



Hercules – the Mythical Founder of Perinthus

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ABSTRACT

The paper concerns Hercules as the mythical founder of Perinthus in the legend told by Ammianus. His image appears on the obverse of pseudo-autonomous coinage popular since but not before the mid-1st century AD, and he was announced as ΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ [the builder] in the time of the Severan dynasty. Thus, the legend proved to be from Roman times, probably after the town had been proclaimed the provincial capital of Thracia as a convincing way to propagate its old history. Hercules was a well-known colonizer on the Thracian littoral, and his appearance on Perinthian coins seems plausible. Another head of a young hero, maybe the eponymous Perinthus himself, was presented on the reverse of provincial coinage in the time of Antoninus Pius, as well as on the obverse of pseudo-autonomous coins from the time of the Severan dynasty at the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century, while Hercules and Perintos were presented in full height on the reverse of a medallion of Alexander Severus. As such, the time of Severi appears to be the probable date for the common legend of the two heroes. Later on, the town was renamed Heraclea, probably in 286 AD in accordance with the administrative reforms of Diocletian.

Keywords: Hercules, Perinthus, mythical founder, Roman Thrace, Thracian coinage

This story could have been started with the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus sometime in the second half of the 4th century AD. In the 22nd book of his enormous history of the Roman Empire describing the land and cities in the region of Propontis and revealing their links with mythical events and historical past, he mentioned "the city which Hercules founded and dedicated to the name of his comrade Perinthus." This was the first and the only mention of the story, so the question becomes whether this was an old myth revived by Ammianus or one he had just manipulated?

According to the known history, the town of Perinthus was a Samian colony founded early in 602 BC.¹ With regard to its mythical founding, all sources are dated later and all of them concern Hercules:²

- 1 M. H. Sayar, *Perinthus-Herakleia (Marmara Ereğlisi) und Umgebung. Geschichte, Testimonien, griechische und lateinische Inschriften*. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998, p.71. See also B. Issac, *The Greek Settlements in Thrace until the Macedonian Conquest*. Leiden, 1986, p.205.
- 2 For myths concerning the foundation of Perinthus, see those listed by Sayar, p. 91–92.



(1). Apollodorus in his *Library* told the myth about the ninth labor of Hercules for the belt of Hippolyta, the queen of Amazons. On his way there, Hercules came to the court of Lycus, son of Dascylus, in Mysia and was entertained by him; in the battle between him and the king of the Bebryces, Hercules sided with Lycus and slew many, amongst them being King Mygdon, the brother of Amykos. Hercules took much land from the Bebryces and gave it to Lycus, who called it all “Heraclea” (2,5,9).

(2). Tzetzes mentioned the Bebrycian Sea and the Thracian Heraclea, formerly known as Perinthus, in his *Chiliades* (1,31,840–841). Later he wrote about Hercules journey by ship to the Amazons for the girdle of Hippolyta, their queen, during which he’d conquered all of Bebrycia and been victorious over the brothers Mygdon and Amykos there. He gave the land to the Mysian Lycus, a son of Deipylus, and Lycus named the city of these people Heraclea in honor of Hercules (2,4,309–316); he repeated the same story, specifying the city of Heraclea to have previously been Thracian Perinthus and to have also been called Mygdonia long ago (3,37,806–817).

(3). Ammianus Marcellinus wrote in his *Res Gestae* about the city Hercules had founded and dedicated to the name of his comrade Perinthus (22,8,5); Ammianus mentioned as well his visit to Heraclea (also called Perinthus), speaking about Julian and his march to Constantinople after the death of Constantius (22,2,3); according to him, Europa the province was conspicuous for having two centers, one of these being Perinthus and which in later times was called Heraclea (27,4,12).

Tzetzes alluded to Apollodorus’ *Library*, which is evident in the two similar versions of Hercules’ campaign against the Amazons and their much simpler plot: He conquered the hostile Bebryces and their king Mygdon, or Amykos, and his victory favored the friendly Mysian Lycus, who obtained the land and named it Heraclea after the Greek hero. Apollodorus’ text made no mention of any town in the conquered land,³ while the town is explicitly present in Tzetzes’ text, which even stressed its old name of Perinthus, which was attributed to the Thracians there, as well as the name Mygdonia, as the city or land had been called long ago. Meanwhile, many misunderstandings occurred concerning the names: Greek myths were overcrowded with many heroes named Lycus, and the one in Mysia was a son of Dascylus according to Apollodorus and of Deipylus according to Tzetzes, which was presumably the eponym of Dascylus, or his grandson with the same name who was the guide of the Argonauts according to Apollonius Rhodius (*Arg.* 2,776, 2,802). And this very Lycus was known as the king of Mariandyne in North-Eastern Bithynia (Apollod. 1,9,23; Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 2,752), where Heraclea Pontica was the principal city. The same with the Bebryces who inhabited this very region and whose king in *Argonautica* was Amykos – the adversary of the Greek heroes (Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 2,1–100). Concerning their king Mygdon (in Apollodorus), however,

3 A slight ambiguity is found regarding the use of ‘πολλῶν’ as ‘πόλιν’ in one of the copies (see Apollodorus in LCL I, p.204, note 3).

another one also existed in Phrygia with the same name. He was known from the time when Priam was his ally against the Amazons (Hom.*Il.* 3,186–189), and his son was an ally to the Trojans in the war (Eur. *Rhes.* 539). Mygdonia was also known as a territory in south-western Thrace between lower Axios and Strymon (Thuc. 1,58; Strab. 7, fr. 36). Therefore, the Mygdonians, as well as the Brigians (or Phrygians), Bebricians, Bithynians, and Mariandynians, were considered Thracian tribes, that had once migrated in Anatolia (Strab. 7,3,2), thus explaining the other Mygdonia in Bithynia near Lake Dascylitis (Strab. 12,3,22).⁴ The text in the *Library* clearly seems to have concerned events and activities in northern Anatolia and the founding of Heracleia Pontica with the involvement of Hercules. This very text preserved in Tzetzes' work was adapted and used sometime later to prove the new name of Perinthus (not the foundation!) after the Greek hero.

Ammianus told a much different story. It resembles an outline but is still informative enough. In the plot, Hercules had still engaged in a struggle or war with some antagonist. He'd been accompanied by a friend, as always (other stories stating the friend as Iolaos or Abder). This friend was named Perinthus and had died in the war (or in an accident), so the hero founded a new town in his memory and gave it his name. Many similar events had happened to Hercules and his companion Abder on the Thracian coast near the outflow of river Nestos, but that had been Hercules' eighth labor for the man-eating horses of Diomedes and the Bistonian king in Thrace. The Greek hero had deprived the king of his horses and his life but lost his companion, who'd been torn by the horses; Hercules had founded Abdera to commemorate him and the place of his death.⁵ Another similar story was told about Hercules in Italy, where he killed Kroton by accident, accorded him a magnificent funeral, erected a tomb for him, and foretold to the natives that after a time, a famous city would rise in this place bearing the name of the man who had died (Diod. 4,24,7). Nearly the same passed in the story about Lokros, whom Hercules had killed by a mistake and then established a town in his honor upon the location of his tomb (Con. 3). Namely, a slain friend had again become an eponym, this time of Lokroi, a town in Magna Graecia. This could be the plot behind the myth of Perinthus: the death of a friend in a conflict or accident being common to all these myths in which Hercules was a town's founder and the eponym proved to be his dead companion.

4 (RE) Pauly A. F. von, et al. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 31, 1933, s.v. Mygdonia.

5 K. Rabadjiev, "Herakles, Diomedes and Thrace." *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, 5(3) (2001), p. 9–12. For the discussion on founder-heroes, their myth, and cult on the Thracian littoral of the Aegean Sea, see A. Pavlopoulou, "Myth and Cult of Founder-Heroes in the Greek Colonies of Thrace" in *Thrace*, edited by V. Papoulia et al. Athens, 1994, p. 115–131; K. Chryssanthaki-Nagle, "Les trois fondations d'Abdère." *Revue des Études Grecques*, 114 (2001), p.385–386.

Hercules is a well-known champion regarding the Greek presence on the Thracian littoral, especially in the region of Pangaion hills that were desired for their silver mines.⁶ The story about Abdera occurred there, as well as Hercule's victory over the Thracians on Thasos, when Hercules granted the island to Alkaios and Sthenelos, the sons of Androgeos from Paros (Apollod. 2,5,9). Thus, the Parian colonization of the island had been demonstrated in the myth, and the legend had its historical sequel when the Thasians started a real war against the Thracian Saian tribe on the mainland sometime before the mid-7th century BC, in which the Parian poet Archilochos, son of Telesikles the *oikistes* of Thasos, took part.⁷ The reason behind Hercules' conflicts in Thracian lands usually involved unjust people presented as the barbarians in the stories and often as brothers (e.g., Mygdon and Amykos of the Bebryces). In the city of Toroni on Sithonia peninsula, Hercules killed Telegonus and Polygonus (Timolus), sons of Proteus and grandsons of Poseidon (Apollod. 2,5,9); their mother Chrysoonea was a daughter of the Sithonian King Clythos, and her sons were fierce and unjust. Thus, they provoked the hatred of Hercules (Con. 32). The eponym of Dikaia-by-Abdera was the fair Dicaeus, whose brother Syleus was killed by Hercules on account of the injustice he had done (Con. 17; Apollod. 2,6,3). Herodotus mentions the Syleus plain to the west of Strymon (Hdt. 7,115), whose eponym was proposed to be Syleus, and thus the myth seems to be connected with Thrace. Zetes and Calais, the sons of Boreas and Oreithyia and citizens of Dikaia-by-Abdera, were killed by Hercules because of their disrespectful behavior (Apoll. Rhod. Arg. 1,1302). In Aenus, Hercules was a guest at the home of the good King Poltys, but Hercules killed his brother, the blasphemous Sarpedon, and the two were sons of Poseidon (Apollod. 2,5,9). Poltys was the eponym of Poltyobria (also Poltymbria), the previous name of Aenus (Strab. 7,6,1). King Phineus, the eponym of Phinopolis on the western coast of Pontus, was sentenced to death by Hercules, for King Phineus had blinded Plexip and Pandion, his and Cleopatra's (the daughter of Boreas) sons (Diod. 4,44).

Collaborating with the good among the native elite against the bad was a real and successful policy. In addition, the close similarities among all these myths and their structure and ideology are explainable not as a product of oral mythmaking but as propaganda in the time of the colonization of the Thracian littoral and probably emitted in the Thasian Heracleion, the religious center of the Heracleian cult in the Northern Aegean at that time.⁸

A marble relief with a Roman date is known from the modern village of Dyulino, close to the ancient Naulochos. On it, Hercules and Dionysos are presented together, and the inscribed dedication is to "the son of Zeus, father Hercules, the founder of Perinthus, and a de-

6 K. Rabadjiev, "Mt. Pangaion: The War for Its Silver in Myth" in *Thrace in the Graeco-Roman World*, edited by A. Iakovidou. Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Thracology. Komotini – Alexandroupoli, 18-23 October, 2005. Athens, 2007, p. 509-513.

7 Issac, p.79.

8 Hercules' struggle with Diomedes for his horses could be dated somewhere between the first foundation of Abdera as an *apoikia* of Klazomenians in the mid-7th century BC, and its second founding by the Theians early in the 5th century BC (Rabadjiev, Herakles, Diomedes and Thrace, p. 9-12).

scendant of Perseus," a votive donation by someone named Iulianus who was also probably from Perinthus.⁹ So, when were the myths about Perinthus created? Surely the text in Tzetzes was a later version of the story in Apollodorus that had probably been adapted to explain its renaming as Heraclea, since it only mentioned Perinthus as a former name. Actually, the question is about the myth in Ammianus and its date. Was it an old traditional story or just a newly fabricated one to explain the old name and at the same time approve the new one? To answer this, the study should look into the Roman coinage of the city, the provincial and especially the so-called pseudo-autonomous one, because Hercules' image had been absent from the autonomous coins with pre-Roman dates. The head of Hercules had been presented on the obverse of pseudo-autonomous coins for a long period of time starting in the mid-1st century AD going up to the second quarter of the 3rd century AD (Fig. 1).¹⁰ During the reign of the Severan dynasty, the hero's image was supplemented with the inscription ΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ [the builder] (Fig. 2).¹¹ The head of a young hero, maybe Perinthus himself, was presented on the reverse of the provincial coinage starting in the time of Antoninus Pius (mid-2nd century), with the head of Marcus Aurelius as a Caesar on the obverse.¹² His head also was on the obverse of pseudo-autonomous coins starting in the time of the Severan dynasty at the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century AD.¹³ Meanwhile, Hercules and Perinthus were presented in full height on the reverse of a medallion of Alexander Severus (Fig. 3).¹⁴



Figure 1. A bronze coin from the pseudo-autonomous coinage of Perinthus from the end of 1st to the mid-2nd century; obverse: laureate head of bearded Heracles to left; reverse: Zeus enthroned left, inscription: ΠΕΡΙΝΘΙΩΝ. Image after: Corpus Nummorum Thracorum, http://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/CNT_2053 [Last downloaded: 2018/02/04].

9 IGBulg. V, 5128.

10 E. Schönert, *Griechisches Münzwerk – Die Münzprägung von Perinthus*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1965, No. 92 (mid-1st century); Nos. 102–117 (end of 1st – mid-2nd century); Nos. 190–196 (second half of 2nd century); Nos. 197–202 (end of 2nd century); Nos. 204–206 (between 198–218); Nos. 207–221 (the time of Emp. Alexander Severus).

11 A large variety of inscriptions: ΗΡΑΚΛΗΣ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ, ΗΡΑΚΛΗ ΚΤΙΣΤΗ, ΤΟΝ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΝ, ΙΩΝΩΝ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΝ, ΙΩΝΩΝ ΤΟΝ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΝ, ΙΩΝΩΝ (Schönert, p.53, Nos. 197–211).

12 *Ibid.*, Nos. 411–418.

13 *Ibid.*, Nos. 203.

14 *Ibid.*, Nos. 781. On the discussion about the founder of Perinthus, see И. Топалилов, Някои бележки върху мита за „Основателя“ на града в Римска Тракия, in *ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ. Studies in Memory of Prof. Dimitar Popov*. УИ „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2016, 367–372; with regard to a wrong interpretation of Hercules and Perinthus as the mythical and historical founders of the town (p.372).



Figure 2. A bronze coin from the pseudo-autonomous coinage of Perinthus from the time of Alexander Severus; obverse: head of Heracles to left, inscription: ΙΩΝΩΝ ΤΟΝ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΝ; reverse: upright club, inscription ΠΕΡΙΝΘΙΩΝ ΔΙΣ ΝΕΩΚΟΡΩΝ. Image after: Corpus Nummorum Thracorum, http://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/CNT_2214 [Last downloaded: 2018/02/04].



Figure 3. A bronze medallion of Alexander Severus from Perinthus; obverse: laureate bust of Alexander Severus to right; reverse: to left a nude youthful Heros of Perinthus, standing right, wearing chlamys over left shoulder, clasp hands with Heracles standing left with lion-skin over left arm, holding club in left hand, inscription: ΠΕΡΙΝΘΙΩΝ ΙΩΝΩΝ ΔΙΣ ΝΕΩΚΟΡΩΝ. Image after: Corpus Nummorum Thracorum, http://www.corpus-nummorum.eu/CNT_3980 [Last downloaded: 2018/02/04].

Thus, all the testimonia such as the literary texts and the coins with Roman dates, and even the votive relief with its inscription, enforce the idea that the myth about Hercules having founded Perinthus had been manipulated by Roman rule when similar stories were used to propagate the ancient so-called history of the new provincial capital of Thrace. The image of Hercules on the obverse of pseudo-autonomous coinage proves his significance as an ancestor in the public pantheon. Definitely, these ideas preceded Emperor Septimius Severus and the time of his second stay in Perinthus in 196 AD; therefore I could not accept the foundation myth as having been invented then.¹⁵ However, the climax of Heracleian popularity on the pseudo-autonomous coinage of the Severan dynasty and the manifested images of Hercules (the *ktistes* [builder/founder]) and Perinthus (the eponymous hero), the two being

15 Топалилов, p.371.

presented both separately and jointly, prove their relation in a common legend, perhaps the one told by Ammianus.

The new name of an old town like Perinthus seemed unusual, but not in a time of great change such as the reign of Diocletian had been. The administrative reforms aimed at the survival of the vast Empire, and Perinthus was a provincial center again in the new provincial arrangement, this time involving Europa and probably having happened in 297 AD.¹⁶ Some years before on March 1-April 1, 286, the Emperor proclaimed Maximian as co-ruler and *Augustus*,¹⁷ and the *diarchy* was defined in religious terms. Diocletian received the surname of *Jovius* and Maximian that of *Herculius*.¹⁸ This new religious doctrine could explain the renaming of Perinthus in Heraclea when Diocletian visited the town on October 13 of the same year (286), and the change could have happened then and there on the spot.¹⁹ A century later, the old name was still mentioned, but only in the works of the learned historian Ammianus, who while writing his book in Rome in the 380s told about Julian having entered “Heraclea, also called Perinthus,” on his march to Constantinople after the death of Constantius II on November 3, 361. The renaming had been the result of official propaganda and had faded away in ordinary use, with the new version that was adapted being the one that survived in Tzetzes.

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16 For more about the town and its history, see the chronology of Sayar, p.76.

17 A. K. Bowman, “Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, A.D. 284-305” in *The Cambridge Ancient History: 12. The Crisis of Empire A.D. 193-337*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 69.

18 This was the sense of the imperial propaganda when the emperors and their gods formed a *domus divina* (F. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1938, 467; H. Leppin, “Old Religions Transformed: Religions and Religious Policy from Decius to Constantine.” In: *A Companion to Roman Religion*, edited by J. Rupke. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 102; J. Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1970, p.43.

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