

MARE THRACIUM: INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Searching the research literature for the geographical term Mare Thracium, the results remain feeble. It can be found in the title of a monograph published by Alexander Conze in 1860 namely the »Reise auf den Inseln des Thrakischen Meeres«. His primarily epigraphic and topographical research brought him to Thasos, Samothrace, Imbros and Lemnos in 1859¹.

Lemnos forms the southern boundary of the Thracian Sea, its extent to the west, north and east can be defined by the coastlines. The latter extends from the east coast of Chalkidiki with the Athos peninsula to the west coast of the Thracian Chersonese.

This is in agreement with Strabon's description of the Thracian Sea: »Eratosthenes ill-naturedly misrepresents him as saying in an absolute sense, that the west wind blows from Thrace, whereas he is not speaking in an absolute sense at all, but merely of the meeting of contrary winds near the bay of Melas, on the Thracian sea, itself a part of the Aegean. For where Thrace forms a kind of promontory, where it borders Macedonia, it takes a turn to the south-west and projects into the ocean, and from this point, it seems to the inhabitants of Thasos, Lemnos, Imbros, Samothracia, and the surrounding sea, that the west winds blow«². In Herodotus, however, the Thracian Sea appears as *Threikon pelagos* in a somewhat surprising context, namely much further south in the localisation of Artemision, where the famous naval battle had taken place in 480 BC: »Artemisium is where the wide Thracian Sea contracts until the passage between the island of Sciathus and the mainland of Magnesia is but narrow«³.

In addition, Pliny the Elder refers to the Macedonian Sea as a term used by the Romans: »The Romans include all these seas under two names, – the Macedonian, in those parts where it touches the coasts of Macedonia or Thrace, and the Grecian where it washes the shores of Greece«⁴.

Remarkably, the Thracian Sea (**figs 1-2**) is often not perceived as one unit in Classical studies today⁵. This is certainly also due to the modern demarcation of the national borders in the region. Since 1924, the Hebros river has formed the border between Greece and Turkey. This was certainly responsible for the fact that Greek Classical studies were primarily focused on the Greek section of the coastline and the associated islands⁶. However, it should also be noted that north-eastern Greece has not been a priority objective of archaeological studies compared to the extensive research conducted in the southern parts of the country. The ancient spatial organisation with the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Thracia already provided for the demarcation of borders within this region. This points to the fact that the riparians of the Mare Thracium were not exclusively Thracians. Independent of the modern spatial order, the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* has covered the coasts and islands of the Mare Thracium in four volumes⁷.

To appreciate this settlement and traffic area in its entirety, a workshop was held in Mainz in 2016, the contributions to which form the basis for this conference volume. It took place as part of the project »The Thracian harbour city Ainos in Roman and Byzantine times – the development of a hub in a changing environment«, funded by the Priority Research Programme 1630 of the German Research Foundation »Harbours from the Roman period to the Middle Ages«⁸.

The landscape of this area (**figs 1-2**) reveals some remarkable conditions that influenced its development. First of all, a marginal location in the extreme north of the Aegean can be noted. While the narrow peninsulas in the case of Athos and the Thracian Chersonese provided hardly any hinterland for the cities, the

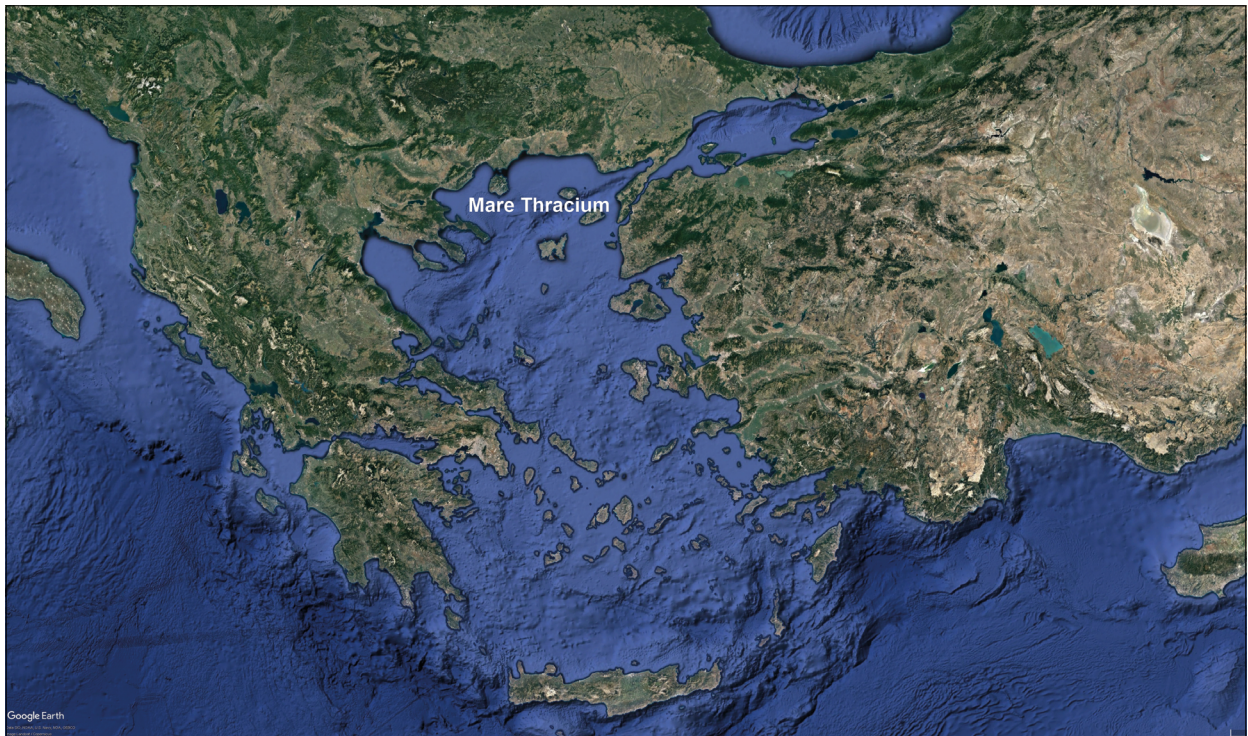


Fig. 1 Location of the Mare Thracium in the Aegean Sea. – (Satellite picture Google Earth).



Fig. 2 Mare Thracium – selection of cities and landscapes cited in the contributions. – (Map Th. Schmidts / K. Hölzl, RGZM).

settlements in the intervening coastal section were able to expand their territories inland. However, Thasos and Samothrace also had, at least temporary, possessions on the mainland. The wealth of mineral resources, such as the silver mines on Thasos or the Thasian and Samothracian marble, was important as well as the rivers, such as Strymon and Hebros, which provided a connection to the Thracian inland. The climate in the

Mare Thracium area is much harsher than in the southern sections of the Aegean, as it is significantly influenced by the northern hinterland.

The Apostle Paul's journey by ship from Alexandria Troas to Neapolis is well known. Apart from that, the written sources reveal little about seafaring in the Mare Thracium. It is therefore important to fill this gap with an analysis of the nautical conditions, as the contribution by Ronald Bockius and Ioannis Triantafillidis does, reconstructing the conditions for seafaring based on wind and sea-current data.

The hitherto largely unknown remains of ship cargoes are presented in the contribution by Stefanos Paliompeis. Although the number of sites investigated is not particularly large in comparison with other areas of the Aegean, pottery recovered by fishermen and confiscations of illegally recovered cargo remain complete the picture. Thus, remains of cargoes from the Classical to the Byzantine period are being presented. Also noteworthy is the Early Bronze Age axe hoard from Mesi, which was discovered during underwater research but was probably originally hidden on land.

The development of the harbour cities and coastal settlements on the mainland and the islands (**fig. 2**) can be assessed much better than the evidence of seafaring in the Mare Thracium area. However, if we begin our consideration in the west with the east coast of the Athos Peninsula the state of research is low, which is certainly also related to the special political status of this area. Of the three literarily known cities of Dion, Olophyxos and Akrothooi, no remains of harbour facilities could be detected during underwater research yet, even in more recent investigations. The same applies to Ierissos near the Isthmos.

Further north, still on Chalkidiki, lies Stageira, the birthplace of Aristotle, which was founded as a colony of Andros in the middle of the 7th century BC. In his contribution, Costas Papastathis uses new excavations to trace the settlement of the city and its hinterland. In any case, the destruction by Philip II in 348 BC, was followed by a repopulation, but it seems that only public-religious life took place within the old city walls, while the population settled somewhat apart on a hill.

The river Strymon is the westernmost of the larger rivers leading into the hinterland. Amphipolis, situated at its mouth, was one of the important cities of Macedonia. Founded as a colony of the Athenians, it was able to monitor the river as access to the resource-rich hinterland. Penelope Malama's article describes the development of the city and its surroundings, which extends up to the Byzantine era. The surrounding area also includes the cities of Argilos and Eion, founded in the 7th century BC in the estuary of the Strymon, whereby harbour facilities have also been preserved from the former. In Byzantine times, the fortified city of Chrysopolis lay on a hill apart from the ancient settlements.

With its wealth of mineral resources, Thasos, founded in 680 BC by Parian colonists, was undoubtedly one of the most important poleis within the Mare Thracium and a hub for maritime trade. In her contribution, Dimitria Malamidou devotes herself to Thasos and to Neapolis, which lies opposite the island. In addition to the three harbours of the city of Thasos, two commercial and one military, which are well researched (see also the contribution by Paliompeis), she also devotes herself to the other harbours on the island, of which the one at Aliko, located directly at the marble quarries from the 6th century BC onwards, is particularly noteworthy. A rare testimony to the regulation of ship traffic within the harbours is represented by the inscription of the 3rd century BC. The city of Neapolis, founded by Thasos, also had a harbour and rich deposits of precious metals in the hinterland. The latter harbour is known for the landing of the apostle Paul mentioned above. Thasos also extended its influence on the coastal zone opposite the island and, in addition, attempted to establish settlements at economically important locations, such as Strymon (see the article of Malama) or Stryme, located further east between Abdera and Maroneia.

The development of the Thracian coastal section between Nestos and Hebros from the Archaic period to the Roman Imperial period is dealt with in Maria Gabriella Parissaki's contribution. The most important harbour cities in this area were Abdera and Maroneia, in addition to several smaller settlements such as Dikaia,

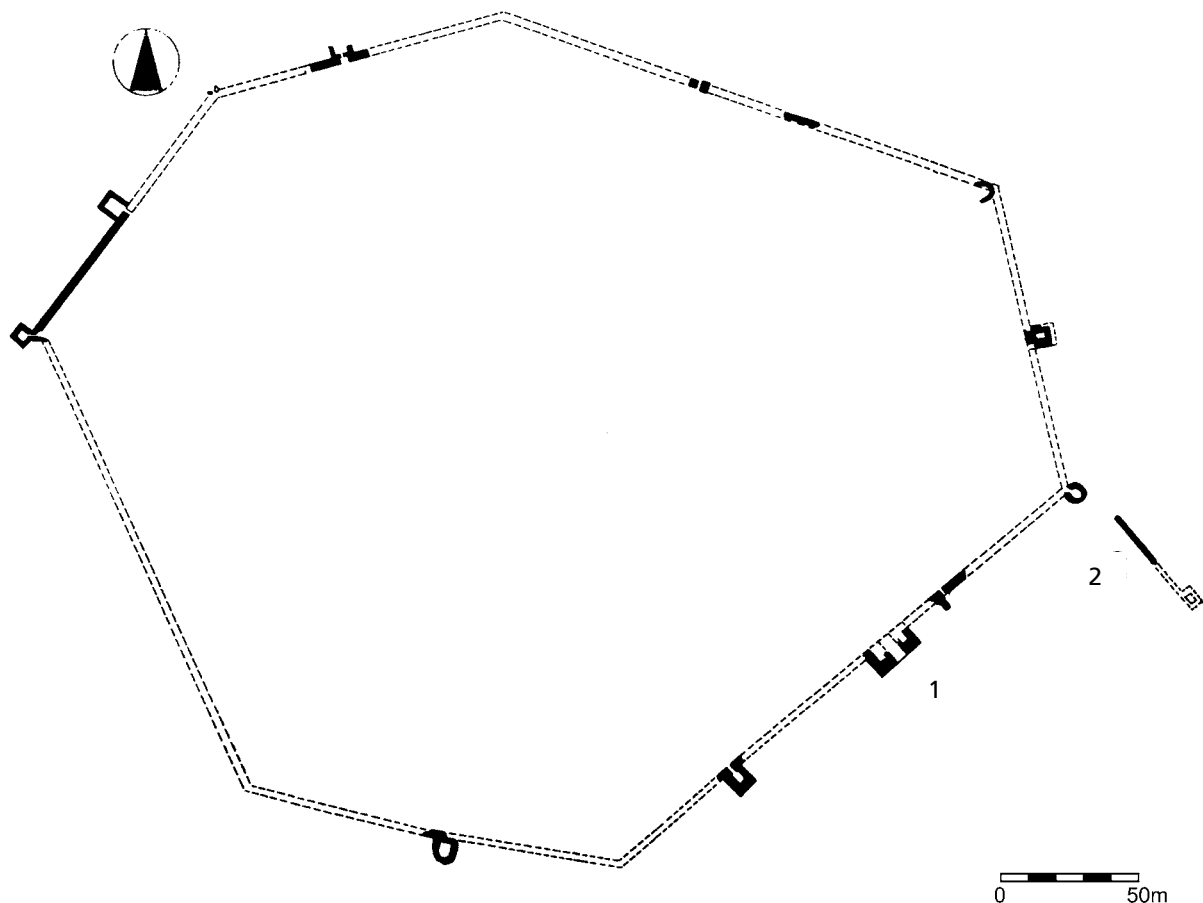


Fig. 3 Plan of Anastasioupolis: **1** Harbour gate. – **2** Remains of the assumed harbour wall which might be a part of the fortification of Justinian. – (After Bakirtzis 1994, 164).

Stryme and Zone, the latter belonging to the Samothracian Peraia. While the harbour cities in the Archaic and Classical periods strove to extend their influence based on economic success, from the middle of the 4th century BC onwards increasing outside pressure set in. It was especially the Macedonians since Philip II, but subsequently also the Hellenistic empires. From the 2nd century BC onwards, Rome extended its influence, which is also reflected in the presence of Roman merchants. Then, in the Imperial period, especially under Trajan, the promotion of the settlements along the Via Egnatia began, which expanded their territories in favour of the old ports.

Abdera as an important harbour city located near the mouth of the Nestos in western Thrace is presented with its harbours in Constantina Kallintzi's contribution. The changes in the palaeoenvironment had a decisive influence on the development of the city. Abdera was founded as a colony by the metropoleis of Klazomenai and Teos. The settlement, which was enclosed by the northern city wall and whose traces date back to the 7th century BC, was abandoned around the middle of the 4th century BC and moved to the south after it had been conquered by Philip II of Macedonia. In addition, sediments transported by the Nestos River had caused the abandonment of the northern harbour. Two new harbours were then built to the east and west of the city. Despite its lesser political importance, the city remained a hub of commerce. It also had an economically strong surrounding area. On a very reduced area, the settlement continued to exist under the name Polystylon in Byzantine times.



Fig. 4 Anastasioupolis. Harbour gate from the northeast. Late Byzantine construction according to tile monograms erected over older, probably early Byzantine, masonry. – (Photo Th. Schmidts).

Lake Bistonis with a water surface of c. 42 km² has access to the sea. It still belongs to the area of Abdera. At its northern tip existed Anastasioupolis (**fig. 3**), a settlement that probably dates back to Emperor Anastasios and was founded around AD 500. Procopius, in his work *περὶ κτισμάτων* [»on buildings«], reports that Anastasioupolis' harbour had been fortified by Justinian due to barbarian raids (**figs 3-4**). This is one of the few records of the fortification of harbours in Late Antiquity⁹.

Between Abdera and Ainos lay Maroneia (**fig. 5**). The development of this harbour city is outlined in the contribution by Maria Gabriella Parissaki. Famous for its wine, the city, which had also been visited by Emperor Hadrian, seems to have been the harbour city of southern Thrace in the Imperial period that developed best. Further east was Zone, a smaller harbour city (see contributions by Parissaki and Paliompeis). A special feature is the large amount of graffiti on pottery fragments with Thracian names.

To the east of the mouth of the river Hebros there was originally a large bay, now silted up, on which Ainos was situated. Sait Başaran's contribution describes the results of the excavations that took place in the past few decades. Although outside the focus of the conference, the Neolithic settlement on Hocaçeşme Höyük should be mentioned due to its importance. The prosperity and economic position of the city in the Archaic-Classical period is underlined by rich grave finds. So far, the structural development can be found for those on the so-called acropolis as well as in sections in the city area. More frequent and better preserved are the structural testimonies from the Byzantine period, which include mainly churches and fortification structures. They attest to the importance of the city in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods.

Thomas Schmidts' contribution is also dedicated to the city of Ainos. New research results obtained within the framework of the above-mentioned DFG project »The Thracian harbour city Ainos in Roman and Byzantine times – the development of a hub in a changing environment« are compared with literary sources and



Fig. 5 The area of ancient Maroneia extending from the harbour with submerged ancient structures (1) to the Hellenistic theatre (2). – (Satellite picture Google Earth).

19th-century researchers' and travellers' reports. This primarily concerns the fortifications which were documented or geophysically detected within the framework of the project. Although these cannot be reconciled with the surviving city walls and harbour fortifications, they enrich our knowledge of the construction activity in the Hellenistic and Middle to Late Byzantine periods. The epigraphic evidence and architectural elements of large buildings from the Roman Imperial and the Early Byzantine period could prove that the first-mentioned period should by no means be interpreted as a phase of decline, even though at that time the minting of coins was obviously insignificant compared to other Thracian cities.

Samothrace is not far from the coast of Ainos and it is easily visible on clear days. In ancient times, the island was mainly known for the famous Sanctuary of the Great Gods, which was visited by many travellers. It already has a long tradition of research. In the paper of Dimitris Matsas, the hitherto little-known interdisciplinary research on the island's harbour facilities is presented. Also noteworthy are the Minoan written testimonies from Mikro Vouni, which prove that contacts from Crete to the North Aegean existed as early as the 19th century BC.

Imbros was the easternmost of the islands in the Thracian Sea. Its close connections to Athens are discussed in the article by Bärbel Ruhl. The island was conquered by Athens in the 5th century BC because it was conveniently located on the grain route from the Black Sea. Subsequently, strong connections with Athens can be traced up to the Imperial period, although from the Hellenistic period onwards, influences from neighbouring regions can also be proven. Like Imbros, the island of Lemnos, the southern end of the Mare Thracium, was also part of the Attic overseas possessions until the reign of Septimius Severus. In addition to the fertility of the soil, the favourable location for sea traffic should be emphasised, so that underwater finds of amphorae (see Paliompeis' article) may be regarded as evidence of merchant seafaring.

The Thracian Chersonese, which borders the Mare Thracium to the east, is characterised by its narrow shape, like the Athos Peninsula in the west. Mustafa Sayar's contribution deals with the changing political conditions in Chersonese, especially during the Hellenistic period, and their consequences. The impor-



Fig. 6 Southern Thracian coast between Abdera/Polystylon and Ainos in Byzantine times. – (Detail of a map of Soustal 1993).

tant harbour cities were Alopekonnesos and Kardia, situated north of the Gulf of Melas, which had been founded as colonies by Miletus and the Aeolians respectively. Kardia served as the port of the residential city of Lysimacheia, founded by Lysimachus in 309 BC, but – unlike the latter – retained its importance until Byzantine times. The Thracian Chersonese, as well as the adjoining section of the coast to the west, had become a plaything of the Hellenistic Empires, a fact that can be proved in consecration inscriptions. Looking at the long-term development lines of the coasts adjacent to the Mare Thracium, we can initially identify a wave of colonisation, whereby the western harbour cities tended to be founded by the western Aegean and the eastern ones by Asia Minor metropoleis. After a phase of Persian dominance, from the 5th century BC onwards the harbour cities belonged overwhelmingly to the Delian League; in the case of Imbros and Lemnos, they were even cleruchies. The Archaic-Classical period was certainly a phase of prosperity, as can be seen from the coinage of the cities or the high contributions in the tribute lists. Trade with the Thracian hinterland also contributed significantly to prosperity, and the major rivers served as important transport routes. They can be reconstructed, especially in the case of the Hebros, from the distribution of Aegean amphorae¹⁰.

The rise of Macedonia under Philip II ushered a period of political instability and varying influences by external agents, such as the Hellenistic Kingdoms. The Thracian tribes also harassed the coastal cities. Only the intervention of Rome as a regulatory power from the early 2nd century BC and especially the establishment of the Roman province of Macedonia led to a certain stabilisation in the middle of the century. After Thrace was also transformed into a province in the Claudian period, the Mare Thracium was completely under Roman rule. Traditionally, research in this region tended to focus on the older periods of antiquity. However, in recent years, the imperial period has also been increasingly considered by researchers¹¹. The harbour cities at least do not seem to have received any particular support from the state, if one considers the location of Roman colonies and cities with imperial *epithea* from the hinterland, especially along the Via Egnatia. Even in

comparison with the harbour- cities on the Asia Minor coast, the Imperial period does not appear to be an era of the highest prosperity. For the Byzantine era (fig. 6), continuity can be noted, so that many harbour cities still existed or even, like Ainos, experienced a flourishing period in the middle to Late Byzantine period. As contributions to these proceedings show, trends in the development in the area of the Mare Thracium can be reconstructed based on regional archaeological studies and the analysis of written sources. Despite its peripheral location, the region was an integral part of the Mediterranean world. The political and economic importance of the region as a whole, but also of the cities, changed according to political circumstances and environmental conditions. Nevertheless, a remarkable continuity can be attested over more than two millennia from the colonisation in Archaic times to the Late Byzantine era. In any case, the potential for future research is beyond question.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the participants of the workshop held in 2016 in Mainz and the authors of this volume. Special mention goes to Chryssa Karadima who helped to organise the content and the list of participants of the workshop. She presented the paper »Coastal settlements of the Aegean Thrace between the Hebros river and lake Bistonis« which unfortunately is not part of this book. Urs Peschlow, who passed away in 2018, presented the paper »The large church in the Byzantine castle in Ainos« which included unpublished research on one of the important sacred buildings of the Middle Byzantine era. Aikaterini Tsanana was not able to participate but her paper entitled »Trading and craft activities at the confines of Mount Athos: the case of Medieval harbour of Hierissos-Chalkidiki« was kindly read by Costas Papastathis, yet it is also not part of this volume. Fortunately, this volume includes two contributions by Maria Gabriella Parissaki and Bärbel Ruhl who had not been part of the workshop.

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We are also grateful to Claudia Nickel and Stefan Albrecht for their commitment in facilitating this publication.

Notes

- 1) Conze 1960.
- 2) Strab. 1, 20 (C 28): οὐκ εὖ δεξάμενος ὁ αὐτὸς συκοφαντεῖ ὡς καθόλου λέγοντος, ὅτι ὁ ζέφυρος ἐκ Θράκης πνεῖ, ἐκείνου λέγοντος οὐ καθόλου, ἀλλ' ὅταν κατὰ τὴν Θρακίαν θάλατταν συμπέσωσι περὶ τὸν Μέλανα κόλπον αὐτοῦ τοῦ Αἰγαίου μέρος οὔσαν. ἐπιστροφὴν γὰρ λαμβάνει πρὸς νότον ἀκρωτηριάζουσα ἡ Θράκη καθ' ἃ συνάπτει τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ, καὶ προπίπτουσα εἰς τὸ πέλαγος τοὺς ζεφύρους ἐντεῦθεν πνέοντας ἀποφαίνει τοῖς ἐν Θάσῳ καὶ Λήμνῳ καὶ Ἰμβρῳ καὶ Σαμοθράκῃ καὶ τῇ περὶ αὐτὰς θαλάττῃ. (Text F. Meineke 1877; translation H. C. Hamilton / W. Falconer 1903).
- 3) Hdt. 7, 176, 1: τοῦτο μὲν τὸ Ἄρτεμίσιον: ἐκ τοῦ πελάγους τοῦ Θρηκίου ἐξ εὐρέος συνάγεται ἐς στεῖνον ἔοντα τὸν πόρον τὸν μεταξὺ νήσου τε Σκιάθου καὶ ἠπείρου Μαγνησίας. (Text and translation A. D. Goodley 1920).
- 4) Plin. 4, 20: *romani omnia haec maria duobus nominibus appellant, macedonicum quacumque macedoniam aut thraciam attingit, graeciense qua graeciam adluit.* (Text K. F. Th. Mayhoff 1906; translation T. Riley / J. Bostock 1855). – For the definition compare with Büchner 1928. – The term is also used by Liv. 44, 11.
- 5) Although in modern Greek Chartography it is mentioned as Θρακικό Πέλαγος. See Hellenic National Hydrographic Service, Chart: ΧΕΕ 32 – Θρακικό Πέλαγος, 2006.
- 6) E. g. for the *Tabula Imperii Romani* (K-35, 1995) or the collection of the corpus of inscriptions of Aegean Thrace (IThrAeg).
- 7) Koder 1998. – Külzer 2008. – Soustal 1991; 2022.
- 8) Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [German Research Foundation] reference nos.: BR 877/31-1. 2 and SCHM 2831/2-1. 2.
- 9) Proc. aed. 4, 11, 11-13. – Schmidts 2019.

10) Tzochev 2010.

11) For the Greek part of our working region e.g. Evangelidis 2021 on Aegean Thrace and Karambinis 2020 on the cities of

Roman Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. For further references see the contributions in this volume.

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