

AGATHOCLES AND THE ITALIC POWERS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 3RD CENTURY B.C.

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Abstract: A first target of these military actions of Agathocles in the Italic area beginning in 304 B.C., could have been Cleonymus, who had come in 303 B.C. with the intention to create for himself a domain in the regions occupied by the Greeks in the West. After the second campaign started in 295 B.C., Agathocles occupies Croton and Hipponium. This expedition completes the coherent and lucid policy of Agathocles towards the Southern Italy. At first, the master of Syracuse opposed the aggressive plans of Cleonymus; then, after 300 B.C., he tried to restore the traditional area of influence of Syracuse in Bruttium.

His military actions in the South of the Peninsula represented an intrusion in an area where Tarentum also had major interests. Agathocles was probably seen, at the beginning of the 3rd century B.C., as a powerful factor, capable to stop the Roman progresses in the South. He seemed to be responsive to the requests of the Dorian colony. Diodorus records that, in 295 B.C., during his second Italic expedition, Agathocles concluded alliances with the Peuceti and the Iapyges.

The reaction of Rome towards the new power relations from the Southern region of the peninsula can only be presumed. In 298 B.C., Rome renegotiated its alliance with the Lucanian League, considering mainly the reopening of the hostilities against the Samnites. If Agathocles had wanted to cross the borders of the Bruttian region, the tyrant showed himself as a threat for Rome and we are entitled to assume that the Roman-Lucanian alliance from 298 B.C. included stipulations aiming at stopping his advance.

The conclusion of the alliances with the Iapyges and the Peuceti in 295 B.C. by Agathocles indicated to Rome a possible intersection of its spheres of control with an adversary from South. In 291 B.C., Rome settled a Latin colony at Venusia. Besides its function as an outpost against the Italic adversaries, the new colony became an excellent position to keep an eye on Tarentum. Agathocles, might have also been targeted by the colony of Venusia: the new settlement showed to the tyrant the boundaries of his Italic ambitions and the limits of the collaboration between Syracuse and Tarentum.