

## Colchis in the System of the Pontic Kingdom of Mithridates VI

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Following the death of Alexander the Great – in the period of the Diadochi – a number of independent states arose in Asia Minor at the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. Including Bithynia, Cappadocia and the Kingdom of Pontus.

Originally, the Kingdom of Pontus occupied an insignificant area. Its boundaries extended from the Thermodon to Amastria, without access to the Black Sea. In the 180s-70s, in the reign of Pharnaces I, the kingdom expanded appreciably. Pharnaces I succeeded in occupying Sinope, a major trading centre of the Black Sea; he also founded Pharnacia and established close contacts with Hereclea, Cyzicus, Messembria and Odessos (Maksimova, 1955, pp. 179-180). It was in the reign of Pharnaces I that relations of the Kingdom of Pontus with the Kingdom of Colchis started, being limited to trade and economic contacts. These links were carried on through Amisos and Sinope – traditional partners of Colchis. Archeological material shows that the contacts between Sinope and the Kingdom of Colchis became especially intensive in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Among wares discovered on the territory of 2<sup>n</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BC Colchis Sinopean manufacture dominates - amphorae, lutheriai, tiles, etc. They occur both in coastal cities and settlements and in the hinterland as well. (Todua 1990 pp. 45-46). The Kingdom of Colchis was linked to Amisos by trade relations, the latter being a city of Pontus. These contacts strengthened the economic influence of the Kingdom of Pontus.

The measures taken by Pharnaces I laid the foundation of the process of uniting the Black Sea area into a single economic and political system. This process was continued and completed by Mithridates VI Eupator. Ascending the throne in 120 BC, in a brief period of time, he succeeded in incorporating the Black Sea regions.

The Kingdom of Colchis became the first victim of his aggressive moves. The written sources contain a fair amount of evidence on his aggression in Colchis (App., Mithr., 101, Strabo, XI, 2,18; XI. 3,1, 28; Just XXXVIII, 7,10), but these authors fail to indicate the date of his action, which causes the difference of views among researcher. Part of them believe that Mithradates conquered Colchis in 111-110 B.C., prior to the incorporation of the Bosphorus (Lordkipanidze 1970, p.17., Shelov, 1985, p.555). In the view of others, this action took place after 107 B.C., following the annexation of the Bosphoru (Nemirowskii, 1980, pp. 63-70; McGing, 1985, pp. 45-47). In my opinion the coins made in Dioscurias - the residence of Mithradates - may prove a reliable source. The copper coins of Dioscurias are today dated solidly to 105-90 (Golenko, 1977, pp. 59-61). However, I believe that the annexation of Colchis by Mithradates should be assigned to 105-90. The circulation of coins of the Kingdom of Pontus itself began precisely in 105 (Todua, 1990, p. 53). From this time Colchis lost independence and hi was converted into a province Pontus kingdom.

As to the status of Colchis within the system of the Kingdom of Pontus, this is also a moot question in the specialist literature. In the opinion of one part of researchers, Colchis was a satrapy of the Kingdom of Pontus (Reinach 1890, pp. 78., Castagna., 1983, p. 113). Others consider it to have been a vassal country (Janashia, 1949, pp 175-176), the evidence of Strabo, Appian and Memnon is of special significance in elucidating this question. According to Strabo, Mithradates always sent one of his friends as a ruler of Colchis (Strabo, XI, 2,18). Strabo appears to describe the political status of Colchis for the entire period when it was involved in the system of the Kingdom of Pontus. Appian reports of the uprising in Colchis in 83 B.C. the Colchians demanded Mithradates to appoint one of his own sons as their King. He met their demand and Mithradates Philopator Philadelphos became the King of Colchis. The Colchians were pacified. However, Mithradates Eupator was mistrustful of his son's intentions, suspecting that he wanted to seize power, He ordered his son to come to him and soon had him executed (App., Mithr., 64). The realness of the report should not cause doubts, for in one passage the term «Βασιλεα» is used twice rather than «διοικετες» or «υπαρχος».

Apart from this, Appian refers to Mithradates second son Machare, who was ruler of the Bosphorus with the same title (App., Mithr., 67). This allows one to assume that Mithradates the Junior received the title formally but in reality he was subject to Mithradates, for Mithradates the Junior did not own all the privileges of royal power, e.g. he did not have the right to mint coins.

Thus, in the period of 85-83 B.C. the status of Colchis changed in a short time and from a province ruled by the "Circle of the king's friends it formally turned into a vassal state.

We have no precise knowledge of what happened here following the recall and execution of Mithradates the Junior. It would be logical to assume that the prior situation was restored in Colchis, i. e. it again turned into a satrapy governed by a viceroy of Pontus.

However, a piece of information is preserved with Memnon which leads some researchers to a different view. In particular, Memnon writes that in 70 BC, when the troops Lucullus besieged Sinope, Mithradates' son Machare, being in Colchis at the time and gathering provisions. For the besieged Sinopeans, betrayed his father and sent an envoy to Lucullus with the proposal of friendship and alliance, and later sent the provisions designed for the Sinopeans to Lucullus (Memn., 53-54). On the basis of their evidence, T. Reinach assumes that a little earlier to this development, in ca 71 BC, Machare conquered Colchis (Reinach, 1890 p. 355). E. Minns also concurs with this view, though with a small difference: he believes that Machare seized Colchis prior to the betrayal of his father, joining it to his own domain (Minns, 1913, p. 587). However, in the views of some researchers, Machare arrived in Colchis to collect the provisions for the Sinopeans and (Inadze, 1968, p. 234 Lordkipanidze, 1970 p. 94).

Some researchers believe that the Bosphorus and Colchis united under Machare for a definite period of time (Memn., pp.53-54: nlut; Luc., 24). Indeed, the sending by Machare of a gold crown to Lucullus and establish-

ing a friendly “alliance” with him must mean that in this case Machare acted not in the capacity of a private person but a ruler of the country. This may also account for the action of the defence chiefs of Sinope: Cleochares and Seleucos, who sent ships to Machare in Colchis, shortly before Machare’s treason (Memn. 53). If Machare was in Colchis for a short while, it is doubtful for the said commanders to act as they did.

Thus, for a definite period of time the Bosphorus and Colchis constituted a single administrative unit under Machare’s rule. It is unknown when their union took effect and how long it lasted.

In the opinion of researchers, Machare was invested with power in Colchis following the execution of Mithradates the Junior (Shelov 1978, p. 59). As Machare was given the right to govern the Bosphorus in 80 BC, it may be assumed that the Bosphorus and Colchis became united early in the 70s BC. As noted above, Memnon attests to the fact of Machare ruling Colchis in 70 BC. It is hard to say how long his rule lasted.

As is known, Mithradates Eupator, defeated by Lucullus, escaped to Armenia and continued to fight the Romans jointly with Tigranes II. In 69 BC. The united forces suffered a serious setback at Tigranakert. By this time, the coastal cities of Pontus surrendered to the Romans: Amisus fell in 71 BC, in the summer of 70 the Romans took Heraklion and Sinope, and in the autumn of the same year, Amasya (Maksimova, 1955 p. 259). Through this time Machare could stay in Colchis without incensing his father. In the autumn of 69 BC, with the approach of the winter Lucullus was forced to abandon the central region of Armenia and to retreat southward to Mesopotamia. Now Lucullus was actually inactive, and Mithradate VI and Tigranes II, taking advantage of the situation, restored their authority on the territories occupied by the Romans. Mithradates VI regained the entire territory of the Kingdom of Pontus.

Meanwhile, Machare came to face the real threat of being punished for betrayal of his father. Having restored his rights over the Kingdom of Pontus, Mithradates could obviously not allow Machare to stay in Colchis and the latter should protect himself from his father’s wrath. Presumably Machare left Colchis and found asylum in the Bosphorus, where his father’s punishing arm could not reach him. In any case, when in 66 BC. Mithradates routed by Pompey, fled first to Colchis, and then to the Bosphorus, Machare, who was in the latter city, either committed suicide (Appian, *The Mithradatic Wars*, 102) or was killed by the order of the king. (Dion Cassius XXXVI, 50, 1-2).

We have no knowledge of who became the ruler of Colchis after Machare’s death. According to Strabo, for some time Colchis was governed by Moaphernes, his mother’s uncle on his father’s side (Strabo XI, 2, 18). According to researchers, Moaphernes ruled the country following the death of Mithradates the Junior (Reinach, 1890, p. 301). However, one report of Strabo speaks of the opposite:

After Dorilaos Mithradates’ relatives on his mother’s side remained for a long time in shamed and humiliated condition, and Moaphernes attained a respected status after a long time – when the fall of the kingdom was near and he and his relatives shared the king’s lot. Apparently, Moaphernes must have been ruler of

Colchis much later, for the king's wrath fell on Dorilaos after the First Mithradate War (Strabo XII, 3, 33). At the end of this war he commanded the army of Mithradates VI, in Greece, jointly with Archelaos.

As noted above, the conflict between Mithradates VI and the Colchians arose after the end of the First Mithradic War. Hence, it was ruled out for Moaphernes to become the ruler at this time; the more so that peace between him and the king of Pontus had been established not long ago. Strabo gives direct evidence: "After a long period of time, Moaphernes again reached a respected status." Proceeding from this evidence. I think that Moaphernes must have been ruler of Colchis in the last years of the existence of the kingdom of Pontus. And Strabo's report on "Moaphernes having shared the king's lot" must probably mean that when Mithradates fled to the Bosphorus via Colchis, Moaphernes followed him and probably perished in unknown circumstances.

Thus, in the period of Mithradates' rule the following stages may be singled out in the history of Colchis:

1. From the annexation of Colchis (105-90 B.C.) to the ascent of the throne by Mithradates Philopator-Philadelphus (between 85 and 83 BC). At this stage Colchis was ruled by Mithradates' viceroys from the "friends" of the king of Colchis.
2. From 85-83 BC to circa 80 BC, when Colchis was ruled by Mithradates the Junior – formally bearing the title of king but actually subject to his father, the king of Pontus.
3. The time that followed the recall of Mithradates the Junior from Colchis, when Colchis joined the Bosphorus and it (Colchis) was ruled by the "king" (actually viceroy) Machare. Presumably, this stage lasted to 68-67 BC, when Machare was forced to flee to the Bosphorus.
4. The stage that followed Machare's escape, when the initial situation was restored and of Mithradates' "friends" was again appointed to govern the country. At this time Moaphernes emerges as such governor, though his rule proved short-lived: he fled to the Bosphorus along with Mithradates. Moaphernes and other representatives of the Pontus administration, to say nothing of Pontian troops, had presumably left the country when Pompey appeared on the scene, for he encountered no opposition in Colchis. Perhaps it was due to this fact that Pompey did not leave his troops behind, nor did he carry out any reorganization in the country. As reported by Appian, Pompey soon left Colchis, appointing a certain Aristarchus as its ruler. (App. Mithr. XII, 114). The rule of Aristarchus in Colchis was not long-lived. From 49 BC Colchis came under the rule of Pharnaces II, his rule too proved short-lived. In 47 BC Pharnaces II was defeated in a battle commanded by Gaius Julius Caesar, and all his possessions, including Colchis, were transferred to the king of Bosphorus, Mithradates of Pergamum. His rule in Colchis also proved short-lived. In the same year of 47 BC he perished in a battle with Asandrus. The written sources are silent about who ruled Colchis after Mithradates of Pergamum. Later, Colchis became a province of the Pontic kingdom of the Polemonids.

Colchis performed an important strategic and economic role in the system of the Kingdom of Pontus. He ensured the dominance of Mithradates in the eastern and northern Black Sea area; as reported by Strabo, Mithradates received from Colchis: timber, flax, hemp, e.g. all raw materials needed in shipbuilding (Strabo, XI, 2,18). Preparing for new conquests and new wars with Rome, Mithradates severely exploited the country, stored up a stock of food-stuffs and military equipment. According to the ancient authors, Colchians, together with Iberians and Cappadocians, formed the main contingent of the Pontus army (Plut., Luc., 14). A considerable part of the Pontus fleet was equipped and manned in Colchis. The inhabitants of the coastal regions of Georgia were considered excellent sailors. Mithradates probably received gold too from Colchis; Colchis earned the name of a country "rich in gold" in Greek and Roman writings (Strabo, XI, 2,17; Plin., NH; XXXIII).

The involvement of Colchis in the system of the Kingdom of Pontus facilitated the revival of urban life, finding clear reflection in building. At the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> in Vani and Eshera fortificational, public and cultural structures were built (Vani, 1972, p. 188; Shamba, 1980, p. 10); ceramic manufacture developed. At the same time, unification of some types--amphorae, pithoi is noticeable in this sphere. New forms of kitchenware appear: painted jugs round bottomed plates, etc. (Lordkipanidze, 1970, p.80, Todua, 1990, pp. 95-96).

In the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> B.C. the trade and economic contacts with the outer world broadened. Dominant position in Colchian import was held by Pontian cities, Sinope and Amisos. Sinopean amphorae appear to have been widespread throughout Western Georgia (Lordkipanidze, 1966, pp. 125-128). Relations continued with Rhodes. Rhodian import in Colchis was represented in the form of amphorae (Lordkipanidze, 1966, p. 130). At the first stages of the dominance of Mithradates in Colchis black-glazed tableware from Delos becomes widespread in the country; trade relations starts with Cos and Cnidus, where products are represented here in the shape of amphorae (Vani, VII, 1983, p. 52; Todua, 1990, p. 99). From the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. B.C. relations were restored with Attica. Attic import to Colchis is mainly represented by cantaroi. Athenian tetradrachms circulated on the Colchian market (Todua, 1990, p. 99). In Colchis in the II-I centuries B.C. not only Mithradatic issues of gold, silver and copper coins were in circulation, but also coins of other lands and cities. The Vanian numismatic evidence suggests that Athenian tetradrachms, of the so-called new style, Cappadocian, and more rarely, Parthian drachmae, Roman Republican denarius and other coins were in circulation on the markets in Colchis. By this period the local so-called "Colchian coins" had gone out of circulation. During the overlordship of Mithradates local gold imitations of Alexander and Lysimachos staters were not minted in Colchis, though the old coins may have continued in circulation for a long time.

This revival in Colchis proved short-lived. The war between Pontus and Rome had an adverse effect on Colchian economy: urban construction diminished, contacts with the outer world were limited. The involvement of Colchis in the system of Mithradates' Kingdom also facilitated the spread of elements of Hellenistic culture in the country. Impulses of Hellenism are noticeable in Colchian architecture, art, pottery, jeweller's, art

(Lordkipanidze, 1979, pp. 208-209). The Greek language reaches into the middle stratum of Colchian society as well. The process of Hellenisation is felt especially in the ideology of the Colchians. From the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> B.C., the cults of Mithra and Isis are widespread (Lordkipanidze, 1970, pp. 121-122), they were especially revered in the Kingdom of Pontus. At the same time the cults of Dionysus and Heracles also were spread (Todua, 1990, p. 116), whose worship was linked to the name of Mithradates Eupator. He was called “New Dionysus” and “New Heracles”.

Nevertheless, Hellenistic culture was not a leading one in Colchis –either before the advent of Mithradates or in his period. Elements of Hellenistic culture in Colchis merged with the local old traditions. Thus, Hellenistic culture in Colchis was of superficial nature, failing to penetrate deep into the country.

To be sure, Mithradates` brief and rather superficial dominance did not bring a radical change in the political, economic and cultural situation in Colchis, yet this period was a significant stage in the history of Colchis: in the first place, Colchis became involved in the Near East and the Black sea region; further, the involvement of Colchis in the Kingdom of Mithradates contributed to the broadening of trade and economic contacts with the outer world, the development of craftsmanship and spread of Hellenistic culture. Finally, the involvement of Colchis in the Kingdom of Pontus determined the future historical destiny of the country: the Romans, who replaced the Pontians here, considered Colchis as a constituent part of Pontus. Here they didn` t restore royal power, and actually subjected the country to the system of Roman provincial administration.

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