A Small Island of Great Importance in Maritime Trade of the South Black Sea Coast: Daphnousia Island/Kefken

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Abstract

Daphnousia is a small island along the north coast of the ancient city of Nicomedeia in Black Sea (Pontus Euxine). The island, presently named Kefken, first appears in Classical literature in the *Voyage of Argonauts* in the third century BC. Argonauts after sailing through the clashing rocks of the Bosphorous Strait proceeded east, to the first harbor along the southern coast of the Black Sea, the Harbour of Thynias Island. The Argonauts built an altar and sacrificed animal to the Lord of Dawn, to God Apollo, for they witnessed epiphany of Him at Dawn. Thus, a cult of Apollo and Daphne was established on the island from where presumably the cult of Apollo disseminated in the region. The harbor of the island must have prospered after getting integrated to the territory of the emporion Heracleia am Pontica throughout the Roman, Byzantine and the late medieval ages. The harbours and their installations were protected with fortresses of which most were Byzantine foundations in origin, and they only began to be facilitated first by the Venetian merchants other than Byzantine *nauclarii* in the last decades of the 11th century AD.

Key Words: Emporion, Bithynia, nauclarii, Venetian merchants, fortress, harbor, Black Sea Coast

Daphnousia or Thynias, is a small island on southern coast of the Black Sea, Pontus Euxine in Bithynia region. Bithynia, where Thyns of the Thracian tribes settled during the Iron Age, is a region which encompasses the land east of the Bosphorous Straits and the Sea of Propontis, including south and north shores of the Astakos Gulf, where the land is irrigated by the rivers Sangarius and Hypius extending to the Black Sea Coast. The north coast of Bithynia along the Black Sea is adorned with small bays and promontories jutting to the Sea with a few tiny islands and rocks surfacing the sea. The biggest of all these Bithynian islands is the island of Daphnousia, which has a harbor large and safe enough for ships to anchor *en route* heading to east to the first major port, the port of the ancient city of Heracleia am Pontica. The island is very close to coast, to the Calpe Bay, present day Kerpe, which is just 4.5 sea miles southwest of the island where ships can anchor, as well.

Heracleia am Pontica was a colony settlement founded as an emporion during the Greek colonization period in 550 BC (Asheri 1972, 12) by Dor tribes together with Boeotians (Pausanias 5.26.7). It was the largest and busiest harbor to the east of Bithynia along the Black Sea Coast. In the 6th century, Heracleia am Pontica controlled the Bithynian coast of the Black Sea, including the island of Daphnousia and the Calpe Bay. In the early Hellenistic period, Heracleia am Pontica prospered via maritime trade, and expanded its territory to west, to the west of Pisilis River and to east, to the land beyond rivers Sangarius and Billaios until the river Parthenios. Thus, gaining power over the towns of Tieion and Amastris (Asheri 1972, 13), Heracleia am Pontica created a *thalassocracy* along the Bithynian and Paphlagonian coasts. The territory expansion policy of Heracleia am Pontica during the fourth century BC spreaded southwards, to inland as well, including the city of Kieros and its chora, which was safe and

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fertile irrigated by the River Hypius (Ameling 1985, 2). The ancient city of Kieros was founded by the Boetian and Thessalian phylae of the Dor tribes, who were the kinsmen of Heracleia am Pontica, and it was a productive hinterland for the emporion.

In Bithynia region, on the southeastern end of the Astakos Gulf, the town of Astakos/Olbia was founded by Megarian colonists on the coast of the inner sea Propontis (Bosch 1946, 37-38). It is not clear whether these two archaic settlements, the city of Astakos and Heracleia am Pontica are contemporarily founded settlements during the Greek colony period. The geographer Memnon, a native of Heracleia am Pontica asserted that settlement of Astakos was founded much earlier than Heracleia am Pontica (Memnon XX.1). The settlement Astakos, somehow faded in history leaving no literary record unto present, apart from some architectural remains in Başiskele locality, presumed site of the ancient town on the southeastern end of the Gulf. In the early Hellenistic period, the city of Nicomedeia was founded on the northern bank of the Astakos Gulf across the archaic settlement of Astakos, which must have fallen in oblivion by then. The Astakos Gulf with its both northern and southern banks must have been more convenient for the Thyn and Megarian *phyle* to found settlements where safer maritime trade and seafaring could be conducted. The Gulf of Astakos stretches deep to east with a smooth sea and mild weather conditions.

During the mid-Hellenistic period, Kingdom of Bithynia under the King Prusias the First attempted to expand its territory to east, claiming rights over the town of Kieros. The hegemony conflict between the cities Heracleia am Pontica and Nicomedeia over the easternmost parts of the Bithynia region resulted in clash of the two powers. Eventually, King Prusias the First took the city of Kieros and renamed it as Prusias ad Hypium. Ancient texts of the geographers Arrianus of Nicomedeia, and Memnon of Heracleia did not record any similar hegemony conflict between the two powers over the Daphnousia Island and the Calpe Bay. Indeed, the northern coast of Bithynia region, except foundation of the emporion Heracleia, was left unsettled for a very long time, until the Hellenistic Period. In the fifth century BC when Xenophon came to the area, there was no settlement along the bay of Calpe and on the island. The earliest written record about the Calpe Bay is by Xenophon of Athens in the fifth century BC (Xenophon 6.2-6.4). Xenophon, a philosopher and a historian happened to find himself as the commander of the *Army of Ten Thousands* that disembarked at Calpe Bay. The soldiers had to go inland to fetch food and water, where they confronted hostile locals of the region. Xenophon, while narrating clash of soldiers with locals, described a harbor, but not a harbor settlement in the Calpe Bay. Ancient settlements in size of a village were 30 *stadia*, ca. five kilometers distant from the sea (Xenophon 6.3.2). The land was fertile and the inhabited villages were cultivating wheat, barley, grapes, everything, but not olives (Xenophon 6.4.6). Xenophon's historical record provides a *terminus post quem* for settlement foundation and building program on the island and on the coast of Calpe Bay, as well as, for power and territory expansion policy of Heracleia am Pontica, which also created smaller *emporia* substantiating its maritime trade.

Daphnousia Island with its harbor is first mentioned in ancient literature in the *Voyage of Argonauts* to the Black Sea to find the Golden Fleece in the third century BC. Apollonius of Rhodes named it as the island of Thynias along the land of Bithynians, where Thyns of the Thracian tribes settled (Apollonius II. 341-359). According to Apollonius, Argonauts after sailing through the clashing rocks of the Bosphorous Strait sailed to east in the Pontus Euxine and proceeded to the first harbor along the coast with an anchorage, the harbor of the Thynias Island. On the island, Argonauts witnessed epiphany of the God Apollo at dawn holding a silver bow and a quiver at his back, as he stepped the earth shook and the waves beat the shore. They

offered sacrifice and libations and called it sacred isle of Apollo of the Dawn upon a suggestion by Orpheus (Apollonius II. 669-685). Thus, cult of Apollo together with his mistress Daphne must have been established on the island from where presumably the cult of Apollo disseminated in the region; and all over the coastal lands of Black Sea once existence of worship to the cult of Apollo has been evidenced (Konstantinos 2013).

Geographers Arrianus of Nicomedeia and Strabo of Amaseia mentioned the island in the first century AD. Arrian of Nicomedia named it as the island of Apollonia while describing coastal landscape of the Pontus Euxine from west to east listing the rivers, bays, harbors, islands and settlements even giving the distance between them in *stadia*. For Arrian, Calpe harbor having good water and timber resources was a good qualified place for the ships to anchor, which was 210 stadia distant from the previous mooring place, estuarine of the Psilis River, present day Şile. Arrian notes that after the Bay of Calpe, the next place good for mooring was the bay of Rhoe, present day Kefken, just 20 stadia to the west. Arrian indicates that the island of Apollonia had a harbor behind (on north side) and was 20 stadia north of the Rhoe bay (Arrianus XIII: 1- 4). However, he mentioned nothing else about the Island. Strabo did not describe the Island in details either, aside from naming it the island of Thynias and that it was situated along the Bithynian coast (Strabon XII.3.7). It is Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer and geographer of the second century AD, who mentioned the island in both names as Daphnousia and Thynias (Ptolemaeus V. 14.1).

Daphnousia Island must have played some role of significance in seafaring and maritime trade of the south coast of the Black Sea all throughout history, so that the harbor and the small settlement on it survived into the early medieval ages recorded in Church accounts. In the Medieval Period, maritime trade of the Pontus Euxine was under monopoly of the Byzantine Empire, of which only the Byzantine *nauclarii* actively conducted seafaring and maritime trade. Daphnousia had a church under the bishopric of Nicomedia, and its one of the renown bishops was the titular Saint Sabas, who was a martyr having the feast day on May the 2nd. Bishop Leon of the church of the Daphnousia Island made amends to the second session of the VIIIth ecumenical council in 869 AD, and after 1300 AD, nothing was heard of the church of the island (Janin 1960, 82).

In the 11th century, the Byzantine Empire, at the time of the Emperor Alexios Comnenos I made allies with Venetians against Normans, and the Venetian Fleet defeated Normans in the Sea of Adriatic (Anna Comnena VI, 191). In return, the Venetians were rewarded with high rank titles and granted the privilege to run maritime trade in harbors of the Byzantine Empire with concession of being exempt of tax in May of 1082 (Ostrogorsky 1991, 331). In the last quarter of the twelfth century, for a while privileges of the Venetians were suspended by the emperor Manuel Comnenus. However, in 1182 AD Venetians did not only regained the privileges of tax exempt trade in harbors of the Byzantine Empire, they also gained the power to control the maritime trade of the Byzantine Empire. Thus, when the Latins invaded Constantinople, it was the Venetians who most benefited the political situation, and they literally reinstated a *Venetian Thalassocracy* in waters of the Empire. They controlled the Straits of Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, as well as, the most important harbors in Pontus Euxine such as, the harbor of Heracleia am Pontica (Ostrogorsky 1991 391).

In the 13th century, two princes of the Comnenus Dynasty, Alexios and David Comnenus founded a kingdom, the Pontus Kingdom in Trapezus. The newly founded Pontus Kingdom, claiming rights over the southern coast of Pontus Euxine, took control of the harbors of Sinope and Heracleia am Pontica. Harbors of the Black Sea, which were out of sight, silent and peaceful

during the hegemony of the Byzantine Empire, began to be the stage of clash of ruling powers after the year 1204 AD.

The Byzantine Empire stationed in Nicea under the Laskarids Dynasty renewed the maritime trade agreement with the Venetians in 1219 AD (Ostrogorsky 1991, 398). On the other hand, the Laskarids took back the southern coast until Sinop including harbors of the Heracleia and Amastris. In 1225, Latins captured Nicomedia and in 1260 AD Venetian fleet together with Latins laid siege to the island of Daphnousia (Ostrogorsky 1991, 415). The siege of the Daphnousia Island was a golden opportunity for the Byzantines to take back the capital, the city of Constantinople, which was left unguarded. In 1261, the Byzantine Emperor Mikhail VIII granted Genoese merchants similar privileges once granted to the Venetians. Eventually, in 1265 AD Genoese and Venetian fleets battled; victorious was the Venetian fleet which took back all the privileges and rights (Ostrogorsky 1991, 420).

The Turks, under the command of Orhan Gazi, first took Nicea/ İznik in 1331 and Nicomedia in 1337. However, Heracleia am Pontica and its harbor continued to be under the control of the Byzantine Empire and its *nauclarii* for some more decades until the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans (Ostrogorsky 1991, 467). During the Turkish Independence War, the Daphnousia Island, as the only island with a harbor good for mooring along the western part of the Black Sea Coast, played a very important role in deliverance of ammunition to Anatolia.

In the middle of the 19th century travelers such as Hommaire de Hell and Charles Texier explored the Bithynia region. After the Independence war, mainly German scholarship conducted several surveys in the Bithynia region such as Bosch, Bittel, Dörner. It is Konrat Ziegler who first studied the history of the island in 1936 (Ziegler 1936, 18; Dörner, Hoepfner 1989: 104). F.K. Dörner conducted an archaeological survey in Bithynia and on the northern coast of Anatolia along the Black Sea Coast, *Historisch- archaeologische Forschungen in Bithynien und an der türkischen Schwarzmeerküste, in* 1984 to1986, and in 1989 published Turkish scholars conducted excavations and surveys in the area right after the Second World War; Arif Müfid Mansel of the İstanbul University and Nezih Fıratlı of the İstanbul Archaeology Museums undertook archaeological examinations in the region. Fıratlı surveyed the island and its vicinity including the bays of Calpe/ Kerpe and Rhoe/ Kefken in 1949 and 1951. A comprehensive archaeological examination of the Daphnousia Island was published by Dörner and Hoepfner in 1989. In the year 2006, the Archaeology Department of Kocaeli University surveyed and evaluated the archaeological remains on the island. The report of the Kocaeli University attested the significance of archaeological structures mostly remaining in good state and reinforced register of the site as a First Degree Archaeological Heritage. The ancient harbor and the architectural remains are protected as the First Degree Archaeological site under the auspices of the Turkish Ministry of Culture.

In his preliminary report examining ancient remains on the Island, Fıratlı observed that a strong fortification wall encloses the island, which most of it stands firmly. For Fıratlı, round towers of the fortification walls on west side of the island demonstrated repairs of the 11th and 12th centuries, and walls on the south and east sides of the island preserved the ashlar masonry of conglomerate stones built without mortar (Fıratlı 1946, 16). Dörner and Hoepfner, agreeing with Fıratlı, noted that most of the remaining fortification walls belonged to the Byzantine Period, whereas the walls on the northern part of the island are of the Hellenistic Period (Dörner and Hoepfner 1989: 105). Fıratlı, even, suggested that the block of stones of the ashlar masonry must have been quarried from a quarry on a cape across the island. Rows of ashlar stones of the wall masonry were irregular, varying in thickness from 0.27 meters to 0.46 meters. Several

cisterns were observed on the island, as well as a lighthouse of which Dörner and Hoepfner presumed to be ancient in origin. Survey reports of both scholars recorded ramparts of the 20th century, which demonstrated potsherds in cross sections of the land dating to the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Fıratlı provided detailed information about the types of the pottery, which were all black slipped late Classical and Hellenistic pottery of kylix, kotyle, and kantahros types, as well as including a wide dish.

The island is ±600 meters in length and ± 110 meters in width measuring circa 600 acres and ±30 meters above sea level. At present, the modern harbor and its moles placed on the southern part of the island, together with the only modern structure belong to marine rescue station of the Turkish Navy. Fortification walls with Hellenistic ashlar masonry still survive in good state. The mole of the ancient harbor in the island is sunken. Remains of some structures within the enclosure of the walls are detected beneath vegetation on the island. Remarkable are the remains on the western part of the island behind the modern structure of the marine rescue station, which appear to be a rectangular structure with an apsis on its east side, possibly a church. Potsherds of similar type found in previous surveys having black shiny slipped ware of the Hellenistic period, as well as green glazed ware of the medieval period are observed, as well. The coast of the island is rich in terms of ancient underwater remains. A cursory survey of the island shores yields several stone anchors as well as fragments of amphorae. The ongoing study of the island is expected to uncover more information about the island and the coastland across it.

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