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Piracy as a disequilibrium factor
in the Eastern Mediterranean seapower balance:
the Cilician example during the Archaic and Classical times

Traditionally, it has been thought that the piratical activity of the Cilicians began around second half of the 2nd century BCE thanks to the action of Diodotus *Tryphon*. Here, we want to analyse whether also the piratical behaviour of the Cilicians, linked with the maritime plunder, has the same origins, or at the time that we have already mentioned such activities were merely systematized and internationalized, not only in terms of its purposes and impact, but also in relation to those who participated actively in the phenomenon, although, as we shall see, this ethnic multiplicity comes from older times¹. Similarly, as noted in the title of this paper, the control of this region and the seafaring skills of its inhabitants had a double effect through history: on one hand, the ruling powers succeeded in securing peace in this area, and on the other, they managed to have the support of those seasoned sea warriors.

In our view, the relationship of the inhabitants of this region with the piratical activity should go back to the period of Sea Peoples and the end of the Bronze Age. In fact, Cilicia and the surrounding areas appear to have been the scene of many episodes of plunder and sea conflicts, which characterized this period. Moreover, the protagonists of many of these events seem to come from these regions, from which they will set out for several places of the Mediterranean, either on their own or pushed by the movement of other populations². There is more than enough evidence to believe that pirate activity in the triangle between Cyprus, Anatolia and the Levant made difficult communications in the Hittite world,

¹ Briant 1976, 185-189; Habicht 1989, 364; Lewin 1991, 168; Asheri 1991, *passim*.

² Later researches about the Sea Peoples and their origin consider Cilicia (closely linked with Cyprus) as one of the places from where those populations started to move, although they defend that the real origin of many of these populations is the Aegean and the Mycenaean world. The latest works on these subjects are Dothan - Dothan 2002, Yasur-Landau 2010 and Lipinski 2015. Cf. with Sandars 1978, chapter 8 and conclusions who was reluctant to admit an Aegean origin of the Sea Peoples.

and compelled the Hittite king to take naval actions aimed at solving this problem. In these events, the Lukka (Lycia) played a leading role³. We refer to famous pirates who came from (or at least operated in) southern Anatolia, i.e. in the place called Lycia during later periods⁴. Thus, when the historical sources of archaic times referred to the “Carian pirates” we are almost sure that they are talking about the direct heirs of the Lukka. Nowadays, scholars are inclined to place them on the shores of Caria and Lycia and the surrounding areas. This could be linked with the fact that, in later times people who lived in Pamphylia and Lycia also were part of the pirate groups that have been called “Cilicians” by ancient historians⁵. For the specific case of the latter, we have examples in this first period as well. For instance, we know that the Hittite army was defeated by the Sea Peoples in the vicinity of Cilicia around 1210 BCE. Moreover, also the ultimate victory of the Sea Peoples against the Hittites took place in Cilicia. In this matter we must consider the fact that the Hittites never formed a naval power. In this field, they depended on the help they could find in the unreliable Lukka and Ugarit, as is stated in Tagalawa’s letter. Therefore, the campaigns of Suppiluliuma II against Tarhuntasa (that was part, together with Kizzuwatna, of the later Cilicia) were probably actions aimed at restraining the Sea Peoples who had settled in this region⁶. In the course of this campaign, the king would have founded a city, called Tana, which would correspond to the later Adana, where, as we know, Pompey would eventually settle some of the pirates whom he defeated in 67 BCE⁷. We

³ Alvar 1989, 34; *KUB XXVI 12+ II 15'*; *KBo XII 38 III 1'15'*.

⁴ Sandars 1978, 37; Alvar 1989, 39.

⁵ See Briant 1976, 165, according to which several populations in this region seem to be linked with banditry since ancient times: Pisidians, Misians and Lycaonians. Although Cilicians do not appear in this list, their relationship with the Pisidians cannot be overlooked. In fact, Briant includes the Isaurians amongst the Pisidians, and we know that they are one of the populations coming from Cilicia Trachea: Str. XII 6, 2; 7, 2-5; Diod. XVIII 22. See also Briant 1976, 185 where the author emphasizes the strange way, almost unique, in which Pisidians surrendered to the Persians.

⁶ Singer 2000, 27. Cf. with Ormerod 1929, 86, who argues that the feathered crown frequently worn by Sea Peoples represented in Egyptian art is directly linked with the Lycian clothing that Herodotus describes in reference to the Persian time. The feathered crowns that are some of the main distinctive clothes of several of the Sea Peoples have been attested as an Aegean fashion, that could easily reach Anatolia with the Mycenaean refugees who fled from Greece Mainland after the collapse of the Mycenaean World. See Yasur Landau 2012, 28-29. Ormerod studies all these identifications, pointing out that the Shekelesh can be connected with the inhabitants coming from the town of Salasgos, in Pisidia. De Souza 1999, 25-27; although he does not consider the Sea Peoples as an evidence for piracy, he thinks that these identifications are correct. Nowadays researchers have demonstrated a Cilician origin, or at least point of departure for several of the Sea Peoples: Yaser-Landau 2010, 180-186; Lipinski 2015, 6-12.

⁷ The link between Adana and piracy seems to come from at least twelve centuries earlier, if we consider that this city and its surrounding land is really «le pays de Danūna» (the coming land of the *Damuna* or *Denyen*, one of the Sea Peoples of the raid against Egypt within the time of Ramses

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consider more risky, but not without foundation, the identification between Shekesh and Cilicians, Thekel and Cilicians, and Pedes and Pisidians that several scholars have proposed⁸. The idea is very interesting, especially if we take into account the reiterations of piratical episodes involving the peoples coming from the region between Caria and Cilicia throughout history. We must bear in mind that, under the label “Lycian” or “Carian”, assigned to some piratical activities in ancient times, we can recognise all those populations practising piracy on every occasion the economic and political conditions urged them to play such role.

As far as the Cilicians are concerned, we do not have enough historical evidence to correctly reconstruct the reality of the Archaic Period, as it happens in most of the Anatolian regions during this period. However, certain data allow us to think that some piratical phenomena occurred in this area along the 8th-6th centuries BCE. Only the strong repression by state authorities in the region – in this case, the Assyrians or the Egyptians – could prevent the problem from becoming even more dangerous. Thus, we know that over the Archaic Era mercenaries from Caria, and probably from the surrounding areas, crossed the Mediterranean first for plunder purposes and then for serving as mercenaries in Egypt. We find a similar story in Assyrian sources from the time of Sargon II (722-705 BCE), when the monarch claims to have defeated the pirates from Iannu and pacified the land of Cilicia and Tyre. It seems clear that there was a direct link between the Ionian Greek world and those pirates, who became fierce enemies of the Assyrians⁹. Similarly, it seems clear that Greek pirates were involved in a revolt of Cilician people against the interests of Sennacherib in 698 BCE. In fact, the Geometric walls in the urban settlements of Asia Minor were not built because of the Assyrian threat, but due to the presence of Carian pirates¹⁰. Greek pirates acting in this area also included those who carried out a naval raid on the Phoenician coast in ca. 738 BCE¹¹. Anyway, the Assyrians never completely controlled

III): Dothan - Dothan 2002, 256-260; Casabonne, 2004, 74-77; Lipinski 2015, 35-36.

⁸ Ormerod 1929, 82, with note 3. See also *ibid.*, 88: for Ormerod, the Thekel may have a direct link with the Teucrid royal house, that reigned over Cilicia along the last two centuries BCE. In fact, some scholars place the “Keftiu” land (the birth place of some Sea Peoples according to the Egyptian sources) in Eastern Cilicia. We can also connect it with Suppiluliuma’s campaign in those regions during these same years, when the Hittite king founded the city of Tana. Concerning this subjects see Yagci, 2001 162 with note 29; Singer 2000, 27; Bryce 2010, 47-51.

⁹ *ARAB* II, 118. For more epigraphic documentation about all those events, see Saggs 1963, 76-77. Cf. with Fernández Tapias 1994, 29.

¹⁰ Snodgrass 1986, 127; Cherry 1987, 156; Dussinberre 2013, 26 with note number 87.

¹¹ Braun 1935, 14-15. Homer gives us several accounts about the piratical activities of the Greeks in this area Archaic times: Hom. *Od.* I 180-184; XIV 257-265; XV 425-427; XVII 425-434. Maybe, the legend of the “bronze men” narrated by Herodotus was created to embellish these sporadic piratic raids leaded by the Greeks, and by the Hellenised inhabitants of Pamphylia, Caria, Pisidia and surrounding areas. See Cook 1983, 173; Fernández Tapias 1994, 112; Casabonne 2004, 165-177.

the Cilician shores, where the Greeks and the native populations made trade and piracy their main activities. This increased their importance in the different revolts and riots inside the Assyrian Empire, as we have seen in the sources¹².

Later, during the rule of the Persians, the relationship between Cilicians and piracy seems to have died out. We cannot say that this kind of behaviour absolutely disappeared, but it is blurred by two main issues. The first is that their actions had little impact when they were done in a very specific and small geographical context. And the second, which explains the first, may be that the uninterrupted existence of a strong state power in the area, the Persian empire, prevented any bellicose or piratical behaviour of the people of this region at least at the time when they tried to expand beyond its traditional area of influence. In fact, within the Achaemenid era, we know that the Cilician fleet was permanently in the service of the Persians (a fact which must be stressed when we look for the reasons for the absence of remarkable Cilician piratical activities in this period)¹³. They formed one of the four permanent contingents of the Persian army, along with the Phoenicians, Egyptians and Cypriots, so much so, that the Persian sources refer to the inhabitants of Cilicia as «seafarers, or the people from the sea»¹⁴. The mostly military-oriented character of Cilicia as a Persian base by land and sea noted by Asheri (1991, 42-50) may also explain the absence of outstanding piratical episodes in this region of Asia Minor. Yet we know that the Persians controlled all the fertile plain that formed Cilicia Pedias, but that they only ruled over the narrow coastal fringe of the Rough Cilicia region, without penetrating inner regions¹⁵. In fact, every time they did so, they risked losing the expedition, as we know sometimes happened. On this subject there is a very interesting report about a Cilician nobleman who served for the Persians, Datames¹⁶, and his relationship with people who lived in the inner mountains (see the *Lives* of Nepos). We know that in order to rule over this mountainous zone, Datames combined the exercise of violence, in the form of warring raids on the tribes of the interior, with his personal ties, in the form of client relations with the dynasties of the region concerned. The contrast between Datames and the outward and warlike appear-

¹² See Fernández Tapias 1994, 22-29 and 203.

¹³ See Blanton 2000, 57. Cf. with Desideri 1991, 300; Wallinga 1991, 276-281; Casabonne 2004, 198-201; Dusinger 2013, 46.

¹⁴ Hdt. V 108, 2; VI 6; VI 43, 2; VI 95, 1; VII 91; VIII 14, 3; Diod. X 3, 7. Other sources attesting the presence of Cilicians in the Persian navy in relation to other historical events are: Diod. XI 60, 5; XII 3, 2-3; Lycurg. *In Leocr.*, 72; Thuc. I 112, 4; Plut. *Them.* 31, 4; *Cim.* 18, 6. See Cook 1983, 65; Asheri 1991, 52; Casabonne 2004, 199.

¹⁵ Xen. *Mem.* V 26; Arr. *Anab.* I 24, 6. See Er 1991, 106-107.

¹⁶ Our best source for Datames' highlights is Nepotes' *Datames*, mainly *Dat.* 2-4. See also Shaw 1990, 237-240 and Casabonne 2001.

ance of his cousin Thuys, the highlander, is very interesting. However, even during the Achaemenid rule, the control exercised by the Cilician dynasties placed on the throne by the Persians extended only over the coastal and plane regions, and there were also tyrants in the mountainous interior. One can find many similarities with the client kings that were employed by the Romans to rule Cilicia along the first centuries before and after Christ, and used to act in the same way, like Tarchondimotus, Antipater from Derbe and some others¹⁷. All this may have encouraged increasing banditry in the interior areas (activity that became endemic in the area over many centuries). The same phenomenon, nonetheless, leads us to think that piracy was not an easy activity, because the Persians barred the rebellious mountaineers from access to the coast, as would have happened during the first centuries of Roman occupation¹⁸.

We have already said that Cilicia was a Persian base for land and sea military operations. This, in our view, is an explanation for the absence in the sources of outstanding piratical events in Cilicia over Classical times. At this juncture, if the belligerent Cilician highlanders wished to fight overseas, their only recourse was joining the Achaemenid fleet, and we think that they really did it, as it is suggested by reports about the rough woollen garments worn by Cilician sailors of the Persian navy¹⁹. There are some other facts that make us think about some connection between Cilicians and piracy: for example, we know that several Cilician cities minted coins with Hermes' image. The presence of Hermes in Cilician coins coming from early Classical times, seems particularly interesting in view of what we know about the piratical connotations of this deity, specially in this region in the great age of piracy²⁰. Furthermore, we can recall the example of Syennesis, commander of the Persian fleet of Xerxes during the campaign in Greece (Hdt. VII 98), that might be the same man who died in the battle of Salamis (Aeschyl. *Pers.*, 326-7). The name Synnesis is widely documented among Cilician élites of the classical period, due to the fact that it was a royal title, rather than a proper name

¹⁷ On Tarchondimotus, see: Plut. *Ant.* 61, 2; Dio Cass. LIV 9, 2 ; LXI 63, 1; Str. XIV 3, 18; Cic. *Fam.* XV 1, 2; Luc. *Phar.* IX 226; Flor. II 13, 15. Calder 1912, 105-106; Cimma 1976, 219-220; Martina 1982, 175-185; Álvarez-Ossorio 2007, 104; Hamdi Sayar 2011, 375-380.

¹⁸ Houwink Ten Cate 1961, 31-32.

¹⁹ Asheri, 1991, 54. See Hdt. VII 91; Str. II 1, 31; Procop. *Pers.* II 26.

²⁰ We have already worked about these matters. See: Álvarez-Ossorio 2010, with bibliography.

as such²¹. Either way, his presence at the head of Persian troops confirms the information provided by certain authors²², who point out that many of the Achaemenid fleet's sailors came from Cilicia; this tells us once again about the outstanding seamanship that this people had throughout history. Therefore, we believe that the links between the Cilicians and sea warfare (which includes a piratical activity that was not practised in a free way) during the Classical age are undeniable.

As a conclusion, we think that banditry and piracy on a small scale had been part of the traditional lifestyle of the inhabitants of Cilicia Trachea. These activities were suffered in some cases by their immediate neighbours, who, other times, did share their looting behaviour. When we analyse the example of the traditional enmity between Lycians and Cilicians, as we have seen, we notice that animosity could come from some rivalry in the performance of piratical action commenced in the past, and later developed in the form of a commercial fight amongst them. Indeed, some scholars have already demonstrated that, at the end of the Roman Republic, behind the label "Cilician" many ethnic groups from the south coast of Anatolia are hidden. Here we argue further that behind the labels "Lukka" or "Carian", that define piratical actions relating to earlier times, something similar may have happened, in the frame of a historical process that encompassed also the inhabitants of the surrounding regions, including the places that would have been the later Pisidia, Pamphylia and probably Cilicia. Just as we talked about a traditional enmity between Lycians and Cilicians, it should be noted that relations between the latter and Pamphylians were much more friendly. So much, that some ancient writers got confused and could not distinguish them clearly. In their view, there were more differences between the Cilician coast and the interior, than between the inhabitants of the coast and its neighbours in the bay of Pamphylia²³. In fact, some authors argue that Pamphylia had formed a unified whole with Cilicia in Diodotus' time (*ca.* 143 BCE). If we come back to Classical age, the battle

²¹ Xen. *Anab.* I 2, 21-22. In this passage, the author tells us that Syenesis controlled only the mountain passes, whilst it was the Persian satrap who ruled over the fleet and the naval resources of the region. See also Er 1991, 112, where the author analyses the role that the Cilician dynasts (Syenesis) played in the Persian fleet and the later transformation of Cilicia into a Satrapy.

²² Wallinga 1991, 277; Asheri 1991, 42-55; Farrokh 2007, 69. We do also know that this importance of Cilicia as a naval base because of its warfare, and conditions (including the easy access to timber) stayed the same over Hellenistic time, when Antigonos and Demetrius founded bases for their fleets in the Cilician Shore, as well as the Ptolomies did during the third century BCE. See Murray 2012, 101-106 and 191.

²³ Rauh 1998, 269-270. Concerning the close similarity between Cilicians and Pamphylians in matter of plunder activities, see Str. XII 7, 2, who use the same terminology also to speak about the Pisidian highlanders. See also Rauh 2003, 170, who describes the perception that people from ancient times had about the shores of Pamphylia and Cilicia, places that they considered inhospitable in spite of its wonderful natural conditions. Cf. with Casabonne 2004, 23.

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order displayed by the Persian fleet at Salamis (Diod. XI 19, 1) cannot be considered a coincidence. When we observe it, we realise that the Cilician contingent, as well as the Pamphylian and Lycian ones fought together, maybe because they were similar populations and used to fight in a very similar way.

The integration of Cilicia in the history of the Mediterranean beyond the regional level (we intend in the Greek world) happened in the time of Alexander the Great; it was his march across these lands that made them known to the Greeks²⁴. In fact, some cities and places that would have played an essential role in the piratical phenomenon in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, had been crucial points while Alexander passed through this area²⁵. From this moment on, the Cilicians were present, in one form or another, in international conflicts affecting the region during the 3rd century BCE. As we said at the beginning of this paper, it would be in the middle of the 2nd century that information about these people and their piratical activities acquires such a range that it cannot be overlooked by the sources, but we are sure, as we have stated, that people living in and around Cilicia were related with piracy at least a thousand years before since *Tryphon* lived and Strabo told us about.

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²⁴ For a geographical description of the territorial limits of the Persian satrapy, see Desideri 1991, 143, and Syme 1995, 18-21. These borders coincided with the domains inherited by Alexander's generals, first Perdiccas and later Antipater.

²⁵ The main event during Alexander's presence in Cilicia was the conquest of Soli, where Alexander introduced a democratic constitution. See Magie 1975, 273. A couple of centuries later, Pompey refunded the city, that was called Soli-Pompeiopolis. Obviously this has been considered a clear example of *imitatio Alexandri*. See also Atkinson 1984, 171; Capecci 1991, 93.

²⁵ About the role played by the Cilicians in several conflicts from the 3rd to the 1st cent. BCE, see Jonkers 1959, 20; Rostovtzeff 1967, 706-710.

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Abstract

Since ancient times, it has been considered that the high point of Cilician piracy took place in the second half of the 2nd century BCE and the first half of the following. The main object of this paper is to demonstrate that the link between the Cilicians and the practice of piracy derives from earlier ages. Therefore, in the period that we have just defined, what we find is only an uncontrolled expansion of Cilician activities all over the Mediterranean Sea. The reason why this phenomenon did not happen before is that the highest powers in the area were well aware, over several centuries, of the warlike and maritime skills of the inhabitants of Cilicia, and tried to use them for their own profit. In order to do so, they enlisted them in their troops, thus taking advantage of their maritime expertise, and establishing a pattern of behaviour that would keep on happening during later historical periods. The main subject of this work is, therefore, to explain how the Eastern Mediterranean seapowers realised about the benefits of ruling over these seasoned mariners. We will see that ruling over the seas is not only a matter of a high naval power level, but piracy (in this case, Cilician) was also considered by Mediterranean States as a factor that could modify the balance of seapower. And this is what happened indeed with the Cilicians within the Archaic and Classical times, or even before.