
The Aetolians have not had a favourable press over the centuries: Thucydides, the first historian to describe them, says that one of their component tribes spoke an almost unintelligible dialect and ate raw flesh (3.94); the first epigraphic mention of their League (Tod, *Greek Historical Inscriptions* II no.137) was provoked by Aetolians kidnapping the heralds who proclaimed the sacred truce for the Eleusinian Mysteries; the Athenians in their notorious ithyphallic hymn honouring Demetrius Poliorcetes (Athenaeus 6.253b-f, quoted from Duris, = FGrH 76 F13) called on him to save them from the Aetolian Sphinx which plundered far and wide; Polybius notoriously considered the Aetolians to be reckless, spendthrift, dissolute and of unbridled insolence (e.g. 2.45.1; 2.47.4; 4.3.1). No ancient authors give a favourable view; Aetolia did not produce any historians, even in the times of the League’s greatest prosperity and power, and no non-Aetolian thought it worthwhile to write any sort of encomium.

Yet the Aetolian League had great achievements. Alone of Greek states, it was undefeated in the ‘Lamian’ War, and never submitted to Macedonia; its members made up the bulk of the forces which protected Greece and saved Delphi from the invading Gauls who had defeated and killed Ptolemy Ceraunus and temporarily obliterated the Macedonian kingdom in 279 BC; after that victory, the League consolidated its hold on Delphi, and used the Delphic Amphictyony—the ancient confederacy of twelve Greek tribes which was responsible for Apollo’s temple—as a vehicle for its own publicity and for its administration of the sanctuary; and from the 270s until the 220s the League grew in size and power, largely through a remarkably enlightened policy of incorporating many neighbouring Greek states as members, in a manner similar to that used contemporaneously with so much success by the Roman republic, but with the significant difference that the Aetolians formed a federal, the Romans a unitary state. This growth was largely due to the League’s continued successful opposition to the revived Macedonian kingdom in its attempts to dominate mainland Greece, and also was a significant factor in making that success possible. By the 230s, the Aetolian League was certainly the most powerful independent Greek state, and might well have succeeded in
completely expelling the Macedonians from southern Greece, and possibly from Thessaly too, had its position not been undermined by the volte-face of its southern neighbour, the Achaean League in the Peloponnese, whose leading politician, Aratus of Sicyon, reversed the policy he and his league had followed for over twenty years, invited the Macedonians back into the Peloponnese, to save his position from a resurgent Sparta, surrendered the crucial and almost impregnable citadel of Corinth to the Macedonian king, and became a satellite of the Macedonian kingdom when it renewed its struggle with Aetolia.

Even though the literary sources are poor and strongly biased, the copious epigraphic evidence, especially from Delphi, but also from elsewhere in the Greek world, makes it possible to discern at least the outlines of Aetolia's political history and its relations with other powers for the sixty two years from the successful defence of Delphi till the Peace of Naupactus (217), when the Aetolians had to accept the terms imposed by the Macedonians and their allies, and Scholten (hereafter S) has brought together and interpreted the evidence very thoroughly.

S's book in most ways is admirable: he cites the evidence fully, he makes clear what conclusions are certain, what are only probable, and what are mere possibilities, and in each case shows the reasons why he has accepted them; he provides eight generally useful maps (though there are notable discrepancies between maps 1 and 2); he has a very full bibliography, and three quite full indices of literary sources, epigraphic sources, and subjects. For any student of Hellenistic history, or of Greek politics and constitutional developments, this book is indispensable and reliable.

However, it is rather a good Ph.D. thesis than a good book. S has not always stood back from his subject and thought what a reader less well informed and less engaged in the subject than himself would know and would want to know. So quite often he is too allusive in his comments, assuming knowledge which most readers would not have (e.g. 42 and n.45 on an inscription from Cos; 43 n.50, referring to the 'curious definition' of the Amphictyony in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, without saying what the definition is; and all through Appendix A, 'Epigraphic evidence at Delphi', which readers unaware of the peculiar and complicated problems of establishing the chronology of the third century BC would probably find
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unintelligible), and often, too, he writes 'everything he knows', without making plain what is crucial and what trivial.

The book is long and solid (though never turgid), but in places more should have been provided: at least there should have been a more detailed account of what sources do exist for S's subject, and what their characteristics are. S would also have been well placed to discuss the curious absence of Greek historiography for most of the third century BC: the continuous chain of generally competent and often outstanding historians stretching from Herodotus' description of the antecedents and course of Xerxes' invasion of Greece to Hieronymus of Cardia's account of the doings of Alexander's Successors suddenly broke at the end of the 270s, and there was, it seems, no historical writing until Phylarchus began near the end of the century—and he seems, from the fragments, to have been more a pamphleteer than a serious historian. This break in the historiographic tradition is the basic reason why it is so difficult, perhaps even impossible, to write a satisfactory history of the Hellenistic Age. Finally, it was probably a mistake to begin only with the Gallic attack on Greece in 279; if S had begun with the Greek war of liberation against the Macedonians—the so-called 'Lamian' War—of 323-22, and the reasons why Aetolia alone among the Greek states remained undefeated, he would, I think, have provided a better perspective on the Aetolian League's development in the following century.

There are some linguistic infelicities: 'aggravate' used several times where the author does not mean 'make heavier' but 'irritate' or 'annoy'; 'all parties... were probably... happy to let these three hundred-pound guerrillas sleep' (77); 'a coalition comprised of nearly every major state' (82); 'two days to wrap up their looting' (277)—presumably this is not meant literally. There is also, as is almost inevitable, a scattering of misprints, but none are serious; in particular, the occasional Greek phrases are almost always faultless.

To sum up, every institution which takes the teaching of ancient Greek history seriously should buy this book; so should every scholar with an interest in the Hellenistic Age; but it is too difficult and specialised for any but exceptional undergraduates. The blemishes mentioned in the previous two paragraphs do not affect the book's value as a reference work, as a
reconstruction of the politics of a past age, and as an example of how research into a particularly difficult historical period should be carried out.

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