

УДК 904 (477.7) : 94 (38).08/09

## PHILODEMUS ON OLBIA: BUREBISTA, IMPERIALISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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In this paper I consider various concerns and problems which are not usually discussed together, even though they share a common relevance to the history of Olbia and the western Black Sea in the years of the late Roman Republic and early Principate. In particular, we shall tackle the (perhaps shockingly) small amount of direct evidence for King Burebista, about whom so much has been written and imagined by modern scholars. Here my purpose is to consider not simply how much we really know about his reign (and more specifically his dealings with Olbia), but also the nature and causes of the evident interest in him by Greek writers of the Roman period. That will entail some consideration of the abiding significance of traditions surrounding Zalmoxis and other Thracians (notably Rhesus) from at least the fifth century BC, through imperial Greek culture, and on into late antiquity. And that in turn will highlight the role of philosophy in its many forms (including politics, medicine and the possible immortality of the soul) in Greek and Roman conceptions about Olbia and its broader region, with the Cynic philosopher Bion (often known as Bion of Borysthenes) to the fore. A neglected (and problematic) few lines of Philodemus will be brought to bear on these matters, while we may be left with a rather different sense even of Burebista.

The sad fact is that we hear little of Olbia in literary sources for the period of the late Roman Republic. A single, short passage in Dio Chrysostom's *Oration* 36 is our key evidence:

The city of Borysthenes, as to its size, does not correspond to its ancient fame, because of its ever-repeated seizure and its wars. For since the city has lain in the midst of barbarians now for so long a time – barbarians, too, who are virtually the most warlike of all – it is always in a state of war and has often been captured, the last and most disastrous capture occurring not more than one hundred and fifty years ago. And the Getae on that occasion seized not only Borysthenes but also the other cities along the

left shore of Pontus as far as Apollonia. For that reason the fortunes of the Greeks in that region reached a very low ebb indeed, some of them being no longer united to form cities, while others enjoyed but a wretched existence as communities, and it was mostly barbarians who flocked to them. Indeed many cities have been captured in many parts of Greece, inasmuch as Greece lies scattered in many regions. But after Borysthenes had been taken on the occasion mentioned, its people once more formed a community, with the consent of the Scythians, I imagine, because of their need for traffic with the Greeks who might use that port. For the Greeks had stopped sailing to Borysthenes when the city was laid waste, inasmuch as they had no people of common speech to receive them, and the Scythians themselves had neither the ambition nor the knowledge to equip a trading-centre of their own after the Greek manner. (*Or.* 36.4-5, Loeb transl.)

However, this key text is problematic for those who wish to understand the history of Olbia at the end of the Roman Republic, as Valentina Krapivina has recently observed, setting Dio's account in the context of a general retraction in the scope of Olbian control in the period before this «Getic onslaught»<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, there is still more scholarly discussion too about the use of this passage for the history of Dio's own day. The problem is not that Dio is writing (as he himself states) about a century and a half after the period he here describes, although that simple fact is obviously awkward in itself. The more fundamental problem is Dio's agenda. For Dio uses Olbia and

<sup>1</sup>Noting archaeology in the city that might be linked to a Getic conquest, and comparing Istrus, on which more below. (This is not the place to revisit the whole issue of Dio's use as history.) Overwhelmingly, the scholars concerned with the Black Sea region benefit from excellent personal relations, to which Valentina Krapivina was central. Here I should also like to mention the considerable assistance I received from Profs. Avram and Minchev in preparing this paper: I hope that they will not be too disappointed by the use I have made of their generosity. As always, all responsibility for views expressed remains with me [20, P. 109-110].

its history to build an argument which is intended not for the historian of this city, but for delivery to the people of his home town of Prusa in Bithynia, where we can hardly imagine a close knowledge of Olbia among the citizens whom Dio was addressing. In fact, the relevance of Olbia is overwhelmingly its potential (which Dio exploits to the full) to introduce, exemplify and support a homily on civic unity. Already in this early section of the speech, which will shortly abandon all concern with Olbia, we should observe Dio's stress upon the theme of community amongst Greeks and the contrast between Greek and non-Greek which was typical for his work and a commonplace among the Greeks of his day. It is absolutely typical for a writer like Dio to stress difference and hostility between Greeks and others. In consequence, we should retain, from the first, some suspicion about his stress on the damage done by the Getae as also on his speculations about Scythian desire for Greek imports and encouragement of the city's revival. Of course, that is not to insist upon Dio's claims being wholly wrong, but rather to keep a sense of caution about them, in part or in whole, because of his familiar concerns and prejudices (see, for example [31]).

This allusion to the Getae also repays some closer examination and reflection. It is usual to see here action by Burebista, or at least some part of his forces. Certainly, the chronology works: this famous king of the Getae ruled about 150 years before Dio's visit to Olbia c. AD 100. We also know of his imperialist extension of power, thanks especially to Strabo. There is no reason at all to doubt that Burebista brought Olbia under his sway, however temporarily. Whether his control of the city required as much destruction as Dio has been taken to suggest, is rather less clear – and we may observe that Dio is rather vague about destruction in Olbia on this occasion. Of course, we must be slow to challenge our only surviving ancient evidence on the matter. On the other hand, however, the fact that Dio's version of events is our only direct literary evidence does not mean that we must or can simply accept it as uncomplicated fact. Further, while it is natural that scholars should seek to build on Dio's rare datum by associating it with other potentially relevant data in the material record, we should probably proceed in such agglomerations with a measure of reticence. For example, an inscription from Odessus (modern Varna), listing priests *after the kathodos* might indeed be an indication that the

city was abandoned in the face of Burebista, as has been argued with great authority,<sup>1</sup> but we must acknowledge also that the date and circumstances of this inscription are not precisely clear. At any rate, talk of a *kathodos* need not imply by any means that the city had been abandoned: the return of the democracy to Athens, down from Boeotia, in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War offers something of a parallel, but in this case the city was never abandoned by its population.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, there is no mention in it of Burebista or of destruction.

An honorific inscription from Istria has also been brought to bear on Burebista.<sup>3</sup> This is the inscription for Aristagoras, son of Apatourios, who is honored by the Istrians for his expenditure of money, energy and perhaps experience in years of crisis. And the inscription makes clear that the crisis entailed barbarians, who *inter alia* are said to have controlled the civic territory for three years. While it is easy to be cynical about the reality underlying the effusive rhetoric of such honorific decrees, there can be no doubt that there was a substantial crisis, and that Aristagoras was a central figure in dealing with it over some years, not least as wall-builder, given the office of *teichopoios*. It is reasonable enough to argue that we have here indications of the civic response to Burebista. All the more so, since archaeology provides firm evidence of substantial late hellenistic destruction at Istria<sup>4</sup>. However, problems abide with this attractive picture of the destructive barbarian. First, we can only date the inscription on letter-forms, so that, while the once-standard date of 100 BC or so seems no longer supportable (replaced by a date in the second half of the first century BC), we are in no position to urge any close date for the decree.<sup>5</sup> Given the tendency of the cities of the region to have such crises (we need look no further than

<sup>1</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup> 145. The noun often occurs in religious contexts (LSJ), so that it might also be important that the context here is a list of priests.

<sup>2</sup> IGBulg.12.46, with Mihailov ad loc, supporting interpretation in terms of Burebista; note too Minchev 2003, 229, with further bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> See Avram 2000, no. 4, with detailed discussion and bibliography. On Dio, 38.10, see further below.

<sup>4</sup> Avram and others 2010-11. We may wonder, in this regard, how much damage *Hybrida* had managed to do, whether or not it shows up in the material record.

<sup>5</sup> A. Avram (pers.comm.) has pointed out that in any case we cannot be sure of the passage of time between the inscribing of the decree and the various events listed. The granting of honours to Aristagoras might most easily be understood in the immediate aftermath of these events, but there is no room for certainty.

the earlier Olbian decree for Protogenes, whose beneficence also includes fortification of the city) and given the clear potential for upheaval in the region during Rome's civil wars, in particular, there must be a measure of doubt that it was Burebista who had caused this particular set of crises, and/or the destruction evidenced in the material remains of the city. Those who prefer to take Dio Chrysostom literally should observe too that he reports that Olbia was not only involved in regular conflict with warlike barbarians, but was often actually captured by them (Dio Chrys. 36.4). Moreover, the Istrian decree fails to mention Burebista at any point, and does not even mention Getae. That is important not simply in itself, but because one might have expected an honorific decree to use the great name of the king to inflate the rhetoric about Aristagoras' achievement. The decree does not speak of these barbarians as if they are an imperial regime of the standing and likely longevity of Burebista's expanded kingdom. In sum, there is an attraction and neatness about the hypothesis that the decree and the physical damage to the city bear on Burebista, especially as such an interpretation seems to chime with Dio's remarks on Olbia. It is a pity that we do not have more of another civic inscription, from Mesembria, which certainly mentions a Burebista and may have been correctly restored as relating to a mesembrian (as it seems) who led war against him.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, we may also wonder whether the name of Burebista has had a magnetic effect on modern scholarship, drawing all our scraps of knowledge about these decades towards him. Strabo, who is our main source for Burebista, presents him as a force for organization in place of disorder, not as a rampant besieger of Greek cities, on whose side we would expect to find the geographer, as earlier with Mithridates.

Meanwhile, a famous inscription from Dionysopolis (modern Balchik, on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, above Varna-Odessus) demonstrates that relationships between Greeks of the coastal cities and the great king of the Getae were by no means all about conflict and war. For this inscribed marble slab sets out honours for a citizen of Dionysopolis, named Akornion, who has served as a key figure in the regime of Burebista. For it is clear from the inscription (and from the king's use of Akornion on a key mission to Pompey) that Akornion had

a well-established place with Burebista, even if he managed also to play an important role in the city as one of its wealthiest.<sup>2</sup> The Dionysopolitans declare, among much else, that he used his position to the benefit of the city.<sup>3</sup> While this inscription says nothing about Olbia, it does remind us that the Greek cities of the region had long experience of and complex relationships with local rulers. Therefore, while Dio was likely, in view of his general sense of the incompatibility of Greek and non-Greek, to stress alienation between Olbia and Burebista's Getae, we also need have no difficulty in envisaging a Getan conquest of the city that was much more about diplomacy than warfare. After all, it would have been wise of late Hellenistic Olbia to seek an accommodation with a king who was also ruler of other Greek cities along the coast, all the way to Apollonia, according to Dio. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere in some detail [15], Olbia was very much an outpost (albeit an important one) of the string of Greek cities along the western coast of the Pontus: its geographical position (entailing also the maritime route up and down this coast) meant that it was unlikely to stand separate from events on the lower Danube and beyond. Accordingly, in trying to form some sense of Burebista's dealings with Olbia, we should perhaps bear in mind too the familiar story of Skyles, which in several ways both suggests complex relationships between this king and the city, and also tends to connect Olbia with Istria and the lower Danube [6; 32]. All the more so when we observe that the Getae were located not only south of the Danube (where scholars tend first to think of them), but also north and east of it, as far as the Tyregetae (the Getans of the river Tyras, it might seem), as Strabo has it [15; Strabo 7.3.1; cf. 14].

As for Olbia, if we can take Dio at his word, Getae were responsible for the «last and greatest» capture of the city (36.4). And here Dio's words need much careful attention. For, while he seeks to present the Getan success here as part of a wider phenomenon on the west Pontic coast (and that too as part of a still wider phenomenon of Greeks falling prey to neighbouring barbarians), he writes of capture, but not of destruction. The city, on his account,

<sup>2</sup> The introduction of «recently» in line 22 is not justified by the Greek, where we have only an *epsilon* and *iota*.

<sup>3</sup> IG Bulg.12.13, with V. 5006 (cf. SEG 38.737). In general, Ruscu 2013 on Greek and non-Greek relations in the western Black Sea, albeit with minimal concern for Akornion and less for Burebista.

<sup>1</sup> IG Bulg.12. 323.

has declined markedly from its great days of the past (a time so dear to the likes of Dio in the so-called «Second Sophistic»). Barbarians have flooded in, he suggests, including not only the Scythians with whom his contemporary Olbia seems to be at war, but there is also a nearby stronghold of a Sarmatian queen. And it was Scythians, as he imagines it, who supported the recovery of Olbia (however that may be imagined), so that Greeks who had stopped making the voyage to the now-alien city had returned to give them the benefits of trade. This whole vision is entirely coherent in the context of imperial Greek obsessions, but we can hardly support its simple reality, as has often been observed.

Strikingly, however, Dio does not name Burebista or even hint at the existence of a king. Instead, he writes only of the Getae in general. The omission of the king enhances the sense of Getan barbarism which Dio requires for his counterpointing of Greek and non-Greek. The more important observation, however, is the broader significance of Getae for Dio and his contemporaries, embracing and developing a tradition that reaches back through Strabo and much else at least as far as Herodotus. For at the very outset of his *Oration*, Dio claims that he travelled to Olbia with intention of passing through the Scythians to visit the Getae in order to see things (*pragmata*) there. The claim is notably peculiar. Passage via Olbia and through Scythians was a strange way to reach the Getae, as anyone as learned as Dio would certainly know very well. Especially so, if Dio sailed by the usual route up the western coast of the Black Sea. If he had done that, as might be expected, he had passed by many easier ways to reach the Getae, for example at Istria. Explanation is elusive, though I am inclined to think that part of the point here is that Dio wishes his more learned readers to understand that his journey is not to be taken literally. The more important question, perhaps, is why Dio would wish to reach the Getae at all: what were these *pragmata*, «things» that he wished to see (whether literally or in an imaginary sense)? The question is all the more intriguing, if we recall that Dio seems to have written a whole work entitled *Getika* (*Things Getic*). While Dio wrote a lot about aspects of Greek culture, with much philosophical reflection on the best kind of life, especially in a civic context of harmony, and while he wrote also on kingship, he only once tackled a sustainedly barbarian theme, as far as we know. Clearly the Getae were special to him, and it is

not hard to see why, at least in broad terms for he was by no means the only Greek to take a special interest in the Getae. Given that general Greek interest, we may be sure enough that it was not the Getan king who attracted Dio (not even Burebista), but the religious and philosophical traditions that were thought to have developed there.

Zalmoxis was of recurrent interest among Greeks of the imperial period. Herodotus' canonical account about his contested identity turned on relations between Greeks and non-Greeks. For he shows a Greek view (evidently in the local cities of the west Pontic coast) that Zalmoxis was a former slave of Pythagoras, who had used some of the knowledge he had gained with him on Samos to manipulate the gullible Getae, among whom he had been born. However, as often, Herodotus also provided insight into the very different perspective of the Getae themselves. For the Getae treated Zalmoxis as a god, among whose accomplishments had been the conquest of death itself. At the same time, Herodotus has something to say also of religion more generally among the Getae. The conflict in Herodotus' two perspectives on Zalmoxis (Greek and Getan) is echoed also in Olbia, where he draws attention to a cultural gap (at east) between Greeks of the city and nearby Scythians over the worship of Dionysus as a god. At Olbia these Scythians are reportedly scornful of the Greeks' god in much the same way as the Greeks of the west coast scorned this god of the Getae [Hdt.4.94-6, with Braund 2008]. Such issues were of prime concern to Greeks of the Roman empire, like Dio, as indeed was Herodotus more generally. However, there was much more of interest for them besides in traditions about the Getae. A rather neglected passage in Plato's *Charmides* may compete in importance with Herodotus' account, especially in view of the persistence of Platonism in one form or another: Dio even reports it at his contemporary Olbia, where Homer allegedly predominated to the exclusion of virtually all else. In *Charmides* (esp. 156d-157c) Plato has Socrates describe his encounter and discussions with a Thracian (Getan?) healer in the tradition of Zalmoxis. Socrates' military service at Amphipolis, or possibly Potidaea, offers the likely context. A Thracian healer there may have been connected with the important foundational cult of Rhesus, which the Athenians had established there only a few years before Socrates arrived, and Rhesus was

himself known as a healer, besides much else.<sup>1</sup> Before proceeding to explain the holistic approach of these healers to medicine, Socrates is made to observe that they «are said even to make one immortal» (157d). Immortality, the ultimate in medicine, was certainly enough to attract Dio and others besides, especially in so famous and influential a text as this Platonic dialogue. However, that was not all.<sup>2</sup>

Strabo provides a valuable indication of those interests and their relevance to the world of imperial Greeks like Dio. We should observe how Strabo saw fit to expand upon Getan practices («things», as Dio might have said) in what is almost an excursus in his *Geography*, for that in itself indicates the imperial Greek concern with Getae. His account of Zalmoxis has both similarities to and differences from the details found in Herodotus. The story had acquired a range of twists and turns: Josephus, notably, writing in Greek in the later first century AD, could quote Hermippus of Smyrna for the notion that Pythagoras had himself taken some of his ideas from the Thracians, thereby reversing the direction of influence.<sup>3</sup> The story had become one of on-going religious involvement in the kingdom of the Getae. As we read Strabo's account of the power of Decaeneus with Burebista, we may well wonder how the king's Dionysopolitan handled this situation on a day-to-day basis:

In fact, it is said that a certain man of the Getae, Zalmoxis by name, had been a slave to Pythagoras, and had learned some things about the heavenly bodies from him, as also certain other things from the Egyptians, for in his wanderings he had gone even as far as Egypt; and when he came on back to his home-land he was eagerly courted by the rulers and the people of the tribe, because he could make predictions from the celestial signs; and at last he persuaded the king to take him as a partner in the government, on the ground that he was

competent to report the will of the gods; and although at the outset he was only made a priest of the god who was most honoured in their country, yet afterwards he was even addressed as god, and having taken possession of a certain cavernous place that was inaccessible to anyone else he spent his life there, only rarely meeting with any people outside except the king and his own attendants; and the king cooperated with him, because he saw that the people paid much more attention to himself than before, in the belief that the decrees which he promulgated were in accordance with the counsel of the gods. This custom persisted even down to our own time, because some man of that character was always to be found, who, though in fact only a counsellor to the king, was called god among the Getae. And the people took up the notion that the mountain was sacred and they so call it, but its name is Cogaeonum, like that of the river which flows past it. So, too, at the time when Burebista, against whom already the Deified Caesar had prepared to make an expedition, was reigning over the Getae, the office in question was held by Decaeneus, and somehow or other the Pythagorean doctrine of abstention from eating any living thing still survived as taught by Zalmoxis. (Strabo, 7.3.5)

A few chapters later, Strabo returns to Decaeneus:

To help him secure the complete obedience of his tribe he had as his coadjutor Decaeneus, a wizard, a man who not only had wandered through Egypt, but also had thoroughly learned certain prognostics through which he would pretend to tell the divine will; and within a short time he was set up as god (as I said when relating the story of Zalmoxis). The following is an indication of their complete obedience: they were persuaded to cut down their vines and to live without wine. However, certain men rose up against Burebista and he was deposed before the Romans sent an expedition against him and those who succeeded him divided the empire into several parts. In fact, only recently, when Augustus Caesar sent an expedition against them, the number of parts into which the empire had been divided was five, though at the time of the insurrection it had been four. Such divisions, to be sure, are only temporary and vary with the times. (Strabo, 7.3.11)

Clearly, Strabo is drawn to the figure of this latter-day Zalmoxis. Insofar as his family had been important in the regime of Mithridates Eupator, the sheer politics involved here might well attract him. Indeed, the geographer himself moved in imperial circles, for example as the

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Blomart 2005, 89; Ustinova 2009, 274. We may wonder whether the fact that Rhesus' mother was a Muse (albeit Kleio) was linked to Thracian healing use of incantations; cf. also Plato, *Rep.*364bff. On Socrates' military service, see now Monoson 2016.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the place to review the many facets of so complex and important a set of traditions: see further e.g. Bonnechere 2003 (Zalmoxis and Trophonius); Ustinova 2009 (Zalmoxis and Apollo Iatros).

<sup>3</sup> *Against Apion*, 1.164-5, primarily concerned with Jews (which makes his mention of Thracians especially interesting). Hermippus wrote in the later third century BC: further on his Thracian concern, see Bar-Kochva 2010, 164-205.

companion of Aelius Gallus, the second prefect of Egypt, and outspoken admirer of Queen Pythodoris. Learning of different kinds (astronomy had a special significance for the geographer) combined with Pythagorean associations, questions of immortality and deification to make the Getae an enticing subject for imperial Greeks, and not only the serious-minded (like Strabo and Dio). The playful Lucian returns several times to Zalmoxis in his satirical writings, as at the start of his *Scythian, or Proxenos*, where he finds it convenient to make Zalmoxis a Scythian.<sup>1</sup> Zalmoxis and the Getae even make their way into an imperial Greek novel, *The incredible things beyond Thule*, written by a certain Antonius Diogenes in the first or second century AD.<sup>2</sup> This most geographical of Greek novels (whose outline is known thanks to Photius' summary) is much concerned with Pythagoreanism and with distant parts of the earth, so that its inclusion of a visit to Zalmoxis in Thrace was to be expected. Meanwhile, there was something irresistible too for many of these writers in the recurrent linkage (explicit or implied) between the Thracian north and the Egyptian south, which brought these two ends of the earth together, as here with Strabo.

Decaeneus may have been viewed by Strabo with some suspicion, but the geographer is clear that he was important to the success of Burebista's regime. It may have been important to Dio that, together, the king and his Rasputinish partner brought to the Getae the kind of unity and harmony that he so prized. All the more so, since this was a regime of some austerity in Burebista's reign at least. That was consistent with its Pythagorean aura (mentioned by Strabo), for Pythagoras too was said even to have avoided the consumption of wine, not least in the interests of self-control.<sup>3</sup> Plato had been specific about the immoderate consumption of wine by Thracians, though he does not specify Getae: in the *Laws* he writes that they drink their wine neat, men and women alike, and let it pour over their clothes, and he discusses the question of how a legislator might best respond to that practice.<sup>4</sup> The philosophical

debates over wine-consumption thereafter (and before: we have noted the issue of Dionysiac cult at Olbia) centres upon discipline and the good of the state and community, so that we can easily appreciate how the destruction of vines and rejection of wine that was credited to Burebista's regime fits into a much larger question of social order, harmony and the general good, as Strabo almost makes explicit in any case. We are left to wonder how this new direction taken by Burebista's regime could have been combined with the cult of Dionysus, with established Thracian practices (as dramatically indicated by the Panagyurishte hoard, for example) and indeed the Thracian economy, as well as the relations between Greek cities of the coast, with their own long traditions of wine production (we may recall the wine of Maronea used by Odysseus to quell the Cyclops in the ninth book of the *Odyssey*). With all this in mind, it is tempting to suppose that Strabo's talk of an end (temporarily) to Thracian viticulture is overstated at least. Nevertheless, it is important if we are to gain a sense of his view of Burebista, who was after all a contemporary in his early life, as Strabo grew up in Rome. Importantly, as we have already begun to observe, Burebista does not emerge from Strabo as a wild or even dangerous barbarian, hostile to his fellow Greeks. On the contrary, he emerges as a ruler who supports order and, despite the peculiar heritage of Zalmoxis and the claims of Decaeneus, he seems to engage with ideas that are comprehensible and respectable enough among Greeks. Crucially, in addition to the broadly positive tendencies of the king in Strabo's eyes, there is no hint of hostility from Burebista towards the Greek cities of the coast in anything that the geographer says. At the same time, we must recall that the Getae whom Dio blames for the decline of these cities are not said to be the forces of Burebista (except by modern scholars).

On the whole, Strabo tends to be far more concerned with the Greek heritage than with more contemporary matters, while Roman imperial intervention only very occasionally interrupts his focus on the Greek past. It is rather unusual, therefore, that Strabo chooses to mention Roman imperial responses to the Getae, by Julius Caesar and by the emperor Augustus. As for the former, the inscription from Dionysopolis indicates what seems to be Burebista's good relations with Pompey in his war with Caesar in 48 B.C. Conceivably

<sup>1</sup> Cf. esp. Lucian, *Zeus trag.* 42, where Zalmoxis is disparaged not only a slave, but, worse, a runaway slave.

<sup>2</sup> See Morgan 2007; Ni-Mheallaigh, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, it is omitted from his diet at Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 34, with Bar-Kochva 2010, 189 on palm wine.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Laws* 637 with Hobden 2013, 105; Peponi 2013, 111.

Burebista had sent troops to support Pomey.<sup>1</sup> However, Caesar's campaign never took place: it may well have been forestalled (as the better-known campaign against the Parthians, as it seems) by Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, rather as Suetonius claims.<sup>2</sup> We may wonder whether this projected Burebistan campaign was ever more than an idea, for these were very busy years for Caesar. However, Augustus' campaign came after Burebista had already been ousted from within (that is presumably part of the Illyrian wars of Caesar's heir in the 30s BC).<sup>3</sup> Strabo makes it clear that the demise of his regime brought the fragmentation of his realm into four or five parts.

It must be admitted, in sum, that our grasp of Burebista is very poor, for the good reason that we have little direct testimony about him. His removal from power, and likely death seems to lie around 40 BC, between the plans of Caesar and the expedition of his heir. No doubt the creation of his extensive realm was the work of many years. Our only hints to when the process began is provided by Jordanes, whose *Getica* presents him as ruler of the Getae already in the time of Sulla, at which time Decaeneus is said to have come to him too, that is around the late 80s BC. Although a shorter reign is often imagined, the sources give grounds only for these dates, in which there is nothing intrinsically impossible.<sup>4</sup> A reign of forty years would be unusual, certainly, but Mithridates Eupator managed some two decades more, for example. His regime, as far as we are told, was greatly strengthened by the Zalmoxis-like Decaeneus, who is named even by Jordanes, a key collaborator of the king in what Strabo presents as an attempt to bring about major cultural change in his kingdom. Clearly that change was expansionist too, but we have no more than isolated possible hints of any Burebistan hostility to the Greeks of the Pontus,<sup>5</sup>

while the Dionysopolis decree and Strabo's general attitude towards the king suggest rather the opposite. Accordingly, while it is quite possible that his expansionism did involve damage to the cities of the western Black Sea, we should consider also the potential harm done by those who came later and sought to replace Burebista in the parts of his realm.

Meanwhile, upon our broad view of Burebista's regime and chronology depends also our assessment of another awkward text that seems to have a bearing on the king, in one way or another, namely Cassius Dio 38.10, where we have a brief account of the controversial Roman, C. Antonius Hybrida, who had been consul with Cicero in 63 BC and had spent the next two years or so as governor of Macedonia. Cassius Dio presents Hybrida as the worst kind of governor, set on plundering those whom he should have protected. We may recall Cicero's account of Piso's later governorship: it is quite possible that Cassius Dio's version derives from a similar speech, by which Julius Caesar had Hybrida condemned after his return to Rome. Cassius Dio asserts (perhaps unfairly)<sup>6</sup> that Hybrida had approached the city of Istrus with intent to enrich himself, apparently by plundering the city, and its neighbours too no doubt. The city was saved, he says, thanks to help from non-Greeks whom he describes as «Scythian Bastarnae» (Cassius Dio, 38.10.3). Who are they and where is Burebista? If the king had been building his empire since the time of Sulla, we should expect him here to drive off this apparently outrageous Roman onslaught. It is at this point that our broader view of the king is critical. For if we imagine his empire in the western Pontus as later than 62-60 BC, there is no need to explain its absence, though the identity and role of these Bastarnae remain to be explained. However, if we consider Burebista already to be in place at this time in and around Istrus, there is no difficulty in explaining the identity of these Bastarnae of our Severan author as Getae,<sup>7</sup> with the king at their head, whether present in person or not. Given Jordanes' chronology, the latter interpretation seems preferable. However, what is beyond dispute in this tangle of possibilities and

<sup>1</sup> Further, Suceveanu 1998, 242-3.

<sup>2</sup> Suet. *DJ* 44.3, no doubt coloured by Augustus' presentation of his own campaigning; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 8.2; App. *Illyr.* 13; *BC* 2, 110. Note that Suetonius writes of *Daci*, while Appian prefers Getae, perhaps more suitable in his Greek tradition. As Strabo stresses, Burebista brought together both, while the Dionysopolis decree locates his realm in terms of Thrace. On Caesar's plans, Malitz 1984, esp. 54.

<sup>3</sup> For careful study of the ancient evidence, together with the substantial modern literature, see Yavetz

<sup>4</sup> As appreciated by Suceveanu 1998, 241.

<sup>5</sup> The strongest are *IGBulg.* 12. 323, as restored, and perhaps Suet. *DJ* 44.3, if pressed.

<sup>6</sup> Note the Antonius in the honours for Akornion.

<sup>7</sup> See esp. Batty 1994, 99 on the terminology. There has been scholarly resistance to the idea that Burebista might have helped Istrus: e.g. discussion in *IG Bulg.* V. 5006. However, there has also been support for such a view, notably Suceveanu 1998, 242, even if we might not share his larger inferences.

polemical writings, is that once again we find a picture of cooperation and not simple conflict (or some soft kind of «influence») between a Greek city of the western Black Sea and its non-Greek neighbours.

## II

With all that in mind, we come finally to Philodemus, who says only a very little about Olbia, but who was strangely connected with many of these events and concerns, not east as a Greek philosopher of the late Roman Republic. As far as I know, he has never been brought into the history of Olbia – perhaps with good reason... However, Philodemus was a contemporary of Burebista, and was also linked to him in rather unexpected fashion. For Philodemus, who came from Gadara in the eastern Mediterranean, was a philosopher who spent much of his career at Rome under the patronage of the wealthy Calpurnii Pisones. Cicero admired Philodemus enormously, despite the fact that (like Cicero's friend Atticus, and probably more so) Philodemus espoused Epicurean philosophy. Despite his admiration, however, Cicero took the opportunity to use Philodemus in 55 BC in his prosecution of Piso, delivered in the Senate. This was Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, who had been consul in 58 BC, after which, in 57, he had become governor of Macedonia, where he remained until 55. We should also note that he was also the father of Calpurnia, who was at this time the wife of Julius Caesar: they had married recently, late in 59 BC. It is Cicero's extraordinary rhetorical assault upon Piso that brings Philodemus and Burebista into the same orbit. For Cicero's central argument is that Piso was an exceptionally bad governor of his province and that so much might be expected of a man so concerned with Epicureanism as to have a Philodemus about the house. Whether Philodemus ever wrote anything about Burebista is unknown, but his works were voluminous. Immortality would have been as important a concern for him as for other philosophers, especially as he authored a work *On death*. The issue of death was central for Epicureans, as is obvious in the work of Philodemus' contemporary Lucretius. Death was a natural process which should not be feared, and which should not encourage belief in religion as a response to such fear. Accordingly, Philodemus would probably have been scornful of the Zalmoxis tradition, as being a religious

tendency supported by claims of immortality. Unfortunately, there is no trace of this in the portion of the *On death* that has survived, but we may be very sure that an author on such a subject who was as learned as Philodemus would certainly have been very aware of the Zalmoxis tradition. The fact that his patron became governor of Macedonia in the 50s BC, makes that strong probability into a virtual certainty. Meanwhile, both Piso's governorship and his dealings as governor with local rulers (including very possibly Burebista himself, as often imagined) gave a special significance to other aspects of Philodemus' philosophical works, for example his study of monarchy (*On the good king according to Homer*), where, rather like Strabo, Philodemus brings close together the works of Homer and the realities of the contemporary Roman world. Unfortunately, Cicero's speech is mostly invective, with the result that it is much less useful as an account of Piso's governorship in Macedonia than might have been hoped. We may at least observe, however, Cicero's insistence that this province required a great deal of military activity from all its governors. Of course, Cicero stresses this in order to claim the weakness of Piso's governorship, but the claim could hardly have been made if Macedonia was not associated in the minds of senators with significant warfare. How we are to understand that history of conflict at the margins of Burebista's expanding realm, remains a matter of uncertainty and potential controversy. It would be remarkable, however, if Rome and its governors had not made significant diplomatic contact with the king. While the Black Sea had become a direct concern for Rome by the time of Sulla, when Burebista is said to have begun ruling, Macedonia was an older and more pressing concern, where the frontier was not so far from Rome and Italy. It is unfortunate, again, that we are told nothing of this diplomacy, and whether it entailed direct or indirect conflict.

Most of Philodemus' writings have been lost. However, the remains of the so-called Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum (apparently holding the library of the Pisones) has provided some very substantial portions of his texts, which have survived the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79, albeit not without considerable damage. Until excavation there is complete we can only guess at how much or little more of his works might be found there. In the meantime, we have only a single mention there of Olbia, or more precisely



of an Olbian. The particular passage is short but highly complex, so that I shall not attempt to elucidate its many complexities here. The broad context of the passage is Philodemus' attack upon Aristotle, who had said that it would be shameful to remain silent and let Isocrates speak. Aristotle was making a hostile joke against his contemporary and rival Isocrates by adapting a verse from the (now mostly lost) *Philoctetes* of Euripides, which (we should observe) was also of great interest to Dio Chrysostom (see *Orations* 52 and 59). Attacking Aristotle for this remark, Philodemus asks whether there were not other things that might better be considered more shameful.

The text (as usually restored):

*For why more shameful to remain silent and let Isocrates speak than to live in the city and let Manes die, and to dwell on land and let the Phoenician and the Borysthenite ride the waves, and in complete safety to be a private citizen all one's life and let Themistocles go to war?*

τί γαρ μάλλον αἰσχρόν ἦν σιωπᾶν, Ἰσοκράτην δ' εἶν λέγειν ἢ κατὰ πόλιν ζῆν, Μάνην δέ σκαπανεύειν εἶν, κ' εἶν τῆι γῆι διατρίβειν, ἐπικυματίζεσθαι δέ τον Φοίνικα καί τον Βορυσθε[νεῖτη]ν, Ἰ και ἀσφ]α[λέστ]ατα [μ]έν ο[λον Ἰ τόν βίον] ἰδιω[τεύειν, Θεμιστοκλέα δέ στρατεύειν εἶν;

As I shall soon argue elsewhere in detail, the now-standard explanation of these lines will not suffice, while the alternative view advanced by Italian papyrologists (and now neglected or ignored) is much better, and completely correct in regard to our Olbian.<sup>1</sup> The standard view, established by Kindstrand [19], insists that Philodemus is writing of Phoenicians and Borysthenites (Olbiopolitans) as famous sailors. Clearly, Phoenicians were indeed famous sailors, but, although Borysthenites could sail of course, they are nowhere mentioned throughout antiquity as famous sailors, so that their inclusion here as an example of such sailors is extraordinary. Kindstrand, no doubt aware of this large problem, claimed that Olbia was famous as a trading emporion. And that is true enough. However, it is hardly relevant, for the role of Olbia, as we find it in ancient texts, is to be an emporium to which Greeks from elsewhere come by sea (as in Dio's *Oration* 36).

It is not the Olbiopolitans who are sailors in this tradition. While the people of Olbia could and did sail, locally and into the Aegean on occasion, there were other Greeks who could have been cited far more obviously, such as the Rhodians. In fact, this is the greatest flaw in Kindstrand's argument, and a flaw which has been overlooked by most of those who focus on Philodemus. However, the alternative view involves no such problem. In fact, Philodemus was referring in his ironic fashion to a series of Cynic philosophers. Although Manes is a common enough name, a Manes was famously the slave of the Cynic Diogenes of Sinope. The Phoenician in question (Phoinix) is not meant to denote Phoenicians in general (singular for plural, as it were), nor even a specific Phoenician, but a writer of Cynic tendencies named Phoinix of Colophon, of whose work only a little has survived. The Borysthenite, similarly, is not meant to denote all Borysthenites, but to invoke the single most famous citizen of Olbia in the ancient world, indeed, perhaps the only really famous one. He is another Cynic philosopher, Bion of Borysthenes.

This is only to broach the mass of problems that surround Philodemus' remark, for I wish here to focus sharply on Olbia. The particular significance of the passage for students of Olbia is not (as Kindstrand would claim) that it marks the city out as the famous home of sailors, but that it shows how Olbia was inescapably connected with Bion, its most famous son, for such philosophical writers. That is of some small interest in terms of Philodemus and his associates, not least his patron Piso and his patron's son-in-law Julius Caesar. We are reminded that this is a Roman elite in which key political figures were also men of letters, and where governorship of a province entailed intellectual and literary concerns as well as the more mundane affairs of government.<sup>2</sup> When an educated Roman thought of Olbia, for whatever reason, it is likely that his first thought concerned Bion, its most famous son. Moreover, when we consider the puzzle of Dio's visit to Olbia, we must include importantly the fact that this was the city inevitably associated with Bion by a philosopher who himself had more than a passing interest in Cynicism.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we must return to Burebista. While our texts make it clear enough that Roman imperial power and its intellectuals (men like

<sup>1</sup> Gigante and Indelli 1978. The best overall study of this text is Blank 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See further, e. g., Wiseman 1985; Braund 1996.

<sup>3</sup> On Dio and Cynicism, see e. g., Moles 1978.

Strabo and Dio) viewed the king through a lens formed in substantial part by the Zalmoxis tradition (in its various aspects), we have no voice from the other side. The closest we come to that is the Dionysopolitan decree and, much later, perhaps Jordanes' *Getica*, produced in a world where Getae looked rather different. Of course, there is nothing very unusual about this imbalance: we very rarely have any sense of an authentic barbarian view, and such views as we do have are regularly located in Greek and Roman writings. For all that, however, it is legitimate and indeed necessary to consider the perspective of King Burebista. This was clearly a ruler of considerable capacity, who made use of the talents of Greeks. As we have seen, Strabo presents him as embracing the ideas of Decaeneus, which included a change as fundamental as the ending of wine-consumption. And as we have also seen, such a change fitted well enough with Greek notions, which included much of the tradition too around Scythian Anacharsis.<sup>1</sup> It is surely at least very likely that Burebista was very aware of the Greek and Roman

Ideas and interests surrounding his regime and his people. With Greek advisers, that was surely inevitable, and especially if the Zalmoxis tradition was as fundamental to his regime as Strabo and Jordanes suggest. Meanwhile, we may also reflect on the long history of Thracian kings of all periods, who not only knew about Greek culture, but embraced it enthusiastically. For example, Xenophon's experiences in Thrace at the beginning of the fourth century BC demonstrate very well that Aristophanes' mockery of King Sitalces had some substance in fact. When Aristophanes' Sitalces runs around his palace writing on the walls «The Athenians are beautiful», he expresses, albeit comically, an approach to Greek culture which we find too not only in written evidence, but also in finds as remarkable as the Panagyurishte treasure (showing the judgment of Paris on a gold rhyton, and what looks like a scene from tragedy on its great cantharus) and again in the treasure from Rogozen, showing Herakles and Auge.<sup>2</sup> The Thracian elite was clearly open to Greek culture. The tradition about King Ateas shows the same tendencies, and we have already observed the story of Scythian Scyles. Accordingly, although we have no direct evidence on the matter, we

may be sure enough, for these various reasons, that Burebista had a good grasp of Graeco-Roman thinking about his realm, its history and its idiosyncratic importance. That matters for many reasons, not least because it offered common ground for diplomacy between the king, the Greek cities and the Romans. Of course, that did not remove the likelihood of conflict and war, but it did mean that, as we have seen, Burebista was a king whom a writer like Strabo could treat with a certain respect and even a measure of admiration. Burebista's forces may have been responsible for destruction at Olbia, Istria and elsewhere, as generally supposed, for the doubts and queries raised in this discussion do not amount to a coherent case that these were not his forces. However, those queries are significant, nevertheless, because the fact remains that we have no firm ancient testimony that Burebista was the cause of this destruction, and not, for example, his divisive and fractious successors. In any case, this was a barbarian king of some culture.

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<sup>1</sup> On Anacharsis, wine and Greek thought, see e.g. Schubert 2010.

<sup>2</sup> On all this, see Archibald 1998.

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#### **Браунд Девід Філодем на Ольвії: Бурбїста, імперіалїзм і філософія**

У цій статті розглянуто різні проблеми, що зазвичай не обговорюються разом, незважаючи на те, що вони відносяться до історії Ольвії та західної частини Чорного моря у роки пізньої Римської республіки та на початку принципату. Зокрема, розглянуто певні докази про короля Бурбїсту, про які так багато було написано сучасними вченими.

Мета статті полягає у тому, щоб розглянути не просто те, що ми дійсно знаємо про його царювання (і конкретніше про його відносини з Ольвією), а й характер і причини очевидного інтересу до нього з боку грецьких письменників римського періоду. Це дало можливість розглянути значущість традицій, які були у Залмоксис та інших фракійців (у першу чергу) з п'ятого століття до нашої ери, від імперської грецької культури до пізньої античності.

Також висвітлено роль філософії в її численних формах (включаючи політику, медицину та можливе безсмертя душі) у грецьких і римських концепціях про Ольвію та її прикордонних областях, акцентуючи увагу на кінетичній філософії Біон (який добре відомий як Біон з Борисфен). Залучивши забуті (і проблематичні) рідкісні рядки Філодема до розкриття даної тематики, ми зможемо змінити наше уявлення щодо Бурбїсти.

**Ключові слова:** Ольвія, Бурбїста, Філодем, римський період, антична філософія, римські уявлення про Ольвію

#### **Браунд Девід Філодем на Ольвії: Бурбїсты, імперіалїзм і філософія**

В этой статье рассмотрены различные проблемы, которые обычно не обсуждаются вместе, несмотря на то, что они относятся к истории Ольвии и западной части Черного моря в годы поздней Римской республики и в начале принципата. В частности, рассмотрены определенные доказательства короля Бурбисты, о которых так много было написано современными учеными.

Цель статьи заключается в том, чтобы рассмотреть не просто то, что мы действительно знаем о его царствовании (и конкретно о его отношениях с Ольвией), но и характер и причины очевидного интереса к нему со стороны греческих писателей римского периода. Это дало возможность рассмотреть значимость традиций, которые были в Залмоксис и других фракийцев (в первую очередь) с пятого века до нашей эры, от имперской греческой культуры до поздней античности.

Также освещена роль философии в ее многочисленных формах (включая политику, медицину и возможно бессмертие души) в греческих и римских концепциях об Ольвии и ее пограничных областях, акцентируя внимание на кинетической философии Бион (хорошо известном как Бион с Борисфен). Подключив забытые (и проблематичные) редкие строки Филодема к раскрытию данной тематики, мы сможем изменить наше представление о Бурбисте.

**Ключевые слова:** Ольвия, Бурбиста, Филодем, римский период, античная философия, римские представления об Ольвии

#### **Braund Devid Philodemus on Olbia: Burebista, imperialism and philosophy**

In this paper to considered various concerns and problems which are not usually discussed together, even though they share a common relevance to the history of Olbia and the western Black Sea in the years of the late Roman Republic and early Principate. In particular, to tackled the (perhaps shockingly) small amount of direct evidence for King Burebista, about whom so much has been written and imagined by modern scholars. Here the purpose is to consider not simply how much we really know about his reign (and more specifically his dealings with Olbia), but also the nature and causes of the evident interest in him by Greek writers of the Roman period. That to entailed some consideration of the abiding significance of traditions surrounding Zalmoxis and other Thracians (notably Rhesus) from at least the fifth century BC, through imperial Greek culture, and on into

*late antiquity. And that in turn to highlighted the role of philosophy in its many forms (including politics, medicine and the possible immortality of the soul) in Greek and Roman conceptions about Olbia and its broader region, with the Cynic philosopher Bion (often known as Bion of Borysthenes) to the fore. A neglected (and problematic) few lines of Philodemus will be brought to bear on these matters, while we may be left with a rather different sense even of Burebista.*

**Keywords:** *Olbia, Burebista, Philodemus, Roman period, antiquity philosophy, Roman conceptions about Olbia*

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*Надійшла до редакції 07.09.2016 р.*