicht, *Studien zur Geschichte Athens in hellenistischer Zeit*, 1982, 15-17 and *Athen. Die Geschichte der Stadt in hellenistischer Zeit*, 1995, 155-156.

¹⁹ Edson (n. 4) was wrong when he stated: “Gonatas’ son and successor Demetrius II is not known to have been the object of cult”.

²⁰ Habicht 1995 (n. 18), 182. By 225/4 BC the Macedonian king was eliminated from the cult of Nemesis at Rhamnous (Moretti, *ISE* 29, lines 16-18).

²¹ Habicht (n. 7), 80-81.

in such a way by one or the other Greek state, for instance at Ios.²² It certainly will not do any longer to argue that the decree of Ios must have focused on another king Antigonus because “Gonatas discouraged cult honours for himself”. And it would hardly be a surprise if other such evidence turned up in time.

The fact that Antigonus Gonatas favoured tyrants in cities of the Peloponnese did not disqualify him from being considered worthy of cult honours in Athens, or in the Aegaeis, or other places. It was never the personal conduct or the general policy of a monarch that earned him such honours by a vote of a city, but what he had done specifically for that community. Local conditions at a certain moment, and how the citizens viewed them, were the determining factors, nothing else. And on the other hand, there is no evidence whatsoever that any Hellenistic king ever discouraged such a vote or refused to accept such honours voted for him.

Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

²² The Antigoneia in Histiaia (*IG* XI 1055.62, Habicht [note 7] 80) may have been celebrated in his honour rather than for Doso, as D. Knoepfler has now pointed out, *BCH* 119, 1995, 155 n. 111.