

THE COUNTRYSIDE OF STRATONIKE AND STAGEIRA – TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FROM THE 7TH CENTURY BC TO THE HELLENISTIC ERA IN NORTH EAST CHALKIDIKI

Archaeological research in North East Chalkidiki (Macedonia/GR) during the years 2011-2015 has been proved fruitful enough to enrich our comprehension of the ancient spatial organisation in the area of Stratonike and Olympias. Previous excavations and surveys in this area have resulted to the identification of two ancient cities:

Stageira, an Archaic colony of settlers from the Aegean island of Andros founded on the south coast of the gulf of Strymon and Stratonike, a Macedonian city, which is situated on the south of Zepkos promontory (fig. 1).

This paper presents new evidence which came to light through recent excavations, aiming at defining ancient boundaries of the *astea* (ἄστυα)¹, necropoleis and *chōrai* (χώραι)² as well as their transformations throughout the centuries.



Fig. 1 Map of North East Chalkidiki. – (Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos).



Fig. 2 Panoramic view of the village Stratoni. The coastal hill Elaionas is identified with ancient Stratonike. – (Photo Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos).



Fig. 3 Stratoni. Golden leaves from a burial jar. – (Image © Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos).

ANCIENT STRATONIKE

Evidence of the necropolis

Stratoni, a modern mining village on the north of Acanthus bay (**fig. 2**) is built on old mining deposits, which have been used extensively as a substrate of roads, disrupting the archaeological stratigraphy. During excavations for the construction of a new sewerage system, a burial jar (πίθος) from the 1st century BC was found in the north-western slopes of the modern village. Among the disturbed skeletal remains, *uguentaria*, gold myrtle leaves from the wreath of the deceased (**fig. 3**), glass beads and a golden *aureus* were found. The burial indicates the western border of the necropolis in Roman times, as it is situated about a hundred meters west of a funerary monument of the same era, discovered by Petros Themelis in 1962³, which contained three statues, a grave stone and an identical burial jar.

Evidence of the countryside

A farmhouse

On the east slopes of Stratonikon mountain, outside the western boundaries of the village Stratoni, remnants of walls and a layer of roof tiles were excavated. They extend approximately 180m² and they probably belong to an ancient farmhouse (**fig. 4**). The building is facing South and overlooks the Acanthian bay. It is situated 800m north-west of the Elaionas seaside hill (**fig. 2**), which is identified as the Hellenistic city of Stratonike.

A spacious lobby (*pastas*) surrounds a small room measuring 20m², which is attached to the mighty northern retaining wall. The entrance of this small room is placed to the west, while the entrance of the whole complex is situated to the south.

The collapse of the roof, sealed within its debris a distinct archaeological layer which contained pottery sherds, that mainly belong to table ware. Kantharoi, plates, cups, pots, mortars, skyphoi, amphorae, perfume bottles and lamps imply that household activities were concentrated in that small room which may have been equipped with shelves and benches attached to the surrounding walls.

In the rest of the farmhouse area, the dispersion of roof tiles is minimal, while the archaeological layer is dominated by the presence of storage vessels, suggesting that the place was used as a warehouse (πιθεών). Stone tools, fishing weights, loom weights and spindle whorls complete the list of household artefacts.



Fig. 4 Stratonikion. Plan of the ancient farmhouse. – (Drawing D. Iakovidou).

Pottery finds provide evidence that the building was constructed during the early 4th century BC, it survived through the century and was deserted during the first half of the 3rd century BC. The cause of its destruction was likely a rock-slide as a result of an earthquake. This presumption arises from the presence of large boulders on the top of the debris and from the fact that the ancient farmhouse is situated very close to the rift of Ierissos which caused a deadly earthquake in 1932.

A tower at Karakoli

In the 4th century BC the formation of the cultural landscape on the slopes of mountain Stratonikon was a result of the following factors: mining activity, metallurgical production, agriculture and animal husbandry. In 2009, during an archaeological survey before the construction of a new metallurgical plant, an Ottoman military outpost came to light on the wooded slopes of Stratonikon mountain in North East Chalkidiki (**figs 1. 5**). The edifice has the form of a tower-house with ancient large ancient carved blocks embedded in its rubble masonry (**fig. 6**). Numerous fragments of Classical and Hellenistic pottery were found around it, suggesting a probable use of the site as a watchtower in antiquity.



Fig. 5 Stratoni. General view of Karakoli within the modern metallurgical deposits. Upper left corner: the 5th century BC tower; its position is marked on the photo. – (Photo Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos).

Several phases were identified during the excavation revealing that, despite the changes in its structure throughout the times, the building preserved a military use from the 5th century BC to World War II.

A strong round tower having a diameter of 9.50 m, dominated the place after the middle of the 5th century BC (**fig. 5** upper left corner), but it was not until later that a rectangular paved courtyard was added to the south. In the west of the tower a circular furnace was cut into the soft rock.

The structure of the cluster and the evidence of ancient metallurgy in the neighbouring mine of Mavres Petres suggest that the tower played a significant role in invigilating intensive mining activity and metallurgical production in the Hellenistic period.

At the end of the 2nd century BC, the tower was abandoned and its remains fell into oblivion for almost 18 centuries.

The place was not inhabited again until the 17th century, when the stones of the destroyed ancient tower were used as building material for the new, rectangular Ottoman military outpost (a *karakol*)⁴ built on the same place (**fig. 6**). The function of the Ottoman *karakol* remained the same, with some structural modifications and the addition of a second two-room building at the east, until the early 20th century (under Ottoman administration), guarding the mines of Mademohoria, a federation of twelve villages in the north-east Chalkidiki, accountable for the protection of the mines and enjoying a special status (*serbestiyet*) of tax exemptions from the extraordinary taxation.

Several snapshots of the local history are related to this Ottoman outpost, such as the presence of a multicultural amalgam of ethnic groups working as miners, the abduction by bandits of the engineer Chevalier,



Fig. 6 Stratoni. The Ottoman outpost at Karakoli. – (Photo C. Papastathis).

director of the Franco-Ottoman mining company in 1899 and the activity of Tahsin Uzer, a local Ottoman prefect, associated with the architectural modifications of the Ottoman outpost in 1908.

The last chapter of the outpost's narrative is written by the remnants of a battle. Dozens of gun cartridges found in the South East corner of the building suggest that the place was used as a stronghold by the Greek partisans against the Nazis during the Second World War. The remnants of war material detected on the walls of the ruined Ottoman outpost were an unexpected disruption in the stratigraphy of the monument. They constitute the final »destruction layer«, the remains of the last battle that sealed the life of the fort. This unknown conflict at Karakoli, which has not been recalled by any of the living survivors of the National Resistance, is an additional page this excavation has offered in the chronicle of the National Resistance in Chalkidiki.

After the liberation from the Nazi occupation, the mine started working again. Then, a bulldozer, probably accidentally, covered the fort with a mound of earth condemning it to oblivion. Its memories have been recently retrieved from silence with the aforementioned excavation.

Synthesis

As assumed from the above, farming and mining fields are the fundamental components of the spatial organisation of the countryside in the 4th century BC.

In these vast areas there are scattered homesteads that serve as primary units for the exploitation of agricultural or mineral wealth. Each of these residences consists of the land, the house and the outbuildings.

If this happens in the countryside, we have to wonder where the ancient city is. Claudius Ptolemy⁵ mentions the city Stratonike in his Geography, which, according to most of scholars, was situated on the coastal hill Eleonas, south of the modern village of Stratoní. The city was founded by Demetrios Poliorketes in honour of either his mother or his daughter both named Stratonike. Its foundation took place probably between 293 and 288 BC, i. e. before the king abandoned the Macedonian throne in favour of Pyrrhus.

Taking into account that the farmhouse and the tower mentioned above date back before the founding of the city of Stratonike and considering the references of the ancient authors and the prior archaeological research in the region, we assume the following about the organisation of the *asty* and of the countryside:

1. The Hellenistic Stratonike founded by Demetrios, has not emerged on virgin soil. Although material evidence of classical times was not broadly identified, the stratigraphy of the steep eastern slopes of the hill Eleonas provides ceramic finds dating back to the 5th and 4th centuries BC.
2. In this case should we assume the existence of an earlier city, founded in the late 5th century BC?
3. The Hellenistic city of Stratonike remained limited to the naturally fortified hill until at least the middle of the 2nd century BC.
4. The destruction of the farmhouse in the early years of the 3rd century BC should be considered incidental and in any case it does not imply a reduction of activity in the countryside during the Hellenistic period.
5. If no *asty* can be found nearby that controlled all these rural activities from the 5th to the 3rd century BC, we can assume that the social and economic structure of the area was based on an organisation called *κατά κώμας* in the ancient world, i. e. on a large area occupied by small, scattered villages.
6. Nevertheless, the attested mining activity on the slopes of Stratonikon mountain during the 5th and 4th centuries BC would have created the need for central control of the metallurgical production. In that case, the only flourishing cities of the region of North East Chalkidiki are Stageira and Akanthos (**fig. 1**), both colonies founded in the 7th century BC by settlers from the island of Andros, aiming at the exploitation of the metalliferous mountains.

7. At the end of the Hellenistic era, the core of the *asty* of Stratonike was shifted to the plain at the foot of the hill Eleonas, as indicated by the construction of a commercial complex in the 1st century BC, which survived until the 5th century AD⁶.
8. Only in Roman times we have a clear idea of the location of the necropolis, which extends to the north of the Roman city.

ANCIENT STAGEIRA

Stageira intra muros

Birthplace of Aristotle, the city was founded in c. 655 BC by settlers from the island of Andros⁷. Until the Persian Wars, Stageira was a free, independent and prosperous city. After the Persians retreated, it became a member of the First Athenian Confederacy (the Delian League), making an annual contribution of one talent to the allied treasury. In 424 BC, during the Peloponnesian War, Stageira seceded from the Delian League and became an ally of the Spartans. Later, the city joined the Chalcidian League and in 348 BC it was captured and destroyed by king Philip II of Macedonia. A few years after the destruction, however, Philip himself repopulated the city in return for Aristotle's tutoring of his son Alexander. Yet Stageira never recovered its former brilliance and it is henceforth mentioned by ancient authors only on a few occasions, invariably in connection with the great philosopher.

An enchanting, later tradition, records that after Aristotle died, the inhabitants of Stageira transferred and buried his relics inside the city, in a place called Aristoteleion, a large altar was erected on his grave, and an annual festival was instituted in his honour, called »Aristoteleia«⁸.

The city lies on a small, beautiful peninsula near the modern village of Olympiada, in North East Chalkidiki (**figs 1. 7**). Excavations conducted by the 16th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities have brought to light part of the Archaic fortification walls as well as the Classical fortification of the city, preserved in very good condition. On the low ridge between the two hills of the peninsula stands the Agora, political and commercial centre of the city. It is dominated by a long, rectangular portico (classical stoa), an edifice in which the people of Stageira assembled for public debate (**fig. 7**). A complex of public storerooms and shops is situated to the east of the portico, in front of a paved road.

On the top of the north hill, the part of a temple from the 6th century BC came to light, under a Byzantine enclosure which was built there during the 10th century AD. On the steep north-east side of the hill are the ruins of an Archaic sanctuary and a row of storerooms and workshops, mainly of the Early Hellenistic period, built against the inner side of the Late Classical fortification (**fig. 7**).

The acropolis of Stageira occupies the large plateau on top of the southern hill. Parts of houses have been discovered all over the area of the ancient city. The steep terrain indicates the construction of stepped terraces on which building blocks or individual houses were erected. An apsidal building on the north hill has recently been interpreted as Aristotle's tomb-heroon⁹ (**fig. 7**).

Stageira extra muros

In 2014 a square room of 60m² was excavated at the northern outskirts of Olympiada (**figs 8-9**). The room probably represents only a part of a larger complex extending to the north and east. The entrance is on the west and in front of the door there is an antechamber separated by the main room with a partition wall.

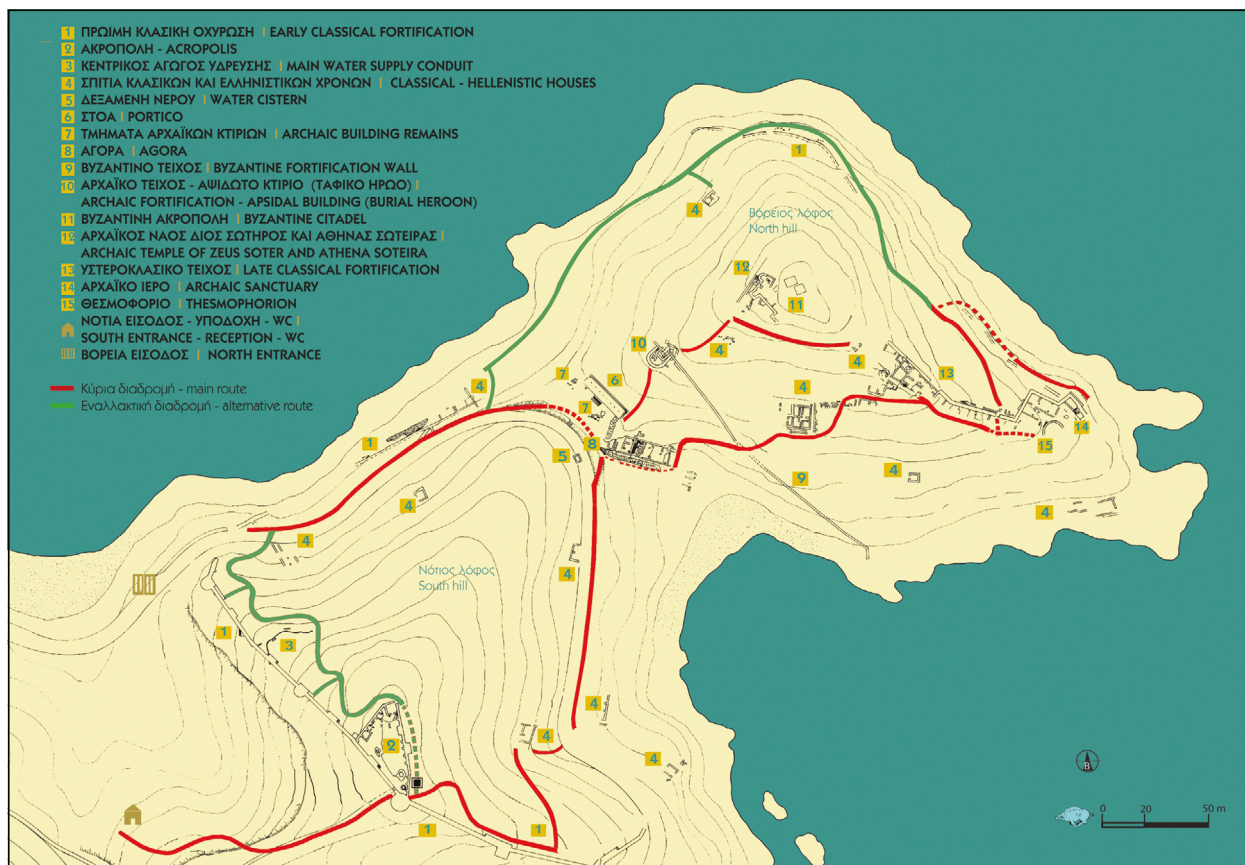


Fig. 7 Stageira. Plan of the archaeological site. – (Map T. Xanthopoulou).

A perimeter bench built with rubble stones is attached around the walls of the main chamber. The superstructure was made of mud brick. The room is surrounded by cobblestone. To the east a narrow channel made of tiles placed upside down served for the drainage of rainwater.

The importance of the complex is its location, 1.5 km north of ancient Stageira (fig. 8), thus its correlation with the colony of Andros seems inevitable.

Depositional and post-depositional effects

The edifice is built on a thick layer of pebbles suggesting that a stream was flowing through this location in antiquity. The archaeological stratigraphy narrates the following events:

- Construction of the building during the Late Archaic period, certainly before 480 BC, that is simultaneously with the construction of the Archaic fortification and the Archaic sanctuaries within the *intra muros* *asty* of Stageira.
- Destruction in the Late Classical period.
- Reuse of the building for a short period in the years of Alexander the Great.
- Abandonment.

The biography of the building proposed above is attested by the archaeological record in the following way: The deepest archaeological layer of the room preserves scarce but characteristic pottery of the early classical period. A secure *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the complex is given by an Archaic silver coin of Colophon in Asia Minor¹⁰.

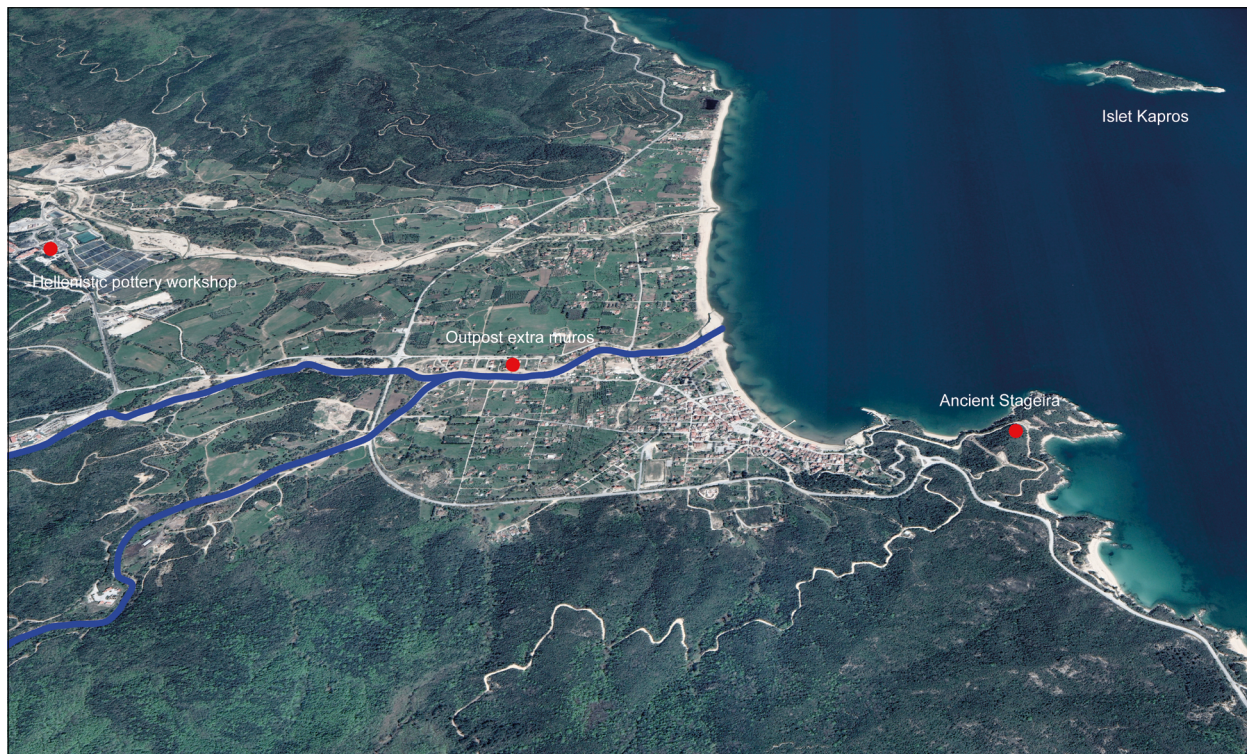


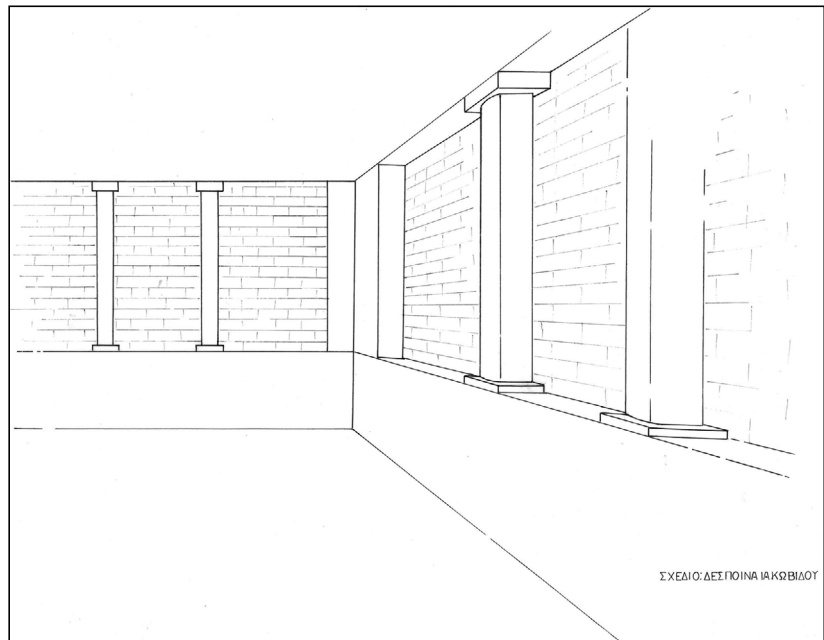
Fig. 8 Archaeological map of Stageira and its countryside. – (Picture Google Earth, layout C. Papastathis).



Fig. 9 Stageira *extra muros*. The building by the stream Asprolakkas. – (Photo C. Papastathis).

The upper layer contains mostly storage vessels, some of which would be placed on the floor, while others give the impression that they fell from shelves. The layer of the collapsed tiles sealed an archaeological stratum that corresponds to 150 years of the building's life. The destruction by fire is apparent.

Fig. 10 Stageira *extra muros*. Graphical reconstruction of the recessed niches in the building by the stream Asprolakkas. – (Drawing D. Iakovidou).



Stamps on the tiles are identical to those discovered in public buildings of the city *intra muros* (*hoplitodrome*), all dating to the Early Classical period. Among the scarce Early Classical finds is also a ring of lapis lazuli depicting the goddess Artemis.

The reuse of the building during the reign of Alexander the Great goes along with some structural changes, such as the replacement of the narrow Archaic entrance by a wide double door. On the stone which functioned as a threshold between the two wings of the Hellenistic door, a bronze coin of Alexander III was found.

Synthesis

The room was no doubt the storehouse of a large complex, which in our judgement had a public character. This argument is strengthened by the following remarks:

1. The diligent masonry and the strong foundation.
2. The pure architectural plan and the monumentality.
3. The surrounding paved corridor.
4. The scenographic setting of the interior: Wooden pilasters based on the perimeter bench create recessed niches used as cupboards (**fig. 10**).
5. The position of the building alongside a natural boundary line, that is the torrent, which delimited the cultivated alluvial plain that nourished the walled city (*asty*) (**fig. 8**).

How could this peripheral storehouse be associated with the *asty*?

The answer possibly lies in the destruction of the *asty* itself. In 349 BC, during the Olynthian war, Philip II razed Stageira to the ground and gave an end to the Stageirite's will to remain an autonomous city-state under the auspices of the »Chalcidian League«. It was the end of the democratic breeze blowing from the metropolis of the south to the colonies of the north. Henceforth Stageira is subject to the Macedonian king, who rebuilds and repopulates the city after the intervention of Aristotle, who in the meantime had been appointed as the tutor to his son Alexander. Aristotle's commitment to Philip's second founding of the devastated city is preserved in the philosopher's biography in an 11th century manuscript, the *Vita Aristotelis* Marciana:



Fig. 11 Mountain Kakavos. The ancient copper mine at Skouries. – (Photo C. Papastathis).

»After his motherland, Stageira was destroyed by Philip, he convinces Alexander to build it again and to offer the city new lands in the countryside«¹¹.

Is the information of that text confirmed by our excavations *extra muros*? Only partly. The building presented above is not situated in these new lands (χώρας ετέρας). Although outside the city walls, it seems that the edifice of the outskirts experienced the same fate as that of the *asty*:

- Construction in the Archaic period.
- Destruction in the middle of the 4th century BC.
- Reconstruction and short life during the years of Alexander.
- Abandonment and oblivion.

Archaeological survey in the periphery of the ancient city provides evidence that the Archaic colony of Andros was flanked by north and west from a vital area, bounded by the torrent today called Asprolakkas. This stream, acting as a natural rampart, protected the city and the countryside (**fig. 8**). The complex presented here is built on this natural limit and it may have been used as an outpost.

In that case, where could these new lands (that according to the ancient literature were given from Alexander to the people of Stageira) be located?

Could the mountainous area of Kakavos be the answer?

In the heart of the mountain situated 20km south west of Stageira there is an ancient copper mine called Skouries (slugs) (**figs 1. 11**). The site was excavated in the years 2012-2014 shedding light on a small scale establishment, a workshop of copper mining of the 2nd century BC (**fig. 12**) which aimed at exploiting the metalliferous rock with the following procedure: extraction of the ore from the adjacent rock, grinding and firing¹².



Fig. 12 Skouries. 3D laser scanning of the excavation. – (Image © Ephorate of Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos).

The crucial factors compelling us to exclude this place from the zone of economic impact of Stageira are the following:

- a. The long distance between the two sites may have been a discouraging factor for the exploitation of the ore.
- b. The short duration of the establishment, which is limited to some decades of the 2nd century BC, may associate the metallurgy of Skouries with the then flourishing city of Akanthos rather than the declining Stageira.

Notwithstanding the scarce evidence concerning those new lands, the answer about their location may have already been given. In 1999 Kostas Sismanidis revealed a pottery workshop that operated after the time of Alexander in the area of Mavrolakkas, some 2.5 km north of Stageira¹³ (fig. 8). Extensive archaeological research and surveys indicate that the excavated site is only one part of a large area occupied by workshops during the Hellenistic period. Most of the antiquities may have been destroyed during the large metallurgical operations in the decade of 1960s.

Moreover, it is very likely that the hill north of Mavrolakkas was populated after the destruction of Stageira by Philip II, since the ruins identified there through the survey date back to the Hellenistic era.

It is therefore very likely that the Hellenistic city of Stageira was rebuilt both *intra* and *extra muros*. One city within the walls with a focus on public, religious and political buildings, symbolically and ideologically reflecting the bond with the Macedonian kingdom; a second city outside the walls with residential and workshop areas to ensure the security of the Philipp's Macedonian peace.

This dramatic change in the organisation of the *asty* and the country in the years of Alexander the Great might explain the fact that Strabo¹⁴, when referring to the Hellenistic Stageira, distinguishes the city's name Stageira from its port, which he calls Kapros.

Notes

- 1) Τό ἄστυ: the city, plural ἄστυα.
- 2) Ἡ χώρα: the countryside, plural χώραι.
- 3) Themelis 1964, 113-115.
- 4) *Karakol*: outpost in Turkish.
- 5) Ptol. geogr. 3, 12.
- 6) Papastathis et al. 2008, 404-410.
- 7) Sismanidis 2003, 8-23 (with bibliography).
- 8) Vita Aristotelis Marciana, f. 276a, 5.
- 9) Sismanidis 2017, 198-211.
- 10) Kim/Kroll 2008, 53-103 with pl. 12-36.
- 11) Vita Arist. Marc. F. 276a, 5. Translation by the author.
- 12) Papastathis et al. 2014, 605-616.
- 13) Sismanides 2000, 347-358.
- 14) Strab. 7, 331, 33.

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Zusammenfassung / Summary

Die archäologischen Untersuchungen, die 2011-2015 im Nordosten der Chalkidiki durchgeführt wurden, waren überaus lohnend, sodass sie unser Verständnis der antiken Raumordnung in diesem Gebiet, insbesondere hinsichtlich der beiden antiken Städte Stageira und Stratonike, bereichert haben. In diesem Beitrag werden neue Erkenntnisse vorgestellt, die bei den jüngsten Ausgrabungen gewonnen wurden und darauf abzielen, die antiken Grenzen der *astea* (ἄστυα), der Gräberfelder und der *chōrai* (χώραι) sowie deren Veränderungen im Laufe der Jahrhunderte zu definieren. Westlich der Bebauung des modernen Dorfes Stratonie an der Nordostküste der Halbinsel Chalkidiki förderten unsere Forschungen Gebäudereste, Haushaltsgegenstände und Fragmente klassischer und hellenistischer Keramik zutage. Landwirtschaft und Bergbau, die maßgeblichen Erwerbszweige in diesem Gebiet, bildeten die Grundlage für die räumliche Organisation des Umlandes der antiken Stadt Stratonike. Der archäologische Kenntnisstand bezüglich Stageira, der Heimat von Aristoteles, wurde durch die Ausgrabung eines Gebäudekomplexes mit öffentlichem Charakter im Norden und einer Töpferwerkstatt am westlichen Ortsrand von Olympiada bereichert. Sie liefern wichtige Erkenntnisse über die Stadt Stageira und zu Veränderungen des Kultur- und Naturraumes im Laufe der Jahrhunderte.

Übersetzung: Th. Schmidts

The archaeological research conducted in North East Chalkidiki during the years 2011-2015 has been fruitful enough to enrich our comprehension of the ancient spatial organisation in the area namely the two ancient cities of Stageira, and Stratonike. This paper presents new evidence which came to light through recent excavations, aiming at defining ancient boundaries of the *astea* (ἄστυα), necropoleis and *chorai* (χώραι) as well as their changes throughout the centuries. Outside the western boundaries of the modern village Stratonie, at the north-eastern coast of the Chalkidiki peninsula, our research brought to light building remains, household artefacts, fragments of Classical and Hellenistic pottery. Farming and mining fields, the main activity around the area, constitute the spatial organisation of the countryside of the ancient city of Stratonike. The archaeological knowledge about Stageira, the homeland of Aristotle, was enriched after the excavation of a building complex of public character at the north and a pottery workshop at the west outskirts of Olympiada, providing important information about the city of Stageira and the transformations of its cultural and natural landscape during the ages.