

Melammu
Workshops and
Monographs

8



Shaping Boundaries

Ethnicity
and Geography
in the Eastern
Mediterranean Area
(First Millennium BC)

Proceedings of the 15th Melammu Workshop,
Verona, 19–21 January 2022

Edited by Simonetta Ponchia
and Luisa Prandi

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Illustration on the cover: *An idea of border*. Monastery of Saint Simeon Stylites the
Younger (Samandağ – Turkey) (photo S. Ponchia).

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The Cimmerian Bosphorus as a Boundary between Europe and Asia according to Aeschylus

An Invented Tradition?

Luisa Prandi

Abstract

This study may be considered as a sequel of my paper about the Thracian Bosphorus (*Kaskal* 2022), where I argued that the evidence of the real weight and role of the Bosphorus, with regard to the relationships between Greeks and non-Greek people, points to the conclusion that the channel was originally perceived as a passage from one country to another, not as an actual boundary.

The same conclusion does fit to the Cimmerian Bosphorus, on the basis of a three steps exposition; a careful analysis of Aeschylus' tragedies concerning the boundary between Europe and Asia (*Prometheus Bound* and *Suppliants*, where the poet mentions Io; a fragment of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Persians*); some considerations about the traditions, in Herodotus, Strabo and other writers, concerning the rivers Phasis and Tanaïs as boundaries, because our sources connect the final course of the Tanaïs and the Cimmerian Bosphorus; an overview of the Greek colonization in that area and of the Persian initiatives against the Scythians in the 6th century.

Premise

In the ShaBo project I considered the Thracian Bosphorus an inescapable case study in the search for areas and reasons that define boundaries and dividing lines – natural or ethnic – between the Ancient Greek and Near Eastern world ¹. And the evidence of the real weight and role of the Thracian Bosphorus, with regard to the relationships between Greeks and non-Greek people, points to the conclusion that the channel was originally perceived as a passage from one country to another, not as an actual boundary.

Ancient writers offer two possible reasons that the name Bosphorus became associated with the Thracian channel. One concerns the link with the myth of Io (the woman loved by Zeus and turned into a heifer, who has pursued by a gadfly sent by Hera, and wandered across the channel toward Asia). The other involves reference to real and anonymous cattle which for various reasons crossed it. The name Bosphorus is always associated with the idea that the Thracian channel was a means to cross from one side to another, a point of passage. Moreover, a se-

¹ Cf. Prandi, 2021. A further outcome of this project was my book about Byzantium, cf. Prandi, 2020.

quence made up of ethnonyms only, Mysian or Phrygian or Thracian Bosphorus, appears in some late writers, like Dionysius of Chalcis, Dionysius of Byzantium, Arrian and Apollodorus. We may note that although they refer to it without providing any commentary, they were certainly aware of the myth of Io. The occurrence in Apollodorus of *poros* (i.e. passage, not *Bosporos*, passage of the bovid) to indicate the path of the channel is also very striking. The word *poros* is particular in being a part of the compound *Bosporos*. Or rather, this may be a basic name derived from remote memories, that is merely *poros* “passage, crossing”, from time to time specified as passage of the Mysians, or Phrygians, or Thracians, or finally of a bovine animal, of the heifer, that is Io.

The late writers already mentioned reflect a couple of important aspects. On one hand, the map of Greek colonization of the Straits area at the beginning of the first millennium BC; there were settlements on both sides without territorial limits. On the other, the policies of the Greek cities in this area in a later epoch, especially Byzantium, were not restrained by considering the channel a foreclosure to their freedom of action. All the evidence suggests that no dividing lines between Europe and Asia did pass through the Thracian Bosphorus; the channel has always had a merely geographical significance, as Herodotus himself points out.

Without having published them, I presented this evidence and my conclusions in a webinar organized in March 2021 by colleagues at the University of Trento. On that occasion my friend Serena Bianchetti told me that the Bosphorus, that is the channel, the strait explicitly defined in our sources as a boundary between Europe and Asia, is the Cimmerian Bosphorus referred to by Aeschylus in the tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. So, I was forced to conduct further research and to write something like a sequel.

My present paper is divided into three parts:

- 1: A careful analysis of Aeschylus' tragedies concerning the boundary between Europe and Asia, not only *Prometheus Bound* and the *Suppliants*, where the poet mentions Io, but also a fragment of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Persians*.
- 2: Some considerations about the traditions, in Herodotus, Strabo and other writers, concerning the rivers Phasis and Tanaïs as boundaries, because our sources connect the final course of the Tanaïs and the Cimmerian Bosphorus.
- 3: An overview of the Greek colonization in that area and of the Persian initiatives against the Scythians in the 6th century.

My aim is to determine whether the Greek evidence shows some perception of the Cimmerian Bosphorus as a real frontier.

to cross the Maeotis strait, that is the Cimmerian Bosphorus⁷, required “a bravery that mangles the entrails” (v. 734)⁸. And, almost in compensation for an effort that surged from the creature's very depths, this crossing remained of great renown (*logos megas*) among humankind, through the eponymy of the channel which is named after Io in the form of a heifer⁹. We may however notice that, after the emphasis on bravery and eponymy, the poet marks the passage from Europe to Asia in a lower tone, like an obvious element of Io's wandering. The second passage seems to announce the whole journey of the pursued woman once more, but v. 790 is related to v. 735 and resumes the narration of the crossing of the stream between the continents¹⁰, that is the Bosphorus strait¹¹.

Both passages show that although the whole ancient tradition related the eponymy of Io to the Thracian Bosphorus, Aeschylus relates it to the Cimmerian. Then he defines this strait as a point of separation between Europe and Asia. The poet refers to a couple of elements that were well-known in his time: the relationship between Io and a channel (a *Bosporos*) and the Cimmerian ethnic name for the channel between Maeotis and Pontus. He links them in an unusual way¹². However, we must find the roots of this link: did it originate before Aeschylus, or did he invent it himself?¹³

Prometheus Bound belongs to a trilogy and the tragedy with which the story ended, *Prometheus Unbound*, is lost. A fragment survives, strongly related to my topic (frg. 191 Radt), handed down by Arrian, Procopius and a scholiast to Dionysius Periegetes¹⁴. Arrian (*Per. Pont. Eus.* 19) describes the Maeotis area and cites the tradition that the River Tanais (Don) was the boundary between Europe and Asia and that its stream continued through Maeotis into Pontus¹⁵. Then Arrian

⁷ The poet uses the word Cimmerian to define the isthmus before the Tauric Chersonese and the channel, perhaps because the toponym Bosphorus became more important later on. Regarding the direction of travel, from north to south, see Bonnafé, 1991: 165–166, with previous bibliography, and Bianchetti, 1988: 207–208, who usefully pinpoints that all the itinerary before the crossing of the Cimmerian Bosphorus is set in Europe.

⁸ Thus Bianchetti, 1988: 211, “un coraggio che strazia le viscere”.

⁹ See Prandi, 2021 for remarks on this etymology.

¹⁰ The use of the dual form is notable. Griffith, 1983: 228 stresses *epeiron* (v. 735) and *epeiroid* (v. 790) as markers of a resuming narration.

¹¹ Thus Wecklein, 1891: 116 and Griffith, 1983: 228. However, Bianchetti, 1988: 213 thinks that the stream is the River Phasis.

¹² Although all our sources on the link between the Thracian Bosphorus and Io are later than Aeschylus, cf. Bonnafé, 1991: 152.

¹³ As Griffith, 1983: 219 suggests.

¹⁴ These writers do not appear to depend on one another because each focuses on a particular feature of the tragic passage: Arrian quotes the verse, Procopius mentions only a word but offers an accurate location of the verse; the scholiast refers not only to Aeschylus but also to Sophocles.

¹⁵ I return to this below, see *Geography*.

traces back to *Prometheus Unbound* the opinion that the River Phasis was the boundary, quoting some verse where the Titans say τῆ μὲν δίδυμον χθονὸς Εὐρώπης / μέγαν ἤδ' Ἀσίας τέρμονα Φᾶσιν (where the great Phasis, common boundary of the land of Europe and Asia). Procopius (*De Bell.* VIII 6. 15) briefly recalls both traditions, about the Tanaïs and the Phasis as boundaries; he does not quote any verse of Aeschylus but refers to *Prometheus Unbound* and clearly echoes his epithet referring to the Phasis (*termona*). The passage of the scholiast (*Schol. Dion. Per.* 10 p. 323, 22 Bernhardt), who provides a commentary on Dionysius Periegetes, who wrote that the River Tanaïs divided Europe from Asia, is more puzzling. He briefly refers to *Prometheus Unbound* by Aeschylus and Sophocles' *Scythae*, another lost tragedy, for this opinion. It seems that Aeschylus believed that the Tanaïs was the boundary. However, we may note that Arrian quotes the verse of Aeschylus on the Phasis and that Procopius and Arrian agree on this point. May be the scholiast was careless or too hasty in his writing¹⁶.

In any case, explaining this clear conflict between two tragedies belonging to the Prometheus trilogy about the boundary between Europe and Asia – Cimmerian Bosphorus or Phasis – is problematic¹⁷. We have also to take into consideration that the tragedies of Aeschylus contain two other challenging passages concerning this topic. The name Bosphorus appears twice in the tragedy *Persians* (vv. 722–723, 745–746), meaning in a peculiar way the Hellespont yoked by Xerxes¹⁸. In the tragedy *Suppliants* the daughters of Danaus, searching for protection from the city of Argos, because of their descent from Io recall the wandering of the woman/heifer pursued by Hera. The Danaids mention the crossing of a *poros* marking a boundary¹⁹ in a very difficult passage (vv. 543–548)²⁰:

¹⁶ See Dan, 2016: 265–267 for a useful analysis of the passage.

¹⁷ Griffith, 1983: 219 says that either the Prometheus tragedies contradict one another or the poet identified the Tanaïs with the Phasis. Cf. also Dan, 2016: 265–267: I agree with her analysis, but I cannot follow her when she denies all contradiction in Aeschylus.

¹⁸ Aeschyl. *Pers.* 722–723: Atossa – μηχαναῖς ἐξευξεν Ἑλλης πορθμόν, ὅστ' ἔχειν πόρον. / Δαρεῖος – καὶ τόδ' ἐξέπραξεν, ὅστε Βόσπορον κλῆσαι μέγαν; (“By a clever device he yoked the Hellespont so as to gain a passage.” Darius – “What! Did he succeed in closing the mighty Bosphorus?”). 745–746: Darius – ὅστις Ἑλλήσποντον ἱρὸν δοῦλον ὡς δεσμώμασιν / ἤλιπσε σχῆσειν ῥέοντα, Βόσπορον ῥόον θεοῦ (“for he conceived the hope that he could by shackles, as if it were a slave, restrain the current of the sacred Hellespont, the Bosphorus, a stream divine”). Cf. Cahen, 1925: esp. 178–181, and Prandi, 2021: 384, note 30.

¹⁹ As Sommerstein, 2019: 240–241 remarks, the recurring term *-poros* indicates a Bosphorus, but it remains unclear whether this is a real Bosphorus or the Hellespont, as in the verse of *Persians*.

²⁰ “... traversing many tribes of men, and [545] |according to fate, cut in two the surging strait, marking off the land upon the farther shore|. And through the land of Asia she gallops, straight through sheep-pasturing Phrygia.”

πολλὰ βροτῶν διαμειβομένα
 φῦλα, διχῆ δ' ἀντίπορον
 γαῖαν ἐν αἴσα διατέμ-
 νουσα πόρον κυματίαν ὀρίζει:
 ἰάπτει δ' Ἀσίδος δι' αἶας
 μηλοβότου Φρυγίας διαμπάξ.

545

The channel is anonymous; vv. 544–546 challenge readers and translators²¹. It will suffice here to remark that the crossing appears fatal (*en aisai*), the *poros* is stormy, and the country on the other side is Asia (therefore Europe is on this side). However, we cannot overlook that the heifer's crossing follows a strange path. As in *Prometheus Bound*, the scenery is fascinating: the earth, like the water, is absurdly divided in two by the animal's crossing; the toponym is lacking, suggesting that the writer and public are both familiar with it. But where is it? After the crossing Io's journey (vv. 547–555) leads her to Phrygia, Mysia, Cilicia and Pamphylia, an itinerary quite compatible with the Thracian Bosphorus – the ford most attested in myth²² – but not at all in agreement with the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

The passages of *Suppliants* and *Prometheus Unbound* are very different, save for the woman protagonist and especially for their emphasis on the crossing.

Geography

The poet does not speak with a single voice. Gathering evidence as to whether some geographical tradition concerning the boundary between Europe and Asia was current in the time of Aeschylus would be profitable, so I proceed to the second point of my paper and take into consideration the well-known Herodotean polemic about the division of the continents.

Notoriously, Herodotus did not accept that there was a division and thought that the commonly cited boundaries were artificial dividing lines²³. However, he is a precious witness of the existence in the 5th century of two different opinions about the boundaries between Europe and Asia (IV 45. 2)²⁴: οὐδ' ἔχω συμβαλέ-

²¹ Cf. Miralles, 2019: 327–329 who gives an accurate overview of the problems and proposed solutions. See in the same volume an Italian translation put forward by L. Lomiento “attraversando numerose stirpi d'uomini, e in due (*dichei*) l'opposta terra tagliando per volere del fato (*en aisai*) definisce un passaggio agitato dai flutti”.

Another anonymous mention of some straits in Soph. *Trach.*, 100–101; see Davies, 1991: 80–81 about the proposed suggestions.

²² As Bonnafé, 1991: 148 remarks, this itinerary is also shorter and easier.

²³ Bianchetti, 1988: 212–213 rightly observes that these views were contemporary, not in sequence.

²⁴ “I cannot guess for what reason the earth, which is one, has three names, all women's, and why the boundary lines set for it are the Egyptian Nile river and the Colchian Phasis river (though some say that the Maeotian Tanaïs river and the Cimmerian Ferries are boundaries); and I cannot learn the names of those who divided the world, or where they

ζθαι ἐπ' ὅτευ μιῆ ἐούση γῆ οὐνόματα τριφάσια κέεται ἐπωνυμίας ἔχοντα γυναικῶν, καὶ οὐρίσματα αὐτῇ Νεῖλός τε ὁ Αἰγύπτιος ποταμὸς ἐτέθη καὶ Φᾶσις ὁ Κόλχος οἱ δὲ Τάναιν ποταμὸν τὸν Μαιήτην καὶ πορθμήια τὰ Κιμμέρια λέγουσι), οὐδὲ τῶν διουρισάντων τὰ οὐνόματα πυθέσθαι, καὶ ὅθεν ἔθεντο τὰς ἐπωνυμίας.

I think it pointless to linger over the difficult identification of the rivers, particularly the Phasis, or the reasons why one river or the other might be chosen²⁵. I prefer to focus on the idea that the course of the Tanais continued after its mouth as a boundary into the stream which crossed Maeotis and came to the channel of the Cimmerian Bosphorus²⁶. After Herodotus, this idea appears in several other writers²⁷. Ephorus²⁸ is credited with having written that the River Tanais flows into Maeotis and the Cimmerian Bosphorus (70F159)²⁹: ὡς δὲ Ἐφορος ἱστορήκεν, ἐκ λίμνης τινός, ἧς τὸ πέρας ἐστὶν ἄφραστον· ἐξίησι δὲ διστομον ἔχων τὸ ρεῖθρον ἐς τὴν λεγομένην Μαιῶτιν ἐς τὸν Κιμμερικόν τε Βόσπορον. Strabo (VII 4. 5)³⁰ says ... διαίρει δ' ὁ στενωπὸς οὗτος τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀπὸ τῆς Εὐρώπης καὶ ὁ Τανάϊς

got the names which they used.”

²⁵ See Bianchetti, 1988: esp. 212–213, and Dan, 2016: esp. 265–267. Bonnafé, 1991: esp. 171–172, rightly points out that Herodotus and Aeschylus had geographical opinions we do not know but apparently different from our own.

²⁶ Wecklein, 1891: 145–146 and Bianchetti, 1988: 212–213 believe in a similar combination but between the Phasis and Cimmerian Bosphorus.

²⁷ However, I think that neither F191 of Aeschylus, which mentions only the River Tanais as a boundary, nor the short Hippocratic treatise *De aer. Aq. Loc.* 13 mentioning only Maeotis, refer to the Tanais-Maeotis-Cimmerian Bosphorus line, as Asheri / Lloyd / Corcella, 2007: 614 suppose.

²⁸ Ephorus is quoted by the *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* 49 M (= ps-Scymn. 860–873 M). However, the passage drew attention mainly because of the presence of the name Hecataeus: ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν Μαιωτῶν λαβοῦσα τὸ ὄνομα Μαιωτῆς ἐξῆς ἐστὶ λίμνη κειμένη, εἰς ἣν ὁ Τάναις, ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ λαβὼν τὸ ρεῦμα Ἀράξεως, ἐπιμίσηθ', ὡς Ἐκαταῖος ἔφορτιεις. (“Next comes the Maeotic Lake which gets its name from the Maeotai. The Tanais, which receives water from the river Araxis, flows into this lake, as Hecataeus”). Cf. Parker, 2016, who comments on 70F159 but does not linger on the content of the Ephorean fragment. The mention of Hecataeus is classified in the *BNJ* both as a fragment of Hecataeus of Miletus (1F195), and as fragment of Hecataeus of Abdera (264F13) – cf. respectively Pownall, 2016 and Lang, 2016 – because Jacoby conjectured, perhaps too subtly, that the sequence ἐφορτιεις should be read as εἶφ' ὁ Τήιος and recalled that Abdera was a colony of the inhabitants of Theos. Asheri / Lloyd / Corcella, 2007: 614 wrongly refer to Hecataeus of Miletus that which the author of *Periplus* traces back to Ephorus. In my opinion the best commentary is that made by Marcotte, 2002: 140 and 250–251, also very useful regarding the relationship between the *Periplus* and the *Periegesis* of pseudo-Scymnus (see F15b).

²⁹ “But as Ephorus has written in his work, (it receives water) from a certain lake, the extent of which is unknown. The current flows, with a double mouth, into the so-called Maeotis and into the Cimmerian Bosphorus.”

³⁰ “This strait (the Cimmerian Bosphorus) separates Asia from Europe, and so does the Tanais river”.

ποταμός³¹, and explicitly couples the Bosphorus and Tanaïs. After him, Dionysius of Byzantium says that the River Tanaïs is the *peras* (limit) of the Maeotis, *oros* (boundary) between the continents (the word is in dual form), flowing into the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

As mentioned above, Arrian (*Per. Pont. Eus.* 19), before quoting the verse from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Unbound* and without explicitly mentioning the Cimmerian Bosphorus, clearly talks of a stream from the course of the Tanaïs to Pontus Euxinus through Maeotis, and therefore through the channel. Procopius too, in the passage cited above (*De Bell.* VIII 6. 15), before referring to Aeschylus says that some people take as a boundary the River Tanaïs, the Maeotis Lake and the Cimmerian strait.

Unlike Herodotus, who restricts himself to recording anonymous opinions that he does not agree with, the later writers accept them and prefer one of the two rivers. They had read Herodotus' work, but were informed by more than his brief remarks. More probably they witnessed the survival and acceptance of geographical views that we know already existed in the 5th century BC. Many were born in cities around Pontus (save Ephorus, who was in any case born in a town in Asia Minor), therefore they lived not far from these geographical features and were not unaware of them.

This perspective on the water system tends to render the river plus the channel as a single feature, the boundary between the continents. Among the writers already mentioned, Strabo says twice (XI 1. 1 and 2. 1) that he chose the Tanaïs as a border marker and so he wants to use it as the starting point of his geographical description.

Ethnicity and politics

Perhaps this outlook is merely theoretical and does not match any actual frontier, ethnic or political. The map of human settlement in the area, Greek and non-Greek, may corroborate this feeling. This leads to the third point of my paper. Greek colonization of the Cimmerian Bosphorus dates back at least to the beginning of the 6th century and, compared to the geographical frames we have seen outlined from Aeschylus onwards, was quite unrestricted in its practices. I would like to recall some well-known features.

Miletus was the metropolis of many colonies³², save Phanagoreia founded later by some inhabitants of Theos forced out by the Persians³³. I will shortly return to this issue. The scarce literary evidence and unusual archaeological remains

³¹ Right afterwards, Strabo says that the course of the Tanaïs is oriented north-south. However, when the river meets Maeotis its course runs east-west instead.

³² Cf. Kochelenko / Kouznetsov, 1990; Gallotta, 2010: 12–19 and 115; Vinogradov, 2012.

³³ Scholars suppose that the Milesian colonies were also a result of the Persian expansion toward the Aegean Sea, cf. Gallotta, 2010: 13.

from the Maeotis area raise many questions, about chronology and typology³⁴. However, it is indisputable that Greek colonies were present on both sides, European and Asiatic, of the Cimmerian Bosphorus³⁵. The situation along the shore of the Hellespont, Propontis and Thracian Bosphorus waterway was very similar³⁶, as well as on the Pontus Euxinus coast. This rules out the possibility that the Greeks or other people perceived and exploited these channels and lakes as significant dividing lines and ethnic boundaries. The presence of seminomadic people³⁷ around Pontus Euxinus is also relevant, particularly because the Cimmerian Bosphorus seems to have functioned as a useful crossroads for terrestrial movements of human groups³⁸.

Our sources document the Scythian tribes in particular, but Greek works name the channel after the Cimmerians³⁹. This may be similar to the case of the Thracian Bosphorus, defined also as the *poros* of the Mysians and Phrygians with regard to the movements of these people. Scattered evidence, not always easy to understand, leads us to conclude that in the 7th century the Cimmerians in Anatolia were a destabilizing factor for organized polities such as Assyria, Phrygia and Greek cities⁴⁰.

However, they are protagonists only in a story recounted by Herodotus⁴¹. This *logos* is not entirely true and has no connections with Maeotis. Herodotus says that the Cimmerians, driven by the Scythians, pushed in turn by Massagetae, were forced to leave their country and move to Anatolia. According to the historian, the Scythians reached the country of the Cimmerians by crossing the River Araxes

³⁴ We must also take into consideration the presence of areas that are by now submerged. Cf. Kochelenko / Kouznetsov, 1990; De Boer, 2006; the papers collected by Solovyov, 2008, especially Podosinov.

³⁵ See Müller, 2000, Müller, 2002 and Müller, 2004–05.

³⁶ See again Prandi, 2021, about the area of the Thracian Bosphorus.

³⁷ I employ the term generically. See Lanfranchi, 1990: 140–145 for useful remarks about the concept of nomadism in reference to the Cimmerians.

³⁸ Cf. the well-known report of Her. IV 28 about the iced-up channel (also Hellan. 4F167), perhaps an exceptional event that has become a literary *topos*. Cf. anyway Vinogradov 2012, 59–60 and 64, with references to his other studies, on mobility.

³⁹ The presence of a non-Greek toponym such as Panticapaeum may indicate the existence of a different name for the channel. However, the meaning currently proposed (“fish way” by Diakonoff, cited by Lanfranchi, 1990: 266 note 103) does not belong to frontier terminology.

⁴⁰ Cf. Lanfranchi, 1990 and Lanfranchi, 2002 with updated bibliography.

⁴¹ Cf. Her. IV 11 for the whole story; 11. 1: ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλος λόγος ἔχων ὅδε, τῷ μάλιστα λεγομένῳ αὐτός πρόσκειμαι. For other information and references to the wanderings of the Cimmerians cf. Her. I 6. 3; 15 e 103. 3, always marked by the feature that the Scythians pursued the Cimmerians. The question of the Cimmerians’ historical movements and locations is beyond my scope; I discuss instead some perceptions of their presence. See Ivantchik, 2001 and 2005.

(IV 11). This river flowed through the Caucasus area, between Pontus Euxinus and the Caspian Sea, a southern land far from Maeotis⁴².

However, right afterwards Herodotus lists toponyms related to the Cimmerians (IV 12. 1) in a country settled by them and then later by the Scythians. He says that Cimmerian names were given until his time to some walls, fords, a land (*chora*) and the Bosphorus (this last name referring to the channel between Pontus and Maeotis)⁴³.

The geographical discrepancy within this passage of Herodotus, who mentions the River Araxes, which is far from the Bosphorus, prevents us from finding in the pursuit of the Cimmerians by the Scythians the occasion when the former gave their name to the Bosphorus, by crossing it. Just like the Greeks thought that the Mysians and Phrygians did by crossing the Thracian Bosphorus. However, Herodotus leads us to suppose that the Greeks from the colonies on the shore of the Cimmerian Bosphorus were the mediators, or even the creators, of the tradition about the toponym. These Greeks came from cities in Asia Minor and had experience of the Cimmerians⁴⁴, but they evidently believed that Maeotis was a land where the Cimmerians had settled just long enough for their name to become attached to it⁴⁵.

In any case, the resettlements of the Cimmerians and Scythians do not show that the Cimmerian Bosphorus was regarded as a frontier.

In this regard, Achaemenid politics during the second half of the 6th century may deserve some consideration. These concerned the relationship of a great empire with its neighbours⁴⁶.

Ctesias says (688F13.20) that Ariaramnes, the satrap of Cappadocia, received orders from Darius to lead an expedition against the Scythians and made use of 30 penteconters (galleys). The official aim was to take prisoners and the satrap achieved it, also capturing the brother of the Scythian king, who was already in

⁴² The account of Herodotus raises many problems. See Macan, 1895: 7–9; Asheri, 1988: 273 and 382–383; Gaetano, 2020: 56–57.

⁴³ IV 12. 1: και νῦν ἔστι μὲν ἐν τῇ Σκυθικῇ Κιμμέρια τείχεα, ἔστι δὲ πορθμῖα Κιμμέρια, ἔστι δὲ καὶ χωρῆ οὐνομα Κιμμερίη, ἔστι δὲ Βόσπορος Κιμμέριος καλεόμενος.

⁴⁴ Cf. Lanfranchi, 1990: 142.

⁴⁵ Cf. Asheri / Lloyd / Corcella, 2007: 580–581. The passage in *Odyssey* where the entry to the Nether Realm is said to be close to the Cimmerians's country (XI 14–19) predates Herodotus. However, I think that these verses have no relationship with my topic and refer to Lanfranchi, 2002.

⁴⁶ This passage of Herodotus, who wrote keeping the Persian expansion in mind, is worthy of note (IV 100. 1): τὸ δ' ἀπὸ τῆς Ταυρικῆς ἤδη Σκύθαι τὰ κατῴπερθε τῶν Ταύρων καὶ τὰ πρὸς θαλάσσης τῆς ἠοίης νέμονται, τοῦ τε Βοσπόρου τοῦ Κιμμερίου τὰ πρὸς ἑσπέρης καὶ τῆς λίμνης τῆς Μαιήτιδος μέχρι Τανάιδος ποταμοῦ, ὃς ἐκδιδοῖ ἐς μυχὸν τῆς λίμνης ταύτης (Beyond the Tauric country the Scythians begin, living north of the Tauri and beside the eastern sea, west of the Cimmerian Bosphorus and the Maeotian lake, as far as the Tanais river, which empties into the end of that lake). However, this would take us too far.

jail. Then the historian says (688F13.21) that Darius, after an exchange of harsh letters with the other king, yoked the Thracian Bosphorus and the Ister and led his troops against the Scythians⁴⁷. The geographical position of the satrapy of Cappadocia and the use of ships may suggest – and is anyway not in conflict with – the possibility that Ariaramnes travelled to the Cimmerian Bosphorus⁴⁸.

As has already been emphasized⁴⁹, the Persian expeditions against the Scythians in the 6th century and the so-called Persian wars against the Greeks in the 5th Century were very similar, each involving a two-stage plan. First, a military expedition entrusted to a general, then a more systematic mobilization of troops under the leadership of the king⁵⁰. In the first case the destination of the expeditions was not the same, but the Persians marched against the same people. On the other hand, the Greek states were numerous, as were the Scythian tribes.

We lack information to assess the risk posed by the first expedition to the Greek colonies in Maeotis, but one of these cities might have seen the approaching Persians as a tragic *dejà vu*. Phanagoreia was founded on the Asiatic shore of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, by inhabitants of Theos in Asia Minor who fled due to Persian pressure⁵¹. The town was a late colonization, not much earlier than the expedition led by Ariaramnes. The mention of Phanagoreia recalls a fragment of an old Persian inscription recently found there, lying upside-down as a doorstep in a burnt house. The text mentions the name Darius⁵². It is arduous to somehow link this inscription to the expedition of Ariaramnes, both because the fragment is isolated among the epigraphic discoveries from the city⁵³, and because the satrap ruled for a short time, too brief for the production of an official document. According to Ctesias, his task was not territorial conquest but to round up manpower,

⁴⁷ Herodotus (4 122) says that Darius pursued the Scythians until the Maeotis and beyond the Tanaïs.

⁴⁸ Cf. Nieling, 2010: 125 and 127; Tuplin, 2010: 301–302; Tsetskhladze, 2013: 212 and Tsetskhladze, 2017: 32–33; Rung-Gabelko, 2019: 115 n. 117 (with reservations). Cf. Gallotta, 2010: 23–28 for the possibly relationship with the birth of the Bosphoran kingdom, another issue unconnected to my topic.

⁴⁹ Cf. Lenfant, 2004: LXXXII–III. There is no trace of it in the Persian evidence, but we have no compelling reasons to doubt of the story.

⁵⁰ The expeditions against the Greeks occur later than the Scythians ones because of some problems concerning succession to the throne.

⁵¹ There are brief reports about its origin in Her. I 168 and Arr. F55 Roos-Wirth. The inhabitants of Theos first found refuge at Abdera. The possibility that Phanagoreia may have been a mixed colony from Theos/Abdera does not significantly affect my topic. The colony may date back to c. 540 BC. Cf. Rubinstein, 2004: 1101–102; Avram / Hind / Tsetskhladze, 2004: 950–951; Lloyd / Asheri / Corcella, 2007: 188–189 (*ad* IV 168).

⁵² The inscription was found in 2016 and published by Kuznetsov / Nikitin, 2019, who suggested a link with Xerxes. Cf. Rung / Gabelko, 2019, who provides an exhaustive overview of the issues raised (91–99).

⁵³ Cf. Rung / Gabelko, 2019: 110–111.

no more than a raid⁵⁴.

The hypothesis that the inscription may be a fragment of the inscribed stelae erected by Darius on the European side of the Thracian Bosphorus, when his troops were leaving for the 514 BC Scythian expedition⁵⁵, is attractive. For example, we know that the Byzantines reused a portion of it in their sacred buildings⁵⁶. The fragment found during the excavations in Phanagoreia might be some sort of trophy, intended perhaps for display in an anti-Persian city such as Phanagoreia⁵⁷.

Some conclusions

We can now assemble a few final considerations regarding the whole waterway consisting of Hellespont, Propontis, Thracian Bosphorus, Pontus Euxinus, Cimmerian Bosphorus, Maeotis and Tanaïs.

To the question of whether the Persian generals and kings went beyond some real boundaries, I think we can answer negatively, with regard to both the Scythian and Persian expeditions⁵⁸. When Darius organized the Scythian expedition in 514 BC and crossed the Thracian Bosphorus, many pro-Persian tyrants were already in charge in the Greek cities on the European side (Her. IV 138. 1–2). Likewise, the Hellespont was not a boundary when Xerxes crossed it, because the European side and the Thracian Chersonese had been under Persian control since the previous century. Certainly, the Greeks later referred to the channel as a limit that the Persian king had dared to pass⁵⁹.

The channel between Propontis and Pontus received the name of Bosphorus, referring to the myth of Io, but also to the *poros*, passage, of Mysians, Phrygians and Thracians. The channel between Pontus and Maeotis was linked only to the Cimmerians; there is no other name that points to the Scythians. It should be noted that the Cimmerians appear to be the most ancient people tied to the area and to Greek memories, although their presence dates back only to the 1st millennium. And the possibility cannot be ruled out that Cimmerian Bosphorus, or better *poros* as in Aeschylus, was the name of a place where the Cimmerian people came and settled.

Let's go back to Aeschylus, my starting point. The verse mentioning the Cimmerian Bosphorus contains nothing which may be related to the Persian wars, the conflicts between Greeks and Barbarians or between freedom and slavery, or to the intertwining of blame, punishment, and revenge. This means that Aeschylus

⁵⁴ Cf. also Vinogradov, 2012: 146.

⁵⁵ Cf. again Rung / Gabelko, 2019.

⁵⁶ Cf. Her. IV 87. 1–2. Cf. Prandi, 2020: 32–34, on the dating of this action by the Byzantines and Prandi, 2021 on the monument's meaning with regard to the Bosphorus.

⁵⁷ Cf. again Rung / Gabelko, 2019: 111–116.

⁵⁸ The first Persian war is of course unrelated to this question, since the Persians crossed the Aegean Sea.

⁵⁹ Cf. Prandi, 2021.

does not appear in this case to have been influenced by a way of thinking that was born in the 5th century, after the Greek victory over the Persians. Like Herodotus, he seems to bear witness to previous geographical systems, showing curiosity but remaining neutral, more interested in literary effects than scientific concreteness or historical faithfulness.

The Cimmerian Bosphorus, like the Thracian, never marked a boundary and never played any actual role in the process of shaping boundaries between Greek and non-Greek peoples. We can however perceive its place in a theoretical definition of the dividing-lines between the continents, an abstract process that did not take account of human presence, ethnicity or political structures and organizations in these lands.

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