KARKINITIS AND THE BAY OF KARKINITIS: TOWARDS AN
EVALUATION OF THE CLASSICAL LITERARY TRADITION*

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Ancient Karkinitis (= Kerkinitis) numbers among the group of small Greek poleis on the north coast of the Black Sea, about which unusually meagre and fragmentary information is available in the Classical literary tradition. The information can be traced back to a variety of periods: as a rule, it is of a geographical character and provides no details of the city’s history. Yet even the few geographical details we have do not always provide us with a clear picture of the topography and hydrography of the area concerned.

Attempts undertaken as far back as the 19th century to locate Karkinitis on the basis of these meagre and, at first glance, contradictory data have given rise to considerable confusion. The existence of several variants of the toponym and also varying interpretations of the geographical landmarks cited in the sources have led scholars to look for two different cities with one and the same name: the first within the Crimea in the vicinity of modern Eupatoria (Керкинитис, Κορονιτίς) and the second beyond the isthmus of Perekop at the mouth of the Kalanchak River (Каркинитис, Carcine, Κάρκινα).1 Similarly, the well-known

* The appearance of this article was to a large extent made possible by support from the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation, the Danish Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and also the Research Support Scheme, to which I should like to express my profound gratitude.

1 For contributions to this discussion, see, for example: Friedländer 1845, 232-233; Spasskii 1850, 169-174; GGM I, 395-396; Koehne 1857, 107-109; Burachkov 1875, 119 ff.; Bonnel 1968, 100-102; Oreshnikov 1892, 3-4; Oreshnikov 1915, 23-25; Danoff 1962, 1117 (cf. also 869-870 with a map-diagram of the Greek colonies on the Black Sea); Dovatur, Kallistov and Shishova 1982, 289 f., note 372; Kuklina 1985, 99-101; Kutaiov 1990, 6-11; Kutasov 1992, 6-15. Most revealing in this connection is also the plotting of the city in the atlases of H. Kiepert, N. Hammond, and R. Talbert, see: Kiepert 1893, pl. II; Hammond 1981, pl. 8 Inset (in accordance with Kiepert’s data only Carcine is shown at the mouth of the River Kalanchak); Talbert 1991, 50 (along with Carcine near the Kalanchak River he also shows Kerkinitis [with a question mark] in the Crimea on the site of Eupatoria). A similar view is represented in the latest edition of the Atlas, see: Talbert 2000, map 23 G2-3, cf. also David Braund’s commentary on this map the Map-by-Map Directory to accompany the Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World in Talbert 2000, vol. 1, 352: “The location of Karkinitis, Kerkinitis and Karkine constitutes an insoluble difficulty. The map follows the usual view that there was only one Karkinitis in the region (also known as Karkinitis), and that this is
bronze coins with the inscriptions KEPKI and KAPKI were seen as emanating from two different poleis. Yet, while the first of these can with adequate grounds be linked with a specific archaeological site, the second remains unresolved and all attempts to look for the second city in the area were fruitless.

Is this tradition, however, really as contradictory as it may appear at first sight? As I have remarked elsewhere, the coin legends demonstrate in this case merely dialectal variants in the spelling which can be explained by the fact that what had originally been an Ionian polis underwent intensive Dorianization. In other words the Doric form of the ethnic-name, reflected in the coin inscription KEPKI, came to replace the earlier Ionian form KAPKI/KAPKINI. The beginning of this process, probably linked with the incorporation of a large group of the Doria evidenced from Chersonese into the city’s community can be dated to the third quarter of the 4th century BC. In light of the foregoing, fluctuations in the spelling of the city-name (with an -α- or an -ε-) and also the locating of the city by Classical authors, either in Taurica or beyond its borders, may well reflect two different groups or sequences of literary sources, which in fact provide information about one and the same polis. Within each of these groups a definite continuity of tradition can sometimes be established.

The earliest mention of Karkinitis is to be found in a fragment of Hecataeus’ ‘Περιήγησις Εὐρώπης’ passed down by Stephanus of Byzantium: Καρκινιτις πόλις Σκυθική; the form of the ethnic-name is Καρκινιται (Hec. FGrHist 1 F 184 = Steph. Byz. s.v.). Although it does not contain any specific topographical

to be located at modern Eupatoria. However, despite the strength of that orthodoxy, there remains considerable concern that Karkinitis should be located further north in the next bay of the Crimea, known today (perhaps significantly) as Karkinitsky Bay, or that the three names refer to more than one settlement.” Meritt, Wade-Gery and McGregor (1939, 496 f.) also assumed that there were two different towns locating Καρκινιτις which they restore in the Tribute list, near Perekop. Cf. in this connection as well Boardman 1964, 262; Sieberer 1995, 83, note 131: “Unsicherheiten bestehen bezüglich der Siedlung Karkinitis, von Herodot an der Mündung des Flusses Hypakryis lokalisirt,” and also maps 15 and 21.

2 Cf., e.g., Imhoof-Blumer 1902, 527, note on no. 2; Head 1911, 279.