

THE RIVERS CALLED PHASIS*

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Abstract

The monolithic syntheses of ancient sources and modern identifications to which the historical geography of the 18th and 19th centuries accustomed us must be abandoned; only a detailed analysis of the different literary traditions, the identification of their aims and thus the type of mythical, poetic and historiographical space presented, as well as the reconstruction of their natural and cultural context can allow us to understand how ancient people mentally constructed their environment and how their geographical knowledge had an impact on history. The River Phasis is an interesting case study: by distinguishing the mythical space of the Golden Fleece, the poetical river that opened or carved the way for the summer solstice to Greek heroes, and the historiographical axis or frontier of imperialistic clashes, one can observe the dynamics of the identifications of several watercourses with this famous river. Homonymies, mythological and historiographical narratives, and landscapes nourished these identifications for which only a few literary and epigraphic echoes remain. In this sense, the Rioni, which was never explicitly associated with the Phasis in antiquity, triumphed over the South Caucasian rivers (Aras, Kelkit and Çoruh) and even the North Caucasian Kuban, because of its exceptional geo-historical context.

Introduction: How to Find the Phasis? (Fig. 1)

Philostratus the Younger *Images* 8: *The Players*.

Ἄγουσα τοὺς πεντήκοντα ἢ Ἄργῶ ἐνώρμισται
τῷ Φάσιδι Βόσπορον τε καὶ Ξυμπληγάδας
διεξελοῦσα. ὄρξ δὲ καὶ τὸν ποταμὸν αὐτὸν ἐν
βαθεῖ δόνακι κείμενον, ἐν βλοσυρῷ τῷ εἶδει,
κόμη τε γὰρ ἀμφιλαφῆς αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνεστηχυσία
γενειάς τε ὑποφρίττουσα καὶ γλαυκιῶντες
ὀφθαλμοί, τό τε ἄθρόον τοῦ ρεύματος οὐκ ἀπὸ
κάλπιδος ἐκχέμενον, ἥπερ οὖν εἶωθεν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ
παντὸς ἐκπλημμύρον ἐνοεῖν δίδωσιν ἡμῖν,
ὅπως ἐπιχεῖται τῷ Πόντῳ.

The Argo carrying its fifty heroes has anchored in the Phasis after passing through the Bosphorus and the Clashing Rocks. You see the river himself lying on this deep bed of rushes; his countenance is grim, for his hair is thick and stands upright, his beard bristles, and his eyes glare; and the abundant water of the stream, since it does not flow from a pitcher as is usually the case, but comes in flood from his whole figure, gives us to understand how large a stream is poured into the Pontos.

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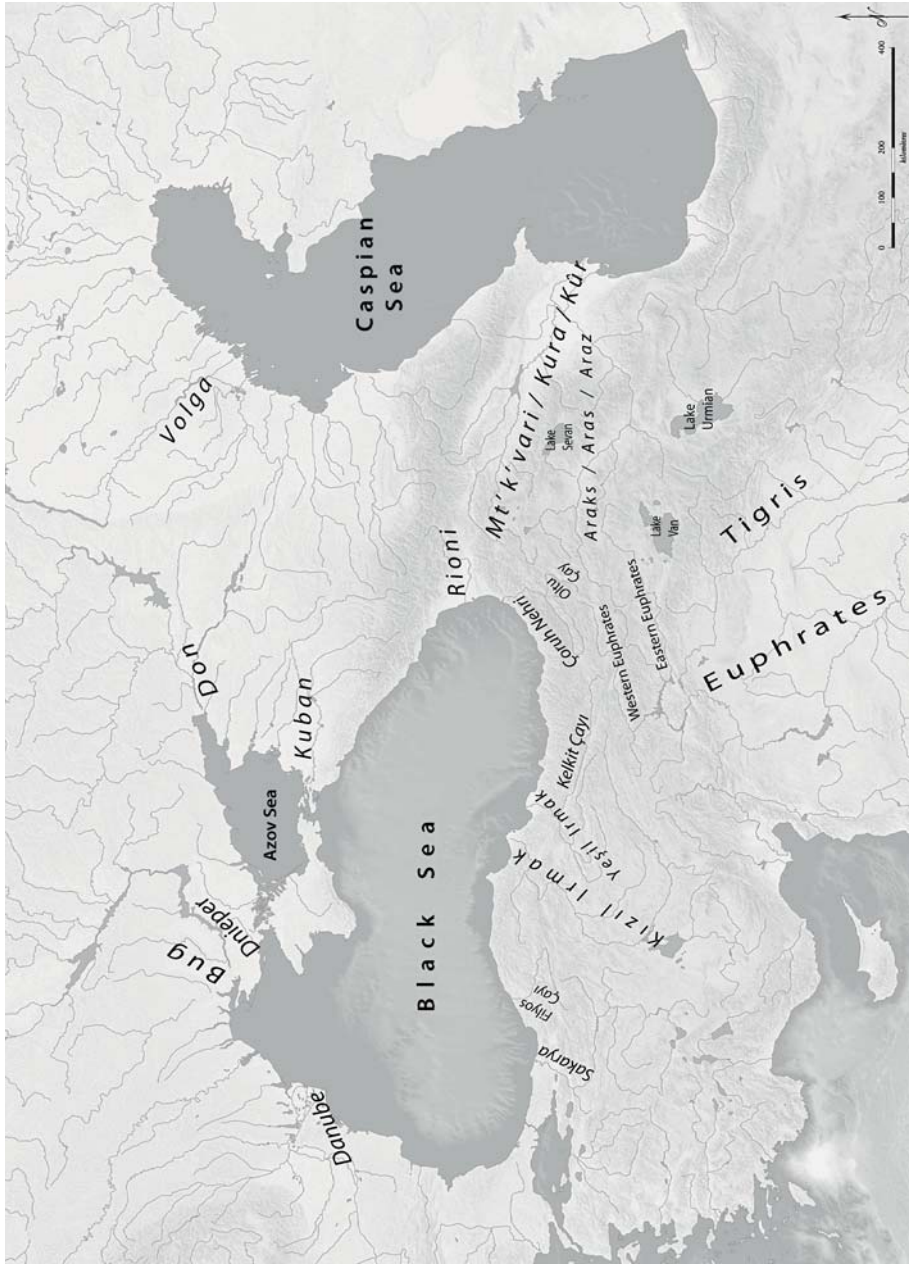


Fig. 1: Modern hydronyms associated with 'Phasis'.

In one of his three *ekphraseis* dealing with the representations of Jason and Medeia's erotic adventures, Philostratus describes the River Phasis as it would have been recognised by all those familiar with the exploits of the Argonauts (already told, in his opinion, by Homer), accompanied by some generalities about the mythical geography of the entrance into the Black Sea as well as some *realia* about the mouth and flow of the Rioni. The rhetorician synthesises three ways of perceiving the Phasis in terms of its relationship to real and lived spaces: a mythic space, the river of the Golden Fleece; a poetical space, for those who imagined the mythical Phasis and celebrated it as another Nile, a 'king of the rivers' (Callimachus *Aetia* fr. 7 Pfeiffer), whose running and marshy waters were symbolised as both meadow and river nymphs (Apollonius of Rhodes 3. 1218–1220); finally, an historiographical space, for those who perceived a real river known as the Phasis or who were familiar with testimonies about it and thus understood this painting's divergence from the stereotypical representations of river-gods: the quantity of reeds and the absence of a pouring vase were means of showing the river's exceptional volume and sliminess.¹

The public who had perhaps viewed the painting and who had heard and read Philostratus were not supposed to identify the river in the real world, but rather to be aware of the literary traditions conveyed by the description. The literary character of the classical references to spaces may sometimes be a source of misunderstanding for modern historians who are tempted to associate traditions deriving from different historical contexts with one real place, just as this would have been seen and described in modern times by travellers and scientists. In the case of the Phasis, this approach led to the invention of a modern mythology associated with the river in Colchis, which does not correspond to any of the ancient perceptions of the river.

The aim of this paper is to review critically the ancient identifications of Phasis and prove that they were not simply inspired by literary fantasies to compensate for a lack of geographical knowledge. Indeed, they are also determined by the multiplicity of rivers rightly or wrongly called Phasis by the Greeks. Accordingly, I dismiss

¹ I propose the distinctions between mythical, poetical and historiographical spaces as well as their relationships with the real and lived space in Dan 2013a. Philostratus describes the only image of the Phasis as a lying river-god (Lordkipanidze 1994; 2000). The river-god was also identified in bovine representations on didrachms from the 5th century BC (*cf.* Doundoua 1982; Tsetskhladze 1993; Vickers, Kakhidze and Varshalomidze 2010), although Hind 2005 definitively rejected this assumption (*cf.* also Hind 1996 and 2002a for the possible implications on the chronology of the city of Phasis, modern Poti). The first local Colchian coins are silver tetradrachms and didrachms dating to the end of the 6th–beginning of the 5th century BC. Their iconography is very similar to those minted under the authority of the Achaemenid kings and their satraps. This, together with other evidence, demonstrates that Colchis was one of the satrapies of the Achaemenid empire (see Tsetskhladze 2013, 298–303).

here the ancient sources dealing with the Phasis as the mythical river of the Golden Fleece, the poetical representations of the Argonauts without any connection to the Black Sea realities, as well as the historiographical references that make no mention of its location:² although all of these representations were, to a certain extent, determined by indirect testimonies about *realia*, they were never known in their totality to an ancient reader. The absence of a location marker should prevent their direct use in the reconstruction of the history of one real river. Thus, in a study dealing with a river really called Phasis in antiquity, one should not take as witness Hesiod, who vaguely refers to a river in the north-east through which the Argonauts would have reached the Ocean,³ nor the *Isthmian Odes* of Pindar (2. 41–42) and the *Andromaca* of Euripides (650–651), where the Phasis is only the mark of the northern, wintry extremity of the world, opposed to the southern, summery Nile. It is true the Phasis-Rioni was generally considered as the most eastern point when sailing on the Black Sea;⁴ also, the connection between the Colchians and Egyptians was supported, at least from Herodotus' time onwards (2. 103–106), by the story of the Egyptian migrations to the north⁵ and by the conviction that the two lands were eventually not very distant from one another, accessed either through the narrow land passage across the Near East or through the Ocean. In Roman times, the Phasis was even considered to contain crocodiles, like the Nile and the Indus.⁶ Other rivers, however, were situated on the same meridian as the Nile (like the Tanais-Don) or could have been considered to separate Asia from Europe (in the case of the Hypanis-Kuban), just like the Nile separated Asia from Libya. Also, it is certain that in the 5th century, many Greeks were familiar with the hydronym 'Phasis', not only through the Argonautic myths, but also because of pheasant birds (Φασιαννοί/Φασιαννικοί):⁷ these references, however, cannot be

² Full inventories of ancient sources are found in Diehl 1938; Danoff 1962; Lordkipanidze 1985; 1996; 2000 (with Hind 2002b); 2001; Braund 1994. Cf. Tsetschladze 1994e.

³ *Theogony* 340 (for a similar literary value in a river catalogue, cf. Ovid *Metamorphoses* 2. 235–259 [v. 249]) and the *Catalogue of Women* fr. 241 Merkelbach-West = 252 a–b Most *apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 259, p. 273 Wendel. It is not clear if this mythical episode was accepted by Hecataeus of Miletus, as the quotations of his work are contradictory: 1 F18a (*apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 259b) and 1 F 18b (*apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 284); cf. 1 F302a–b–c. Cf. Eck 2003 for an analogous critical approach of the relationship between mythical and historical spaces.

⁴ For example, Plato *Phaedo* 109; Xenophon *Anabasis* 5. 7. 6–7; Apollonius of Rhodes 2. 1260–1261 (ἔσχατα πείρατα Πόντου; cf. 2. 1277–1278; 3. 57–58, as the term of the Argonautic journey, the first human crossing of the sea); Polybius 4. 56. 5; Strabo 11. 2. 15–16, see below; Dionysius Periegetes 762–763; cf. also the new interpretation of the so-called Shield of Doura-Europos, in Boshnakov 2015.

⁵ Ivantchik 1999a–b; more generally, Ivantchik 2005.

⁶ Pausanias 4. 34. 2; Ps.-Plutarch *On Rivers* 5. 3, referred to below; Braund 1994, 25.

⁷ See, for example, Aristophanes *Acharnians* 725–726; *Clouds* 108–109; *Birds* 68; Aristotle *History of the Animals* 557a, 559a, 633b; Athenaeus 5. 32, 9. 36–38 Kaibel.

taken into account when reconstructing the history of a particular river, because the name tells nothing about the identification of the Phasis, the river through which these birds had arrived in Greece from the Caspian.

The existence of several rivers named Phasis raises the issue of the relationship between identical toponyms. This is a current phenomenon, determined by geographical and historical analogies or even confusion between spaces. The Greeks were well aware of this dilemma; they invented narratives, imaginary rivers and mountains, or karst landscapes in order to explain the use of the same name for two different spaces; they also used homonyms in literary and especially esoteric texts, like the oracles.⁸ However, this can still be a source of misunderstanding, especially when ancient and modern readers have access only to snippets from a large and heterogeneous literary tradition.

In order to explain similar confusions, this paper will attempt to identify the different rivers that could have been called Phasis by the Greeks as well as the different literary traditions that could have been mixed, whether consciously or unconsciously, by authors describing one particular river through elements originally referring to others. The mythical Phasis could have been identified with several rivers of the north-east (the direction of the summer solstice) on the basis of their barbarian names that the Greeks perceived to be similar, either because of their dimensions (which could have indicated a water channel linking the interior sea to the Ocean) or because of their perception as frontiers between the different ethnic groups or political powers of the Near East.⁹

The paper has three sections: the first is a short overview of the clear ancient references to the Phasis-Rioni. The second deals with the identifications of a Phasis river further to the south, lying between the Taurus and the Caucasus, in Armenia, Iberia and Colchis. Xenophon and Procopius, the authors of these references, designate homonymous rivers as 'Phasis', convinced that they were dealing with a part of the mythical Phasis, which poured itself into the Black Sea by the Phasis-Rioni. The third and final section is an analysis of the apparently incoherent data concerning the frontier between Europe and Asia, which can nevertheless be explained through the identification of a Phasis river at another end of the Pontus, near the Cimmerian Bosphorus, on the course of the Kuban. Yet this would not be the only northern Phasis: at the end of antiquity, the anonymous *Periplus* of the Black Sea mentions a River 'Basis' lying at the foot of the Caucasus.

⁸ Cf., for example, Dan 2015.

⁹ An example not discussed in this paper is the River Phasis on Taprobane Island (modern Sri Lanka), mentioned by Ptolemy (*Geography* 7. 4. 7–8) and Stephanus of Byzantium, but which remains difficult to identify: see Talbert 2000 ('Map 5. India', by M.U. Erdosy) for its identification with Pliny the Elder's Palaesimundus (*NH* 6. 86). There is no other explanation for this name, except the possible phonetic resemblance of a local name with the hydronym well known to the Greeks.

Phasis-Rioni in Colchis

Three types of references point to the identification of the mythical Phasis with the modern Rioni in poetical and historiographical contexts: the association with Colchis and the Colchians at the eastern end of the Black Sea; the distances by sea and land; and the description of the natural conditions in the Rioni Delta.

Phasis had probably been identified with the main river of the Colchians since Archaic times. Nonetheless, the earliest clear reference preserved to our days is Pindar's Argonautic itinerary (*Pythian Odes* 4). Related mythical places – such as the island Aia of Aietes, the Oriental parallel of the Occidental Aiaia inhabited by Circe – were probably identified with inland Colchis, on the river or on the sea shores (around Dioskourias, modern Sukhumi), by colonists and travellers seeking to justify their presence in the Pontus through legendary genealogies and *lieux de mémoire*.¹⁰ At the beginning of the 4th century BC, even the most ignorant of Xenophon's soldiers would have recognised the East where the Phasis flowed.¹¹

For us, Herodotus is the first author who treats the Phasis-Rioni as an historiographical space, providing a reliable geographical frame for his *Histories*: his Phasis is the limit of the isthmus at the heart of the Achaemenid empire, which separates the Red and Black Seas, Lower and Upper Asia (4. 37–38, 40, 45). This historical frame is reinforced by numerical estimations of the northern shore of Asia Minor (nine days and eight nights of navigation from the Thracian Bosphorus to the Phasis: 4. 86),¹² as well as the relative distance between the Phasis and the Maeotis, located on the northern edge of the known world (30 days for a quick traveller, impossible by land but credible by water when compared with the ca 500 km measured today on an imaginary straight line between Kerch and Rioni) (Herodotus 1. 104; cf. Ps.-Plutarch *On Rivers* 5. 2 and below). More reliable evidence about Colchis was brought to the attention of the Greeks and Romans by the historians of Mithradates VI Eupator's campaigns and by Strabo,

¹⁰ For example, Pherecydes 3 F 100 *apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 3. 1093, 1074; cf. Philostephanos *apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 277–278b; Nikanor of Alexandria (grammarian of the 2nd century AD) *apud* Stephanus of Byzantium *s.v.* Αἴα. The elements of the mythical landscape are listed in Apollonius of Rhodes 2. 397–406; cf. Appian *Mithridatica* 478–479 for the claim by local populations. For the genealogical link between the Colchians and Phasis, see Mnaseas 154 F 31 *apud Schol. Vet. ad Theocritum* 13. 75. The sources concerning the connection with the Dioscuri are discussed in Braund 1994, 30–33. More generally, on the archaeological site of Sukhumi, see the bibliography in Kacharava and Kvirkveliya 1991, 86–89; Gabelia 2003. Cf. Tsetskhladze 1998a, 15–26; 2013.

¹¹ See Dan 2014.

¹² Cf. Strabo 2. 1. 39 (for Kyaneiai Phasis) and, partially, for the distance from Trapezous to Phasis 12. 3. 17; Procopius *Wars* 8. 5. 33 for 52 days' walk (*ex correctione*) along the southern shore of the Pontus up to the Phasis.

their critical compiler. Despite the importance of the Eastern campaigns in Roman political life of the 1st century BC and 1st century AD and the continuous frequenting of Colchis, common opinions were nevertheless difficult to correct: for example, Strabo criticised an anonymous iambic verse, used as a proverb pointing to the mouth of the Phasis-Rioni as the most eastern gulf of the internal sea. Familiar with the area, if not by his travels, then at least by what he could discover from his relatives involved in the Mithradatic administration, he fixed the eastern end of the Pontus 600 stadia to the north at Dioskourias (11. 2. 15–16). To justify the common opinion about the remoteness of the Phasis, he makes a compromise and concedes a ‘soft’ definition of Phasis as ‘Colchis’: just like their legendary relatives, the Egyptians, who were said to extend as far as the people could drink the waters of Nile (Herodotus 2. 18), Colchis would extend between the Colchian and the Moschian mountains as far as the people shared an analogous way of life (*cf.* Dionysius Periegetes 688–694). Yet Strabo’s correction of the parallel of Dioskourias remained isolated.

A more precise description of the life conditions in the Rioni Delta was presented in a 5th century BC text of Hippocrates:

Hippocrates *On Airs, Waters and Places* 15.

Περὶ δὲ τῶν ἐν Φάσει, ἡ χώρα ἐκείνη ἐλώδης ἐστὶ καὶ θερμὴ καὶ ὑδατεὶνὴ καὶ δασεῖα· ὄμβροι τε αὐτόθι γίγνονται πᾶσαν ὥρην πολλοὶ τε καὶ ἰσχυροί· ἢ τε δίκαιτα τοῖσιν ἀνθρώποισιν ἐν τοῖσιν ἔλεσίν ἐστιν· τὰ τε οἰκήματα ξύλινα καὶ καλάμυνα ἐν τοῖσιν ὕδασι μεμηχανημένα· ὀλίγη τε χρέονται βαδίσει κατὰ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὸ ἐμπόριον, ἀλλὰ μονοξύλοισι διαπλέουσιν ἄνω καὶ κάτω· διώρυγες γὰρ πολλαὶ εἰσιν. Τὰ δὲ ὕδατα θερμὰ καὶ στάσιμα πίνουσιν, ὑπὸ τε τοῦ ἡλίου σηπόμενα, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ὄμβρων ἐπαυξανόμενα. Αὐτός τε ὁ Φάσις στασιμώτατος πάντων τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ ῥέων ἡπιώτατα· οἱ τε καρποὶ γιγνώμενοι αὐτόθι πάντες ἀναλδέες εἰσὶ, καὶ τεθλιυσμένοι, καὶ ἀτελεές, ὑπὸ πολυπληθείης τοῦ ὕδατος· διὸ καὶ οὐ πεπαίνονται· ἡγὴρ τε πουλὺς κατέχει τὴν χώραν ἀπὸ τῶν ὑδάτων. Διὰ ταύτας δὴ τὰς προφάσις τὰ εἶδεα ἀπηλλαγμένα τῶν λοιπῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσιν οἱ Φασιηνοί· τὰ τε γὰρ μεγέθεα μεγάλοι, τὰ πάχεα δ’ ὑπερπαχές· ἄρθρον τε κατὰ δῆλον οὐδὲν, οὐδὲ φλέψ· τὴν τε χροίην ὠχρὴν ἔχουσιν, ὥσπερ ὑπὸ ἰκτέρου ἐχόμενοι· φθέγγονται τε βαρύτερον ἀνθρώπων, τῷ ἡέρι χρεόμενοι οὐ λαμπρῶ, ἀλλὰ χροῶδει τε

Now let me turn to the dwellers on the Phasis. Their land is marshy, hot, wet, and wooded; copious violent rains fall there during every season. The inhabitants live in the marshes, and their dwellings are of wood and reeds, built in the water. They make little use of walking in the city and the harbour, but sail up and down in dug-outs made from a single log, for canals are numerous. The waters which they drink are hot and stagnant, putrefied by the sun and swollen by the rains. The Phasis itself is the most stagnant and most sluggish of all rivers. The fruits that grow in this country are all stunted, flabby and imperfect, owing to the excess of water, and for this reason they do not ripen. Much fog from the waters envelops the land. For these causes, therefore, the physique of the Phasians is different from that of other folk. They are tall in stature, and of a gross habit of body, while neither joint nor vein is visible. Their complexion is yellowish, as though they suffered from jaundice. Of all men they have the deepest voice, because the air they breathe is not clear, but moist and turbid. They are by nature disinclined for physical fatigue. There are

καὶ διερω· πρὸς τε τὸ ταλαιπωρέειν τὸ σῶμα
ἀργότεροι πεφύκασιν· αἳ τε ὄραι οὐ πολὺ
μεταλλάσσουσιν, οὔτε πρὸς τὸ πνίγιος, οὔτε πρὸς
τὸ ψύχος· τὰ τε πνεύματα τὰ πολλὰ νότια, πλήν
αὔρης μιῆς ἐπιχωρίας· αὕτη δὲ πνέει ἐνίοτε
βίαιος, καὶ χαλεπὴ, καὶ θερμὴ, καὶ Κέγχρονα
ὀνομάζουσι τοῦτο τὸ πνεῦμα· Ὁ δὲ βορέης οὐ
σφόδρα ἀφικνέεται· ὀκότεν δὲ πνέη, ἀσθενὴς καὶ
βληχρὸς.

but slight changes of the seasons, either in respect
of heat or of cold. The winds are mostly moist,
except one breeze peculiar to the country, called
“Kenchron”, which sometimes blows strong, vio-
lent and hot. The north wind rarely blows, and
when it does it is weak and gentle.

Faithful echoes of this text appear only in modern times, in travel reports such as that of Jean Chardin (17th century):

pp. 154–55: L’air est assez tempéré pour le chaud et pour le froid. Il n’est point sujet aux orages, aux éclairs et au tonnerre. Il produit rarement la grêle; mais il est fort incommodé et fort mauvais à cause de son extrême humidité; il y pleut presque continuellement. En été, l’humidité de la terre, échauffée par l’ardeur du soleil, infecte l’air, cause souvent la peste et toujours des maladies. Cet air est insupportable aux étrangers; il les accable, d’abord, d’une maigreur hideuse, et les rend, en un an de temps, jaunes, secs et débiles. Les naturels du pays en sont moins maltraités durant leur vie; mais il y en a peu qui la poussent à soixante ans. J’attribue à cette température d’air l’hydropisie, qu’on peut dire la maladie épidémique des Mingréliens, laquelle ils combattent non seulement par l’exercice continu qu’ils font à cheval, étant sans cesse par voies et par champs, sans s’arrêter plus de trois ou quatre jours en un lieu; mais aussi en mangeant beaucoup de sel et en se tenant toujours autour du feu. J’y attribue aussi la vermine dont le pays est fort affligé, tant les hommes que les bêtes. Les cochons, surtout, sont, pour la plupart, couverts de poux....

p. 158: ... Le terroir de la Colchide est mauvais et produit peu de sortes de grains et de légumes. Les fruits sont presque sauvages; ils n’ont point de goût; ils engendrent des maladies. Il en croît en Colchide de presque toutes les espèces que nous avons en France....

p. 160: Comme ces peuples sont paresseux et lâches au-delà de l’imagination, ils s’excitent et s’entretiennent à l’ouvrage en chantant et en hurlant si fort qu’ils s’entr’étourdissent.

(*Voyages du Chevalier Chardin, en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient* [Paris 1811], vol. 1).

This Hippocratic image is confirmed by the realistic descriptions of 19th century. One may quote the precise description of Frédéric Dubois de Montpéroux:

p. 355: La mer lutte sans cesse contre l’embouchure des rivières, et forme en reculant petit à petit de longues barres sèches qui laissent derrière elles des bas-fonds moitié mer, moitié marais, sources de l’extrême insalubrité de ces climats. Pendant les chaleurs de l’été, ces bas-fonds marécageux s’échauffent et se corrompent à un point incroyable. Le vent de mer en emporte les exhalaisons dans l’intérieur du pays, et l’Européen ne résiste guère à cette infection mortelle. Quand le vent souffle de l’intérieur du pays, c’est alors que Poti et Redoute-Kalé souffrent.

(*Le Voyage autour du Caucase*, Paris, 1843, vol. 1)

Even Alexandre Dumas *père* went down to the river during the winter of 1858–59 and described the mouth of the Rioni like a landscape worthy of one of his novels:

Chapitre LVII, les Scopsis: ... Le Phase, à l'endroit où nous nous embarquions, était large à peu près comme la Seine au pont d'Austerlitz, mais sans aucune profondeur: de là vient la construction longue, étroite et plate des bateaux sur lesquels s'opère sa navigation. En outre, nous reconnûmes la vérité de ce que nous avaient dit les scopsis, en se refusant de marcher la nuit: de cent pas en cent pas, son cours est obstrué par quelques troncs d'arbres déracinés. Notre barque était montée de trois de ces condamnés; un se tenait au gouvernail, les deux autres aux avirons. De temps en temps, d'un bout à l'autre du bâtiment, ils échangeaient de leur voix grêle une parole languissante et retombaient dans un silence morne; pas une seule fois pendant toute la navigation un seul d'entre eux ne modula un son qui ressemblât à un chant. Dante a oublié ces bateliers-là dans son Enfer...

Chapitre LVIII, Route de Maranne à Cheïnskaïa: ... Sur un autre fleuve, nous aurions bu de l'eau, ce qui est toujours un topique pour l'estomac; mais l'eau du Phase est d'un jaune à dégoûter à tout jamais de l'eau de rivière. ... Le prince, que nous interrogeâmes, nous dit que, l'été, ces bois étaient magnifiques; seulement, ils sont pleins de larges flaques d'eau que les rayons du soleil ne peuvent tarir, n'arrivant pas jusqu'à elles. À chaque pas et de chaque buisson, on fait fuir des serpents noirs et verts, fort dangereux, à ce que l'on assure, et des troupeaux de daims, de sangliers et de chevreuils, que personne n'ose aller chasser, attendu que, pour les chasser, il faut braver à la fois la morsure de la fièvre et celle des serpents.....

Chapitre LIX, Les bouches du Phase: ... Enfin, vers trois heures, à travers une immense ouverture du Phase, – depuis le matin le fleuve s'élargissait visiblement, – nous commençâmes d'apercevoir, non pas la plaine, mais un immense marais bordé de roseaux; si l'on ne voyait pas encore la mer, on en sentait au moins le voisinage. Nous tournâmes brusquement à gauche dans une espèce de canal qui contourne une île et qui met en communication les deux bras du Phase. Rien de plus charmant que ce canal, même en hiver, bordé qu'il est par des arbres d'une forme merveilleuse dont les branches se joignent en berceau au-dessus des barques qui passent...

Chapitre LX, Poti, ville et port de mer par oukase de l'empereur Alexandre II: ... Je ne sais pas ce qu'était le champ de Mars du temps de Jason; mais, aujourd'hui, c'est un marais de boue tremblante, où l'on risquerait de disparaître tout entier, si l'on restait seulement une demi-heure à la même place...

(*Voyage au Caucase* [Paris 1859])

Once again, although precise, Hippocrates' statements about life at the mouth of the Phasis-Rioni remained isolated in antiquity. Authors who had a more or less direct acquaintance with the region described the wetlands but emphasised its positive aspects, fitting the prestige of the mythical river lying at the end of the Archaic world.¹³ The description of the quality of the fresh water, in particular, marks a

¹³ For example Strabo 1. 3. 7: *περὶ δὲ τὰ τοῦ Φάσιδος ἢ Κολχικῆ παραλία διάμμος καὶ ταπεινὴ καὶ μαλακὴ οὖσα* / at the mouths of the Phasis, the Colchian seaboard, which is sandy, low-lying and

sharp contrast between the father of medicine, probably aware of the experiences of the earliest Milesian colonists in Colchis, and Roman military historians, directly involved into the administration of the empire. Both Arrian (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*, who sailed on the Phasis during his official inspection of the Roman troops in AD 131–132), and Procopius of Caesarea, assessor of the chief of the Roman armies, Belisarius, on the Persian front (*ca* AD 527–531 and 541), knew about the repulsive aspect of the stream charged with sediments, but they agreed on the excellence of this water that flows far into the sea, without mixing with the salty waves, because of its unusual density or speed:

Arrian *Periplus of the Euxine* 8 (transl. William Falconer 1805)
= Ps.-Arrian *Periplus of the Euxine Sea* 9v8–19 Diller = 47 Podossinov

... εἰς τὸν Φᾶσιν ..., ποταμῶν ὧν ἐγὼ ἔργων
κουφότατον ὕδωρ παρεχόμενον καὶ τὴν χροιάν
μάλιστα ἐξηλλαγμένον. τὴν μὲν γὰρ κουφότητα
τῷ τε σταθμῷ τεκμαίροιο ἄντις, καὶ πρὸς
τούτου, ὅτι ἐπιπλεῖ τῇ θαλάσσῃ, οὐχὶ δὲ
συμμίγνυται, [...] καὶ ἦν κατὰ μὲν τοῦ
ἐπιπλέοντος βᾶψαντα γλυκὺ τὸ ὕδωρ ἀνιμήσασθαι,
εἰ δὲ εἰς βάθος τις καθῆκεν τὴν κάλπιν, ἄλμυρόν.
[...] ἡ δὲ χροία τῷ Φάσιδι οἷα ἀπὸ μολίβδου ἢ
καπτιτέρου βεβαμμένον τοῦ ὕδατος· καταστὰν δὲ
καθαρῶτατον γίγνεται. οὐ τοίνυν νενόμισται
εἰσκομίσαι ὕδωρ εἰς τὸν Φᾶσιν τοὺς εἰσπλέοντας
εἰς αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν εἰσβάλλωσιν ἤδη εἰς τὸν
ῥοῦν, παραγγέλλεται πᾶν ἐκχεῖν τὸ ἐνὸν ὕδωρ ἐν
ταῖς ναυσίν· εἰ δὲ μή, λόγος κατέχει ὅτι οἱ τούτου
ἀμελήσαντες οὐκ εὐπλοοῦσιν. τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ τοῦ
Φάσιδος οὐ σήπεται, ἀλλὰ μένει ἀκραιφνὲς καὶ
ὑπὲρ δέκατον ἔτος, πλήν γε δὴ ὅτι εἰς τὸ
γλυκύτερον μεταβάλλει.

the Phasis... whose water is lighter in the bal-
ance, and more changeable in its colour, than any
with which I am acquainted. Any person may
satisfy himself of the superior lightness of this
water by weighing it, or by observing that it floats
on the surface of the sea without mingling with
it. [...] The water of the Phasis, if you take it
from the surface, is fresh; but if any one lets down
a jar deep into the stream, he finds the water
brackish. [...] The colour of the water of the Pha-
sis resembles that of water impregnated with lead
or tin; but on standing and depositing a sediment,
it becomes perfectly pure. It is even provided by
the law, that those who fail into the Phasis should
not import any foreign water into the country;
but as soon as they enter the stream, it is signified
to them, that they should pour out what water is
left in the ship; which if they neglect to do, the
common opinion is that their future voyages will
not be prosperous. The water of the Phasis does
not corrupt by keeping, but continues free from
any taint of this kind for more than ten years. The
only change that takes place is, that it becomes
sweeter than it was originally.

soft. Archaeological and geological investigation demonstrates that in ancient times the territory around Poti and other sites was wetland, marsh, etc. Thus, Greeks and locals had to adapt their way of life to the physical conditions (Tsetskhladze 1997a).

Procopius *Wars* 2. 30. 25–26.

ὁ γὰρ ποταμὸς οὗτος βάθους μὲν εἴπερ τις ἄλλος
 ἰκανώτατα ἔχει, εὐρους δὲ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον διήκει.
 τῆς μέντοι ῥύμης αὐτοῦ τοσοῦτον περίεστιν ὥστε
 δὴ ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν ἐκβαλὼν ἐπὶ μακρότατον
 κατὰ μόναν χωρεῖ, οὐδαμῆ ταύτη ἐπιμιγνύμενος.
 ὕδωρ ἀμέλει πότιμον τοῖς ἐκείνη ναυτιλλομένοις
 ὑδρεύεσθαι πάρεστιν ἐν μέσῳ πελάγει.

For in depth this river is not inferior to the deepest rivers, and it spreads out to a great width. Moreover it has such a strong current that when it empties into the sea, it goes on as a separate stream for a very great distance without mingling at all with the sea-water. Indeed, those who navigate in those parts are able to draw up drinking water in the midst of the sea.

How should we explain these differences between the most precise descriptions of the mouth of the Rioni and their limited, if not nil impact on the general knowledge about the river? Indeed, ancient authors lacked the methodological constraints of modern scientists: aware of the importance of autopsy and up-to-date information, most of the time they depended exclusively on the works available to their entourage. The results of direct explorations were not accepted if they did not fit the mental map, the narrative frame and the purposes of an author. In antiquity, there was no geographical exploration only for scientific purposes, no scientific revolution and no linear progress of knowledge. The fortune of geographical information was determined mainly by the history of the literary tradition and transmission and by the mechanisms of common sense, which selected empirical observations and developed logical conjectures, in agreement with a vague, flexible, but shared mental image of the Colchian Phasis. The result is a heterogeneous collection of poetical and historiographical representations, scattered throughout texts of different genres, epochs and cultural contexts, which was never accessible as a whole to an ancient mind, but which remains, in its main lines, faithful to the common opinion about the mythical space.

The Southern Phasis: The Aras, Kelkit, Çoruh and Other Cappadocian-Armenian-Colchian Rivers (Fig. 2)

For the modern reader, one of the main difficulties is to understand the ancient mental construct of river courses: how did the Greeks and Romans identify the main courses, their tributaries, distributaries and sources, and how did they invent the connections with other streams that flowed in distant spaces, but that were linked by human movements and landscape divisions? There is no evidence for an ancient attempt to explore the entire hydrographic basin of the Rioni; therefore, the syntheses of data collected from different local populations or participants in military expeditions were hazy and often contradictory. Moreover, they were spread

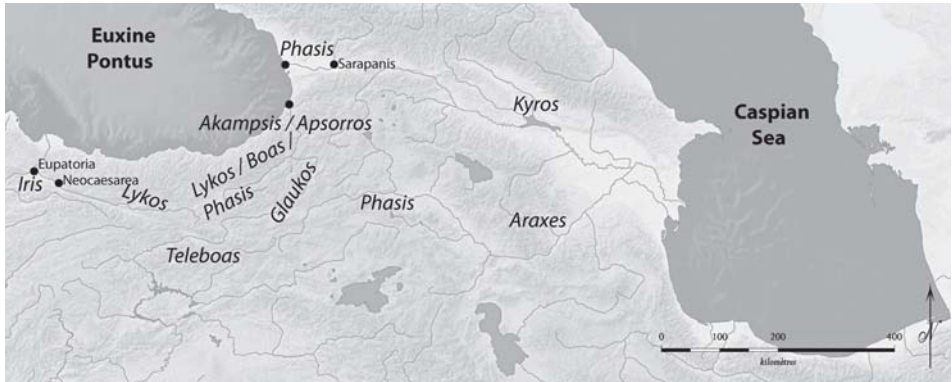


Fig. 2: 'Phasis' in the southern Caucasus.

throughout works by different authors who tried to establish some coherence between the elements at their disposal and who, as a result, constructed their own Phasis based on the empirical data available regarding the characteristics of the river as well as homonymies, analogies with other rivers, the consistency within the naratological frame and the aims of their stories.

The name of the Rioni itself, probably derived from a Caucasian name which also gave the Greek 'Ρίς and 'Ρέων and the Latin Surium, is attested for the middle course of the river in the second half of the 4th century BC by Ps.-Scylax (§80), in the 1st century AD by Pliny the elder (*NH* 2. 226, 6. 13), and in the first half of the 6th century AD by Procopius, who follows the geographical frames of Arrian from the 2nd century AD (*Wars* 8. 13. 3, 8. 14. 47). The identification 'Ρέων-Rioni seems certain, due to the mentions of Kotiaion/Kotais/Koitaion and Archaeopolis on its banks: in fact, if Kotiaion/Kotais (modern Kutaisi) is situated on the Rioni, Archaeopolis (modern Nokalakevi) is on the modern Tekhuri, a tributary of the Rioni, known in antiquity also by the names of Glaukos/Kyaneos, and which, together with the Hippos and the Phasis, would have isolated the Aia 'island' (i.e., the land encircled by waters) from the rest of Colchis.¹⁴ Neither Procopius, however, nor the authors mentioning the Glaukos/Kyaneos establish an explicit connection between these rivers and the Phasis.

¹⁴ Strabo 11. 2. 17, 11. 3. 4; Pliny *NH* 6. 13; Stephanus of Byzantium *s.v.* Αἴα; cf. Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 10. 2 (Map 3 of Asia; for the cartographic inaccuracy, see Tupikova and Geus 2015); Agathias 3. 19–21; see Kiessling 1914d; von Tischler 1977, 126; Braund 1994, *passim*. The relationship of the Glaukos/Kyaneos with the Katharos and the Dokonos (Agathias 2. 21. 10, 3. 7. 7) needs further clarification: see Herrmann 1936, followed by Talbert 2000 ('Map 87. Pontus-Phasis', by D. Braund and T. Sinclair, 'Map 88. Caucasia', by D. Braund); *contra* Kiessling 1913; Tomaschek 1905.

By contrast, at least three distinct rivers situated south of the Rioni were directly identified as the upper courses of the Phasis: the Phasis-Araxes (modern Aras) on the basis of its name; and the Lykos (modern Kelkit Çayı) and the Boas (modern Çoruh Nehri) because of their geographical conditions and historical functions.

The identification of rivers at the northern extremity of Media, on the slopes of the Caucasus, is mostly contradictory in Greek texts before the campaign of Pompey. Therefore, Araxes corresponds not only to the modern Araks/Aras/Araz (the river that divides Turkey, Armenia, Nakhichevan, Iran and Azerbaijan, and that flows into the modern Koura/ancient Kyros and through it into the Caspian Sea),¹⁵ but also to the Mt'k'vari/Kura/Kûr (called Kyros since Hellenistic times),¹⁶ Amu Darya (Oxus),¹⁷ Syr Darya (Jaxartes),¹⁸ and even to a lower part of the Don (Tanais) or the Volga (Oaros-Rha), which would have been imagined as connected to the Don-Tanais.¹⁹

Accordingly, for Xenophon (*Anabasis* 1. 4. 19), the Ἀράξης is a North Syrian tributary of the Euphrates, corresponding to the modern (K)Habur.²⁰ The Araks/Aras/Araz, running through the country of the Phasians, is called Phasis and marked the near end of the terrible trip of the Ten Thousand. Wider than one plethros (approximately 32 m) and followed by Xenophon's men over a length of about 35 parasangs (165 km), this river separated the snowy mountains of Armenia from the high plain of the Chalybes, the Taochoi and the Phasians (4. 6. 5, cf. 7. 8. 25). The name of Φασσιανή/Βασσιανή ('Basean' in the Armenian texts attributed to Ananias of Širak)²¹ is still preserved today in the toponym Pasinler (in the Turkish district of Erzurum).²² Xenophon, the other authors of *Anabaseis* who could have served as sources to Diodorus Siculus (14. 29), as well as all of their readers of whom we have but mere echoes (such as Constantinus Porphyrogenetus: *On the Administration of the Empire* 45) never doubted that this part of the Aras/Araks was the real Phasis (of the Argonauts and the Greek colonists on the eastern shore of the Pontus), even though the Phasians lived apart from the Pontic Colchians, inland beyond the Macrons (Xenophon: *Anabasis* 4. 8. 9, 4. 8. 22, 5. 2. 1, 5. 3. 2, 5. 7. 2, 7. 8. 25; Diodorus Siculus 14. 29. 6, 14. 30. 3).

¹⁵ Cf. Kiessling 1914b; Tomaschek 1895b; Kuklina 1983; Müller 1997, 99.

¹⁶ Weissbach 1924.

¹⁷ Herrmann 1942.

¹⁸ Herrmann 1914.

¹⁹ Herrmann 1932; 1937; Kiessling 1914c. Cf. Podossinov forthcoming.

²⁰ Tomaschek 1895c; Bernard 1997.

²¹ See Hewsen 1992, geographical index 'Basean' and 'Vanand'.

²² See Hewsen 1983, 131–43; 2001, map 17 and commentary *ad loc.* Cf. Honigman 1935, 21; Sagona 1999; 2004; Lendle 1995, 250–53.

This extension of the Colchians along the southern shore of the Black Sea through the territories of Trapezous and Kerasous (the colonies of the Sinopeans),²³ made Apollonius of Rhodes imagine, more than a century later, another link between the Araxes (probably identified with the modern Aras) and the Phasis-Rioni:

Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonautica* 4. 131–135.

<p>ἔκλυον οἱ καὶ πολλὸν ἑκάς Τιτηνίδος Αἴης / Κολχίδα γῆν ἐνέμοντο παρὰ προγοῆσι Λύκοιο, / ὅς τ' ἀποκιδνάμενος ποταμοῦ κελάδοντος Ἀράξεω / Φάσιδι συμφέρεται ἱερὸν ῥόον, οἱ δὲ συνάμφω / Καυκασίην ἄλαδ' εἰς ἓν ἐλαυνόμενοι προρέουσιν</p>	<p>Those heard it who dwelt in the Colchian land very far from Titanian Aea, / near the outfall of Lykos, / the river which parts from loud-roaring Araxes / and blends his sacred stream with Phasis, and they twain / flow on together in one and pour their waters into the Caucasian Sea.</p>
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The Lykos is usually identified with the Kelkit Çayı, lying on the edges of the ancient Colchis and Armenia, mainly on the basis of its etymology and approximate geographical situation. This corresponds to the description of Strabo (Strabo 12. 3. 15, 30; Plutarch *Lucullus* 15; Pliny *NH* 6. 8–10): the Kelkit Çayı runs from east to west through the plain of Phanaroia and the territory of Kabeira/Diospolis/Sebaste/Neocaesarea (modern Niksar) and flows into the Yeşilirmak (ancient Iris) at the level of the ancient Eupatoria/Magnopolis.²⁴ It is in reality formed by two main tributaries, the Koşmasat Çayı, coming from the mountains at the frontier between the modern provinces of Gümüşhane and Bayburt, and the Çömlécik Deresi, running north from the frontier between the modern provinces of Gümüşhane and Erzincan. How could this river be represented by Apollonius as a distributary of the Araxes and a tributary of the Phasis? Apollonius probably never referred to the Kelkit Çayı but rather to another course flowing into a river called Phasis. Judging by Ptolemy (*Geography* 5. 6. 7) who presents the Lykos as the tributary of the Apsorros along with the Glaukos (modern Oltu Çay), this watercourse should correspond to the Çoruh Nerhi.

In the 6th century AD, Procopius of Caesarea (*Wars* 8. 2. 1) calls the upper course of the Çoruh Nerhi 'Boas' and its lower course 'Akampsis': the first name is local and attested as 'Voh' in the Armenian texts attributed to Ananias of Širak.²⁵ Procopius related the second Greek name to the inflexibility of the river, which flowed into the Euxine Pontus with such strength that ships were forced to avoid the coast – an observation that recalls Procopius' description of the Phasis (*Wars*

²³ For the identification of Xenophon's Kerasous, see Dan 2009, 654–58.

²⁴ Ruge 1916; 1927; von Tischler 1977, 67, 92–93; Olshausen and Biller 1984, 27–54; Bryer and Winfield 1985, 107–10, 118.

²⁵ See Hewsen 1992, geographical index 'Voh'.

2. 30. 25–26, quoted above). In fact, the southernmost of the two arms through which the Çoruh Nerhi flowed into the sea was called Apsorros/Apsaros/Absyrτος, like the nearby port and fortress associated with the mythical place of Medea's fratricide (modern Gonio).²⁶ The hydronym Boas, however, is also said by Procopius to correspond to part of the upper course of the Phasis-Rioni: it must have flowed from the south to the north and, changing its direction in order to pour into the deepest eastern gulf of the Euxine Pontus, it would have become navigable and changed its name from Boas to Phasis (*Wars* 2. 29. 14, 16; *cf.* 1. 15. 21, 2. 30. 36–37, 8. 2. 2–9). Or, if, for Procopius, the Phasis-Rioni became navigable at the level of the fortress of Sarapanis (as was the case for Ps.-Scylax and Strabo – see below), and if he supposed any link between the Boas-Phasis and the Boas-Akampsis (which, in this case, would be the same river and not only an homonym), then this connection should correspond to an imaginary water channel, in fact one of the passes of the Southern Caucasus. The Zekari Pass is situated amidst the Kershaveti and the Khanistskali/Chaniszqali rivers, tributaries of the Phasis-Rioni flowing to the north-west, the Kvabliani river tributary (through the Potskhovistskali river) of the Kyros-Mtkvari flowing to the east, and the Acharis-Tskali river, tributary of the Boas/Akampsis-Çoruh, flowing to the south-west. Accordingly, for Procopius, it would not have been impossible to imagine a Boas river, as a segment of the Phasis, which would have linked not only the Çoruh and the Rioni, but also the Kyros-Mtkvari (and, implicitly, its tributary Araxes/Araxes). Moreover, other 'Caucasian/Caspian Gates' offered shortcuts for the passages of the southern Caucasus, between rivers that could have been associated with the Phasis (flowing into the Pontus) and those associated with the Kyros and the Araxes (flowing into the Caspian Sea). The Surami Pass, for example, dominated by the Sarapanis fortress, marks the place where the Suramula and Kvabiskhevi, tributaries of the Kyros-Mtkvari, are close to the Barimela, the Sakraula, the Shavi-Tskali and Ch'kherimela rivers, which belong to the hydrographic basin of the Phasis-Rioni. Strabo (11. 3. 4–5) mentions this path as the first access to Iberia from Colchis. Yet there were other possible passages between the upper basins of the Phasis-Rioni and Kyros-Mtkvari, like the one located further to the north-east at the Jvari Pass.²⁷

Accordingly, through Procopius' references to the Boas, we can explain how Apollonios of Rhodes could refer to a Lykos river – the same as Ptolemy's Lykos – as a channel between the Phasis and the Araxes: his sources, just like those of Procopius, could have mentioned a path following the valleys of the Lykos-Çoruh, Phasis-Rioni and Araxes-Mtkvari. However, a more southern connection between

²⁶ Tomaschek 1894b; 1895a; Kacharava and Kvirkveliya 1991, 30–32; Tsetskhladze 1999, 87–98.

²⁷ See Lordkipanidze 2002; Talbert 2000 ('Map 88. Caucasia', by D. Braund).

the Lykos-Kelkit and the Araxes-Aras was also possible. South from the Koşmasat Çayı (tributary of the Kelkit Çayı mentioned above), in the region of the modern village of Gökçedere, lies the source of the Pular Deresi that flows to the east through Bayburt and forms the Çoruh Nerhi after the confluence with the Sakızlı Deresi. This river flows from west to east until the region of Pasinler, where its tributary, the Oltu Çayı (Ptolemy's Glaukos), comes close to Xenophon's Phasis (the modern Aras – as recorded above) as well as to the Upper Euphrates.²⁸ Accordingly, this Lykos-Çoruh could have been presented as a link between Xenophon's Phasis and Araxes (as defined above).

This identification of Apollonius' Lykos – the Çoruh Nehri – with Strabo's Lykos – the Kelkit Çayı – was certainly made by the scholiast who added here the parallel identification of the Thermodon (modern Terme Çayı), flowing east of the Iris (modern Yeşilirmak) into the Black Sea, with the Araxes, the 'Scythian' river flowing into the Caspian, as described in the lost work devoted by Metrodoros of Scepsis to the king Tigran of Armenia (184 F 1).²⁹ In this case, no significant path unified the Pontic valley of the Terme Çayı with a Caspian river: however, this east-west construction of the Thermodon seems to go back to Eratosthenes. It is therefore possible that this identification was based on the confusion with the corridor of the southern Caucasian passes assigned by Apollonios to his Lykos; Strabo himself affirms that Eratosthenes took the Lykos to be the Thermodon.³⁰ He must have had a strong mythological reason for doing so: this Thermodon-Araxes would have been the axis of the land of the Amazons, occupying not only the plain of Themiskyra in the south of the Black Sea but also the valley of the Araxes-Syr-Darya, north of which lived the Massagetai of Tomiris in historical times (Herodotus 1. 212–214). Together, these identifications based on homonymies or other mythical and historical associations reinforced the tradition of the 'Phasis rivers' as a crossing path between the Taurus and the Caucasus, the Pontus and the Caspian.³¹

²⁸ In the region of Sadak (ancient Satala), several kilometers south from the Çömlecik Deresi, flows the Dereyurdu Deresi, a tributary of the Kara Su, which is the so-called Western Euphrates. This proximity reminds us that Pliny the Elder mentioned the Lycus not only as the Kelkit Çayı (*NH* 6. 8–10), but also as a tributary of the Euphrates-Arsanias (modern Murat Su, which merges into the Kara Su, *cf.* 5. 84, and may be identified, at least partly, with the ancient Teleboas). One could think that this is the reason why Lycus is mentioned by Pliny the Elder as one of the Asiatic rivers whose courses are partially underground (*NH* 2. 225): this final Lycus, however, must be totally different from the homonymous tributary of the Maiandros; *cf.* Ruge 1927.

²⁹ Eratosthenes (*cf.* III B 84 Berger = book 3 fr. 119 *apud* Strabo 11. 14. 7) could have offered a ground for this thesis.

³⁰ For the ancient sources on the Thermodon, see Dan 2015. The most precise descriptions of the Roman and Byzantine paths are given by Bryer and Winfield 1985, 17–65.

³¹ The problem of the mountains where the Phasis originates must be treated apart: unlike from the 19th century onwards, mountain ranges in antiquity were defined not only on geographical but

The Northern Phasis: Kuban, Sochi and the Hybris (Fig. 3)

To cross from the Pontus to the Caspian Sea (and therefore from Greece/Scythia/Europe to the realm of the Medes/Asia: Herodotus 1. 104), it was possible to take two major routes, one on each side of the Caucasus. The southern path (judging by the orientation of the Caucasus on our modern maps), also the shortest, followed the Colchian Phasis, crossed the Caucasus mountains (also called Kaspios by Eratosthenes, III A 34, III B 65 Berger = book 3 fr. 52 Roller *apud* Strabo 2. 1. 39) through one of the many 'Caspian Gates', and continued through the land of the Sapeires along the Kyros river (modern M^tk'vari/Kura/Kûr) to the Caspian Sea. Although probably ignored in detail by people from the Mediterranean, this network of passages is mentioned throughout antiquity: Xenophon hoped to have found it when meeting the Phasians (*Anabasis* 4. 6. 5, 5. 6. 37, see above); Alexander the Great would have included it in a direct highway spanning from India to the Black Sea, and Pompey would later have walked in his steps.³² Different estimations are known for some segments of its length: the Phasis-Rioni was navigable upstream for 180 stadia (Ps.-Scylax §81). The route from the point where the navigation on the Phasis ceased – at Sarapanis (modern Shorapani) – to the Kyros river took four days in the time of Strabo (11. 2. 17, *cf.* 11. 3. 4) and no more than five days according to the source of Pliny the Elder (*NH* 6. 52); Strabo (11. 1. 5), who seems to have followed a common opinion, maybe going back to Eratosthenes, obtained the sum of 3,000 stadia from one sea to the other, just as between the Pontus and the eastern Mediterranean through the Cappadocian isthmus (III A 2 Berger = book 3 fr. 47 Roller *apud* Strabo 2. 1. 3). Poseidonius, who preferred the equation with the isthmus between Pelusium and the Red Sea and with that between the Maeotis and the Caspian, reduced this distance by half, manifestly without taking into consideration the experience of his own student, Pompey.

The second northern route, crossing the isthmus between the Maeotis (at the mouth of the Pontus) and the Caspian, was said by Herodotus (6. 84) to have been much longer: the route was taken by the Scythians who left the Caucasus to their

also on historical, ethnographical and political grounds. Under these conditions, the various mountains associated with the source of the Phasis (the Caucasus for Aristotle *Meteorologica* 1. 13 350a; the mysterious Amarantian mountains, whose name should be associated with a local name, for Ctesias fr. 94 Müller *apud Schol. ad Apol. Rhod.* 2. 399–401a and Apollonius of Rhodes 3. 1219–1220; the Armenian mountains for Eratosthenes III B 75 Berger = book 3 fr. 120 Roller *apud Schol. ad Apol. Rhod.* 2. 399–401a, Strabo 11. 2. 17, 11. 14. 7, Procopius *Wars* 1. 15. 21; the Moschian mountains for Solinus 15. 19 after Pliny *NH* 6. 13) do not help in the identification of the real river course; instead, they participate, in the same manner as rivers do, in the different mental constructions of the region.

³² Strabo 11. 3. 4–5; Appian *Mithridatica* 103; Solinus 19. 5. *Cf.* Strabo 2. 1. 39 for Eratosthenes and Hipparchos who used these references for determining their meridians; Polybius 5. 55. 7; Dionysius of Alexandria 689.



Fig. 3: ‘Phasis’ in the northern Caucasus.

right when descending to Asia by following their Phasis.³³ This ‘Scythian’, northern Phasis fits several other references to a Phasis that could not be identified with the Rioni. Thus, the name Arcturus, the Latin equivalent of the Greek north-eastern wind Boreas (Ps.-Plutarch *On Rivers* 5. 1), hardly corresponds to the subtropical climate of the mouth of the Rioni on the Black Sea.³⁴ Actually, for Herodotus (3. 97), Boreas was associated with the space beyond the Caucasus, the European North that did not belong to the Asiatic Persians (*cf.* 1. 104, 4. 12; and Mela 1. 109; Pliny *NH* 6. 15, 6. 28–29).³⁵ If the mythical Phasis were to be identified with a real north-eastern river, the division between Europe and Asia would better fit all of the evidence concerning the North Caucasian regions: the high ranges (Caucasus and Taurus) remain in Asia, while the northern steppes belong to Europe. The Cimmerian Bosphorus remains the end of the Pontus, opposed to the Thracian Bosphorus situated on the same meridian as the Nile. This opposition between the two

³³ *Cf.* Ivantchik 1999b.

³⁴ The tradition of a cold Phasis goes back to Pindar *Isthmian Ode* 2 and can be explained by its opposition to the Nile: *cf.* in the Latin tradition, Valerius Flaccus 1. 43–44, Lucan 2. 585; Statius *Silvae* 2. 4. 27; *Thebais* 12. 181–182; Seneca *Natural Questions* 4a. 2. 20.

³⁵ For the political construction of Asia in Hecataeus of Miletus, see Tozzi 1963.

Bosporus straits appears clearly in the 4th century AD in Ammianus Marcellinus' interpretation of the Euxine Pontus' association with the form of a Scythian bow (22. 8. 10–43): unlike Dionysius of Alexandria (156–162), who extended the cord of the bow along the Asiatic coast of the Black Sea between Byzantium and Phasis (following the tradition of the Phasis as the easternmost point of the interior sea, criticised by Strabo 11. 2. 15–16 above), Ammianus leant towards Crimea and the Cimmerian Bosporus and identified the two round parts of the Scythian bow with the two European gulfs at the mouths of the Borysthenes and the Istros.³⁶ Moreover, on the scale of the inhabited world, the Cimmerian Bosporus forms a perfect pair with the Pillars of Heracles (modern Gibraltar),³⁷ just like Atlas bearing the celestial vault faces his brother, Prometheus, on the Laconian cup of Arkesilas (Vatican Museum 16 592, found in Cerveteri and dating to the middle of the 6th century BC). The Tanais was the perfect continuation of the line separating Europe and Asia, from Gibraltar through the Black Sea straits and the Maeotis (considered as a pond on the flow of the river, upstream from its mouth that corresponded to the Cimmerian Bosporus).³⁸ This symmetry is not broken when situating the frontier between the two parts of the world along the Phasis, that is, if this Phasis is a north-eastern river, like the Kuban that was known in antiquity, only from Aristotle onwards, under the names of Hypanis, Antikeites, 'the one that is across/in front of/on the opposite side of' the Bosporus (in Strabo 11. 2. 5), and Saranges (in the *Orphic Argonautica* 1050–1054).

Three types of evidence point to this identification: the new reading of several Archaic and Classical texts concerning the limit of Europe and Asia and the relationship between the Maeotis and the Phasis; the reinterpretation of an inscription on a silver cup discovered in the Kuban region in a context five centuries later than its fabrication; the geo-archaeological reconstruction of the landscape at the mouth of the Kuban river, lying between the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea and the Caucasus.

Among the texts that indirectly suggest the identification of the Phasis with a major North Caucasian river like the Kuban, one counts, besides Herodotus (above), Hecataeus of Miletus and Aeschylus. The *Periodos*, written by Hecataeus of Miletus at the end of the 6th century BC in the form of two books, Europe and Asia, to suggest a bipartite world,³⁹ is now lost, and its modern editors – including Felix Jacoby – had the greatest difficulties to justify Hecataeus' division between Europe and Asia, which correspond neither to the Tanais nor to the Phasis-Rioni (following

³⁶ Dan 2013b.

³⁷ Cf. Panchenko 2005 with Dan *et al.* 2016; cf. also Musbakhova 2015.

³⁸ For example, in Arrian *Periplus of the Black Sea* 19; Ps.-Arrian *Periplus of the Black Sea* 43–50 Müller = 10r26–12r20 Diller = 71–79 Podossinov). Cf. Podossinov 2015.

³⁹ *Contra* Zimmerman 1997; Arana 1996. See also Dan 2009, 332–44.

the alternative attested by Herodotus 4. 45, *cf.* Procopius *Wars* 8. 6. 1–15; *On Buildings* 6. 1. 7). In fact, both Bosphorus straits appear half European and half Asiatic: on the Cimmerian Bosphorus, the Sindike, the Gulf of Apatouron, Phanagoria, Patrasys, perhaps the mysterious Krossa (if identified with Ptolemy's Gerousa, in *Geography* 5. 9. 4), and the Scythian/Sarmatian-Maeotian peoples of Iamai and Ixibatai (1 F 211–216) were all located in Asia. Yet the Caucasian foothills were divided between Europe and Asia: the Dandarioi and the Tipanissai (1 F 191–192) were in Europe, while the Koloï lived on the Asiatic skirts of the Caucasus (1 F 209) towards the Koraxoi (1 F 210) and the Colchians.⁴⁰ The Dandarioi were associated with other Sindian people in inscriptions of the Bosporan kingdom, from the 4th century BC onwards;⁴¹ they must have lived on the banks of the Hypanis river, because Strabo (11. 2. 11) wrote that Pharnaces, the son of Mithradates VI, had inundated their lands by manipulating the waters of the river. This river is probably also mentioned by Tacitus (*Annals* 12. 15, 16), under the name of Panda (<*Υπανάριδα), separating the Dandari from the Siraci, in the context of the Roman intervention against Mithradates VIII of Bosphorus in AD 49. The second people from the edges of Europe in Hecataeus' *Periodos*, the Tipanissai, are not known from other sources. Their ethnic name, however, recalls the same Hypanis river, which is attested as the limit between Europe and Asia by C. Cornelius Gallus (a Latin poet of Augustan times and first prefect of Egypt after the defeat of Cleopatra, quoted by a 3rd-century AD Latin author Vibius Sequester).⁴² Taking into consideration the fragments of Hecataeus, the river could have played this same role well before.⁴³

⁴⁰ *Cf.*, for example, Ps.-Scylax (§ 78–79 = Ps.-Arrian 10r7–9 Diller, quoting Ps.-Scymnus 925–937 Diller = fr. 20 Marcotte, and Arrian *Periplus of the Black Sea* 11); Pomponius Mela 1. 111; Pliny *NH* 6. 15; Hippolytus of Rome *Chronikon* § 80 Helm = Epiphanius *Ancoratus* 113. 5 Holl, etc.

⁴¹ Inscriptions concerning Satyros I: *CIRB* 6, 6a, 1037, 1038; see 1014 for his son and successor, Pairisades.

⁴² 77: *Hypanis, Scythiae, qui ut ait Gallus / 'uno tellures diuidit amne duas'. / Asiam enim ab Europa separat.* This second Hypanis, different from the European Hypanis-Bug, must have also been mentioned by Gallus' younger contemporary and elegiac competitor, Propertius, as a river of the north-east (1. 12. 4: *quantum Hypanis Veneto dissidet Eridano; pace* Álvarez-Pedrosa Núñez 2005). This river was famous enough to be the subject of a statement made by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 4. 83) against those who believed in the existence of an Asiatic Hypanis (*cf.* 4. 84, 4. 88, 11. 120, 31. 56; Solinus §14; Martianus Capella 6. 663). Cicero (*Tusculanes* 1. 94) makes the error of ascribing Aristotle's statements about the Hypanis-Kuban to the European Hypanis (*History of the Animals* 552b). Ammianus Marcellinus (22. 8. 26) could also reflect a mixture of information when pretending that Panticapaeum, lying on the European shore of the Cimmerian Bosphorus, was surrounded (*perstringit*) by the Hypanis. For an overview of sources, see Kiessling 1914a; Schramm 1973, 166–76; Aalto and Pekkanen 1975, 255–58, *s.v.* For its mention in Cornelius Gallus, see Korenjak 2002; *contra* Boucher 1966, 83–84; Fedeli 1980, 291; Barchiesi 1981, 165; Cairns 2011.

⁴³ The hypothesis was already presented by von Scheliha 1931, 34–35; Elnitskii 1961, 13–14; Vinogradov 1974; Musbakhova 2014.

The evidence is garbled because the ancient name of Hypanis corresponded not only to the modern Bug (as attested first by Herodotus) but also to the Kuban river (from Aristotle *History of the Animals* 522b, onwards). Alexander Polyhistor (a Milesian scholar who had an important impact on the Roman authors writing Greek stories in Rome in the 1st century BC) mentioned a Hypanis river that flowed in both the Pontus and the Maeotis (273 F 17). Latin poets, like modern philologists, supposed that Polyhistor imagined the flow of the Bug crossing the European steppe north of Crimea/Taurike, somehow dividing Europe, which remained to the southwest, from Asia to the north-east: an absurd image that would prove the lack of reliable information and geographical common sense in late-Hellenistic compilations. However, the reference of Polyhistor makes sense if it is related to the Kuban river, flowing to the south of the Maeotis and through the newly discovered 'Kuban Bosphorus' to the Pontus (see below). From east to west, this river cuts the North Caucasian isthmus, which was itself identified as a crossing-point from Europe to Asia, probably by Eratosthenes.⁴⁴ In fact, the isthmus of the Kuban, between the Caspian Sea and the Pontus, could have been regarded as the northern limit of Asia, just like the isthmus of Pelusium between the Red Sea/Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean was the southern limit.

Therefore, one can assume that Hecataeus separated Europe from Asia through the north Caucasian isthmus and, probably, through the river crossing it. This river could have been called or somehow associated with the Phasis, considered as the most ancient frontier and associated with the Pontic-Caspian isthmus, either south or north of the Caucasus.⁴⁵ Of course, this is only a logical deduction on the basis of indirect proofs. We have no direct literary evidence for a connection between the Phasis and the Hypanis in Greek antiquity (if this was indeed the name of the Kuban before the end of the Classical period), unlike the evidence for the Tanais, about which Hecataeus of Teos/Abdera (more probably than Hecataeus of Miletus) said that it would have taken its source from the Araxes (probably identified with the Volga, flowing into the Caspian Sea).⁴⁶ A fragment of Aeschylus' tragedy *Prometheus*

⁴⁴ Eratosthenes' *Geography* is lost today, but we know that this text was used in the Aristotelian text *De mundo* (393b) from the 1st century BC as well as in the *Periegesis* of Dionysius of Alexandria (20–22) from the 2nd century AD: both texts attest to this frontier between Europe and Asia. In fact, this must have been exactly the frontier between the two main parts of the known world for Hecataeus of Miletus.

⁴⁵ For example, by Agathemeros (*Sketch of Geography* §3): 'Ἀσίας δὲ καὶ Εὐρώπης οἱ μὲν ἀρχαῖοι Φᾶσιν ποταμὸν καὶ τὸν ἕως Κασπίας ἰσθμὸν, οἱ δὲ ὕστερον (νεώτεροι) Μαιῶτιν λίμνην καὶ Τάναιν ποταμὸν.

⁴⁶ 1 F 195 and 264 F 13 in Ps.-Arrian §49 Müller = Diller 11v30 = fr. 78 Podossinov, from Ps.-Scymnus 868–870 Müller = fr. 15b Marcotte; if here Ps.-Scymnus, who must be identified with Apollodoros of Athens, was still following Ephoros, as in its previous quotation for the description of the Scythian tribes (70 F 158), and if the inventor of the Tanais-Araxes connection was Hecataeus, this can

Unbound, as reconstructed by H.J. Mette, however, could have associated the two rivers Phasis and Tanais as a common frontier between Europe and Asia: πῆι μὲν δίδυμον χθονὸς Εὐρώπης μέγαν ἤδ' Ἀσίας τέρμονα Φᾶσιν <Τάναϊν τε (?) ...> (fr. 322 Mette).⁴⁷ But this artificial construction should be rejected on two philological grounds: firstly, it is based on an uncritical synthesis of two contradictory testimonies. The first tradition, represented by Arrian (*Periplus of the Black Sea* §19) and his reader, Procopius (*History of the Wars* 8. 6. 15), states that the Phasis was for Aeschylus the limit between Europe and Asia. The second tradition, in the anonymous *scholia* to the *Periegesis* of Dionysius of Alexandria (verse 10), assumes what looks like a contradictory opinion: Αἰσχύλος δὲ ἐν Προμηθεῖ λυομένῳ καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἐν Σκύθαις ὑπὸ τούτου διορίζεσθαι φησι τὰς ἡπείρους ('Aeschylus in the *Prometheus Unbound* and Sophocles in *The Scythians* [fr. 548 Pearson] say that the parts of the word are divided by this one [i.e., the Tanais]'). Karl Müller corrected the scholiast, supposing a 'saut du meme au même' in the manuscript tradition: the original explanation, perhaps also dependent on the quotation in Arrian (who established a divergence from the current opinion according to which the Tanais was the limit, while Aeschylus pretended that it was the Phasis), would have claimed that not the Tanais, but the Phasis, was considered by Aeschylus and Sophocles as a frontier: ὑπὸ τούτου] *olim scriptum fuerit* οὐχ ὑπὸ τούτου, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τούτου Φάσιδος; *nam Aeschylum in Prometheo Phasim Asiae et Europae terminum posuisse ex Arriani Periplus constat*.⁴⁸ Although coherent with Arrian and Procopius, this conjecture goes against the manuscript tradition and must be considered as nothing more than a hypothesis. The second argument for rejecting Mette's reconstruction of Aeschylus' fragment is the prosody: the quotation of Arrian contains four anapaestic dimeters, usually contained in a *parodos* (which corresponds to Procopius' statement that they were originally situated at the beginning of the tragedy): τοὺς σοὺς ἄθλους τούσδε, Προμηθεῦ, / - - - - -uu - - (SS DS) / δεσμῶ τε πάθος τόδ' ἐποψόμενοι / - - uu- uu- uu- (SA AA) // πῆι μὲν δίδυμον χθονὸς Εὐρώπης / - - uu- uu- - - (SA AS) // μέγαν ἤδ' Ἀσίας τέρμονα Φᾶσιν / uu- uu- -uu - - (AA DS). The reconstruction of Mette implies that the verses were anapaestic pentameters, but of a lesser quality, because the name of Prometheus, split between two lines by verbal synapheia, prohibits the usual pause; also, with this conjecture, there are fewer metrical symmetries and stichometric parallelisms to establish with the *Prometheus Bound*.⁴⁹

only be the archaic logographer of Miletus. It is more probable, however, to suppose that this link, also attested in Aristotle *Meteorologica* 1. 13 350a, was invented in the context of Alexander's campaigns.

⁴⁷ Mette 1959, fr. 322a-b-c; 1963, 21-22. Cf. Bianchetti 1988, 213.

⁴⁸ *Geographi Graeci Minores* II, p. 431 *ad Scholia eis Dionysion* 10.

⁴⁹ West 1979. I am grateful to Anne-Iris Muñoz and Anne-Catherine Baudoin for all of the information provided on this point.

Rejecting the reconstruction that associates the Phasis and the Tanais as limits between the two parts of the world in one verse (as in the *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* of Stefan Radt, fr. 191) does not mean, however, that the testimony of the scholiast of Dionysius Periegetes on the splitting role of the Tanais should be also rejected.⁵⁰ In the preserved tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus situates the Cimmerian Bosphorus between Europe and Asia (732–735); accordingly, the assumption that he would have assigned this function to the Tanais in the *Prometheus Unbound* is coherent with the geographical representation of the *Prometheus Bound*, because the Greeks perceived the Cimmerian Bosphorus as the continuation of the Tanais at the other extremity of the Maeotis. Herodotus describes this frontier line by the succession Τάναϊν ποταμὸν τὸν Μαίητην καὶ Πορθμήϊα τὰ Κιμμέρια λέγουσι (4. 45).⁵¹ Moreover, at different moments, the river's course has been inflected to come either from the Caucasus (and being, accordingly, close to the Phasis),⁵² or from the Rhiphaeans (eventually near the Istros/Danube). If one assumes that Aeschylus' Phasis was also somehow related to the Cimmerian Bosphorus, as Tanais was, there is no contradiction between these testimonies.

This connection could be suggested by the comparison of Aeschylus' two Pontic *periploï* known today: in *Prometheus Unbound*, the itinerary of the Titans starts in Aethiopia and the Red Sea (fr. 323 Mette in Strabo 1. 2. 27) and goes through the land of the Heniochoi (fr. 331a–b in Pausanias the Athenian and Hesychios *s.v.*) from the Caucasus (fr. 321 Mette in Cicero *Tusculanes* 2. 23–26) to the Phasis (in fr. 322 Mette discussed above); in *Prometheus Bound*, Io is said to follow the shores of Europe from the Nomad Scythians. But the poet mirrors the Asiatic shores on the European ones and lists the Chalybes, the Hybristes river, the Caucasus mountains and the country of the Amazons, up to the Cimmerian Bosphorus (707–735). On the contrary, Asia is left to the mythical monsters (790–815). The identification of the Hybristes is not obvious: the scholiasts saw here the Araxes on the basis of the etymology of the epithet – as referring to the violence of the flows – and of the hydronym itself.⁵³ If this is the case, the Araxes could correspond to the northern

⁵⁰ The reference of the scholiast to Sophocles' *Scythians* cannot be evaluated because there is no other mention of the Tanais in the preserved texts of Sophocles. The Argonauts, mentioned in this tragedy, would not have travelled on the Tanais, but rather on the same path as when they came to Colchis (*Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 284).

⁵¹ For the ancient references to the Tanais, see Herrmann 1932; Schramm 1973, 176–90; Aalto and Pekkanen 1975, *s.v.* Tanais, 202–10.

⁵² For example, Theophanes of Mytilene 188 F 3 *apud* Strabo 11. 2. 2 (*cf.* Strabo 2. 4. 5–6); Dionysius Periegetes 663; Avienus *Description of the World* 851–855; Ammianus Marcellinus 22. 8. 7.

⁵³ *Cf. Schol. ad Prom. Vi.* 717–719: ἤξειεις δ' ὕβριστήν: Ὑβριστήν ποταμὸν τὸν Ἄραξιν φησι. Ἄραξις δὲ λέγεται παρὰ τὸ ἀράσσειν καὶ ἡχεῖν τὰ κύματα αὐτοῦ· τῷ γὰρ ὀνόματι τούτου καὶ ἡ προᾶξις ἐστὶ συνᾶδουσα. τοῦτο γὰρ δηλοῖ τὸ 'οὐ ψευδώνυμον'. ἤτοι 'οὐ μάτην λέγεται Ἄραξις'. ὃν μὴ περάσσης (δύσκολος γὰρ καὶ οὐκ εὐβατός ἐστι περᾶσθαι) πρὶν ἂν μόλης καὶ παραγενήσῃ πρὸς αὐτὸν

course of the Volga in the steppes of the Sauromatian Amazons. The re-inversed periplographic order of text, however, suggests that for Aeschylus, this Hybristes river could have been the Phasis in Colchis or a part of its course. The violence of the current corresponds to the descriptions of the South Caucasian rivers, difficult to traverse, with waters that do not mix with the sea.⁵⁴ At the same time, however, the intimate association with the Caucasus near the Cimmerian Bosphorus could indicate the Kuban,⁵⁵ or even the Tanais, especially if this was thought to originate in the Caucasus (like or through the Araxes-Volga).⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the epithet ‘Hybristes’ does not only refer to the physical characteristics of the flow, but it also recalls the legends related to the river: these may concern Prometheus’ opposition to Zeus’ *δέικη* through *ὑβρις*, Medea’s fratricide of Absyrtos,⁵⁷ or the etiology of the Phasis-Arcturus as a river that was named after Phasis, son of the Sun and the nymph Okyrrhoe, who killed his mother before killing himself. This last explanation was associated by Ps.-Plutarch with legendary trials by ordeal: adulterous people would have been thrown in the Phasis in the Mouth of the Impious (*Στόμιον τῶν ἀσεβῶν*), and their bodies would have resurfaced, 30 days later, in the Maeotis. The direct connection between the Phasis-Hybristes and the Maeotis (reminiscent of the 30 days of land travel already mentioned by Herodotus 1. 104, see above) could correspond to archaic knowledge about the karstic waters and caves under the Caucasus and the north-east corner of the Black Sea (at the mouth of the Corax river, modern Bzyb), which have been explored since the 20th century and discovered to be as the deepest known karstic structures in the world. They were already known to Aristotle, who interpreted them as a flowing of the Caspian into the Pontus.⁵⁸ Yet, in the *Orphic Argonautica* (1036–1082), this appears as a surface stream, which brought the Argonauts from Colchis to the northern Ocean through the Upper Phasis, its confluence with the Saranges, the Cimmerian Bosphorus, the Maeotis and a channel which is reminiscent of the Tanais-Don and the Rha-Volga altogether.⁵⁹

τὸν Καυκάσον, ἥτοι πρὸς τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ Καυκάσου· ὁ γὰρ Προμηθεὺς ἐν τινι μέρει καὶ ἀκρωρεῖα τοῦ Καυκάσου ἐσταυρώθη· ὁ δὲ Καυκάσος ὄρος ἀπέραντον”;

Eustathius of Thessalonica *Commentary on Dionysius Periegetes* 739: Τοῦ δὲ Μασσαγετικοῦ τούτου Ἀράξου μέμνηται καὶ Αἰσχύλος, καὶ ἀρέσκειται καὶ ἐκείνος ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀράσσειν καλεῖσθαι αὐτόν.

⁵⁴ See above. For the meanings of *ὑβρις*, see Moreau 1997.

⁵⁵ Kiessling 1914c; cf. Bolton 1962, 50–53, 63 n. 25, cautiously, for a mythical, north-eastern river.

⁵⁶ Cf. F. Jacoby, *FGH* I, p. 353.

⁵⁷ Pherecydes 3 F 32a–c *apud Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod.* 4. 223, 4. 228, *Schol. ad Eur. Med.* v. 167. From the 5th century onwards, other places outside Colchis are designated for the murder (see Wernicke 1895).

⁵⁸ Aristotle *Meteorologica* 1. 13 351a with Bolchert 1908, 7–10; cf. Pliny *NH* 2. 224; Clendenon 2009; Klimchouk and Kasjan 2003–04.

⁵⁹ Vian 1987, 31–32; cf. Musbakhova 2015.

Therefore, it seems possible to infer that behind these traditions lies the idea of a Phasis-Hybristes that could communicate with the Pontus, the Maeotis and eventually the Caspian. If Aeschylus referred to this Phasis, he could have simultaneously considered that the Cimmerian Bosphorus, and thus the Tanais, together marked the border between Europe and Asia. This northern Phasis could have been invented, just like the southern channel Phasis/Akampsis/Thermodon-Araxes/Kyros, on the basis of these mythical associations, a general knowledge about surface and underground flows, and even homonyms: in fact, the use of local names close to the name of 'Phasis' was not limited to the southern Caucasus. The anonymous author of the late antique *Periplus of the Black Sea* (10r2–3 Diller = fr. 57 Podossinov) indicates a second name, Basis, for the Achaïous river (probably to be identified with the modern Sochi).⁶⁰

Direct evidence for this Phasis-Kuban connection came to light at the end of the 19th century, when an inscribed silver phiale (dated around 420 BC) was discovered in barrow 1 of Zubov (dated to the 1st century BC) in the Kuban region (the phiale is now held in the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Inv. No. 2234/18).⁶¹ The inscription on the vase reads: Ἀπόλλωνος Ἡγέμονός εἰμι τὸμ Φάσι.⁶² This object raises more questions than can be answered: for example, there is no agreement about the place where this phiale was made and inscribed (whether it was made and inscribed in Lydia/Troas/Aeolis, in the Caucasus region, or made in north-western Asia Minor and inscribed in the Caucasus). The geographical and chronological context of the find remains difficult to explain. For those who accept the authenticity of the object,⁶³ the most widely accepted hypothesis nowadays is that this phiale was initially an offering in a temple of Apollo in the city of Phasis (being one of the earliest, if not the earliest mention of the city to be situated in the region of modern Poti), and that it was brought to the Kuban region in the context of the Mithradatic wars. Another interesting solution, proposed by David Braund, was that of a possible distance offering to the god in Rioni.⁶⁴ These two hypotheses, however, are problematic, since already in Classical times, this type of object was imported to the East as well as to the northern regions of the Black Sea.⁶⁵ The hypothesis of the object being moved in the context of the conquests of Mithradates VI or during the pirate attacks that made the reputation of this region

⁶⁰ Tomaschek 1894a.

⁶¹ With extensive bibliographies and photographs, see Tsetschladze 1994a; 1998a, 9–10, figs. 6–8; 2002; Lordkipanidze 1997; 2000, 62–81; Treister 2007, 96–97, Fig. 19; Sens 2009, 136–37.

⁶² Jeffery 1961, 368–69, 373, no. 72; Lazzarini 1976, 253; cf. *SEG* 34 777, 49 1971, 50 1383, 60 1642.

⁶³ Pace Ehrhardt 1984, 155–58.

⁶⁴ Braund 1994, 96–98; cf. Braund 2009; 2010.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Kakhidze 2004; Boltryk and Treister 2012.

(Strabo 11. 2. 12)⁶⁶ is not supported by precise historical proofs. Moreover, the inscription is curious, not only because the iambic trimeter is far from perfect and the epiclesis ‘Hegemon’ for Apollo a hapax (only Προκαθηγεμῶν being known for the Didymaeon Apollon in Miletus in Roman times),⁶⁷ but also because of the association of an epiclesis with a toponym – ‘Phasis’ – in order to identify a god. The writing in Ionic dialect is currently understood as ‘I belong to Apollo, the Leader in Phasis’ (i.e., in the city of Phasis). Nevertheless, the meaning could also be: ‘I belong to Apollo, the Leader on Phasis’ (i.e., on the banks of the River Phasis/up the Phasis). This interpretation, already suggested by the first editor of the discovery,⁶⁸ now fits the geographical context of the discovery, the lower Kuban, where the cult of Apollo appears to have been particularly important in the 5th century BC in the light of recent discoveries in Vestnik and Labrys-Semibratnee, which still await detailed publications.⁶⁹ This would suggest that the Kuban could have somehow been related to the name of Phasis in Archaic and Classical times, either in an historical sense – as Herodotus’ Phasis of the Scythians – or in a mythical sense, as the largest north-eastern river of the world that the Ionian colonists explored in the traces of the Argonauts.

The geo-archaeological research conducted during the past year in the Taman Peninsula, south of the Kuban Delta, eventually proved that the Kuban-Hypanis-Antikeites flowed into the Pontus and the Maeotis through the ‘Kuban Bosporus’, part of the multiple Cimmerian Bosporus:⁷⁰ this was Hipponax of Ephesus’ ‘Sindian vagina’ (fr. 2)⁷¹ at the extremity of the ‘mother of Pontus’ (Herodotus 4. 86; Pliny *NH* 4. 20). The deltaic mouths of this hypothetical Phasis or the branch of Phasis are rarely mentioned in literary sources before Strabo. The most important exception is Aristotle, whose statement justifies why the Kuban could have been forgotten, despite the importance of the Greek presence on the Bosporus and the reputation of ‘Phasis’:

⁶⁶ See Charachidzé 1998; Tsetskhladze 1990; 2002; 2008; Avram 2007.

⁶⁷ *Milet* I 3, 134; Sokolowski 1955, 53. Cf. Lordkipanidze 1997.

⁶⁸ Kieseritzky 1901; cf. Musbakhova 2013.

⁶⁹ For the temple in Vestnik, see Chevelev, Kashaev and Sudarev 2011. More generally, see Garbyzov, Zavojkin, Strokin and Sudarev 2011. For the reconstruction of the ancient landscape in Labrys-Semibratnee, see, for example, Goroncharovsky 2005; 2010; Vnukov *et al.* 2008; Smekalova 2010. For a political hint in the first half of the 4th century BC, see Tokhtas’ev 2006.

⁷⁰ See Zhuravlev and Schlotzhauer 2011a–b; Schlotzhauer and Zhuravlev 2014; Zhuravlev and Schlotzhauer 2014; Zhuravlev *et al.* 2015; Tsetskhladze 2015, 29–34; Dan and Gehrke forthcoming.

⁷¹ Cf. Surikov 2013.

Meteorologica 1. 14 353a.

ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν Μαιῶτιν λίμνην ἐπιδέδωκε τῇ προσχώσει τῶν ποταμῶν τοσοῦτον, ὥστε πολλῶ ἑλάττω μεγέθει πλοῖα νῦν εἰσπλεῖν πρὸς τὴν ἐργασίαν ἢ ἕτος ἐξηκοστόν. ὥστε ἐκ τούτου ῥᾶδιον ἀναλογίσασθαι ὅτι καὶ τὸ πρῶτον, ὥσπερ αἱ πολλαὶ τῶν λιμνῶν, καὶ αὕτη ἔργον ἐστὶ τῶν ποταμῶν, καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον πᾶσαν ἀνάγκη γενέσθαι ξηρὰν. ἔτι δὲ ὁ Βόσπορος αἰεὶ μὲν ῥεῖ διὰ τὸ προσχωῦσθαι, καὶ ἔστιν ἔτι ταῦτα καὶ τοῖς ὄμμασιν ἰδεῖν ὅν τινα συμβαίνει τρόπον. ὅτε γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀσίας ῥόνα ποιήσειεν ὁ ῥοῦς, τὸ ὅπισθεν λίμνη ἐγίγνετο μικρὰ τὸ πρῶτον, εἴτ' ἐξηράνθη ἄν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἄλλη ἢ ἀπὸ ταύτης ἡῶν, καὶ λίμνη ἀπὸ ταύτης· καὶ τοῦτο αἰεὶ οὕτως συνέβαινεν ὁμοίως. τούτου δὲ γιγνομένου πολλάκις ἀνάγκη χρόνου προϊόντος ὥσπερ ποταμὸν γενέσθαι, τέλος δὲ καὶ τοῦτον ξηρὸν.

Furthermore, there has been such a great increase of river silt on the shores of Lake Maeotis that the ships that ply there now for trade are far smaller in size than they used to be sixty years ago. And from this fact it is easy to deduce that, like most other lakes, this too was originally produced by rivers and that eventually it must all become dry. Besides, there is always a current through the Bosphorus as a result of the silting, and one can even see with one's own eyes how the process works. For whenever the current made a sandbank off the shore of Asia, there formed behind it at first a small lake, which subsequently dried up: then a further sandbank formed in front of this one and another lake, and so the process went on. When this has happened often enough the channel must in course of time be narrowed till it is like a river, and even this in the end must dry up.

In this moving landscape, Greek populations from western Asia Minor (Ionians, Eolians and maybe Carians) and the northern Aegean probably established themselves from the end of the 7th century BC.⁷² From the second half of the 6th century BC, they controlled access to the Maeotis, and thus to the commercial channels of the Eurasian steppe and the Caucasus, through a system of fortifications established along the key points of the straits. However, the Kuban's aggradation and the joint action of the Pontus and the Maeotis forced them to change their networks of communication and relocate their sites, depending on the environmental changes. Nonetheless, one can still suppose that in the favourable conditions of the Archaic and Classical times, when the double Bosphorus gave them access to extraordinary resources, they could have imagined themselves to be sailing along the river of the Golden Fleece to the north-eastern end of the *oikumene*.

Conclusion: Phasis – The End of Worlds

How has the Rioni become and remained, for most of us, the Phasis of antiquity? The previous pages have shown that this was far from being a simple process of designating one river. Several watercourses were identified in antiquity with the mythical, poetical and even historical Phasis. By its reputation, the Rioni surpassed

⁷² The evidence has been discussed in several papers by Udo Schlotzhauer and partially published in Zhuravlev and Schlotzhauer 2011a–b; Schlotzhauer 2016; cf. Tsetskhladze 1992; 1994b–d; 1997b; 2006; 2007; 2012; 2015; Tsetskhladze and Treister 1995.

all others for natural, mythological and political reasons. The Rioni basin has invaluable natural advantages in comparison with the Kelkit, the Çoruh or even the Kuban: it opens the most important Transcaucasian routes, east to west and south to north, and despite the important metamorphosis at its mouth, it did not share the destiny of a complete silting up, as did the Kuban Bosporus. The myth of the Argonauts, precursors of the Greeks at this end of the world, was strongly anchored in the mythological topography of Colchis, through a multitude of well-known *lieux de mémoire*, from the Achaeans in the north to Armenia and Cappadocia in the south. One must not forget, however, the subsistent political explanation. The Phasis-Rioni was a credible limit of the powers of the south, the Persians to the east, the Roman to the west (Strabo 6. 4. 2; Zosimus 2. 33. 1) and the Armenians in the middle (Plutarch: *Comparison between Cimmon and Lucullus* 3; *Lucullus* 33), all people whose power could never extend over the Caucasus. Just as in the case of Xenophon and his Ten Thousand, who could be deluded in their expectation of reaching the Pontic Phasis, the historians writing about these empires had an interest in manipulating the space by exploiting homonymies and inventing etiologies. The geography of ‘common sense’ allowed this flexibility.

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Abbreviation

Milet I 3 G. Kaweran and A. Rehm, *Das Delphinion in Milet* (Berlin 1914).

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