THE TRADITION OF THE IONIAN COLONISATION OF ASIA MINOR: REMARKS ON THE SOURCES

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Atheniensium res gestae, sicuti ego aestumo, satis ampleae magnificaeque fuere, verum aliquanto minores tamen quam fama feruntlet. Sed quia provenere ibi scriptorum magna ingenia, per terrarum orbem Atheniensium facta pro maxumis celebrantur.

Sallustius, Bellum Catilinae 8

Abstract: This article discusses the tradition of the Ionian colonisation preserved in ancient literary sources. The author focuses on the time and circumstances in which the Athenians were responsible for the Ionian colonisation emerged. He also examines whether there is any support in the sources for the opinion expressed by some historians that such a belief was already strong in the Archaic period.

Key words: colonisation, Ionia, Athens, Euripides, Thucydides, Herodotus.

Ionian migration is a familiar term in historiography. Certainly, there is an ongoing debate about the extent to which accounts about the Ionians’ arrival from Attica in Asia Minor reflect the actual events at the turn of the 1st millennium BC. However, it is generally accepted that as early as the 6th century BC the myth of the Ionian migration played a significant role in forming a bond between Athens and the Greek cities in Asia Minor. This paper is an attempt to critically re-examine the problem. We will start our examination by quoting a fragment of the Compendium of Roman History by Velleius Paterculus, who wrote at the turn of the eras:

Subsequenti tempore magna vis Graecae iuventutis, abundantia virium, sedes quaeritans in Asiam se effudit. Nam et Iones, duce Ione, profecti Athenis nobilissimam partem regionis maritimae occupavere, quae hodieque appellatur Ionia, urbesque constituere Ephesum, Miletum, Colopho-

1 The author would like to thank Prof. Sławomir Sprawski for all his input concerning the content.
The passage paints a rather consistent picture of the colonisation of Ionia. According to the Roman historian, Ionia was settled by incomers from the territory of Athens. The campaign that populated the territory of Asia Minor and the neighbouring islands was reportedly led by Ion. The reason behind organising a colonisation expedition was over-population. This image of the colonisation, carried out from the territory of Athens and making the city into something of a metropolis for the whole of Ionia, had such a powerful influence on historians studying the Greek past that some believed this tradition to be a completely, or at least largely, faithful depiction of actual events. N.G.L. Hammond, a British historian who studied migrations in ancient Greece, wrote in his *A History of Greece* that the Athenians initiated the process of the Ionian colonisation. What is more, he suggests that as a result of the colonisation process initiated by Athens, which brought new settlers to these territories, a bond was formed between the Ionians and the Athenians. Using the example of the festival of Apaturia, mentioned by Herodotus, he writes that even in the 8th century BC its role was to emphasise the ties binding the Ionians and the Athenians, and that the Ionians saw Attica as their homeland. Hammond, then, believed that the sense of unity between the Athenians and the Ionians was formed very early on.

Herodotus, who devoted quite a lot of space to the Ionian colonisation, mentions that having arrived at the territories of Asia Minor, the Ionians founded twelve cities, because their tribe had been divided into twelve parts on the Peloponnese. The Ionians are described as an *ethnos* in *Histories*. However, Herodotus’ observation that some of the Ionians avoided using a common name must give us pause.

We should also ask ourselves about the prevalence (in the Archaic and Early Classical Periods) of the sense of belonging to the Ionian *ethnos* and the belief in the tradition that the Ionian cities had been established by Athenian colonists. There is a theory which holds that it was the Ionians who tried to make their bond with the Athenians visible. This supposedly took place at the turn of the 5th century, when Ionian cities in Asia Minor found themselves in the Persian yoke and needed the support of a stronger ally.

From the perspective of the Ionian cities in Asia Minor, the sense of such a union with the Athenians is not apparent in the sources. The local traditions of these Ionian cities include colonisation myths which have little to do with the territory of Attica. According to Mimnermus of Colophon (7th/6th century BC), his city was reportedly founded...
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by Messenian settlers from Pylos (fr. 9 West). Hellanicus of Lesbos, a writer from the 5th century BC, relates that the founders of Priene came from Boeotian Thebes.10

The above fragments of works concerning the foundation of cities in Ionia (κτίσεις) and describing their history do not contain evidence of a unity of the region, and foundation myths treat each polis separately, without any references to common Ionian traditions. The graffiti at Abu-Simbel, probably left behind by Greek mercenaries in the early 6th century BC, is an interesting source. The inscriptions follow the same pattern of a person’s name and country of origin. Among them, we find some names from Ionian cities, e.g. Pambis of Colophon.11 The inscriptions found at Naukratis in the Nile Delta, created by people from Chios, Phocaea, and Cladzomenai, follow a similar pattern. It is puzzling that not one of these Greeks called himself an Ionian. Literary sources and inscriptions lead us to posit that perhaps in the archaic period the Ionians did not think of themselves as one community, and it was the polis that generated a sense of unity.12

On the basis of the surviving sources, it is difficult to prove that the Greeks in Asia Minor found it important to emphasise the existence of ethnic ties binding them to the Athenians. Therefore, it could be assumed that it was not in Ionia but in Athens that the tradition of common ancestry originated.

Historians put forward various theories regarding the time and circumstances in which this conviction emerged. In his article Myth as Propaganda: Athens and Sparta, Jan Bremmer stated that around 600 BC the ties between Athens and Ionia were well documented in Athens. This claim is based on one of the fragments attributed to Solon, who calls Attica the oldest part of Ionia.13 In his comprehensive monograph, Michel Sakellariou, in turn, dates the origin of the idea that the Ionians were descended from the Athenians to the first half of the 5th century BC.14 His interpretation is based on the work of one Panyassis, who was supposedly more or less contemporary to Herodotus.

Since this interpretation does not appear very convincing, we must turn to ancient accounts. According to Sakellariou, the work of Panyassis, entitled Ιονικά, presented Neleus, the son of Kodros (king of Athens) as the leader of the colonisation expedition. However, Sakellariou’s conclusions should be taken with caution. Panyassis’ work has not survived, and very little is known of its content. Liber Suda, which is our source of information on Panyassis, merely states: ἔγραψε (Πανύασις = J.K.) [...] Ιονικά ἐν πεντάμετρο ἐστὶ δὲ τὰ πέρι Κόδρον, καὶ Νηλεα, καὶ Ιονικάς ἀποκαίη.15 Based on this one mention, it is impossible to determine what role Neleus played in the colonisation of Ionia. Additionally, the mention should be interpreted as “on Kodros and Neleus,” not “on Kodros, the son of Neleus,” as Sakellariou claims. We should be very cautious indeed when it comes to chronology connected with Panyassis, as very little information

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10 FGrH 4 F 101 = Hesych. s.v. Καθυσίοι.
11 Pernigotti 1998, 63.
12 Crielaard 2009, 43.
14 Sakellariou 1958, 30: “L’idée que les Ioniens seraient issus d’Athènes est donc postérieure à la révolte ionienne, mais antérieure à 460, date à laquelle est mort Panyassis, dont l’œuvre, nous l’avons dit, présentait Nélée, fils de Codros, comme chef de la migration en Ionié.”
15 Liber Suda, s.v. Πανύασις.
second half. In *The Land of Ionia*, a book devoted mostly to archaeology, Alan Greaves is right on the mark when he notes that stories about the Athenian colonisation of the Ionian territories reveal who the Ionians were according to the Athenians. Of course, such a belief could have existed earlier, although claims that it had been strong before the 5th century BC receive very weak backing from the sources. The popularisation of the myth may therefore be connected not with the period of building political cooperation between Athens and the Ionian cities, but rather with the period of the Athenians’ struggle to keep their Empire in the second half of the 5th century. At that time, with Athens facing a difficult political situation, a need arose to emphasise the connections between the Athenians and the Ionians. Works in which this was reflected were written by authors connected with Athens; writers such as Thucydides or Euripides used their talent to support Athens in a very challenging period of time. Presenting the Athenians as the colonists of Ionia may be interpreted not only as a measure to emphasise their antiquity and ties with Ionia, but also as an attempt to add splendour to Athenian history and strengthen the imperial pride. Such measures perfectly correspond with the fragment of Salustius’ *Bellum Catilinae* quoted at the very beginning, whose author believed that its very talented writers raised the status of Athens’ history from great to the greatest.

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88 Greaves 2010, 223.


