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A HISTORICAL AND EPIGRAPHIC COMMENTARY ON HYPSICRATEIA'S EPITAPH*

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A unique discovery was made during the underwater excavations of Phanagoreia in 2005: the epitaph from the marble base of the monument to Hypsicrateia, wife of Mithridates VI Eupator.[1] It is rightly considered to be one of the most substantial finds in the classical archaeology and epigraphy of the northern Black Sea region (and, probably, of the ancient *oikoumene* as a whole) of the last decades. The significance of the monument goes beyond the fact that it provides a brilliant confirmation of information recorded by Plutarch (*Pomp.* 32. 8);[2] it also gives us a rare opportunity to see heroes of the past not just as 'historical characters', but as living people with human feelings. In addition, Hypsicrateia's epitaph conveys exceptionally valuable information about both the final period of the Mithridatic wars in the Bosporan area and some aspects of the history of Pontus itself. As was quite reasonably stated by the editor of the inscription, it is not difficult to restore its text;[3]

* I should like to extend my utmost gratitude to my colleagues who assisted in my work on this article, looked through this text prior to its publication and gave me a number of valuable comments which I have taken into consideration (regardless of whether or not I agreed with them), and, especially, who discussed my paper on this subject at the Ist International Conference in Epigraphy (Moscow, 30–31.01.2012): A. G. Avdeyev (Moscow), L. Ballesteros Pastor (Sevilla), D. G. Bugrov (Kazan), A. Chaniotis (Princeton), P. A. Evdokimov (Moscow), H. Heinen (Trier), G. M. Kantor (Oxford), I. A. Levinskaya (St. Petersburg), I. A. Makarov (Moscow), N. I. Nikolayev (Nikolayev), S. Yu. Monakhov (Saratov), N. A. Pavlichenko (St. Petersburg), R. V. Stoyanov (St. Petersburg - Çanakkale), I. E. Surikov (Moscow), E. R. Ustaeva (Taman), A. A. Zavoykin (Moscow). Despite the large number of specialists mentioned above, all inaccuracies and mistakes, of course, lie with the author alone.

1 In most detail: Kuznetsov, V. D. 2007a, 238–243, with illustrations of the inscription; Kuznetsov, V. D. (ed.) 2008, 61–63; more briefly: Kuznetsov, V. D. 2007b, 5–15; see also the first publication, Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko, G., Kuznetsov V, 2006, 277–278. Unfortunately, this last work contains a number of regrettable mistakes: the name Hypsicrates is given there not in the vocative but in the nominative case, Mithridates' royal title is omitted altogether (and, as a result, the inscription text is given in three lines, not four), and the king's name is written with *iota* in the second syllable, instead of *alpha*, which was the typical form for the Northern Black Sea region (277). Some very valuable observations in connection with this report were made by the Academician P. Bernard: 280–288 (his name in the following notes on this work will therefore be cited especially). See also the brief mention of this subject in the article of H. Heinen (Heinen, H. 2008, 190–191) and his more detailed recent work (Heinen, H. forthcoming).

2 It is impossible to accept the opinion of F. Canali De Rossi, who believes (without serious arguments) that this fact could be understood as evidence of the spurious character of the inscription (http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009-05-22/html); cf. Heinen, H. forthcoming.

3 Kuznetsov, V. D. 2007a, 238.

nonetheless, it is possible to expand his commentary on the document's content (both epigraphic and historical), giving special attention to some points which seem not to have been recognized in the publication.[4]

The text of the epitaph is as follows:

Ὑψίκρατες γύναι
βασιλέως Μιθραδάτου
Εὐπάτορος Διονύσου
χαῖρε.

The analysis presented here will be twofold. First, a tentative reconstruction is offered (in much more detail than that of V.D. Kuznetsov) of the events in Phanagoria that led to the death of Hypsicrateia. On the whole, I agree with Kuznetsov's hypothesis that Phanagoria, after the beginning of the uprising against Mithridates led by a certain Castor,[5] was most probably occupied by the Pontic troops who came on ships sent by Mithridates from Panticapaeum (δίκροτα πολλά), according to Appian, to help the king's daughter Cleopatra, who was holding out stoutly against the enemy (App. *Mithr.* 108). It is hard to suppose that Cleopatra could have put up resistance on the Acropolis, which was already on fire,[6] for the other children of the king surrendered and were captured by the Phanagorians; later, they were led in the triumph of Pompey (117); she must have been elsewhere. After that came the funeral (or, more strictly, preparations for the funeral, which is all we can say for sure) of Hypsicrateia, who fell in the course of those events. She had either been in Phanagoria before the beginning of the uprising or had arrived from Panticapaeum (as Appian says that the resistance in Phanagoria was headed by Cleopatra, the second suggestion is preferable). It is highly probable that Hypsicrateia fell like a hero, as far as we can guess from what we know about her character and from the fact that there is a male name in the epitaph, which leads us to think of her "courage and bravery", according to Plutarch.[7]

This circumstance, to my mind, raises serious doubts (without fully excluding it, of course) about the much simpler and yet 'less romantic' version, which should nonetheless be noted (as, regrettably, was not done by the editor of the inscription): that Hypsicrateia died and was buried in Phanagoria *before* the uprising against Mithridates, e.g. as early as 65 B.C., because she could not endure the hardship of the long and difficult march from Asia Minor (App. *Mithr.* 101–102). It is necessary to mention also the interesting idea of L.A. Naumov: according to him, Hypsicrateia's death could be the result of the same disease (apparently, of infectious character) from which Mithridates was suffering during his stay in Panticapaeum (App. *Mithr.* 107).[8]

Nevertheless, we cannot be certain that the bronze statue of the deceased (the production of which would undoubtedly take up much time) was actually completed and fixed on the stone (which would disprove the reconstruction of events presented in the present paper). The tombstone could have been prepared in a much shorter time, and the mounting of the sculpture by means of a lead-filled peg[9] could hardly have been so technically difficult that we must suppose that the mounting-hole was made *after* the statue was completed: the necessary adjustment would not have been difficult. So the chronological considerations – above all, the necessity of

4 The editor also made some insignificant omissions. 1) Autopsy of the stone, which I had the opportunity to perform in 2005 as a member of the Phanagorian archaeological expedition, shows that the last letter in the second line of the inscription, the *ypsilon*, is gone but for the remainder of the vertical hasta, which is missing on the drawing (although it is visible on the photograph); therefore, the *ypsilon* in the publication should not have been placed in square brackets, but a dot should have been placed under it. The same concerns the first letter of the inscription: its remains, however damaged, are still visible on the stone. 2) V.D. Kuznetsov's observation that the "block was *broken off* (italics supplied. – *O.G.*) in some places in ancient times" (Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 238) does not seem quite accurate: the nature of the damage to the stone (see photo) clearly indicates that the statue base was deliberately *chipped* in the course of later re-use for a more comfortable positioning in the wooden structure of an underwater platform. 3) The name of one of Mithridates' daughters, who were exhibited in Pompey's triumph, was not Oxabaris, as given by the editor (Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 242; and Kuznetsov, V.D. (ed.) 2008, 63), but Orsabaris (App. *Mithr.* 117) or Orsobaris, as on the coins minted by her (Gabelko, O.L. 2005, 90–91 and note 23). 4) Eupator's daughter Cleopatra, who in 63 B.C. was in Phanagoreia and who showed special courage in the fight against the rebels, should not be identified with her namesake, another daughter of the Pontic king, who was married to Tigranes of Armenia (Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 242); besides, the date of this marriage, given by the editor as 95 B.C., is not universally accepted (cf. Ballesteros Pastor, L. 1996, 79, n. 188). Tigranes' wife most probably remained at her husband's court, so Appian must be speaking of a different, much younger daughter of Mithridates (Gulenkov, K.L., 2001, 82). She was born, probably, after Cleopatra 'the Elder' had married and left her father's court, or, as K.L. Gulenkov supposes, she took this famous name after the death of her elder sister with the same name. The fact that she had the same name is a peculiar feature of the onomastic practice of the Pontic dynasty: cf. the two sisters of Mithridates named Laodice (Gulenkov, K.L., 2001, 72–73) and it should be remembered that the king had a younger namesake brother, Mithridates Chrestos. 5) It seems doubtful that Mithridates and Hypsicrateia had children, as is entertained by V.D. Kuznetsov (Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 242 and n. 74): to all appearances, Hypsicrateia rose to prominence in the Pontic royal court only as late as 66 B.C.; for that reason Th. Reinach, following Cassius Dio, quite reasonably takes this as the explanation for the fact that Mithridates' former favourite, Stratonice, deserted him (Plut. *Pomp.* 36. 2; App. *Mithr.* 107) as she felt the king had left her (Dio Cass. XXXVII. 7. 5) (Reinach, Th. 1890, 296; cf. Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 75). Hypsicrateia, evidently, was still young and she hardly had time to have a child to Mithridates in 66–63 B.C., during a march from Asia Minor to Bosporus that was full of battles, hardship and adversity. Even if there was a child, it must have still been an infant in 63 B.C. and Appian could hardly have known the child's name. 6) Finally, P. Bernard quite fairly noted that it is necessary to collect information about all instances of the rare name Hypsicrates; he has noted some examples omitted by the editor (Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko, G., Kuznetsov, V. 2006, 280–281). The drawing of the inscription is also far from ideal.

5 See on this person: Panov, A.R., 2005.

6 The excavations of the last years have clearly shown that the fire on the acropolis was very fierce: Kuznetsov, V.D. (ed.) 2008, 63; Abramzon, M.G., Kuznetsov, V.D. 2008; Abramzon, M.G., Kuznetsov, V.D. 2011.

7 It is interesting to note the idea of P. Bernard that the monument presented Hypsicrateia as an Amazon: Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko, G., Kuznetsov, V. 2006, 287–288. Extremely interesting is a parallel pointed out by H. Heinen – the image of a certain Plotina, a character in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (VII. 6. 2f.), offers a wider 'Amazonian' context in which Hypsicrateia's story and monument could be included (Heinen, H. forthcoming).

8 Naumov, L.A. 2010, 208–209.

9 Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 239.

having a sufficiently long time to erect the monument – cannot be counted a decisive argument against Kuznetsov's hypothesis about the date of the inscription.

Moreover, the idea that Hypsicrateia died *before* 63 B.C. cannot explain one other thing: why was there a mistake, later corrected, in the first line of the inscription? Why would this occur if the inscription had been made in an untroubled context (a point that will be discussed in detail below)? The assumption that the *eta* carved initially was then filled up to conceal the mistake (with lime or some other material which was later wiped off or washed off by water?) could be theoretically true for the period of the siege of Phanagoria in 63 B.C., whereas about a year earlier there would have been no necessity for this: it would have been easier for the stonecutter to shave and file down the stone, and so avoid the risk of calling down the wrath of the Pontic king, which would have inevitably been provoked had the king discovered such a case of 'retouching', as it would have revealed the craftsman's negligence. Finally, the hypothesis of the death of Hypsicrateia prior to the Phanagorian uprising is not convincing if one considers a very plausible idea of Kuznetsov, that her monument was only one part of a sepulchral complex comprising not only one statue but a rather complicated and relatively high structure:[10] its erection would have been possible only due to the simultaneous death of a number of relatives of Mithridates and his courtiers of high rank, which would hardly be the case if it had not been for the warfare.

It is necessary also to determine the status of Hypsicrateia at the Pontic court (and the resulting interpretation of some features of the marital policy of Mithridates Eupator).[11] Strange as it may seem, some interesting thoughts on both matters may be found by analysing a point that is quite inconspicuous and insignificant at

10 Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 239, 242–243. At the same time, his opinion that the stone's side-edges were not worked because other monuments were to be joined to them seems plausible but needs additional support. The example given by Kuznetsov (Hesberg, H. von. 1992, 86, Abb. 117) can be supplemented by other, even more apt examples: Caro G., 1943. 30 ff; Kienlin, A. von. 2003, 13 ff (the monuments are of the 5th–4th centuries B.C.). The design of such collective monuments from Attica makes it clear that their side-edges were to fit tightly and the stones would be fitted dry, which would only be possible after working them thoroughly. If separate stones from the Phanagorian collective monument were to be joined by mortar, their side-edges would be left coarse for a tighter fit; however, Kuznetsov gives no examples of this type of join. Therefore, a different explanation for the coarse side-edges seems much more plausible: the stone with Hypsicrateia's epitaph simply was not completely ready to be erected as the pedestal.

11 Aside from that, P. Bernard questions whether the custom of calling a wife by a male name is proof of the king's homosexual bent: Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko G., Kuznetsov V., 2006, 283. It is fair to note that the same point was suggested some 10 years earlier by L. Ballesteros Pastor, who tried to prove this idea using Plutarch's words about the king's sympathy for a young Galatian, Bepolitanus (*De virt. mulier.* 23; Ballesteros Pastor, L. 1996, 297), although I do not find it convincing: both episodes are quite explicable without this hypothesis (cf. also: Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 75–76). Another attempt to apply the 'gender-anthropological' approach to the analysis of the inscription was realized by A. Mayor, who insists on the identity of Hypsicrateia (a woman) and the historian Hypsicrates (a man), mentioned by Strabo (VII. 4. 6; XI. 5. 1), and claims that the latter "could also have been responsible for his own legend" (Mayor, A. 2010, 423–428). This unfounded fantasy is completely outside the framework of scholarly research.

first glance: why would the word "wife" at the end of the first line initially have been put in the nominative, with no agreement with the vocative Ὑψικράτες, and only later have been corrected to the vocative case γύναι? The first editor noted this fact,[12] but made no attempt to explain it; however, this feature is extremely odd. It is perfectly clear that Mithridates' courtiers, who at that moment were ruling Phanagoria and were people very close to the king, would only assign the task of cutting the epitaph of their master's wife to a very skillful and experienced stonecutter. This is proved by the very way the inscription was made: it has no preliminary ruling and is very elegant, with letters finely decorated with apices, but with no excessive ornamentation.[13] What could be the reason why this expert stonecutter made such a major mistake in so simple a text?

This circumstance may be explained by several reasons that need not be mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, could all simultaneously be correct. Firstly, the lack of agreement between the vocative and nominative cases is quite common in Bosporan inscriptions (see below, note 16). It leads us to think that the cutter was a native Bosporan who was a subject of Mithridates (i.e. he did not arrive in Bosporus together with the king's troops) and as skilled a master as he was, he spoke quite an 'adulterated' local variety of Hellenistic *koine*, which can be viewed as one reason for his *lapsus manus*. The officials of Mithridates residing in Phanagoria at the time, who were probably familiar with Hellenistic high culture,[14] must have found the mistake unacceptable for the solemn event of the burial of their king's wife; therefore, they had the master re-work the word γυνή, which is common in Bosporan epitaphs of the period, into γύναι – even though this damaged the exterior of the monument.[15] It should be specifically noted that this form of the vocative is never encountered in Bosporan epigraphic texts,[16] a fact that can be deemed an indicator

12 Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 241 and n. 68. However, the vocative of *CIRB* 522, Ὑψικράτη, is different from the one we observe in our inscription. Such vocative forms are typical in Bosporus for names in –κράτης: see *CIRB* 748 (the earliest of the monuments mentioned here, dating probably to the 2nd-1st century B.C.), 287 (1st century B.C.?), 602 (with final *iota*, according to the *CIRB* album), 748, 754 (there may be the remains of an *iota* at the end of the name), 768. In other words, the 'correct' vocative of the personal name in the epitaph of Hypsicrateia is a *hapax legomenon* in Bosporan epigraphy!

13 Notable is the cutting of the *rho*, the lower semicircle of which is adorned with a peculiar cirrus. I could not find any analogues to this form of the letter. This is not completely reflected in the drawing (Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 240, especially the first line, where this detail is not shown at all).

14 The high level of culture of the Pontic king's court is described, for example, in: Olshausen, E. 1974.

15 It was common practice in the Roman empire for an inscription honouring the emperor to be re-written after his *damnatio memoriae* or in some other cases (Højte, J.-M. 2005, 56–64); so it cannot be difficult for the cutter from a technical point of view. Of course, it would also have been unproblematic to correct a single letter in Hypsicrateia's epitaph.

16 Γύναι in *CIRB* 1109, according to the opinion of the corpus' authors, should be understood as the vocative of the personal name Gynais. Moreover: "The word γυνή, probably, lost its vocative: in some prose funerary inscriptions next to the word υἱέ and the vocative of the male name one sees not γύναι, but γυνή" (followed by 17 examples, the earliest of which date not later

of its 'external' origin. This form of the vocative in prose[17] inscriptions of the Greek world is singular: I could not find any other instances, whereas, to judge from the *TLG* corpus, it is quite frequent among literary authors, especially the dramatists. This provides one more support for our suggestion that the official of Mithridates responsible for the burial of Hypsicrateia was a highly educated person willing to make the epitaph exquisite and solemn, even laconic, as it were.

An attentive study of the first line of the text leads to even more interesting conclusions. That its letters suffered from having been washed away with water cannot hide its obvious difference from lines 2 to 4. Lines 2 to 3 have a clearly defined spacing between the words, whereas line 1 offers quite the opposite: the *sigma*, the last letter of the name, and the *gamma* of γύναι are practically conjoint; however, this *gamma* and the next letter of the word, the *ypsilon*, are separated by a noticeable space.[18] This *ypsilon*, in turn, is separated from the following *ny* by a larger space than is the case with the other letters. At the same time, we cannot grasp *de visu* any defects of the stone which would have prevented the normal cutting of the letters. The first line, unlike the others, is not centred (it starts aligned with ll. 2–3, but finishes earlier), even though it would have been easy to do this. (It is worth noting that the spacing between the words and the centred alignment are quite infrequent in Bosporan epigraphy; a promising approach would be to search for analogues, above all in Asia Minor, though this would be a subject for another work. For example, dedications by Attalus II for the victories over Prusias I and II contain similar spacing near the titles and names of the kings and by the names of the gods – *OGIS* 298; 327 – as in our inscription.)

These circumstances lead one to believe that the first line of the inscription was not cut earlier, as would be expected, but *later* (!), than the others and filled a place that had been set aside for it; moreover, a certain negligence in its carving (most notably in the nominative initially used instead of the vocative) was due to some emergency that made the skilful cutter rush and make mistakes.[19] Additional indirect evidence that could confirm this suggestion is that the very end of this line rises slightly, which could be a consequence of a change in the stone's location during the execution of the inscription. Evidently, the most comfortable position for the

than the first half of the 1st century A.D.) – *CIRB* 814. Cf. what was said earlier of male personal names ending in –κράτης (note 12 above).

17 It is also infrequent in poetic inscriptions: I am only aware of two examples: *IG* II2 13149, 1 (Attica) and *IvPergamon* 8. 1–3, 2. 576. Face B, 1.

18 In the later Hellenistic inscriptions of Bosporus, as was the case earlier, the *gamma* sometimes has a relatively long horizontal bar (e.g., see: Boltunova, A.I., Knipovich, T.N. 1962, 9–10, tables II–III). In our inscription the bar is very difficult to see, but even if it is accepted, the distance between the *gamma* and the preceding *sigma* would not be more than that between the *gamma* and the following letter of the same word, the *ypsilon*.

19 A very important analogy is presented by the Olbian decree granting proxenia to Dionysios, son of Thago (Levi, Ye. I. 1956, 98–102, No 2; cf. Nikolaev, N.I. 2008, 83–86). The dating by the name of eponymous priest, Herogeitonos, is cut not on the main field of the table, but 'squeezed' over it, on the triangular detail in the form of a pediment. As a result, the letters in this line are smaller than in the others; and perhaps the initial mistake in the priest's name, which was corrected later, is not sheer accident either.

cutter would be to work on the horizontal surface, since the stone is not very high, but it seems possible that the last word was completed when the pediment had been set up in a vertical position (directly on the spot where the monument was to be erected?).[20]

How can this be explained? What made Mithridates' representatives in Phanagoria (and, consequently, the cutter), who were responsible for the burial of his friends who fell while suppressing the uprising of Phanagorians (if we follow the *editor princeps*' hypothesis), take their time over completing the inscription to Hypsicrateia and then finish it hurriedly? The answer is obvious. Unaware of Mithridates' approaching defeat and willing to do their duty for their king, they simply *did not know* how to designate the name and/or status of the deceased and so they made every effort to solve this delicate problem! It stands to reason, given that the very personality and career of Hypsicrateia, fragmentary as our knowledge of them is, are unique.

As is rightly noted by Kuznetsov, the use in the inscription of the male name Hypsicrates reflects a most intimate side of the relations between the Pontic king and his beloved woman;[21] therefore, its use in the epitaph could hardly occur without the king's direct sanction, given by his authorized delegates (or in his presence, given his great love for Hypsicrateia?). The king's temper was harsh and his officials could easily forfeit their heads for the slightest liberty in this matter.[22] The king needed time to receive information on the situation in Asian Bosporus: he was in Panticapaeum at the time, with no direct access to Phanagoria, and there was unrest in Bosporus, as the Phanagorians' uprising was followed by those in Chersonesus, Theodosia and Nymphaeum (App. *Mithr.* 108). Having learned about the death of Hypsicrateia from the messengers of the Phanagorian garrison, Mithridates had to give orders, through his delegates, for how the first line of the inscription was to be done in accordance with his wish, and this could have taken up to several days (under normal conditions, the voyage from Panticapaeum to Phanagoria would have taken only hours), which could have had a decisive role if the situation in Phanagoria changed again.

It is also of great interest that in this epitaph Hypsicrateia is named the king's *wife*. The question of the 'official' status of women who were close to Mithridates, as known from the sources,[23] has been studied in most detail by K.L. Gulenkov, who came to the conclusion that, contradictory as the sources are, it is most likely that Stratonice, Berenice and Hypsicrateia were the king's concubines rather than

20 Almost the same feature, but much more accentuated, is seen in the well-known Jewish inscription from Aphrodisias: Chaniotis, A. 2002, 211–213.

21 Kuznetsov, V.D. 2007a, 241.

22 This occurred with special frequency in the last years of the king's life, during his stay in Bosporus (App. *Mithr.* 102; 107; 110; Oros. VI. 5. 3).

23 The difference in the status between the wives and concubines of Mithridates, as postulated by Th. Reinach on the analogy of the Serail of the Turkish sultans (Reinach, Th. 1890, 295–296), is far too speculative; cf., however, remarks on the marriage between Mithridates and Monima, who demanded a nuptial agreement and acknowledgment as queen (Plut. *Luc.* 18): Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 74, n. 17.

'legitimate' wives.[24] The epitaph of Hypsicrateia gives us grounds to determine this point more closely. When this woman is mentioned in the description of the events of 66 B.C., Plutarch refers to her as to a concubine (παλλακίς) (*Pomp.* 32. 8). The Roman authors follow the more informative Valerius Maximus (IV. 6 ext. 2) and call her the king's wife (Fest. XVI. 1; Eutrop. VI. 12. 3). This information and the vocabulary of the inscription seem to suggest a certain *cursus honorum* for Hypsicrateia: she was of humble origin (which is not uncommon for the women close to Eupator)[25] and was initially regarded as a concubine, but, for the courage she showed during the king's escape after his defeat by Pompey, her status was 'raised' to wife and queen[26] (it is interesting to note that Valerius Maximus speaks of her in this way in the context of events that happened much later than the unsuccessful battle with Pompey, during Mithridates' escape to Bosporus through the lands of "wild tribes", i.e. Scythians, Heniochi and Achaeans – App. *Mithr.* 102; cf. Plut. *Pomp.* 35; Flor. I. 40. 25). It is also possible, after all, that the king ordered that Hypsicrateia be made his rightful wife *post mortem*, as it were, for her loyalty and courage during suppression of the Phanagorian uprising[27] and it took him some time to notify his officials in Phanagoria of this, which would be the cause of the delay in completing the statue-base. Finally, and all things considered, we cannot be completely certain that the word γυνή in the inscription is a technical term: one would hardly expect the word 'concubine' in a solemn epitaph.

Either way, it is highly probable that due to some delay the first line of the epitaph – the last in the sequence of cutting! – was executed by the stonecutter in circumstances quite different from those under which the other lines were carved. The

24 Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 76 (with a source analysis; the author plausibly concludes that Plutarch's source was Theophanes of Mytilene, a quite knowledgeable historian; cf. McGing, B.C. 1998, 108 – with no arguments). But perhaps Theophanes was not the only source of Plutarch's treatment of Hypsicrateia: Plutarch may have added to it his own negative attitude to the Pontic king (Ballesteros Pastor, L. 2009).
The collective references to Mithridates' "wives and concubines" are numerous in the sources in connection with his harem (which, as was reasonably pointed out by B. McGing, is almost exclusively mentioned in relation to the events of the final stage of the king's career: McGing, B.C. 1998, 108). The 'real' queen was undoubtedly Mithridates' sister Laodice, who was killed by him for her participation in a conspiracy (Just. XXXVII. 3. 7; 38. 1. 1; Sallust. *Hist.* II. 76). The status of queen and wife is undeniable for Monima (see Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 74–75); contrary to the opinion of K.L. Gulenkov, Berenice from Chios is also named a wife along with Monima by Plutarch (Plut. *Luc.* 18. 5). Things are more difficult with Stratonice: in descriptions of the same events she is referred to as a concubine (Plut. *Pomp.* 36. 2), wife or concubine (App. *Mithr.* 107), or the king's wife (Dio Cass. XXXVII. 7. 5); and, following Gulenkov, we may prefer Plutarch's information. Could it be that what we know of Stratonice and Hypsicrateia implies that only some of Mithridates' concubines were able to fulfil his most important and responsible commands, due to their personal qualities, whereas his wives were a sort of 'adornment' of his reign, as it were, and stayed in his harem with the rest of the concubines? However, we have very few data for such a conclusion.

25 Seibert, J. 1967, 102; Gulenkov, K.L. 2001, 74.

26 See the reports that Mithridates rewarded the people who proved loyal after his escape from Pompey: *Plut.* 32. 9; cf. Heinen, H. 2008, 191.

27 Cf. with the opinion of P. Bernard: Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko, G., Kuznetsov, V. 2006, 283.

balance of forces between the Mithridatic garrison and the rebellious Phanagorians (and their allies?) had probably changed, and not to the advantage of the former: the Pontic troops lost the edge once again and when the nameless Bosporan craftsman in the service of the Pontic king finally received instructions about the content of the inscription he had to finalize it under emergency conditions – obviously, in circumstances of direct military danger, all of which contributed to the errata in the cutting of the inscription. As was mentioned above (see note 10), we cannot discount the possibility that the monument of Hypsicrateia was not yet ready to be erected by the time the rebels finally got hold of the city (Oros. VI. 5. 2). It is also possible, however, that this is only a 'draft' version that was rejected by the king's officials because of the cutter's mistake: given that there was a permanent lack of good stone in Phanagoria and in Taman as a whole,[28] this high-quality marble block may have been be re-used later (but before it became a part of the underwater construction). This circumstance must be taken into consideration, though we cannot be certain that Hypsicrateia's monument was actually erected at all.[29]

It is of course clear to me that my suggestions regarding the historical context of Hypsicrateia's epitaph are purely hypothetical and, moreover, are mere 'speculative reconstruction', impossible to prove (but also impossible to contest) due to the lack of other sources. The monument itself, laconic and simple as it seems, is so

28 E.g. Kuznetsov, V.D. 2008, 26.

29 See P. Bernard's doubts about the possibility of erecting this monument and preserving it in the difficult military and political circumstances of 63 B.C.: Bongard-Levine, G., Kochelenko, G., Kuznetsov, V. 2006, 286. Very illustrative in this context is the case of *damnatio memoriae* of Mithridates in a building-inscription from Olbia: Krapivina, V.V., Diatroptov, P.D. 2005, 73. Bernard, however, assumes that the monument could have been erected by Pharnaces before his campaign in Asia Minor. But it seems hardly probable that Pharnaces had any reason to display piety towards one of his father's wives (especially given that Mithridates was betrayed by Pharnaces himself). H. Heinen (forthcoming) does not exclude that the pediment could be part of a cenotaph, but the supposed form of such a monument remains unclear.
Recently another authoritative specialist, G. Bowersock, has given attention to the inscription: Bowersock, G.W., 2008: 600–601. He supposes that Hypsicrateia's 'rehabilitation' and the erection of the tombstone took place later – during the reign in Bosporus of the queen Dynamis, Eupator's granddaughter, who pursued as a political course the renewal of 'Mithridatism' (see for example Saprykin, S.Yu. 2002, 90–124). Unfortunately Bowersock does not specifically address the palaeography of the inscription as an argument for his dating. However, this question is of interest: the script of several letters in the text of the epitaph (the *pi* with hastae of equal height, the *rho* with a comparatively large loop) is quite close to the forms that were used in the Bosporus around the turn of the eras. On the other hand, the *ypsilon* and also the *psi* with a high vertical line are rather typical of the earlier period (cf. Boltunova, A.I., Knipovich, T.N., 1962, 10, table 3), so 63 B.C. is quite possible too (despite obvious differences from the Phanagorian decree on the mercenaries dated to 88 B.C.: Vinogradov Yu. G., 1992; Vinogradov Yu. G., Wörrle, M., 1992). As a result, it seems that the palaeographic analysis can hardly be used as a means of clarifying the date of the document within a narrow period. G. Bowersock's hypothesis also ignores the peculiarities of the first line of the inscription that have been analysed in the present work. Incidentally, the use in the epitaph of Hypsicrateia's' 'male pseudonym' can hardly have been current decades after her own life and death: it is hard to imagine that the persons who were commissioned to make the monument were well-informed on the content of Theophanes of Mytilene's work!

unique that it prompts one to put forward new suggestions as to its interpretation, even if there can be no hundred-per-cent certainty of their reliability. An epigraphic document becomes especially valuable when its analysis yields broad conclusions allowing us to reconstruct (with some or other degree of approximation) the historical situation in which it was created and which it reflects. If the interpretation of the monument suggested here is correct, it should be admitted that the monument conveys the dramatic developments in Bosporus in 63 B.C. with even more richness than do written sources.

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