Exploring the Hospitable Sea


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ROMANS IN THE NORTH BLACK SEA REGION: 
GRECO-ROMAN BILINGUALISM IN OLBIA

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Abstract: An Olbian dedication to Achilles Pontarches made by a retiring priest includes the priest’s gratitude towards Achilles for ‘the continuance of the city’: ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως … διαμονῆς (IPE I² 140). The word διαμονή can be found in Greek inscriptions more than 200 times. In the majority of cases these inscriptions date from the Roman epoch and are made in honor of Roman emperors, the Senate and the people. This paper offers a classification of the ὑπὲρ τῆς διαμονῆς formulas. The analysis of the διαμονή-usages in the Greek inscriptions of the Roman epoch demonstrates that the Greek διαμονή in this formula is a calque for Latin aeternitas. The above mentioned Olbian inscription IPE I² 140 is an extraordinary exception: a deity is thanked only for Olbian ‘continuance’, without mentioning the Roman one. Another significant specimen of this sort is the CIRB 36 inscription, where an originally Roman cliché is attributed to Bosporan King Teiranes and Queen Aelia. The author thus proposes that we can observe a sort of ‘transmission’ of ‘Rome’s eternity’ to the periphery of the Empire, namely to the Greek city of Olbia or the Greek Bosporan Kingdom (CIRB 36). We can also see how the Greeks applied some phenomena of the Roman culture to themselves.

Keywords: Black Sea, Olbia, Greeks, Romans, bilingualism, epigraphy

Research in the field of Greek-Roman bilingualism caught its second wind in the last decade¹ and it did not happen quite by accident. Language contacts between the Greeks and the Romans can provide us with as much useful information for epoch reconstructions of classical antiquity as, for example, the construction efforts of the ancient city dwellers. One cannot state that the penetration of Latin elements into the language of the Black Sea region Hellenes had never aroused scholarly interest before²; however, the subject had never been the focus of a separate work. Recently the situation in this area of research has changed radically as important discoveries of great consequence to the whole picture of the history of the region in the Roman epoch came to light³.

In this paper I would like to touch upon the issue of the influence of Rome’s official language on the language of the stone inscriptions of Olbia.

Data on Olbia’s relations with Rome⁴ can be found as early as the time of Augustus and Tiberius⁵. Pioneering research of Olbian history has already asserted that the city had acknowledged Rome’s supreme power in the epoch of Septimius Severus, as it was this epoch that saw the beginning of the coinage with the names of the Roman emperor’s family members. In addition, statues dedicated to the emperor’s sons, Caracalla and Geta, were erected by the Olbian council and the people in the same epoch (IPE I², 199). Another important piece of evidence corroborating this theory is the inscription bearing on the dedication of a bath complex to Geta and Caracalla by the Olbiopolitai (IPE I², 174). This inscription lists a ‘governor of the province’ (ὁ διέπων τὴν ἐπαρχεῖαν) as one of the eponyms (the actual name of the governor is not preserved on the stone). A number of researchers, starting with V. Latyshev⁶, state the possibility of Olbia’s annexation to the Lower Moesia province in the Severan epoch but this theory is far from being a proven fact.

The supreme power in Olbia still belonged to the council and the people, and it was on their behalf that the dedication statues to Geta and Caracalla were erected (IPE I², 199). The board of archons was still the supreme executive body (IPE I², 174). The decree IPE I², 42 dating from the Septimius Severus epoch has no formal differences from those decrees that do not belong to the era of the Roman political influence. In addition, Olbia retained the right to mint its own coins, albeit only copper ones, and even these bore visible signs of submission to Rome: they depicted emperors and members of the Roman royal family.

I would like to put yet another important testimony of the Roman-Olbian connections on the scholarly agenda. As it

¹ See the detailed bibliography on Greek-Roman bilingualism studies in the 19th-20th centuries in Rochette 1997, 26-35. See also: Adams et al. 2002 and Adams 2003. The collection of articles Biville et al. 2008 is also dedicated to Greek-Roman bilingualism and epigraphy.
² See, e.g. Solomonik 1973, 269-270.
³ See, e.g. Tokhtas’ev 2011.
⁵ Olbian citizen Abab son of Callisthenes dedicated a portico (constructed with his own money) to the emperors Augustus and Tiberius and the IPE I², 181.
is not as manifest as the others, it probably did not receive as much attention in the past.

Achilles assumed the role of the supreme Olbian deity in the Roman period and was worshiped with the title of Ποντάρχης, which is attested by a great number (more than 40!) of stone inscriptions of Olbian magistrates: archons, strategoi, agoranomoi and priests. In general the formula for these dedications adheres to the following pattern: the inscription usually begins with the words Ἀγαθὴ τίμη and immediately afterwards follows the name of Achilles Pontarches in the dative singular (Ἀριλλίη Ποντάρχης). Then comes the name of the dedicator and, if a dedication belongs to a magistracy, there is a list of its members’ names starting with that of its chairman: οἱ παρ_i τον (name and patronymic) ἀρχοντες, στρατεγοι (names and patronymics of the college of magistrates). The final part usually conveys the purpose of the dedication: υπὲρ εὐσταθίας τῆς πόλεως, διαμονῆς, εἰρήνης, ἀνδραγαθίας, πολυκαρπίας and εὐσοφίας. Sometimes, however, the final formula consists of no more than the single word εὐχαριστία (IPE F 155) or χαριστήριον. The χαριστήρια of Olbian magistrates present Achilles as the giver of fertility, water, health and wealth of the city, and one inscription from the pre-Get period calls him ‘the eternal father of Olbian archons’ (IPE F. 53: ἈριλλίηΠοντάρχης ἀνέθεσαν οἱ ἄρχοντες τῷ πατρί (α)).

One of the Olbian dedications to Achilles Pontarches (IPE F 140) is presented by a retiring priest who thanks Achilles for “the continuance of the city”:

Ἀγαθὴ τίμη
Ἀγαλλίι Ποντάρχης
μὴ Καλλίστα
τος Ἀριλείκλαδος
5 ἑρωτεύσας ὑπὲρ: τῆς πόλεως εἰρήνης, ἀνδραγαθίας, πολυκαρπίας

The word διαμονή can be found in Greek inscriptions more than 200 times in such formulae. In the majority of cases these inscriptions date from the Roman epoch and are erected in the honor of Roman emperors, the Senate and the People. Rare exceptions are connected with sacred mysteries (Eusebianism, for example, IG II 4705), sanctuaries (of Apollo of Didyma, for instance, SEG 15.685) or other important public premises or institutions (Chios 18; Stratoniukiea 5; ISmyrna 246; 707; IEph 27a; Iiznik 1131; EKM 1. Beroia 7 etc.).

The most typical meaning of the word διαμονή itself (verbal noun originated from the verb διαμένω) for the Roman period is ‘eternity’, ‘continuance’. According to the Greeks of the epoch, this word is a precise equivalent of the Latin words aeternitas, divitvritas in these formulae. Greek inscriptions honoring Roman emperors mirror Latin wording pro aeternitate by ‘ὑπὲρ τῆς διαμονῆς’ formula. There are, however, several types of this formula, so I would like to present their general typology since no such typology has ever been compiled before: υπὲρ τῆς διαμονῆς, υπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς, υπὲρ τῆς νίκης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς.

The proposed typology takes into account almost all the inscriptions with the word διαμονὴ known to date. The examples cited in this typology exhaust all the possible types of formulae containing the word in question.

The word διαμονὴ is known both in everyday speech and in the Greek Vishnoi formulae. In the Vishnoi inscriptions, the word διαμονὴ is used in connection with διαμονή in Greek inscriptions in general: see Instinsky 1942 (but there is no research on the diversity of the epigraphic formulae in this work).

11 On aeternitas in Roman inscriptions see: Cumont 1888; Moore 1894; Cumont 1896; Auct 1893; Cumont 1893; Charlesworth 1936. On aeternitas in connection with διαμονὴ in Greek inscriptions in general see: Instinsky 1942 (but there is no research on the diversity of the epigraphic formulae in this work).

12 The proposed typology takes into account almost all the inscriptions with the word διαμονὴ known to date. The examples cited in this typology exhaust all the possible types of formulae containing the word in question.

13 For more details see: Belousov 2009, 310-312.

14 In the inscription of the priest Skartanes (IPE F 142) not only the name of Achilles Pontarches is mentioned but also the name of his mother, Theitis: Ἀριλλίη Ποντάρχης καὶ Θείτις.

15 The gratitude for εἰρήνη, εὐσταθία and also for ὑγεία is regularly met in Olbian inscriptions dedicated not only to Achilles Pontarches, but also to Apollo Prostates, Hermes Agoraios and some other deities. For example, Πολυκαρπία τῆς πόλεως (IPE I2, № 130; № 80, 81- τῆς πόλεως). It is quite probable that the plea of gratitude for εἰρήνη, εὐσταθία and ὑγεία is regular same semantic shade in Olbia. These words along with the word εὐσοφία met in dedicatory inscriptions can prove to be quite important for our understanding of Achilles’ religious value in Olbia and in the Pontic kingdom in general.

16 As in IPE F, 133-134, 135; Boltenko 1953 et al.
employed in the inscriptions without any direct connection to Rome or Roman power. In this case we are dealing with an even more profound aspect of the Roman influence on the Greek cities. The word διαμονή is not used in relation to Roman power or to Rome in general but by the Greeks in relation to their own city or, as in the case of the Bosporan inscription, to their own king. Therefore, we can observe a most interesting aspect of the influence exercised by Rome over the provinces and vassal cities of the Hellenic world: a certain ‘transfer’ of the idea of Rome’s and its emperor’s eternity to a Greek city. Taking the religious semantic value of the ‘eternity’ predicate, thoroughly studied by France Cumont as far as the Roman ΑΕΤΕΡΝΙΤΑΣ is concerned,20 one could suggest that the Olbian citizens accepted the word’s semantical antithese of the calque itself and reinterpreted it after their own fashion: the source of the ‘continuance’ of the Olbian polis was probably found in the principle deity of the time, Achilles Pontarches, whom Olbian archons called their πατίρι αἰώνιος (IPE F. 53) and whom they thank for all the blessings that keep the city and themselves wealthy.

Abbreviations


Bosch, Quellen Ankara Bosch, E. 1967. Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Ankara im Altertum. Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarıin. Ser. 7. №. 46.


See Cumont 1896.

For now, it is too early to assert whether the usage of the word διαμονή in the epigraphic monuments of the northern Black Sea region proves whether this expression, which is rooted in Roman epigraphy, had already been assimilated into the Greek language of the epoch and stripped of its purely Roman connotations or, on the contrary, if these connotations were still strong. In the latter case we could envisage the usage of this expression as a political manifesto. In order to resolve this problem in Olbia’s case it seems vital to discern the political status of the city and its relation to the Roman Empire during the epoque. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to draw the following conclusion:

The usage of the word διαμονή in the formulae in question is an important illustration of the Roman influence on the Olbian epigraphic language. However, this word

ύπερ τῆς ύπαξίας καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς17, ύπερ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς18 and their combinations19.

We can see that in the majority of cases the word διαμονή is used as an element of standard Roman formulae. Greek inscriptions that contain prayers or gratitude for a city’s ‘eternity’ or ‘continuance’ are very rare. Moreover, in almost all these cases these prayers for a local city’s wealth come after an enumeration of Roman officials (for example, the inscription from Miletus SEG 15.685: ταῦτα δὲ εἶναι εἰς εἰσίνεβον / ἐν κοινοίς καὶ τῶν Συμβάσεων / καὶ διαμονῆς τῆς πόλεως). Olbian inscription IPE F. 140 is an extraordinary exception: a deity is thanked only for Olbia’s ‘continuance’, without mentioning Rome’s. Another significant example of this sort is the CIRB 36 inscription, where what would originally have been a Roman cliché is attributed to Bosporan King Teiranes and Queen Aelia: θεοῖς ἐπουρανίους Δὶς Σωτῆρι καὶ Ἦρᾳ Σωτείρᾳ ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐσέβειας τῶν τε θεῶν καὶ τῶν Σεβαστῶν ταῦτα ἀπόκειται τῷ ἡμῶν Αὐτοκράτορος; EKM 1. Beroia 69; IG X, 2 1 141; SEG 49:815; SEG 49:816; 49:817; Samsaris, Bas-

17 IGBR I 2 297; MDAI(A) 20 (1895) 386, 5; IG XII, 3 324 (ὑπὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς τοῦ… ἔργων καὶ τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως ἁγίας καὶ τῆς δαυδικῆς καὶ τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς δια-

18 IG XII 3 324; IG XII 3 325; IG XII, 5 1097; SERP 33, 12; Fayoum 1:88.

19 IG I 2 3404; IG I 2 5205 ([ὑ]πὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς της ἡμῶν Αὐτοκράτορος); EKM 1. Beroia 69; IG X, 2 1 137; IG X, 2 1 141; SEG 49:815; SEG 49:816; 49:817; Sam-Samsaris, Bas-Strymon 35 [SEG 39, 590]; IGGR II 615; II 606; III 904; III 1 904; III 1 907; III 1 911; III 1 1074; III 1 1374; IV 1917; IV 1928a; IV 2000; IV 2001; IV 2012; IV 2016; IV 2021; IV 2040; IV 2058; F 17; F 70(2); F 252a; V 333-335; V 5337; V 5692; V 5776-71; Dumont-Homolle 315; M. Perlmuth-Harakleia 56; JOA I 15 (1912) Bbl., 228, 31; SEG 42-646b; 45-878; IScm III 173; II 82; I 187; I 141; I 193; II 67; II 82-83; II 85; II 107; II 73A; V 259; ISer di Cos EV 102bis; IG XII, 5 662; SEG 44:721; Aphrodisias 29; Aphrodisias 607; IK Rhod. Peraia 514; Rhodian Peraia 31; CIG 6829 [IGR 4:468]; Bosch, Quellen Ankara 245, 184-185; IGR IV 548; IV 566; SERP 370, 329, 3 333, 12-13; SEG 6: 616; IG Sys 6 2744; 13 1, 7244; SEG 39:1663; I Porto 3; SEG 35:1040/1732. Apart from these, there is one more type, however, it is represented only by a single inscription: Agora 15 411 [cf. IG I 2 1800] (ἐξὶνι πέντε [και] ἐπὶ αὐξὸν [καὶ] πόλεως ὑπὲρ τῆς τύχης καὶ τῆς διαμονῆς τῆς ἡμῶν Αὐτοκράτορος [και] [και] [και] [και] אָמַרְךְּ (ת)וֹרָאָו; [M. Aṣṭarp̱]. ίου).
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Discussion

Anca Dan: I have a question about Olbia in the Roman period: What are the traces of military presence in the territory of Olbia or, let’s say more generally, between Istrıos, on the Western Black Sea coast, and Crimea?

Alexey Belousov: It is a big question whether Olbia was a part of the province of Lower Moesia or not. Some scholars support this, e.g., Latyshev, Krapivina and even Yuri Vinogradov. But some others think that we can’t now speak of Olbia as part of the Roman Empire because it was out of the ‘times’. For example, it seems that Ivantchik
and Tartasyev don’t think that Olbia was part of a Roman province. I do not know, because there are good arguments from the former but in that case – if Olbia was part of Lower Moesia – it would have had a very special status as a city. I think that we need to wait for developments from archaeological investigation for this.

Adela Sobotkova: How do you perceive the concept of the Roman influence in the inscriptions? Is this a passive reception of the clauses that were circulating and just put in the inscriptions, like ‘profuma’, or do you see this reception as genuinely coming from the city, being an act of actively embracing the authority of the Romans?

Alexey Belousov: There are many directions of this influence of the Roman official language on the Greek language. There is an active borrowing of words from the Latin language. This is the case of official terms, e.g., *veteranus*, where this is direct borrowing. And we have cases where the borrowing was more passive; it was more a translation. The most difficult part is to find the borrowings that are not direct. Only recently, new investigations began to appear, as in for example, the monograph of Dubuisson about the Latin language of Polybius, where he presents the methods which help us recover the Latin syntactical constructions or suffixes in Polybius’ language. It is very difficult to classify now the ways these influences of the Latin language affected the Greek. A useful book is that of Adams about ancient bilingualism and about the influence of the Latin language on the Greek, as is the collection of articles on epigraphy, edited by Frédérique Biville, Jean-Claude Decourt, Georges Rougemont (ed.), *Bilinguisme gréco-latin et épigraphie: actes du colloque*, Lyon, 17-19 Mai 2004.