

Doriskos. “Αἰγιαλός καὶ πεδῖον μέγα”. A Harbour on the West Side of the Evros River

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Doriskos is reported by the ancient writer ps.Scylax (Periplous 67) as a “defensive wall” (τεῖχος) and by Herodotos (7.58-59) as a “seashore” and as “a plain of great extent” in Thrace, but also as an important fortified post (royal wall – τεῖχος βασιλῆιον) of the Persians, where a permanent garrison was installed following Darius I’s campaign against the Scythians in 514 BC. In 480 BC Xerxes, marching from the gulf of Melas first reached Ainos, an Aiolian colony, then passed by Lake Stentoris and finally arrived to Doriskos, i.e. the large plain around the delta, on the west side of the Evros River. The area served as a convenient place for reviewing and mustering the army of Xerxes’ and as a supply center where he had laid up stores of provision. It had great strategic importance being located on the overland corridor that connects Asia with Europe and the Aegean coast with the Thracian hinterland through the Evros River, which was navigable.



Fig. 1: The acropolis of Doriskos: Part of the excavated area, 2007.



Fig. 2: Clay mould for arrow heads, surface find from Doriskos.

Grigorios Euthymiou and Georgios Bakalakis already by 1955 and 1960, respectively, had come to understand the significance of the site on “Sarayia” Hill, east of the modern village of Doriskos and south of Feres, which was identified as the ancient Doriskos. Small-scale excavations conducted by Diamantis Triantafyllos in 1971 have revealed sections of the fortification wall of the 4th century BC, a paved road and some looted tombs. Since 1991 systematic surface collections conducted on the site have yielded many finds which date from the Prehistoric through the late Hellenistic times.

The former 19th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (now Ephorates of Xanthi, Rhodopi and Evros) in conjunction with the Geophysics Division of the Department of Geology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (in collaboration



Fig. 3: Bronze coin of Doriskos.



Fig. 4: Stamped amphora handle of Samothrace found in Doriskos.

with Prof. Grigorios Tsokas) has carried out two consecutive seasons of geophysical survey (2005–2006) on the site of Doriskos (fig. 5). These surveys have provided clear indications for the existence of ancient residential remains. Magnetic and resistance mapping were used to investigate an area of around 14.400 m². In particular, the resistance anomalies show clear rectangular shapes that appeared closed in most cases. Also, long linear anomalies were detected.

An initial six-week excavation campaign in the fall of 2007 was followed by a second season in 2010, which revealed part of the fortification wall and of the urban plan of the Hellenistic city confirming the results of the geophysical surveys. The archaeological evidence provides the image of a small fortified settlement (figs. 1. 2) whose inhabitants made their living through cereal cultivation, textile production, fishing and trade, as attested by archaeological finds that specifically include grinding mills, wine presses, clay loom weights, coins of the Classical and Hellenistic periods (fig. 3), transport amphoras from Thasos, Akanthos, Ainos, Samothrace (fig. 4) and southeastern Aegean trade centers, as well as fine and common-ware pottery, coming mainly from neighbouring Ainos. The large number of amphora material, especially from the centers of Ainos and Samothrace, found in quantities within the site but also along the Evros River in the interior of Thrace (in sites like Kabyle, Seythopolis

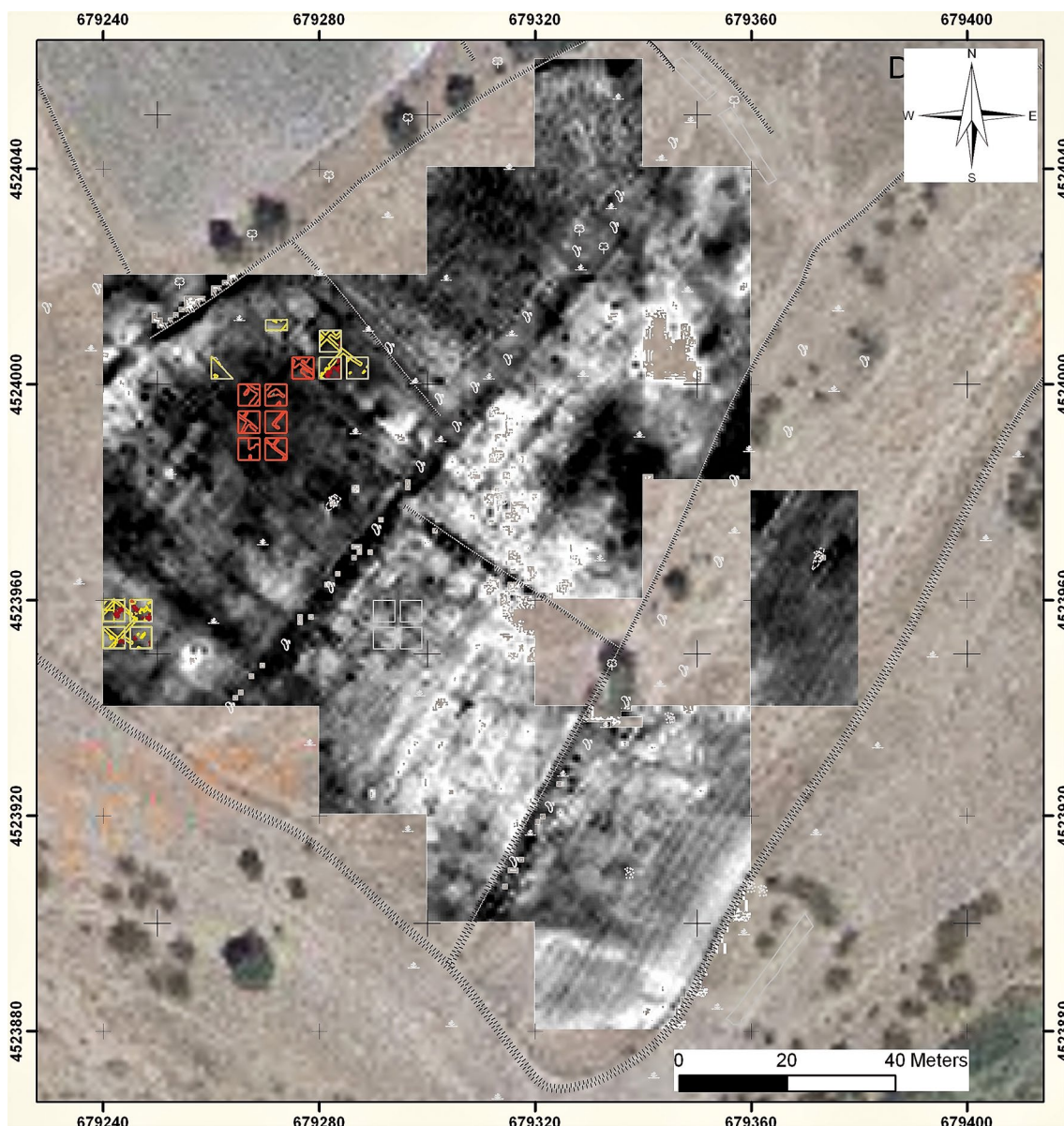


Fig. 5: The acropolis of Doriskos: Geophysical survey and excavated areas.

and Emporium Pistiros) testify to the navigable nature of the River Evros and the importance of Doriskos as a trade point.

In addition, the evidence of coins has highlighted the trade contacts that existed between the cities of Thrace and the Aegean Islands (Ainos, Maroneia, Zone, Madytos and Samothrace) as well as between the Macedonian and Thracian kings and dynasts (Philip II, Alexander III, Cassander, Lysimachos, Antiochos II and Sparadokos). The archaeological evidence supports also the hypothesis that Athens controlled Doriskos,

at least before the Macedonian occupation by Philip II: The only coin type known so far from Doriskos' own mint has the head of Athena on the obverse, the name of the city (ΔΟΡΙ[ΣΚΟΣ]) and an owl on the reverse, and has been found during our excavations (fig. 3).

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