LYDIAN MOUNT KARIOS

Rose Lou Bengisu

Foreword

The religious attitudes of Lydian culture reflect a dualism of plain and mountain, of agriculture and pastoralism. Recent discoveries in the Lydian region of Mount Tmolus have shed new light on the local manifestations of these religious attitudes. These finds offer deeper insight into the local history of the surrounding region when they are examined in the context of their regional setting in antiquity.

The following account of such latest findings is offered with gratitude to the memory of the late M.J. Vermaseren whose dedicated scholarship continues to chart the way for scholars through the vast fields of Anatolian, Greek and Roman civilizations.

I. Geography of the region: physical and ancient

South of the city of Sardis, the capital of ancient Lydia, lies the broad mountain range of Tmolus. It stretches for more than a hundred kilometers across southern Lydia from the upper Cogamus in the east to the pass of the Karabel in the west.

The overall topography of this region can be described as a complex, densely contracted mass of high mountains separated by numerous and fertile highland valleys. The Tmolus range separates these valleys by a barrier, twenty or forty kilometers deep, bounded on the north by the alluvial plains of the Hermus and Caicus and on the south by the Cayster and Meander.1

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1 Comprehensive review of the history and historical geography of the Tmolus region appears in C. Foss "Explorations in Mount Tmolus" in History and Archaeology
The massive range of Tmolus rises to its highest peak at Mount Tmolus proper south east of the city of Sardis, today called Boz Dağ, the “Grey Mountain”, and reaches an altitude of 2,152 meters. The Tmolus range has long been associated with the early legends and mythology of ancient Lydia. It was believed to have been the reputed birthplace of the gods Zeus and Dionysus.\(^2\)

New discoveries in the Tmolus region substantiate descriptions by ancient sources. The account by the geographer Strabo specifically describes Mount Tmolus as a blest mountain with an “exhedra” on its summit, a work of the Persians, whence there is a view particularly of the Cayster plain.\(^3\) Strabo does not mention which summit he is referring to. Until recently, literal translation of Strabo’s text gave rise to confusion and speculation among scholars. Notably, interpretation of the word *exhedra* combined with the phrase τὰ κύκλῳ πεδία, which was generally understood to refer to the plains of the Cayster and Hermus, promoted the prevalent misconception that the *exhedra* functioned as an observation-post or watchtower intended for viewing the surrounding plains.\(^4\)

Since the seventeenth century, repeated attempts have been made to locate the remains of the *exhedra*.\(^5\) Recent discovery and confirmation of its location at the very summit of the Kel Dağ (“Bald Mountain”) by this writer and Uğur Bengisu now allows a more precise

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\(^1\) of *Byzantine Asia Minor* (Hampshire 1990) 21–51 [reprinted from CSSA 2 (Berkeley 1979)]; for the asymmetrical formation of the Tmolus range see D. Sullivan *Human Induced Vegetation Change in Western Turkey* unpublished dissertation Univ. of Calif. at Berkeley (1989) 60–62.

\(^2\) Tmolus as the birthplace of Zeus (*infra*); Tmolus as the birthplace of Dionysus, see Euripides (*Bacchae* 461–64) and W. Quandt *De Baccho in Asia Minore culto* Diss. Phil. Hall (Halle 1912) 175–77; the legends of Mount Tmolus are surveyed in Preisendanz’ article in Roscher’s *Lexikon* (1922), s.v. *Tmolus*.

\(^3\) Strabo 13.4.5. (Loeb) transl. H.L. Jones:

υπέρκειται δὲ τῶν Σάρδεων ὁ Τμώλος, εὐθαίμον ὄρος, ἐν τῇ ἀκροπείρα σκόπην ἔχον, ἐξέβαλεν λευκοῦ λίθου, Περσῶν ἔργον, ἀφ’ οὗ κατοπτεύεται τὰ κύκλῳ πεδία, καὶ μάλιστα τὸ Καιστριανόν· περιοικοῦσι δὲ Λυδοὶ καὶ Μυσιοὶ καὶ Μακεδόνες

Above Sardis is situated Mt. Tmolus, a blest mountain, with a look-out on its summit, an arcade of white marble, a work of the Persians, whence there is a view of the plains all around, particularly the Cayster Plain. And round it dwell Lydians and Mysians and Macedonians.

\(^4\) This subject will be treated in a forthcoming archaeological survey report by Stephen F. Sachs.