Manuscript Transmission and Reconstruction of a Fragment of Diodorus Siculus (XII. 31. 1)

This article provides a textual and paleographical reassessment of a fragment from Book XII of Diodorus Siculus's Bibliotheca Historica, describing the earliest rulers of the Cimmerian Bosporus. By analyzing two sixteenth-century manuscript codices (Codex Coislin 149 and Codex Grec 1663) alongside the 1559 editio princeps, the study challenges the long-standing historical consensus regarding the Archaeanactid dynasty. It is argued that the traditional reading stems from incomplete word separation in the medieval transmission of the text (scriptura continua). Paleographical evidence from Codex Grec 1663, specifically the placement of internal diacritical marks, suggests that the original narrative referred instead to the "Actid" (or "Radiant") dynasty (ἀρχε ἂν Ἀκτίδαι), representing an early instance of royal deification. Furthermore, based on a lexico-grammatical analysis of the term διεδέξατο ("inherited power by succession"), the study demonstrates that the archon Spartacus was himself a member of the Actid dynasty, rather than the founder of a new line. The analysis concludes that this flawed reading calls into question the modern historiographical concept of the "Spartocids" as a distinct ruling house.

Keywords: *Cimmerian Bosporus, Diodorus Siculus, paleography, textual reconstruction, codex, archon.*

Introduction

The description of the Northern Black Sea region in ancient literature is remarkably limited; consequently, even a brief textual mention of a historical fact is of paramount importance to researchers attempting a general reconstruction of the region's history.

Traditionally, in established classical studies, ancient texts were utilized after being subjected by classical philologists not only to comprehensive reconstructions from isolated fragments or diverse textual variants — widely known as "philological assemblages" — but also to the introduction of various conjectural emendations. It is only relatively recently that manuscript traditions and early printed editions have become accessible to a broad circle of researchers. This digital and physical accessibility requires a transition to a qualitatively new level of engagement with historical sources, primarily necessitating a thorough revision of long-established preconceptions within the ancient literary tradition.

It must be specified that the work of Diodorus Siculus was subjected to severe and, it must be said, highly justified criticism as early as the 19th century.[1] His Bibliotheca Historica represents a crude compilation of texts extracted from

[1]Strogetsky, V. M. "Vvedenie k 'Istoricheskoy biblioteke' Diodora Siciliyskogo" [Introduction to the "Historical Library" of Diodorus Siculus]. *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History] no. 2 (1986): p. 65.

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entirely different, disconnected works; it completely lacks stylistic editing, and the author failed to cross-check or synchronize the various historical chronicles brought together within the volumes. However, since the vast majority of the primary sources utilized by Diodorus have not survived to the present day, contemporary researchers are compelled to operate with the material that remains available to them.

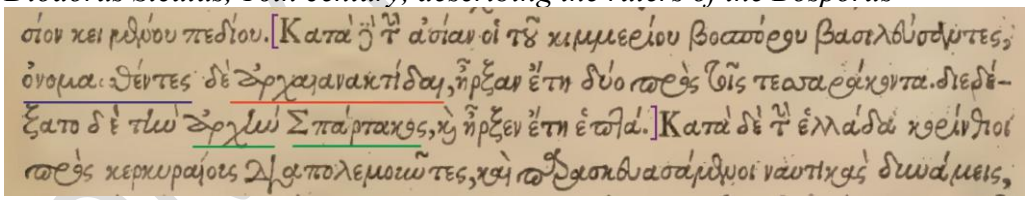
Since this study turns specifically to the text of Book XII, it is necessary to outline the formation of scholarly perspectives concerning this particular section of the library.

Paleographical Reassessment of the 16th-Century Witnesses

The first printed edition of Diodorus's work to include the text of Book XII was published in Geneva in 1559 under the editorship of H. Stephanus.[2] Unfortunately, he did not specify the details regarding the sources of the text, but this edition became the foundation for subsequent publications, up to the edition by F. Vogel in 1888, who conducted a reconsideration of the available ancient manuscripts of Diodorus's work.

Specifically for Book XII, F. Vogel gave priority to *codex Coislin 149* (Coislinianus), dating it to the 15th century, while he considered *codex Grec 1663* to be a corrupted version of Diodorus's text written in the 16th century.[3] Currently, the understanding of the dating of *codex Coislin 149* has changed; according to the data from the official website of the National Library of France, where it is available in open access, the codex was written in the 16th century.

Figure 1. *Fragment of the manuscript text of the "Bibliotheca Historica" of Diodorus Siculus, 16th century, describing the rulers of the Bosporus*



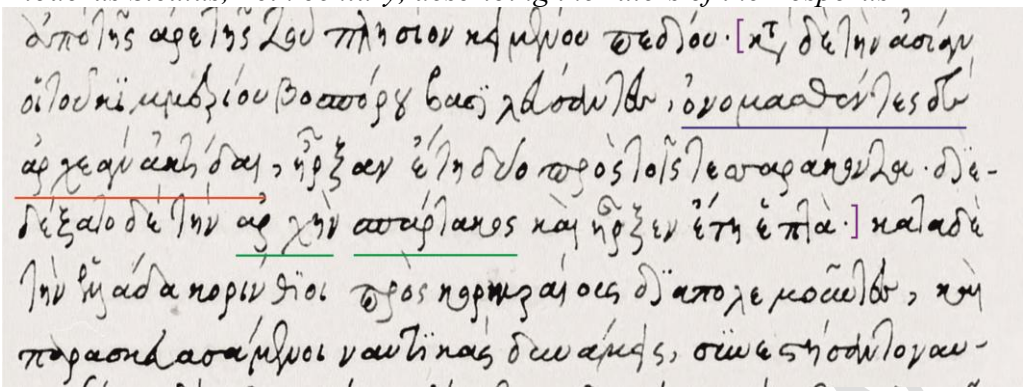
Source: Codex Grec 1663, fol. 61v.

[2]Diodori Siculi. *Bibliothecae Historicae Libri Quindecim de Quadraginta*. 1559. Edited by Henricus Stephanus. Geneva. URL: https://archive.org/details/bib_fict_443764

[3]Vogel, F., ed. *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica*. Vol. I. Lipsiae: Teubner, 1888. p. vii–xvii

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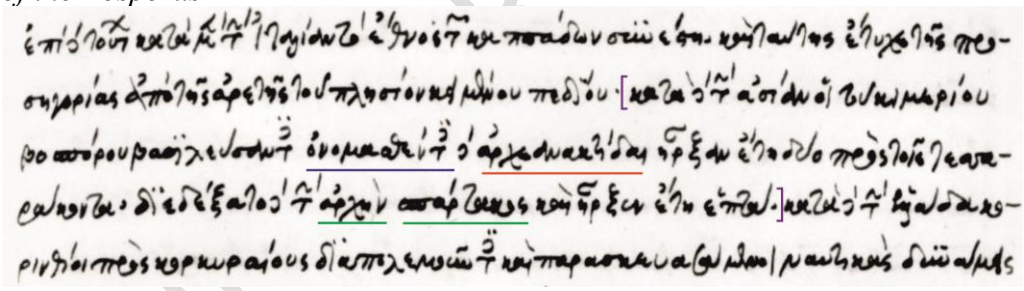
Figure 2. *Fragment of the manuscript text of the "Bibliotheca Historica" of Diodorus Siculus, 16th century, describing the rulers of the Bosporus*



Source: codex Coislin 149, p. 463).

Based on this, at present, we have three 16th-century texts: two manuscript codices and the printed edition by H. Stephanus, which obviously trace back to a single manuscript that perhaps never appeared in Europe. It is known that when it was impossible to buy a particular manuscript, agents engaged in the search for ancient texts simply copied them.

Figure 3. *Fragment of the text of the first printed edition of the "Bibliotheca Historica" of Diodorus Siculus, which included Book XII, describing the rulers of the Bosporus*



Source: Diodori, 1559, p. 303.

We know that ancient texts were written continuously (*scriptura continua*) without punctuation marks; the division into separate words began to gradually occur in medieval manuscripts. The punctuation that appeared there did not always denote a semantic pause; sometimes it could serve to indicate the separation of individual words, primarily proper names. Punctuation in modern texts edited by classical philologists differs, sometimes significantly, from what we can see in the surviving manuscripts. Therefore, the punctuation from the texts we have involved must be perceived with a certain degree of conditionality.

The fragment to which we turn describes the formation of the ruling house in the Cimmerian Bosporus, which we will immediately present in the form we believe it should have originally appeared:

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> *κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀσίαν οἱ τοῦ Κιμμερίου Βοσπόρου βασιλεύσαντες ὀνομα θέντες δὲ ἀρχε ἂν Ἀκτίδαι ἦρξαν ἔτη δύο πρὸς τοῖς τεσσαράκοντα διεδέξατο δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν Σπάρτακος καὶ ἦρξεν ἔτη ἑπτὰ* (XII. 31. 1).
> "On the Asiatic side of the Cimmerian Bosporus, the rule of [those who] since antiquity were named the Actids was established; forty-two years from the beginning of [their rule], power was inherited by Spartacus, [who ruled for] the following seven years."

Lexico-Grammatical Analysis and the "Actid" Hypothesis

The first thing to pay attention to is the split spelling of the words *ὀνομα θέντες* that we have introduced. In manuscript texts, as in modern editions, there is a continuous spelling *ὀνομασθέντες*. This, it should be noted, is quite positive, as researchers transmitted the archaic spelling to the reader; however, it should be pointed out that these are different words: *ὀνομα* translates as "to be named," and *θέντες* as "to establish," "to confirm," or there are also meanings "to dedicate," "to class among". Moreover, the use of the word *ὀνομασθέντες* is no longer known, both in the work of Diodorus himself and as a whole across the entire ancient literary tradition.

Although in the text of the codices we see that these words are joined by the letter "*σ*", it is entirely possible that we are dealing with a scribal error to which the cited manuscripts trace back. In any case, H. Stephanus, clearly understanding the erroneous nature of this spelling variant, separated these words, while leaving a special "broken" sign (Figure 3), which indicates to us that they were written continuously in the source he utilized.

In our view, a similar situation occurs further in the text where the well-known Archaeanactidae are mentioned, as this is the spelling that dominates in modern editions and is likewise observed on page 463 of *codex Coislin 149* (Figure 2). In the text of H. Stephanus, the spelling differs only stylistically: Archaianactidae (Figure 3). A much more interesting variant of the spelling is observed on fol. 61v of *codex Grec 1663* (Figure 1), where the scribe marked the separation of the words with a diacritical mark "*ἀ*"; since such marks are placed only over the first letter of a word, we obtain the spelling *ἀρχε ἂν Ἀκτίδαι*.

What, then, does this separation provide us? In the first case, these are indeed different words, especially since they were already separated in the 1559 edition; however, now that we are discussing the name of the ruling house, does this separation constitute merely a "play on words" by one of the scribes, and what does it offer us?

It appears to us that with this separation, the semantic content changes significantly, since the Archaeanactidae are unknown anywhere else, either in literature or in epigraphy. Of course, it is necessary to take into account that the primary sources themselves are not so numerous, but nevertheless, no such mentions exist. By obtaining the separation, we receive the word *ἀρχε* ("beginning", "ancient"), followed by the modal particle *ἂν*, and closed by the word *ακτίδα* ("sunbeam", "direction of a beam of light"). Since the word *Ἀκτίδαι* is specified in the plural, it would be most logical to translate this as "The Radiant

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Ones" (or "The Luminous Ones"). That is, it is quite obvious that we are presented with a description of the deification of the ruling house.

As mentioned above, the spelling used by H. Stephanus differs slightly (Figure 3). Although he did not separate the words, let us allow for such a separation, as the form in which it is written is of interest to us. It is either *ἀρχαιαν*, which has the same meaning as *ἀρχε* but is used in the accusative singular feminine (Acc. fem.), or *ἀρχε*, i.e., "beginnings" or "origins" in the plural. In any case, we obtain identical semantic structures.

The definitive syntactic justification for the split reading *ἀρχε ἂν Ἀκτίδαι* is provided by the specific iterative function of the modal particle ἂν in narrative prose, a characteristic feature of the Ionic dialect that was entirely absent from the later Attic standard. Given that Diodorus Siculus heavily compiled his early Bosporan narrative from lost regional chronicles, it is highly textually plausible to expect the preservation of a syntactic substratum from the primary source, wherein the particle ἂν coupled with a past indicative tense (imperfect or aorist) denotes a habitual, cyclical, or long-standing action in the past. A precise parallel for this structure is found in Herodotus's Histories (IV. 130)[4], describing the repetitive tactical maneuvers of the Scythians and the subsequent reaction of the Persians:

> *αὐτοὶ ἂν ὑπεξήλαυνον ἐς ἄλλον χῶρον· οἱ δὲ ἂν Πέρσαι ἐπελθόντες ἐλάβεσκον τὰ πρόβατα καὶ λαβόντες ἐπηείροντο ἂν τῶι πεποιημένωι.*
> "They themselves would withdraw to another place; then the Persians, upon arriving, would seize the livestock, and having taken them, would become emboldened by what they had done".

Within the reconstructed fragment of Diodorus, the phrase *ἀρχε ἂν* underscores the traditional, continuous, and legitimate nature of the multi-decade rule of the "Radiant Ones" (the Actids). However, for medieval copyists working with a text transmitted long after Herodotus's time, this construction within the scriptura continua appeared as an anomaly, which may have led to an incomplete word separation during the transmission of the text, thereby artificially generating the quasi-Attic compound "Archaeanactidae."

The deification of rulers is a widespread practice dating back to the ancient royal dynasties of the East. For instance, regarding the Pontic region during the Hellenistic period, we possess excellent examples of the deification of the kings of Bithynia, which has found reflection in epigraphic monuments.[5] The mythologization of a ruling house could be aimed at both internal consumption and external presentation, i.e., when rulers were integrated into the political system of interstate relations. It is also worth mentioning that in ancient

[4]Herodotus. *Historiae*. Vol. I (libros I–IV continens). Edited by H. B. Rosén. Lipsiae: Teubner, s. 421.
[5]Gabelko, O. L. *Istoriya Vifinskogo tsarstva* [The History of the Bithynian Kingdom]. Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo St. Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2005, p. 142.

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literature; only one mention of the name *Ἀκτίδα* is known: Diogenes Laertius (VIII, 88) indicates that this was the name of one of the daughters of Eudoxus.[6]

The next point that warrants detailed attention is the mention of the archon Spartacus. In historiography, the name Spartokos is traditionally utilized for this ruler, by analogy with the epigraphic evidence concerning later rulers in regional inscriptions.[7] Traditionally, researchers have assumed that in this passage, Diodorus informs us of a case regarding a change in the ruling house to the "Spartocids." Such a reconstruction of the text, in our view, is highly controversial.

A rigorous lexico-grammatical analysis of the verbal form *διεδέξατο* (from *διαδέχομαι*) further dismantles the traditional historiographical consensus regarding a violent or non-familial dynastic shift to the so-called "Spartocids." In classical Greek prose and Hellenistic historiography, the verb *διαδέχομαι* — particularly in its middle voice aorist form διεδέξατο — is employed with highly specific semantic precision to denote the direct inheritance of power by legal or peaceful succession within an established ruling line. A precise parallel for this usage is observed in Polybius's Histories (II, 71),[8] where the term systematically designates the regular, legitimate transfer of an office or royal title from a predecessor to a successor within the same institutional or dynastic framework.

Had Diodorus Siculus intended to signal a violent usurpation, an inter-ethnic overthrow, or the abrupt termination of one ruling house and the rise of an entirely distinct dynasty, the ancient historical tradition would typically demand explicit vocabulary to describe such a rupture (such as *καταλύω*, *τυραννεύω*, or a direct narrative depiction of a coup). Conversely, the text of Book XII states with neutral brevity that forty-two years after the consolidation of the Actid rule, power was inherited by Spartacus (διεδέξατο δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν Σπάρτακος).

From a structural standpoint, the fragment omits the names of the intermediary rulers during that forty-two-year span, yet it maintains absolute syntactic and logical continuity. Spartacus is thus positioned not as an external conqueror founding a new dynasty, but as a legitimate member of the Actid line who took up the arche in accordance with the established sequence. Consequently, the modern historiographical concept of the "Spartocids" as an independent, ethnically distinct ruling house appears to be an artificial construct, generated by a flawed reading that isolated the first archon from the preceding dynastic name due to the incomplete word separation in the transmission of the text.

Second, although we are well aware of "Aesopian language" and mythopoetic narratives, in ancient literature, if an author intended to recount a change of a ruling house, they would describe it to us directly; in this case, however, not even a hint of such a transition is visible. The text states that forty-

[6]Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Vol. II. Edited by R. D. Hicks. London: Heinemann, 1925 p. 402.
[7]Struve, V. V., ed. *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani* [Corpus of Bosporan Inscriptions] (CIRB). Moskva – Leningrad: Nauka, 1965, p. 843.
[8]Polybius. *The Histories*. Vol. I. Translated by W. R. Paton. London: Heinemann, 1922, p. 412-414.

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two years after the establishment of the Actids' rule, power was obtained by Spartacus, who, judging by the text itself, is an Actid himself; that is, the fragment simply did not list the names of the preceding rulers, and nothing more.

Third, the term "Spartocids" itself is entirely unknown in both classical literature and epigraphy; this term was created by modern scholars precisely on the basis of the very text we are analyzing.

Now let us focus on how power is designated in this fragment. Spartacus is styled as an "archon" (*ἀρχὴν*). The term archon itself is general in nature; it signifies power in the broadest sense of the word, representing both an office and a process. The meaning of archon is most fully conveyed by the terms "ruler" and "ruling".

In ancient literature, it is customary to style the rulers of the Bosporus as tyrants, although neutral designations are also attested. For instance, in the speeches of the Athenian orator Demosthenes dedicated to Leucon, the latter is referred to as the archon of the Bosporus, with the orator specifically noting that Leucon held Athenian citizenship. The occurrence of this term in classical texts with reference to kings is extremely rare and is found exclusively in its verbal form.

In any language, an object frequently mentioned in writing has several different designations, and power is one of such objects. Therefore, ancient authors could alternate these terms in their descriptions to avoid constantly repeating the same word. The word *βασιλεύσαντες* is similar in meaning to archon, only in this case it functions as a substantivised participle. Despite originating from the word "basileus," it is applied broadly and therefore does not signify specific royal power at all. Even in the cited fragment, this word is present precisely to avoid repeating the word archon twice.

Historiographical Implications for the Cimmerian Bosporus

We possess an excellent example of an epigraphic monument from the time of Leucon (*CIRB* 6) (Figure 4),[9] where Leucon is styled *ἄρχοντος* of the Bosporus and Theodosia, while in the next line, the participle *βασιλεύοντος* is used in the genitive singular, performing the exact same role as in our passage — to avoid repeating the same word twice; that is, Leucon is the ruler of the Bosporus and Theodosia, as well as the ruler of the tribal union. It is logical to assume that since the Bosporus was, first and foremost, a trading state, the tribal union led by Leucon was also of a commercial character.

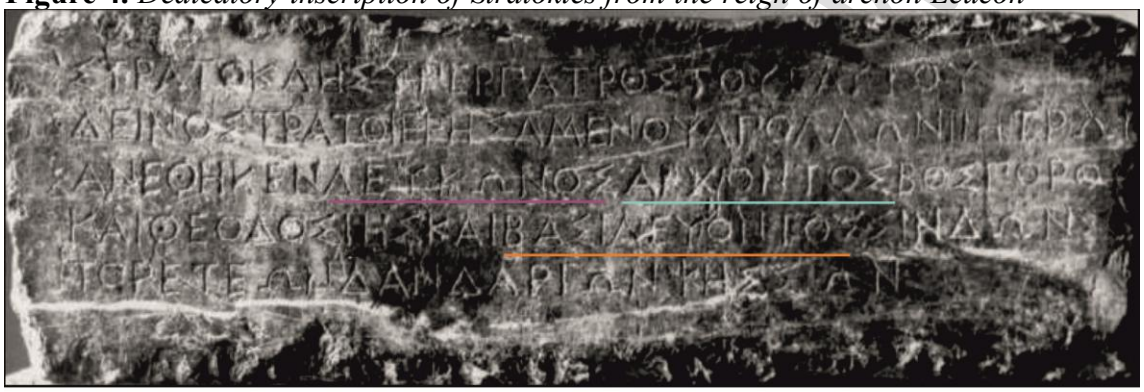
All of this pursued the exact same goal — to avoid repeating the same words in succession. Similarly, contemporary archaeologists alternate the words "burial" and "tombs," "monument" and "settlement," and so forth in their publications.

[9]Struve, V. V., ed. *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani* [Corpus of Bosporan Inscriptions] (CIRB). Moskva – Leningrad: Nauka, 1965, p. 18; Gavrilov, A. G., ed. *Korpus bosporskikh nadpisey: Albom illyustratsiy (KBN-albom)* [Corpus of Bosporan Inscriptions: Album of Illustrations] (CIRB). Sankt-Peterburg: IIMK RAN, 2004, CIRB 6.

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Another question that arises in the analysis of this text is whether the deification of the ruling lineage is a reflection of later realities. It is well known that myths possess an explanatory character; that is, they do not merely reflect the historical past, but can alter it to suit the political realities of the present. Precisely for this reason, we are aware of various mythical plots, and cities could over time change the legends about their founders. Thus, it is possible that this deification also occurred, as we would say, "retrospectively." To answer this question at the current stage of research is impossible without knowing the source that Diodorus utilized, when it was written, and what goals the author set; all of these remain questions without answers. Unless, perhaps, some epigraphic source belonging to this period is found that will shed light on the political history of the region.

Figure 4. *Dedicatory inscription of Stratokles from the reign of archon Leucon*



ΣΤΡΑΤΟΚΛΗΣΥΠΕΡΠΑΤΡΟΣΤΟΥΕΑΥΤΟΥ
ΔΕΙΝΟΣΤΡΑΤΟΙΕΡΗΣΑΜΕΝΟΥΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙΙΗΤΡΩΙ
ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝΛΕΥΚΩΝΟΣΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣΒΟΣΠΟΡΟ
ΚΑΙΘΕΟΔΟΣΙΗΣΚΑΙΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΟΝΤΟΣΣΙΝΔΩΝ
ΤΟΡΕΤΕΩΝΔΑΝΔΑΡΙΩΝΨΗΣΣΩΝ

Source: Gavrilov, 2004, CIRB-6.

Now it is necessary to proceed to the next question: are we presented here with a description of the formation of the state of the Bosporus or not? Traditionally, the Bosporus as a state is linked with the strengthening of Panticapaeum in the 4th century BC. We, however, have a text that would now sound like "on the eastern coast of the Kerch Strait...." Here it is important to clarify that the Cimmerian Bosporus is the name of the strait, not the country, which would later be called simply the Bosporus. Does this not indicate a different political formation on the shores of the strait, which could have later entered the state being created by the rulers of Panticapaeum? This cannot be ruled out, and judging by epigraphic finds, Thracian names, to which Spartacus also belongs, were quite widespread in the region.

Despite the discrepancies of the chronological systems in the text of Diodorus, researchers tie the time of Spartacus's coming to power to the

archonship of Theodorus in Athens in 438/437 BC.[10] Taking into account that in the 5th century BC, Herodotus, in describing the Northern Black Sea region, indicated that Syndica is located on the Asiatic shore of the Cimmerian Bosporus (IV, 28; IV, 86)[11], it turns out we must understand that the new political formation appeared within the territory of the Syndic Kingdom, or at least on its western territories.

And here the main question arises: is this story true at all? Diodorus created his work from compilations of various texts to give a moral evaluation to a particular character or even a historical process. In Book XX, he provides us with a detailed narrative about the ruler of the Bosporus, Eumelus; accordingly, does this passage, along with certain insertions in Books XIV and XVI, not serve precisely to ensure that Eumelus does not appear "all of a sudden?"

Let us assume that Diodorus knew the names of certain rulers of the Bosporus, and he inserted them into different fragments of the book, allowing for discrepancies regarding the nature of power (in the subsequent fragments they would become kings), as well as regarding the name of the country — Pontus would begin to figure in Diodorus's text instead of the Bosporus. The questions of chronological divergence in the dates of rule and the simultaneity of the rulers of the Bosporus holding power have repeatedly become the subject of research.

Conclusion

A critical examination of the sixteenth-century manuscript tradition of Diodorus's Book XII reveals that the long-standing historical consensus regarding the "Archaeanactidae" relies on an unstable paleographical foundation. While *codex Coislin 149* and H. Stephanus's 1559 editio princeps exhibit the consolidated spelling variants *Ἀρχαιανακτίδαι* and Archaianactidae respectively, a structurally distinct reading is preserved of *codex Grec 1663*. In this codex, the scribe executed a deliberate textual intervention by introducing a distinct diacritical mark — specifically a smooth breathing (spiritus lenis) combined with an accent — directly over the internal alpha (ἀ). Within the conventions of Byzantine and Renaissance Greek paleography, such diacritical clusters are non-accidental features; they are strictly restricted to the initial vowel of a standalone word.

The placement of this internal diacritic demonstrates that the scribe, or the earlier uncial prototype (protopgraph) they were consulting, recognized a distinct syntactic and semantic boundary within what later traditions homogenized into a single proper noun. By adding the breathing mark to the

[10]Latyshev, V. V. ed. *Izvestiya drevnikh pisateley, grecheskikh i latinskikh o Skifii i Kavkaze*, T. I [Ancient Testimonies About Scythia and the Caucasus. Greek and Latin Writers. Vol. I], Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk, 1890. p. 473.

[11] Herodotus. *Historiae*. Vol. I (libros I–IV continens). Edited by H. B. Rosén. Lipsiae: Teubner, 1987, s. 368, 400.

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internal alpha, the scribe effectively isolated the preceding phonetic block, yielding the segmented reading *ἀρχε ἂν Ἀκτίδαι*.

This paleographical marker indicates that the transmission of the text suffered from an incomplete word separation (scriptura continua), a frequent source of error when medieval copyists encountered archaic or dialectal syntax. Rather than a scribal slip or a marginal anomaly, the diacritic in *codex Grec 1663* acts as an empirical corrective, signaling to the reader that the text transitions into a new lexical entity. The preservation of this internal breathing mark serves as a critical link, showing how a rare dynastic name, *Ἀκτίδαι* (the Actids), accompanied by an Ionic iterative particle, was erroneously absorbed into a single nominal composite by less precise copyists who smoothed over a difficult reading.

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