

THE RIVERS OF THE PONTOS REGION IN ANCIENT AND MIEVEAL SOURCES: THE HALYS, IRIS & THERMODON

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Abstract

For ages, the seas have shaped and moulded the surrounding geography ecologically, economically, demographically and politically. However, freshwater resources, essential for people's lives, also attracted human communities to themselves, and settlements were formed around the freshwater resources and streams. Like all seas, the Pontos Eukseinos (the Black Sea) shaped its surrounding geography and gave its name to the region on the south coast. The Pontos region attracted attention in ancient times because of its suitable climatic conditions, geographical features, rich underground and above-ground resources, and the autochthonous peoples living there. It is understood that the rivers significantly shaped this region. These rivers marked the region's boundaries and were regarded as the psychological border between societies and civilizations throughout history. The Halys was one of these rivers. Not only did the Pontos region mark the southern and western borders, but it was also considered the border between the eastern and western cultures throughout the ages. Another important river in the region was the Iris River, being the lifeblood of the region, with its waters forming the fertile plains. The Thermodon River, which gained its fame with the legendary peoples living around it, contributed to the popularisation of the region and formed fertile lands suitable for agriculture due to its wetlands; it also significantly added value to the development of the region. This study has tried to deal with the importance of the Halys, Iris and Thermodon rivers in the Pontos Region and their images in people's minds throughout the ages by considering the axis of ancient and medieval sources and modern research.

Keywords: Black Sea, Amazones, Themiscyra, River Gods.

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(Makale Gönderim Tarihi: 03.11.2023 - Makale Kabul Tarihi: 30.04.2024)

Öz

Antikçağ ve Orta Çağ Kaynaklarında Pontos Bölgesi'nin Nehirleri: Kızılırmak, Yeşilirmak ve Terme Çayı

Denizler, çağlar boyu çevresindeki coğrafyanın ekolojik, ekonomik, demografik ve siyasi olarak şekillenmesini sağlamışlardır. Bununla birlikte insanların yaşamları için gerekli olan tatlı su kaynakları da insan topluluklarını kendine çekmiş, tatlı su kaynaklarının ve akarsuların çevresinde yerleşimler oluşmuştur. Tüm denizler gibi Karadeniz (Pontos Eukseinos) de çevresindeki coğrafyayı şekillendirmiş, güney kıyısındaki bölgenin de isim babası olmuştur. Antikçağda Pontos olarak adlandırılan bölge iklimsel koşullarıyla, coğrafi özellikleriyle, yeraltı ve yerüstü zenginlikleriyle ve üzerinde yaşayan otokton halklarla ilgi çekmiştir. Bu bölgenin şekillenmesinde de akarsuların önemli olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Bu akarsular bölgenin sınırlarını çizmekle kalmamış, tarih boyunca toplumlar ve medeniyetler arasındaki psikolojik sınır olarak da görülmüşlerdir. Kızılırmak bu nehirlerden biridir. Pontos Bölgesi'nin güney ve batı sınırlarını çizmekle kalmamış aynı zamanda çağlar boyu doğu ve batı kültürü arasındaki sınır olarak da görülmüştür. Bölgedeki önemli diğer bir nehir de taşıdığı sular ve oluşturduğu verimli ovalarla bölge için can suyu niteliği taşıyan Yeşilirmak Nehridir. Hem etrafında yaşayan efsanevi halklarla ün kazanan ve bölgenin popülerleşmesine katkı sunan hem de oluşturduğu ovaların sulak olması sayesinde, tarıma uygun verimli alanlar yaratan Terme çayı bölge için önemli katma değer yaratmıştır. Bu çalışmada Pontos Bölgesi'nde yer alan Kızılırmak, Yeşilirmak ve Terme'nin bölge için taşıdığı önem ve çağlar boyu insanların zihninde oluşturdukları imgelem antikçağ ve orta çağ kaynakları ekseninde, modern araştırmalar da göz önünde bulundurularak aktarılmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karadeniz, Amazonlar, Themiskyra, Nehir Tanrıları.

Introduction

Water is known as the essential element living things need to survive. Water is important not only for the survival of living things but also for sustaining the environment in which they live. It is an obvious generalisation and known fact that civilisations have constantly developed and flourished at the water's edge. For this reason, sometimes great importance was given to the extent of water, and sometimes the water was considered sacred. From this perspective, freshwater resources and the seas and oceans were considered to be respected. Moreover, water occupied a critical role in creation myths and was accepted as the primary substance of the universe. Water has always been at the core of Hellenic mythology's creation stories or philosophers' discussions. They called it "arkhe/arche" as the primary substance of the universe. For various reasons, it is known that the Hellenes, who developed in maritime due to their geography, established colonies overseas. In this process, the Hellenes were interested in many seas as venues to establish colonies and trade, but the Black Sea was the most appealing one to them. The Black Sea, with its rocky shores, counter currents and storms and unsuitable and very difficult anchoring shores, had a wrong impression and reputation in the Hellenic imagination and myths, so it was called "ἄξεινος/ἄξενος" which means "moody" and "inhospitable"¹ In the following periods, the Hellenes, who sailed to the Black Sea with more advanced

¹ Hdt. IV. 62; 103; Xen. *Anab.* V. 4. 1-34 etc.; Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 1015-1029; 1117; Strab. XII. 3. 18; Diod. XIV. 30. 5-7; see also. Minns 1913, p. 437.

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ships, established many colonies on the shores of the Black Sea, and thanks to these colonies, they benefited from the riches of the region, so they described the Black Sea as a “*hospitable sea*” εὔξεινος². This sea, Pontos Eukseinos (= Hospitable Sea), was later called ‘Pontos’. With its tremendous geopolitics, the Black Sea maximized its influence on trade and transportation to the broader areas through the rivers in the pieces of land surrounding it. In this context, the Black Sea reached³ beyond the Volga to Central Asia and the Far East through the Don River; to the northern Black Sea with the Kuban River; to the southern Caucasus by the Coruh River; to the Balkans and Europe by the Danube River; to Ukraine and the Baltic countries with the Dniester and Aksu Rivers; to the inner parts of Anatolia by the Sakarya, Kızılırmak and Yeşilirmak Rivers. Over time, the Hellenes, also called ‘Pontos,’ were the central and eastern parts of the southern coasts of the Black Sea. The Pontos Region was shaped by mountains running parallel to the beach, and the valleys were formed by rivers flowing through the mountains and the plains. Some ancient writers reported that Pontos Eukseinos used to be a lake that became a sea overflowing with the waters of the rivers flowing into it⁴. The rivers played a significant role in shaping the region and became the natural borders of the area. The Pontos Eukseinos, from which the part was named, was located north of the Pontos Region⁵. While the southern boundaries and western borders of the region were drawn almost entirely by the Halys (Kızılırmak) River⁶, its east was bounded by the Apsarros (Çoruh) River⁷. This study aims to deal with the Halys, Iris (Yeşilirmak) and Thermodon (Terme Stream) rivers, which were within the borders of the region called Pontos in ancient times and shaped the area geographically, economically and politically, and to focus on the importance of those rivers in the region.

The Halys

The geography of the Pontos Region was shaped by the mountains running parallel to the coast and the rivers that sometimes took their source from these mountains and sometimes flowed through these mountains and formed deep valleys. Many large and small rivers flow through the Pontos Region to the Pontos Eukseinos. The longest of these rivers is the Halys (Kızılırmak), shaping and forming the southern and western borders of the region. The river, which was called Maraššanta and Maraššantiya⁸ during the Hittite period, was also mentioned in the Hittite cuneiform tablets, ID—indicated by the SAs sumerograms. Both Maraššanta and ID were stated as SAs/ ^{ID}SA₅ means “*Red/red river*”⁹. The river was seen in red colour due to the contents of the rocks in the flow route and was named Kızılırmak for ages because of its colour. The Kızılırmak was named

² Işık 2001, p. 2; Avram *et al.* 2004, p. 924; Arslan 2006, p. 82; De Blois 2007, p. 1 ff.; King 2008, p.33.

³ Öztürk 2017, p. 89.

⁴ Diod. V. 47. 4-5; Strab. I. 3. 4; 6.

⁵ Strab. XII. 1. 1; 2. 10.

⁶ Hdt. I. 6; 72; Strab. XII. 1. 1; 3. 1-2; 9; 12.

⁷ Strab. XII. 3. 17-18.

⁸ Ticschler 1990, p. 147 ff.; Forlanini 2013, p. 80.

⁹ Ticschler 1990, p. 147; Vigo 2010, p. 299 ff.

Halys (=Ἁλυς) by the Hellenes. Strabo (XII. 3. 39) stated that Halys got this name from the salt flats on its flow route. Evliya Çelebi, in his travel book, also stated¹⁰ that “*the river was called as Kızılırmak as it flowed into the sea like red blood*”. Hans Dernschwam, one of the envoys accredited by the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I to Suleiman the Magnificent, declared¹¹ that the Kızılırmak was flowing red and blurred. Modern studies have also revealed that it tastes salty because of the salty and gypsum layers present in the direction of the river¹². Furthermore, it verifies Strabo’s accounts of the naming of the river. Overall, it can be said that the rocks in the flow route of the river determined not only the taste and colour of the river’s water but also its name.

Herodotus (I. 72) claimed that Halys was born in the Armenia Mountains, passed through Cilicia, flowed between the Matiens and Phrygian lands, and then curved in the north direction, drawing the border between the Cappadocian Syrians and the Paphlagonians. Moreover, Plinius (*nat.* VI. 2) claimed that the river took its source from the Taurus Mountains. Strabo, a famous geographer, gives a much more comprehensive account of the source and flow route of the river. According to this account, the Halys, originating from the Kamisene (Kemiş) region located on the borders of the Cappadocia Region, flowed in the west along the northern borders of the Cappadocia Region, passed through the Laviansene in the south and the Kulupene (around Akdağlar) lands in the north. After separating Saravene and Mazaka (Kayseri) regions, the river curving in the north flowed through the Ksimene, Babanomom and Pimolisene regions, forming the meanders through the Galatia and Paphlagonia regions, filtered eastward between the Olygassys (Ilgaz) mountains and joined the Pontos Eukseinos¹³. Evliyâ Çelebi, the 17th century traveller, by considering the Ottoman provincial organization, stated the flowing route of Kızılırmak first from the Ankara sanjak, then through Çaşnigir Bridge, Osmancık Castle, Hacı Hamza and Tosya and he declared¹⁴ that it flowed into the sea in that area. Contemporary studies done in this field have also confirmed the ancient authors’ claims and accounts about it and determined that the Kızıldağ, in the east of Sivas, was the original source of the Kızılırmak. According to this, the river, taking its source from Sivas, flows through the cities of Kayseri, Nevşehir, Kırşehir, Aksaray, Kırıkkale, Ankara, Çankırı, Çorum, Kastamonu, Sinop and Samsun and pours into the Black Sea¹⁵.

Herodotus (I. 72) drew attention to the length of the river by stating that the Halys River divided the region into two by crossing and flowing through the area between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean coasts. Sallustius, in *Histories* III. 92; 72 M; 52Mc, also stated that the Halys was the longest river in Asia Minor. With a length of 1355 kilometres, the Halys River was the longest in Asia Minor, from which it originated,

¹⁰ Evliya Çelebi, 92.

¹¹ Dernschwam 1992, p. 268. In addition, it is understood that colours have symbolic meanings in Turkish history and culture. From the earliest times of their history, the Turks have used the five main colours to indicate the four directions of the world and the centre. Accordingly, centre = yellow, east = green (or sky, that is, blue), west = white, south = red (Genç 1997, pp. 1075-1077).

¹² Efe 1996, p. 39; Tournefort 2005, p. 116.

¹³ Hdt. I. 6; Strab. XII. 1. 4; 3. 9; 12-13; 25; 39; Arr. *periplus* XV. 1.

¹⁴ Evliya Çelebi, 92.

¹⁵ Efe 1996, p. 39 ff.; Jaoshvili 2002, p. 12 ff.

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flowed, and poured into the Black Sea¹⁶. The Halys, not only with its length but also with its width, and the difficulties of crossing this river have been told for ages.

Moreover, in the laws of the Hittite civilisation that flourished around Kızılırmak (law 43), there are statements that people passed through shallow parts of it by holding on to the tails of oxen and finding solutions to the problem they experienced while crossing¹⁷. Herodotus also mentioned the difficulties of crossing the Halys in his two different narratives. In one of these narratives (Hdt. I. 72), when the Lydian King Kroisos, who came to the shore of the Halys River, could not cross the river with his soldiers, he made his soldiers dig a deep canal upon the suggestion of Thales, a natural philosopher from Miletos and made the river flow from two branches, so he was able to cross it. In another narrative (Hdt. V. 52), he stated that to pass Halys on the Phrygian border, the mountain range and a vital castle had to be crossed. Xenophon (*Anab.* V. 6. 9), who came to the region himself, stated that the river was more expansive than two stadia (approx. 355 m.) in places¹⁸. Appianos (*Mithr.* 65) II., while describing the Roman Murena's attack on Pontos lands in 83 BC during the Mithridatic War, stated that the Halys River was “*a rather large and difficult river to cross*”. The length and width of the river, as well as its currents, made it impassable, as the ancient writers mentioned that the currents of the Halys were violent, winding, swirling, and noisy¹⁹. Evliya Çelebi also named²⁰ it as “*a crazy river*” because of its violent current. Due to the intensity of the flow of the Kızılırmak and the streams feeding it, the crossing was made possible²¹ with stone and wooden bridges. The bridges were built where the flow of the river slowed down and spread over a wide area. The Seljuk sultans built²² castles on high places to control the most important transportation route beginning from Kızılırmak and which had been used frequently since ancient times.

It is known that the natural events and climate changes taking place over time have significantly affected the rivers. Accordingly, changes in the flow route, flow rate, and flow also involved using rivers for transportation. Moreover, the changes in the flow route, flow rate, and flow also affected the use of rivers for transportation. It should also be considered that the streams used for transportation in ancient times cannot be used today or vice versa²³. The sand brought by Kızılırmak was not very wide since it closed the mouth of the river, so unlike the other rivers connected to the Black Sea, it was not suitable for ship transportation²⁴. Some modern studies contend that transportation activities were done on the Halys (Kızılırmak) in II. century BC. According to this

¹⁶ Efe 1996, p. 39.

¹⁷ Imparati 1992, p. 63 item 43; Hoffner 1997, p. 223.

¹⁸ In 1858, botanist Heinrich Barth (Barth, 2017, p. 169), during his regional investigations, stated that it was an average of 90 m. It reached 300 m. at its widest point, and that islet formed in the river.

¹⁹ Ovid. *ex pont.* IV. 1. 45-50; Basil. *Ep.* CCCLXV.

²⁰ Evliya Çelebi, 92. See also. Dernschwam 1992, p. 264.

²¹ Dernschwam 1992, p. 268.

²² Barth 2017, p. 105.

²³ Campbell 2012, p. 312.

²⁴ Bijişkyan 1969, p. 32.

contention, it was stated that during that time, river transportation was used between some sections of the river to cross the river in both directions²⁵. The ancient writers did not give any information about whether the Halys River was used for river transportation or not. With the fragmentary information provided by the ancient writers and sources, it can be inferred that, at least, the boats were used to cross the river²⁶. Although the Halys is not used for transportation today, it has been confirmed that it was used for this purpose recently²⁷.

The King of Cappadocia Ariarathes V (160 BC-130 BC) built a dam where the Melas Stream (Karasu) and the Halys River join. According to this account, with the completion of the dam construction, the neighbouring plain turned into a lake like the sea. Some of the islands in this lake resembled the Cyclades, which was cut off from the outside world and King Ariarathes V spent time there with childish pleasures. However, a great disaster occurred when the accumulated waters flowed back into the Halys River with the dam's collapse. In this disaster, the flooded Halys River damaged the regions on its flow route, swept away some of the Cappadocia lands, destroyed many settlements and cultivated lands, and badly damaged the Phrygian lands ruled by the Galatians. King Ariarathes V paid 300 talant (their currency) to cover the loss of the native people²⁸.

The rivers, mountains, deserts, and barriers were generally considered as borderlines, treaties were made accordingly, and geographical names and locations were named after these rivers and mountains, etc. Furthermore, the Halys River also appeared in the imagination of ancient people as the border between civilizations, states, geographical regions, and peoples. Herodotus (I. 6; 28; 72-75) stated that Halys was the border first between the Lydians and the Medes and then between the Lydians and the Persians²⁹. The Halys was regarded here not only as the border between two states but also as a wall between two different cultures. It was a border between Cappadocia and Paphlagonia³⁰; Cappadocia and Pontos³¹; Paphlagonia and Pontos³² regions. A similar situation can be said about the Seljuk State. Hülegü, who consolidated his dominance in Iran and abolished the Baghdad Caliphate, approved the division of the country between the two brothers due to the conflicts that erupted in the Seljuk State in 1259. The West of Sivas water (Kızılırmak), i.e. east of Anatolia to Rukn al-Din Kilij Arslan IV, and the West part was given to 'Izz al-Din Kaykaus II³³. In addition, the word Rum, which was used to express the whole Anatolia during the Anatolian Seljuk period, was later used to

²⁵ Ekmen 2015, p. 55 ff.; Zengin-Koşan, 2019, p. 50 ff.

²⁶ Front. *Str.* I. 4.

²⁷ Maercker 1894, p. 80; Akkan 1962, p.265 ff. Contrary to this view, Heinrich Barth (Barth 2017, pp. 189-190), who came to the region in the 19th century, said that not only Kızılırmak but also none of the rivers in Anatolia were suitable for ship transportation.

²⁸ Strab. XII. 2. 8.

²⁹ See also. Strab. XII. 1. 3; Arr. *periplus* XV. 1; Aesch. *Per.* 860-870; Sallust *Hist.* III. 92; 72 M; 52Mc.

³⁰ Hdt. I. 6; 72.

³¹ Strab. XII. 1. 1; 2. 10.

³² Hdt. I. 6; 72; Strab. XII. 1. 1; 3. 1-2; 9; 12.

³³ Ibn Bībī, 231.

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describe the *beglerbeylik* region within the Kızılırmak arc in the early Ottoman periods³⁴. The Halys also determined the eastern border of the geography to the west, once called Asia Minor.

The flow routes of the rivers and the valleys they formed on this route created natural roads and passages in impassable geographies. In this context, the Halys River also contributed to road transportation in the steep and impassable regions on its flow route. Herodotus (V. 52) revealed that the way used by the Persians, which was called “*the royal road*,” passed through the Halys. The connection of the commercial road, which enabled the products produced inland regions to be sold in foreign markets through the ports in the Pontos Region, was provided by the valleys formed by the Halys³⁵. After the abolition of the Crusader principalities in the 13th century, the lands of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia became important for Europeans as it was a short and reliable route. This route, beginning from Ayas, reached Tabriz on the one hand and the Black Sea on the other hand. By the way, the route to the Black Sea was, of course, remarkable for us. The route from Ayas followed the Ceyhan River until Anabad, then left the river and continued on the edge of the Anabad Stream, one of its branches. The route passing under the walls of Geben turned to the north-east after Gökşun and reached the point where the Seyhan (Sarus) river emerged, passed the Antitaurus, and proceeded along the Kızılırmak (Halys) and reached Sivas. The caravan route was divided into two in Sivas. On the one hand, one went to Tabriz via Erzincan-Erzurum and from there to the interior of Asia by following the Silk Road. It connected the Black Sea coasts of Turkey to both the east and the south, namely the Mediterranean³⁶. On the other hand, the trade route to Tabriz was significant because it was the largest market then. The Tabriz market, fed by both the Silk Road and the Spice Road, was considered the largest market in the world. Marco Polo most likely followed a similar route with his father Niccolo and Uncle Matteo on his way to China and from Ayas to Iran³⁷.

Rivers were conceived as gods, and ancient civilisations and many societies have shown respect for them. Similarly, the Halys was assumed to be a god by the communities living on the coast and different civilisations in ancient times. The Hittites, who lived in the Halys basin, regarded the rivers as goddesses and showed great respect to the rivers³⁸. Though the Halys, known as Marašşanta/Marašşantiya, was not conceived as a specific god, the importance of the river to Nerik’s Storm God was frequently mentioned in the Hittite texts. It is understood from these texts that human qualities were attributed to the river³⁹. The Hellenes and Romans also considered some rivers to be gods. In this context, as understood from the works of some ancient authors, the Halys was conceived as a god in the Hellenic and Roman cultures. According to a narrative, nymph Sinope, the daughter

³⁴ Baykara 1988, p. 23.

³⁵ Hdt. I. 72; II. 34; Strab. XIV. 5. 22; see also. Arslan 2007, p. 64 footnote 294; Doğançcı 2020, p. 135.

³⁶ Turan 2000, pp. 148-149. See about the road from Ayas to Tabriz. Eşikurt 2014, p. 27.

³⁷ Marco Polo, p. 74-78.

³⁸ Zengin-Koşan 2019, p. 50.

³⁹ Hoffner, 1990, p.22 ff.; see also. Zengin-Koşan 2019, p. 50.

of the river god, Asopus, escaped from Apollo and the Halys in love with her and preserved her virginity forever with the help of Jupiter⁴⁰. The Halys was depicted as a river god on Roman Imperial coins. It is observed that it was usually depicted on the coins of cities such as Tavion and Gangra, located on the banks of the Halys River⁴¹.

The Iris

The Iris River, originating from the picturesque Pontos Region, meanders through fertile plains, enhancing the region's beauty. It serves as a vital water source, sustaining agricultural activities in the territory. Finally, it gracefully flows into the Pontos Eukseinos, marking its significance as one of the most important rivers of the Pontos Region.

Our understanding of the Iris River is mainly indebted to the renowned geographer Strabo (64 BC - 24 AD) from Amaseia (Amasya), an actual authority on Pontos geography. Strabo (XII. 3. 15) reveals that the river originates from the Phanaroia (Taşova) region. It then courses through the heart of the city of Komana in Pontos, flows west from Dazimonitis, a fertile plain, and curves north towards Gazioura. After passing the formidable city of Amaseia, it reaches the Phanaroia region⁴². The Lykos (Kelkit) River, located in the middle of the valley formed by the Ophlimos and Lithros mountains, joined the Skylaks River in the south of Amisos City and poured into the Iris River in the vicinity of Eupatoria/Magnopolis⁴³. After this joint, the river flowing northward crossed the Themiskyra lands and flowed into the Pontos Eukseinos⁴⁴. The Ankon (Cape of Mercury) Harbour was located where the Iris River flowed into the Black Sea⁴⁵. Recent studies indicate that the river, originating from the western slopes of Köse Mountain, flowed in the direction of Sivas, Tokat, Amasya, and Samsun and flowed into the Black Sea from the vicinity of Çarşamba Plain⁴⁶.

The Iris is the second-longest river flowing through the Pontos Region after the Halys River. With its connection with the Lykos River, the length of the river was measured at approximately 521 km⁴⁷. Xenophon (*Anab.* V. 6. 9), who came to the region and saw the river, stated that the width of the Iris was three plethron (90 m.) in some areas. In the following periods, it was stated⁴⁸ that the sand brought by the fast-flowing river filled the wide river mouth, and therefore, the flow rate of the part pouring into the Black Sea was low. There were wooden and stone bridges on Yeşilirmak, and its branches, as in Kızılırmak⁴⁹.

⁴⁰ Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 945-955; Val. Flac. V. 105-125.

⁴¹ Altınoluk 2005, p. 45.

⁴² Strab. XII. 3. 15.

⁴³ Strab. XII. 3. 30; 39; Plin. *nat.* VI. 4. 11.

⁴⁴ Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 365-370; 960-965; Strab. XII. 3. 15; Arr. *periplus* XV. 3; Val. Flac. IV. 600; Amm. Marc. XII. 8. 17.

⁴⁵ Arr. *periplus* XV. 3.

⁴⁶ Soyulu and Gönülol 2003, p. 17; Güney 2004, p. 48.

⁴⁷ Jaoshvili 2002, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Bijişkyan 1969, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Dernschwam 1992, p. 278-279; 281; 296; Chesneau 2012, p. 49; Barth 2017, p. 90.

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It can be claimed that the Iris⁵⁰ stood out with its clear waters, gave life to the Pontos Region with its fertile plains and lands, and was mainly used for irrigation. Where the Iris and Lykos rivers and their branches met was regarded as the most important and fertile part of the Pontos region because the region's most important cities, such as Komana, Gazioura, Amaseia, Eupatoria and Amisos, were established on the banks of the Iris River. Furthermore, Strabo (XII. 3. 30) stated that the most fertile wetlands of Pontos, such as the Phanaroia (Taşova) region, Dazimonitis Plain (Kaz Ova), Zelitits region and Gazakene lands were formed by the Iris, and they have irrigated its tributaries⁵¹. The renowned traveller Ibn Battuta, who came to this region, observed⁵² that the water taken from the wooden mills established on the riverside in Amaseia provided the need for accommodation and agricultural lands.

Like the Halys, ancient societies perceived the Iris River as a god. In Amaseia, the Iris was depicted as a god on the Roman Imperial Period coins minted in the name of Faustina II. On the coin, Iris is described as a long-haired, bearded man holding a musical instrument (reed) in his left hand. The bow of the ship is also in front of him⁵³. Although it is not mentioned in ancient sources, some scholars have stated that the ship on the coin signifies river transport⁵⁴. Heinrich Bart stated that when he was in the region, people used the flow rate of Yeşilirmak in the vicinity of Tokat and transported their wood logs via the river⁵⁵.

The Thermodon

Apollonios of Rhodes (*argon.* II. 970-980) claimed that the Thermodon River took its source from the Amazonius (Mason) Mountain⁵⁶. Plinius (*nat.* VI. 3. 10-11) similarly contended that this river originated near a castle called Phanaroia and flowed from the foot of the Amazonius Mountain⁵⁷. According to Ammianus Marcellinus (XXII. 8. 17), the Thermodon River had already begun to flow from Mount Arminius. Ptolemaios (*geogr.* V. 6) argued that the river emerged from the southern slopes of the Pontos Mountains. The river met with many small springs. (*geogr.* V. 6) argued that the river took its source from the southern slopes of the Pontos Mountains, and it joined many small springs.⁵⁸ It flowed through the Themiskyra Plain (Çarşamba Ovası) and formed the meanders⁵⁹. The river, running parallel to Iris River in some places, was an important

⁵⁰ Dion. *Perieges.* 783. In the book of Dionysius of Alexandria, there are also opinions that it joined the Iris and Thermodon rivers. See: Bekker-Nielsen and Jensen 2015, p. 231 ff.

⁵¹ Kinacı 2015, p. 185 ff.

⁵² İbn Battûta, 417. See also Barth 2017, p. 95.

⁵³ Altınoluk 2005, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Bekker-Nielsen and Jensen 2015, p. 231 ff.

⁵⁵ Barth 2017, p. 57.

⁵⁶ The Çöldürtepe-Mason Mountain is shown as the location of this mountain. Şaroğlu, 2010, p. 38; 88.

⁵⁷ Strabon (XII. 3. 15) also stated that the source of the Thermodon River was in the Phanaroia region.

⁵⁸ Strab. XII. 3. 15.

⁵⁹ Plin. *nat.* VI. 3. 10; Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 970-980. Amm. Marc. XXII. 8. 17.

water source for the Themiskyra Plain, flowed into the Pontos Eukseinos, and contributed a lot to the agricultural activities done in the plain⁶⁰.

Although the ancient writers claimed that the Thermodon River was located in the Pontos Region, some writers needed clarification or made mistakes about its location. For Pseudo-Plutarkhos (*de fluv.* XV. 1), it was located in the Scythian lands on the northern shores of the Black Sea. On the other hand, according to Dionysios of Alexandria (*Perieges.* 772-786), its location was the southern shores of the Black Sea. He confused the Iris with the Thermodon River. Accidentally, he identified the Iris River instead of the Thermodon River⁶¹.

The Thermodon River, approximately 57 km away from its source, flowed into the Pontos Eukseinos and based on the information given by Xenophon (*Anab.* V. 6. 9), the Thermodon had a width of three plethra (ca 90 m) in some places and was extremely difficult to pass. Moreover, Ovidius (*Met.* II. 245-250) and Valerius Flaccus (V. 120-126) described the river's currents as fast and angry. Recent studies on the Thermodon River somehow confirm the ancient writers' accounts of the river. Accordingly, it originated from the north-facing slopes of the Canik Mountains located at 1100-1300 m altitude, and it formed the Thermodon/Terme River at the connection with the Ayazma Stream, Kırkıl Stream, Yeşildere and Bolas Stream in the Salıpazarı area⁶². This river flowed in the northeast and poured into the Black Sea from Çaltı Burnu, located east of Terme District⁶³.

The Thermodon River formed the Themiskyra Plain, which enabled people to do agriculture and grow livestock by providing the necessary water for the region. It also became one of the most significant rivers, socio-economically giving life to the Pontos Region. Themiskyra, the home of the Amazons and known as Amazonia, named after an Amazon⁶⁴, is a fertile plain irrigated by the rivers Iris and Thermodon. As stated by many scholars, it is known that this plain, surrounded by mountains on one side and forested on the other, extended to the sea. Since it was a well-irrigated plain, both agricultural production and self-grown fruits could be found in abundance; therefore, hunting animals lived there as they could find plenty of food in Themiskyra. Strabo (XII. 3. 15), describing the region, contended that “*their plenty of water offsets any drought, so that no famine comes down on these people*” to reveal the abundance and fertility in Themiskyra Plain. Aristotle (*hist. an.* V. 22. 10) claimed that white bees lived in the lands on the coast of the Thermodon, and these bees made honey twice a month in winter and hid their combs in the soil. In line with Aristotele, Plinius (*nat.* XI. 9. 59) also said that two types of bees lived on the coast of Thermodon, while one made their honeycombs on the trees and the other on the ground. Furthermore, Thermodon was also rich in fishing. Its sheltered, warm and fresh waters provided many fish species to live in this river, and it is said that large

⁶⁰ Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 365-380; 970-980; Strab. XII. 3. 15.

⁶¹ For further information, see: Bekker-Nielsen and Jensen 2015, pp. 231-242.

⁶² Uncu 1995, p. 85; Poellauer 2000, p. 3.

⁶³ Uncu 1995, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Appian, *Mithr.* XII. 78

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fish species laid their eggs where the river poured into the sea⁶⁵. It is understood that Thermodon was also crucial for river transportation. According to an anonymous text entitled ‘*Periplus Ponti Euxini*’ (29.5), it is claimed that the Thermodon River, located in the Pontos Region among the rivers flowing into the Pontos Eukseinos, was suitable for river transportation and could be crossed by ship (= ναυσίπορος). It was claimed that it was possible to travel with small ships in the region where the river met the sea, especially in the spring season⁶⁶. In addition, there was a dark blue type of iaspis (jade) stone, which was very popular in ancient times on the riverbanks⁶⁷.

The Thermodon River became famous for the people living on its banks rather than for making the lands fertile through which it flows. However, it is mentioned that Sidenes and Leuko Syrians (White Syrians) resided on the coast of Thermodon, the Thermodon River and the region of Themiskyra on its banks are identified with the Amazons, the legendary female warriors of antiquity⁶⁸. Those warrior women who cut off or cauterised their right breasts in order to shoot arrows well, hence the so-called breastless (= Ἀμαζών)⁶⁹, were believed that they are the daughters of the war god Ares⁷⁰. It is rumoured that the Amazons rode horses and hunted on horseback, used bows very well, protected themselves in battles with small crescent-shaped shields, dressed like men and fought like men⁷¹. These unmarried women purposely injured their newborn male children’s arms and legs to make them powerless and unable to fight while cauterising the newborn female children’s right breasts so they could use their bows better⁷². It is understood that there was a unique tie between this tribe, whose existence was controversial even in antiquity, and the Thermodon River. Many ancient writers or poets sometimes regarded the Amazons as virgins of Thermodon⁷³ and even though they bathed in this river⁷⁴. From this perspective, the Thermodon River and the Amazons were the subjects of myths. While Theseus marries one of the Amazons on the coast of Thermodon in one of these myths⁷⁵, Heracles’ ninth mission was to steal the belt of Hippolyte, the leader of the Amazons living on the coast of Thermodon⁷⁶. In addition, the similarity of the female warrior types in the Dede Korkut stories that emerged among the Turks in the

⁶⁵ Aristot. *hist. an.* VI. 13. 15-20.

⁶⁶ Philostr. *Her.* 54. 7.

⁶⁷ Plin. *nat.* XXXVII. 116.

⁶⁸ Hom. *Il.* VI. 188-189; Aesch. *Per.* 410-420; 720-730; Hdt. IV. 110-117; *FGrHist* “Ephoros” (70.) 114a; Apoll. Rhod. *argon.* II. 370-373; 964-1000; Ps.-Scymnos 882-885; Diod. II. 44. 2-3; IV. 16. 1-2; Strab. XI. 5. 4; Mela I. 105; Arr. *periplus* XV. 3; Amm. Marc. XXII. 8. 17-19; see also. Steph. Byz. *Ethnika* s.v. Ἀμαζόνες=Amazones.

⁶⁹ “Breast (= μαζός/μαστός)” with the combination of its missing prefix “ἀ” “breastless” means Amazon (= Ἀμαζών) derived from (Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, with a Revised Supplement*, Oxford 1996, s.v. “Ἀμαζών”).

⁷⁰ Diod. II. 45. 3.

⁷¹ Diod. II. 45. 1-3; Arr. *anab.* VII. 13. 1-3.

⁷² Diod. II. 45. 1-46. 6; Strab. XI. 5. 1; Sen. *Med.* 215-216.

⁷³ Phiostr. *Ep.* 47.

⁷⁴ Prop. III. 11-17.

⁷⁵ Dion. Chr. *Orat.* XI. 47-48.

⁷⁶ Diod. IV. 16. 1; Apollod. II. 9.

later periods with the Amazons is highly remarkable. These Turkish epics, written down in the second half of the XVth century, belong to the previous centuries. Dede Korkut Stories, consisting of a combination of stories that emerged in the period from the VI century up to the XI century, covered⁷⁷ a wide geography from Trabzon to Mardin, from the Caucasus to Azerbaijan, together with the traces of the old Turkish geography. When we look at these stories, we come across warrior women types such as Selcen Hatun⁷⁸, the daughter of Trabzon Tekfur, Burla Hatun the tall⁷⁹, Banu Çiçek⁸⁰. Among them, especially, there are forty female warriors around Burla Hatun the tall. The Thermodon River, like some other rivers in antiquity, was perceived as a river god and was depicted on coins of the Roman Imperial Period. It appears as a male figure with reeds, branches and amphorae on the minted coins⁸¹.

Conclusion

The Halys, Iris and Thermodon rivers politically shaped Asia Minor and the Pontos Region, with cities established on their flow routes and seen as borders between geographical regions, states and peoples. Moreover, they also contributed to the increase in agricultural production with the alluvial plains they created in the region and their use for the irrigation of agricultural lands in the region. It is known that these rivers were very instrumental in the establishment of the road and communication network between the inner and coastal regions, with the valleys they opened between the mountains that run parallel to the coast and cut off the communication between the coast and the interior areas, so they contributed a lot to the development of trade in the region and the increase in the trade volume in the region. The Black Sea, which had an intense trade in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, also expanded its hinterland through these rivers. As a matter of fact, it can be contended that the Halys, Iris and Thermodon rivers shaped the Pontos Region politically, geographically, and economically and had an essential role in turning the region into a centre of attraction.

⁷⁷ Anon. *Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri*, 11.

⁷⁸ Anon. *Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri*, 144-164.

⁷⁹ Anon. *Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri*, 49-69.

⁸⁰ In book *Dede Korkut "Bay Büre Bey Oğlu Bamsı Beyrek Hikayesi"*. Anon. *Dede Korkut Hikâyeleri*, 70-109. See also Koç 2017, p. 147-154.

⁸¹ Altınoluk 2005, p. 211.

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