

TRACING CULTS IN AEGEAN THRACE: THE EVIDENCE OF PERSONAL NAMES

In a pioneering article published in 1851, the French scholar J.-A. Letronne argued forcibly and persuasively over the importance of personal names —and, especially, of theophoric ones— as an additional means to a better understanding of ancient Greek cults. His ingenious remark that a name such as *Μανδρόδωρος* could be nothing but theophoric led to the recovery of an otherwise unattested oriental god Mandros and at the same time raised the profile of a discipline that often appeared trivial and unrewarding.² In our own times, the publication of the fundamental and justly renowned *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* —of which the fourth volume covering northern Greece has just appeared— gave a new impetus to Letronne's approach; an article published in 2002 by Robert Parker and entitled "Theophoric Names and the History of Greek Religion" was just a first and telling example of these new possibilities.³ A similar approach to the anthroponymic material of Aegean Thrace —that is the part of Thrace included between the lower courses of the Nestos and Hebros rivers, the Rhodope mountains and the Aegean sea— has just been made possible through the recent publication of the *Corpus* of the almost 500 inscriptions of the region, a joint collaboration of the Centre of Greek and Roman Antiquity of the National Hellenic Research Foundation with the 19th Ephorate of Antiquities in Komotini.⁴ A prosopographical and anthroponymic database was therefore compiled, which was further enriched with all the relevant material offered by inscriptions found outside Thrace but pertaining to the region, with the names of magistrates preserved on coins and with those mentioned by ancient Greek and Latin authors. This database, which currently consists of almost 700 names for 1,300 individuals and covers a period from the beginning of the 6th c. BC to late antiquity, will form the subject of a volume that will be published in the near future as a companion to the *Corpus*; but in the meantime, some first remarks pertaining to the particular category of the theophoric names will be presented here.

Personal names that can be qualified as theophoric are basically those formed as simple derivatives or as compounds from names of gods and goddesses (such as *Διονυσᾶς* or *Διονυσόδωρος*) or from their cult epithets (such as *Πυθίων* or *Πυθόδωρος*). According to this qualification, theophoric names in Aegean Thrace amount to 136 (that is almost 19 % of the total) with 403 occurrences (almost 31 % of the total); the gods represented are Apollo (27 names for 78 persons), Dionysos (9/61), Mother of the Gods (9/40), followed by those of Hera (17/36) and Zeus (15/37), Heracles (4/20), Hermes (12/18), Athena (7/17), Artemis (6/15), Dioscourai (1/12), Egyptian Gods (4/10), Poseidon (3/9), Demeter and Hekate (2/8), Aphrodite (3/6), Asclepius (4/6), Men and the Nymphs (3/6), Bendis (2/4), Hestia (1/3) and Mandros (2/3). In order to investigate the relevance of these names to the different cults of the region, I would like to comment briefly on three groups, for which we possess a differing amount of evidence: (I) names related to Apollo and Dionysos, the two most important deities of Aegean Thrace according to all literary, epigraphic and numismatic evidence; (II) those connected to Hera, a cult for which we possess only circumstantial evidence; and

¹ National Hellenic Research Foundation, Centre of Greek and Roman Antiquity.

² Letronne 1851, 1-139 = 1885, 1-126, esp. 38-49. Letronne's contribution to the awakening of onomastic studies has recently been pointed out by Elaine Matthews in her introduction to *GPN*, 2-4.

³ See *LGP* vol. 1-IV; for Parker's article, see *GPN*, 53-79.

⁴ *IThrAeg*; in the present article, numbers preceded by an E (for inscriptions) and a T (for literary sources) refer to this *Corpus*.

(III) those connected to Hermes and the Nymphs, both mentioned in a literary source, the authenticity of which has been justly doubted by modern editors.

I. In the two most important cities of Aegean Thrace, that is Abdera —a colony first of Clazomenians and then of Teians just east of the Nestos estuary— and Maroneia —further east on the coast and close to the Ismaros mountain— the most important cult, at least during the Archaic and Classical periods, seems to have been that of Dionysos. In respect to Abdera, the supremacy of Dionysos's cult over that of Apollo has been debated for a long time because of contradictory information in our sources. In the famous inscription usually referred to as *Teiorum dirae* (Τηίων ἀραι) and dated at the first half of the 5th c. BC we learn of the celebration of Anthesteria at both Abdera and her mother-city Teos, while inscriptions of the Hellenistic period mention the Dionysia and the theatre of Dionysos, where foreigners were honoured and honorary decrees set up (*IThrAeg* TE84, E7, l. 23 and E8, l. 32-33). On the other hand, a first reference to Ἀπόλλων Δηρηνός in Pindar's second Paean, dated to the beginning of the 5th c. BC, is followed by a blank in our sources till the middle of the 4th century, when Apollo's head appears on the reverse of the city's coinage.⁵ In recent years, after a closer analysis of all relevant material, scholars have started expressing the view that there has been a shift in the importance of these two cults —from that of Dionysos to that of Apollo— and that this shift was closely related to the establishment of Macedonian control somewhere around the middle of the 4th c. BC.⁶ At Maroneia, the cult of Dionysos remained important throughout antiquity, though here too it seems to have been gradually combined with new ones introduced during the Hellenistic and Roman periods; in a series of honorary inscriptions dating from the imperial times, the priest of what seems to have been the most important cult during that period is mentioned as follows: Ἱερεὺς Διὸς καὶ Ρώμης, and then, Διονύσου καὶ Μάρωνος (*IThrAeg* E188-E198 and p. 330-31).

Even if all relevant information was lacking, personal names alone would suffice to prove the particular importance of both these cults; as noted above, personal names connected to Apollo form the most important group, not only of theophoric but of personal names in general,⁷ followed by those of Dionysos.⁸ But a closer —even if cursory— look at the chronological distribution of the cases related to Abdera and Maroneia might help us throw some additional light to the information offered by other sources.

A gradual diminishing in the presence of personal names connected to Dionysos can indeed be observed at both cities. At Abdera from the 16 relevant occurrences, five date from the period before the middle of the 4th c. BC, 11 to the Hellenistic one up to the 2nd c. BC and none to the Roman. The same picture is more or less duplicated at Maroneia; from the 36 relevant occurrences (35 from the name of the god itself and one from his cult epithet Βάκχιος), two date from the period before the middle of the 4th c. BC, 33 to the Hellenistic one and none to the Roman. The paucity of the first period should not be considered significant if we take into account the fact that, up to this day, no Archaic or Classical remains seem to have been discovered at the site of Hagios Charalampos, where Maroneia of the Hellenistic and Roman times is certainly located; but the picture of the Roman one does permit us to surmise that after the 2nd c. BC Dionysos had stopped being an important source of

⁵ See *IThrAeg* T163 for Pindar and Chryssanthaki-Nagle (2007, 130) for the introduction of the new iconography during period VIII (346/45-336 BC).

⁶ See already Isaac 1986, 83-84 with earlier bibliography and more recently, Chryssanthaki 2001, 400-401.

⁷ Names attested at Aegean Thrace are the following: Ἀπελλᾶς/-ης (4 times), Ἀπολλᾶς (1), Ἀπολλινάριος (1), Ἀπολλόδοτος (5), Ἀπολλόδωρος (13), Ἀπολλωνία (1), Ἀπολλωνίδης (2), Ἀπολλώνιος (17), Ἀπολλωνοφάνης (1) and the fragmentarily preserved Ἀπολλ... (3), Κάρνης (1), Κωμαῖος (2), Φαναῖος (1), Φοῖβος (1), Πυθαγόρας/-ης (2), Πυθέας (2), Πυθῆς (3), Πυθίνης (1), Πυθῆς (1), Πυθίων (1), Πυθόγενης (1), Πυθόγονος (1), Πυθόδωρος (4), Πυθοκλῆς (1), Πυθόνικος (1), Πύθων (4), Πυθώννιος (1) and the fragmentarily preserved Πυθοδ... (1) and Πυθ... (1).

⁸ Names attested at Aegean Thrace are the following: Δεονύς (3), Διονυσᾶς (9), Διονυσία (2) and Διονύσιος (33), Διονυσικλῆς (1), Διονυσόδωρος (4), Διονυσόθεμις (1), Διονυσοφάνης (4), the fragmentarily preserved Διονυσ... (1) and Βάκχιος (2).

inspiration for name-giving in both these cities, thus corroborating what has already been postulated on the evidence of other sources.

An interesting information can also be drawn from names related to Apollo at Abdera. Those formed on the Ἀπελ-/Ἀπολ- root amount to only six, whereof three date to the Classical period and three to the Hellenistic one; compared to the wealth of relative names throughout the ancient Greek world, this is certainly an interesting remark.⁹ But there is one particular group of theophoric names related to this god that shows a quite distinct picture; and this is the group of names formed on his cult epithet as Πύθιος. Indeed, names formed on the Πυθo- root amount to 25, whereof 17 occur at Abdera;¹⁰ of these, 10 date to the Classical period up to the middle of the 4th c. BC and seven to the Hellenistic one. The proof that this should not be dismissed as a coincidence or as an irrelevant detail is to be found in a badly weathered but still legible inscription, which has been found in 1983 and only recently published (E14). This inscription is engraved on a stone that was initially used as an altar or some kind of marker and subsequently as building material for the construction of the Byzantine wall on the Polystylon hill, where the acropolis of ancient Abdera is located. It dates to the end of the 5th c. BC and mentions the name of goddess Hestia followed by the cult epithet of Πυθία, both in genitive and in ionic form. This particular combination is to my knowledge unique, since Πυθία is a cult epithet that seems exclusively associated with Artemis; and inscriptions referring to Hestia and Artemis or the Apolline triad are indeed present in other regions of the ancient Greek world.¹¹ But despite this combination and all its possible explanations, the presence of this cult epithet at Abdera is, I think, enough to support the evidence offered by personal names.

II. In marked contrast to the relative wealth of evidence we possess regarding the cults of Apollo and Dionysos, Hera's presence seems restricted to some Late Roman coins from Plotinopolis and Traianoupolis, probably depicting a cult statue (*IThrAeg* 533 and 575 respectively); however, the relevant theophoric names attested in the region seem to indicate that her cult was an important source of inspiration, since they come only after those related to Apollo, Dionysus and the Mother of the Gods. The names attested in Aegean Thrace are the following: Ἡραγόρας/-ης (4), Ἡραΐννα/-η (2), Ἡραΐς (4), Ἡράκλειτος (3), Ἡρανδρος (1), Ἡρᾶς (1), Ἡρόβουλος (4), Ἡρογείτων (3), Ἡροδότη (1), Ἡρόδοτος (4), Ἡρόδωρος (1), Ἡρόνεστος (2), Ἡρόπυθος (1), Ἡρόστρατος (1), Ἡροφάνης (1), Ἡρόφιλος (2) and Ἡροφῶν (1). Some of them can be qualified as more or less pan-hellenic (such as Ἡραγόρας/-ης, Ἡρόδοτος and Ἡραΐς), others point to the ionic world (such as Ἡρᾶς and Ἡροφῶν); but some deserve a short notice, since they seem to have a strong local character. The name Ἡρόνεστος is attested in two funerary inscriptions of the second half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th c. BC respectively, from the city on the promontory of Molyvoti (*IThrAeg* *E118 and E145), which has been usually identified with Stryme, though not on firm ground. Though it seems to occur for the first time, names that combine that of a deity with that of a river are well attested and usually considered as pointing to the *onomasticon* of Asia Minor (Masson 1985, 21; 1988, 174); moreover, if the presence of the Νεστο-/-νεστος element in the *onomasticon* of a city so close to the homonymous river is absolutely justified, it is important to notice that this element has been combined with the name of Hera. The name Ἡρόπυθος, attested for one of the diseased that Hippocrates visited at Abdera at the end of the 5th c. BC (*IThrAeg* T116), is also quite characteristic; compounded from two distinct elements, the name of one deity and the cult epithet of another — the Πυθo- one, the importance of which has already been stressed for Abdera of the Late Archaic and Classical periods — it shows a characteristic geographical distribution with only five more occurrences in the published volumes of the *IGPN*; two at Chios of the 5th c. BC and three at Kos of the Hellenistic period. Even a name such as Ἡρόβουλος, which seems quite common in its

⁹ See Parker, *GPN*, 62.

¹⁰ Six more are to be found at Maroneia, 1 at Zone and one at the city on the promontory of Molyvoti.

¹¹ See e.g., *IG II²* 4547, coming from the sanctuary of Kephisos in Attica and dating from the beginning of the 4th c. BC.

formation, can be qualified as local, since it occurs only at Aegean Thrace and the near-by island of Thasos.¹²

A closer look at the chronological and geographical distribution of this group can again be instructive. Most of the cases (22/36) belong to the Classical period up to the middle of the 4th c. BC, fourteen to the Hellenistic period and none to the Roman one, showing once again a gradual decline. Their geographical distribution is more even, with thirteen occurrences at Maroneia, twelve at Abdera and eleven at the city on the promontory of Molyvoti; moreover, in this last city, personal names deriving from that of Hera constitute the most important category of theophoric names (eleven versus seven for the Mother of the Gods, six for Apollo, four for Dionysos, three for Artemis, two for Zeus, Demeter, Hecate and the Dioscourai and one for Athena, Poseidon, Hermes and Mandros). The presence of these names in Aegean Thrace, their early date and their diversity – some times even their originality – are all elements that can be interpreted, in our view, as evidence for the importance of Hera's cult in the early history of these cities; and in this respect, it should be reminded that names related to Hera were particularly important at Samos, of course, but also at Chios – which is considered the mother-city of Maroneia – and, to a lesser degree, at Thasos (Parker 2000, 71–73).

III. In a series of letters preserved in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, we learn of a visit of Hippocrates at Abdera, somewhere in the late 5th c. BC, triggered by the concern of Abderites for the health and well-being of their most important citizen, the famous Democritus. In the last letter, Hippocrates describes his encounter with Democritus and at the same time offers some valuable information on the topography of the city; among other things, he mentions a sacred enclosure (τέμενος) of the Nymphs and the fountain of a certain Hermaïs (*IThrAeg* T122). Modern editors consider the letter a fake and it is true that most of the topographical features described in it seem impossible to recognise on the ground. But Lazarides, the first excavator of Abdera and the author of the first synthetic treatise on the site, expressed the view that some of the information in it could be attributed to autopsy (Lazarides 1971, 41 § 206–207). The study of the *onomasticon* of the city can again be offered as a corroboration to Lazarides' view. If names formed on the Νυμφο- radical amount only to six or seven for the entire Aegean Thrace, they all occur at Abdera and date to the Classical period.¹³ Even more telling is the presence in the city of names connected to the cult of Hermes. In Aegean Thrace there are twelve names of this category for 18 occurrences.¹⁴ From these 18 occurrences, only two are to be connected to Maroneia and one to the city on the promontory of Molyvoti; the other 15 come from Abdera and date from the very beginning of the 5th to the 2nd c. BC; here again, no occurrence is dated to the Late Hellenistic or Roman period. A hint to the importance of the cult of Hermes at Abdera can also be offered by the coins and possibly by a fragmentary inscription of the middle of the 5th c. BC, where the name of Hermes Agoraios has been tentatively restituted.¹⁵

As noted by Parker in the article mentioned earlier, “every god was worshipped in every city (or so we should assume, in default of contrary evidence)”; but, he immediately adds, “not with the

¹² See *LGPN* I–IV.

¹³ The famous Nymphodoros mentioned by both Herodotus (7.137) and Thucydides (2.29.1 and 4–7) as a leading Abderite with strong international relations, may be identified to the Nymphodoros occurring in coins of period IV (in 446/45 BC according to recent views, see Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 111–13), but also to Nymphodoros, the father of Artemisia, in a funerary inscription of the second quarter of the 5th c. BC (E32). But other names of the same group are attested at Abdera, see *IThrAeg* E15, E31, TE52 and May 1966, 127, ns 140–41.

¹⁴ Names attested at Aegean Thrace are the following: Ἐρμαγόρης (1), Ἐρμαίς (1), Ἐρμιογένης (1), Ἐρμόδοτος (1), Ἐρμόθεος (1), Ἐρμोकάλλης (1), Ἐρμokraτίδης (1), Ἐρμόστρατος (3), Ἐρμόφαντος (1), Ἐρμιόφιλος (1), Ἐρμων (1) and Ἐρμῶναξ (4).

¹⁵ This god is sporadically depicted on the reverse of silver coins during periods V–VII, but becomes a standard depiction on the obverse of the bronze coins of the city during period XII (end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd c. BC); see Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2007, 275. For the inscription, see *IThrAeg* E13.

same intensity" (Parker 2000, 71). And though conclusions based on the evidence of personal names alone should not be pressed too hard, the juxtaposition of the information offered by theophoric names with that of the literary, epigraphical and numismatic sources seems to be a promising field for further investigation.

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