

# The Downfall of the Odrysians: Cersobleptes' Struggle to Unite the Kingdom and the Thraco-Athenian Relations During the Rise of Philip II

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## *Abstract*

With the death of Cotys I began the downfall of the Odrysian kingdom. His son Cersobleptes inherited a war with Athens for the strategic and long desired Thracian Chersonese, which Athens intended to win by supporting the Odrysian separatists Berisades and Amadocus II. But Cersobleptes realized that a united Odrysian kingdom was a more perspective goal and this marked a sudden swift in his relations with the polis. This study traces the complex internal and foreign relations of Cersobleptes, who in 353/2 BC, either because of the threat posed by Philip II, or because of Athens' abandonment of its policy of supporting Amadocus II and Cetriporis, handed over to Athens the entire Thracian Chersonese, keeping only Cardia for himself, which allowed him to effectively secure his rear from the south and look for opportunities to defeat the separatists. But Philip would not allow this to happen and, beginning his conquest eastward in 352/351 BC, by the end of the 340s the Odrysians lost their access to the Thracian Sea and Sea of Marmara.

**Keywords:** Odrysian kingdom, Cersobleptes, Thracian Chersonese, Philip II of Macedon, Berisades, Amadocus II, Cetriporis.

## 1. Cersobleptes

Like the Athenian *strategos* Iphicrates, who at the beginning of Cotys' reign (384/383–360 BC) married his daughter, so Charidemus married Cersobleptes's daughter (Dem. 23.129), probably immediately after his accession to the throne. He thus became closest to the new king and it is quite logical that he immediately took action to protect his kingdom against the Athenian *strategos* Cephisodotus in the Thracian Chersonese. He was sent there in 360 BC, scouted the peninsula for seven months and finally headed towards Perinthus, an enemy of the Odrysians, where he expected to meet Charidemus as an ally. But, apparently, he misjudged Charidemus' new position and was defeated by horsemen and peltasts, who slaughtered many of his warriors (Dem. 23.165-167). It was not difficult for Charidemus to gather such an army for the attack, because of the located in the immediate vicinity of Perinthus Odrysian residences with their garrisons: Beos, Mokarsos, Heraion (Neon) Teichos, Bisanthe, Orni, Ganos, Ergiske.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Porozhanov, 2021: 281-282.

- Cersobleptes inherited from his father Cotys I a war with Athens for the strategic and long desired Thracian Chersonese.
- He soon realized that a united Odrysiian kingdom was a more promising goal.
- This marked a sudden swift in his relations with Athens.



Figure 1. Fortress-residences (*tyrseis*) of the Thracian kings and Hellenic *poleis* on the Thracian Sea, Sea of Marmara and Black Sea, 5<sup>th</sup> – middle of 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Adapted after Porozhanov 2021: 368 (cf. Porozhanov 2009)

After the failure at Perinthus, Cephisodotus hastened with his army, embarked on ships, to besiege Alopeconnesus, for the city had always been an Athenian possession and was to be relieved from robbers and pirates (Dem. 23.166). Charidemus headed overland to Alopeconnesus and sent a fleet from Lampsacus, forcing Cephisodotus to sign a treaty, which undoubtedly cemented Cotys’ conquest of the Thracian Chersonese, without Elaios and Crithote. The terms of the agreement were so disgraceful for Athens that Cephisodotus was dismissed, fined five talents, and “there was a majority of three votes only against a sentence of death” (Dem. 23.167). Charidemus also managed to capture the former treasurer of Cotys I who in 362 BC revolted against his king – the Odrysiian aristocrat Miltokythes:

Knowing that the man’s life would be spared if he were taken to Cersobleptes, – for killing one another is not customary among the Thracians, – Charidemus handed him over to your enemies the Cardians. They took Miltocythes and his son, put out in a ship to deep water, cut the boy’s throat, and then threw the father overboard, after he had witnessed the murder of his son. (Dem. 23.169)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Demosthenes does not state the reason why such measures were taken against Miltokythes, only hinting that he was always pro-Athenian. A passage in Polyaeus (7.31), however, reports that on his accession

The assassination of the Miltokythes, long desirous of all power in the Odrysian state, showed two other aristocrats, Berisades and Amadocus II, probably paradynasts<sup>3</sup> in the kingdom of Cotys, what might happen to them under the reign of the new king Cersobleptes (Polyaen. 7.31; Dem. 23.169, 175). This seems to have been the logical reason for the alliance of Berisades and Amadocus II with the Athenian *strategos* Athenodorus, against Cersobleptes. This seems to have been the logical reason why Berisades married his daughter to the Athenian *strategos* Athenodorus and together with Amadocus II they allied against Cersobleptes. Apparently they had military achievements, because in the autumn of 359 BC an agreement was reached for the partition of the former kingdom of Cotys between the three Odrysian nobles and Athens, as the fourth party, regained its dominion over the Chersonese (Dem. 23.170).<sup>4</sup> Berisades established himself in the area around the lower Nestos and Strymon, bordering Macedonia;<sup>5</sup> Amadocus II, perhaps a son of Amadocus I, took the mountainous hinterland of Maroneia between the lower Nestos and Hebrus (mod. Maritsa);<sup>6</sup> for Cersobleptes remained the largest part: from the lower course of Hebrus to the environs of Perinthus and from Cabyle to Cardia, which remained under Thracian control (Dem. 23.182-183).<sup>7</sup>

But Cersobleptes had no intention of giving up the hard-won Thracian Chersonesus from his ancestors and in the same autumn of 359 BC, probably taking in consideration that Athenodorus had no money to pay his mercenaries (Dem. 23.171), he violated the treaty:

... he claimed the right to take the port-dues and the ten-per-cent customs-duties; that he again talked as though the whole country belonged to him, requiring that the duties should be under the control of his own custom-house officers; and that, though he had taken his oath to Athenodorus that he would surrender the son of Iphiades,<sup>8</sup> the hostage whom he held on behalf of Sestus, he now does not even promise to surrender him. (Dem. 23.177)

In the spring of 358 BC, the newly elected Athenian *strategos* Chabrias set sail with only one ship with the task of renegotiating the actual return the Thracian Chersonese to Athens, but at the end had he had to sign a new treaty with “terms more monstrous than those made with Cephisodotus” (Dem. 23.171; 176).<sup>9</sup>

In 357 BC, Philip II of Macedon (359–336 BC) besieged Amphipolis and Athens lost another strategic *polis*.<sup>10</sup> The Athenians therefore had to react appropriately in the face of heavy losses and in 357 BC, sent the *strategos* Chares as plenipotentiary (unlimited authority) to the Thracian Chersonese, who, assisted by Athenodorus, Berisades and Amadocus II, this time

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Cersobleptes had some trouble with relatives whom he managed to drive away. According to A. Fol (1975: 167), the correlation of the two sources suggests that Miltokythes might have again organized a revolt against the central authority.

<sup>3</sup> A paradynast is a co-ruler; a governor who controlled separate regions of the kingdom. Additional proof for this hypothesis is the coins of Amadocus II (Yurukova, 1992: 65-67).

<sup>4</sup> Porozhanov, 2021: 283.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Worthington, 2014: 40.

<sup>6</sup> It is assumed that he also controlled the Southern Rhodopes. His name is inscribed on coins and phiales found among the treasures of the Getae and Triballians, indicating that he maintained active political relations with inner Thrace in an effort to ensure the longevity of his kingdom (Fol, 2017: 237).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fol 2017: 225.

<sup>8</sup> It is probable that the son of Iphiades in question was taken hostage as early as the time of Cotys, who conquered the city. Iphiades is probably the same who is mentioned by Aristotle (*Pol.* 1306a) as the leader of an oligarchic group in Abydos (Tzvetkova, 2008: 205).

<sup>9</sup> Hesel, 1997: 60 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Yordanov, 1998: 23; Tzvetkova, 2008: 206.

managed to negotiate a treaty advantageous to Athens, “the best and most equitable of the lot” (Dem. 23.173): Cersobleptes got to keep only Cardia (Dem. 23.181-182) and the rest of the *poleis* on the Thracian Chersonese had to pay on one side tribute (*φόρος*) to Berisades, Amadocus II and Cersobleptes,<sup>11</sup> and on other – as members of the Second Athenian League (378–355 BC) – contribution (*σύνταξις*) to Athens.<sup>12</sup> But just as before, it would not take long before Cersobleptes violates this treaty as well.



Figure 2. Coins of Cersobleptes

## 2. The Rise of the Macedonian Kingdom

In the early 350s BC, Thassos settled colonists in Crenides, a gold mine-rich area north of the Pangaion Hills. As the area was located in the lands of Berisades, who had an interest in the mines, the inhabitants of Crenides turned to Philip for help. In 356 BC he repulsed the Thracians, fortified the previously insignificant settlement, changed its name to Philippi, turned it into a populous and powerful city, and drastically increased the gold mines output, bringing him a revenue of more than a thousand talents (Diod., 16.3.7, 16.8.6-7). It was in 356 BC that the name of Berisades disappeared from historical sources, which may be linked to the mentioned conflict.<sup>13</sup> He was succeeded by Cetriporis (356–351 BC), presumably his eldest son. Cersobleptes saw this event as an opportunity to unite the Odrysian kingdom (Dem., 23.9): he used Athens' involvement in the War of the Allies (357–355 BC) and launched a war against Amadocus II and Cetriporis, but without much success (Dem., 23.10-11).

At that time, Cetriporis began seeking allies to counter Philip's growing expansion. But even this threat was unable to overcome the conflict between the three Odrysian rulers. Athens' short-sighted policy of having a weak and divided Odrysian kingdom bore its bitter fruits. The united forces of the Odrysians might still have been able to stop the conquering drive of the Macedonian king. Instead, Cetriporis sought an alliance with the Illyrian king Grabus II (358–356 BC) and the Paeonian king Lyypeius (359/8–335 BC). Athens also joined the alliance and ratified the pact, which goals were specific: a war against Philip II and the conquest of Crenides.<sup>14</sup> While Athens was preoccupied with the War of the Allies to render effective aid, Cetriporis, Grabus and Lyypeius acted sluggishly, and because of the great distances they could hardly coordinate their forces for quick and simultaneous action. This allowed Philip II to appear “before their

<sup>11</sup> The payment to the three Odrysian kings *simultaneously* (not separately) was recorded in the treaty text because of the old tribute imposed by Cotis I. According to Kalin Porozhanov (2021: 287), this was also done with the idea of leaving open the possibility of conflicts arising between the three kings, whereby Athens would gain full control of the peninsula.

<sup>12</sup> Translation of the treaty in Foucart, 1909: 96; Todoroff, 1933: 42-43; Porozhanov, 2021: 286.

<sup>13</sup> Delev, 1997: 12.

<sup>14</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup> 1 (1913), № 127.

dispositions were made, struck terror into them, and compelled them to join forces with the Macedonians".<sup>15</sup>

All these events coincided with the rapid rise of the Macedonian kingdom. In 357/356 BC, Philip II conquered Amphipolis, Potidaea, and Pydna, and in 355/354 BC, Methone.<sup>16</sup> All of these, however, were traditionally within the Athenian sphere of influence (Diod. 16.8.3-5), and so Philip actually found himself an adversary of Athens. The strategically located Byzantion, traditionally an ally of Athens since the Athenian Empire (454–404 BC), left the Second Athenian League at the beginning of the War of the Allies in 357 BC and supported Thebes, thus effectively turning into an enemy of Athens and ally of Philip II (Dem. 9.34). In the meantime, Athens signed a treaty with the Bosphoran kingdom for the import of wheat. This is probably the reason why Byzantion sought to tax Athenian ships passing through the Bosphorus with grain.<sup>17</sup>

In order to oppose Byzantion Athens needed an ally in the region and apparently Cersobleptes seemed to be the only option. Since he already had an Athenian citizenship, inherited from his father Cotys I, the rapprochement between him and Athens was actually achieved through the granting of Athenian citizenship and golden wreaths to Charidemus, since he was, presumably, the closest one to Cersobleptes (Dem. 23.141, 144-145). Thus, in 356/355 BC,<sup>18</sup> Athens started seeking friendly relations only with the legitimate heir of the Odrysian kingdom. This is indirectly confirmed by Delphi's decree from 355 BC,<sup>19</sup> granting proxeny (*proxenia*) to Cersobleptes' sons: Iolaus, Poseidonius, Medistas, and Teres.<sup>20</sup> It was in the interest of Athens that the Delphic Amphictyony be supported, albeit indirectly, through demonstrated good relations, with an ally such as the most powerful Odrysian king; after all, the contacts between the partially Hellenizing Odrysian royal court and Delphi had an anti-Macedonian orientation.<sup>21</sup>

Scholars believe that, despite the 357 BC treaty recognizing Athenian claims to the Thracian Chersonese, the *polis* could not actually consolidate its presence there and the peninsula remained in the following years under the control of Cersobleptes.<sup>22</sup> This assumption is based on the fact that it was not until 353/2 BC that a real increase of Athenian activity on the peninsula is attested. In that year, either because of the threat posed by Philip II,<sup>23</sup> or because of Athens' abandonment of its policy of supporting Amadocus II and Cetriporis,<sup>24</sup> Cersobleptes handed over to Athens the entire Thracian Chersonese, keeping only Cardia for himself, which is *de facto* a waiver of the 357 BC treaty.<sup>25</sup> Thus, by securing his rear from the south he could focus on uniting the divided in 357 BC into three Odrysian kingdom. But Philip overtook him.

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<sup>15</sup> Diod., 16.22.3. Hammond, 1994: 33; Delev, 1997: 13; Popov, 2011: 117; Delev, 2015: 49; Fol et al., 2017: 235.

<sup>16</sup> Dem., 1.5; 2.14; 6.20; Diod., 16.8.2; 16.31.6; 16.34.5.

<sup>17</sup> Dem., 5.25. Porozhanov, 2021: 289.

<sup>18</sup> See Porozhanov, 2021: 290-293.

<sup>19</sup> *FD* III.1 392 = Dittenberger, 1915: 195.

<sup>20</sup> The privileges were: *promanteia* (acquiring an oracle before others, though still after the priests and the citizens of Delphi); *proedria* (reserved/preferential seating at local communal festivals, theaters, public games, etc.); *prodikia* (priority of trial procedures); *ateleia* (exemption from taxes, including import/export taxes); and "all else given to *proxenoi*" (see [web.archive.org/web/20240525041838/proxenies.csad.ox.ac.uk/terms](http://web.archive.org/web/20240525041838/proxenies.csad.ox.ac.uk/terms)).

<sup>21</sup> Fol, 1981: 228.

<sup>22</sup> Fol, 1975: 172; Veligianni, 1994: 189; Tzvetkova, 2008: 209.

<sup>23</sup> Yordanov, 1998: 31.

<sup>24</sup> Delev, 1997: 14-15.

<sup>25</sup> Kahrstedt, 1954: 32; Tzvetkova, 2008: 211.

In the autumn of 352/351 BC, Philip II passed through the kingdom of Amadocus II, who had no other choice but to ally with Philip, since Athens was no more supporting him.<sup>26</sup> Then Philip besieged Heraion Teichos (Dem. 3.4) and one of Cersobleptes' sons was taken hostage to the Macedonian capital Pella, who was seen there by Aeschines (2.81 *Emb.*) in 346 BC. Since that moment, within a decade, the Odrysians would lose their access to the Thracian Sea and Sea of Marmara. In 347 BC, the Macedonian *strategos* Antipater conquered Abdera and Maroneia,<sup>27</sup> and in 346 BC, Apros and Drys (Theopomp. Fr. 160-161). Concerned by this existential threat, in March of 346 BC Cersobleptes allowed the Athenian *strategos* Chares to station small Athenian garrisons at the long-established strategic Odrysian fortress-residences of Serrion, Doriscos, Ganos, Serreion Teichos, Hieron Oros, Ergiske, and Myrtenum.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, a ten-member Athenian delegation, sent to Pella at the beginning of 346 BC in accordance with the proposal submitted by Philocrates, was negotiating peace terms with Philip, who was about to keep for himself Amphipolis and the conquered lands in Chalkidike and Thrace.<sup>29</sup> The Ecclesia of Athens, after hearing the report of the returning delegation, approved the treaty, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> of Elaphebolion (Aeschin. 2.90 *Emb.*; in the middle of April) 346 BC a solemn oath was sworn before Philip's representatives who had arrived in Athens for the purpose. According to the agreements, the Athenians were sworn in together with their allies, and here a significant difference in the interpretation of the relevant clause became apparent – in addition to the members of the Second Athenian League, the Athenians tried to include in the treaty their other *de facto* allies – the Phocians, the Thessalian city of Halos and Cersobleptes, on whose behalf a certain Critobulus of Lampsacus appeared in the city, authorized to take the necessary oath. The Macedonian representatives, however, protested strongly and refused to recognize such an extended interpretation of the clause regarding the allies. Either way, by taking the oath, the Athenians were considered bound to fulfill the obligations of the treaty – but not Philip, who had yet to take the oath before the Athenian representatives in Pella. As it turned out, the Macedonian king did not fail to take the most arrogant advantage of this pending situation; already in March 346 BC, after the departure of the Athenian delegation from Pella, he immediately set out for Thrace and swiftly attacked the fortresses of Cersobleptes, driving the Athenian garrisons from them. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of Elaphebolion, the very day the oath of peace was sworn on the Athenian side in the Ecclesia, Philip conquered Hieron Oros (the Sacred Mountain; called Gantias by the Thracians), one of the main strongholds of the Odrysians, and was able to confidently dictate his terms to the defeated Thracian king. The Athenian *strategos* Chares reported urgently in Athens on the disastrous situation in Thrace; Demosthenes insisted that the Athenian delegation, which was to take Philip's oath, should go immediately by sea to Thrace and try on the spot to halt further developments of Macedonian aggression. For reasons unknown, however, the delegation did not leave Athens until 9 days after the oaths were sworn, and only then, travelled by land the full 23 days to Pella, and remained there waiting another 27 days for Philip's return from Thrace, only to be confronted with the *fait accompli* of Cersobleptes' surrender.<sup>30</sup>

In the early summer of 342 BC Philip again invaded Thrace and began large-scale military operations, this time aimed at the complete subjugation of the territories of Teres II and Cersobleptes, who seem to have buried their mutual strife in face of the common danger.<sup>31</sup> According to Diodorus (16.71.1), Philip was led by his benevolent attitude towards the Greek cities

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<sup>26</sup> After 351 BC, Amadocus II is no longer mentioned in written sources; after him ruled Teres II.

<sup>27</sup> Aeschin., 2.70-74 *Emb.*; Polyæn. *Strateg.* 4.2.22.

<sup>28</sup> Dem., 7.37; 8.64; 9.15; 10.8, 65; 18.27; 19.156; Aeschin., 3.82 (*Ctes.*). Porozhanov, 2021: 293-294.

<sup>29</sup> Dem., 19; Aeschin., 2 (*Emb.*).

<sup>30</sup> Delev, 1997: 17.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 1976: 166-171; Hammond & Griffith, 1979: 554-566; Badian, 1983: 66-70.

in Thrace, which he wished to rid of the constant raids of Cersobleptes, and this was probably the officially proclaimed reason for the new campaign. The explanation, however, seems insufficient in view both of the extent and character of the actions undertaken in Thrace, and of Philip's subsequent offensive against the very Hellespontine cities<sup>32</sup> he had ostensibly set out to save – this was a war on a scale not comparable with the previous short incursions, and seems to have lasted through three summer seasons, 342–340 BC, without interruptions for the intervening winters.<sup>33</sup>

In the beginning of the campaign Philip used Cardia as a strategic base. Soon Ainos was conquered, from where he penetrated along the lower course of Hebrus to the interior of the Odrysian kingdom. Despite the undeniable Macedonian superiority in armament and discipline, Philip was forced to fight many difficult battles. To counter his advantage, Cersobleptes resorted to sudden attacks and deceptive manoeuvres, even succeeding in forcing Philip to withdraw from positions he had already conquered (Polyaen., 4.2.4, 13). The Macedonians suffered heavy losses in order to conquer Drongilum, Cabyle and Masteira (Dem. 8.44). In the spring of 341 BC, Philip brought new troops from Thessaly and Macedonia (Dem. 8.14), because he realized very well that he had to lay hands on the nucleus of the Odrysian kingdom, which was concentrated then along the middle and lower courses of the Tonzos and Hebrus rivers. Apparently that was the time of the so-called Philip's colonization in Thrace, which included Philippopolis, Cabyle, and Poneropolis, mentioned by Theopompus (Fr. 110), which is identified with one of the two cities – Drongilum or Masteira.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

Demosthenes achieved his dream of dividing and weakening the powerful Odrysian state, instead of opposing it to the kingdom of Philip II, believing that Athens would succeed in defeating Macedonia as it had achieved success against Thrace. Cersobleptes inherited from his father Cotys I a war with Athens for the strategic and long desired Thracian Chersonese, but realized that a united Odrysian kingdom was a more perspective goal, which marked a sudden swift in his relations with the *polis*. His waiver of the 357 BC treaty, either because of the threat posed by Philip II, or because of Athens' abandonment of its policy of supporting Amadocus II and Cetriporis, allowed him to effectively secure his rear from the south and look for opportunities to advance east. But Philip overtook him in 352/351 BC and in a matter of a decade the Odrysians lost their access to the Thracian Sea and Sea of Marmara. After the end of 341 BC Cersobleptes is no more mentioned in historical sources.

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<sup>32</sup> Delev (1997: 19, n. 103) notes that Diodorus refers to "Hellespontine cities", though these may actually be cities located in the Propontis, such as Byzantion, Perinthus, and Selymbria.

<sup>33</sup> Delev, 1997: 19; 2015: 51. Fritz Wüst (1938: 106) suggests that this was the first stage in Philip's preparations for the war against the Persian Empire which were already under way.

<sup>34</sup> Jordanov, 1995: 169-170.

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