



IDENTIFICATION OF A NEW CULT IN CAPPADOCIA: ZEUS ARGAIOS*

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Abstract

Argaios (Erciyes) constitutes one of the most deeply-rooted cults as a mountain god in Cappadocia Region since the Hittite period. Pictured antropomorphically by the Hittites, this mountain god is seen as a triangular mountain symbol in numismatic data since the reign of Archelaus. Since then and until the 3rd century A.D., Argaios was depicted together with many figures and motives on coins, gems, and agalmas, which created the versatile worship and the syncretic structure of this mountain cult. One result from this versatile worship in Argaios is the cult of Zeus Argaios.

Nevertheless, there is no epigraphic data yet to support the existence of a belief system as Zeus Argaios. However, the existence of this cult is necessarily proved by Zeus-Argaios and Argaios-eagle depictions seen on the coins minted in Caesarea, the capital of the region, and on the agalmas some of which have the image of a bearded god. It can therefore be concluded that the seat of Zeus was on top of Argaios for almost three centuries, and this cult was widely worshipped.

Keywords: Cappadocia, Zeus, Argaios, Mountain Cult.

Introduction

In ancient times, the mountain image was used as the representation of a god or his throne. With the magnificence of their high peaks, mountains were significant imageries, as they served as centers of reproduction, productivity, and fertility in addition to providing items necessary for human survival. The associated god was generally the chief deity of that settlement or area. This representation emerged in Mesopotamia, spread into Anatolia, and went as far as Greece; it was seen in diverse locations but in the same sense. It is possible to state that there is a great variety and extensive worship of mountain gods especially in Anatolia. Additionally, the local mountain god of one region was also accepted in another.

Deities such as Ida, Olympos, Olybris, Agdistis, and Akraios are among the prime mountain gods in Anatolia. As the subject of this study, Argaios in one of the most significant examples in Anatolia, constituting the most deeply rooted worship. Argaios is the ancient name of Mount Erciyes, the largest volcanic mountain in Central Anatolia located 25 kilometres south-east of Kayseri today. As the local mountain cult of Cappadocia, Argaios was worshipped since the Hittites, and it became the most long-lasting cult of the region, even of Anatolia, surviving until the 3th century A.D.

It is possible to find detailed information on Argaios in ancient texts and travel accounts. Strabo states that the city of Mazaka (the former name of Caesarea) was named as *next to Argaios*. Strabo also uses exaggerated expressions as he describes Argaios:

"(...) *Persons who ascend it (but they are not many) say that both the Euxine and the sea of Issus may be seen from thence in clear weather. (...)*

"(...) *the Argæus is surrounded by a forest, so that wood may be procured near at hand, yet even the region lying below the forest contains fire in many parts, and springs of cold water; but as neither the fire nor the water break out upon the surface, the greatest part of the country is covered with herbage. In some parts the bottom is marshy, and flames burst out from the ground by night. (...)*" (Strabo, Geog.: 12.2.7).

Apart from Strabo, Solinus (Solinus, De Mir. Mundi: 45), Claudianus (Claudianus, In Rufinum: 2.28-30), Ammianus Marcellinus (Marcellinus, Res Gestae: 20.9), and Plinius the Elder

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(Plinius, Nat. Hist.: 6.3) mention Argaios in their works. Solinus states that the people of Cappadocia believed that their God resided on Argaios (Solinus, De Mir. Mundi: 45.4). Claudianus defines Argaios as *the father of fast horses*, yet the other two writers only indicated that Caesarea was on the outskirts of Argaios.

Travellers and researchers such as Serbin (Serbin, 1893: 32), Simeon (Simeon, 1999: 255-256), Macdonald Kinneir (Kinneir, 1818: 151 et al.), William Francis Ainsworth (Ainsworth, 1842: 219 et al.), C. Texier (Texier, 2002: 545), Hamilton (Hamilton, 1842: 259 et al.), Henry Franshawe Tozer (Tozer, 1881: 106 et al.), Pierre Tchihatcheff (De Tchihatcheff, 1853: 450-452), Gertrude Lowthian Bell (Bell, 2004: 344), and Henry C. Barkley (Barkley et al., 2011: 160) relate detailed information about Argaios. They rather mention the structure of Argaios as a mountain but do not give any information about it as being worshipped as a mountain god. However, we can relate to its existence as a mountain god thanks to archaeological data rather than epigraphic data or ancient texts.

Accordingly, the earliest archaeological data in which Argaios was depicted as a mountain god is found in Yazilikaya Temple dating to 16th century B. C. and located 2 km northeast of Hattusa, the Hittite capital. On the main scene of the relieves on the walls of Yazilikaya Temple Gallery A, the sky god Teshub stands on mountain gods Hazzi and Namni (Seeher, 2002: 116). There are discussions on which mountain Namni is depicted on (Koch, 1993: 201). As seen in these discussions, it is no use to search for these two mountain gods away from Hittite center or especially in Syria. It seems more logical that Namni (and Hazzi, of course) is among the local gods of Cappadocia. Therefore, it is reasonable to deduce that the name used for Argaios was Namni in Hittite period.

Accepting this deduction, it is striking that Namni in Yazilikaya Gallery A was pictured as having a beard. Beard is the iconographic feature of sky god Teshub and many other mountain gods in Hittite art. The meaning of this description during that period is the reflection of the male strength it represented (Özcan, 2014: 387). Namni and Hazzi's depictions with the beard which belonged to elder gods and the chief deity point to the significance of these mountain gods in Hittite pantheon.

The examples for the cult of Namni are not limited to Yazilikaya. Another archaeological data is located on an ivory piece. Pictured as a bull under sun course, the sky god Teshub is represented with Namni and Hazzi on each side. Facial details and ears of both gods are exaggerated and formed largely. They hold lituus in their hands which are crossed on their chests (Özgüç, 2002: 244-247, Kat. No. 113). This form of crossing hands on the chest can also be seen on Eflatunpinar and Fasillar¹ monuments, both of which are Hittite structures². Apart from the aforementioned examples, Namni depictions can be observed on seals and statuettes³.

Except from the archaeological data, there is numismatic proof on the cult of Argaios belonging to Late Hittite period. The epigraphic data on the word *Argaios* dating to 8th century B. C. states that this mountain named as Namni on Yazilikaya is called Harhara. It reads "Mountain God Harhara" (Bossert, 1954: 135) in Hittite hieroglyphs on the inscription found in Tekirderbent village located on the road to Erciyes. Additionally, two inscriptions in Hisarcik county of Melikgazi, Kayseri, are related to Harhara (Hawkins, 2000b: 483, Pl. 268-269). The first of Luwian inscriptions found on Toptepesi near Hisarcik village tells about a sacrifice to Harhara Mountain, and the other one is related to a deer dedicated to him. These inscriptions are dated to 8th century BC.

After being worshipped under the names of Namni and Harhara, there is an interruption in the archaeological and epigraphic data indicating to the worship of this mountain cult. This break is especially evident during the time when the region was subdued to Persian rule as a satrapy until the fall of Hellenistic Kingdom of Cappadocia. The earliest data on the rebirth of this mountain cult belong to the rule of Archelaus, and the cult is now known as Argaios instead of Namni or Harhara (Baydur, 1994: 73-74).

¹ Above the main scene on Eflatunpinar monument, there is a depiction of five gods with beards and their hands crossed on their chests. (Emre, 2002: 222, 228; Mellaart 1962: 115)

² Three mountain gods upon which Teshub stands are depicted in profile as bending their hands forward, and their arms are folded at their elbows (Emre, 2002: 226).

³ There is a number of examples with mountain gods being represented individually. A bearded mountain god with large ears and a pointed cone is represented on Sarkishla ceremonial axe. Such representational features can also be observed on Tudhaliya IV relief located in Yazilikaya Gallery A. Emre, 2002: 225-226. Besides, there are some examples of seals where Tudhaliya IV is depicted as a mountain god (Dinçol, 2002: 92-93).



The most significant evidence for the cult of Argaios during Archelaus' rule is the Caesarea coins. Being pictured anthropomorphically by the Hittites, the cult begins to emerge as an agalma or a mountain representation on the reverse of coins. Argaios was represented on the reverse of coins in early examples and as individually with an eagle on top of it or along with a temple (Wroth, 1999: pl. 8.1; Sydenham, 1978:12, 14, 60, 118, 119, 167, 363). There are coins on which Argaios is depicted with a wreath on its top since the time of Titus. It is possible to see the wreath motive in many periods until Gordianus III (Sydenham, 1978: 118, 119, 272, 556, 601).

There are various representations with Argaios on the coins of Trajan. Some compositions are observed for the first time: the peak of Argaios with a figure on each side, an animal chasing another on the slopes of Argaios (Weiss, 1985: 32, 19b), and Argaios along with an altar (Marthaler, 1968: 78, 103). There are garland and/or eagle motives where Argaios is represented along with an altar. Such representations continue until Gordianus III (Ibid: 102, 221; Sydenham, 1978: 617a).

With Hadrianus and onwards, there are examples where Argaios has single or three stars on its top. In the coins of Septimus Severus, Iulia Domna, and Caracalla, Argaios is observed with four figures (Weiss, 1985: 32, 26a-b), three of which are on the right; however, the three figures exist on top of Argaios on the coins during the rule of Elagabalus (Güler, 1995: 77, fig. 42; Sydenham, 1978: 513). Three figure compositions are formed as all three on top or one on top and one on each side (Güler, 1995: 78, fig. 48).

Being represented along with various symbols or as many depictions since the time of Archelaus, Argaios provides the numismatic evidence for the syncretic structure fusing local beliefs of the region, especially those of Persians and Greeks. Eastern, western, and local features on these coins, although such epigraphic data are limited, are significant as they demonstrate the cult variety and religious structure in Cappadocia.

The Cult of Zeus Argaios in Cappadocia

Having been worshipped as a mountain god since the Hittites, the cult of Argaios continued to exist as the local cult of the area until the 3rd century AD. Nonetheless, Argaios did not solely remain as a mountain god; as still being worshipped after many centuries, it formed a syncretic structure by absorbing many other gods. Consequently, this mountain god created its unique pantheon with the many images it represented.

In fact, Maximus Tyrius supported this idea stating "A mountain is to the Cappadocians a god, an oath, and a statue; ..." (Tyrius, Diss.: XXXVIII), and he pointed out to the sophisticated worship of Argaios. Even after the end of the Persian rule, the worship in Persian gods such as Ahura Mazda and Mithra still continued, and that belief did not stay apart from Argaios. Another god in the complex structure of this mountain god was Zeus.

Zeus has an extensive cult in Cappadocia with Persian, Greek, or unique local epithets. Among these, however, no direct description as *Zeus Argaios* is seen to exist in the epigraphic data or information by ancient sources. However, the existence of the cult under this title should necessarily be derived from the archaeological data. Besides, it would be illogical to assume that Zeus did not in any way form a connection with this cult while the largest volcanic mountain of the region and Central Anatolia was being worshipped as a mountain god. The analyses of the coins, gems, and agalmas belonging to this region bring the idea that the god acquired the epithet of Argaios or that Zeus and Argaios was thought to be one there. In other words, it can be stated that a cult named Zeus Argaios existed in the region, and it was based in Caesarea.

Before this study, there was no publication on the existence of such a cult. However, the cult of Zeus Argaios was hesitantly mentioned by W. Deonna and A. B. Cook. Deonna talks about *the possibility* that the star and half-moon depictions on the reverse of Caesarea coins might point to the cult of Zeus Argaios (Deonna, 1946: 24-25). Cook considered the same possibility and stated that the said depiction represents Hellenistic Zeus (Cook, 1925b: 980). There are some conflicting views on these coins with a star and half-moon depictions. Kirsten puts forward that they might indicate that Zeus is the real cult of Argaios (Kirsten, 1954: 876), and Sydenham connects them with Mithra (Sydenham, 1978: 20). In this study, it is proposed that the moon-star coins primarily form a syncretic structure. Instead of pointing to one single god, moon and star should actually be the symbols of both Greek god Zeus and Persian gods Ahura Mazda and Mithra. Therefore, the depictions on these coins



should be regarded as an evidence concluding that both east and west are included in the cult of Argaios.

The first group of data to define Zeus Argaios in this study are composed of Zeus and Argaios depictions on Caesarea coins. The earliest data on this cult is a coin from the period of Archelaus. On the obverse of this coin dating to the fall of the Cappadocian Kingdom is the head of Zeus with a beard and a wreath of laurels, and the reverse has the earliest Argaios depiction (Von Aulock, 1987: 6338; Güler, 1995: 85, fig. 63). This coin on which Zeus and Argaios are portrayed together points to the beginning of the cult.

Another coin dates to the time of Severus Alexander (222 - 235 AD). On the reverse of this coin, the chief god Zeus with a kalathos on his head is portrayed as holding Argaios on his extending left hand (Güler, 1995: 83, fig. 58). This depiction clearly states that both gods are regarded as one, not individually.

For the cult identification of Zeus Argaios, there is a different composition on another coin from the time of Severus Alexander (Güler, 1995: 83, fig. 58). On the reverse of this coin, Mount Argaios is seen on the left above an altar with a wreath. On top of the mountain, there is a figure holding globus on one hand and a sceptre on another. To the right of this depiction, Zeus is seen again with a kalathos on his head and clothing wrapping his body; he holds a sceptre in his left hand, and his right hands reaches to Argaios⁴.

The second group of archaeological data for the identification of Zeus Argaios comes from the depictions of Mount Argaios and eagles. Such depictions are found on coins, gems, and agalmas of the region. The earliest example of these representations with an eagle on the summit of Argaios on the reverse of Caesarea coins belongs to the period of Archelaus (Baydur, 1994: Kat. No. 1). On another coin from the period of Commodus, an eagle is located on the pediment of a tetrastyle temple. A figure stands just before the entrance of the temple, with a spear and shield in his hands. An eagle is seen above an altar on another coin from the same emperor's period (Sydenham, 1978: 363v). An example from the time of Septimus Severus depicts an eagle on a base with two columns and Argaios above it (Weiss, 1985: 33.28; Sydenham, 1978: 410; Marthaler 1968: 82.113).

On bronze agalmas, Zeus' eagle is seen on the top of Mount Argaios located on an altar-like base. Argaios is sometimes depicted as a breaded god's bust (Weiss, 1985: 28 no.1-2; Baydur, 1994: Kat. No. 2; Güler, 1995: 96, fig. 83). This bust is supposed be the image of Argaios or Zeus. Beard was a feature seen in two mountain gods on which Teshub places his foot. It seems that this tradition can also be seen during the Roman Empire.

There are also similar depictions on Caesarea gems. However, they are rather varied and complex compared to those on the agalmas. Zeus' eagle is sometimes pictured as holding a wreath in its beak. In some gems with this depiction, there is a star and moon on each side of the eagle⁵, or there are banner motives on both sides of the mountain depiction⁶. Some examples have a naked male figure with a sceptre and Nike on one side and eagle depiction on the other⁷.

Conclusion

All these examples clearly provide the evidence for the cult of Zeus Argaios in the region without the need for epigraphic data. However, for the moment it seems impossible to know whether

⁴ However, there are some views that this depiction is not of Zeus but Serapis (see Weiss, 1985: 35, 54.; Sydenham, 1978: 545; Marthaler, 1968: 94.186.) It is because the hat on the god's head on both coins is Serapis' modius. Yet, modius is similar to kalathos used by many deities in Greek art. There are also some numismatic data in regional cities which represent Zeus with a hat or a kalathos. On the reverse of two Caesarea coins dated to Trajan period, Zeus is represented with a kalathos on his head (see Sydenham, 1978: 173.). Therefore, in order to interpret the god as Serapis, first you need to evaluate the existence of Egyptian cults in Cappadocia. The existence of Egyptian cults in the region are not clear as there is no archaeological or numismatic data except the limited numismatic data with Zeus Ammon depictions belonging to the periods of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. Additionally, it may be concluded that Egyptian beliefs did not exist in Cappadocia as no findings were discovered in the settlements of the region and political and social relations between two parties were scarce in ancient times.

⁵ Deonna (1946: 24-25) and Cook (1940b: 980) stated that moon and star point to Zeus. However, these depictions must result from the fact that the region was under Persian influence for a long time and its traces continued until this period. Yet, it is not correct to assume that moon-star motive solely reflects Persian characteristics; these motives should echo the Persian-Greek syncretisation in the area.

⁶ Sydenham, 1978: 564, pic. 95, Marthaler, 1968: 97, 200; Baydur, 1994: Kat. No. 2:1.

⁷ Weiss, 1985: 6; Baydur, 1994: Kat. No. 1.



locals of the time named this cult directly as Zeus Argaios. Yet, it would not be wrong to assume that Cappadocians perceived Zeus and Argaios as one.

Consequently, Argaios, which is known just as a mountain god dating back to Hittites, depicts a syncretic structure incorporating local, eastern, and western features since the fall of the Kingdom of Cappadocia. Zeus constitutes the primary prevailing cult in this syncretic and also complex structure. This identification results from coins, gems, and agalmas which refer to an interpretation of Argaios and Zeus together and to a worship of *Zeus Argaios*; and it is also verified by the same data.

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