

A THRACIAN THALASSOCRACY?

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Almost every visitor, I suppose, of the Archaeological Museum at Sozopol (Bulgaria)—ancient Apollonia Pontica—is bound to notice the museum's collection of anchors. Rather flat pieces of stone pierced by one up to three holes (Fig. 1) seem to be the eldest type, also known from other sites inside and outside Bulgaria, like the Bronze Age temple of Byblos. A number of these anchors has also been found near Cyprus, inscribed with Cypro-Minoan signs: they have been dated between 1400 and 1200 BC¹. Later on, we observe the reduction of weight—in combination with a better designed type—of the anchor. The weight was concentrated in the stock, while the rest of the anchor was, most probably, made of wood (Fig. 2). We may discern, then, typologically after the flat stones the stone-stocked anchors and the lead-stocked anchors. In a—not published—M.A. thesis Douglas Haldane² has proposed a typology of wooden anchors, based on historical and archaeological evidence (Fig. 3). By the way, Sozopol's device (Fig. 4) represents an early stone-stocked anchor³.

Not the fact that almost all types of anchors—though relatively a larger number of stone and stone-stocked and earlier types of lead-stocked—can be found at Sozopol is surprising, but the quantity. After all, Thracians did not go out at sea—at least not in historical times—according to the general opinion⁴. Or did they?

In Eusebius' *Chronicle* we find a list of so-called thalassocracies,

¹ Karageorghis, V., *Chronique des fouilles à Chypre en 1967*, *BCH* 92 (1968), p. 278, figs. 34-35; —, *Chronique des fouilles à Chypre en 1968*, *BCH* 93 (1969), p. 531, fig. 170; Catling, H.W., and K. Nikolaou, *Composite Anchors in Late Bronze Age Cyprus*, *Antiquity*, 1968, p. 225-9; p. 228, plate XXXIV.

² Haldane, Douglas D., *The Wooden Anchor*, M.A. Thesis to Graduate College of Texas A & M University, 1984.

³ Haldane, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ Appian, *Bella Civilia*, IV 13, 102; cf. also Dimitrov, B., and C. Nicolov, *Stone Anchors from Sozopol*, *IJNA* 5 (1976), p. 81.

taken from Diodorus Siculus⁵. It is according to Myres⁶ "... a mutilated but genuine document of approximately Periclean date ...". Though his arguments for this view⁷ were questioned by Fotheringham⁸, who did not regard the list of any great historical value, Myres maintained that the list was essentially from the fifth century BC⁹. The importance for us of this list lies in the mentioning of the Thracians as rulers of the sea during 79 years: from 879-800 BC, according to Myres¹⁰, from 995-916 according to Fotheringham¹¹. Miller supposes that the lists indicate that there were two successive Thracian thalassocracies, one of the Thracians in Europe during 19 years, followed by one of 79 years of Thracians from Asia: she dates the total of Thracian thalassocracy from 998-900 BC¹². All these dates are calculated from the fall of Troy, dated at 1184/3. A. Fol¹³ even dates the Thracian supremacy between the 12th and 11th century BC, unfortunately without giving evidence for his view. Though the list is focused on the eastern Mediterranean world, and omits e.g. the Pontus¹⁴, it is worth while to examine the classical sources to see whether they give any information that might confirm a Thracian thalassocracy.

The earliest source that connects Thracians and seafaring is Homer. In the *Iliad*¹⁵ is mentioned that Iphidamas, son of Antenor, came to help Troy with twelve ships, which he left behind at Percote (in the northernmost part of the Hellespont on the Asian side).

Diodorus Siculus¹⁶ relates how a group of Thracians raided the Cycladic islands and mainland Greece from an island that they had occupied as their basis, Strongulê, later Naxos. Due to the context,

⁵ Diodorus Siculus, VII.11. This text also has been preserved by Jerome: variants are known from Synkellos, Michael and Armenian *Canons*: cf. Miller, M., *The Thalassocracies. Studies in Chronography II*, Albany (N.Y.), 1971, *passim*, esp. p. 9-12, 65-68.

⁶ Myres, John L., On the 'List of Thalassocracies' in Eusebius, *JHS* 26 (1906), p. 84-130, p. 130.

⁷ Myres, 1906, p. 85-9.

⁸ Fotheringham, J.K., On the 'List of Thalassocracies' in Eusebius *JHS* 27 (1907), p. 75-89.

⁹ Myres, John L., 'List of Thalassocracies' in Eusebius: a Reply, *JHS* 27 (1907), p. 123-30; p. 125-6.

¹⁰ Myres, 1906, p. 89 *sq.*

¹¹ Fotheringham, *op. cit.*, p. 80-4.

¹² Miller, 1971, p. 60-1, 70, 130-4.

¹³ Fol, A., La Thrace et les mers, *Thracia Pontica* 1 (1982), p. 9.

¹⁴ Myres, 1907, p. 125.

¹⁵ Homer, *Iliad*, XI.227-230.

¹⁶ Diodorus Siculus, V.50-51.3.

Theseus and Ariadne are said to have visited the island of Naxos, the Thracian raids should be dated well in the heroic age.

Though Myres¹⁷ indicates that Thracian thalassocracy is also attested by Strabo¹⁸, these passages give no single direct indication that the Thracian activities mentioned there are in some way or another connected with a dominance at sea. Looking at the possible evidence of the Greek sources for a Thracian thalassocracy I presume that we may safely conclude that this evidence looks rather faint. We might even say that the idea of a Thracian thalassocracy seems somewhat obscured¹⁹, though we have no reason at all to abolish it, yet. Ere we can do such a thing, we have to go somewhat further. We must remember that generally the interest of the Greeks in their neighbours was rather limited and superficial if Greece was not involved more or less directly—and this attitude is reflected by the majority of Greek writers. Therefore, we must look whether from other fields, in this case archaeology, additional information may be gathered. The problem here is that, as far as I know, few archaeological finds exist from the Aegean or Marmora seas connecting unambiguously Thracians with the sea or seafaring, in spite of the fact that a lot of archaeological fieldwork has been carried through: unfortunately (for us) it concerns more or less exclusively the Greek settlements in Thrace²⁰.

There have, however, been some finds that give us something to go on. Firstly anchors. Not the anchors at Sozopol, but anchors found at Lithoporos, 15 km S.W. of Serrhai (modern Siris). According to D. Samsaris²¹: “il est toutefois probable que les indigènes aient utilisé ce type d’ancre avant la colonisation du littoral égéen de la Thrace par les grecs, c’est-à-dire à la fin du II^e millénaire ou au début du I^{er} millénaire av. n. è.” Though these anchors were found rather far from the coast it seems that the ships that carried them were not only used for fluvial navigation but for the sea as well²². Archaeological finds also show that the Thracian tribe of the Edones (which is mentioned by

¹⁷ Myres, 1906, p. 126.

¹⁸ Myres mentions Strabo VII.7.1, IX.2.3, IX.2.25 and IX.3.13.

¹⁹ Cf. also Danov, Chr. M., *Altthracien*, Berlin/New York, 1976, p. 142, n. 25.

²⁰ Cf. for the most recent review, covering all Greek settlements in Thrace Isaac, B.H., *The Greek Settlements in Thrace until the Macedonian Conquest*, Leiden, 1986.

²¹ Samsaris, D., Recherches sur l’histoire de la navigation des habitants du cours inférieur du Strymon dans l’antiquité, *Thracia Pontica* I (1982), p. 259-60.

²² Samsaris, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

Thucydides²³) was a tribe with maritime traditions, showed by their occupation of Thasos and the foundation of Antisara, modern Kalamitsa²⁴ (Fig. 5).

In fact, we have a methodological problem. We have a testimony of a Thracian thalassocracy, that can not be confirmed *beyond doubt* by other literary sources, except one that would date it in the Late Helladic period (by the way in agreement with Fol's opinion, quoted above). On the other hand we have, I admit a rather limited amount of, archaeological evidence that might defend the rightness of the assumption of a Thracian thalassocracy in the Aegean in the transitional period of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age. Anyway, taken together, it seems to be too much of evidence to discredit Eusebius' list. If we look at the proposed dates for the Thracian thalassocracy we see that—if any—it should be dated somewhere between the 12th and 9th centuries BC. Personally, I am inclined to support a date about the beginning of the 12th century BC, both because of the context of the—faint—literary evidence and the archaeological materials, including the parallel with the anchors from Byblos and especially Cyprus.

An extra complication is that since the serious beginning of maritime and underwater archaeological research after World War II very few finds from these periods have ever been made: the Cape Gelidonya wreck (near Antalya, Turkey) and the 14th century BC wreck at Kas (near Bodrun, Turkey) of course being the most notable exceptions²⁵. Perhaps an observation on the anchors found in the Pontus may still give somewhat more clarity.

In the early eighties of this century the stone anchors and the stone-stocks found on the Bulgarian coasts of the Pontus have been examined²⁶. In the report is stated that 139 out of 150 investigated stone anchors were made of stone occurring in Bulgaria and that for 122 of them it is absolutely certain that they were made of "local" material. Only 11 anchors were demonstrably made of stone not occurring in Bulgaria²⁷. This observation led to the conclusion that the numbers show that the coast between Nessebâr and Michurin was a center for

²³ Thucydides, IV.cix.4.

²⁴ Samsaris, *op. cit.*, p. 263; for the identification cf. Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 10; p. 65.

²⁵ I mean by this a find in a set context. Individual bronze age finds are also known from the Bulgarian coast of which two ingots (oxhides), found at Kaliakra and Cerkovo, are among the most interesting. Cf. Toncheva, G., *Thracia Pontica à l'âge du Bronze Récent, Thracia Pontica 1* (1982), p. 176-182.

²⁶ Ivanov, Z., e.a., Les résultats préliminaires de l'analyse pétrographique des ancres en pierre et des jas du littoral bulgare de la mer noire, *Thracia Pontica 2* (1985), p. 135-150.

²⁷ Ivanov e.a., *op. cit.*, p. 138.

large-scale fabrication of stone anchors during a long period²⁸; consequently, it also must have been a centre of seafaring in those days.

Quite different is the situation with the stone-stocks. The majority of stocks is made of stones not occurring in Bulgaria and must be considered as allochthonous²⁹. As for lead-stocks, no research in this field *e.g.* by spectro-analysis has been carried through in Bulgaria at the time being³⁰.

It is tempting to combine these data with the results of the review of evidence for the Aegean on Eusebius' list. Bearing in mind the chronology of anchors we may suppose that, from the Late Bronze Age to about the eighth or seventh century BC, probably with emphasis on the earlier period, Thracians have frequently sailed the sea, but gradually left this activity to other people, like the Greeks. The introduction in the area of Apollonia Pontica of the stone-stocked anchor and the chronology of this type of anchor fit neatly with the presumed date of the foundation of Apollonia Pontica by Milesians, about 610 BC³¹. Whether the Thracians have—at any time during that given period—gained a real thalassocracy, in the Aegean or in the Pontus, will remain an open question until more evidence is available. Until then, we have no reason at all to doubt Eusebius' list as far as the Thracians are concerned.

²⁸ Ivanov *e.a.*, *op. cit.*, p. 140; based on other evidence also Lazarov, M., *Localités pré-grecques sur le littoral de la mer noire au sud de Balkan, Thracia* 3 (1974), p. 107-113, p. 113 concluded that seafaring around modern Sozopol was, in prehistoric times, more structural than incidental.

²⁹ Ivanov *e.a.*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

³⁰ Cf. discussion on anchors, *Thracia Pontica* 3 (1986), p. 448-9.

³¹ Cf. Danov, *RE, s.v.*; Short, G.A., *The Siting of Greek Colonies on the Black Sea Coasts of Bulgaria and Romania, AAALiverpool* 24 (1937), p. 142; Tzaneva, M., *Thrako-Griechische Beziehungen in der frühen Periode von der Entwicklung von Apollonia Pontica, Thracia Pontica* 1 (1982); Hind, J.G.F., *Greek and Barbarian Peoples on the Shores of the Black Sea, Arch. Rep.* 30 (1983-4), p. 72; Isaac, *op. cit.*, p. 242-4.

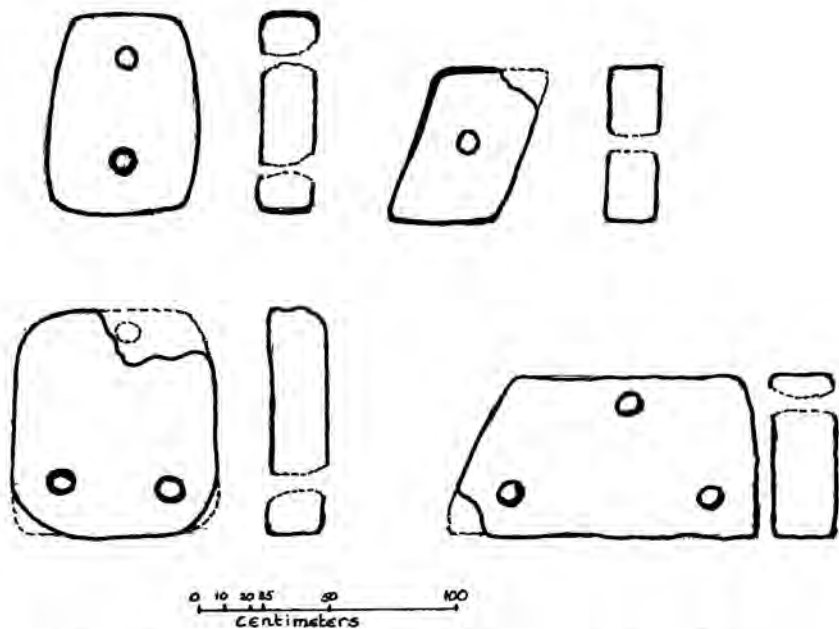


Fig. 1. Some stone anchors from the Sozopol Archaeological Museum.

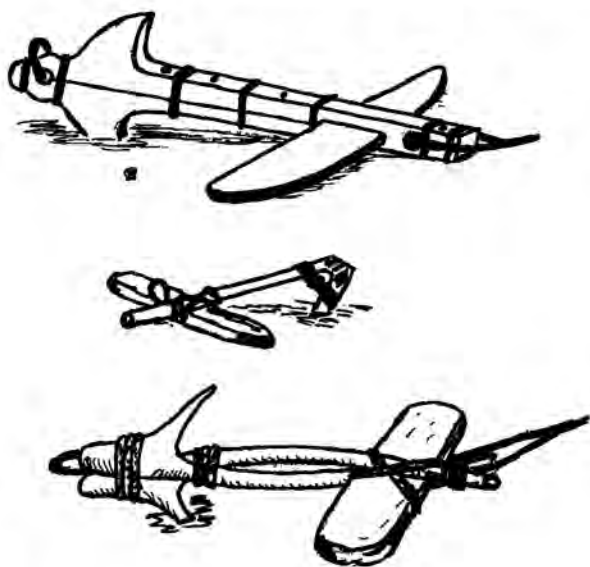


Fig. 2. Proposed reconstruction of stone-stocked anchor, after G. Kapitän, "On Stone Stocked Greek Anchors as Found in Thracia Pontica: Suggested Reconstruction of their Wooden Parts", *Thracia Pontica* 1 (1982), p. 290-300, figs. 5, 6 and 7.



Fig. 5. Thrace and the Aegean: location of sites mentioned in the text.
1. Naxos; 2. Apollonia Pontica (modern Sozopol); 3. Troy; 4. Serrhai
(modern Siris); 5. Thasos; 6. Antisara (modern Kalamitsa).