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**Συγγραφή :** *Dan Anca* *(13/5/2008)*

# Dionysius of Byzantium

## Περίληψη :

Dionysius of Byzantium was a Greek geographer known for his work Ἀνάπλους Βοσπόρου *(The Description of the Bosporus)*.

## ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΙΑ - ΤΟΠΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΗΣ

Byzantium, 2nd-3rd century AD (?)

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## ΚΥΡΙΑ ΙΔΙΟΤΗΤΑ

Geographer

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### 1. Biography

Nothing is known about the life of Dionysius and this must have been the case already since the 10th century AD, the time when the Suda lexicon had simply registered: "Dionysius of Byzantium, epic poet; <he wrote> a periegesis of the navigation on the Bosphorus and *On laments*, which is in fact a poem full of dirges (Διονύσιος, Βυζάντιος, ἐποποιός. Περιήγησιν τοῦ ἐν τῷ Βοσπόρῳ ἀνάπλου, Περί θρήνων· ἐστι δε ποίημα μεστόν ἐπικηδείων).[1] So, it is surprising that Suda calls Dionysius an "epic poet" when his geographical work, the only one we have (partially) preserved, is in prose; but this could be due only to his poem *On laments* or to his other (lyrical? philosophical?) work, now entirely lost.[2]

It is generally considered that the Byzantine sources describing Constantinople[3] did not directly use Dionysius' treaty. In fact, the only ancient external testimony recognized today dates from the 6th century AD, when Stephanus of Byzantium knew the existence and the text of the *Anaplous Bospori* and quoted Dionysius' etymology for Chrysopolis. It was probably the patriarch Photius who included, in the 9th century, the Anaplous in his collection of geographers, with Arrian's *Periplous of the Black Sea* and Strabo's *Chrestomathies*.[4] In the Latin Occident, the text remained unknown until the research of Petrus Gillius in the 16th century.[5]

The only chronological information we have about this author comes from the preserved fragment of his *Description of the Bosporus*, as the linguistic characteristics of the text point to a Roman imperial date.[6] However, the most important indication occurs *e silentio*, from the absence of any references to the siege of Byzantium by Septimius Severus' troops in 193-195/196 AD,[7] the destruction or to the reconstruction of the city. The most recent monument mentioned must be Apollo's altar on the Cyaneai rocks ("Cobalt-dark rocks"),[8] erected at an unknown date by the Romans and never identified by modern researchers.

### 2. Works

The *Description of the Bosporus* belongs to the literary genre of the *periploi*. This was the earliest Greek form of geographical writing, to which allude already the Catalogue of the Ships in the second book of the *Iliad* and some nautical narrations in the *Odyssey* (e.g. at the beginning of the ninth book).[9] However, a long way has been made since the 6th century BC, when empirical data about the Mediterranean coasts has been synthesized, apparently for the first time for literary/scientific purposes, into a continuous description of a sea (as was the case of the *Massaliote Periplous*, later translated by the Latin poet Avienus) or of all the internal sea, our Mediterranean[10] (as the *Periplous* of Scylax of Caryanda, eventually written for the Persian king Darius I).

The 2nd century AD was a time of great interest in archaism, erudition, universalism, and scientific progress. This century has seen Ptolemy, who brought further than any other ancient scholar the study of the mathematical geography, continuing the work of Eratosthenes and of Hipparchus for the construction of a correct representation of the world based upon astronomic calculations. It

has also seen the development of the *periegesis*, a full description of a precise region containing geographical, historical, mythological, and artistic information, from the local tourist guidebooks of the Hellenistic period (as Heliodorus' *About the Acropolis* or the 2nd century BC Guides of Athens, Sparta, Delphi, Ilion, Olympia, etc. by Polemon), to the extensive *Periegesis of Hellas* by Pausanias and to the poetic *Periegesis of the World* by Dionysius of Alexandria.[11] About 132 AD, Arrian of Nicomedia wrote a *Periplous of the Black Sea*,[12] in the form of a Greek letter addressed to Hadrian, the Hellenophile emperor of the time. This text has the ancient structure of a periplous (an enumeration of ethnics, toponyms, hydronyms, and nautical distances between them), completed with historical, literary, mythological and scientific digressions and enhanced by the personal travel of the Roman governor on the southeastern coast of that sea.

This attachment to exhaustive detail, erudition, and direct knowledge of the region, cast in the ancient form of the coast-descriptions, characterizes Dionysius' Anaplous too. Thus, we cannot say that the Anaplous is the ancient correspondent of the modern Black Sea pilots: the nautical information it contains agrees more with the curiosity of a scholar than with the necessity of a mariner whose knowledge was orally transmitted and enhanced from generation to generation. Also, there is no need to have a map accompanying the text; for the ancient public, such a description was sufficient to construct the mental representation of a linear space.[13]

### 2.1 The Anaplous

The name "Anaplous" designates originally the "sailing up-stream", from the sea to an inland harbour (through a canal) or from the mouth up on the course of a river. In the 4th century BC, the anonymous author of the periplous identified today with Pseudo-Scylax, named the region up of Bosporus, till the mouth of the Black Sea, Anaplous:[14] this was quite expected, because the Bosporus was perceived in Antiquity as a sort of river through which the Black Sea ran into the Hellespont.[15] Using his personal knowledge of the region but also inspired by sources entirely unknown today, as well as by Herodotus, Polybius or Arrian, Dionysius has described this knot of the ancient oekoumene, where Europe meets Asia and the Aegean receives the floats of the Black Sea, following its European coast, from the city of Byzantium to the Kyaneai rocks and back, on the Asiatic shore, to the city of Chalcedon.

The Anaplous begins with a proemium, which indicates the purpose of the author, through a praise of the objected to be studied. Dionysius writes for those who "navigate to the Black Sea and to what is called its mouth": "I think it is necessary to write about these things, for those who see them, so that they do not loose anything from their perfect and complete comprehension, and for those who never saw them, to have through what they have heard a good idea about them". In the tradition of Herodotus who wrote about "the extraordinary… the most marvelous of all seas"[16] largely overestimating its dimensions, Dionysius considers the Black Sea as "superior by its size to all the other seas which cannot compare to the exterior sea" and records the amazing system of successive streams separating Europe and Asia, from the Tanais, through the Maeotis, the Cimmerian Bosporus, the Black Sea and the Thracian Bosporus.

When reading such a book, one cannot but think about the Argonautic saga, placed since the Archaic period in the Euxine,[17] and intimately closely connected with the passage through the Planctae/Symplegades/Kyaneai. For Dionysius, the link between the landscape he sees and describes and the myth is obvious: "in my opinion, this is the origin of the name of the 'Symplegades' ('clashing rocks'), because they seem to open in front of those who approach by ship and to close for those going back, this opinion coming from a false illusion".[18]

Leaving the city of Byzantium,[19] established on the Bosporios promontory, the geographer advances to the north, to the sanctuary of Athena Ecbasia, the temple of Poseidon, and goes alongside the stadia, the gymnasia and the three ports of the Byzantines. The temples of Gaia, Demeter and Kore, Hera and Pluto come next. This is the place Darius choose to pass from Asia to Europe during his Scythian campaign,[20] and this last temple was destroyed by Philip of Macedon when he captured Byzantium.[21]

After the Scironides rocks and Kykla comes another sanctuary of Athena (Skedasia), the gulf of Melias, open lands good for gardening where Arcadian Zeus was honoured, different places named after heroes otherwise often unknown to us. This was the pasture "on a wet, Thracian shore, near the mouth of the Pontus", where "the fish and the deer graze together", which was indicated

# Dionysius of Byzantium

by the oracle to the Greek colonists, near to the Kydaros and the Barbyses rivers. It is a mythical land, where Jason the Argonaut, Io, and Semystra, wife of Poseidon and mother of Byzas, the eponym founder of Byzantium, have passed through.

Apollo, who guided the Greek establishment in this area, is honoured further north in a place called "Drys". Number of other places recording ancient Byzantine history (in particular Philip's attack) and Megarian heroic mythology (Nikaios, Hipposthenes, Schoinicles) are listed up to Artemis Phosphoros' and Aphrodite Praeia's sanctuary. Bays famous for good fishing[22] are listed between different Hellenistic monuments (as the temple of Ptolemy Philadelphos, the Fortifications of the Rhodians) and legendary reminisces of the Argonauts (a Jasonion, a Geron Alios place, Medea's laurel) and of founders of cities that never existed (as that of a Scythian descending to Crete or of Archias the Thasian).

Approaching the entry into the Euxine Pontus, other sacred places appear with different variants of their legends: the promontory of Hestia, the temple of Artemis Dyktynne appeased by the Cyzicenes, Faidaliva connected again to Byzas' myth, the Port of the Women, the temple of Hecate, a gulf dedicated to another Megarian hero, Lasthenes, with a sanctuary of Amphiaraus, other places connected with Phillip's campaign against Byzantium (Bacchiae), with the Argonauts (Pharmacias). Finally, the clear references to the entry into the Black Sea, as the Keys of Pontus and the Fair rock, the Profound gulf, the Golden river, the "Timea"[23] tower guiding the mariners on the way of the Euxine, particularly inhospitable in its south-western part,[24] and a place called "Phosphorus" because of a lighthouse or of Artemis, separate the sanctuaries dedicated to Apollo and to the Mother of Gods, another temple of the Phrygian Goddess next to the promontory dedicated by Jason to the Twelve Gods, and places recording the passage of Ephesians, Lycians, or Myrleans. Finally, the Cyaneai Rocks, "whose view calls the greatest pleasure and admiration", as they are the term of this sinuate narrow channel and the beginning of a great open sea.

From the Clashing rocks, Dionysius brings his reader back, following the Asiatic coast.[25] The Argonautic tale is back again with mentions of Jason's travel (Ancyreum promontory, Pyrgos Medeae or the Asiatic Cyaneai, Αἰετοῦ Ρύγχος) and even of Phrixus (Hieron, Φρίξου λιμήν). Different monuments belonging to the Chalcedonians and recalling their Megarean history (e.g. Nausikleia) as well as other mythical episodes mark the shore till their homonyme river and city.

We can only hope that this text, which combines local geography, mythology and history but is generally used only by the historians of the region, will regain in the future the place it deserves in the cultural history of the second century AD as well as in the field of ancient geography.

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1. Crusius, in his entry "Dionysius von Byzanz 98" in *Real Encyclopaedie* , col. 927, registred the lexicographer Hesychius as source of Suda's testimony. Dionysius of Byzantium is not registered among the entries of the *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd edition, 2003), neither among the ancient authors recorded in the last numbers of *Année Philologique*.

2. C. Müller, in his edition of *Geographi Graeci Minores* II, p. v, tried to correct Suda's text. However, such artificial reconstructions must remain philological supposition and should not become history.

3. For the *Patria* of the 11th century, see G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire. Etude sur le recueil des "Patria" (*Paris 1984).

4. Cf. the codex Palatinus Heidelbergensis gr. 398; D. Marcotte, *Géographes grecs. Introduction générale (*Paris 2000).

5. Petrus Gillius / Pierre Gilles (1490-1555) was a French traveller in Ottoman empire (Greece, Asia Minor, and, with the occasion of the military campaign against Persia, in Syria, and Egypt). Among other works inspired by his missions, he is the author of *De Bosporo Thracio libri tres (*Leiden 1632).

6. R. Güngerich, *Dionysii Byzantii Anaplous Bospori (*Berlin 1958), p. xxviii*sq*.

# Dionysius of Byzantium

7. *Cf.* C. Müller, *Geographi Graeci Minores* II, p. 5; R. Güngerich, *Dionysii Byzantii Anaplous Bospori (*Berlin 1958), p. xliv; C. Mango, *Le Développement urbain de Constantinople (IV$^e$-VII$^e$ siècles) (*Paris 1985), p. 1*sq.*

8. fr. 53 Müller = fr. 86 Wescher/Güngerich, preserved in the Latin version of Gillius. The Cyaneai rocks, indicating the entry into the Black Sea, have been identified since Euripides' tragedies with the Planctae and the Symplegades. They were an important landmark in the Argonautic legend (especially in the Apollonius Rhodius' poem) and have been differently localized by ancient geographers, on the European or the Asiatic shore of the northern Bosporus. Today, the prevailing view is that they correspond to the Örek tası (*Cf. The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, map 53). The dark color suggested by their name is probably connected with a more general image of the North as a dark land, maybe the same perception which determined in Indo-Iranian languages (and probably Persian in particular), the name of the "Black" Sea, borrowed by the Greeks as "άξενος/άξεινος" ("without strangers" or "inhospitable"), adjective transformed later, by antiphrasis, in "εύξεινο" ("hospitable"). See R. Schmitt, "Considerations on the Name of the Black Sea : what can the Historian Learn from it ?", in W. Leschhorn, A.V.B. Miron, A. Miron (eds), *Hellas und der Griechische Osten. Studien zur Geschichte und Numismatik der griechischen Welt, Feschrift für P.R. Franke zum 70. Geburststag (*Saarbrücken 1996), p. 219-224.

9. For this type of literary text, see R. Güngerich, *Die Küstenbeschreibung in der griechischen Literatur (*Aschendorff 1950), p. 21-22 for Dionysius of Byzantium.

10. The concept of "Mediterranean" did not exist till Roman times. However, there is an opposition in the Greek geographic thought between the sea (around which the Greeks lived) and the Ocean, seen as a river or as an external sea. *Cf.*, for Antiquity, J.S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought. Geography, Exploration and Fiction (*Princeton 1994) and more generally, N. Purcell, P. Horden, *The Corrupting Sea : A Study of Mediterranean History (*Oxford 2000).

11. For this literary genre, see J. Schnayder, *De Periegetarum Graecorum Reliquiis* (Societas Scientiarum Lodziensis 8) (Łódź 1950).

12. *Cf.* Liddle, A. *Arrian. Periplus Ponti Euxini (*Bristol 2003).

13. The "hodologic" form of the Greek and Roman geographical perception was argued by P. Janni, *La mappa e il periplo. Cartografia antica e spazio odologico (*Macerata 1984). This book was often exaggeratedly used for proving that the Greeks and Romans had no maps. For a much subtler view, see C. Jacob, *L'Empire des cartes. Approche théorique de la cartographie à travers l'histoire (*Paris 1992) (also in English, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History (*Chicago 2006)).

14. Demosthenes, *Against Polyclès* 18, called the sailing-up from Sextos to the entry of the Pontus "ἀνάπλους". For "Anaplous" as a toponym, see also, Arrian, *Bithyniaca* fr. 36 Roos-Wirth = fr. 20 Jacoby, and in Byzantine times, Procopius, *De aedificiis* 1.8.7, Stephanus Byzantius *s.u.* Γυναικόσπολις, Δάφνη and Καλλίπολις, and Eustathius' *Commentary* in Dionysius Periegetes v. 916, etc.

15. *Cf.* E. Oberhummer, "Bosporus 1", *Real Encyclopaedie* 5 (1897), col. 741-757 (especially 742). However, local fishermen were certainly aware of the existence of a deep inverse current, mentioned by Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 7.12.36*sq.*), *cf.* S. West, "*The Most Marvellous of All Seas*; the Greek Encounter with the Euxine", *Greece&Rome* 50.2 (2003), p. 151-167 (p. 153 for these references).

16. Hdt., *Histories* 4.85

17. A short history of the poetic creations inspired by the Argonautic journey opens P. Green's *The Argonautika by Apollonios Rhodios (*London 1997/2007).

18. For the Argonautic stations in the Bosporus, see H.B. Dewing, "Argonautic Associations of the Bosporus", *CJ* 19.8 (1924), p. 469-483.

19. The most complete study to localize the toponyms mentioned by Dionysius is that of C. Foss, in the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World.*

20. *Cf.* Hdt. 4.85. For a modern discussion, see P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre (*Paris 1996), p. 154 ff.

21. The debate about this episode is resumed in A. Dumitru, "Byzance et les Philippe de Macédoine", *Revue des études grecques* 119 (2006), p. 139-156.

22. Fishing was one of the most important resources of Byzantium, *cf.* J. Dumont, "La Pêche du thon à Byzance à l'époque hellénistique", *Revue des*

# Dionysius of Byzantium

*études anciennes* 78-79 (1976-1977), p. 96-119.

23. For this central part of the *Anaplous* no Greek manuscript has been recovered, so we depend upon the Latin text of Petrus Gillius, which explains the Latin form of the toponym (fr. 57-95 Wescher / Güngerich).

24. The absence of ports, the danger of shipwrecks and the ferocity of the barbarian tribes of Salmydessian Thracians is a recurrent opinion in ancient sources since the 6th century BC (e.*g.* Hipponax, fr. 115 West).

25. For the Bithynian coast of Byzantium, see the study of O.L. Gabelko, "Zur Lokalisierung und Chronologie der asiatischen Besitzungen von Byzanz", *Orbis Terrarum* 2 (1996), pp. 121-128.

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## ΠΑΡΑΘΕΜΑΤΑ

**Διονυσίου Βυζαντίου , Ἀνάπλους Βοσπόρου, 1. 1-11.**

Εἰ μόνην συνέβαινε τοῖς ἀναπλέουσιν εἰς τὸν Εὔξεινον Πόντον
κατὰ τὸ καλούμενον αὐτοῦ Στόμα τερπνὴν ἅμα καὶ θαυμαστὴν εἶναι
τὴν ὄψιν, δυσχερὴς ἦν ἄλλως ἐπὶ τοῖς ὁρωμένοις ὁ λόγος· ἀπείργαστο
γὰρ δὴ τὸ σύμπαν ὑπὸ τῆς ὄψεως, ἀξιοθαύμαστον ἑαυτὴν παρεχο-
μένης κατά τ' ἐγγύτητα καὶ στενοχωρίαν τοῦ πορθμοῦ καὶ τὴν δι' (5)
ὀλίγου τῆς θαλάττης πρὸς ἀμφοτέραν τὴν ἤπειρον ἐπιμιξίαν <καὶ>

# Dionysius of Byzantium

ἐγγυβαθῆ κόλπων καὶ λιμένων ἀνάχυσιν, ὑφ' ὧν οὐχ ἧττον εὔθηρός
ἐστιν ἢ σκεπανή, καὶ τοῦ ῥεύματος τὸ μὲν πλέον κατιόντος, ἔστι δ'
ὅτε κατ' ἐπικράτειαν ἀναστρέφοντος, εἰσιόντων τε τῶν ἀκρωτηρίων,
τὴν περιαγωγὴν παραλλήλων ἀναπτυσσομένων καὶ ἐκ τῆς κατ' εὐθὺ (10)
πορείας ἀναλυόντων τοῦ ῥεύματος τὴν βίαν.