



Dynasty of the Spartocids

Summary :

The dynasty of the Spartocids ruled Bosphorus Cimmericus from 438/7 to 109 B.C. The dynasty got its name from the first ruler named Spartocus.

Main Role

Dynasty of the Bosporan Kingdom

1. Descent-sources

According to Diodorus of Sicily,¹ in 438/7 B.C. the rule of Bosphorus passed down from the [Archaeanakids](#), who ruled for 42 years, to the new ruler Spartocus,² who himself lasted only for seven years. The new dynasty that descended from Spartocus was called the Spartocids and ruled the [Bosporan kingdom](#) for almost 300 years up to the end of the 2nd c. B.C.

Unfortunately we do not know the circumstances under which the dynasty changed. Was it a forced dethronement of the Archaeanakids or Spartocus somehow peacefully and legitimately inherited the authority? Historians are inclined to the first version, particularly because the names of the founder of the dynasty and his descendants are of Thracian origin, belonging to the Odrysian king clan. Historians make some suppositions on the background of it. It could be a Thracian mercenary, who used his influence on the Bosporan army, or the representative of the local Scythian-Thracian milieu, however strongly Hellenized. The epigraphical sources,³ numismatic data and literary accounts⁴ give detailed information on the succession of the dynasty.

Concerning some of the Spartocids, there are detailed biographies though for others only their names survive. The sources elucidate well the reigns of the king Satyros I, Leucon I, Spartocus III, Pairisades I. A chronological chart of their rule is given by Diodorus⁵ and [Strabo](#) provides a brief summary of the reign of the Bosporan kings: «For a long time Pantikapaion was ruled as a monarchy by the dynasty of Leucon, Satyros, and Pairisades, as were also all the neighbouring settlements near the south of Lake Maeotis on both sides, until Pairisades gave over the sovereignty to [Mithridates](#). They were called tyrants, although most of them, beginning with Pairisades and Leucon, proved to be equitable rulers and Pairisades was actually held in honor as a god. The last one of these monarchs also bore the name Pairisades, but he was unable to hold out against the barbarians, who kept exacting greater tribute than before, and he therefore gave over the sovereignty to Mithridates Eupator».⁶ Concerning the character of the power of the Spartocids, ancient authors call them "tyrants", sometimes "kings" or "dynasts". Therefore the tyrannic form of the ruling is evident.

2. Form of the Spartocids' rule

As numerous inscriptions reveal, the Bosporan king often ruled together with his brother or son, that is why historians sometimes tell about the corporative character of the Bosporan tyranny. So, Bosphorus elaborated a particular form of state unusual for the rest of the Hellenic world: the sovereignty of a single democratic polis was strongly reduced in favour of the personal tyrannic rule. Sometimes this phenomenon is called "protohellenism". Already E.H.Minns and M.I.Rostovtzeff thought that the rule's form of the early Spartocids "forestalled" the Hellenic monarchies.⁷ As it is well known, the monarchic power, standing over the poleis, appeared later under [Alexander the Great](#) as a synthesis of a Greek polis organization and the oriental despotism. The appearance of the similar state form in Bosphorus one and half century earlier than Alexander may be considered as an original feature of the Bosporan kingdom.

3. Policy of the Spartocids

Already from the end of the 5th c. the Spartocids pursued the policy of expansion. The first victim of it became the Greek city of



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[Nymphaeum](#), situated south of Pantikapaion and probably a member of the [Athenian League](#). Nymphaeum was incorporated into the Bosporan kingdom, as a result of armed capture during Satyros' I reign around 410 and 405 B.C. [Theodosia](#), a Greek city in the southeast of the Crimea, which was strategically important because of its all-year ice-free harbour, became the next "victim" of the Spartocids. Ancient authors inform us that the struggle for Theodosia was long and hard. Theodosia was supported by [Heraclea Pontica](#) and was surrounded by firm walls.⁸ The founder of the dynasty, Satyros I, perished during Theodosia's siege.⁹ Probably only his son Leucon I managed to incorporate the city into Bosporus, because in epigraphical sources he is called "archon of Bosporus and Theodosia" pointing to the submission of the latter. In order to secure the region against the warlike inhabitants of the Crimean steppes, Bosporan rulers erected in the beginning of the 4th century B.C. a system of protective banks, stretching from north to south in the west of seaside cities (e.g. the Uzunglar bank).

During the reign of Satyros I and Leucon I, the territory of the Bosporan kingdom also expanded to the east. Some historians consider it possible that large Greek cities of the Asiatic Bosporus (such as [Phanagoria](#) and the Sindian Harbour) were incorporated into the Bosporan kingdom by force. The next task was the subjugation of the local Sindian and Maeotian tribes of the Taman peninsula and the eastern shore of the Sea of Azov. After long diplomatic and military efforts, Sindika was incorporated into the Bosporan kingdom, but it was highly hellenized since the 5th c. B.C. because of close contacts with the Bosporus. Later on the other Maeotian tribes were subjugated and annexed to the kingdom, which was reflected in the title of the Bosporan kings. Thus, Leucon I was the first one who began to call himself besides the ordinary "archon of Bosporus and Theodosia" also "the king of Sindians, Toretai, Dandarioi and Psessoï".¹⁰ His son Pairisades I added to this title also the names of the Thates and Doschi tribes or simply named himself "the king of Sindians and all Maeotians".¹¹ Polyaeus gives information about one episode of the struggle of the Bosporan king Satyros I together with the Sindian king Hekataios against the Maeotians.¹² It is interesting to note that Satyros' I son Gorgippos, when sent to Sindika to regulate some internal affairs, renamed the Sindian Harbour (the capital city of Sindika) after him (Gorgippia). From Bosporan inscriptions we are informed that Pairisades I was "the ruler of all land, which lies between the last ends of Tauriens and the borders of Caucasian land".¹³ Demosthenes mentions the war between Pairisades and the Scythians,¹⁴ and [Strabo](#) indicates that Pairisades was deified after his death.¹⁵ Pairisades, whose cult survived also during the first centuries A.D., was buried in the Tsarskij (Royal) monumental tumulus not far from Pantikapaion.

4. The territory of the Bosporan kingdom

Approximately in the third quarter of the 4th century B.C. the territory of Bosporan kingdom was formed in its main outline and remained so until the end of the Antiquity. It occupied an area of about 5000 km² and it was the largest Greek state of that time after the Sicilian kingdom of Dionysius. It included ca. 30 cities and large settlements of different status and a vast agricultural area.

Incorporating the large "barbarian [chora](#)" into the state had an unquestionable influence on forming such a model of the state system, which later was developed in the Hellenistic states. It is notable for the evolution of the monarchic power in Bosporus that the Spartocids, whose predecessors in the 5th and 4th c. B.C. appeared as "archons" of Greek cities and "kings" of barbarian tribes, beginning from the 3rd c. designated themselves as kings of all citizens of Bosporan kingdom (so was Spartocus III).¹⁶ Although practically all aspects of the power (military, political, of foreign policy, fiscal, juridical and others) were in the Bosporan ruler's hands, Greek cities reserved some outward signs of policy autonomy for a long time including minting of coins named after the citizens of Pantikapaion. At the same time, we know from Aeschines' speech that Satyros I donated the Greek city of [Kepoi](#) to the Athenian Gylon, who went over to Bosporus.¹⁷ That means that cities were ruled not by the city council elected by citizens, but by individuals coming from the king's close circle.

Probably the barbarian tribes, which were obliged to pay a tribute to the Bosporan kings and supply them with military contingent,¹⁸ had also a certain autonomy and were governed by their own leaders. The part of the Scythian aristocracy was in the Bosporan rulers's employ and lived in Greek cities. As for evidence we can refer to the rich Scythian barrows in the environs of Pantikapaion and its necropolis, which were particularly numerous in the 4th c.

5. Cult



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The cult of Apollo Iatros had a special meaning for the dynasty of the Spartocids. This cult was under their patronage and some of the Spartocids served as highest priests of [Apollo](#).

6. Economy

A political, social and economic stability, based on the interests of both parts of the society (inhabitants of Greek cities and population of barbarian periphery), was a presupposition for the economic prosperity of the Bosphorian kingdom and its commercial expansion to the Greek world. By studying Greek orators such as Lysias, Isokrates, Demosthenes as well as Athenian and Bosphoran inscriptions we are informed that a huge amount of grain was dispatched to Athens in the 4th c. B.C. From the end of the 5th c., the Bosphoran rulers had friendly relations with Athens. For example, the Spartocids, who controlled the grain trade, sent to Athens about 400,000 medimnoi (= 16,380 t) of grain in 356 B.C. (as Demosthenes indicates).¹⁹ By an honorary decree from the Athenian acropolis, we are informed that in 284 B.C. the Bosphoran king Spartocus III had presented 15,000 medimnoi (ca 590 t) of grain to the Athenians. For that reason two bronze statues depicting him were built on the Athenian agora and acropolis "near the statues of its forefathers".²⁰ The Athenian state granted to Leucon (alike to his father Satyros) Athenian citizenship and some other privileges.

Bosporus also exported some other goods: fish, fur, wool – and imported vine, olive oil, items of craft and luxury.²¹ Many rulers allowed or confirmed the right of Athenian merchants for duty-free import. This helped to advance Greek production at Bosporus and via the Greeks to the surrounding barbarians.

In the 3rd and 2nd c. B.C. some signs of an economical and political crisis are recognized on Bosporus. Two important factors caused this crisis. First, the reorientation of the commercial connections caused loss of the Athenian interest in buying grain from Bosporus. Consequently, the trade of cattle, fish and slaves gained the first place. In the mid 3rd c. coinage in gold and silver was ceased. On the other hand, activity on the barbarian tribes of the northern Black Sea shores had considerably risen. At this time the hegemony of the Sarmatians was established in the steppes. The [Scythians](#), who were removed by the Sarmatians, set up their kingdom in Crimea in the 3rd c. and the Asiatic Scythians started to pressure the Sindi-Maeotian periphery of the Bosphoran kingdom. Finally, all this new factors led to the fall of the Spartocids dynasty and to the fall of the Bosphoran kingdom at the end of the 2nd c. B.C.

7. Decline of the Bosphoran kingdom

After the death of Pairisades I, the fight among his sons Satyros II, Eumelos and Prytanis, resulted to turbulence within the Bosphoran kingdom. Diodorus tells a detailed story about this fratricidal war.²² Eumelos, who was the winner of this fight, ruled for about 5 years and was the last strong and glorious leader of Bosporus. One of his most outstanding achievements was a fight against the pirates – Eumelos had freed the Black Sea from the pirate tribes of the Taurians, Heniochoi and Achaeans.²³ No one of the subsequent rulers achieved such a great fame, as far as it can be estimated from the sources.

The dramatic events happened under the rule of the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator. At the end of the 2nd c. B.C., when the Crimean Scythians had increased their pressure on [Chersonesus](#), Mithridates sent there his army under the leadership of [Diophantos](#) who had crushed the Scythians in the Crimea in 110 and, then, in 109, he interfered with the inner affairs of the neighbouring Bosporus. There, a man called Saumakos who led the revolt of the Scythians and killed the Bosphoran king Pairisades V. Diophantos managed to put down the revolt and brought the Bosphoran kingdom to Mithridates' sphere of power. We are informed about this events by an honorary decree from Chersonesus, which was erected in honour of Diophantos,²⁴ as well as from the words of Strabo,²⁵ who said that, before his death, Pairisades V handed his kingdom to Mithridates on his own free will. This may indicate the revolt of Saumakos was directed against this assignation.

8. Evaluation



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Concerning its organisation, the Bosporan kingdom appeared as a Greek state, but under the influence of different factors, including warlike barbarian surroundings and the necessity of coexisting with them in the same area, the kingdom changed into its own peculiar political system, which at some points anticipated the features of the Hellenistic monarchies. By using this system, the Bosporan kingdom managed to exist for about 300 years, playing a remarkable role in the political and "international" life of the Hellenic oikoumene.

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1. Diod. Sic. 12. 31. 1.
 2. Diodorus like other ancient authors calls him "Spartakos"; the local epigraphic sources prefer the form "Spartokos".
 3. They are collected in editions: B. Latyshev (ed.), *Inscriptiones orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae* I, II, IV (I²-1916) (Petropoli 1885-1901), further *IPE*; *Corpus inscriptionum Regni Bosporani* (Moscow-Leningrad 1965), further *CIRB*.
 4. Single episodes of the history of the Bosporan kingdom are preserved in works of Aristoteles, Lysias, Isokrates, Aeschines, Demosthenes, Dinarchus, Strabo, Harpocration, Diodorus, Aeneas Tacticus, Polyaeus, Athenaeus et al.
 5. Diod. Sic. 12. 31. 1; 36. 1; 14. 93. 1; 15. 52. 10; 16. 31. 6; 20. 22 et al.
 6. Strabo 7. 4. 4.
 7. Minns, E.H., *Scythians and Greeks. A Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North Coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus* (Cambridge 1913) p. 565, 577, 613; *CAH* 2² p. 561, 568, 572, 582-588 (M.I., Rostovtzeff).
 8. Polyaeus. 5. 23; 6. 9. 3-4.
 9. Demosth. 20. 33.
 10. See *CIRB* 6, 1037, 1038.
 11. *CIRB* 9-11, 971, 972, 1015, 1039, 1040.
 12. Polyaeus. 8. 55.
 13. *CIRB* 113.
 14. Demosth. 34. 8.
 15. Strabo 7. 4. 4.
 16. *CIRB* 19-21, 23, 974, 1043,
 17. Aeschin. 3. 171-172.
 18. About the participation of Scythian troops in the struggle of Leucon I against Theodosia see Polyaeus. 6. 9.
 19. Demosth. *Contra Leptinum* 31-32.



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20. IG II² 653.
21. Cf. Polyb. 4. 38. 4-5.
22. Diod. Sic. 20. 22-24.
23. Diod. Sic. 20. 25.
24. IPE I² 352.
25. Strabo 7. 4. 4.

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Webliography :

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartocids>

Glossary :

 chora, the

The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.

Sources

Aeschines 3. 171-172.

Demosthenes *Contra Leptinum* 31-32.

Diodorus 12. 31. 1., 20. 22-25.

Polyaenus 5. 23, 6. 9. 3-4., 8. 55.

Polybius 4. 38. 4-5.

Strabo 7. 4. 4.

Chronological Table

Dynasty of the Spartocids: Chronology chart

438/7-433/2 B.C.: Spartokos I

433/2-393/2 B.C.: Satyros I (together with Seleukos I)

393/2-389/8 B.C.: Satyros I (alone)

389/8-349/8 B.C.: Leukon I

349/8-344/3 B.C.: Spartokos II (together with Pairisades I)

344/3-311/0 B.C.: Pairisades I

311/0-310/9 B.C.: Satyros II (together with Prytanis ?)

310/9 B.C.: Prytanis I (s. Diodor. 20.22-24)

310/9-304/3 B.C.: Eumelos

304/3-284/3 B.C.: Spartokos III (partly together with Seleukos II)



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- 284/3-ca. 245 B.C.: Pairisades II (partly together with Satyros II)
- ca. 245-240 B.C.: Spartokos IV
- ca. 240-220 B.C.: Leukon II
- ca. 220-200 B.C.: Hygiainon
- ca. 200-180 B.C.: Spartokos V
- ca. 180-160 B.C.: Kamasarye (first alone, then together with Pairisades III and IV)
- ca. 180-170 B.C.: Pairisades III (together with Kamasarye)
- ca. 170-150 B.C.: Pairisades IV Philometor (first together with Kamasarye, then alone?)
- ca. 150-140 B.C.: Spartokos VI (?)
- ca. 140-109 B.C.: Pairisades V