

Abstract

Greeks and Iranians in the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the 1st century BC – 1st century AD: new epigraphical data from Tanais

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The role of the Iranians in the Cimmerian Bosphorus considerably increased in the 1st century BC – 1st century AD, and they were to occupy an important place in local affairs in subsequent centuries. Iranian influence in the Bosphorus had a double origin. Its first source was the policy of Mithridates Eupator, who was proud of his Achaemenid roots. During his reign, people and traditions of Persian origin penetrated into the Cimmerian Bosphorus from the Anatolian part of his kingdom. The influence, however, of local Iranians, the Sarmatians, and kindred peoples, who spoke Iranian languages of the North-Eastern group, was even more important. The inscriptions recently found in Tanais throw new light on Greek-Iranian relations in the Bosphorus during this period.

The Iranians played an especially important role in this city in the Roman period, as attested by the names mentioned in inscriptions of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The city also had a very specific internal organization: it consisted of two communities, “Hellenes” and “Tanaitai” directed respectively by Hellenarches and by “archontes of the Tanaitai”. The inscriptions of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC recently found in Tanais are the first ones dating to such an early period. They allow us to suppose that this structure, previously attested only for a later period, did exist in the city since Hellenistic times. The same inscriptions confirm the hypothesis of the Iranian origin of the Tanaitai and prove in any case that Iranians were present in the city in the Hellenistic period. Other new inscriptions concern the reign of the queen Dynamis, the grand-daughter of Mithridates, who faithfully kept up his traditions. They confirm that Dynamis enjoyed the support of Tanais and of some Iranian (Sarmatian) tribes in her fight against the Roman protégé Polemon. One of her close retainers, who had an Iranian name, Mathianes, son of Zaidaros, and was perhaps one of the Sarmatian chiefs, was at the same time closely connected with Tanais.