

SAVAGE BUSINESS – The Economy of the Tyle State

One would imagine that an invasion by hundreds of thousands of barbarians would have a catastrophic effect on a region's economy. However, this presumption has been challenged in recent years by the archaeological and numismatic data emerging from the territory which fell under the control of the 'barbarian' Tyle state in eastern Thrace during the 3rd c. BC.

The traditional description of the Celtic tribes who arrived in this area has been one of *'thirsty savages'* or *'gangs of mercenaries'* (latest Emilov 2007, 2010), and we have been repeatedly informed that *'their aim was not to settle, but money and booty which could be acquired in different ways ... by attacking wealthy cities, and by ravaging the countryside'* (Nixon 1977, cited by Mitchell 1993; most recently Emilov 2010). However, repeating a simplistic stereotype does not make it true, particularly when the depiction of a culture directly contradicts all the available archaeological and historical evidence. In this case the facts tell a rather surprising tale – a barbarian invasion that brought political stability and economic prosperity in its wake.



Eastern Thrace – 3rd c. BC

THE 'BARBARIAN BOOM'

Recent archaeological evidence has clearly shown that no destruction accompanied the Celtic migration at the beginning of the 3rd c. BC and, even more surprisingly, in none of the regions which fell within the limits of the Celtic Tyle kingdom can an economic downturn be detected (Lazarov 2010: 110). Indeed, it is precisely in the wake of the establishment of the Celtic state that the main Hellenistic economic centres in eastern Thrace and the Black Sea coast such as Kabyle, Mesambria and Odessos flourished and trade boomed. It was through the ports of Mesambria and Odessos that the wine and olive oil from Rhodes, Sinope, Kos and Thasos reached the Thracian interior; the amphorae of these centres are widespread along the middle reaches of the Kamchiya river, which was the political centre of the Celtic state, as well as the rest of eastern Thrace both north and south of the Balkan mountains. This has led experts in the region to conclude that the Celtic arrival in eastern Thrace did not bring 'disasterous effects' as some have claimed, but rather created the conditions for economic and commercial prosperity (op cit).

The Greek cities did have to pay substantial tribute to the Celts (Lazarov 2010, Manov 2010, Dimitrov 2010), but the archaeological evidence indicates that the amounts were significantly less than had been previously demanded by the Thraco-Macedonian Odrysae dynasty. Certainly the modest Celtic settlements and burials from this region in the 3rd c. BC are in sharp contrast to the lavish tombs and palace complexes of the previous period, which had been funded by massive taxes and tribute from the local Thracian population and the Greek Black Sea colonies (see 'Behing the Golden Mask' and 'New Material 1 + 2' articles).

The coinage of the kings of the Celtic 'Tyle' state in E. Bulgaria from the 3rd c. BC are concentrated in the area of today's Bulgaria stretching from the Stranja mountains in the south to the Dobruja region in the north. The best known and recorded of these were issued by the Celtic leader Cavaros who struck both silver tetradrachms and bronze issues, but silver tetradrachm emissions of three other Celtic 'kings' (Orsoalt, Kersebaul and Lilarkii) have also been recorded in eastern Bulgaria from this period:

**Silver Tetradrachms of the Celtic
Kings of Tyle in Thrace (3rd c. BC)**



1. Cavaros



2. Lilarkii

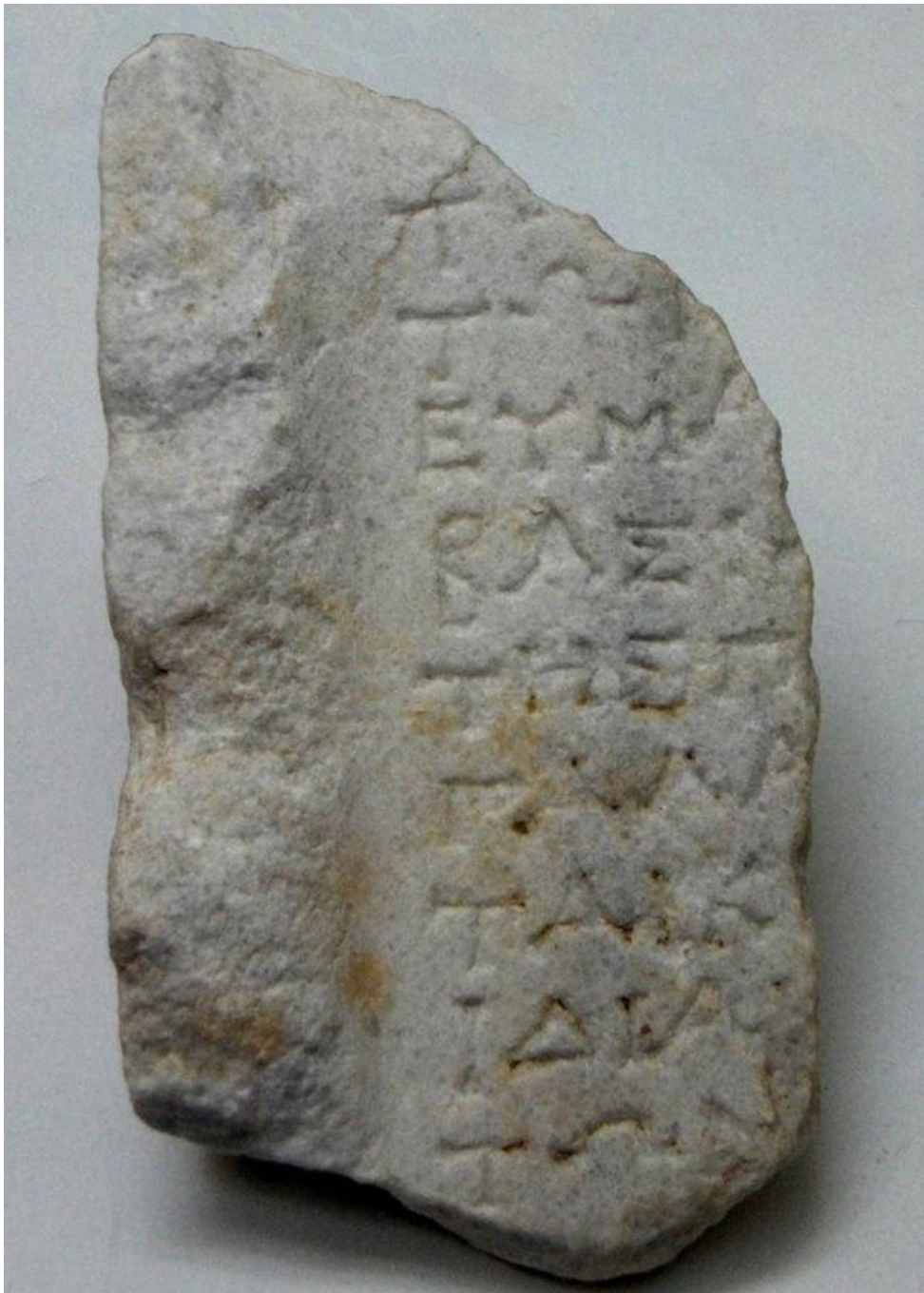


3. Orsoaltes



4. Kersebaul

The Hellenistic city of Kabyle, whose internal autonomy was respected, flourished under the Celts, maintaining trade contacts with Mesambria. Both silver tetradrachms and bronze issues of the last king of Tyle, Cavaros, were minted at Kabyle (Dimitrov 2010). Furthermore, at least one of the Pontic harbours south of Burgas Bay was under direct Celtic control, which allowed the Celts to protect and participate in the Pontic trade (Dimitrov 2010:61-62; see below).



Fragmentary Inscription from Kabyle mentioning the Celts (referred to as Galatians)

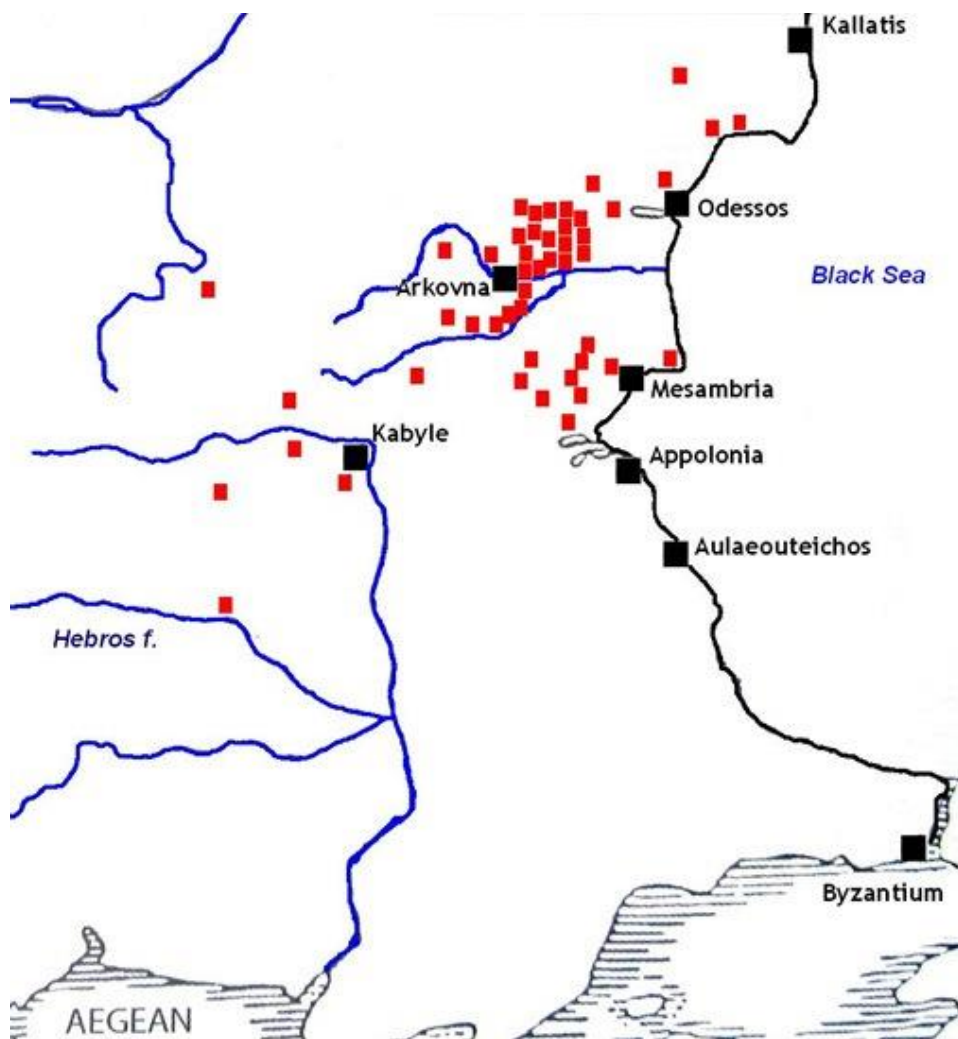
(after Emilov 2005)



Cavaros bronze; SNG BM 195; SNG Cop 1175; Cabyle mint.

In terms of distribution, heavy concentrations of bronze coins of Cavaros, the last king of Tyle, have been found in the Dalgopol area (Arkovna Peak, the villages of Asparukhovo and Sladka Voda), Provadia area (Provadia, Blaskovo, Bozvelijsko, Venchan, Kiten, Nenovo, Petrov Dol, and Chajka), the Vetreno municipality, Varna region (the villages of Nevsha and Neofit Rilski) and on the southern slopes of the Eastern Balkan range in the Burgas region (the villages of Sadievo, Cherna Mogila, Malka Polyana, Miroljubovo, Ruen, Prosnik, Goritsa, Emona and Yabalchevo) (see Numismatic section 1). Other Cavaros issues in this area of eastern Bulgaria have been found at the villages of Kosovo, Devnya, Bilka, as well as from Appolonia (Sozopol), Odessos (Varna) and Messambria (Nessebar) on the Black Sea coast. To this one may add the Aitos-Karnobat area which connects this area of Bulgaria with the Sliven-Cabyle (Jambol) – Nova Zagora –Stara Zagora region which has produced a number of similar finds. Of particular interest are several bronze issues of Cavaros, discovered in the Southern Dobruja region (Bozhurets, Septemvrijtsi and Sveti Nikola near Kavarna) which, along with recent discoveries of La Tène material from north eastern Bulgaria (see archaeology section), indicate that during this period (3rd c. BC) the Celtic state reached the southern bank of the Danube river (Lazarov 2010).

The abundant finds of bronze coins of both Odessos and Mesambria in the Dalgopol/Arkovna area also testifies to strong trade contacts between the Celtic capital at Arkovna and both Pontic cities (Dimitrov 2010:60), while the Celtic Mesambria shield coins (Price 1991, Karaytov 2000) once again illustrate the close economic and political relationship between this Greek colony and the Tyle state. These coins, which feature a helmet on the obverse and a Celtic oval shield on the reverse (viewed from within; loc cit), circulated together with the other bronze issues of the Celtic state. It appears that Mesambria, like Kabyle and Odessos, although within the area of the Tyle state, were allowed to continue to function as de facto free trade zones, with minimum Celtic interference, retaining a measure of political autonomy, and also continuing to mint their own coinage. This relationship ensured the continued prosperity of these economic/trade centres which were vital to the economy of the region, and by extension contributed to the prosperity of the region and the Celtic state, particularly during the reign of Cavaros.



Distribution of Bronze Issues of the Celtic 'Tyle' State' (3rd c. BC)

*Does not include Mesambria and Apros Celtic Shield Coins



Bronze Mesambria Celtic Shield Issue (last quarter of the 3rd c. BC)

(After Karaytov 2000)

As regards the southern border of the Tyle state, the recent publications of bronze coins bearing Celtic shields minted at Apros would appear to confirm the testimony in ancient sources that this area of European Turkey also fell within the sphere of influence of the Celtic state in the 3rd c. BC (see numismatics section 10).



Bronze Celtic shield coins minted at Apros

(After Draganov 2001)

Apros was located either at present-day Kestridge or further west near present-day Kermian, both in European Turkey above the Thracian Chersones and on the route of the later Via Egnatia

A man of magnanimity and regal character ?

By the last decades of the 3rd c. BC the Tyle state in Eastern Thrace had become a vital part of the regional economic system, and its last king, Cavaros, a powerful political figure. Polybius describes him as *'a man of magnanimity and regal character'* (8.24), and as *'protector of trade on the Black Sea'* (op cit). Praise indeed from a Greek historian for a 'barbarian' leader.

And then, with typical Celtic logic, just as it reached the peak of its political and economic power, the Tyle state self-destructed. The exact circumstances surrounding the collapse of the Celtic state in eastern Thrace remain unclear, but a number of factors contributed. The migration of the Aegosages tribe in 218 BC (see Aegosages article) illustrates the growing disillusionment of the Celtic tribes with Cavaros' leadership by this point, and the Aegosages migration into Asia-Minor logically weakened the state in s.e. Thrace. It appears that the last king of Tyle, Cavaros, in building a successful Hellenistic style state had lost the confidence of the very tribes which comprised it, and had himself become increasingly corrupt (Polybius 8. 22).

In circa 212 BC the Tyle state imploded, and although some Celtic tribes remained in s.e. Thrace (App. Syr. 6.22), the centre of Celtic economic and political power subsequently moved to northeastern Bulgaria, to the Rousse/Veliko Tarnovo area north of the Balkan Mountains.

'Tyle' had been a unique political experiment – a Celto-Hellenistic state which had proved that co-operation between the Greek and 'Barbarian' worlds was not only possible, but mutually beneficial. In the end, however, as with many political experiments in the Balkans, it was destroyed, not by external forces, but by the greed and corruption of its own leaders.

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