



Gylon

Summary :

Gylon, an official or a merchant, born in Athens, lived in the end of the 5th – beginning of the 4th century BC and died in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Having committed treason in respect to Athens, he escaped to the Bosporan kingdom where he played an outstanding role at the court of the local Spartocid dynasty. He was grandfather of the famous Athenian orator Demosthenes.

Date and Place of Birth

Athens, end of 5th century

Date and Place of Death

Bosporus Cimmericus, 4th century

Main Role

Official or merchant

1. Biography

We do not know much about Gylon and his life. The main information comes from the Athenian orator Aeschines,¹ who, as a political enemy of Demosthenes, in his third speech against Ctesiphon in 330 B.C., tried to compromise Demosthenes. According to Aeschines, the grandfather of Demosthenes descended from the Athenian Deme of Kerameikos ("ἐκ Κεραμείων"). During the conflict between Athens and the rulers of the [Bosporan kingdom](#), Gylon handed the city of [Nymphaion](#), situated in the Crimea, over to the enemies. After the denunciation of this fact, the Athenians condemned him to death, and he escaped to Bosphorus. There he got the city of [Kepoi](#) as a gift from the local rulers and got married to a native rich woman of [Scythian](#) origin. From this woman Gylon had two daughters. When they grew up, he sent them to Athens with a generous dowry. One of them (probably called Kleobula) married Paeonian Demosthenes, father of the orator Demosthenes. That is why Aeschines denounces Demosthenes as an enemy of the Athenian state, as his grandfather was condemned by the Athenians, and as a barbarian Scythian speaking Greek, descending from a barbarian mother. Zosimus of Ascalon,² Syrianus,³ a scholiast of Aeschines,⁴ Plutarch⁵ and some other ancient writers would repeat later the same information.

2. Historical background

The narrative about Gylon (under the name "Gylon's treason") gives historians of the Bosporan kingdom grounds for discussions. First of all, this story is an important testimony that Nymphaion – the Greek city on the western shore of the Strait of Kerch near the modern settlement of Geroevka south of the city of Kerch ([Pantikapaion](#)) – was for some time under the jurisdiction of Athens, probably for reasons of controlling the Bosporan [grain trade](#). According to some other literary and epigraphical sources, historians even suppose that Nymphaion paid a tribute (*phoros*), at first one [talent](#),⁶ later, after 425 B.C. – two talents to the [Athenian League](#).⁷ Already U.Koeler in 1870 in the publication of the epigraphic list of contributors of the League in 425 B.C.,⁸ reconstructed the name of Nymphaion in it among some other Pontic cities such as [Tyras](#), Tamyraka, Kimmerikon, [Nikonion](#) etc. All of them entered the Euxine tribute district of the Athenian arche. Annexation of Nymphaion to the Athenian Sea League (or probably even its foundation) could have happened after the expedition of Pericles into [Pontus](#) ca. 438/7 B.C.⁹



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Independence of Nymphaion from the Bosporan kingdom in the last quarter of the 4th century B.C. is confirmed by the beginning of the coinage of Nymphaion just at the time, when the coinage of the individual cities of the Bosporan kingdom ended and the entire coinage was concentrated only in Pantikapaion. Moreover, Nymphaion geographically turned out to be outside the huge Tyritake defence wall, which was built in order to defend the territory of the Bosporan kingdom.

As for the role of Gylon on these events, he was probably a representative of Athens in the Crimean territory, maybe an official agent in purchasing grain that was imported in a great volume from Bosporus. Sometime between 410 and 405 B.C., Gylon could hand over the city to the [rulers of Bosporus](#), who actively expanded their territory.¹⁰ Cessation of independent coinage in Nymphaion at this time can serve as an evidence for this development. Condemned by Athenians to death, Gylon was friendly accepted by the Bosporan king, Satyros I (433/2-393/2 B.C.). After the annexation of Nymphaion at the end of Satyros' life another Greek city of [Theodosia](#), situated southward of Nymphaion, was also incorporated into the territory of the Bosporan kingdom.

We can assume as reliable the account about the offering of the small town of Kepoi to Gylon: it was a common practice in the tyrannic regimes in Sicily, Persia and the Hellenistic world. The [mixed marriages](#) between the Bosporan Greeks and the noble Skythians, who inhabited the territory of the Bosporus, were very likely usual here, so the data about the Scythian wife of Gylon may not be fictitious. Moreover, Aeschines in the other speech addressed directly to Demosthenes calls him "a descendant from the mother which comes of the nomadic Scythians"; Dinarchus calls him "a despicable Scythian".¹¹ The account that Gylon could send his daughters to Greece and have them married to Athenian citizens can be explained by the fact that a policy of mixed marriages (epigamia) existed at that time between Athens and the Bosporus. The great political and financial influence of Gylon in the Bosporus perhaps clarifies the reasons, why his grandson Demosthenes was such a passionate upholder of the Bosporan interests in Athens, getting one hundred medimnoi of the Bosporan grain every year as a gift from the Bosporan rulers.¹²

1. Aeschin. 3. 171-172.

2. Zosim. Ascal. 8. 8.

3. Syrian. *Comm. in Hermogen.* 2. 25.

4. *Schol. ad Aeschin.* 3. 171.

5. Plutarch. *Demosth.* 4.

6. Harpocr. *Lex.* s.v Νυμφαίων with a reference to a certain Krater.

7. In detail and with the literature s. 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. 90–115.

8. *CIA* (Berlin) I 23.

9. A criticism of these opinions s. Zhebelev, S.A., "Afiny, Nimfej i izmena Gilona", in Zhebelev S.A. (ed.), *Severnoje Prichernomorje* (Moscow - Leningrad 1953) p. 180-195; Brashinskij, I.B., "K voprosu o polozhenii Nimfeja vo vtoroj polovine V veka do n.e.", *Vestnik drevnej istorii* 2 (1955) p.



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148-161.

10. Meritt, B.D. - Wade-Gery, H.T. – McGregor, M.F., *The Athenian Tribute Lists 1* (Cambridge Mass. 1939) p. 527.

11. Dinarch. *In Demosth.* 1. 15.

12. Dinarch. *In Demosth.* 1. 15.

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Glossary :

	talent, the
Numismatic weight unit. The silver talent equaled 60 mnai or 6000 silver drachmas.	

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