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TYRRHENIAN PIRATES

Notwithstanding the diversity in modern theories of myth research, almost every theory agrees that often metaphorisation of the event, having taken place realistically, is characteristic to mythological thinking. In other words, concrete historical reality gives an impulse to each myth, whatever abstract and fantastic its plot might seem.

Therefore it is quite possible to talk about chronological frames of myth development, which, naturally, serves as an important factor for scientific research of a myth.

It is interesting that share of historical reality might be higher in the plot, full of fantastic elements, rather than in a story with concrete geographic names, because the latter might describe mythological reality and mythological peoples.

Interesting synthesis of reality and fantasy can be observed in the myth about Dionysus and Tyrrhenian pirates – the scene of transforming pirates into dolphins co-exists with the concrete ethnonym – ‘Tyrrhenian’.

The myth about Dionysus and Tyrrhenian Pirates is quite a popular plot in Ancient literature, as well as in fine arts.

This episode is mentioned in Homeric Hymns at the first time, namely in the eighth dithyramb, which is fully dedicated to the meeting of Dionysus and Tyrrhenian Pirates:¹

*Presently there came swiftly over the sparkling sea
Tyrrhenian pirates on a well-decked ship - a miserable doom led them on.*
(8, 49-51)²

¹ ‘... ταχα δ’ ἄνδρες εὐσσελμου ἀπο νηὸς/ληϊσταί προγέροντο θοῶς ἐπι οἶνοπα πόντον,
/Τυρσηνοί τοὺς δ’ ἦγε κακὸς μορος.’

² Hesiod, *Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans. by H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library 1914.

Thus the first allusion of this myth in belles-lettres belongs to the second half of VI c. and the first half of V c. BC.³

Who are Tyrrhenian Pirates? What does the word ‘Tyrrhenian’ mean? Does it describe historically existing people or it represents mythological ethnonym like ‘Phaeacs’ and ‘Hyperboreans’?

In Ancient sources the term ‘Tyrrhenian’ is first mentioned in Hesiod’s works. It is pointed out at the end of *Theogony*:

‘And Circe the daughter of Helius, Hyperion's son, loved steadfast Odysseus and bare Agrius and Latinus who was faultless and strong: also she brought forth Telegonus by the will of golden Aphrodite. And they ruled over the famous Tyrenians, very far off in a recess of the holy islands.’⁴

Some modern scholars regard that these lines were attached to *Theogony* in VI c. or V c. B.C, because the information given here is the justification of myth about Aeneas, although there are some opposite assumptions as well.⁵

We dedicated a special article to proving of originality of mentioned lines in *Theogony* by Hesiod.⁶

Having discussed mythology of the peoples of ancient Italy (Latins, Marsi, Ausonians, Etruscans) we became confident that so called ‘Italic pre-conditions’ really existed for this version of the myth, given in Hesiod’s poem. Hesiod meant Italy’s native Etruscans under the term: ‘Glorious Tyrrhenians’, as it is obvious from the given excerpt, which Greeks called Tyrsenoi/Tyrsanoi (Tyrrhanoi/Tyrrhenoi from V c. BC) (Besides literature sources, Tyrrhenians as Etruscans are mentioned in inscriptions in Delphi and in Olympos – V c. BC). And concrete creators of this variant of the legend (As known, Homer, in difference with Hesiod, thought that island Aia was situated in the Far East) might have been Eubeians – founders of the first colony in Italy. The myth might have been composed in the beginning of VIII c. BC, which is clearly confirmed in archeological materials reflecting active contexts between Greek Cumian Colonists and Etruscans.⁷

³ Homer’s this particular hymn is created in this very period, scientists regard. Refer to Wecklein N., *Die Homerischen Hymnen und die griechischen Tragiker*, München 1920, 15.

⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1011-1016.

⁵ Refer to Attilio Mastrocinque, *Ricerche sulle religione italiche*, SE, vol. LXI-MSMXCV, Serie III, 1996, 141.

⁶ Кобахидзе Е., Кирка и Италия, Caucasia. The Journal of Caucasian Studies, 5, 2002, 70-79.

⁷ Cristofani M., Cuma, in: *Dizionario illustrato della Civiltà Etrusca*, Firenze 1999, 83.

Thus Etruscans and Greeks are already familiar with each other by the period of creation of this myth by Homer. Eubeians attempt to 'put' 'Tyrrhenians' in Hellenic genealogical myths, which are reflected in the conclusive passage of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

Although, if the term 'Tyrrhenians', if proceed from geographic concrete terms (mentioning them with Latins), can be undoubtedly linked with Etruscans, the Antiquity has contradictory assumptions regarding 'Tyrrhenians', being mentioned in the myth reflecting the meeting of Dionysus and pirates.

Namely, Thucydides notes, that other tribes, living in Adriatic Sea, were named as Tyrrhenians too. Thucydides indicates that these tribes had Pelasgian origin and before being settled in Khalkidia, they lived in Athens and island Lesbos. The Greek historian considers that these very people were involved in kidnapping of Dionysus.⁸

It is significant that there was non-Indo-European culture on island Lemnos that used western variation of Greek alphabet.⁹ It seems that so called 'Lemnosian Stella, dated by VI c. BC, is composed on the local dialect.¹⁰

This dialect has certain reference to Etruscan language (Considering phonetic, as well as lexical similarities).¹¹

As regarded, it is possible to restore common linguistic phase between Lemnosian and Etruscan, though, considering the archeological data, it is early to speak about unanimity of these cultures.

We think that this kinship stipulated the common ethnonym of Etruscans and Lemnos natives, both were given these names by Greeks.

Notwithstanding this fact, as mentioned above, 'Lemnosians' and 'Etruscans' were not of same ethnos, consequently, different people, being geographically far away from each other, could serve as a stimulating factor for a concrete myth.

Because of the fact that, there are no geographic concrete terms at the very first mention of the myth, namely, in Homeric Hymn, (which could specify the area of location of 'Tyrrhenian'), it is worthwhile to take into

⁸ Thucydides, vol. I, History of the Peloponnesian War, I, books 1-2, edited by J. Henderson, translated by C. F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library 2003, II, 57.

⁹ Malzahn M., Das Lemnische Alphabet: Eine Eigenständigl Entwicklung, SE, vol.V, 1999, 259-279.

¹⁰ Hewrgon J., A propos de l'inscription Tyrrhenienne de Lemnos, Secondo Congresso Internazzonale Etrusco, Firenze, 26 V-2, VI, atti I, 1985, 93-103.

¹¹ Cristofani M., Lemno, Dizionario Illustrato, 153. C. de Simone, I Tirrenei a Lemnos, Firenze 1996; Woudhuissou F.G., Linguistica Tyrrhenica, Amsterdam 1992.

consideration the information about piracy of 'Tyrrhenians'; in other words, information about piracy activities of these two people.

Presumably, the appearance of Dionysus and Tyrrhenian pirates in world of letters should be regarded as starting point VI-V cc. BC.

There is nothing known about the piracy activities of Tyrrhenians pirates, living in Adriatic Sea, on the other hand, much is said about Etruscans in Ancient sources (Not to count Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica* which says, that the descendents of Argonaut Euphemus were kicked out from the island Lemnos by Tyrrhenians (IV, 1760) – Λήμαου τ' ἐξελαθέντες ὑπ' ἀνδρασι Τυρρηνοῖσιν). This fact confirms the warrior features of this tribe.

For instance, Diodorus the Sicilian points out, that because of Etruscan pirates' attacks, from the period of Knidan colony (580 c. BC), half of population was busy with agriculture in Lipari, and the other half defended the island from Etruscan pirates (V, 9, 4).

Strabo says that Etruscans were wide famous by piracy, which, according to the author, served as main reason for Etruria's decentralization:¹²

'Their united government was dissolved, and the Tyrrheni, yielding to the violence of their neighbours, were broken up into separate cities; for otherwise they would not have given up a happy land and taken to the sea as pirates, different bands turning to different parts of the high seas; indeed, in all cases where they acted in concert, they were able, not only to defend themselves against those who attacked them, but also to attack in turn and to make long expeditions' (It should be explained here, that all seaside countries were engaged in piracy and this activity was not regarded shameful until the establishment of political-institutional essence of a country, co-existing with commerce).¹³

Thus, in accordance with the above-mentioned, by the period of appearing legend about Tyrrhenian pirates in ancient literature and arts, Italian native Tyrrhenians, based on Ancient data, were more eligible for the concept of the myth, than so-called Lemnosian Tyrrhenians, living in

¹² Τότε μὲν οὖν ὑφ' ἐνὶ ἡγεμόνι ταπτόμενοι μέγα ἴσχυον, χρόνιος δ' ὕστερον διαλυθῆναι τὸ σόστημα εἰκὸς καὶ κατὰ πόλεις διασπασθῆναι βία τῶν πλησιοχώρων εἴξαντος· οὐ γὰρ αὐτῶν χώραν εὐδαίμονα ἀφέντες τῇ θαλάττῃ κατὰ ληστείαν ἐπέθεντο ἄλλοι πρὸς ἄλλα τραπόμενοι πελάγε, ἐπεὶ ὅπου γε συμπνεύσαιεν, ἕκαστοι ἦσαν οὐκ ἀμύνασθαι μόνον τοὺς ἐπιχειροῦντας αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀντεπιχειρεῖν καὶ μακρὰς στρατείας ποιεῖσθαι (V, II, 2).

¹³ Camporeale G., *La vocazione marittima degli Etruschi*, in: *Gli Etruschi*, Milano 1998, 36.

Adriatic Sea, which, after moving to Kalkidia, were not regarded as controlling forces of the sea.

Ethnonym 'Tyrrhenian pirates' in Ancient literature is motivated by the etymology, mentioned by Herodotus, according to which Tyrrhenians were led by their king Tyrsenos, having taken them from Lydia to Italy. Afterwards these people were named after the name of the King.¹⁴

The presumable date of myth creation might be V-VI cc. BC, when establishment of Greek colony - Cumae caused familiarization of Helens with Etruscans.

Mentioning Tyrrhenians by Hesiod in the context of Greek myths, as it was already pointed out, might be the variant of the legend, developed by Eubians.

Development of the latter, presumably, might be the impression, received from Tyrsenians' military strength and high level of civilization.

To our mind, the Dionysus and Tyrrhenian pirates' story is chronologically followed by the myth of dominion of Circe's sons' over famous Tyrrhenians.

This can be observed in mood of the myth. The relationship is already tensed between Greek colonists and Etruscans in VI c. BC. The reason for this might be Etruscans attacks against Cumae colonists, the earliest of which is dated by 524 BC. In 524 the united army of Etruscans, Umbrians and Dauni attacked Cumae (Although they were defeated by Cumae cavalry). Later, in 474 BC Tyrrhenians again attacked Cumaens and came off second-best (The story is narrated in one of odes by Pindar, which is dedicated to Hieron of Syracuse and Tyrrhenian failure is described there).¹⁵

Thus, Dionysus, Greek divinity, gains victory and severely punishes Tyrrhenian, which fail to identify him as a divinity and do not worship him. Only one Tyrrhenian Aketos acknowledges the power of the son of Zeus and is given mercy and respect by Dionysus.

A couple of words about the existence of Dionysus' cult in Etruria (It can be assumed, that his settlement in Etruria, as in other episodes of Dionysus' adventure, was not easy and painless).¹⁶

¹⁴ Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 94. Other assumptions on Etruscan origin are not provided here, because it goes beyond limits of the topic in question.

¹⁵ Pindar, I, *Etna*, 72, 102; *Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes*, Edited by J. Henderson, Translated by W. H. Race, Loeb 2002.

¹⁶ Livius, for instance, points out, that Dionysus cult emerged to Rome exactly from Etruria, which was forbidden by the Senate in 186 BC.

In V c. BC Etruscan Chthonian deity Fufluns, the cult of which was popular in Vay-city, preserved its name, but became a character of Hellenic myths and occupied Dionysus' place in Etruscan pieces of art.

In parallel with popularization of Dionysus Cult in Italy (It seems that Etruscans got acquainted with him in Coumae),¹⁷ the myth about Dionysus and Tyrrhenian pirates, which might be created by Eubians in VII-VI cc. BC, reflects attitude of the Greek towards Tyrrhenians and piracy as well, which is narrated by allegoric language of this fantastic metamorphosis.

Therefore, the myth about Dionysus and Tyrsenian pirates, which is metaphorically based on opposition of the Good and the Evil, might be reflecting several historical events:

1. War between Greeks and Etruscans (Tyrrhenians) for the supremacy on sea.

2. History of establishment of Greek culture (Namely, Cult of Dionysus) in the Basin of Tyrrhenian Sea and the Apennines (VIII-IX cc. BC).

It is significant that Tyrrhenian pirates, being the personification of negative forces, gain additional features in Ancient literature and turn into hyperbolized Evil.¹⁸

Consequently, it seems quite realistic to consider orientation date of creating Dionysus-related myth VI-V cc. BC.

It is important that this assumption is justified by archeological data so far there is no reflection of a specific myth in pieces of art earlier, than VI-V cc. BC.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mario Cristofani, *Fufluns*, 118.

¹⁸ Kobakhidze E., *Tyrrhenian Pirates*, in: Kobakhidze E., *Etruscans in Ancient Literature*, Logos, Tbilisi 2007, 280- 281.

¹⁹ The earliest: Hydria from Taledo (510-500 cc. BC. Ohio. Fine Arts Museum: Bowl Exekias (540-530 c. BC), Munich, Antikensammlungen.