
ON THE NAME OF MESSAMBRIA PONTICA

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ABSTRACT:

The present text deals with the etymology of the name of one of the Western Pontic colonies, Messambria Pontica. Although it has been a topic of discussion since antiquity, the problem is still not considered resolved, with debates continuing among modern scholars. Many questions remain unanswered, such as whether the name is a single word or a compound, whether it is of Greek or Thracian origin, or whether it is composed of a combination of two Thracian glosses, two Greek glosses, or a mixture of Thracian and Greek elements. In fact, the etymology of the name sheds light on the earliest period of the colony's history, which in turn raises additional challenges for scholars to address.

REZUMAT: DESPRE NUMELE MESSAMBRIA PONTICA

Acest articol analizează etimologia numelui uneia dintre coloniile vest-pontice, și anume Messambria Pontica. Deși a fost subiect de discuție încă din antichitate, această problemă nu este considerată rezolvată nici acum, iar dezbaterile continuă și acum. Multe întrebări rămân fără răspuns, cum ar fi dacă numele este alcătuit dintr-un singur cuvânt sau este compus, dacă este de origine greacă sau tracică, sau dacă este compus dintr-o combinație de două glose tracice, două glose grecești, sau un amestec de elemente tracice și grecești. De fapt, etimologia numelui aruncă lumină asupra perioadei celei mai timpurii din istoria coloniei, ceea ce, la rândul său, ridică probleme suplimentare pe care specialiștii să le abordeze.

KEY WORDS: etymology, city-name, west Pontic colony, Thracians, Greeks.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: etimologie, numele orașului, colonie vest-pontică, traci, greci.

The name of Messambria Pontica has been debated since antiquity and, despite this, the question remains open or at least a consensus has not yet been achieved in the scholarship.¹ This is not surprising since the various sources seem to provide information that initiates discussions, which are often contradictory. The name of each *politeia*, however, is of great importance for revealing the beginning of the polis itself and especially for establishing the ideological base of the claims of the local elite and the political propaganda undertaken accordingly. Messambria Pontica was not an exception to this rule, but even may be pointed out as a very good example of it, as in its name the clarification and veneration of the eponymous *oikistes*, who has been called in some ancient sources and modern studies as Melsas, is assumed to be closely embodied.² Some skepticism, however, may be expressed as the eponymous *oikistes* of Μετα[μβρία] or Μεσ(σ)α[μβρία] as the colony was named on its earliest coins³ should be named as *Messa*. Unsurprisingly, in the third quarter of 1st century AD Pliny the Elder points exactly that name.⁴ As the transformation of -σσ- into -λς- and vice versa seems unlikely,⁵ it is suggested that Μελσημβρία⁶ or Μέλσα καὶ βρία⁷ would belong to the first, Thracian name of the city, before the Hellenic colonization undertaken by the

¹ See the review of all ancient written sources and comments in IGBulg. I, 255-257.

² On this see most recently in modern historiography in Karayotov 2009, 20-21. The ancient narratives will be discussed in the next when appropriated.

³ See the coins in Karayotov 2009.

⁴ Plin. Nat. hist. 4.45: nunc in ora Mesembria, Anchialum, ubi Messa fuerat.

⁵ Nawotka 1994, 325.

⁶ FGrH 90, fr. 43.

⁷ IGBulg I², 345.

settling down from the colonists from Byzantium and Kalchedon.⁸ This may reveal the mythologization of the origins of the city connecting it with the genealogies of the local Thracian tribes⁹ by using the name of mythical Thracian personage. However, this does not explain the name ΜεΤα[μβρία] or Μεσ(σ)α[μβρία] which is the goal of this study.

The name of the *politeia* is attested in various forms in different media through the centuries. The Dorian name Μεσ(σ)αμβρία or ΜεΤαμβρία can be found on the earliest coins of the colony¹⁰ and determines the city-ethnic which is presented on the epigraphic monuments as Μεσσαμβριανῶν,¹¹ which lasted at least until third century BC when the double σσ was replaced by a simple σ. There are also some Ionian forms such as Μεσαμβρία,¹² *koine* Μεσημβρία,¹³ but also Μεσεμβρία¹⁴ as some of the forms are unique.¹⁵ Indeed, this may indicate the level of knowledge or the origin of the stone-cutter as well as the origin of the author of the narrative source, who wrote the name of Messambria after hearing it. As some of the ancient authors such as for example Strabo and Nikolaos of Damascus used sources that have not reached us – local or such revealing the local believes, it may be possible that the name in fact reflect the foundation story or myth. The case with the *oikistes* Mena and the Μεγαρέων ἄποικος mentioned in Strabo may be some of those cases.¹⁶ In the next paragraphs we will use this presumption when studying the etymology of Messambria Pontica.

The scholars are divided into two groups when studying the etymology of the name of Messambria Pontica: those who accept it as a single word and those who believe that it is a composition of two words: both Greek, both Thracian, or mixed, one Greek and one Thracian.

The earliest written evidence known up to now is Herodotus, who assigns it to the first group as it is presented as Μεσαμβρία. It is found in two places in his History that treat the beginning of the *politeia*:

Hdt. 4.93: οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὸν Σαλμυδησὸν ἔχοντες Θρήικες καὶ ὑπὲρ Ἀπολλωνίης τε καὶ Μεσαμβρίας πόλιος οἰκημένοι, καλεῦμενοι δὲ Κυρμιάναι καὶ Νιψαῖοι, ἀμαχητὶ σφέας αὐτοῦς παρέδοσαν Δαρείῳ;

Hdt. 6.33.2: Βυζάντιοι μὲν νῦν καὶ οἱ πέρηθε Καλχηδόνιοι οὐδ' ὑπέμειναν ἐπιπλέοντας τοὺς Φοίνικας, ἀλλ' οἴχοντο ἀπολιπόντες τὴν σφετέρην ἔσω ἐς τὸν Εὐξείνιον πόντον, καὶ ἐνθαῦτα πόλιν Μεσαμβρίην οἴκησαν.

Herodotus' notice led some scholars to speculate whether its meaning could derive from the Ionian word for 'midday' and 'at noon',¹⁷ which may indicate the time of the day when the *apoikia* was founded,¹⁸ with the completion of the ritual for this by the *oikistes*. Another possibility is suggested by B. Head, who believed that the name of the *politeia* might have appeared in the terms of the Greek language as 'mesameria,' which would mean 'midday sun place' or 'site of the noon-day sun',¹⁹ which may have impacted the iconography of the Messambrian coinage, with the use of the four-spoked wheel on the reverse type which is commonly explained as a solar symbol and therefore may be regarded as a visual pun on the name of the *politeia*.²⁰ It seems, however, although the word μεσημβρία is linked with the sun, but also with the stars,²¹ that the solution to the problem should be sought in another direction, as Messambria neither appeared as Mesameria in any ancient source, nor did the rayed wheel appear on the reverse of the first coins of the *politeia* with the quadripartite incuse square.²²

⁸ Karayotov 2009, 21.

⁹ See for this Robu 2014, 320.

¹⁰ See the coins in Karayotov 2009.

¹¹ See for example IGBulg. I², 307 (281-277 BC).

¹² Hdt. 4.93, 6.33.2.

¹³ e.g. Ps.-Skylax 67.

¹⁴ IGBulg. I² 345.

¹⁵ See the list of all attested forms in Velkov 1969, 27–28.

¹⁶ Strabo 7.6.1: εἶτα τὸ Αἴμιον ὄρος μέχρι τῆς δεῦρο θαλάττης διήκον: εἶτα Μεσημβρία Μεγαρέων ἄποικος, πρότερον δὲ Μενεβρία, οἶον Μένα πόλις, τοῦ κτίσαντος Μένα καλουμένου, τῆς δὲ πόλεως βρίας καλουμένης θρακιστί.

¹⁷ For the references of μεσαμβρία / μεσημβρία with this meaning including in Herodotus – see Liddle-Scott 1995, 1105-1106. See also Detschew 1976, 296.

¹⁸ Dechev 1954, 368.

¹⁹ HN 2, 278.

²⁰ Hind 2007, 24.

²¹ Liddle-Scott 1995, 1106.

²² Karayotov 1994, 6; SNG BM Black Sea 265.

Another possibility was suggested by M. Bratchkova and subsequently accepted by M. Blavatskaya, who emphasized the meaning of Μεσσαμβρίη in geographical terms, i.e., as “south”²³ or “southern”.²⁴ As noted in the Liddel-Scott Lexicon, Herodotus himself uses the word Μεσσαμβρίη in a couple of cases in this meaning,²⁵ which may be the case also with West Pontic Μεσσαμβρίη. By assuming this,²⁶ it would seem that the name of Messambria Pontica may well have appeared as a geographical landmark of another Hellenic *apoikia*, which both scholars believed was the Tauric Chersonesos.²⁷ The latter is known to have been founded by the Megarian colony of Herakleia²⁸ and, being located north of Messambria, would fit perfectly the proposed thesis. What is, however, a decisive weakness of this plausible idea is the discrepancy that one would face when dealing with the chronology, as it is clear now that the northern *apoikia* was in fact established later than Messambria, during the fourth century BC, a presumption based mainly on the lack of imports of the preceding century.²⁹ Even if there was an earlier *emporion* that existed before the *apoikia*, its foundation date would be relatively later when comparing with the Messambrian.³⁰ So, the proposed example by M. Brachkova cannot be accepted without hesitation.

The proposed idea may be applied, however, with a different example. On the Western Black Sea coast, north of Messambria, another Megarian colony was founded whose beginning dates back to the time of the founding of Messambria or even a bit earlier, depending on the years we assume for the founding of the latter, with the dates between 519-512 BC³¹ or most probably in 497 BC or shortly after.³² This Megarian colony is the only one besides Messambria that was a Doric colony on the Western Pontic Sea coast and it is assumed that it was founded in general at the end of sixth century BC – Callatis.³³ Indeed, Messambria is located south of Callatis, which corresponds to the description of “southern city”. No matter which date one chooses for the foundation of Messambria Pontica, in both cases the *politeia* can be considered as the ‘southern’ city in the context of the Kalchedonian colonization along the Western Pontic coast pursued in the early fifth century BC.

In regard to these observations the suggested idea is now more plausible, but it seems to me unlikely because of two reasons. First, we actually do not know in what meaning Herodotus used the word, as in his History the name of Mesambria as Μεσσαμβρίη was used also when describing a polis located on the North Aegean coast.³⁴ This polis, which is believed to have been founded by Samothrace or at least closely related to it, being a part of the Σαμοθρηκία τείχεα, is located in to the east, west and even north when comparing with other Greek *politeies*, but not the south. If we accept that city-name reveals the geographical location of the *apoikia* in comparison with the location of her metropolis, i.e., Samothrace, it should be regarded indisputably as the northern rather than the southern polis. The resemblance of the city-name of Pontic Messambria to that of Aegean Messambria and the geographical location of the latter when comparing with the other Greek cities, including her metropolis, is a clear sign to me that the idea of Messambria of being the ‘southern’ polis should not be considered. Besides, the Greek practice in these cases is to locate the newly founded *apoikia* near rivers, regions, distinguished local landmarks, and even with the meaning of ‘middle’ but with the addition of ‘polis’, as we will see below; the name consisting of just the geographical direction is not to be found. It seems that the meaning of the city-name of Messambria Pontica should be studied in a different aspect.

With one exception, the proposed etymology of the name of Messambria Pontica concerns the “city”. The exception is the idea of J. Hind who suggests that the city-name of the colony is composed by two Greek glosses and connect with a famous stanza from Homer’s Iliad:

μέσσην κἄκ κεφαλὴν: ἦ δ’ ἄνδιχα πᾶσα κεάσθη ἐν κόρυθι βριαρῆ³⁵

²³ Brachkova 1922, 12; Dechev 1954, 368; Liddell-Scott 1995, 1106.

²⁴ Liddell-Scott 1995, 1106.

²⁵ Liddell-Scott 1995, 1106. Hdt. 1.6: ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσσαμβρίας μεταξὺ Συρίων τε καὶ Παφλαγόνων; 7.113.2: τὰ δὲ πρὸς μεσσαμβρίην τείνουσα ἐξ αὐτὸν τὸν Στρυμόνα.

²⁶ K. Vlahov is against this possibility – Vlahov 1986, 176.

²⁷ Brachkova 1922, 12; Blavatskaya 1952, 21-22; Gyuzelev 2009, 80-81.

²⁸ Avram et al. 2004, 942.

²⁹ Avram et al. 2004, 942.

³⁰ Kats 1990, 97-111 suggests that its existence lasted no longer than two generations.

³¹ Boteva-Boyanova 2000, 45; Robu 2014, 312; Zahrt 2015, 37, 38.

³² Oppermann 2004, 16; Veligianni-Terzi 2004, 56-57; Avram 2012, 208; Robu 2014, 314; see most recently in Topalilov 2021, 87-105.

³³ Avram et al. 2004, 934; on Calltis and its foundation see also Avram 2007, 244-246.

³⁴ Hdt 7.108.2: παραμείβετο δὲ πορευόμενος ἐκ Δορίσκου πρῶτα μὲν τὰ Σαμοθρηκία τείχεα, τῶν ἐσχάτη πεπόλισται πρὸς ἐσπέρης πόλις τῆ οὐνομα ἐστὶ Μεσσαμβρίη. ἔχεται δὲ ταύτης Θασίων πόλις Στρώμη, διὰ δὲ σφῶων τοῦ μέσου Λίσος ποταμὸς διαρρέει, ὃς τότε οὐκ ἀντέσχε τὸ ὕδωρ παρέχων τῷ Ξέρξῳ στρατῷ ἀλλ’ ἐπέλιπε. On the polis – see Avram et al. 2004, 880.

³⁵ Hom. Il. 16.412-413.

Hind believes that in this case we clearly may observe the phrase μέσσην and βριαρή, ie. ‘Center’ and ‘strong’, which enclose the words ‘head’ and ‘helmet’. Therefore, the Greeks were called *Mesambrianoi*. Given the popularity of Homer’s work, he suggests that this passage was used by the engravers of Messambrian coins when designing the obverse side of those coins with the frontal Corinthian helmet.³⁶ By this, a visual attempt was made to represent the name of the *politeia* to the local community,³⁷ which may imply that the etymology of the city-name of Messambria Pontica should be some sort of ‘a strong center’.

Hind’s idea is attractive and could explain the existence of the Corinthian helmet on the early Messambrian coins which eventually become the mark of the *politeia*. It is, however, some of the coins under consideration that might put the idea in question with the introduction of two ‘dots’ into the eye openings, which gives I. Karayotov reason to believe that, in these cases, a certain character is represented, according to him, the mythical founder Melsas, rather than just military weapons.³⁸ It is very likely, however, that the Messambrian elite saw the opportunity provided by the coincidence with the passage in Homer’s *Iliad* to establish a firm ideological base of its supremacy and ambitions, which is revealed by the most propagandistic media such as coinage. And this is not the only passage in Homer’s *Iliad* that the Messambrian elite may refer to, but by this it joined the group of Greek city elites that used Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* according to their needs as inspiration for the creation of local myths related to the beginning of the certain *apoikia*. Hellenic cities in Thrace are no exception, and a very good example for this is the case of Maron, the eponymous *oikistes* of Maroneia, presented as a priest of Apollo in the *Odyssey*.³⁹

In the rest of the cases proposed, the etymology of the city-name of Messambria Pontica is inextricably linked with “town” - βρία.⁴⁰ This finds arguments in the passages in Strabo and Nicholaos of Damascus:

εἶτα Μεσημβρία Μεγαρέων ἄποικος, πρότερον δὲ Μενεβρία, οἶον Μένα πόλις, τοῦ κτίσαντος Μένα καλουμένου, τῆς δὲ πόλεως βρίας καλουμένης θρακιστί.⁴¹

v. Μεσημβρία: ἐκλήθη ἀπὸ Μέλσου βρια γὰρ τὴν πόλιν φασὶ Θραῖκες ὡς οὖν Σηλυμβρία ἢ τοῦ Σήλους πόλις, Πολτυμβρία ἢ Πόλυτος [πόλις], οὕτω Μελημβρία ἢ Μέλσου πόλις, καὶ διὰ τὸ εὐφρονότερον λέγεται Μεσημβρία.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, the discussions among the scholars are focused on the meaning of the first glossa Μεσ(σ)αμ. For example, according to D. Dechev the *Messa*, mentioned in Plin. H.N 4, 45⁴³ should derive from the Greek word μέσ(σ)α, which is a designation of land, which ‘divides the rushing sea to the shore into parts’. Thus, Μεσσαμβρία should mean ‘a city located on both sides of the sea’,⁴⁴ i.e., probably surrounded on both sides by the sea. Given the location of the *apoikia* itself on a peninsula jutting out into the sea, the proposed interpretation could find support in the peculiarities of its geographical location and thus its name would actually reflect the geographical specifics of its location. In this case, it seems that the name of the *politeia* contains Hellenic and Thracian words, respectively.

Another interpretation is advanced by Vl. Georgiev according to who the old form of the name of Μεσσαμβρία should be restored as Μελισσάων βρία and should be linked with the Greek μέλισσα and in particular the Attic word μέλιττα with the meaning of ‘bee’. Therefore, the name of the *politeia* should have the meaning of ‘the Bee town’ or ‘city of bees’, and in this case we are dealing with the totem name of the local Thracian tribe which was interpreted as ‘bees’, and the Thracians were called as Μελσαι[αι]. Following this logic, Georgiev is also inclined to see a Thracian correspondence of the Hellenic μέλισσα in μέλσα in the famous funeral inscription of Julia of Messambria dated to the middle of the second century AD in whose epitaph ἀπὸ/[Μ(?)]έλσα καὶ βρία is mentioned⁴⁵ which should not be translated as from ‘Melsa and town’ as commonly accepted, but it should be rather as ‘from (Thracian words) bee and city’.⁴⁶

³⁶ See the coins in Karayotov 1994, 18-19, 79-82 (catalogue nos. 1-140).

³⁷ Hind 2007, 24.

³⁸ See Karayotov 2009, 20.

³⁹ *Od.* 9 197-198.

⁴⁰ On the βρία as the explicit Thracian word for ‘town’ – see Detschew 1976², 86; Georgiev 1966, 175; Georgiev 1977, 13, 22, 41, 71, 99, 103, 168, 169; Velkova 1986, 48-50; Paliga 1987, 23-24; Ognenova-Marinova 1991, 133-136.

⁴¹ Strabo 7.6.1.

⁴² FGrH 90, fr. 43.

⁴³ *Nat. hist.* 4.45.

⁴⁴ Dechev 1954, 369-370.

⁴⁵ *IGBulg I*², 345.

⁴⁶ Georgiev 1967, 6.

The most numerous interpretations, however, concerns the both glosses as Thracians. Thus, K. Vlahov believes that the name Μεσ(σ)αμβρία derives from the combination of two Thracian words: ‘Μέλσαμ’ and ‘βρία’ which would mean ‘island’ and ‘sea’ respectively. By this, the name of Messambria should be translated or meant as ‘a city located on a peninsula destroying by the sea’. By this, a combination of the geographical location of the settlement and its topographical features and the destructive role of the sea is made.⁴⁷

The evidence of Strabo and Nicholaos of Damascus, transmitted by Stephen of Byzantium, from 20-12 BC reveal that at that time in Messambria there was a tradition with two city-names coexisted. One of them consists the name of the legendary founder of Messambria, Μέλσας or Μένα and the second one was Μεσημβρία. As the official name of the *politeia* is Μεσσαμβρία / Μεσαμβρία which was transformed by Nicolaos of Damascus into Μεσημβρία, we may assume that Μελημβρία was in fact a local, Thracian name of the city which due to its sound proximity with the original may have lived as such for some time more or less as a colloquial speech.⁴⁸ As a matter of fact, Messambria is not the only such case in Thrace: Philippopolis, for example, had three names at the same time: Greek, Thracian, and official Roman, as follows respectively Φιλιπποπόλις, Pulpudeva,⁴⁹ and Trimontium,⁵⁰ and later a new one – Eumolpiada was added for some reasons.⁵¹ What also makes an impression is that, unlike the tradition that was paved by Strabo with his statement about Μενεβρία which derives from Μένα πόλις⁵² and which is in fact not accepted in the modern literature, but gained wide acceptance in the medieval literature,⁵³ it is not the case with the Μέλσα tradition, which, according to the sources known up to now, does not exceed the Roman period and the aforementioned funeral stela of Julia of Messambria.

Before continuing, one would recall the words of Alexandrian lexicographer Hesychios about βρία,⁵⁴ which may reveal that the earliest Hellenic settlement might be interpreted also as an ‘agricultural settlement’.⁵⁵ If this is correct, it may reveal the nature of the initial settlement as an *emporion* that was later turned into an *apoikia* by preserving the old name. As the timespan between the two initiatives was very short, it might not have left any traces in the sources and may explain the information about the different colonists that were involved, namely from Kalchedon, Byzantium, and Megara.⁵⁶ If this etymology is correct, the name of Μεσσαμβρία would be in fact composited by the Greek words, one of which – βρία, accepted in the Thracian language.

The interpretation of the name Μεσσαμβρία as a combination of Μέσσοσ and βρία may reveal the origin of the colonists of the earliest settlement.⁵⁷ As the Homeric Μέσσοσ, which is mostly Aeolian, is related to the Ionian-Attic Μέσοσ,⁵⁸ it may reveal that the name of the *politeia* could actually mean ‘the middle, intermediate bria’.

A certain Μεσσά πόλις is found in Laconia by Pausanias, who describes it as a polis equipped with a port.⁵⁹ It is probably that polis is also mentioned in Strabo’s presentation of Homer’s Catalogue of Ships.⁶⁰ As the name is very similar to that of our Μεσσαμβρία, one may speculate about a certain link between them, as, for instance, with the meaning of ‘a port city,’⁶¹ or it may just be by chance and in this case we are simply dealing with pure coincidence of the city-name of two *poleis* in the Hellenic *koine*. In fact, the Laconian Μεσσά πόλις is also located in ‘the middle’, ie. between Hippola and Oetylus both of which seem to be older than Μεσσά πόλις.⁶²

⁴⁷ Vlahov 1986, 176; Gyuzelev 2009, 81.

⁴⁸ The idea that the *politeia* has been named in various ways, but not among its citizens, but by its citizens and the rest of the Hellenes is advanced by Dechev – Dechev 1954, 367-368 with the local coinage and epigraphic monuments contributing to the former while the literary sources and epigraphic monuments found abroad to the latter.

⁴⁹ Iordanes Rom, 221.

⁵⁰ Plin. NH. 4, 11, 41.

⁵¹ Amm. Marc. 22.2.2: Filippopolim petit, Eumolpiada veterem; 26.10.4. On this phenomenon – see Topalilov 2018, 217-230.

⁵² Strabo 7.6.1.

⁵³ Theophanes Continuatus, Ps.-Symeon, De Leone Basilii filio 13B, Georgios Continuatus M.831 10, discussed in Diller 1950, 241-245 and Navotka, 321-322.

⁵⁴ Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon 321, 23: βριαν την επ’ αγροϊς κόμην.

⁵⁵ See the comments in IGBulg. I², 1970 and Alexandrescu & Morintz 1982.

⁵⁶ Another example of Megarian initiative which ended up with the foundation of an *apoikia* in whose name the word ‘βρία’ was included is the aforementioned Σηλυμβρία – see Isaak 1986, 199.

⁵⁷ For the lack of nasal ‘μ’ can found explanation in one of the rules of the Old Greek language with the disappearance of the nasal consonants before spirants – see for this Schwyzer 1939, 213-214. For other examples on the Western Black Sea coast see Galabov 1957, 407-409 with the discussion of the name of neighboring Anchialos.

⁵⁸ Liddel-Scott 1996, 1107.

⁵⁹ Paus. 3.25.9: ὀλίγον δὲ ἀπωτέρω Μέσσα πόλις καὶ λιμὴν.

⁶⁰ Strab. 8.5: τῶν δ’ ὑφ’ Ὀμήρου καταλεγομένων τὴν μὲν Μέσσην οὐδαμοῦ δείκνυσθαί φασι: Μεσσάαν δ’ οὐ τῆς χώρας εἶναι μέρος ἀλλὰ τῆς Σπάρτης.

⁶¹ On the ports of Messambria – see for example Ognenova-Marinova 1994, 139-142.

⁶² Paus. 3.25.9 – 10: ἐντεῦθεν ἀποσχόντι τριάκοντα σταδίουσ Θυρίδες ἄκρα Ταινάρου καὶ πόλεωσ ἐρείπια Ἴππόλασ ἐστίν, ἐν δὲ αὐτοῖσ Αθηναῖσ ἱερὸν Ἴππολαΐτιδοσ: ὀλίγον δὲ ἀπωτέρω Μέσσα πόλις καὶ λιμὴν. ἀπὸ τούτου στάδια τοῦ λιμένος πεντήκοντά

It seems that the practice with the ‘middle city’ gained some acceptance within the Hellenic koine with numerous *poleis* also named as Μεσσή πόλις.⁶³ The analysis proposed above suggests that Messambria Pontica may have also belonged to the group of these cities which is best supported by its geographical location being situated between two earlier established Dorian colonies on this side of Black sea - that of Byzantium from where the colonists started their journey, and Callatis, which was at that time the northernmost point reached by the Dorians in the colonization of the Pontus Euxinos. As the newly founded *apoikia* is situated between them it is logical that it might have assumed the name of ‘intermediate, middle settlement / city’.

The historical narratives, however, and especially Strabo as well as archaeological evidence may imply for a more complex history. The archaeological excavations in modern Nessebar, where ancient Messambria is located, might reveal the existence of a possible Ionian pre-Messambrian settlement, based on the found fragments of the Rhodes-Ionian, Attic⁶⁴ and Thasian pottery⁶⁵ as well as a terracotta of Aphrodite and head of a kore dated to the second half/end of the 6th century BC,⁶⁶ and an antefix dated to the last quarter of the 6th-beginning of the 5th century BC.⁶⁷ This settlement might have been an *emporion*, or a trade-place of the colonists with the local Thracian tribes, a settlement that was a temporary and away from solid foundation and function. We even may go further and suggest that the colonists came from neighboring Apollonia, the only colony in the region that was mighty enough to stop any other settlements. In fact, the founding of Messambria is a mirror image of that of Apollonia, but on the other end of today’s Burgas Bay. The lack of any resistance of this settlement by the mighty Ionian Apollonia reveals that this action was agreed upon with her. The new settlement was also located between two Ionian colonies - that of Apollonia in the south and that of Odessos in the north, established in ca. 610 BC⁶⁸ and between ca. 593/587 BC respectively,⁶⁹ both colonized by Miletos which suggests the interpretation of the Ionian Μεσαμβρία as the “middle city”. The use of the *sampi* in the official nomenclature of the colony presented as META (messa) on its earliest coins, clearly reveals the Ionian character of its founders.

The short analysis proposed in this text suggests a rather complex early history of Messambria Pontica which reflected on the name of the colony and political propaganda issued by its elite or part of it. The colonization seems to have started after the Scythian campaign in Darius I in 513-512 BC with the arriving of a small group of colonists from neighboring Apollonia in order to establish a trade point with the local Thracian tribes, in this case - Cyrmianae and Nipsaei,⁷⁰ which reflected on the name of the settlement as ‘intermediate settlement’, located between Apollonia and Odessos with *βρία* stressing on its function as an ‘agricultural settlement or *emporion*. This is the tradition presented by Strabo. Whether this settlement was abandoned at a certain point is unclear, but probably. With the arriving of the colonists from Kalchedon and Byzantium in 497 BC the solid colony was established which seems to have inherited the name of the previous settlement as ‘intermediate, middle settlement / city’ turned into Doric dialect. The name of the colony allowed a close link with the Μεσσή πόλις in Strabo’s presentation of Homer’s Catalogue of Ships to be established, and by this to make another connection with the victorious Hellenes in Homer’s Iliad that would provide the elite of the newly founded *apoikia* a very strong argument in their future claims for a prestigious status among the other Hellenic *apoikiai*.

ἔστι καὶ ἑκατὸν ἐπὶ Οἴτυλον: ὁ δὲ ἦρωσ ἀφ’ οὗ τῆ πόλει τὸ ὄνομα ἐγένετο, Ἀργεῖος τὸ ἀνεκάθεν, Ἀμφιάνακτος υἱὸς ὦν τοῦ Ἀντιμάχου.

⁶³ A certain Μεσσή πόλις is also known from Crete – see Hoffmann 1841, 1327, 1334.

⁶⁴ Reho 2005, 33-35; Bozhkova 2017, 41.

⁶⁵ Bozhkova 2009, 143-145.

⁶⁶ Ognenova-Marinova 2005, 56.

⁶⁷ Ognenova-Marinova 1991, 28, n. 28.

⁶⁸ Avram et al. 2004, 931.

⁶⁹ Avram et al. 2004, 936.

⁷⁰ Hdt. 4.93.1: πρὶν δὲ ἀπικέσθαι ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰστρὸν, πρῶτους αἰρέει Γέτας τοὺς ἀθανατίζοντας. οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὸν Σαλμυδησσὸν ἔχοντες Θρήκες καὶ ὑπὲρ Ἀπολλωνίης τε καὶ Μεσαμβρίας πόλιος οἰκημένοι, καλούμενοι δὲ Κυρμιάται καὶ Νιψαῖοι, ἀμαχητὶ σφῆας αὐτοὺς παρέδοσαν Δαρείῳ.

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