

Priest and Poet? (CIRB 118)

The presence of poets at tyrant's or other monarchic court is obvious since Homer. The best example for that is Pindar, one of the greatest poets of ancient Greece, who was not only paid for his odes but even was member of tyrant's court in Sicily (Pindar 1935, Race 1997). Therefore it is no surprise that such situation we meet at the court of Spartokid dynasts too although there are only few literary testimonies for such presence. More we find among epigraphic texts.

First interesting mention we find by Athenaeus (8, 41) following in that place Machon (Corinthian playwright, III a.C.):

Στρατόνικος ὁ κιθαρωδὸς ὡς Βηρισάδην ἔπλευσεν εἰς τὸν Πόντον ὄντα βασιλέα. πολλοῦ χρόνου δ' ἤδη γεγονότος ἀποτρέχειν ἠβούλετο Στρατόνικος εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. πολλοῦ χρόνου δ' ἤδη γεγονότος ἀποτρέχειν ἠβούλετο Στρατόνικος εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. ὡς δ' αὐτὸν, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐ προσίετο, τοῦτ' ἀποκριθῆναι φασὶ τῷ Βηρισάδῃ: "σὺ γὰρ διανοεῖ, φησὶν, αὐτοῦ καταμένειν"

Translation:

The kitharodos Stratonikos once had sailed to Pontus, to see king Berisades. And when he'd stayed in Pontus long enough, he thought he would return again to Greece. But when the king refused to let him go, they say that Stratonikos said to him - "Why, do you mean to stay here long yourself?"

Stratonikos, one of the most distinguished musicians of his times, was Athenian living in the time of Alexander the Great (Athenaeus, 8, 40-46), (Strabo, 13, 1; 14, 2), (Aelianus, VH 14,14) and therefore Berisades can be only the king Pairisades I (349-310 a.C.). The credibility of that information is high: Machon was active relatively shortly after Stratonikos and historical moment also agrees with this information. It was in the period of Bosporan Kingdom's golden era and, to use example of Pindar, it was common custom of tyrants and monarchs to invite famous poets.

Another example supporting this thesis is another kitharodos - Aristonikos from Olinth – who came to Bosporan court as a spy (Polyaenus, 5, 44):

Μέμνων ἐπιτιθέμενος Λεύκωνι τῷ Βοσπόρου τυράννῳ, βουλόμενος καταμαθεῖν τὰ μεγέθη τῶν πολεμίων [πόλεων] καὶ τὰ πλήθη τῶν ἐνοικούντων ἔπεμψε Ἄρχιβιάδην Βυζάντιον ἐπὶ τριήρους πρεσβευτὴν πρὸς Λεύκωνα ὡς ὑπὲρ φιλίας καὶ ξενίας διαλεξόμενον. συνέπεμψε δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ Ὀλύνθιον κιθαρωδὸν Ἄριστόνικον, εὐδοκιμοῦντα μάλιστα δὴ πάντων τότε παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, ὅπως ἐν τῷ παράπλῳ προσορμιζομένων, ἐπιδεικνυμένου τοῦ κιθαρωδοῦ, τῶν ἐνοικούντων εἰς τὰ θέατρα σπουδῆ συνιόντων τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατάδηλον τῷ πρεσβευτῇ γένοιτο.

Translation:

Memnon had decided to make war on Leucon tyrant of the Bosphorus. In order to acquaint himself with Leucon's forces, and the population of the country, he dispatched Archibiades of Byzantium on a trireme, as his ambassador to Leucon, as if to arrange an alliance with him. And with him he sent an

eminent citharode, Aristonicus of Olynthus, the most celebrated artist of his day in Greece; in order that whatever towns he touched at in his journey, Aristonicus might publicly entertain them with his musical abilities. When the inhabitants of course crowded to the theatres to hear him, the ambassador was able, from the number of men he saw there, to form some estimate of the population of the respective places.

In that case the king is Leucon I (389-349 a.C.), the father of Pairisades I. Both stories show us that in the IV century a.C. at the court of ruling Spartokidai and among Bosporans we find high interest for poetry. Unfortunately we have in literary sources only this two mentions about professional poets in Bosporan Kingdom which is not sufficient to announce existence of high literacy at the Bosporan court. Happily we may prove this another way.

Firstly we may presume that at the same period existed historians preparing local history. This is consequence of the analyse of well known passage by (Diodor, XX, 22-26) and the hypothesis was accepted by (Rostovtsev 1931, 113-114). Further we should not forget about philosopher Sphairos Bosporaneus (ca. 285-210 a.C.; Diog. Laert. 7, 177-178, Plutarch, Agis and Cleomenes, 23,2) although his Bosporan origin is open to question. Anyway this examples together suggest existence in Panticapaeum of a society of eminent intellectuals: poets, historians and philosophers. The atmosphere in Pantikapaion create favourable conditions for poets in that time.

Following fragment (Strabo, II, 1, 16) allows to widen our "poetical" testimonies:

ὁ δ' Ἐρατοσθένης καὶ τοῦπίγραμμα προφέρεται τὸ ἐν τῷ Ἀσκληπιείῳ τῷ Παντικαπαιέων ἐπὶ τῇ ῥαγείσῃ χαλκῇ ὑδρίᾳ διὰ τὸν πάγον "εἴ τις ἄρ' ἀνθρώπων μὴ πείθεται οἷα παρ' ἡμῖν γίγνεται, εἰς τήνδε γνώτω ἰδὼν ὑδρίαν· ἦν οὐχ ὡς ἀνάθημα θεοῦ "καλόν, ἀλλ' ἐπίδειγμα χειμῶνος μεγάλου θῆχ' ἱερεὺς "Στρατίος."

Translation:

And Eratosthenes brings forward, also, the following epigram from the temple of Asclepius at Panticapaeum, which was inscribed on the bronze water-jar that had been burst by freezing: "If any man is incredulous in regard to what happens in our country, let him look at this water-jar and know the truth; which, not as a fair offering unto God but as an illustration of our severe winters, has been dedicated by Stratius the priest."

So, we have testimony for existing of local priest-poet, who lived in the 3rd century a.C. or earlier. The author of the epigram could be Stratios itself or a professional hired by him which is not so important at the moment. The crucial element is testimony for existing of priest-poet and the most important question is: was that single phenomenon or we have with a kind of regularity to do? Answering that question helps to determine scale of poetic society in Bosporan Kingdom. Therefore I propose to analyse a fragment of a funerary stela of Smikron (CIRB 118).

Unfortunately the stela is missing and therefore we do not know dimensions and material (probably it was limestone). We have only description cited by (Latyshev 1922, p. 92): "Надпись эта не целая, настоящая часть сохранилась на обломке камня простого и мягкого."

History: the stone was fund in Kerch or its neighbourhood in 50-ties of XIX century. The copy of the text was most probably made by the director of the Kerch Museum, Mr. Begichev, but there is no

mention about place, date and circumstances as well as description of the stone. The stone missed most probably about 1856, during war.

Preservation: unknown

Date: Latyshev dated inscription for the end of the 4th century a.C. – not after 3rd century a.C. after orthography (1. preservation of the letters with elision ΣΗΜΑΟΣ = σῆμ' ὄς, ΣΤΗΡΙΚΤΟΕΓ = στήρικτ' ἐγ; ΔΕΕΝ=δ' ἐν; 2. letter Ν twice joint following letters: εγγνωμη = ἐν γβώμη, ΤΟΜΜΟΥΣΑΙ = τὸν Μοῦσαι.

Bibliography: 1. (Latyshev 1922, 92-94, no1) (after copy of Mr Begichev made in 1852, find by Shkorpil in the Kerch Museum archive, with transcription in majuscule.); 1.1 (SEG 1925) 482; 1.2 (Peek 1955, no 101); 1.3 (CIRB) no 118 (no photo by Gavrilov, Album)

Cf. (LGPN) 4 s.v. σμίκρος

Text:

1. Σμίκρου σῆμα ὄς πίστιν <ἔ>ην
2. μέγας ὦι τὸ δίκαιον
3. στήρικτο ἐγ γνώμη
4. ῥιζό<θ>εν ἐκ φύσεως,
5. τὸμ Μοῦσαι παίδευσα
6. [.] ΔΕΕΝ[.] ΟΛΟΙΣ ἐδίδαξεν
7. ---]ΣΙΝΔΩΚ[---

Apparatus:

L. 1 HHN [transcription at copy]; <ἔ>ην [Latyshev] | L. 4. ΡΙΖΟΟΕΝ [transcription at copy]; ῥιζό<θ>εν [Latyshev]; ῥιζόθεν [Peek] | L. 5 παίδευσαν· [Peek] | L. 6 ΔΕΕΝ[.] ΟΛΟΙΣ [transcription at copy]; [ὄ] δὲ ἐν [τρι]ό[δ]οις [Latyshev]; ἐν [συν]όδοις [Hiller, SEG, Peek] | L. 7 ΣΙΝΔΩΚ [transcription at copy]; [καὶ τοῖς ἀστοῖ]σιν δῶκ[εν ἄριστα φρονεῖν] [Latyshev – exempli causa, who after CIRB originally proposed [ἐγ γαίη] Σινδῶ{ν}]; [πᾶσιν τε ἀστοῖ]σιν [Hiller von Gaertingen]; [πᾶσιν δὲ ἀστοῖ]σιν δῶκ[εν | ἄχος φθίμενος] [Peek] | the end of the verse Latyshev leaved without lectio, [μαθεῖν τὰ καλὰ] [Hiller von Gaertingen, SEG exempli causa]; [μέρος σοφίας] [Croenert, Wilhelm, SEG]; δῶκ[εν ἄριστα φρονεῖν] [Dovatur in CIRB]

Translation:

Smikros' grave, of great belief, whose inviolable justice of mind rooted from his nature.
Educated by Muses, [...] teach

...

Commentary:

Elegiac distich.

Latyshev proposed following reading:

Σμίκρου σῆμ', ὄς πίστιν ἔην μέγας, ὦι τὸ δίκαιον
Στήρικτ' ἐγ γνώμη ῥιζό{θ}εν ἐκ φύσεως
Τὸμ Μοῦσαι παίδευσαν, [ὄ δ'] ἐν [τριόδ]οις ἐδίδαξεν
[καὶ τοῖς ἀστοῖ]σιν δῶκ[ε---

Preserved are only two strophes and from 4th stichos (2nd pentameter) is preserved only 6 letters in

the last verse. Proposal of Latyshev is e.g. only but the space is for 6 another letters.

L. 1 HHN instead of EHN, which is maybe consequence of the fact that letter E was hardly read on the stone.

L. 4 Omicron instead of Theta is probably consequence of fading away of the letter.

L. 7 CIRB redactors pointed out that non Peek proposals have this advantage, that continue pedagogic characteristic of Smikros and therefore keep conceptual unity of the epitaph, joining this verse precedent verses, where directly were named such virtues of deceased. This could be right, if we agree with pedagogic occupation of Smikros. I however prefer Peek version, which agrees with my proposal of epigram interpretation.

Σμικρός as proper name (with changing of accent for properispomenon) is attested also in other texts (cf. Pape-Benseler, s.v. especially Smikros-painter with acme in 510-500 a.C.), but in epigraphic text it appears at the first time. By the way we have very interesting word play in the epigram, connected with the name "Small": Mr. Small was of great (μέγας) belief. Expression πίστιν {ἐ}ην μέγας we can understand in two ways: 1. Deceased was of deep faith 2. Co-citizens trusted him very much (cf. IG 12, 1, no 141, v. 6 πίστεως πά[σ]ης χ[ά]ριν) where as analogy is cited also our inscription). Latyshev probably rightly choose the second interpretation, where we meet innate justice of deceased.

Also phrase τὸμ Μοῦσαι παίδευσαν can be interpreted in two ways: 1. he was a poet 2. He was generally well educated. Latyshev again favoured second option. He understood ἐν τριόδοις as backstreet and argued that poets do not teach at backstreets. Some editors see in Smikros a philosopher rather (living before Sphairos Bosporeneus) than poet too, a kind of Socrates, who teach at street. In contrary, when we follow Peek and SEG (ἐν [συν]όδοις), Smikros would teach on synods. The kind of synod remained however unknown.

I propose to compare this epigram with the epigram with new interpretation of Hekataios inscription (CIRB 121=KL 438) (Twardecki 2007) (Twardecki 2010 ?). The text of the epigram follows:

1. Οὐ λόγον, ἀλλὰ βίον σοφίης ἐτυπώσαο | δόξαν
2. αὐτοδαῆς ἱερῶν γινόμενος κριμάτων.
3. εὐδὼν οὖν, Ἐκαταίε, μεσόχρονος, ἴσθ' ὅτι θάσσον
4. κύκλον ἀνιηρῶν ἐχέφυγες καμάτων.

I would like turn attention to similarity in the description of both deceased. Both were trusted by compatriots as men of great virtue (βίον σοφίης ἐτυπώσαο δόξαν and ὅς πίστιν {ἐ}ην μέγας in Latyshev interpretation), especially of good judgments (ἱερῶν γινόμενος κριμάτων and ὦι τὸ δίκαιον στήρικτ' ἐγ γνώμηι), which were deep rooted in their own nature (αὐτοδαῆς and ῥιζό{θ}εν ἐκ φύσεως). I have impression that both texts describe similar behaviour and profession. In my opinion it is possible, that Smikros was, like Hekataios, a priest or hold high position in a religious society (*synodos*) in Bospor. In that case I would agree with Peek *et alii lectio* of the 6th verse: Τὸμ Μοῦσαι παίδευσαν, [ὁ δ'] ἐν [συν]όδοις ἐδίδαξεν. Unfortunately we do not know what teaches Smikron at synods: poetry, philosophy or something else? Example of Straton, a priest-poet mentioned above, who lived in the same period (4th-3rd century a.C.) makes credible that Smikros was a poet too. In that way we would have in Pantikapaion at the same time two priest-poets.

Therefore the epigram can be, in my opinion, a strong argument supporting hypothesis about golden age of cultural development in the 4th – 3rd centuries a.C. in Bosporan Kingdom and existence of poetic society in Pantikapaion at least.

Alfred Twardecki

National Museum in Warsaw

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