BEBRYKES AT THE SEA OF MARMARA IN
APOLLONÍOS RHODÍOS

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With his *Argonautica* Apollonios tried to demonstrate a poeticised history of the ancient Greeks, connected with the time prior to or around the emergence of the new non-Hellenic space conquered by them through the sailing of the *Argo* ship along the coasts of the Thracian Sea, the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. He created his epic poem for that purpose, which comprises themes and motifs connected with the culture, faith, behaviour and customs of a population that in his 3rd century BC was a relic of the old Paleo-Balkan and Western Asia Minor ethnic and cultural community (the second half of the second millennium BC and the first half of the first millennium BC) (Porozhanov 1998: 44-50; 2012: 49-96). Moreover, it is believed that the Thracian element in *Argonautica* is authentic to the highest extent, being a reminiscence of the past (Gočeva 1984: 85-95). As Apollonios presents communities possessing Thracian characteristics, this is precisely the reason why some of them are studied in the present work. In this concrete case here we are referring to the Thracian ethnic and political formation in Northwestern Asia Minor, located along the eastern coast of the Sea of Marmara, notably the Bebrykes.

In his *Argonautica*, Apollonios Rhodios narrates how the wind pushed the ship off the coasts of Mysia for a whole day and a whole night. In the morning the heroes saw a very wide coast stretching after the twist in the coastline, they started rowing more vigorously and arrived in the land at dawn (A. Rhod. *Arg.* 1, 1358-1362).

Apollonios associates the toponym Mysia, the large peninsula located to the east/northeast of Phrygia, with the Bear Island/Peninsula on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara. The fact that the Argonauts left Mysia and headed towards the very wide coast after the twist in the coastline means that they crossed the big Astakos Bay (present-day İzmit Bay), moving to the north, and 24 hours later they saw the southern/southwester coast of the biggest peninsula in Asia Minor, which limits the Bosporus/Bosphorus Strait upon entering the Pontos (present-day Black Sea), which definitely determined its strategic location. That

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was the peninsula inhabited by the Thracians Bithynoi, about whom Apollonios Rhodios apparently refrained from mentioning anything deliberately. As we shall see, it was not by chance that he referred there to Bebrykes, but not to Bithynoi.

Upon arriving at the northern/northwestern coast of the Bithynian Peninsula, the Argonauts first learned about the stables and farms of the haughty king (ἀὐωνόματος) of the Bebrykes – Amykos, son of the Bithynian nymph Melia and Poseidon. Amykos straightened his scores with foreigners by boxing many of them to death. The king went down to the ship and told them that they, being strangers coming from the sea, ought to know the established rule, namely that foreigners coming to the Bebrykes could leave only after winning a fist fight with him. Fights followed, resulting in the death of the king of the Bebrykes (A. Rhod. Arg. 2, 1-135).

Irrespective of the epic poet’s negative assessment of the Bebrykes, there is no doubt that he was referring to the kingdom of the Bebrykes, whose king bore the name of Amykos and was of divine origin, being the son of Poseidon and the Bithynian nymph Melia. That king of the Bebrykes was not hospitable to foreigners. What is more, he actually killed them. It seems that in the period from the second half of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC, and/or around the 7th – 6th century BC, this probably collective image of the king of Bebryka as Poseidon’s son reigned over the waters of his coastal lands in the eastern part of the Sea of Marmara, thus preventing the Argonauts to pass through the Bosporus/Bosphorus so as to enter the Black Sea, and the circumstance that he was the son of the Bithynian Melia emphasised the belonging of the Bebrykes to the Bithynoi. In other words, the Bebrykes in Apollonios, who obviously controlled the entry into the Strait from the south, proved to be the southwestern part of the Thracians-Bithynoi in Northwestern Asia Minor.

The ethnonym Bebrykes (Ἀβρυκαίοι) was characteristic of the Thracian areas of Bithynia and Mysia in Asia Minor, according to researchers (Ruge 1897: 180-181). It could be compared to the ancient European Thracian ethnonym of Brygoi (Ἀβρυγάδοι, Ἀβρυγά) (Vassileva 1995: 31). This is suggested by Herodotus as well, who reports that in the past the Brygoi lived in Europe together with the Macedons, and it was precisely they – the Brygoi – who started calling themselves Phrygians after they crossed into Asia Minor (Hdt. 7, 73). This was how the Brygoi became a synonym of the Phrygians.

However, it was not accidental that Apollonios Rhodios used precisely the name Bebrykes, because the name presented in this way is similar in sound to ἀεικυτάρητος, ἀεικυτάρητος, which had the meaning of “eat, devour” in ancient Greek and was an indisputable sign of a negative characteristic feature of that indigenous population: the Bebrykes who killed foreigners, i.e., this means that they did not allow the Greeks to pass through the Strait.

Apparently, an open hostility towards the alien Greeks on the part of the local Thracian coastal population in Asia Minor, connected with the Bithynian nymph, was registered there from the second part of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC, before and around the 8th – 7th century BC. And it was only after the victory of the Argonauts over King Amykos that they entered and sailed unperturbed in the Bosporus/Bosphorus. It would be logical to conclude that the Bebrykes, i.e., the Bithynoi, controlled the entry into the Strait from the south.

The Bithynian kingdom had an active political history during the 3rd century BC, and it was not probable that Apollonios was unaware of it, as he was its contemporary. That was the
time of four successive kings of Bithynia: Zeipoites/Zipoites (328 – 280 BC), Nikomedes I (280 – ca. 255 BC), Zielas and his brothers (ca. 253 – ca. 242 BC), Zielas alone (242 – 230 BC) and Prusias I (ca. 230 – ca. 183 BC), who successfully imposed their authority over the Greek poleis in the coastal regions of their kingdom, notably Heraclea Pontica along the Southern Black Sea coast, as well as Astakos, Kiera, Thios, Nikaia, Kios and Myrlea in the eastern part of the Sea of Marmara (Gabelko 2005: 525-526). However, as Apollonios referred to an earlier time in his poem, he simply wrote about the Bithynian land/country (A. Rhod. Arg. 2, 164 – 177) and placed in its southwestern part some hostile indigenous people, deliberately named Bebrykes, who were undoubtedly the actual Bithynoi, who were mean to the Greeks, because they indeed conquered the cited Greek poleis at that same time and before the eyes of Apollonios Rhodios.

In other words, Bebrykes should be understood to mean the southwestern part of the Thracians Bithynoi, who inhabited the northeastern part of the Sea of Marmara, the southwestern coast of the Bithynian Peninsula, the southern part of the Bosphorus/Bosphorus, and the passing through the Strait depended on them.

Other authors in addition to Apollonios Rhodios also mention the Bebrykes, and those authors confirm the location and the characteristics of those ethnic and political organisations such Thracian.

Strabo (64 BC – 21 AD) says that the Mysians originated from the Mysians, who are also Thracians, which are called Moesians (in Europe – author’s note, K.P.), and that during his lifetime they lived among the Lydians, Phrygians and Trojans, and that the Phrygians were actually Brygoi – a Thracian ethnos like theMygdones, Bebrykes, Maedobithynoi, Bithynoi and Thynoi... and theMarianidynoi. (Strab. 7, 3, 2). Again Strabo comments that the lands around Kyzikos to Praktios were inhabited by Phrygians, those around Abydos – by Thracians, and before those two peoples – by Bebrykes and Dryopes. After them, the land was inhabited by Treres, who are also Thracians (Strab. 13, 1, 8).

The geographer lists the ethnic communities along the southern coast of the Propontis: Phrygians, Thracians, Bebrykes, Dryopes and Treres, explaining at the end that they, too, are Thracians, which implies that the earlier communities were Thracian as well.

The Mythological Library, attributed to Apollodoros (ca. 180-109 BC) is a brief reference to Apollonios, retelling how the Argonauts sailed from Lemnos directly to the Doliones who were ruled by Kyzikos... After the funeral of Kyzikos, the Argonauts sailed to Mysia from where they arrived in the land of the Bebrykes, who were ruled over by Amykos, son of Poseidon and the Bithynian nymph (Apollod. 1, 9, 18-20).

In conclusion, Bebrykes is the name of a population that was probably part of the Thracian community of the Bithynoi in the eastern part of the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara, located on the southern/southwestern coast of the Bithynian Peninsula. These Thracians – the Bebrykes – were ruled over by a king called Amykos. They are presented with their rites that are connected, however, with the control of seafaring in their waters and with the protection of their shores against foreign incursions. These waters and coasts are the southern part of the strategic Bosphorus/Bosphorus Strait. The evidence indicates that there was the Thracian kingdom in that part of Northwestern Asia Minor, which was connected with the ethnonym Bebrykes, i.e. Bithynoi, and which held the power for passing through the Strait.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


