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THE RIVER GODS IN AIOLIS

AIOLIS BÖLGESİ'NDE IRMAK TANRILARI

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Abstract: It is not surprising to see rivers, the vital sources of life, as revered deities in the pantheon. Rare examples aside, the cults of river gods have generally been poorly documented as in the case of Aiolis. The cults of four river gods, respectively Hermus, Xanthus, Titnaius, and Boionites, have been attested in the region. Little is known on these deities and the available scanty information on them is mainly provided through the numismatic evidence. The rivers in Aiolis have been studied under different topics and within different contexts such as religion and historical geography. Focusing on the divine characteristics of the rivers in Aiolis, this article aims to present a depiction of the river gods in question in the region.

Keywords: Aiolis • River Gods • Hermus • Xanthus • Titnaius • Boionites

Öz: Yaşam kaynağı olarak algılanan ırmakların tanrılar olarak pantheonda yer alması şaşırtıcı değildir. Nadir örnekler dışında genel itibariyle ırmak tanrılarının kültleri hakkında fazlaca veri bulunmamaktadır. Aiolis Bölgesi'ndeki kültler de bu genellemeye istisna teşkil etmemektedir. Bölgede Hermos, Ksanthos, Titnaios ve Boionites olmak üzere dört ırmak tanrısının varlığı bilinmekedir. Bölgedeki ırmaklar farklı başlıklar altında; din, tarihi coğrafya gibi farklı bağlamlarda çalışılmıştır. Aiolis Bölgesi'ndeki ırmakların tanrısal niteliklerine odaklanan bu çalışma, bahsi geçen ırmak tanrılarının bölge temelinde incelenmesini amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aiolis • Irmak Tanrıları • Hermos • Ksanthos • Titnaios • Boionites

A glance at literature[1] concerning the river gods would confirm the previously documented importance attached to them: They are witnesses of the oaths taken by people, they are the protector of the young and they have control over the destiny of people as the bringers of prosperity or calamity. Being unpredictable natural powers, they receive prayers and dedications from the worshippers who expect to avoid their wrath and ask for their protection[2]. Whether due to the characteristics of the cults or to the lack of preserved evidence, the cults of river gods have been relatively less well documented. The literary, archaeological and epigraphic records may carry traces of them, yet the numismatic evidence stands as the major source of river god related information[3]. The cults of the river gods in Aiolis have been attested mostly from coins and in a single case an inscription.

This paper firstly touches upon the iconographic development of river gods providing a frame for evaluations in the religious context briefly pursuant to the nature of evidence for documentation. Then the religious nature of the rivers will be investigated following quick review of the ono-

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1 For references in literary sources see Otrowski 1991, 10-14.

2 For the cult activities in honour of river gods recorded in ancient sources and the role of these deities in mythology see Otrowski 1991, 10-14; Graf 2008, 616-617.

3 For a comprehensive evaluation of the river gods in Asia Minor from the numismatic evidence see Altınoluk 2005.

mastic evidence.

River god depictions begin to be seen in the VIIth century B.C. and continued to exist with some alterations until the end of the antiquity[4]. The early zoomorphic representations of these deities reflected the perception of identifying the river god as a bull with overflowing energy. The emergence of the mixed creatures with a human face and bull body has been interpreted as marking the transition from zoomorphic to anthropomorphic depictions[5]. The formation of the anthropomorphic type was completed within the Vth century B.C. and male heads adorned with horns began to appear. Later in the Vth-IVth centuries B.C. the "reclining river" composition emerged and spread in the Hellenistic period,[6] while the widespread use of this composition on coins coincides with the Roman period. The influential work of Eutychides (*ca*. 300 B.C.) depicting Tyche seated on a rock and the river god Orontes swimming at her feet thereby created a new model for the river god compositions. While the previously known compositions coexisted with the newer ones throughout the Roman period, a contribution worthy of mention appeared in the period in question. The cities Laodicea and Colossae depicted the Lycus (wolf) and Caprus (boar) rivers as symbols demonstrating their literal meanings on coins[7].

Another key element casting a light on the cults of the river gods is onomastics. Rivers may be seen as a source of self-identification at individual and social levels for the communities lived in Western Asia Minor[8]. The personal names derived from river names (terminating with "-δωρος" and "-δοτος") categorised under *theophoric* names which may be defined as personal names stemming from the names of deities[9]. The practice of giving theophoric names to children has often been explained by the devotion of parents or as the act of gratitude for owing the very existence of the child to the related god. River gods, as a resort for the women desperate to have a child, have strongly been associated with fertility. It may be assumed that if sterile women became pregnant after bathing in a river or drinking the river's water, the children they gave birth to were perceived as the gift of this river[10]. It is also worth noting that the personal names derived from river names which have been commonly observed amongst slaves also might have indicated their hometown[11].

Hermus (Gediz), one of the longest rivers in Western Anatolia, was the source of life for many cities along its course of approximately 400 km from Dindymus (Murat) Mountain to Smyrna

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4 For a comprehensive assessment of the river god iconography in the Graeco-Roman world see. Otrowski 1991.

5 Otrowski 1991, 18.

6 Otrowski 1991, 22-23: Otrowski opposes with the claim that this composition developed from a depiction of the Nile dated to the Hellenistic period (IIIrd-IInd centuries B.C.) and supports his own hypothesis with earlier examples.

7 Ostrowski 1991, 27.

8 Many examples of personal names stemmed from river names have been attested over a wide geographical area. These names reveal the ties between metropoleis and colonies (Robert 1968, 213). For the personal names derived from rivers (including Hermus and Xanthus) in Western Asia Minor see Robert 1968; Masson 1985 Curbera 1997; Thonemann 2006. For the identification of a community with a river name see the discussion of the "Magnesians" example in Thonemann 2006, 38-40.

9 For general information see Parker 2000, 53-79; McLean 2002, 77-82.

10 McLean 2002, 82.

11 Parker 2000, 65; McLean 2002, 81.

Bay[12]. Hesiod counts him among the rivers being the sons of Oceanus and Tethys[13]. His cult has also been attested epigraphically. Three inscriptions from Manisa and İzmir reveal the divine nature of Hermus. Two inscriptions from Manisa dedicated to Hermus record pleading for his help[14]. The first inscription addresses the god as "Hermus Epekoos" – the epithet meaning "hears/listens to [prayer]" and conveys the voice of dedicator seeking help (probably) for his cattle[15]. The second inscription dating to 212/213 A.D. also records a vow made to the "River God Hermus Epekoos"[16]. The fragmentary inscription found in İzmir was dedicated both to Hermus and emperor Antoninus Pius by (twice neokoros) Smyrna[17]. The geographic distribution of the Hermus cult can also be traced through the numismatic evidence. Many cities on the route of the Hermus[18] depicted him on their coins (Fig. 1-2). Hermus appears in a reclining position, leaning against an overturned vessel with water flowing out of it and holding a reed in his hand[19].

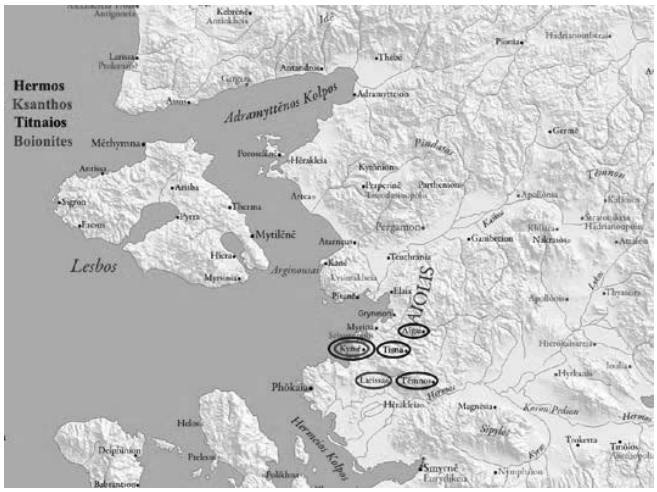


Fig. 1

The river god Hermus appears in Aiolis as the reverse figure on the Roman imperial coins of Cyme and Temnus. The god is represented as the reclining river following the compositional form of the time (Fig. 3-4). The fertile lands watered by the

[12] The Gediz River is one the most important rivers draining into Aegean Sea with an 18.000 km² catchment area (Emir-Akbulut *et al.* 2009, 647). Besides forming the sixth-largest delta in the country, it also has the highest population density per km² (Emir-Akbulut *et al.* 2009, 654). The information on the Gediz River in "Rivers of Europe" is as follows: "*The Aegean catchments (Greater and Smaller Meanders, Gediz) have been almost completely transformed into agricultural land. Animal grazing is restricted to a few areas in the headwaters*". "*During the past several thousand years, the Gediz River has frequently changed its lower course. Today, it forms a large delta (Table 17.2). Until 1886, the delta was about 50 km west of İzmir. In 1886, the river was diverted to prevent the silting up of İzmir harbour. In 1963, the course of the river was again changed through human interference and, as a result, the wetland has increased in salinity*" (Emir-Akbulut *et al.* 2009, 653-655). For the riverbed of the Hermus and its change over time see Heinle 2015, 19-20.

[13] Hes. *Theog.* 343.

[14] Herrmann – Malay 2007, 103-104, no. 76-77.

[15] This interpretation (Herrmann – Malay 2007, 103) is based upon the bull depiction on the stele.

[16] Herrmann – Malay 2007, 104, no. 77.

[17] *ISmyrna* II. 1. 767.

[18] The cities on the route of Hermus are Cadi, Bagis, Silandus, Tabala, Saittai, Sardis, Magnesia (ad Sipylum), Temnus, Cyme, and Smyrna.

[19] Cahn 1990, 390-391. Cahn categorises this type under six groups. He also includes uncertified examples as well as the ones previously misattributed to Hermus.

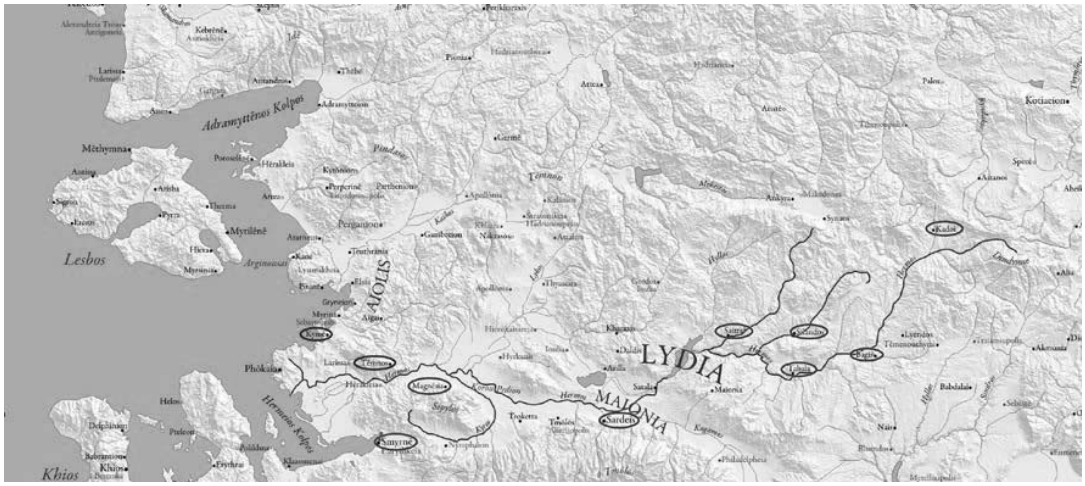


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Hermus were under the control of Cyme and Temnus[20]. Hermoupedion was among the lands under the control of Cyme. The river god Hermus was of vital importance economically to both cities, therefore, unsurprisingly he was depicted on the coins of these cities.

The onomastic evidence for the cult of Hermus in Aiolis comes from an inscription on a marble statue base unearthed in Cyme recording the name "Hermodotus"[21]. This name belongs to a category of theophoric names constructed with the name of a deity and the ending -δωρος or -δοτος (the gift), such as Diodotus, Artemidorus etc[22]. This practice implies that the bearer of the name is the gift of the god(dess) since s(he) comes into the world by the grace of this deity. This must also have been the case for Hermodotus, "the gift of Hermus". Given the association of river gods with fertility, it would not be unlikely to assume that he was born due to the divine intervention of the river god Hermus.

The river Xanthus, located to the north of Cyme, was depicted as a reclining river god holding a bundle of reeds in his hand on the coins of the city (Fig. 5)[23]. The river was the driving force of the agricultural activity to the north of the city[24]. Therefore, he has become a reverse type of the coins of Cyme alongside Hermus.



Fig. 5

Although it is not as magnificent as the Hermus river, it

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20 Ragone 2003; Heinle 2015, 44-46, 62.

21 Ἑρμόδοτος Βακχίω / [τῶ Ἀν]δροτέλεος / κὰτ τὰν διαθήκαν / τὰν Ὀρδεος τῶ Ἀ<ν>δροτέλεος (*IKyme* 31).

22 McLean 2002, 81: MacLean treats those names terminating with "-δωρος" and "-δοτος" as a separate category under the theophoric names when considering the large number of these names. According to his classification, personal names derived from river gods and heroes form a subgroup of the category in question.

23 *SNG von Aulock* 1648-1649; *SNG Copenhagen* 127; *BMC Troas* 13, 114.

24 Heinle 2015, 43.



Fig. 6

seems the Titnaius river (Kocaçay) was of great importance for Aigai and for Tisna[25] from which its name stemmed. Titnaius is thought to be represented on the coins of both cities. The young male whose head is adorned with horns on the obverse of the classical period coins of Tisna[26] is interpreted as depicting the river god Titnaius (Fig. 6)[27].

By the imperial period, Titnaius began to be seen on the coins of Aigai as shown in the reclining river pose (Fig. 7)[28]. Heinle is sceptical whether these two river gods depicted about six centuries apart are identical with each other[29]. The absence of continuous evidence disallows a diachronic investigation of the development of the river god iconography for each city as well as a comparative analysis between the coins of these cities. Hence two depictions of Titnaius belonging to different periods will be dealt with as two separate cases.



Fig. 7

As discussed above, the depiction of a "young male head adorned with horns" on the obverse of Tisna coins is identified with the river god, for a settlement of which very little is known except for its coins and an account in Pliny that Tisna owes its name to the Titnaius river[30]. It is thought to be located within the territory of Cyme, close to the river providing support to the agricultural activities of the city[31]. From this point of view, the Titnaius river may be deemed pivotal to its existence. The practice of depicting Titnaius as the obverse type of the coins matches the importance attached to this river by the city. Coupled with the socio-economic background of the settlement, the young male depiction on Tisna coins may reasonably interpreted as depicting the river god.

The Titnaius river appears as a reverse type on the coins of Aigai during the imperial period. Titnaius is represented as a reclining river god, which is a type very widespread in the Roman period, leaning against an overturned vessel with water flowing out of it and holding the *cornucopia* in his hand. Aigai, as a mountainous city with very limited agricultural areas, must have regarded Titnaius as the source of life.

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25 The name of river Titnaius and the settlement are referred to as "Titanus" in Pliny (*hist. nat.* V. 32).

26 *SNG Copenhagen* 283; *BMC Troas*1; Imhoof-Blumer 1883, 275, 240; *SNG Munich* 641. The reverse type of these coins is the one-handled cup (kyathos), a symbol also represented on Cyme coins as the parasemon of the city. *BMC Troas* (Cyme) 16-20. 27-53; *SNG von Aulock* 1625-1629. 1641-1642; *SNG Ashmolean* 1266-1360; 1409-1412; 1416-1422; *SNG Copenhagen* 41-87; 106-108; *SNG München* 443-445; 448-479; 504-509. The one-handled cup is also represented on the amphora stamps of Cyme. For a discussion on the subject see Lagona 1984, 453-465; Heinle 2015, 40. Heinle concludes that Tisna might have been a colony of Cyme in interpreting the Cyme-Tisna relationship.

27 Schultz (1997, 37) notes that this type was also common in Italy in the same period, especially in Sicily.

28 *BMC Troas* 98, 23-24; Imhoof-Blumer 1924, 276, no. 255 pl. 8, no. 22; *SNG von Aulock* 1599.

29 Heinle 2015, 40. However, according to Heinle, the identification of the young male head on the Tisna coins with the river god is possible.

30 Hopefully, further research in the area could contribute in providing more information concerning Tisna. For recent studies on Tisna see. Erdan 2019b.

31 Heinle 2015, 40-41.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Recently, a spring near Sarıkale Tepe surrounded by two rows of walls has been identified by the Tisna survey team[32]. The arrangements at two spots between these walls covering channels and troughs carved into the bedrock, have been tentatively interpreted as sacrificial areas for Titnaius[33].

The last river god to be investigated is Boionites. The reverse type of Boione and Larisa coins date to the IVth-IIIrd centuries B.C.[34], apparently a cattle[35], has been interpreted as a river god (Fig. 8-9). In his recent study on the coinage, localization and history of Boione, Nollé has convincingly grounded the abovementioned hypothesis[36].

Besides the cattle depiction, Boione coins have the legend ΒΟΙΩΝΙΤΙΚΟΝ, and more rarely, ΒΟΙΩΝΙΤΗΣ on the reverse. The preference of *ktetikon*, the form indicating possession instead of the very common *ethnikon* representing the community may be worth mentioning in the Boiōnotikon case. As a rarely encountered practice in Asia Minor, the use of ktetikon in Aiolis has only been seen to date at Boione[37]. The rarely observed second legend in the nominative case (Boiōnitēs) expresses the very name of the river[38]. When combined with considering the identification of river god with the bull, it may be concluded that both the name and image of the river god are given forming the reverse type of this version.

Nollé also presents linguistic evidence to support his hypothesis as follows[39]: Boione evokes a meaning such as "cattle village" and "cow village", like many toponyms composed of "Bous" (Βοῦς: cow, ox). The river named after its headwater Boione, thus it is called Boionites, meaning "the river comes from Boione" or "the river springs from Boione". The zoomorphic depiction (cattle) of the river on coins represents the embodiment of its name, as in the case of Lycus and Caprus mentioned above.

The close similarity between the reverse types of Larisa and Boione supports the idea of the same river god (Boionites) represented on coins of both cities[40]; prompting Nollé to include Larisa's location in his investigation on the localization of Boione[41].

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32 Erdan 2019a, 206-207.

33 Erdan 2019a, 206-207; 210-211.

34 Boione, *BMC Troas* 101, no. 1-2; Larisa, *SNG von Aulock* 1658.

35 Nollé 2012, 287, fn. 1: "It is not possible to determine the sex of the animal from depictions". Hereafter referred to as "cattle".

36 Nollé 2012, 287-318.

37 Nollé 2012, 292.

38 Nollé (2012, 293) also takes notice of the river names terminating with -(ι)της in Western Asia Minor such as Μανθίνης in Ephesus.

39 Nollé 2012, 292-294.

40 Imhoof-Blumer 1883, 272. Nollé (2012, 295) states that it is difficult to identify the coins of these cities without a legend.

41 Nollé 2012, 297. For the localization of Boione see also Ragone 2003, 299.

The interpretation of the iconographic and linguistic evidence forms a coherent picture. All inferences from this interpretation are based on the probable representation of the river god as the reverse figure on the coins of these two settlements. Even if this figure is not the river god, the similarity between the figures and symbols on the coins of these two settlements, as in the example of Cyme-Tisna pair, should not be ignored, but noted for further research. According to Nollé, it is highly probable that the coins of Boione, a small settlement that does not stand out with its population, would have been struck in Larisa[42].

This study set out to depict how the river gods made their presence felt in Aiolis. Among the four river gods investigated, Hermus and Xanthus and a depiction of Titnaius can safely be identified owing to the legends on the coins. The identification of Boionites and the Titnaius (?) depiction on the Tisna coin are yet to be reevaluated in the context of further discoveries. As the current evidence implies, the river gods in Aiolis seem to match the river god characteristics in the Graeco-Roman world. Hopefully, further research in the region might provide a wider perception of the importance attached at that time to the rivers on both an individual and social level.

[42] Nollé 2012, 308.

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