

# Persian Imperial Policy Behind the Rise and Fall of the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the Last Quarter of the Sixth to the Beginning of the Fifth Century BC

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The aim of the following paper is to recollect arguments for the hypotheses of a substantial Persian interference in the Greek colonies of the Cimmerian Bosphorus and that they remained not untouched by Achaemenid policy in western Anatolia. The settlements ought to have been affected positively in their prime in the last quarter of the sixth century, but also harmed during their first major crisis at the beginning of the fifth century and afterwards. A serious break in the tight interrelationship between the Bosphoran area and Achaemenid Anatolia occurred through the replacement of the Archaeanactid dynasty, ruling the Cimmerian Bosphorus from 480 onwards, in favour of the succeeding Spartocids by an Athenian naval expedition under the command of Pericles in the year 438/437.<sup>1</sup>

The assumption of a predominant Persian influence to the north of the Caucasus mountains contradicts the still current theory of V. Tolstikov<sup>2</sup> and the late Yu.G. Vinogradov,<sup>3</sup> who favour instead a major Scythian or local impact as a decisive factor at the Bosphoran sites.<sup>4</sup> To challenge this traditional position, this paper will follow the successive stages of architectural development in the central settlement of Pantikapaion on its way to becoming the capital of the region. The argumentation is necessarily based on a parallelization of stratigraphical evidence with historical sources, since decisive archaeological data to support either the Persian or the Scythian hypothesis are few.

## *Maximum contra minimal interpretation*

The discussion about Persian influence on the northern Pontic coast was revived in 1997 by N.F. Fedoseev, who compiled some Persian and Persian-inspired objects of the minor arts from the area, mostly seals and coins, and opted for a far-reaching Achaemenid control of these territories on the basis of a note from Strabon that, in fact, should not be interpreted in this way.<sup>5</sup>

This theory was critiqued by E.A. Molev in 2001,<sup>6</sup> who replied directly that the material quoted, "...only proves the economic and cultural connection between the colonies and their metropoleis, through which some elements of

Achaemenid culture were transferred, not more". The most recent compilation of Persian and Persian-inspired material from the northern Pontic area may be found in M. Treister's contribution in this volume.

Bearing in mind the quantitative and diagnostic limitations of the material available, it is not easy to prove Persian presence or dominance, but, on the other hand, it is far from easy to discard the hypothesis either. Other places which are known from the written sources to be undoubtedly under Persian rule, such as Miletos or Ephesos, have not produced large collections of Persian-related material so far. It is instead through the written sources, mainly Herodotos, that these places are known for certain to be Persian at particular periods. The great Father of History nearly fails to report anything about the Cimmerian Bosphorus, which was probably too far from his Aegean area of focus. Nevertheless, the general historical context described by him speaks of a substantial affection for the whole Ionian colonial network, from the period before Dareios I's Scythian campaign, commonly dated to 514, up to the Ionian revolt after 499/498<sup>7</sup> and onwards through the Persian Wars until the Attic Delian League was strong enough to include individual places like Nymphaion in its zone of influence and drive the Persian forces back from the coasts into inland Anatolia.

### *1. Persian desire for expansion as a motor for the strengthening of the Ionian colonial network*

#### *1.1. A horizon of dugout architecture*

The so-called great Milesian or Ionian colonization started and remained on quite a modest level, architecturally, throughout the greater part of the sixth century.<sup>8</sup> At strategic points all along the Black Sea coast a sequence of trading posts was established, but their outer appearance could not have been humbler.<sup>9</sup>

Simple small pit-houses, similar to those used by the indigenous, semi-nomadic population, were found in most of the Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea littoral. These constructions were designed for seasonal shelter during a short period of barter-trade rather than for the housing of farmers, who planned to live in these places with their families for years. The classical reconstruction of a dugout, which allows for only 4-6m<sup>2</sup> of space under the ground level of the hut, may be incorrect in the sense that there was probably a wooden hut built on top of the pit, which used the occasionally rather shallow depression as a cellar. Such a hut may well be constructed without archaeologically detectable postholes by the use of a foundation frame of timbers. The earliest appearance of a Greek colony might, nevertheless, have been that of a seasonal port, marked by moored ships and a few shelters for basic protection not far from the shore. The actual trading partners can be thought of as having passed by in the course of their seasonal transhumance. The seaborne tradesmen, therefore, may be referred to as semi-nomadic in the

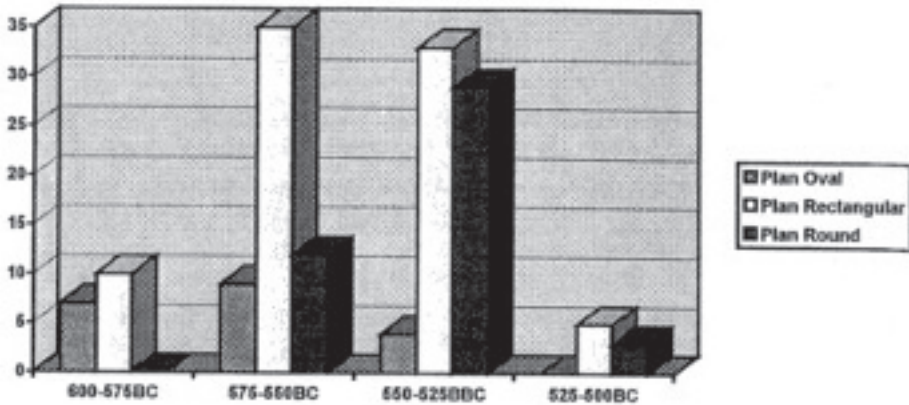


Fig. 1. Intensity of dugout construction at Berezan (Solovyov 1999, fig. 17).

same way as their Scythian customers are. For both of them, the feeble huts were obviously sufficient and well adapted to the local climate. The dugout or semi-dugout huts constructed exclusively on the northern Pontic coast until the last quarter of the sixth century were certainly not of much interest to the Persian rulers in Anatolia, although they provided a base for the collection of knowledge about inner Scythia.

## 1.2. The foundation of new colonies and a horizon of stone architecture in the already existing ones

When Dareios I became ruler of the Persian Empire in 522, an Achaemenid Persian interest in the northern Pontic zone arose. The Great King directed a military campaign against the Scythians in or around 514, which, according to Herodotos (book 4), was disastrous. One has to ask what Dareios I's motives for such an endeavour were, but will be left without a convincing answer. Whatever his reasons might have been, the large, but unsuccessful conquest should not be considered as the unplanned adventure Herodotos suggests. A principally non-urgent project like this,<sup>10</sup> under the personal leadership of the Great King himself, certainly required several years of planning. Ctesias book 20 records that a successful minor campaign was launched against the Scythians under General Ariaramnes, the satrap of Kappadokia, most probably in 519. It remains unknown which part of Scythia was seized by him with his fleet of 30 penteconters, but it might well have been the Bosporan area. It would fit perfectly with these somewhat isolated historical tidings that the Anatolian satraps enforced Ionian and Dorian entrepreneurs, via their local tyrants, to strengthen the already existing colonial network as logistical preparation for the campaign in planning. In the last quarter of the sixth century we do indeed see a rapid development.

At least one new colony was positioned in a strategic position suitable to

supply an army taking the western route around the Black Sea,<sup>11</sup> according to Pseudo-Scymnos this was Mesambria.<sup>12</sup> The foundation of Callatis “around 520” to the south of Tomis, half-way between Mesambria and the Danube delta by the most persophile city of Heracleia Pontica,<sup>13</sup> could be considered an ideal preparation for the Darian campaign to Scythia.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, as John Hind has pointed out, we still lack archaeological material to prove a late Archaic settlement underneath the late Classical one. A somewhat similar case is the establishment of an *emporion* and later a colony at Chersonesos in western Crimea<sup>15</sup> by the same metropolis, where again a date in the late Archaic period can be based only on a small amount of pottery.

Even at the far northeastern end of the Sea of Asov, at the mouth of the River Don, the already long-existing trading post at Taganrog<sup>16</sup> was shifted to the acropolis of Elisavetovka, which might be considered a defensive improvement. This may appear, at first sight, to be a very secondary effect of a general enthusiasm for colonial enterprise. On the other hand, it complies with Herodotos’ report, which states that during the first phase of the campaign the Persian army followed a Scythian detachment under Scopasis all the way along the coast of the Maiotian Sea and even across the Tanais river. The Scythians destroyed all kinds of forage on their way, but the Persians still made good pursuit.<sup>17</sup> If this widespread roaming far away from the heartland of Scythia and even further away from the base camp at the Danube is not totally fictitious, the Persians may well have waged this risky encounter since they could probably rely on supplies deposited at coastal stations. Unfortunately, Herodotos does not report how the army was supplied, but certainly it was still strong enough to go even further inland afterwards on its way back to the Danube bridge. Even if the campaign generally failed in Greek eyes, some territories were actually conquered by the Persians. The foundation by the Milesian tyrant Histiaios of Myrkinos near later Amphipolis with royal Persian approval can serve as a model for the general benevolence of the Persian authorities towards the Ionians as trustworthy comrades after 514 as well. This special case, reported again by Herodotos,<sup>18</sup> served to secure the conquered part of Thrace and to control the Thasian area, where, already at the end of the sixth century, large quantities of trading goods came from, notably wine in Protothasian amphorae, and where, as the critical Megabyzos says, wood for shipbuilding was abundant and silver mines were present. The whole Strymon valley can be considered as the hinterland of the new foundation.

More important than the foundation of new colonies, and better recorded, is the rapid architectural development in the already existing poleis after 520. At Pantikapaion, the construction of mud-brick houses on stone foundations for civic life and of a stone-paved agora, as well as the erection of impressive stone buildings on the acropolis, took place.<sup>19</sup> The central position is held by a tholos, which is surrounded by solid, so-called multi-chamber buildings. Sherds of a Panathenaic amphora and a lavishly decorated bath-tub attest a certain cultic or high-ranking administrative function for the whole complex.<sup>20</sup>

Possibly already in the sixth century, tyrants who had close connections to Miletos and the Persian overlords in Anatolia were in power at Pantikapaion.

A similar architectural development concerning houses for civic life is attested for the satellite settlements of Tyritake and Myrmekion.<sup>21</sup> Corresponding to the development of the urban centres, the chorai of the Bosporean colonies were also enlarged in the last quarter of the sixth century. Saprykin has recently calculated that the number of settlements on the Taman peninsula rose from 30 in the third quarter to 63 in the last quarter of the sixth century and reached over 100 after 480.<sup>22</sup> This resulted in a significant increase in the demand for cereal products and, subsequently, in agriculture, not only during the phase of the Scythian campaign but also afterwards through the time of the Persian Wars in western Anatolia and mainland Greece and in the following Archaeanactid period.

The region of Olbia enjoyed a similar phase of wealth with the erection of stone architecture and, according to A.S. Rusjaeva, a new wave of colonists from Miletos, the metropolis, who established the cult of Apollon Delphinios.<sup>23</sup> Berezan obtained the status of a city.

## *2. A horizon of destruction interpreted as a consequence of the Ionian revolt*

With the revolt in Ionia of 499, with Miletos at its head, Persian support for the Ionians necessarily ended in the Black Sea as well. A minor "Persian" fleet operating from Sinop or the Dorian Heracleia Pontike could easily have destroyed the Ionian colonial network, especially if all the western Anatolian navies, except those of the Black Sea poleis, were gathering in the Aegean Sea.<sup>24</sup> There was good reason for the Persians to destroy a Milesian thalassocracy before attacking the metropolis itself and there might have been good reasons for the north Anatolian poleis to join in such an action. This view is indirectly supported by Herodotos, who states that the Milesians themselves were discussing the matter.<sup>25</sup> Hekataios advised his fellow citizens to do their best to become rulers of the sea, in order to have any chance of surviving a war with Persia. The Persians, of course, knew this too. Herodotos does not mention any Pontic ships on either side in his description of the Battle of Lade.<sup>26</sup> But there must have existed some if the story about Ariaramnes conquering a part of Scythia with a naval force around 519 is to make sense. As Herodotos states that troops from all territories west of the Halys river were gathered to fight the Ionians after the sack of Sardis, the suppression of the revolt was probably considered by the Persians to be a problem of the Lydian satrapy alone.<sup>27</sup> An eastern Anatolian satrap, such as, for example, the successor of Ariaramnes in Kappadokia, in whose sphere of interest the Bosporus certainly would have fallen, may have interfered on his own behalf in order to take advantage of the situation. Greek poleis on the northern Turkish coast, like the Dorian and most persophile Heracleia Pontike, might have been quite willing to expel the western Anatolian rivals from the Scythian market in favour of their own trade.

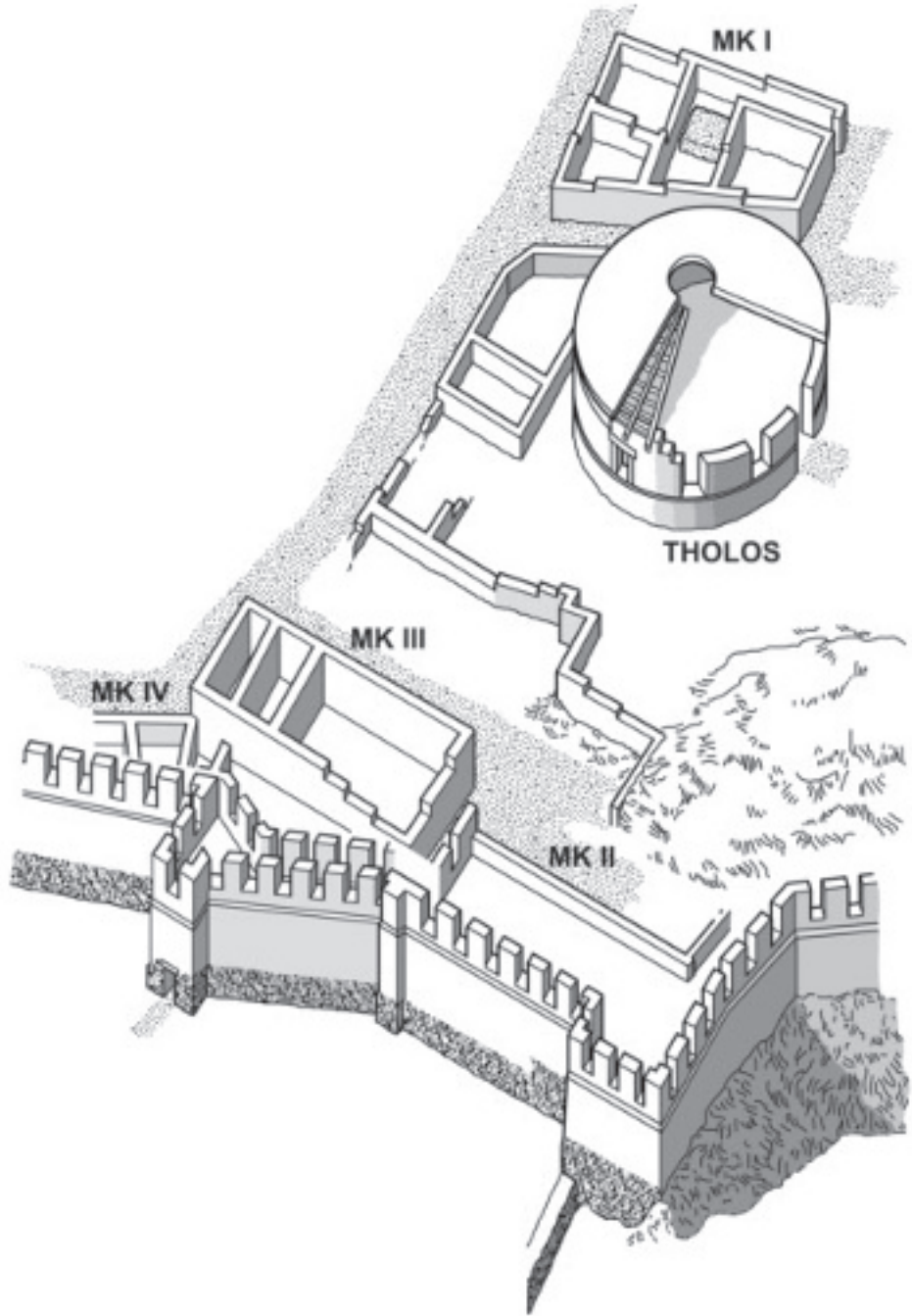


Fig. 2. Pantikapaion: reconstruction of the western plateau (after Tolstikov 2003, 328).

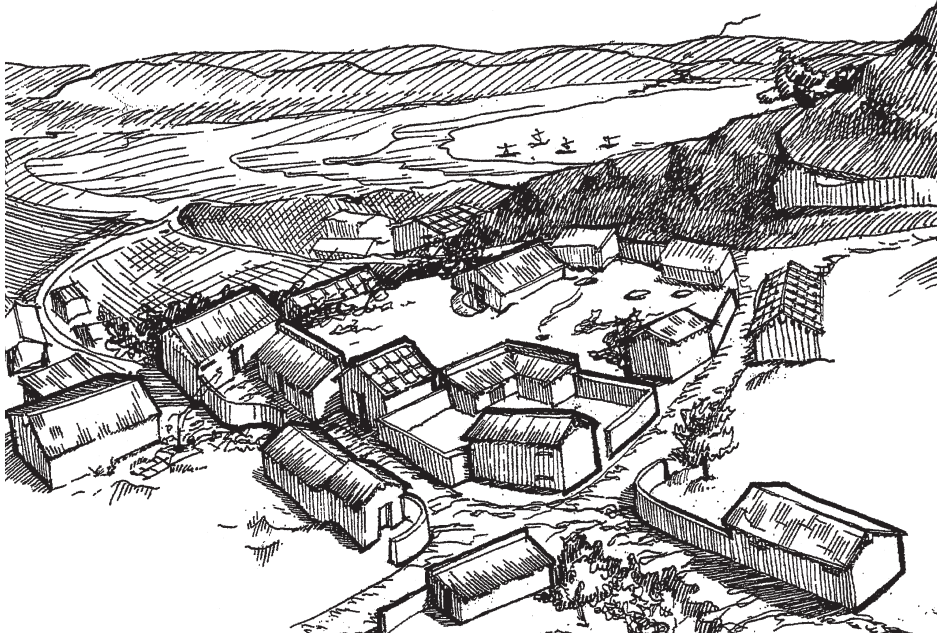


Fig. 3. Pantikapaion: reconstruction of the new esplanade quarter (Treister 2003, 568).

#### *The archaeological feature at the Cimmerian Bosphorus*

In Pantikapaion and the surrounding Bosphoran area an extensive horizon of destruction is attested for the first decade of the fifth century.<sup>28</sup> The above-mentioned marvellous buildings on the acropolis and the fortification wall were ruined and burnt down.<sup>29</sup> In building MK III some 23 arrowheads were found, of which three were found still stuck in the walls. In a destroyed workshop of the new esplanade quarter a single *akinakes* and 250 armoury-scales confirm that there were even “Scythians” or “Sindians” defending the city, or, alternatively, that Greeks obtained local weapons instead of the usual hoplite set of armour. Similar devastations and a few pieces of martial equipment have been recognized at nearly all archaeological sites in the area in which late Archaic levels have been excavated.

V. Tolstikov, the excavator of the acropolis at Pantikapaion, and the late J.G. Vinogradov considered the devastations to be the result of a Scythian attack. They linked the conflict to social developments among the royal Scythians caused by the invasion of the Persian army led by Dareios I in 514. The sack of the Greek colonies of the Bosphorus would then only be a very indirect consequence of an unsuccessful Persian attempt at expansion. This far-fetched explanation does not make sense as a strong Scythian leadership would certainly have preferred to control intact Greek trading posts rather than to destroy the basis of regular income from luxury items. The local inhabitants of

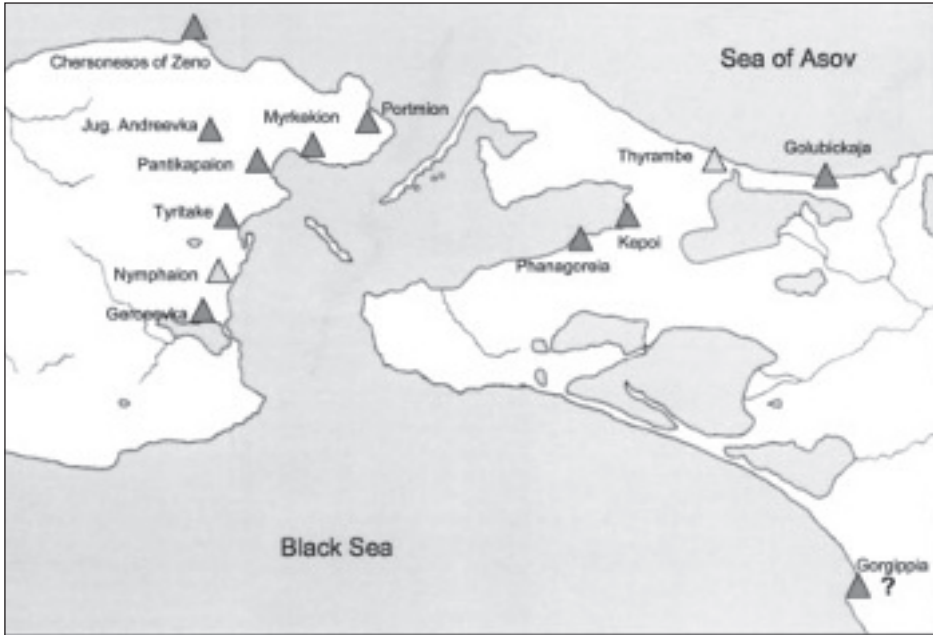


Fig. 4. Sites of the Cimmerian Bosphorus bearing traces of violent destruction at the beginning of the fifth century BC. Black: settlements; Grey: coin hoards.

Crimea, whether hierarchical or not, had no reason to destroy “their” Greek colonies either, as long as the regular transfer of cattle and people over the frozen Bosphorus in winter was not harmed. There had already been a concentration of local settlements (and graves) in the areas around the colonies, most probably so as to benefit from the presence of the colonies. (Maslennikov 1995, 32-33.)

Given the contemporary Ionian revolt and the fact that the colonies of the Cimmerian Bosphorus were Ionian settlements, the material from the horizon of destruction should be labelled as “Perserschutt”, like that of the Athenian acropolis and agora. With this assumption, a good amount of material for comparative studies between the much-debated debris from Athens and that of the Ionian coast can be identified. It seems, so far as such a statement is possible, as if the disaster was limited only to the larger and smaller urban centres on the coast without having a deeper impact on the inland chora. This may be a slight hint that the enemy came from the sea and was interested in extinguishing major structures but not necessarily every single farm and village. In my opinion, this has the fingerprint of an official naval force rather than that of raiding nomad cavalry or angry local neighbours.



### 3. Ongoing Medism during the reign of the Archaeanactids

In the aftermath of the Persian War, from 480 the reign of the Archaeanactids as a kind of tyranny follows the characteristic Persian anti-democratic model of government.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is possible to consider the regime to be supported or accepted by the Persians, or at least not to be in total opposition to them. The Persian rulers in Anatolia generally established tyrants in the Anatolian Greek cities, where they maintained control before and after the Battle of Salamis. For example, at Samos a certain Theomestor was put in power as reward for his choice of side.<sup>31</sup>

The first thing the new Bosporan dynasts did, with great effort, was to protect their acropoleis by constructing new fortifications, even if people on the acropolis had to dwell in dugout huts again.<sup>32</sup> Several huts were constructed directly on the ruins of the multi-chambered buildings. As they contained evidence of metal production, they can be considered as workshops or as workmen's shelters. Otherwise, very little is known about the Archaeanactid period. At least it can be counted as a sign of the tyrants' persophilia that they were expelled from power in favour of the Spartocids, probably with the assistance of Pericles' naval expedition in 438/437. Striking evidence for an official Pantikapaion Medism is a change in the coin-standard from Aeginetian in the late Archaic period to Persian after ca. 490, as V.A. Anochin<sup>33</sup> first observed. This confirms a strong Persian commercial presence, not to say pressure, in the region and the wish to participate in the Persian market.<sup>34</sup> One may assume the presence of Persian ambassadors and merchants in the Bosphorus as well. Even if their archaeological context remains unknown, there exist two Achaemenid cylinder seals "from Kerch" which are executed in fine and original Achaemenid court style.<sup>35</sup> They show Persian warriors or kings fighting and subduing enemies. On the first seal, the targets are distinctly characterized as Greek hoplites, while on the second one, bearing the name of the Great King Artaxerxes, they are more generally depicted in Oriental costume, their leader wearing an Egyptian crown. The scene both resembles and varies from the famous Bisitun relief of Dareios I in which the Great King is depicted directing a group of bound enemies who are standing opposite him. Passing by, he crushes another foe with his foot and bow-tip. The royal name and the depiction of the palm tree on the Bosporan seal directly identify its bearer as a messenger of the Great King.<sup>36</sup> Boardman considered original court-style seals in Anatolia to originate from the early phase of Persian dominion, i.e. the later sixth and first half of the fifth century, when the leading elites were still in the process of formation and therefore used tokens of direct court contact as symbols of power.<sup>37</sup>

A stylistic comparison of the leading figures on the seals with the depiction of the hero-warrior on Persian official coins results in both cases in a date closer to the earlier type, i.e. in the first half of the fifth century. It is worth paying attention to the realistically depicted silhouette of the hero's back and

leg which push through the thin dress. In the later coins, this is reduced to a mere impressionistic rendering of the drapery. Therefore, these seals must have belonged originally to high ranking Persian officers during the Archaeanactid period. Since they were bought on the art market, one can only guess that they might have been buried in a late Classical tumulus, which was plundered in the later 19th century. Due to the unknown contextual conditions, one will never know whether the seals could also have been obtained and used during the fourth century. A parallel is given by two Georgian court-style seals which were found in late Classical graves.<sup>38</sup> These pieces were certainly in use for a long time before they entered the graves. It remains debatable whether such highly prestigious, but personal objects could have circulated freely throughout the Pontic area or were instead closely kept as family heirlooms over more than 100 years. Only in the second case is there testimony of a distinguished Persian or Persian-related officer in the region in which they were actually found.

#### 4. *A brief statement by Herodotos from the third quarter of the fifth century*

Herodotos (3.97.4) gives only a very short comment concerning Persian rule in the eastern half of the Black Sea after he had given an account of how satrapies and taxes were installed by Dareios I after his coronation in 522 BC:

The Colchians also had set themselves among those who brought gifts, and with them those who border upon them extending as far as the range of the Caucasus (for the Persian rule extends as far as these mountains, but those who dwell in the parts beyond Caucasus toward the North Wind regard the Persians no longer) – these, I say, continued to bring the gifts which they had fixed for themselves every four years even down to my own time, that is to say, a hundred boys and a hundred maidens (translation: Macaulay, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/hh3090.htm>).

This passage is quoted especially by E.A. Molev as overwhelming proof that Persian rule extended not further to the north than the Caucasus mountain range. However, the contrary should be read into it. The Greek text has:

τὰ δὲ πρὸς βορρῆν ἄνεμον τοῦ Καυκάσιος Περσέων οὐδὲν ἔτι φροντίζει

οὐδὲν ἔτι should be understood in a temporal sense and not from a geographical or gradual aspect.<sup>39</sup> The people to the north of the mountains regard the Persians *not any longer* at Herodotos' own time of writing sometime between 447 and ca. 425. Indirectly, this is indeed valuable proof that they had been under Persian dominance at some time not long before. The overall context makes it clear that the period of Dareios I and afterwards is meant, as the pas-



Fig. 5. Two cylinder seals from Kerch (Minns 1913, 411). Siglos type III b (early) 500-475 and Daric type III b late 425-375 (Weisser 2006, 74).

sage is positioned at the end of the list of satrapies established by that king. The next statement, that the Colchians, *even in the author's own time still* offer gifts, provides additional evidence that in the preceding passage the status of a past time is being described. This is confirmed by a similar phrase used about the Ethiopians before the Colchians are mentioned. The author shifts from the past tense in the description of the list of satrapies to the present and back again, which is another sign indicating reference to different chronological levels.<sup>40</sup> The critical event, when the territories north of the Caucasus extinguished Persian dominance, may well be Pericles' expedition in 438, but the author does not stress this.

### Summary

To conclude, it seems as if the Greeks communities lost the Persian Wars in the Cimmerian Bosphorus after they had profited from the Darian campaign against the Scythians, one way or another, during the preceding two decades. We have no decisive evidence as to who ruined most of the Bosphoran settlements at the beginning of the fifth century, as no ancient writer bothers to tell us. Certainly, it could have been an internal Greek affair or a local

conflict with the Sindoi or Crimean Scythians or even a combination of both. However, the chronological coincidence of the archaeological material with the historically reported war in western Anatolia, which deeply affected the Ionian metropoleis, plus the numismatic, glyptic and textual evidence for the period after the destruction should not be neglected. Any Persian satrap from eastern Anatolia may well have been responsible for the devastation, even if he had sent Greeks from the southern Black Sea coast or Pontic non-Greek forces to do his dirty work. If the Persians were responsible, it will be impossible to determine the real enemy in the Bosphorus from archaeological material, such as weaponry, alone.

## Notes

- 1 Braund 2005, 86.
- 2 Tolstikov 1984, 25.
- 3 Vinogradov 1980, 69-70. See also Maslennikov 2001, 247, 249.
- 4 Discussion at the Bosporan Kingdom Conference, Sandbjerg 2009, demonstrated this to a high degree. See as well, Treister this volume.
- 5 Fedoseev (1997, 315) quotes a lecture given by G.A. Koshelenko, who had the idea that the Cimmerian Bosphorus, which is catalogued under "Asia" in Strabon 11.2.5-10, should therefore be reckoned as one of the territories governed by the Persians, which is quite unconvincing.
- 6 Molev 2001, 29.
- 7 Hdt. books 4 and 5.
- 8 Tsetschladze 2004, 226-278.
- 9 Berezan, Olbia and its chora, Nikonion, Kerkititis, Pantikapaion, Nymphaion, Myrmekion, Thyrambe, Gorgippa. See above, Tsetschladze 2004, 230-240.
- 10 Non-urgent in the sense that there was no revolt or other provocation we know of in Scythia which required instant subduing.
- 11 Hdt. 4.118.
- 12 Pseudo-Scymnos 788-843. The Chalkedonians and Megarians founded Mesambria "at the time when Dareios made his expedition against the Scythians". See Hind 1998, 138.
- 13 Summerer 2005, 243. Justin 16.3.
- 14 Hind 1998, 139.
- 15 Hind 1998, 141-144 for a revised dating of objects formerly considered to be Archaic.
- 16 Dally 2008.
- 17 Hdt. 4. 120-122.
- 18 Hdt. 5.11, 5.23.
- 19 Treister 2003; Tolstikov et al. 2004.
- 20 Fornasier, Böttger 2002, 45.
- 21 V.A. Zinko and A. Butjagin at the the Bosporan Kingdom Conference, Sandbjerg 2009.
- 22 Saprykin 2006, 274-277.
- 23 Rusjaeva 2003, 96. The traditional opinion to be challenged here is that these people came as a result of their disagreement with Persian rule in Anatolia.
- 24 Hdt. 6.7.

- 25 Hdt. 5.36.
- 26 Hdt. 6.6, 6.8.
- 27 Jacobs 1994, 119.
- 28 Tolstikov 1984, 27; Maslennikov 2001, 249.
- 29 Tolstikov et al. 2004, 328.
- 30 Diod. 12.31.1 states 42 years of government before the reign of Spartakos, i.e. 480/479 to 438/437 BC.
- 31 Hdt. 8.85. Cf. Wachsmuth 1832, 406. See also Briant 2001, 532. The expulsion of all western Anatolian tyrants in favour of democracies by Mardonios (Hdt. 6.43) may be reckoned as exceptional.
- 32 Tolstikov et al. 2004, 328.
- 33 Anochin 1986, 23.
- 34 V. Stolbas' paper given at Sandbjerg in 2008 recollected the related material and underlined Anochin's thesis.
- 35 Minns 1913, 413; Treister this volume, no. 15.
- 36 See also, Ellen Rehm's article on the classification of objects from the Black Sea region in this volume. At least three seals with the names of Great Kings show the image of the date-palm tree: Dareios I (London BMWA 89132, Boardman 2000, fig.5.9); the one described here, naming Artaxerxes (St Petersburg 19499, Boardman 2000, fig. 5.6); and Xerxes on a seal impression from Daskyleion in Istanbul (Boardman 2000, fig. 5.15).
- 37 Boardman 1970, 325.
- 38 Dzhavakhishvili 2007, 126, figs. 1-2.
- 39 In the sense that Persian rule would have extended towards the Caucasus, *not further* to the north.
- 40 Many thanks to Dr George Hinge for discussing the philological aspects of my interpretation.

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