

Mariusz Mielczarek

<https://doi.org/10.26485/AAL/2020/66/12>

HERODOTUS AND GREEK SETTLEMENTS IN THE LOWER DNIESTER REGION

ABSTRACT The evidence for Greek settlement on the Lower Dniester region in the ancient written sources is very scanty. The evidence in Herodotus is of prime importance. In reality Herodotus was more interested in Scythian matters than those of the Greeks. Herodotus gave special attention to the history of king Scyles and his special relations with Olbia. In light of the coin evidence Scyles could also be connected with Nikonion.

Key words: Herodotus, Lower Dniester region, Greek settlements, the Scythians

HERODOT I OSADNICTWO GRECKIE NAD DOLNYM DNIESTREM

ABSTRAKT Osadnictwo greckie w dolnym biegu rzeki Dniestr w źródłach antycznych opisane jest bardzo skromnie. Wczesną, bardzo ogólną informację podał Herodot. Dalsze uwagi Herodota w pierwszej kolejności odnoszą się do Scytów. Dużą uwagę poświęcił on na historię scytyjskiego króla Skylesa, i jego szczególne związki z Olbią. Skyles, w świetle znalezisk monetarnych związany mógł być również z Nikonionem.

Słowa kluczowe: Herodot, dolne Naddniestrze, osadnictwo grecki, Scytowie

Greek settlement on the lower reaches of the river Tyras, the present-day Dniester, was not of particular interest to Greek and Roman authors. At different times and on the basis of various sources,¹ they mentioned (frequently as an aside to the main subject being discussed) the names of several settlements located on the River Tyras. It can be stated that at the beginning of the 5th century BC there were two large centres here, Nikonion, on the left bank of the eastern branch of the river as it flowed at the time, and Tyras, on the right bank of the western branch. Here we refer to the information supplied by Pliny,² that Ophiussa was the old name of the city of Tyras.³

The limited interest of ancient authors in the activities of the Greeks who settled on the River Tyras,⁴ may be a result of the region's peripheral location in relation to the areas where events of major importance for the Greek world took place.⁵ It cannot be ruled out that the lack of more detailed commentaries on the events taking place at the mouth of the Tyras River in the 5th and 4th centuries BC may be because the contents of the late-classical and early Hellenistic descriptions of the Euxine Pontus are not fully known at present. One can guess that the texts of geographers and historians related to the western and northern Black Sea region were particularly important – Demetrios of Kallatis (late 3rd century BC),⁶

¹ The first researcher who dealt with the interpretation of written sources relating to the Lower Dniester region was M.I. Rostovcev: Rostovtsev 1925: 24ff.; Rostovcev 1937: 27ff. See Skrżinskaâ 1989: 22-23; Vinogradov et alia 1990; Ohotnikov 2000: 36-51.

² NH IV 26 82.

³ See Mielczarek 2018.

⁴ For new proposed dates for the foundation of Nikonion: Sekers'ka, Bujs'kih 2018; Sekers'ka, Bujs'kih 2019. See also Dzis-Rajko et alia 2012.

⁵ This opinion was expressed in the case of Olbia by G. Vinogradov (1989: 17).

⁶ Ps.-Scym. 718-720. See Avram 2003: 284.

whose work was used by Pseudo-Scymnus, and Poseidonius of Olbia too,⁷ and his work *περὶ τῆς Τυρικήσ καλουμένησ χώρασ*.⁸

The oldest recorded evidence for the presence of Greeks at the mouth of Tyras is the short sentence of Herodotus contained in fragment of the *Histories*,⁹ of which the “guiding principle” was the geographical characteristics of the Pontic region, including indicating the largest rivers available for navigation. By mentioning the river Tyres, i.e. Tyras, Herodotus, who paid a great amount of attention to Olbia, mentioned the Greeks downstream who “call themselves” the Tyrites - Τυρῖται.¹⁰ There are no grounds for any possible attempt to apply the term used by Herodotus to the inhabitants of Tyras.¹¹

In the other parts of the *Histories*, Herodotus does not return to the question of the Tyritai. He did not mention them even in the description of the Scythian expedition of Darius I.¹² Going from the west into the interior of Scythia, it was necessary to cross the River Tyras. The possible suggestion that the Greeks had not yet settled downstream during the Persian expedition could not be a possible theme to be discussed.¹³

Herodotus’ description of Scythia, based on standard *logoi*, in the opinion of some researchers seems to be chaotic; the differences between the parts are explained by the use of different sources.¹⁴

The paucity of the information given by Herodotus about the Greeks living on the River Tyras is puzzling. Basing their opinion on selected fragments of the *Histories*, and above all on the forms of providing information,¹⁵ there are researchers who believe that Herodotus visited the areas in the lower reaches of the River Tyras.¹⁶ In the light of the materials excavated during archaeological research, it can be concluded that Nikonion has strong links with Olbia, where

Herodotus certainly must have stayed and where, as he himself admitted, he obtained a lot of information about the Pontic region, allowing him, among other things, to give such a rich presentation on Scythia.¹⁷

In the ethnographic description of the region,¹⁸ Herodotus devoted much space to the story of the Scythian king Scyles.¹⁹ In Nikonion, during the excavations, cast bronze coins bearing the inscriptions ΣΚ, ΣΚΥ, ΣΚΥΛΗ were found. Due to these inscriptions, which are an abbreviated form of the name, the issue of these coins is currently attributed to the Scythian king named Σκύλης.²⁰ Since such coins have not been found anywhere except the Roksolany settlement, Nikonion has been identified as their place of production.²¹

According to Herodotus,²² Scyles was the son of the Scythian king Ariapeithes and a female resident of Istros. The Scythians sentenced Scyles to death for his acceptance of Greek customs.²³ According to the opinion of some researchers, the *polis* of Nikonion lay under the protectorate of the King, like Olbia, and perhaps Istros.²⁴ In light of the proposition of Yu.G. Vinogradov Scyles ruled between 470 and 450 BC, his removal from power and death would occur between 450 and 440 BC.²⁵

The story of Scyles is the second, alongside the fate of the sage Anacharsis²⁶ (according to A. Corcello, both stories contain fictional elements),²⁷ example given by Herodotus of punishment for deviating from Scythian customs and of a Scythian turning to Greek culture.²⁸ Referring to both cases, one can clearly see the difference in the degree of “Hellenization” of the Scythians. With Anacharsis is knowledge (philosophy) and religion. With regard to Scyles, it is dress, behavior, language, religion, and customs.²⁹ The story of King Scyles has been cited many times as

⁷ Suidas [Becker], 877.

⁸ See the publication from years ago – Biliński 1947: 150.

⁹ Hdt. 4.51. See West 2007: 80, in relation to Olbia.

¹⁰ Hdt. 4.51.

¹¹ Agbunov 1978: 113; Karyškovskij, Klejman 1985: 7; Karyshkovskii, Kleiman 1994: 9. In relation to the coins – Zograf 1957; Frolova 2006. Corcella 2007: 619.

¹² Cameron 1975: 77-88; Černenko 1984; Gardiner-Gardner 1987: 326-350.

¹³ See Ohotnikov 1997: 28.

¹⁴ Corcella 2007: 558. See Hornblower 2002.

¹⁵ Hdt. 4.11, 4.51, 4.82.

¹⁶ Karyšovskij, Klejman 1985: 14.

¹⁷ For instance: Rybakov 1979; Moreno 2007: 146-147. Also see Paroń 2012.

¹⁸ Corcella 2007: 560.

¹⁹ Hdt. 4.78-80. Vinogradov 1989: 95 ff.; West 2007: 85-92.

²⁰ Vinogradov 1989: 106-107; West 2007: 86.

²¹ Zaginajlo 1966, Zaginajlo 1991, Zaginajlo, Karyšovskij 1990; Mielczarek 1999; Mielczarek 2005

²² Hdt. 4.78-80.

²³ Hdt. 4.78-80.

²⁴ Vinogradov 1989: 106-107; Avram 2003: 306; Snitko 2011: 130, 134.

²⁵ Vinogradov 1989: 120-121.

²⁶ For instance Rusâeva 2001; Terzopoulou 2015.

²⁷ Corcella 2007: 635.

²⁸ Kuznecova 1984.

²⁹ See Benardete 1999: 9, 11, 98.

an example of relatively early and profound changes in the barbarian world brought about by the influence of Greek culture.³⁰

The work of Herodotus is treated as objective to a large extent, although there is no lack of opposite opinions.³¹ In the case of descriptions of the north-west coast of the Black Sea, the first view certainly prevails. Herodotus obtained a lot of information during his stay in Olbia, from Scythians as well, although this is variously assessed. One can, however, advance the opinion that in this case what Herodotus heard,³² was combined with what he observed personally. Attention is increasingly brought to fact that the data supplied by Herodotus was adjusted to his “idea of presentation” of a specific issue,³³ and it is also possible that “additions” and possibly “changes” were made in antiquity to the original version prepared by Herodotus.³⁴ With regard to lower Dniester region, it is necessary to take into account possible later interference in the text of Herodotus.³⁵

Herodotus reported that he obtained information about the Scythians from the Scythians themselves,³⁶ including Tymnes whom he met in Olbia,³⁷ whom he wrote,³⁸ had been Ariapeithes’ ἐπίτροπος.³⁹ In the description of Herodotus, the person of Ariapeithes connects the main centers of the northwestern zone of Greek settlement on the Black Sea, emphasizing to some extent its unity. Ariapeithes’ wife came from Istros, his ἐπίτροπος resided in Olbia. Putting to one side the question of whether Herodotus visited the lower Tyras, this begs the question that if the author of the *Histories* was given information in Olbia about the Greeks living on the River Tyras, he would have surely considered it worth mentioning in his text. Can the situation described above be associated with the

attitude of the informants Herodotus met in Olbia (which to some extent could reflect the opinions of the Olbiopolitans)? Or was it Herodotus who decided that it was not necessary to refer to them in his story of Scyles? Opinions have already been expressed that in Book IV of his work, Herodotus included his own reflections.⁴⁰ It is also permissible for Herodotus to omit data which he considered to be unreliable, but also those which he considered to be inconsistent with his ideas.⁴¹ A detailed analysis of the Herodotus passage relating to Scyles carried out by Yu.G. Vinogradov showed a number of inconsistencies and even contradictions contained in the text. This concerns the assessment of the fact related by Herodotus that Scyles left the Scythian army outside the walls of Olbia (which is also linked with the need to resupply the army),⁴² the closing of the city gates at the behest of the Scythian ruler, and the denunciation made by an inhabitant of Olbia.⁴³ This may indicate that by giving a description of the events in this form, Herodotus was implementing the idea he had previously proposed. He even did this by “retouching” information or omitting certain facts.⁴⁴ If one allows the possibility that he deliberately omitted the affairs of Nikonion, this in turn gives rise to the question of what might have been the cause of Herodotus’ attitude?

It seems that referring to the stories of Anacharsis and Scyles could have been a deliberate action by Herodotus, allowing in his opinion to show the influence of the Greeks on the Scythians. In such an arrangement, any description of the situation on the River Tyras (apart from the debatable issue of the issue of cast bronze coins by King Scyles), was either not necessary (it did not enrich the main theme) because it did not contribute anything new, or the situation that existed among the Greeks operating on the River Tyras and their relations with the Scythians (a lot of Scythian pottery was found during the excavation of Nikonion),⁴⁵ was not what Herodotus preferred it to be. The statement that Nikonion and Tyras were dependent on Scyles might have spoiled Herodotus’ narrative of the problem of “Hellenization” of the Scythians.

³⁰ Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 145-147.

³¹ Fehling 1971; Bichler 1985; West 2002; Root: 296-297, 302; West 2007: 79-92.

³² Herodotus was supposed to talk with the inhabitants of over 40 cities, in different parts of the Greek world: Myres 1966: 9-10.

³³ Vinogradov 1989: 102-103.

³⁴ Bravo 2012: 67-70; Bakker 2002, Sinitsin 2019. It remains a fact that in the Mediaeval manuscripts the texts of the *Histories* differ little one from another – Myres 1966: 4.

³⁵ Phol 1975.

³⁶ Hdt. 4.5; 4.8; 4.81.

³⁷ Cf. Fehling 1971:89. See also Cobet 1974 (review of Fehling’s book) and Bichler 1985: 125-126.

³⁸ Hdt. 4.76.

³⁹ Vinogradov 1980a: 76-77; Vinogradov 1989: 115; Ivančik 2009:71 n. 49.

⁴⁰ Benardete 1999: 4.

⁴¹ Vinogradov 1989: 96-98.

⁴² Snitko 2011:134.

⁴³ Vinogradov 1980a: 77; Vinogradov 1989: 100-102.

⁴⁴ Vinogradov 1989: 100, 102.

⁴⁵ At this point, all comment on the circumstances in which the ceramics found their way to Nikonion has been omitted.

In this situation, it is worth recalling the opinions of Herodotus about the origin of the Scythians.⁴⁶ Referring to this issue, Herodotus clearly distinguished, probably on the basis of information obtained in Olbia, the Scythian and Hellenic versions.⁴⁷ According to the testimony of Herodotus, the Scythians called themselves Σκόλοτοι, Skolotoi, derived from the name of their ruler.⁴⁸ The Hellenes were to call them Scythians. This term was to be derived from the king's name (according to the Greek version of the Scythian origin).⁴⁹

To evaluate the text of Herodotus relating to the history of Scyles, it is worth recalling that the names Σκύλης,⁵⁰ and Σκύθης (Σκύθης was more popular than the previous one⁵¹) are the names of rulers. Σκύθαι is supposed to refer to the anthroponym Σκύθης.⁵² Σκύλης – Σκόλοτοι.⁵³ Σκύλης and Σκύθης may be the same anthroponym, but transmitted differently in the different dialects existing in the Scythian language.⁵⁴ In any case, Herodotus' use of the name Scyles gives his story an individual character.

The existence of a person named Scyles, who is considered to be the king of the Scythians described by Herodotus, has been confirmed by the finding of a golden ring with Σκύλεω (the genitive of the personal name Σκύλης) engraved on its face, i.e. «[I belong to] Scyles», next to the image of a goddess sitting on a throne holding a mirror in her right hand. The ring has been associated with the king of the Scythians. The proposals for interpreting the inscriptions on the ring differ.⁵⁵ According to one suggestion, the inscription on the ring's band may indicate that it was meant to be «a royal gift to a certain Argotas».⁵⁶ It was found by chance

in the 1930's, about 10 km south of Istros.⁵⁷ The site was known to be related to the king's escape from Scythia.⁵⁸

One question remains, why did Herodotus touch on the stories of Anacharsis and Scyles. Could it really have been for educational purposes?⁵⁹

Abbreviations

- AAL – Acta Archaeologica Lodziensia
 KSIA – Krakie Soobščeniâ Instituta Arheologii
 LPGN – A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names, vol. IV Macedonia, Thrace, Northern Regions of the Black Sea, P.M. Fraser, E. Matthews (eds) Oxford 2005
 MASP – Materiały po Arheologii Severnogo Pričernomorâ
 REG – Revue des Etudes Grecques
 SA – Sovetskaâ Arheologiâ
 WN – Wiadomości Numizmatyczne
 VDI – Vestnik Drevnej Istorii

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⁴⁶ See Ivantčik 1999.

⁴⁷ Hdt. 4.5-6 i 4.8-10.

⁴⁸ Hdt. 4.6.

⁴⁹ Hdt. 4.6; 4.8-10. See Ivanchik 2009: 65, Other literature there.

⁵⁰ LGPN, vol. IV:313.

⁵¹ LGPN, vol. IV: 313; vol. II (Attica): 400; vol. V.B (Coastal Asia Minor: Caria to Cilicia): 385; vol. V.A (Coastal Asia Minor: Pontos to Ionia): 406. The name has a place also in the Slavic languages – Loma 2000: 343.

⁵² Schmitt 2003: 18-20 no. 18; Szemerényi 1980:16-23.

⁵³ Schmitt 2003: 20-21 no. 19; Szemerényi 1980:21-22; Ivanchik 2009: 65-xxx.

⁵⁴ See Ivanchik 2009.

⁵⁵ Cf. Vinogradov 1980b and Dubois 1996: 11-13.

⁵⁶ Dubois 1996: 11-13.

⁵⁷ Vinogradov 1980; Vinogradov 1981; Dubois 1996: 11-13.

⁵⁸ Vinogradov 1980b.

⁵⁹ Immerwahr 1966: 5; Węcowski 1996: 397.

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Mariusz Mielczarek
 ORCID 0000-0002-2476-270X
 Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology
 Polish Academy of Sciences
 Łódź Department
 mielczmar@o2.pl