



Dynasty of the Archaeanaktids

Summary :

The dynasty of the Archaeanaktids ruled the Bosporan kingdom from 480/479 to 438/7 BC. They must have been the first rulers who unified all the different poleis situated on the shores of the Strait of Kerch in one state under the aegis of Pantikapaion.

Main Role

Dynasty of the Bosporan Kingdom

1. The historical framework

All we know about the Archaeanaktids comes from Diodorus of Sicily that says "in Asia the dynasty of the Cimmerian Bosporus, whose kings were known as the Archaeanaktids, ruled for forty two years; a successor to the kingship was Spartacus who reigned seven years".¹ We know almost nothing about the origin of the Archaeanaktids, the events which led to the union of the autonomous poleis, the character of the power of the kings or the circumstances of the transition of power to the new [dynasty of Spartocids](#). However, this period of the history of the Bosporan kingdom is of paramount interest to the historians who tries to reconstruct the historical situation under the Archaeanaktids.

Greek colonies established on the shores of the Strait of Kerch (Bosporus Cimmericus) in the 6th century BC were independent democratic poleis, politically organized in the same way as their metropoleis (most often it was [Miletus](#)). On the Crimean shore of the strait the greatest and most important city was [Pantikapaion](#) and on the Taman shore [Phanagoria](#). The information from Diodorus testifies that already in the first half of the 5th century (480/479 BC) nearly all Bosporan cities were united and a new political structure in the form of a league or amphictyony² emerged under the leadership of Pantikapaion. As historians think, this unity was necessary in the face of danger that appeared from the neighbouring barbarian tribes, most powerful of which were the [Scythians](#). After the unsuccessful [campaign of the Persian king Darius I](#) against the Scythians in ca. 519 BC, they started expanding and consequently threatened the cities of Bosporus too. [Herodotus](#) reports the annual migrations of the Scythians from the Crimea to the Sindica across the frozen strait,³ i.e. actually through the territory of the Bosporan cities; archaeological data show that many Greek settlements on this itinerary suffered destructions in the first two decades of the 5th century BC.⁴ Clearly, the fact that many Bosporan cities raised walls and fortifications for the first time is to be connected with this situation. To protect the Bosporan cities from the nomadic Scythians of the Crimea, a 25 km long wall (the so-called Tyritake wall) was erected during the rule of the Archaeanaktids. Besides that, the close economical contacts between these cities contributed to their integration (e.g. Pantikapaean [coinage](#) was used in all Bosporan cities).⁵

2. The Dynasty

Archaeanaktus could have been a [strategos](#) of the already mentioned league that turned it into a tyranny (as Dionysius and [Gylon](#) in Sicily). The tyrannical type of his power is evident by the terms used by Diodorus when describing the rule of the Archaeanaktids.⁶ Diodorus calls them "βασιλεύσαντες" which means "the reigning" and defines their power as "αρχή", although researchers point out that Diodorus modernised the past by calling Archaeanaktids and Spartocids kings, which they were not, despite the aristocratic nature of their rule.⁷ It is possible that the Crimean cities of [Nymphaeum](#) and [Theodosia](#) left the league during the establishment of the tyranny; they were later annexed to the [Bosporan kingdom](#) by the dynasty of the Spartocids who succeeded the Archaeanaktids on the Bosporan throne.

The reign of the Archaeanaktids was a time of economical flourishing. Cities were founded, old parts of cities were replanned and new temples and altars were constructed along with new defensive structures. A great progress in metallurgy, pottery and jewelry production was achieved. In Pantikapaion a monumental temple of [Apollo](#) was built; this temple became the religious centre of the Bosporan kingdom. Coins with inscriptions such as ΑΠΟΛΑ are supposed to be connected with the temple of Apollo.



Dynasty of the Archaeanactids

3. The origin of the first rulers

The Archaeanaktids were believed to be an aristocratic clan. Archaeanaktos, one of the clan members could have been among the first colonists, or even the founder of Pantikapaion. It is supposed that they originated from [Miletus](#)⁸ or [Mitylene](#),⁹ because the name of Archaianax was found in both cities.¹⁰

Diodorus mentions in his narration that the Archaeanaktids were based in Asia. Some historians considered this as the eastern part of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, where the Greek city of [Hermonassa](#), founded by Semandrus from Mitylene,¹¹ was located. These historians suppose that Archaeanaktus was one of Semandrus' relatives or fellows which proves his Mitylenian origin.¹² Other researchers have stressed that Diodorus meant by Asia the zone of Persian influence, and they assume that this is a proof of the Persian influence on the Bosporan kingdom.¹³

4. Evaluation of the Dynasty

The result of the Archaeanaktids' rule was the consolidation of the Greek poleis under a strong central power in order to defend themselves from Scythian tribes. Thus, an over polis state was founded. All that favoured the peaceful economic development of the cities.

1. Diod. Sic. 12. 31. 1.

2. Cf. scepis about it in: Vasiljev, A.N., "K voprosu o vremeni obrazovanija Bosporskogo gosudarstva", in A.K.Gavrilov et al. (eds.) *Etjudy po antichnoj istorii i kulture Severnogo Prichernomorja* (Sankt-Petersburg 1992) p. 111-128.

3. Herod. 4. 48.

4. Cf. Molev, E.A., *Politicheskaja istorija Bospora VI-IV vv. do n.e.* (Nizhnij Novgorod 1997) p. 36, where the author ascribes indications of fire and destructions not to the Scythians, but to the aggressive politic of the Archaeanaktids.

5. V.F.Gajdukevich, D.P.Kallistov, S.A.Zhebelev, V.D.Blavatskij, D.B.Shelov, T.V.Blavatskaja et al. assumed that the economical necessity was the main reason of the integration of the Bosporan cities.

6. Artamonov, M.I., "K voprosu o proishozhdenii bosporskih Spartokidov", *Vestnik drevnej istorii* 1 (1949) p. 33; Blavatskaja, T.V., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Bospora v V-IV vv. do n.e.* (Moscow 1959) p. 17; Gajdukevič, V.F., *Das Bosporanische Reich* (Berlin 1971) p. 52; Shelov-Kovedjajev, F.V., "Istorija Bospora v VI-IV vv. do n.e.", *Drevnejshije gosudarstva na territorii SSSR. Materialy i issledovanija. 1984 god* (Moscow 1985) p. 70-71 et al.

7. Vinogradov, Ju.G., "Die historische Entwicklung der Poleis des nördlichen Schwarzmeergebiets im 5. Jh. v. Chr.", *Chiron* 10 (1980) p. 68-69; Vasiljev, A.N., "K voprosu o vremeni obrazovanija Bosporskogo gosudarstva", in A.K.Gavrilov et al. (eds.) *Etjudy po antichnoj istorii i kulture Severnogo Prichernomorja* (Sankt-Petersburg 1992) p. 121.

8. Zhebelev, S.A., "Vozniknovenije Bosporskogo gosudarstva", in Zhebelev, S.A. (ed.), *Severnoje Prichernomorje* (Moscow-Leningrad 1953) p. 68-71; Vinogradov, Ju.G., "Die historische Entwicklung der Poleis des nördlichen Schwarzmeergebiets im 5. Jh. v. Chr.", *Chiron* 10 (1980) p. 65-66; Shelov-Kovedjajev, F.V., "Istorija Bospora v VI-IV vv. do n.e.", *Drevnejshije gosudarstva na territorii SSSR. Materialy i issledovanija. 1984 god* (Moscow 1985) p. 70.

9. A.Boeckh in *CIG* 2, 11, p. 91; Blawatsky, W.D. "Zur Herkunft der bosporanischen Archaianaktiden", *Klio* 52 (1970) p. 33-36.

10. For Mitylene see. Strabo 13. 1. 38; Alcaeus Fr. 119 (94).



Dynasty of the Archaeanactids

11. Eustath. *Comm. ad Dionys. Perieg.* 552-553.
12. Blawatsky, W.D. "Zur Herkunft der Bosporanischen Archaianaktiden", *Klio* 52 (1970) p. 33-36
13. Koshelenko, G.A., "Ob odnom svidetelstve Diodora o rannej istorii Bosporskogo tsarstva", in A.V.Podossinov (ed.) *Drevnejshije gosudarstva Vostochnoj Evropy. 1996-1997. Severnoje Prichernomorje v antichnosti: Voprosy istochnikovedenija* (Moscow 1999) p. 138-141.

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Dynasty of the Archaeanactids

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Glossary :

	strategos ("general") During the Roman period his duties were mainly political. Office of the Byzantine state's provincial administration. At first the title was given to the military and political administrator of the themes, namely of the big geographic and administrative unities of the Byzantine empire. Gradually the title lost its power and, already in the 11th century, strategoi were turned to simple commanders of military units, responsible for the defence of a region.
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