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PONTUS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Studies in Black Sea History, Historiography, and Archaeology

EDITED BY

C.J. TUPLIN

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PREFACE

The first seven papers in this volume originate from a conference held in Liverpool in January 1997, one of a pair arranged in conjunction with a visit by Dr Andrei Zaikov (Ekaterinburg). (The other was devoted to Sparta – a topic also reflected in two items published here.) The visit was arranged under the auspices of a British Academy programme enabling scholars from the Former Soviet Union to spend time in the United Kingdom. It was, in fact, the second such visit by Dr Zaikov, and I am glad to take this opportunity to acknowledge publicly our gratitude to the Academy for its generous assistance on both occasions. The remaining three papers, added at the suggestion of the series editor, chime so perfectly with the conference theme that it is hard to remember that they were not part of the original fare.

That theme, put simply, is the interaction (necessarily long-distance) between the Black Sea and the world of the Mediterranean Basin. In the modern era contact between many of the areas abutting the Black Sea and the outside world has often been sparse and never straightforward. Times are still difficult in much of this region, but it is heartening that personal communication and the interchange of ideas are at least a bit easier now than they once were.

I should like to extend my thanks to the eight authors, both for their papers and for their patience; to Gocha Tsetskhladze for including the volume in the Colloquia Pontica series; and to the secretarial staff of the School of Archaeology, Classics and Oriental Studies, the University of Liverpool (especially to Jean Bolton) for assistance with the logistical arrangements surrounding the conference and Dr. Zaikov’s visit in general.

It remains only to note that in the pages that follow all dates are BC unless otherwise indicated.

Christopher Tuplin

Liverpool

July 2003
We know very little about contacts between Sparta and Scythia. Herodotus preserved a Peloponnesian tradition about a visit to Sparta by Anacharsis, who formed a most favourable opinion of the Spartans (4. 77. 1-2); and according to the same author a group of Scythian ambassadors went there as well with a proposal for a military alliance against Darius to take revenge on him for invading their country (6. 84. 2). After this embassy (it is alleged) Spartans began to say ‘fill up in Scythian fashion,’ when they wanted to drink stronger wine than usual (6. 84. 3). But there is reason to think that the record of cultural contacts between these two peoples is not exhausted by these cases, and that such influence occurred already in the 7th century.

The only clear indication of such contacts is to be found in a very late source, viz. Philostratus’ Life of Apollonius (a work of the 2nd or 3rd century AD). In a discussion of the flagellation of Spartan boys, Apollonius contends that the practice was part of the cult of Scythian Artemis and claims that the ritual was adopted in Sparta from the Scythians by order of God. It is clear from the context that this Spartan cult of Scythian Artemis is very old (6. 20).

But the value of such testimony is, of course, very much open to doubt and a particular interest therefore attaches to the mention of a ‘Colaxaean steed’ in line 59 of the famous Louvre Partheneion of the Archaic Spartan poet Alcman:

This is Hagesichora here, and the second in beauty after Agido will run like a Colaxaean horse against an Ibenian.

The Partheneion has a reputation for being ‘one of the most enigmatic [texts] in ancient Greek poetry’ (Yarkho 1970, 45), and it has presented scholars with a set of notably difficult questions of a philological, mythological, religious and even astronomical character. Alongside all these problems the comparison between horses and the beautiful girls who participate in the choir and perform this Partheneion does not seem to be a complicated matter at all. What, in fact,
is more natural than likening a long-legged, youthful and sturdy woman with a lively mare, especially in a situation in which the woman is demonstrating not only her beautiful voice, but also (obviously) her graceful dancing? As a rule commentaries on this passage confine themselves to noting that the ‘Colaxaean horse’ may be from Scythia\(^2\) and debating whether or not one horse is implicitly superior to the other (Page 1962, 7; West 1965, 193; Devereux 1965, 176; Campbell 1987, 69-71; Davies 1991, 32).

My purpose in the present paper is to examine this image more closely. There are three main questions:

1. Is the comparison of those performing in the choir (especially Hagesichora and Agido) with horses an ordinary metaphor or is there a deeper sense behind it?
2. Why is one of horses called ‘Colaxaean’? Is this Scythian reminiscence casual or does it have a special point?
3. How did a figure from Scythian folklore come to appear in Sparta at such an early date?\(^3\)

_Hagesichora and Agido in the form of horses_

In the artistic representation of feminine beauty Alcman yields nothing even to Sappho. The radiance of Agido is compared with sun. The hair of Hagesichora has the bloom of undefiled gold, and her face is silver. The girls are like stars rising through the ambrosial night. The song of the choir-leader resembles that of a swan. But the comparison between the most beautiful girls in the choir and horses runs like a thread through the whole of the second half of the poem.

She herself [Hagesichora] seems pre-eminent,
just as if one were to put a horse among grazing herds,
a sturdy, thunderous-hoofed prize-winner,
one of those seen in fleeting dreams.
Why, don’t you see? The race-horse is Venetic. (45-51)

This is Hagesichora here;
and the second in beauty after Agido
will run like a Colaxaean horse against an Ibenian. (57-59)

\(^2\) ‘Colaxaean’ evidently refers to Colaxais, the first Scythian king in the legend on the origin of Scythians (Hdt. 4. 5-7).

\(^3\) Alcman most probably lived in the 7th century (Page 1951, 166; Bowra 1961, 19). But cf. West 1965, 188.
For is not fair-ankled
Hagesichora present here? (78-79)

For the trace-horse... (92)

The horse appears first of all as something seen in fleeting dreams
(ὑποπτεριδίων ὀνείρων).

Then three different breeds are named – Venetic (presumably from the northern Adriatic, in the area of modern Venice), Colaxaean (presumably from Scythia), and Ibenian (from Lydia) (Bolton 1962, 43; Devereux 1965, 176; Campbell 1988). All three horses are foreign, and it is particularly interesting that the Scythian horse is identified by the name of its legendary owner. It seems that all these horses are legendary or mythical, rather than real breeds. But if this presumption is correct, some sort of ritual must lie hidden behind this mythological image, because the text that we are considering is far from being a piece of ‘pure’ literature.

Alcman’s Partheneion belongs to a specific genre of archaic Spartan poetry. These ‘Maidens’ Songs’ were a type of hymn performed during national festivals in honour of a particular deity (or deities) and made up of three compositional elements: 1) a mythological part recounting the exploits of respected Spartan heroes; 2) the gnome – a didactic aphorism warning mortals against pride; and 3) a folklore-style song which included girlish bragging, glorification of one’s friends and defiance of one’s adversaries. The song was performed just once and presupposed a particular cast, whose names were put into the text. The surviving text quite clearly evokes the atmosphere of a contest (agon), and it is obvious that the performance of such songs – and of the dances that went with them – was part of some sort of festival competition.

Since the first half of the mythological section (which itself made up just half of the whole Partheneion) has not been preserved and the second half survives in a poor condition (Yarkho 1970, 47), the identity of the divinity to whom the Partheneion was dedicated remains an open question. It is usually reckoned that Artemis Orthia or the Dioscuri are the most probable addressees (Farina 1950; Page 1951; Garzya 1954; Pavese 1967, 113; cf. Garvie 1965, 4

Campbell’s translation of this phrase is ‘rock-sheltered dreams’ (1988, 69-71) and West (1965, 195) speaks of dreams which ‘lurk under shady rocks.’ But Page (1951, 166; 1962, 3) adduces a parallel passage from Etymologicum Magnum to justify the translation ‘fleeting dreams’ (Etym. Mag. 783, 24: οὐποτεριδίων οὕποτεριδίων), and LSJ, basing itself upon the same passages (Alcman and Etym Mag.), understands οὐποτεριδίως as ‘winged.’ (Calame 1983, ad loc. agrees; Brown 1986: 345 notes that doubts remain).
185-7), and the appearance of the name Polydeuces in the first surviving line and of the word ὅρθρια in line 61 do make this assumption seem very plausible.

But there is another obvious fact which has to be taken into account, viz. that the names of the dead sons of Hippocoon are listed in lines 3-9. Hippocoon was the mythical king of Sparta who took the throne away from his younger brother Tyndareus, the father of Castor and Polydeuces. Tyndareus managed to recover his royal status with the help of Heracles, who fought two battles against Hippocoon and his sons. On the first occasion they forced Heracles to retreat and even wounded him. Such an exploit deserved special honour in the local Laconian tradition and, in fact, according to the scholiast on Clement of Alexandria’s Protrepticus, Alcman mentioned the fact that Heracles was wounded by the sons of Hippocoon in Book 1 (schol. Clem. Alex. Protr. 36. 2). Only in the second war was Heracles able to kill Hippocoon and his sons and restore Tyndareus to Sparta (E. Her. 740-742; Paus. 3. 19. 7, 20. 5; 8. 53. 9).

In the Partheneion the names of these Laconian heroes are consistently accompanied by positive epithets: ‘swift-footed’, ‘helmeted’, ‘lord’, ‘outstanding among demigods’, ‘great’, ‘the gatherer [sc. of the army]’, and – above all – ‘the best of their kind’ (11: τῶν ὅρθριων). (τὸν βιατάν in 4 might appear to be an exception, but Yarkho [1970, 47-9] convincingly argued that the interpretation ‘violent’ favoured by Page, Garzya and Campbell cannot be accepted. The correct translation in the present context is ‘powerful’ or ‘mighty’). Moreover when Pausanias visited Sparta in the 2nd century AD he was shown the graves of the sons of Hippocoon (3. 14. 6-7; 15. 2) – evidence which makes it hard to doubt that there was a Spartan cult of these heroes as hemisioi (demi-gods). Finally, there is the phrase οὐκ ἐγὼν Λύκαθον ἐν καὶ κοιμῶν ἀλέγω [Ἐνω]ροφόρον... in l. 2 of Alcman’s poem. This was translated by Page as ‘among the dead, I make no reckoning of Lycaethus, [but] of Enarsphorus...’, and by Campbell as ‘I do not reckon Lycaethus among the dead but Enarsphorus...’. But Marzullo (1964, 176 ff.) convincingly argues that the verb ἀλέγω can have a another meaning in Alcman’s text, viz. ‘to glorify’ or ‘hold sacred’, so that the phrase can be translated: ‘among the dead I do not hold sacred Lycaethus [about whom nobody knows anything], but Enarsphorus...’

In the light of all of this one can suggest that Alcman’s Partheneion was designed for performance at a festival in honour of either the sons of Hippocoon or the Dioscuri – or, maybe, that the festival was connected in general with all the Spartan heroes of ancient times.
One feature of the situation which demands attention in this connection is that the Dioscuri (and particularly Castor) were honoured in Sparta as ‘horse-tamers’ or ‘horsemen’ and were sometimes shown in Spartan art leading or riding horses (Fitzhardinge 1980, 78). Now, Hippocoon’s name is obviously connected with horses and the girls who sing about his sons in Alcman’s choir are emphatically likened to legendary horses. Is this all mere coincidence?

The mythological, ritual and fairy-tale figure of the horse has a set of essential features which are common to people in different parts of the world. Large numbers of studies of all sorts of religious material have unanimously proved that, whether in myth, fairy-tale or ritual, the horse is above all a death-dealing animal associated with funerals and burial-places (Propp 1986, 171-6; Golan 1993, 48-50). The ceremony of burying a dead warrior together with his horse existed among ancient Greeks, Romans, Germans and Celts, as well as in mediaeval France and among many other peoples, and is encountered in its most vivid form in Scythian burial-mounds, e.g. in the Pazyryk tumulus where excavation uncovered the horses that drew the funerary chariot. Social anthropologists have described the ritual dedication of a horse to the deceased which prevailed among Ossetian and other Caucasian peoples. In earlier times burials in the Caucasus ended with horse-races; and Homer describes the same rite in his account of Patroclus’ burial in Iliad 13. It is interesting that Sophocles’ native deme was called Kolonos (‘mound’), because there was a barrow there known as kolonos hippios or ‘Horse Tumulus’ (Paus. 1. 30. 4). On Greek tombstones one often finds pictures of the deceased together with a horse (Negelein 1901, 378; Rohde 1910, 241; Himmelmann 1999, 21-30, Abb. 2, 15). In this connection it is reasonable to suppose that the wooden horse left by the Greeks under the walls of Troy as a gift to Athena was nothing but an epic re-interpretation of the ritual of placing the figure of a horse on the graves of fallen warriors.

The tradition was known in Laconia too, as is shown (first of all) by the large earthenware mixing bowl (or amphora) with a relief representation of a procession of chariots and soldiers which was found by C.A. Christou in 1960 in its original position in a group of graves at Sparta (Fitzhardinge 1980, 52-3). Then there are three Archaic Laconian cups (by the so-called Rider Painter) preserved in the Hermitage, Louvre and British Museum collections: they all show the same subject – a youth on a horse, with attendant spirit and birds – and its religious significance is quite obvious: the horseman is a deceased hero (Valdgauer 1914, 56; Stibbe 1974, 19-20; Pipili 1987, 76). Again, Herodotus reports that in Sparta horsemen carried the news of a King’s death to all parts of Laconia
Andreev (1969, 29) assumes the term *hippees* should be understood here as referring, not to ordinary horse-borne messengers, but to members of the famous Spartan corps of 300 youths (*neaniskoi or koroi*), who were known as ‘horsemen’. These *hippees* did not actually ride horses (Strabo 10. 4. 18), and in historic times nobody knew why they had such a strange title, but Jeanmaire was obviously right to assign a religious and mystic character to this corps (1939, 547).

Greek mythology also shows a definite connection between the horse and death. For example, the terrible horses belonging to the war-god Ares are the children of Boreas, the god of the North wind, who dwells in a place of eternal cold and fog. The horses of Achilles were the offspring of Zephyr and the Harpy who abducts the souls of mortals. Among her other functions, Hecate, the chthonic goddess of darkness, helps people to breed horses. The ‘terrible steed’ Areion (*II. 23. 346*) resulted from the union of Poseidon in the shape of a stallion and Demeter Erinys in that of a mare (Paus. 8. 25. 7-8) – and *Erinys* means ‘she who avenges’, that is, by guarding the interests of the dead. Each chariot-race that Oenomaus organised ended with the death of his rival, until he himself perished in the competition against Pelops. The horses of Autonoos trampled his son to death, while those of the Thracian king Lycurgus mauled their own master. Another Thracian king, Diomedes, fed his horses on human flesh but was eventually himself fed to his equine man-eaters by Heracles. Finally, the Laconian Dioscuri, who take turns to live in the Kingdom of the Dead and on Olympus and who thus symbolise the eternal periodic succession of life and death, are worshipped as horse-tamers and protectors of horsemen.

The world of Russian fairy-tales is no less eloquent on this topic. Here the hero often gets the horse that will help him in his adventures from his father out of a ‘grave; or he obtains it from a deep ‘cellar’ or a mountain which he has to dig up – so it is really neither a cellar nor a mountain, but a crypt or vault (Propp 1986, 174).

The colour of mythical horses has a definite significance as well. Propp (1986, 175) notes that, although horses in fairy-tales can be all sorts of colours, *there is a noticeable predominance of red and white ones. The appearance of white is no accident, since it is the colour appropriate to creatures that have lost their corporeal nature. In the Book of Revelation the attribute of death is a ‘pale horse,’ and the Greeks had a rule of only sacrificing white horses (Stengel 1905, 212; for an example, see Braund’s paper in this volume, p. 20). On the other hand, the colour white can also signify the radiance of a magic horse – a horse which is not simply white, but silver. In Russian fairy-tales his colour is defined by
the words ‘every strand of wool is silver’. In a Yakut myth the hero sits on a pure white horse with silver wings. This radiance can also be transmitted by the colour red. On Russian icons of Saint George fighting the dragon, for example, the horse is always either white or flame-red. The reason is that there is another basic principle apart from death involved in the complex figure of the mythical horse, viz. fire or (sometimes) the sun. This fundamental association between horses and fire can be seen very clearly in the Indian god Agni and (where Greek material is concerned) in the chariot of Helios.

The funerary aspect of the mythical horse is thus somewhat curiously interwoven with his solar, cosmic and celestial aspect. The association with heaven manifests itself in the ability of fairy-tale horses to fly. In Russian tales we have the ‘Grey-Brown’ and the ‘Little Hunchback’, in Yakut myth a white horse with silver wings, and in Greece Pegasus and all the horses attached to the chariots of the gods. Pelops had winged horses too (Pi. Ol. 1.67-88); and there are pictures of winged horses on the votive lead figures and ivory combs from the Spartan temple of Orthia.

Let us now return to Alcman’s Partheneion. When Agido appears for the first time (40), she has the radiance and brightness of the sun – and is perceived as its embodiment. Then Hagesichora appears, and her hair looks as though it is made of pure gold, while her face is silver. Since Hagesichora is also compared to a beautiful mare, the association between the girl’s luxuriant hair and a golden horse mane is natural, while the colour of her face is seen in terms of the blinding silver colour of a horse. At the same time line 49 strengthens the other-worldly and heavenly association, for this ‘thunderous-hoofed prize-winner’ belongs to the world of ‘fleeting dreams’ (ὑποπτηριδίων ὄνείρων).

There can be no doubt therefore that Alcman’s choice of marvellous horses as a comparison for those participating in the festival choir was no accident. This beautiful metaphor has a clear mythological and, probably, ritual significance. I am inclined to think that the Partheneion was linked to an ancestor-cult and to the practice of honouring the ancestors’ graves. It was created for a Laconian religious festival at which the Spartans glorified the heroes of old and mounted choral and dance competitions in their honour. It is very plausible that these heroes were Hippocoon and his sons.

In this connection I should like to make a further observation. In Greek religion the horse is often one of the attributes of the ‘hero’ – originally a term designating a local deity (and object of worship), but then applied more generally to deceased men who receive posthumous cult (Negelein 1901, 378). Moreover it is possible that the deceased hero himself was originally conceived in the image of a horse
(Propp 1986, 173). This assumption accords very well with the rich horse-related onomastic material in Greek heroic myths. Pausanias, describing a sculpture by Phidias, mentions among other heroic figures a man named *Hippeus*, standing next to his horse (Paus. 1. 33. 8). In Arcadia Odysseus was associated with the cult of Poseidon Hippios at Pheneus (where he had come in search of some lost mares): in Pausanias’ day one was shown a statue which was allegedly dedicated by Odysseus to Poseidon and which carried an inscription purporting to record Odysseus’ instructions about the mares (Paus. 8. 14. 5). Not far from Mantinea there was a place where horses raced and also a sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios, which no mortal was allowed to enter. When Aepytus, son of Hippothous, dared to do so he was struck blind and died soon afterwards (Paus. 8. 5. 5; 10. 2-3). At Olympia Hippodameia (the wife of Pelops) had a tomb and a sacred place – the Hippodameium – which the women entered once a year to perform sacrifices and other rites in her honour. According to the myth Hippodameia had been the cause of many deaths – those of the numerous suitors killed by her father Oenomaus during horse-races. Eventually it was Pelops’ turn and he destroyed Oenomaus together with Myrsilus, the king’s charioteer, whose professional trick helped him win the deadly chariot-race (Apollod. 2. 3-9). Hippodameia became his wife and bore him two sons (Atreus and Thyestes) – who subsequently killed Pelops’ existing son (Chrysippus) at their mother’s instigation (Paus. 6. 20. 7). In the hippodrome at Olympia there was an altar of *Taraxippos*, the terror of the horses. The identity of the dedicatee of this altar was much debated and Pausanias lists a number of versions: some said a hero was buried at the spot, others a hero together with his horse, but all versions are united on one point – the deceased turned into a hostile deity (οὐκ ἐμενῆς δαίμων) who harmed the horses during races in the hippodrome and caused many deaths. Charioteers therefore offered sacrifices at the altar in an effort to calm his anger. Similar local deities with the same name were known in other parts of Greece as well, e.g. at the Isthmus, where according to legend a Taraxippus was killed by his horses in a race at some funeral games (Paus. 6. 20. 15-19).

Such examples could easily be multiplied. All of them – and particularly the altar of Taraxippos – lead one to imagine that the high incidence of horse-related names in Greek mythology is based on something of a ritual character. Where we meet mythological names with the element -hippo-, we can postulate a generalised image of the local hero-dead – something akin to the Roman *Lares*. If this is right, the word *hippos* may in the distant past have served as the common designation of an ancestor whose grave was revered as a local sacred place. The
graves of the sons of Hippocoon at Sparta (Paus. 3. 14. 6-7; 15. 2) are a perfect confirmation of this conjecture.

Lines 60-63 of the Partheneion contain the following sentence: ‘for the Pleiades, as we carry a plough to Orthria, rise through the ambrosial night like the star Sirius and fight against us’. On this basis people often conclude that the poem was meant for performance during a festival of Artemis Orthia. But this actually confirms my own conjecture. M.P. Nilsson showed that the goddess Artemis in her earliest, pre-Greek form was a goddess of death (Nilsson 1955, 428). So it is not impossible that the cult of some local dead heroes (viz. the sons of Hippocoon) was combined here with worship of the oldest goddess of death and thus became the part of the cult of Artemis Orthia.

**Why is the horse Colaxaean?**

So, the horses in the Alcman’s Partheneion fulfil a very important mythological and ritual function. The first is named keles Enetikos, the second hippos Ibenos, the third hippos Kolaxaios. Keles Enetikos could mean a horse from Paphlagonia (Asia Minor), for according to Homer a tribe of Veneti lived there in the distant past (Il. 2. 852). But it is more probable that it comes from the northern Adriatic, the land of an immigrant Venetic people who came originally from Asia Minor (Strabo 1. 3. 21; 12. 38, 25; 13. 1. 53). Strabo tells us that in earlier times the Greeks thought highly both of Venetic horses and of the skill displayed by the Veneti in rearing and training them (Strabo 5. 1. 4). The hippos Ibenos is normally treated as a horse of Celtic or of Ionian/Lydian origin (Devereux 1965, 176; West 1965, 196; Puelma 1977, 29, 32). Hippos Kolaxaios is the horse of the Scythian king Colaxais. In other words all three horses are foreign, not Greek.

Skrzhinskaya tried to connect all of them with Asia Minor and explained the connection in terms of the superiority of Asian breeds of horse to European ones (1991, 56). On this view the poet’s words simply show a commonplace preference for foreign, high-quality goods. But in my opinion there is an entirely different and much more important issue, viz. that all the horses are from overseas—because this fact also turns out to be connected with the cult of dead heroes.

Among the Greeks there was a belief that Elysium (or the Isle of the Blessed) was situated somewhere far away in the Ocean (Hes. Op. 166-173; Pi. Ol. 2. 71-73). Odysseus had to sail across the Ocean to get to the entrance of Hades (Od. 10. 508), and it is interesting that, according to Homer, this entrance was not

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5 See also scholia B to the Partheneion (P. Oxy. 2389 fr. 6 i).
far from the land of the Cimmerians (Od. 11. 10-20; cf. Strabo 1. 2. 9), i.e. somewhere on the northern side of the Black Sea. It is well known that Greek ideas about the after-life were not uniform and comprised elements of differing date (Hommel 1981, 60-2). For example, alongside a basic belief that the souls of the dead dwelled in Hades there survived an older – perhaps pre-Greek – idea that certain elect heroes after their death were transported to Elysium. Our sources name the Spartan king Menelaus and his wife Helen among these elect heroes (Od. 4. 561-569). It is very interesting that already in the 7th century Greek literature assigns to Elysium (Isle of the Blessed) an extremely precise geographical location. Proclus (who is paraphrasing an early epic, the Aethiopis) has the following statement in his account of Achilles’ death: ‘Thetis snatches her son [sc. Achilles] away from the sacrificial fire and transports him to Leuke Nesos’ – i.e. the White Island (Chrestom. 172). According to Pindar Thetis took Achilles to Elysium (Ol. 2.79-80), but in another passage the same poet says that Achilles has ἐν δὲ Εὐξεῖνῳ πέλαγει φαεννάν νῆσον – a ‘radiant island in the Euxine sea’ (Nem. 4.49-50). This makes it obvious that Pindar identified Elysium with Leuce, a small island in the north-western Black Sea near the mouth of the Danube. Euripides also mentions Leuce as Achilles’ dwelling place (Andr. 1260-1262); and Pliny explicitly notes that it was also known as the Island of the Blessed (eadem Leuce [insula] et Macaron apellata: HN 4. 93).

This geographical identification of the White Island with Elysium arose very early. Even if we leave aside the fact that Odysseus enters Hades not far from the land of Cimmerians, Aethiopis (the poem quoted by Proclus) is ascribed to Arctinus of Miletus and, although the dates for his akme in Eusebius and the Suda (first and ninth Olympiad, respectively) seem too early, scholars who connect the poem’s date of composition with Milesian trade and colonisation in the region (starting no later than the middle of the 7th century) may well be right to do so. In any event, the early geographic localisation of Elysium in the Euxine is usually accounted for in terms of sailors returning from the Northern Black Sea with the notion that the small limestone island they had discovered in an otherwise almost islandless sea was identical to the Isle of the Blessed (Hommel 1981, 62-3).

It is also relevant to note that (a) Gruppe (1906, 389, 400) supposed that the Greek name Pontos Euxeinos was connected with Hades and meant ‘hospitably meeting the dead’ – a conjecture which arose from the observation that one of the epithets of Hades is Polyxenos⁶ – and (b) the name Leuce is very significant.

⁶ A.PV 157; fr. 228 Radt. See also Tolstoy 1918, 158; Hommel 1981, 68-9; Skrzhinaskaya 1991, 23.
since (as we saw earlier when discussing the colour of horses) a white or radiantly silver colour betokens death, because it is the colour of bodiless beings.

So the foreign character of Alcman’s horses is not just a meaningless poetic device. On the contrary it had a particular significance for those who took part in the festival at which the Partheneion was performed. The point was not that these breeds were swifter or more beautiful or more expensive. What mattered was that these horses, at the same time both bewitching and terrible, were connected with ‘the other world’.

In the light of everything that has been said, the horse of the Scythian king Colaxais turns out to be a very important figure in Alcman’s festival choir. Nor is it just a matter of its coming from a far-off foreign land in the vicinity of Elysium and the entrance of Hades. The figure of Colaxais himself is essential as well. His name is encountered in ancient authors just three times: in Alcman’s Partheneion and the scholion (B) on the fragment in P.Oxy. 2389 fr. 6 i; in Herodotus’ account of the Scythian ethnogonic legend (4. 5-7); and in the Argonautica of the 1st century AD Roman author Valerius Flaccus (6. 48-68), where it appears in the Latin form Colaxes.

In his account of the Scythians’ own version of their national origins, Herodotus names three brothers, who became the ancestors of the Scythian tribes: Lipoxais, Arpoxais and Colaxais. All of these names include the element -xais and this is generally agreed to come from the Iranian xšaya – ‘master’, ‘lord’, ‘king’ (Raevskii 1977, 62). In studies by Abaev (1949, 242-3; 1965, 39-40) and Grantovskii (1960, 7-9) the name of Lipoxais is etymologised as ‘the Mountain King’, that of Arpoxais as ‘the Deep King’, and (the one that interests us most) that of Colaxais as ‘the Sun King’ – from an assumed Iranian *Hvar-xšaya. This etymology, together with a number of other observations, allowed Grantovskii to advance and Raevskii (1977, 110-8) to develop the hypothesis that in Scythian mythology there existed the idea of a tripartite cosmic model in which Colaxais is an incarnation of the upper – heavenly and solar – zone. His fiery and solar essence also manifests itself in the fact that he is the one who gets the gold sacred objects which fell from the sky and which caught fire when his elder brothers tried to approach them. In Valerius Flaccus’ tale (6. 46-59, 621-656) ‘Colaxes’ has fiery-red attributes; and it should be recalled that Alcman’s Hagesiclora (who is likened to Colaxais’ horse) has a silver face and gold hair, while Agido is compared with the sun.

Raevskii (1977, 110-8) has undertaken an interesting and largely persuasive attempt to reconstruct the Scythian religious festival of which Herodotus gives a brief account in 4. 7. The main feature of this festival was the ritual dream of
the man who has possession of the Scythian sacred gold: he was fated to die in
the course of the following year but in the meantime was given as much land
as he could cover on horseback in a day. Dumézil (1941, 221) and Artamonov
(1947, 7-8) long ago conjectured that the man who slept with the Scythian sacred
gold was acting as a ritual substitute for the real Scythian king. Raevskii goes
further and sees here a ritual representation of the fate of the first owner of the
gold relics, i.e. Colaxais. The motif of Colaxais’ death is also unambiguously
present in the poem of Valerius Flaccus, where he is killed by Jason and where
– interestingly – his horse perishes first, as though predicting its rider’s death
(6. 621-656, esp. 638-640). Raevskii very ingeniously associates this passage
with the famous comb from Solokha on which two warriors (a rider and a foot-
soldier) are represented attacking a third: his fate is sealed – and his horse has
already been killed.7

Alcman’s allusion to the Colaxaean horse is an additional support for Raevs-
kii’s reconstruction, and he concludes that Colaxais (the king ritually doomed to
die), the horse, and the sun are all different incarnations of the same Scythian
religious and ritual subject. It should be added that the ritual function of horses
in Scythian burial rites is very well established, especially by evidence from the
so-called Royal Kurgans of the Dnieper region.8

So far as the present study is concerned the most important thing is the
probable link between the mythical (and ritual) king and death. If this assumption
is correct, the allusion to Colaxais’ horse is an unusually successful poetical and
ritual conception on the part of the Spartan poet. Earlier on we established that
Alcman’s Partheneion was connected with a funeral cult of local heroes. The
ghostly silver horse of a foreign (in fact an other-worldly) hero links the ancient
kings and demigods of Sparta with the other world – both with Elysium and with
Hades. That world lies somewhere beyond the sea on the edge of oikoumene
– a region variously identified as the home of Hippemolgoi (‘mare-milkers’: Il.
13. 5-6), Scythians (Hesiod fr. 150 M-W; Strabo 7. 3. 7) or Cimmerians (Strabo
1. 2. 9; Callim. Aetia 252; cf. Od. 11. 10-20). But Alcman’s new image could
only work on one condition – that the girls who were singing the song and the
other people taking part in the ritual recognised Colaxais at the first mention of
his name. And so we come to the third of the questions posed at the beginning of
this study.

7 For illustrations of the Solokha comb see, for example, Piotrovskii et al. 1987, pls. 128-129;

8 It is interesting that in Scythian religion and myth the horse seemingly replaces the older deer.
The horses harnessed to the funeral chariot at Pazyryk have golden deer masks with horns.
How did a figure in Scythian mythology appear in Sparta?

The problem is one of chronology. Scythian archaeological culture was completely formed in the Northern Black Sea area only during the second half of the 7th century. Before that date it is unknown (in its finished form), whether in that region or anywhere else. Of course, the formation of an archaeological culture and the emergence of a people are two quite different things. Both the classical tradition and Near Eastern sources allow us to postulate a Scythian presence in the Northern and Eastern Black Sea areas in the late 8th or early 7th century. All the same the appearance of a figure from Scythian mythology in a poem by a Spartan poet who lived in the second half of the 7th century seems a very remarkable thing. Bolton and a series of later scholars think this image was a reminiscence from the Arimaspeia of Aristeas of Proconnesus (Bolton 1962, 43, 181; Devereux 1965, 176; West 1965, 193). But – whatever one’s precise view of the status of this poem (cf. Stephanie West’s paper in this volume) – this view strikes me as absolutely incredible, because the genre represented by Alcman’s maiden-songs is immeasurably distant from that of such storehouses of mythological lore as, for example, the Odes of Pindar. For his success Alcman depended on being comprehensible to both performers and audience. The imagery in his works had to be recognisable even by those Spartans who had not the slightest idea that Aristeas existed.

Skrzhinskaya takes a different point of view, using Alcman’s Lydian origin as her starting point. The poet’s childhood and youth probably belong in the mid-7th century – just the period at which the Scythians were in the Near East. The image of the mythical Scythian king Colaxais became known to Alcman in Sardis and later on he imported childhood memories into lines written during his Laconian period. But this elegant idea is vulnerable to criticism for the same reason as before: the people who sang, danced and were present at the festival in Sparta had to understand all the allusions which the poem contained. Yet the reference to the Colaxaean horse is as fleeting as the horse itself: clearly in Sparta of Alcman’s day they knew something about Colaxais.

There is another consideration which forces me to reject Skrzhinskaya’s idea. The versions of the myth about Colaxais’ origins in Herodotus and in Valerius Flaccus both have a strictly local rather than ethnic character. This is also true of other versions of the Scythian ethnogonic myth9 – all of them insist that

the ancestors of the Scythian tribes descended from a nymph who belonged somewhere or other in the northern or eastern Black Sea region. In other words, Colaxais is clearly a local hero, and it is not impossible that the Scythians adopted him from the aboriginal population when they first arrived in this part of the world.

* * *

All of the material which we have examined leads me, therefore, to the following conclusion. Alcman’s famous Louvre Partheneion displays obvious features of a funeral ritual. The heroes who were celebrated in this festival were most probably the sons of Hippocoon. The common assumption that the girls were servants of the cult of Artemis Orthia (who is mentioned in the poem) does not contradict my conclusion if we bear in mind the ancient chthonic character of this goddess. Worship of heroes with ‘hippo-’ names could quite easily be part of the cult of Artemis. The most curious aspect of the situation is the knowledge of Colaxais (a figure of Scythian mythology) and of his horse amongst mid-7th century servants of this cult which we find reflected in Alcman’s verses. One should add that Alcman – and probably his audience – knew other Scythian figures as well. For example, according to Stephanus of Byzantium, the Scythian tribe of the Issedonians was mentioned in one of Alcman’s poems (s.v. Issedones = Alcman fr. 156). Establishing the fact of this familiarity with Scythian material is really more important than what may now be hopeless attempts to define precisely the route by which one particular figure found its way into Spartan poetry.

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