

Ephorus' Cock-And-Bull Story: A Rationalization of 'Io' at the Bosphorus (*Fgrhist* 70 F156)

Among Ephorus' fragments, F156—an explanation of how the Bosphorus was named—holds the dubious distinction of being labelled by Jacoby “unusually foolish” (*ungewöhnlich albern*, 1926: 82). Given Jacoby's low estimation of Ephorus, that is saying something. The citation comes from the scholia to Apollonius' *Argonautica* and centers on the Io myth (2.168b). Ephorus follows Herodotus' Persians insofar as Io is abducted by Phoenicians and taken to Egypt (1.1-2), but he then adds:

In her place, the king of the Egyptians sent a bull to Inachus (Io's father). But since that man had died, they went around displaying the bull to all, inasmuch as they were not aware of that animal before. The place where those with the bull sailed was called the Bosphorus.

According to Jacoby, the bull is sent overland from Egypt through Asia, giving name to the Bosphorus, literally “ox-crossing,” in the process (see also Parker 2011: *BNJ* 70 F156 and Parmeggiani 2011: 311 n.838). Read in this light, the fragment is indeed foolish. Such a circuitous journey beggars the imagination, and the bull's subsequent tour appears wholly superfluous. But the sequence of the story as reported by the scholiast suggests that the crossing in question was not undertaken in the initial dispatch of the bull from Egypt, but when the animal was toured around Greece. Wendel's later edition of the scholia to Apollonius would seem to support Jacoby decisively by placing the explanation of the name immediately after the dispatch of the bull, but the manuscript tradition lends no support to that emendation (1958: 139).

Once cleared of misinterpretation and unnecessary emendation, the fragment sheds important light on Ephorus' methodology. The Persian story of Io is accepted as fact, even though Herodotus himself did not present it as such (1.5.3). Her abduction leaves much of the pre-existing tradition in tatters, however, since popular memory associated several toponyms with her subsequent wanderings (Kipp 2005). In sharp contrast to Thucydides (1.20.1), Ephorus put

considerable faith in popular tradition, inventing the bull and its tour to account for it. The choice of a bull (ὁ ταῦρος), as opposed to a cow (ἡ βοῦς), may reflect local traditions at Byzantium (Russell 2012). It's tour around Greece parallels Io's wanderings and thus serves to explain the various toponyms associated with her. Indeed, the scholiast may reflect just such an observation on Ephorus' part when he goes on to note that there were two straits called the Bosphorus, the Thracian and Cimmerian. Ephorus' explanation is clever and takes care to account for elements of the popular tradition disturbed by Herodotus' earlier rationalization of the myth, but his own version is no less a work of rationalization with its characteristic patchwork of tradition and invention (Pownall 2006 and Hawes 2014).

Parmeggiani has done much to redeem Ephorus' reputation, arguing that in many ways he was a historian in the mold of Thucydides and Polybius (2011: 99-146 and 2024: 61-150). The present reading of F156 does exculpate Ephorus of an inexplicable lapse in judgement, but what remains is a salutary reminder not to over-correct earlier conclusions about his work. Ephorus was no fool, but no Thucydides either.

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