

Between Therme and Troy: the ceramic exchange in the regional network of the northern Aegean in the late 8th and early 7th c. BC

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In the second half of the 8th and the early 7th century BC a dynamic exchange network developed in the multi-ethnic northern Aegean basin, manifested by changes in the ceramic assemblages at a number of local sites.¹ It encompassed the coastal zone between the Thermaic Gulf to the west and Troy to the east, incorporating the islands of Thasos, Samothrace, Tenedos and Lemnos (fig. 1). Although the study of the manufacturing, exchange and consumption patterns of local ceramic groups during the discussed period is still in its beginning, the last 30 years of research have contributed to a growing knowledge on the subject.² The importance of the discussion can be emphasised in the light of the fact that a significant part of the coastal area as well as the islands of the northern Aegean were still inhabited at that time only by native pre-Greek people.³

The colonisation of the northern Aegean basin was a long-lasting process. It started in the second quarter of the 7th century BC for Thasos and the Thracian Chersonese, while the rest of the coast between Athos peninsula and Propontis received Greek colonists in the middle and the second half of the 7th century BC.⁴ Consequently, the Aegean basin turned into Hellenic Sea and the polis became the main social and political structure in its coastal areas. In the second half of the 8th and the first quarter of the 7th century BC,



Fig. 1: Map of the Northern Aegean with place names mentioned in text.

however, the coast of the Aegean Thrace and the islands of Thasos and Samothrace are still inhabited only by native *ethne*. Their ceramic production still follows the native tradition of handmade wares with smoothed or burnished/polished surface and incised, fluted or stamped decoration.⁵ By contrast, the demographic picture in the northeastern and northwestern corners of the Aegean at that time does not appear so clear-cut since the early Greek settlers have, presumably, already established themselves there. The eighth city of Troy is traditionally accepted as the “Greek” one, but this assumption was challenged some years ago and the significant role played by the native Luwian people was advocated.⁶ The ceramic assemblage until the mid-7th century BC is dominated by local wares (Northwest Anatolian Grey Ware, Tan and Buff Wares, painted G 2-3 Ware), while connections with contemporary ceramic groups from mainland and eastern Greece are hard to prove.⁷ Similarly, the coastal zone of the Thermaic Gulf and the western Chalcidice peninsula are traditionally seen as region where early, pre-8th century BC, Euboian activities and economic interests are registered. The view is usually supported by the presence of Euboian and Euboian type locally produced pottery.⁸ This was also challenged in the last 20 years and the view that the importance ascribed to the Euboians is overemphasised, was advocated.⁹ However, the volume and nature of the archaeological evidence ascribed to Euboian activities changes from 8th century BC on. It is probably not a coincidence that imports from the eastern Mediterranean and the southeastern Aegean dated to the late 8th and early 7th century BC are concentrated exactly in sites in that region and probably partly linked to the commercial activities of the Euboians. By contrast, the territories east of Sithonia peninsula, which were beyond the area of active Euboian involvement, have not produced equivalent contemporary imports.

Considering the demographic situation, the distribution of local ceramic groups in the second half of the 8th and the early 7th century BC in the northern Aegean is very indicative for the directions and mechanisms of exchange between the inhabitants of its micro regions. It remains an open question who had the leading role in this system of exchange and if it is at all reasonable to search for a “protagonist.”

While the currently known ceramic assemblage from sites east of Nestos Delta and from Samothrace suggests more active exchange with the Troad and Lemnos, the island of Thasos, its Peraia and the Strymon Delta appear as a crossing point where ceramic imports from east and west reached (fig. 2). This regionally developed network was not restricted to distribution of various locally manufactured ceramic groups in neighbouring sites. It included transmission and adoption of technological know-how, most likely facilitated by the work of itinerant potters. The distribution pattern of a regional group of standardised sub-geometric, fine, painted tableware, known as G 2-3 Ware (fig. 3,1), mirrors the movement of vessels, but also potters and technological knowledge from Troy and Lemnos in westerly and northerly direction, towards Samothrace, Thasos, coastal Thrace and less so the Thermaic Gulf (fig. 2 red). It is the main group of painted tableware with sub-geometric decoration manufactured in the northeastern Aegean in

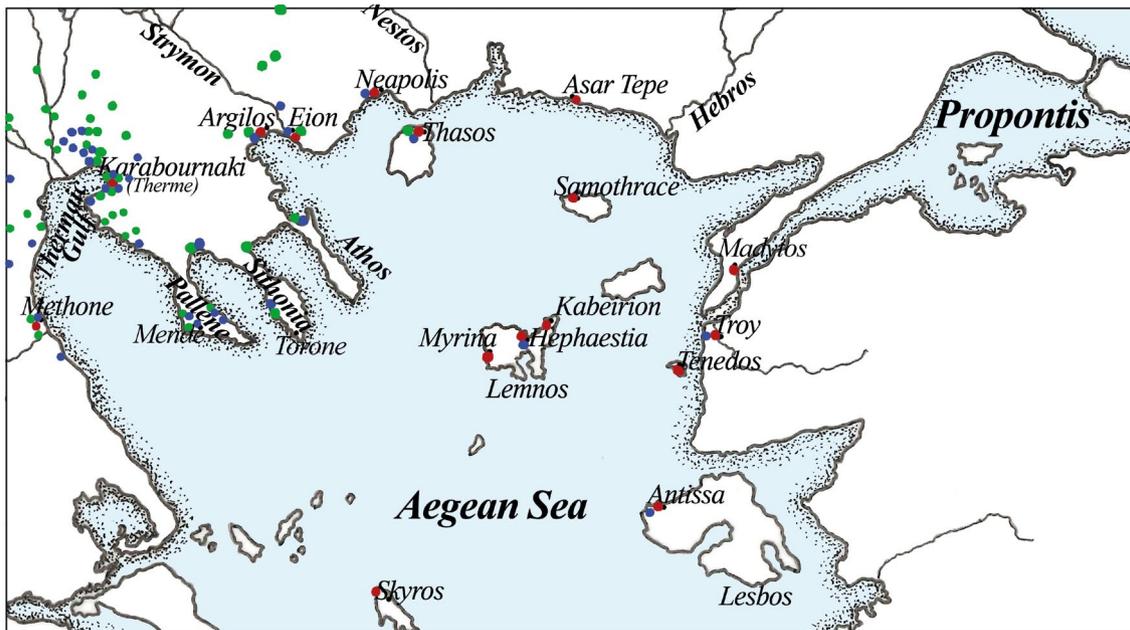


Fig. 2: Distribution map of G 2-3 Ware (red dots), Silver Slip Ware (green dots) and Thermaic transport amphorae (blue dots) (prepared by author).

the second half of 8th and the first half of 7th century BC.¹⁰ Its quantity and contextual distribution in Troy and Lemnos as well as the results from NAA of fragments from Troy and the evidence for production on Lemnos clearly indicate that these were the two main centres of manufacture and sources of exported vases and travelling potters.¹¹ The argument is supported by micro-XRF analysis of 120 samples from various sites.¹² The results indicate that the manufacture must have been organised in multiple centres rather than in a single one which would then export vases for exchange. An on-site small scale production at least on the island of Thasos and the opposite coast has already been advocated.¹³ The process had significant impact on the native Thracians living on the islands of Samothrace, Thasos and the opposite coastal areas. It not only led to the adoption of new ceramic technology, wheel-made vs the native handmade, but to introduction of new shapes whose usage was perhaps linked to the introduction of new social practices as well.¹⁴ Although G 2-3 Ware vessels were discovered in sites west of the Strymon Delta, such as Argilos, Karabournaki and Methone¹⁵ their quantity is minimal in comparison to the dominant groups of locally and regionally (from the Thermaic Gulf) manufactured tableware. G 2-3 Ware vessels appear to have reached the northwestern corner of the Aegean perhaps occasionally, rather than as a result of regular exchange.

On the other side contemporary ceramic groups produced in the Thermaic Gulf are present on Thasos and sites on the opposite mainland coast, but did not travel further to the east, apart from a small amount of shards from Troy. The distribution pattern of two



Fig. 3: Examples of G 2-3 Ware (photos: author), Silver Slip Ware (fragments to the left after Κεφαλίδου – Ναζλής 2013, εικ. 3-4; restored vessel after Τζαναβάρη 2013, εικ. 1) and Thermaic transport amphorae (after Τιβέριος 2013, εικ. 1α-β).

ceramic groups, the so-called Thermaic transport amphorae and the Silver-Slip Ware can best illustrate the process.

The Silver-Slip Ware (fig. 3,2) features very distinctive silvery or golden surface colour due to the high mica content in the fabric and even more in the slip that covers it.¹⁶ The distribution map indicates concentration in sites along the northern and the eastern coast of the Thermaic Gulf (fig. 2 green). It is currently accepted that it must have been manufactured in several centres, one of which is the Sindos settlement mound. The easternmost point where it appears, according to the currently available evidence, is the pre-colonial settlement on Thasos¹⁷ where it shares context with G 2-3 Ware, Grey Anatolian Ware, Thermaic transport amphorae and native handmade wares.¹⁸ It is indicative for the exchange between these two micro regions within the northern Aegean network. On the other side examples from Koprivlen in Bulgaria¹⁹ suggest a different model of distribution and exchange. These are locally produced and most likely indicate the work of itinerant potters who introduced new technological skills to the native Thracians, similarly to those who introduced and manufactured G 2-3 Ware on the island of Thasos.

The Thermaic transport amphorae (fig. 3,3), nearly contemporary with G 2-3 and the Silver-Slip Ware, were produced in the coastal area of the Thermaic Gulf and also reached the island of Thasos. Their distribution, however, continued to the east and can be illustrated by a small number of fragments from Troy, Lemnos and Lesbos (fig. 2 blue).²⁰ In consideration with the fact that such amphorae were discovered in Syria and southern Italy, their distribution is often associated with the long-distance, seaborne commercial activities of the Euboians who probably had an important role in connecting the northwestern Aegean to the eastern Mediterranean. Such model, however, is hard to apply for the area east of Athos peninsula since the contemporary archaeological record there does not suggest any Euboian link. The results from a chemical analysis of a Thermaic amphora fragment from Troy are even more revealing as these indicate its local production.²¹ Again, like the local manufacturing of G 2-3 Ware on Thasos and of Silver-Slip Ware in Koprivlen, the archaeological evidence suggests the travelling of craftsmen and technological transfer. It does not mean, of course, that import of ceramic vessels and their content, especially in the case of the amphorae, did not exist. It rather adds one more aspect to the exchange patterns that developed along the northern Aegean littoral in the late Geometric and the early Archaic period. Another interesting aspect of the distribution pattern of late Geometric and early Archaic north Aegean ceramics is the apparent lack of Thermaic wares along the coast between Thasos and Troy and on the island of Samothrace, where northeastern Aegean ceramics such as G 2-3 and Grey Anatolian Wares have come to light. This situation is revealing on the sea routes that were followed and directions of sailing. A boat leaving the Thermaic Gulf, sailing south and then east would have had to go around the tips of the Pallene and Sithonia peninsulas of Chalcidice. After that, however, Lemnos

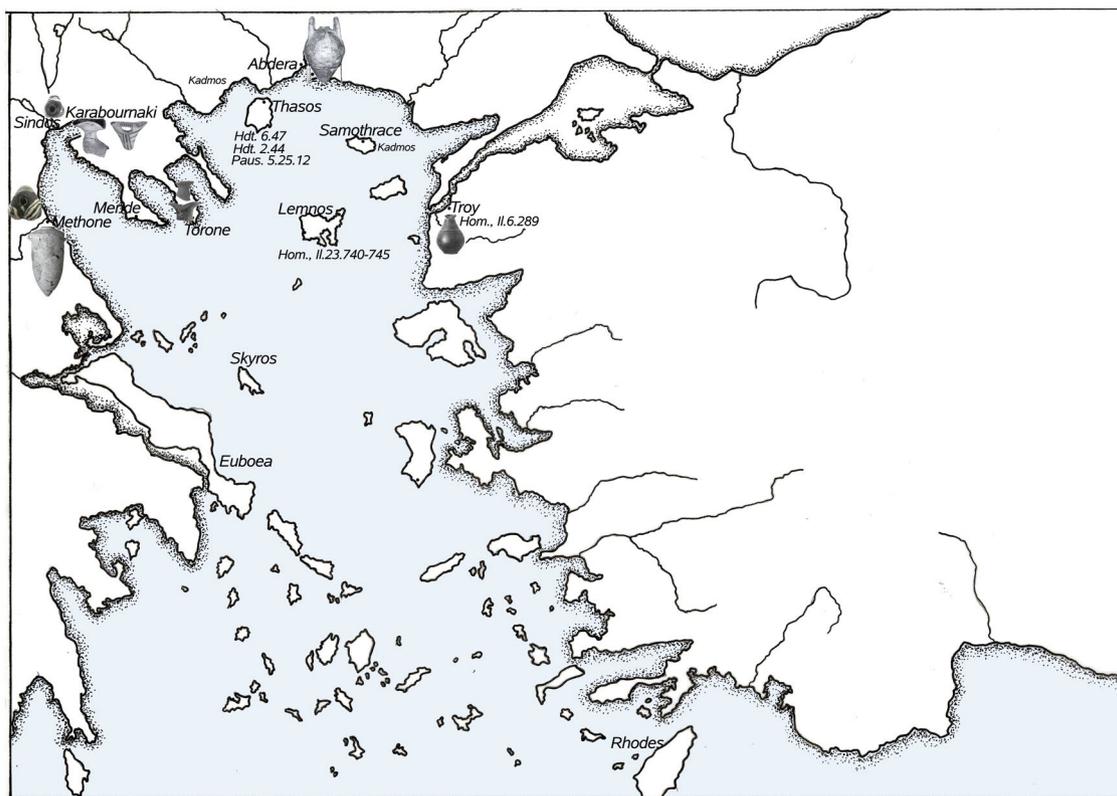


Fig. 4: Distribution map of Cypriot, Phoenician and Phoenician-type artefacts in the Northern Aegean and sites associated with Phoenicians by ancient literary sources.

is the next point due east, giving access to Troy or Lesbos to the southeast. Had a boat tried to go north and then followed the coast of Thrace in eastward direction, it meant sailing around the southern tip of Athos peninsula. This is a very dangerous journey even today²² and we have the examples of the destroyed Persian fleet there in 492 BC,²³ followed by the digging of Xerxes' canal 10 years later,²⁴ as well as the disaster of the Spartan fleet in 411 BC.²⁵ It seems that the coast of Thrace between the Strymonic Gulf and Nestos Delta as well as the north coast of Thasos were more easily accessible from the Thermaic Gulf by a land journey followed by a short sea crossing and the distribution map of the Thermaic amphorae and the Silver-Slip Ware certainly traces land routes (fig. 2 green and blue). By contrast, G 2-3 Ware is currently known only from coastal sites. As it started from the northeastern Aegean (Troy and Lemnos), it is not a surprise to find it in sites such as Samothrace and Asar Tepe. A boat sailing from the east did not have to negotiate an obstacle such as Athos peninsula and could easily access the coast between Thasos and Troy. Considering the fact that the Euboians did not have commercial and sailing initiatives east of Chalcidice one may imagine that its distribution is a result of the

activities of the local population of Troy and Lemnos. Forty years ago J. Graham suggested a link between the distribution of G 2-3 Ware and Phoenician activities in the northern Aegean reported by the ancient literary testimonies.²⁶ Since there is no archaeological evidence that could be directly linked to Phoenician activities between Athos peninsula and Troy, this idea still remains hypothetical. The coastal sites of the Thermaic Gulf and Chalcidice, however, have produced still limited number of eastern Mediterranean ceramics and artefacts dated to the late 8th and early 7th century BC, which provide evidence for contacts with this part of the ancient world, most likely via Euboa and Cyprus and allows for the assumption that a small number of Levantine people might have been present or occasionally visiting the northern Aegean. It is important, however, that the distribution map of G 2-3 Ware overlaps with the distribution map of Cypriot and Phoenician objects in the northwestern Aegean and with the map of sites where the written sources place Phoenicians, east of the Chalcidice Peninsula (fig. 4). This is a topic that the future discoveries will throw more light on.²⁷

Notes

¹ Some of the best illustrations of this process come from the islands of Thasos and Samothrace: cf. Gimatzidis 2002, 73–81; Ilieva 2009, 109–123; Ilieva 2010, 138–171; Ilieva 2014, 85–96; Ilieva 2018, 231–250.

² The annual reports on the archaeological and archaeometric research in North Greece are presented in the AEMTH volumes, while a number of doctoral dissertation at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki have greatly contributed to our understanding of the ceramic manufacture and exchange in the LG and Archaic northern Aegean. For collected papers on the subject: cf. Adam-Veleni et al. 2013; Tiverios et al. 2012; Kefalidou – Tsiafaki 2012; Kotsonas 2012, 111–300.

³ Archilochus (fr. 46-52) refers to the native people of Thasos and the opposite mainland at the time of the Parian arrival as *Thracians*. Similarly, the ancient literary tradition agrees on the Thracian origin of the pre-Greek population of Samothrace. For collected literary sources on Samothrace: cf. Lewis 1958; Burkert 1993, 178–191. The ancient literary sources provide various accounts on the identity of the pre-Greek peoples of Lemnos. Homer knew them by the name *Sinties* (Il. 1, 594) and *Sinties of savage speech* (Od. 8, 293-294). Sch. ad Il. 1, 594 tells us that the Sinties were Pelasgoi, the sch. ad Od. 8, 294 describes them as Thracians. Hellanicus of Mytilene, fr. 71a knew that the people of Lemnos were Thracians, but describes them as *mixhellenes* and few in number. The sch. ad Aesch. Pers. 890 also refers to Lemnos as Thrace (Thracian). Herodotus (Hdt. 5, 26; 4,145; 5, 138-139) informs us that the non-Greek inhabitants of Lemnos (and the neighbouring Imbros) were Pelasgoi. Thuc. 4, 109, 1 knew of the people of Lemnos as Pelasgoi, but described them as part of the tribe of the Tyrsenians. The coast between lower Strymon and Hebros rivers was home of various Thracian *ethne*, some of which were known by tribal names such as Kikonos (in the Ismaros area opposite Samothrace), Bistonos (along the lower Nestos, in the chora of later Abdera), Edonoi (lower Strymon, around Pangaion), for collected sources and comments cf. Delev 2005, 105–121; Delev 2007, 85–106; Ilieva 2006; Ilieva 2017, 253–275; Ilieva 2018, 231–251. Similarly the

area east of Hebros river, around Ainos, the Melas Gulf and the Thracian Hersonese was inhabited by Thracian tribes some of which known as early as the Homeric epics (east Thracians living around Ainos, Il. 2: 844–845, 4: 519–520), for collected sources and comments on Thracian Hersonese: cf. Tsvetkova 2008.

⁴ For the colonisation of the Northern Aegean: cf. Ilieva 2006; Tiverios 2008, 1–154; Damyanov 2015, 297–301. For Thasos in particular: cf. Muller – Mulliez 2009, 135–150 with earlier bibliography; for Samothrace: Graham 2002, 221–260; Ilieva 2010, 138–170.

⁵ For the specifics of the EIA local, hand-made ceramics from Aegean Thrace: cf. Triantafyllos 1990, 297–322; Koukoulē-Chrysanthakē 1992; Ilieva 2010, 138–170.

⁶ Rose 2008, 399–430.

⁷ Aslan 2002, 79–129.

⁸ Tiverios 2008, 1–154.

⁹ Papadopoulos 1997, 191–219; Papadopoulos 2011, 113–133; Anagnostopoulou – Gimatzidis 2013, 369–376.

¹⁰ For summarising studies on G 2-3 Ware, see Ilieva 2007, 212–27; Ilieva 2009, 109–123; Ilieva 2010, 138–171; Ilieva 2013, 123–131; Ilieva 2014, 85–96; Ilieva 2016, 207–222; Ilieva 2018, 231–250; Ilieva et al. 2010, 565–574.

¹¹ The results from NAA analyses of Trojan ceramics proved the local origin of G 2-3 Ware (Mommsen et al. 2001, 169–211), while the discovery of misfired sherds on Lemnos supports its role as a centre of manufacture (Beschi 1994a, 69; Beschi 1994b, 35).

¹² Ilieva et al. 2010, 565–574.

¹³ Ilieva 2014, 85–96; Ilieva 2018, 231–250.

¹⁴ See recently Ilieva 2016, 207–222; Ilieva 2018, 231–250.

¹⁵ Karabournaki: Tiverios et al. 2001, 259. 262 fig. 6. – Methone: Kotsonas 2012, 115. – Argilos: Ilieva 2013, 123–131.

¹⁶ For summarising discussions on technological features, shape repertory, centres of manufacture and distribution: cf. Tiverios 1992, 357–367; Gimatzidis 2010, 226–252.

¹⁷ Two deep trenches excavated by P. Bernard in 1960 in the ancient town of Thasos, to the north-west of the Artemision, led to the revealing of the earliest evidence of habitation, especially in sounding G1: Bernard 1964, 77–146. Partly excavated apsidal (or oval?) building K with a dividing wall, clay floor and stone masonry which probably continued in a wattle-and-doubt construction and the associated ceramic finds of North Aegean manufacture were initially interpreted as the earliest remains of the Parian *apoikia* established by the first wave of settlers led by *oikistes* Telesikles. The layer with these remains was dated by the excavator to the first half of the 7th c. BC. The re-examination of the stratigraphy and the ceramic assemblage from this earliest layer of habitation led to the conclusions that it precedes the Greek arrival on the island and belongs to a Thracian settlement dated to the last decades of the 8th and the early 7th c. BC.: Kohl et al. 2002, 58–70; Muller – Mulliez 2009, 135–150. The nature and the date of the finds from this layer influenced its designation as *pre-colonial* in terms of chronology, meaning that it is immediately preceding the establishment of the Greek settlers on the island, see Graham 2001, 364–402; Koukoulē-Chrysanthakē 1993, 679–735; Kohl et al. 2002, 58–70; Muller – Mulliez 2009, 135–150; Ilieva 2009, 109–121. The results from the re-examination and

the new chronological margins of the precolonial settlement have as a consequence the dating of the Parian arrival ca. 670–660 BC (Muller – Mulliez 2009, 135–150 with earlier bibliography) *versus* the older dating ca. 650 BC supported by Graham (Graham 1978, 62–98; Graham 2001, 364–402). In fact this habitation level must have been preceded by an even earlier phase, represented by a very small part of a wall named P in the new topographic plan of trench G1: cf. Kohl et al. 2002, 58–70.

¹⁸ Bernard 1964, 77–146.

¹⁹ Bozkova 2002, 133–144; Bozkova – Delev 2012, 69–78.

²⁰ Catling 1998, 151–187. For detailed discussion on terminology, technological and ornamental features, centres of manufacture and distribution see Kotsonas 2012, 150–158 (with earlier bibliography).

²¹ Momsen et al. 2001, 195–196 (sample 118); Kotsonas 2012, 155 no. 532.

²² In 1835 when Leaky was walking around Athos he couldn't find a local sailor willing to take him by boat around the south-eastern tip of the peninsula despite the generous amount that he offered. The storms around its shores, especially the north-eastern one are notorious and still intimidate the local sailors and fishermen: Hovardas 2007, 12.

²³ Hdt 6, 44. 95; 7, 189.

²⁴ Hdt. 7, 22–24. 37. 116–117. 122.

²⁵ The Spartans lost 50 ships according to Diod. 13, 41, 1–3.

²⁶ Graham 1978, 61–98.

²⁷ I would like to attract the attention to an analogous example of another group of famous easterners that, according to Herodotus (Hdt. 5, 98; 7, 59. 106–113. 119; 9, 116), not only crossed, but established themselves in Aegean Thrace – the Persians. It is a well-known axiom that had the Herodotus text not survived, the archaeological record would never make us guess their presence in the area. Nevertheless, no one questions the validity of this written testimony, while the information on the Phoenicians in the area is frequently scrutinised in comparison and juxtaposition to the material evidence (or more correctly its absence).

Image Credits

Fig. 1–4: by author.

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