



## Pistiros and Thasos: revisiting the foundation narrative of the settlement at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa (Vetren)

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### ABSTRACT

The discovery of the Pistiros inscription (SEG 49. 911) in 1990 dramatically changed the interpretation of the nearby ancient settlement at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. The site came to be identified as the *emporion* Pistiros, a Greek trading post founded by settlers from the Thasian *perea*. Based on historical and archaeological arguments, the excavation director Mieczysław Domaradzki proposed that after Thasos lost its continental possessions to Athens in 462 BC, Thasians settled in the interior of Thrace in pursuit of new riches. This foundation narrative and the hypothetical Thasian link have significantly shaped subsequent scholarship not only about the settlement at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa but also about Thracian-Greek relations more widely. This paper examines the alleged role of Thasos as a founder and main commercial partner of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. A re-evaluation of the key underlying arguments, namely the historical evidence, the fortifications and the foundation date, the coins, and the transport amphoras shows that the idea that Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was a Thasian foundation or that it had a special link with Thasos does not stand up to scrutiny. The settlement was well connected to north Aegean trade networks, and its fortifications followed trends in late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC Greek cities, but there are no grounds to think of these connections in colonial terms, nor to emphasise the role of Thasos. Instead, we see Adzhiyska Vodenitsa as a Thracian city with a mixed population, under Odrysian economic and political control. The idea about a Thasian *emporion* opened opportunities for research over the past 37 years. We hope that re-evaluating this hypothesis will likewise move our understanding of the site forward, and open new avenues for interpretation.

### KEYWORDS

Thrace, emporion, trade, fortifications, coins, transport amphoras

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## Introduction

In 1990, an inscribed granite block was found by accident in the ruins of a Roman road station near Vetren, south Bulgaria (Domaradzki 1991, 47–48). The discovery of what came to be known as the Pistiros inscription (SEG 49. 911) changed the interpretation of a nearby archaeological site virtually overnight. From a Thracian town and the residence of a local ruler, Adzhiyska Vodenitsa (fig.1) became the *emporion* Pistiros, a trading post, established by Greek settlers from Aegean Thrace (cf. Youroukova, Domaradzki 1990; Domaradzki 1991). The inscription regulates relations between a Thracian authority, multiple emporia, the city of Maroneia, and a place called Pistiros, where citizens of Apollonia and Thasos lived (Domaradzka, Velkov 1994; Chankowski, Bravo 1999; Domaradzka, Chankowski 1999; Graninger 2012; Hatzopoulos 2013; Chankowski 2024). Of the several cities



Fig. 1. Places mentioned in the text (author C. Tzochev)

mentioned in the text, Thasos took on a particular importance for the interpretation of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. On the one hand, the material culture discovered at the site seemed to show links with Thasos. On the other hand, a polis named Pistiros located in the Thasian *perea*, was mentioned by Herodotus (Hdt. 7.109–110). Seeking to explain and reconcile the inscription with the archaeological finds, Mieczysław Domaradzki proposed that Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was an *emporion*, founded by settlers from the Aegean Pistiros, and named after its metropolis (Domaradzki 1991, 48; 1995, 26). But he also suggested that Thasos was the leading force behind this endeavour. After losing their continental possessions to Athens in 462 BC, the Thasians sought new territories for economic expansion, and their pursuit of natural resources brought them to the interior of Thrace (Domaradzki 1993, 51).

Domaradzki's ideas influenced many subsequent publications, especially those resulting from the Pistiros project. While some of the publications simply reiterate the presence of Thasians in Adzhiyska Vodenitsa, or the role of Thasos as a main trading partner of this settlement, others take a step further by accepting that Thasians founded the settlement – either alone or along with Maroneians and Apollonians (e.g., Bouzek 1996, 44; Bouzek, Domaradzka 2007, 255)<sup>1</sup>. The 2000 edition of the *Guide de Thasos* shows Adzhiyska Vodenitsa as “Pistiros” on a map of Greek cities in the north Aegean, and mentions that Thasian traders lived there (Grandjean, Salviat 2000, 14, 30–31, fig. 1). A clear example of these ideas can be seen in the current exhibition of the Museum of Thasos, which opened in 2011. The exhibition includes a copy of the Pistiros inscription, with an explanatory plate

1 The inscription prompted multiple and contradictory interpretations, as Veronique Chankowski notes: the excavators variously refer to the site as a city, an *emporion*, and a colony (Chankowski 2010, 241), without clarifying the distinctions and contradictions inherent in these terms and the different historical processes they signify. For example, the site of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was designated an *emporion*, but the process of its foundation was described as a form of “colonisation” in the upper Hebros valley (Domaradzki 1993, 43; 1995, 58, 79). Further references to colonisation appear also in the Pistiros volumes (e.g., Bouzek 2002, 344).

stating that “The Thasians founded, very soon after their arrival on the island, a series of colonies and trading posts... Their aim was to ensure commercial penetration into the Thracian mainland. One of the most remotest [*sic*] trading posts was Pistryros, near the modern Bulgarian city Septemvri...”

The link between Thasos and the settlement called Pistiros may not be universally accepted but it has never been questioned explicitly and it continues to influence the interpretation of the archaeological data and the site, as we show below. In the meantime, the Pistiros inscription has generated many debates. While it is impossible to review the lengthy discussions in this article, it should be mentioned that both epigraphists and archaeologists have objected to the identification of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa with Pistiros. Andrzej Chankowski and Benedetto Bravo contested the idea of two separate places called Pistiros and Pistryros through textual evidence, and suggested that the inscription refers to the polis with this name on the Aegean coast (Chankowski, Bravo 1999). Gocha Tsetsckhladze (2000; 2011) added archaeological arguments against the identification of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa with an *emporion*. Véronique Chankowski (2010) emphasised that the archaeological surveys in the area of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa did not produce any evidence of Greek presence or Greek-style organisation of the surrounding territory, and proposed that the settlement is not Pistiros, but one of the emporia mentioned in the inscription. Denise Demetriou (2010, 90) suggested that the inscription could be a copy for the Thracian side, in accordance with the common Greek practice of recording official documents in multiple copies, one for each party concerned. In this case, it is conceivable that Pistiros and the emporia referred to in the inscription were all located in Aegean Thrace<sup>2</sup>, thus removing the need to imagine an extensive trade network and roads through the Rhodope Mountains.

Since the debate over the identification of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is far from over, we find it particularly important that archaeological data from the site are considered independently from the inscription and that previous interpretations of such data continue to be scrutinised in order to build a more robust understanding of the past. Here, we offer a long-overdue re-appraisal of the arguments for the Thasian foundation of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa and for special relations between Thasos and this settlement by going through the key elements: the historical arguments, the fortifications and the foundation date, the coins, and the transport amphoras.

## Historical arguments (BD)

Domaradzki proposed that Thasos turned to Thrace in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, because Athens had seized the Thasian continental territories and mines (Domaradzki 1993, 51; 1995, 26–27). It is well-documented that Thasos was a member of the Delian League and as Athens began to encroach on its rich *perea*, in the 460s BC Thasos rebelled. Athens crushed the rebellion and forced Thasos to give up its continental territories including a mine and pay annual tribute (Thuc. 1.100–101). The payments are recorded in the Athenian Tribute Lists and between 447/6 and 444/3 BC they increased from 3 to 30 talents per year (Meritt et al. 1950, 259). According to Domaradzki, this increase was contemporaneous with the settling of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa, and he proposed that this foundation gave Thasos access to new markets (Domaradzki 1995, 27) and a new source of mineral riches (Domaradzki 1993, 51). By implication, the expansion helped to augment Thasos’ revenue and its tribute to Athens.

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2 There are two known sites near the mouth of the river Nestos, which have been proposed as possible locations of Pistryros, one by Pontolivado (Koukoulis-Chrysanthaki 1973; 1980) and another near Nea Karvali, 8 km to the west (Nikolaidou, Patera 2005, 30–32; Chankowski 2010, 245). Both were fortified sites inhabited from the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC though neither has yielded evidence for the identification besides their location. A recent paper identifies Pontolivado with Pistryros by relying mainly on Herodotus and indirect historical arguments, then connects this to Domaradzki’s narrative of a Thasian foundation in the interior (Papadopoulos, Zannis 2022). This highlights the risks of compounding multiple unverified hypotheses. Although the settlement is likely a Thasian foundation, attaching a name to it requires more explicit evidence that has yet to come from the site itself.

This narrative is built upon several assumptions, which cannot be proven. Thucydides mentions that the Thasians had *emporía* on the coast opposite the island (Thuc. 1.100), but there is no evidence that they had the ambition or capacity to establish trading posts as far as the Upper Hebros valley. The *phoros* (tribute) of different cities in the Athenian Tribute Lists changed for different reasons at various times, and often we do not know why. There are many possible explanations why Thasos paid lower tax in 447/5 BC and higher tax in 444/3 BC (see Pébarthe 1999 for a review). The island's revenue may have increased or Athens may have reduced Thasos' taxes as indemnity for war damage or because it had seized the continental Thasian mines in place of cash. Both of these explanations are possible in view of the link between a city's *phoros* rate and its resources demonstrated by Nixon and Price (1990). Moreover, the Athenian Tribute Lists are not a complete source of data – the payments in silver supplemented *phoros* contributions in kind, which were not recorded in these lists (Unz 1985, 29ff). The payments of other cities in Aegean Thrace including Argilos, Galepsos, Abdera, Maroneia, and Selymbria also varied significantly and these variations are also difficult to explain (Graham 1992, 61–62; Pébarthe 1999, 147–148). Finally, the proposition that Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was founded at the same time as the *phoros* increased is hard to prove. Domaradzki relied on dating the fortifications in the third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC but, as we will see, this date is problematic. We have therefore no robust historical evidence that Thasos founded *emporía* in the interior of Thrace or received revenue from them.

### Fortifications and foundation date (CT)

The fortification wall at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is one of the main pieces of evidence supporting the theory that Greek, specifically Thasian, settlers established the settlement. The wall's foundations and its lower courses are made of granite blocks that sandwich a fill of cobblestone and rubble, mixed with earth or clay (Kolarova 1996). In height, the wall was a mudbrick structure covered with a tiled roof (Bouzek 1996, 43; Stoyanova, Popov 2008, 340–341). A notable feature of the excavated section of the wall is the Eastern gate: an opening in the curtain, protected by an internal tower on the same axis, and flanked by a second, external, tower on the left and a bastion on the right (fig. 2).

Domaradzki suggested that the use of orthostates of irregular size in the face of the wall is most similar to the fortifications of Thasos, particularly the west wing of the Gate of Heracles and Dionysos, and the Gate of Silenos. He also emphasised that a gate flanked by a tower and a bastion, as seen in the Eastern gate, is closest to the Thasian traditions (Domaradzki 1993, 40). Subsequent publications reiterate these ideas, with some scholars even going further in their interpretation. For example, Jan Bouzek stated that “The use of orthostates, and some sloping joints reminding one of polygonal masonry come especially near to the Thasos walls. As Pistiros was founded from Thasian *apoikias* [*sic*], just after its defeat by the Athenians, this close relation of both does not seem to be accidental. The technique may have been introduced that far north by those Thasian architects and stonecutters, who were dissatisfied with the defeat...” (Bouzek 1996, 44).

While the fortifications at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa certainly reflect late 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC trends in the Aegean, two propositions are questionable: their connection with Thasos, and their contemporaneity with the foundation of the settlement. Domaradzki's claim that the configuration of the Eastern gate was typically Thasian is difficult to trace to specific monuments. His claim is supported by a reference to a plan of a gate at Kydna (Adam 1982, fig. 21) and a general reference to Charles Picard's study of the Thasian gates with sculptured decoration (Picard 1962). The only fortified gates in Picard's study that bear any comparison with the Eastern gate are the Gate of Heracles and Dionysos and the Gate of Silenos. The first had a bastion, but no towers (Picard 1962, pl. IV–V; Grandjean 2011, 215–223). The latter received an external flanking tower only in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC (Grandjean

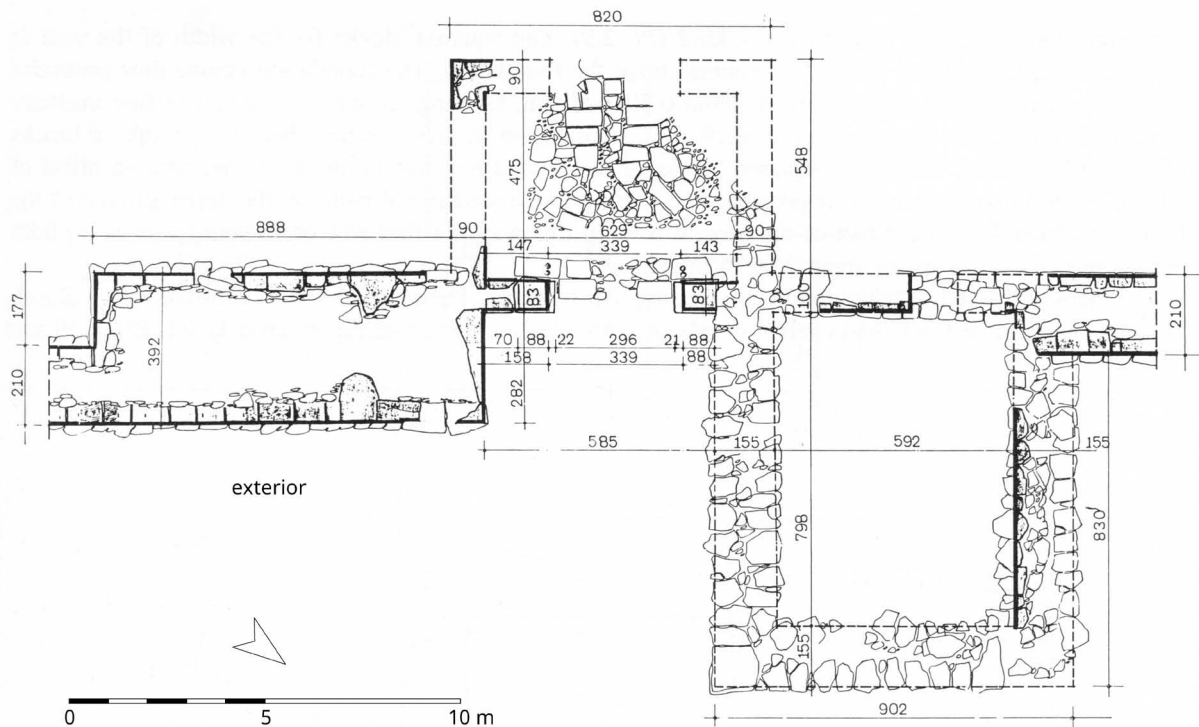


Fig. 2. Plan of the Eastern gate (after Kolarova 1996, 38 fig. 2.3)

2011, 170–176, 178). Furthermore, it is striking that when Domaradzki first made a comparison with Thasos, the internal tower at the Eastern gate had not yet been excavated (Domaradzki 1993, 40, fig. 4). Although the discovery of the tower added a major new element to the architecture of the gate, his opinion did not change (Domaradzki 1995, 48).

In fact, none of the gates in the Thasian city wall show a configuration similar to that of the Eastern Gate at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa (for a most recent and comprehensive presentation of the Thasian fortifications, see Grandjean 2011). As for the proposed similarities in masonry style, they are too generic to argue for a link, let alone the presence of Thasian masons at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. Indeed, one of the most problematic points in the comparison between the fortifications of Thasos and those of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is that the former were built entirely of stone, while the latter were mudbrick in height. The use of large blocks with occasional keying (where blocks are cut down at one corner to receive blocks of a course of a different height) and of sloping joints in a wall base topped by a mudbrick superstructure has better parallels elsewhere, for example, in the so-called Kononian phase (beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC) of the Athenian city-wall (Ohly 1965, 360–376; Theodoraki 2011, 113–118). We do not need to look that far for parallels of the granite socle of the wall. Very similar in style granite masonry can be found some 45 km to the northeast of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. The face of the retaining wall of Chetinyova Mogila (covering the Starosel tomb) has a similar rusticated finish with split surfaces often cut vertically with a point. It also has the peculiar keying of courses meeting at different heights, similar chamfered edges, and pry holes on the top surfaces (Tzochev 2022, 100–103). While the Starosel tomb was designed and built by an architect and stonemasons trained in the Aegean, the granite walls supporting the mound and the dromos, which required a great deal of effort, were more likely the work of local craftsmen. We will not entertain the possibility that these same craftsmen built the socle of the fortifications at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa, but only point out that there are other possible explanations besides settlers from the Aegean coast, especially if one allows that the fortifications were built much later than initially suggested.

The construction date of the fortification wall at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is a crucial point in Do-

maradzki's foundation narrative. Following his initial publications, the excavation team adopted a construction date ca. 450–440 BC (Domaradzki 1995, 23; Bouzek et al. 2006, 47). Rather than being based on specific archaeological evidence, this date was chosen because it aligned with the historical information about *phoros* payments and justified the idea that Thasian settlers built the wall soon after they founded the settlement. However, the excavations have yielded very few artefacts dated before 425 BC (see below) and none of them are associated with the fortifications. If the fortifications were built in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, they would have left a considerable amount of 5<sup>th</sup> century rooftiles at the site, since the mudbrick superstructure required roofing. Yet all remains of roofs discussed in Jiri Musil's publication date to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC, including those associated with the fortifications (Musil 1996, 56–62).

Opinions on the construction date of the fortifications have started to shift more recently. Emil Nankov (2008, 36) has argued that such large, thick-walled towers with roofed upper chambers developed in the late 4<sup>th</sup> c. in response to the parallel development of siege weaponry. The most recent excavation report mentions new (yet unspecified) archaeological evidence suggesting that the fortification wall was built after the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Gotzev, Nankov 2021, 414). Thus, the fortification of Adzhyska Vodenitsa can be seen as part of a broader trend in the interior of southern Thrace: the emergence of fortified settlements in the decades before and after the Macedonian conquest (342–339 BC)<sup>3</sup>.

Rethinking the date of the fortifications disassociates them from the settlement's foundation, and invalidates a key part of the Thasian colonization narrative. As for the foundation date, the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC seems indisputable; however, the archaeological evidence does not particularly favour the alleged 444/3 BC. Only a negligible part of the excavated objects can be dated with certainty before 425 BC. These include:

- a few fragments of Attic pots from ca. 500–450 BC (Archibald 2002, 136–140, nos 1–6);
- a ceramic lamp from ca. 525–475 BC (Jurina 1996, 95);
- a rim fragment from a Milesian transport amphora dateable before 480 BC (Tušlová, Weissová 2013, 161, pl. 36.6);
- two silver coins of Neapolis from the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Taneva 2018, 384–385, fig. 6).

These objects were found in later strata or lack context. They are also suspiciously earlier than the assumed foundation date. One possible explanation is that we are dealing with exceptional cases of older objects brought by the first inhabitants in the period 425–400 BC. More likely, a settlement existed at this place since the early 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC but received imports only on rare occasions until the last quarter of the century, when it opened to north Aegean trade networks. This would not be surprising or exceptional, considering the evidence for 5<sup>th</sup> century activity in the area of Akandzhievo, some 3.5 km east of Adzhyska Vodenitsa. These comprise a hoard of silver coins from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC (CH 6.7) and a cemetery of 15 mounds, used between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Gizdova 2005, 117–121). Among the imported grave goods were Attic *lekythoi* dated ca. 450–425 BC (Gizdova 2005, 120).

In summary, Adzhyska Vodenitsa was settled sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, but the archaeological

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3 Kabyle was previously thought to have been fortified before the Macedonian campaign of 342–341 BC. However, the design of the fortification towers and the dearth of archaeological finds dateable before ca. 342 BC makes it more likely that the construction followed the establishment of a Macedonian garrison there (Nankov 2008, 36; Tzochev 2009, 64–68). Both Philippopolis and the settlement on Krakra Hill near Pernik were inhabited in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC and were fortified around the middle of that century, but it is unclear whether this happened before or after the Macedonian conquest (for Philippopolis, see recent review in Bozhinova, Hristeva 2016, 160–163; for Krakra: Paunova et al. 2003, 39; Paunova, Mihaylov 2004, 66).

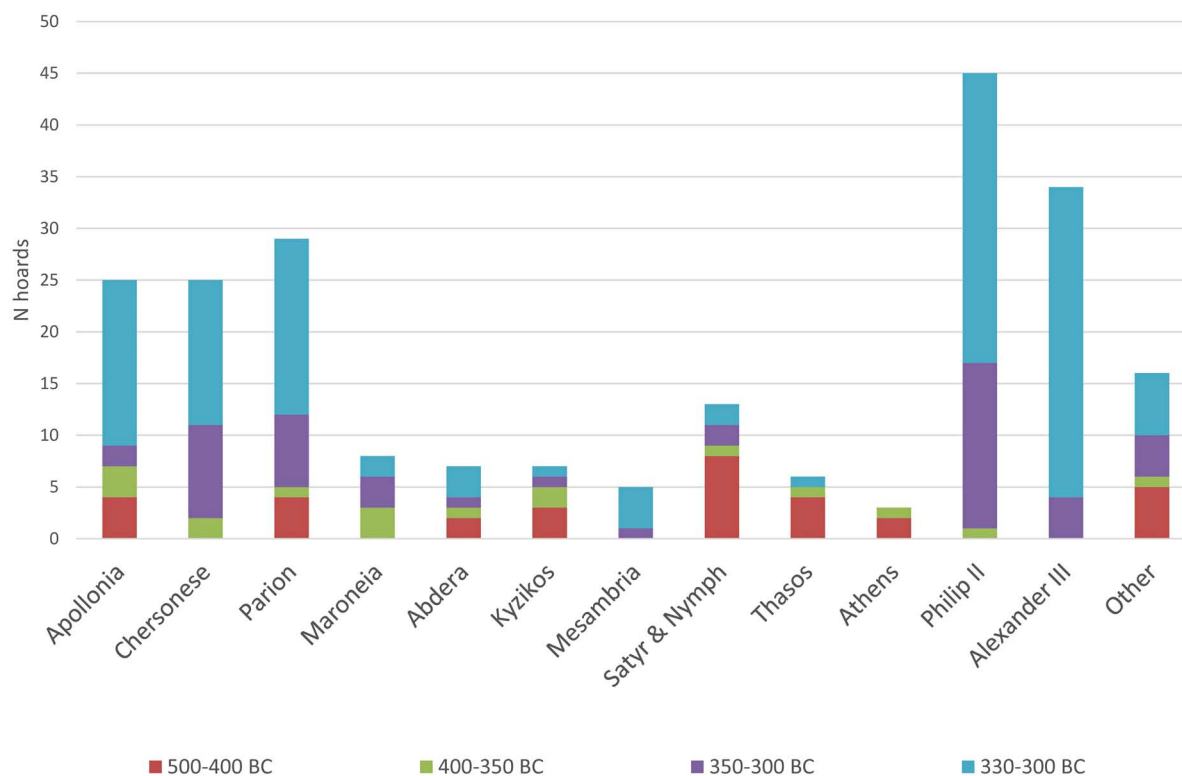


Fig. 3. Frequency of mints in coin hoards in Thrace (data collated after IGCH, CH, Gerasimov 1946; 1952; Gyuzelev 2009; Youroukova 1979; 1981; 1982a; 1985; see tabulated summary in Dimova 2015, 309–316 Tables 13–14)

data do not support a foundation date in the 440s. Furthermore, the settlement was most likely fortified only after 350 BC, at a time when deteriorating security led to the rise of fortified communities in the region. Nothing in the design or the technology of the fortifications suggests a connection with Thasos. In terms of masonry style, the granite socle of the wall has local parallels.

## Coins (BD)

Publications on the coins from Adzhiyska Vodenitsa has drawn attention to the unusual presence of early Thasian coins, particularly a group of Thasian *hemihektai* minted ca. 410–400 BC, which are otherwise rare in hoards in Thrace (Youroukova, Domaradzki 1990, 9; Domaradzki 1993, 43–44; Taneva 2000, 49: 7 coins). Elsewhere Thasian coins are cited as evidence for commercial relations with the island. For example, in his discussion of the coins, Domaradzki notes that “Another characteristic feature is the strongly emphasised south-western direction of trade contacts (Bergai, Thasos, Sermyle), which is completely understandable, if we consider the origin of the traders who settled at Pistiros” (Domaradzki 1995, 54 trans. by the authors). This observation is echoed in later publications: “During the early commercial history of the site (which is here taken to mean the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC), Thasian coins dominated exchanges at Pistiros, alongside those issued by the Thracian rulers. Trade relations were thus oriented to the southwest” (Taneva 2005, 29). The prominence of coins of the Thracian Chersonese and Parion later in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. is read as a sign that trade relations shifted over time (Taneva 2005, 29).

To assess the place of Thasos within the numismatic material, however, we need a view of the wider assemblage. Valentina Taneva (2018, 380–381) provided an overview of the material, compris-

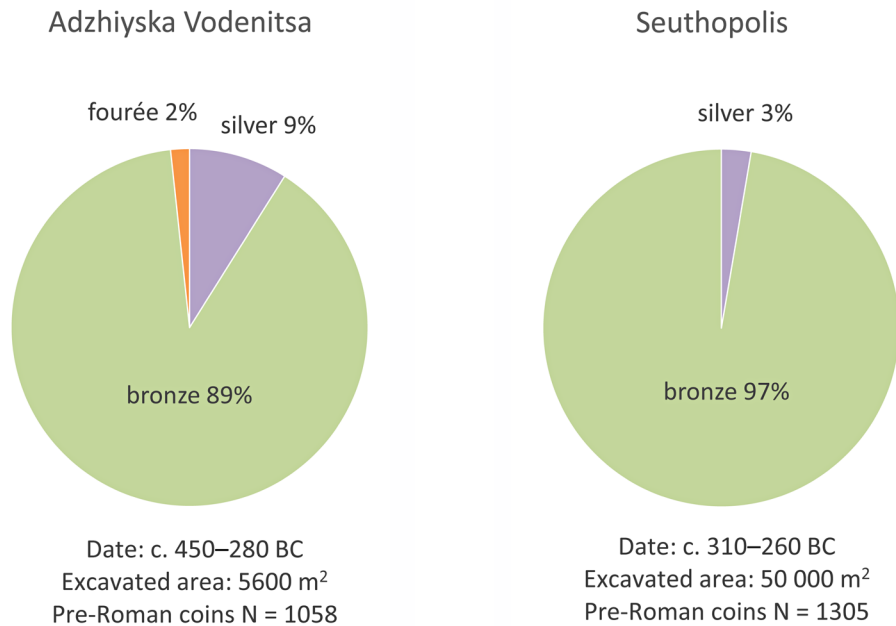


Fig. 4. Ratios of bronze and silver coins at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa and Seuthopolis (data after Dimitrov 1984; Taneva 2018)

ing 1174 coins: 1049 (89%) in bronze, 105 (9%) in silver, and 20 (2%) fourées. Macedonian coins make up 42% of the assemblage (493 pieces), coins of Odrysian rulers – 17% (193 pieces), and the coins of Greek cities – 12% (141 pieces)<sup>4</sup>. In other words, the coins found at the site are a mix of emissions of Greek cities, Macedonian and Thracian rulers, which is typical for contemporary monetary assemblages in the Thracian interior, as reflected in coin hoards (fig. 3) and cities with published numismatic collections such as Seuthopolis (Dimitrov 1984).

The mint of the Thracian Chersonese dominates the assemblage of Greek city coins, comprising 62 coins or 5% of the total (Taneva 2018, 384). This is not surprising, as other scholars have noted: the Thracian Chersonese is also the most common mint in coin hoards from across Thrace (Youroukova 1982b, 219; Tzvetkova 2004, 23–24; Psôma 2011, 151). According to Taneva's data, Thasos is represented only with 16 silver coins (Taneva 2018, 384). This number includes at least 4 Satyr and Nymph coins, whose attribution to Thasos is hypothetical and has never been demonstrated with solid evidence (cf. Head 1911, 263–264; Price, Waggoner 1975, 36; Gerasimov 1975, 39; Picard 1982, 418–424; Topalov 2012). If we exclude them, the share of Thasian coins is even more modest and falls to around 1% of the total.

The mixed coins of Greek cities at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa reflect the fact that in the Thracian milieu, the silver coinage of many north Aegean cities, including Thasos, Maroneia, Parion, and the Thracian Chersonese, served as a regional currency and a means of storing wealth (Figueira 1998, 28). It would be a methodological fallacy to consider that the silver coins of Thasos or any other city indicate direct trade. Hence, the numismatic evidence does not corroborate the proposed strong trading relations between Thasos and Adzhiyska Vodenitsa, much less the foundation narrative. Rather, it shows that the latter fits within the coin circulation patterns in Thrace.

The most remarkable part of the numismatic material from Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is the bronze coins, making up 89% of the total (Taneva 2018, 380), and especially those issued by Thracian rul-

<sup>4</sup> These figures exclude the hoard of mostly Macedonian coins buried with the destruction of the city ca. 280 BC (Bouzek et al. 2016).

ers, which dominate the assemblage before the Macedonian conquest (Taneva 2005, 29). Bronze coins have value only within the range of the issuing authority. A good illustration of this is the city of Seuthopolis where 97% of the coins are bronzes and the majority (65%, 849) are issued by Seuthes III, the city's founder and ruler (Dimitrov 1984, 7, 41). Adzhiyska Vodenitsa fits well with the pattern from Seuthopolis, a Thracian city with no claims to having been founded by foreign settlers. The two coin assemblages are similar in terms of both the high percentage of bronzes (fig. 4), reflecting small monetised transactions at the urban market, and the high proportion of coins issued by Odrysian rulers (for the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa, and the late 4<sup>th</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. at Seuthopolis). What is more, the concentration of Odrysian royal emissions at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa and the presence of two bronze blanks matching the weight and shape of the coins of Kotys I and Amatokos I are a strong indication that Odrysian coins were minted here (Domaradzki 1993, 44; Taneva 2000, 51–52; 2018, 384).

### Transport amphoras (CT)

In support of his narrative about Thasian settlers and special commercial relations with Thasos, Domaradzki emphasised the predominant – in his view – quantity of Thasian imports among the transport amphoras found at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa (Domaradzki 1993, 46–47). The Czech excavators adopted this opinion uncritically: “Transport amphorae are nearly all Thasian... As the Thasian transport amphorae are well known, no detailed description is necessary” (Bouzek, Musil 2002, 38). Only in a more recent publication has this oversight been amended with detailed statistics, stating that 71% of the stamped fragments, 34% of the rim fragments, and 26% of the toes recovered from the site belong to Thasian amphoras (Tušlová et al. 2010).

Using the transport amphora argument in support of the site's commercial relations with Thasos is problematic in several ways. To begin with, assessing the share of Thasian imports within the assemblage of amphoras found at the site is more challenging than it may seem. This certainly cannot be done by counting stamped fragments. The 71% figure does not mean much, because Thasos was one of the very few amphora-exporting centres that regularly applied stamps during the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Most amphora producers of this period did not stamp, or stamped only occasionally their amphoras. As a result, Thasian stamped fragments are the most numerous at virtually all 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC settlements in Thrace, including those on the Aegean coast.

Estimations based on quantifiable amphora parts, such as toe and rim fragments, are usually more reliable. However, such estimations are complicated by the fact that the Thasian amphora shapes are not unique to this island. A number of places in the north Aegean region produced amphoras very similar to those made on Thasos, including the cities of Abdera<sup>5</sup>, Ainos (Karadima 2004), Akanthos (Filis 2012, 70–74), Oisyme (Karadima 2007), Samothrace (Karadima-Matsa 1994), and other yet unidentified centres. While knowledge of local fabrics can help distinguish between different producers, it is also of limited use because north Aegean amphora fabrics are often macroscopically similar. In such cases it is safer to attribute fragments to wider areas than to specific cities. Hence, the detailed statistics on the proportion of Thasian fragments provided in the Pistiros volumes should be taken with a pinch of salt. The amphora assemblage from Adzhiyska Vodenitsa is undoubtedly dominated by north-Aegean amphoras, but determining the share of Thasos in the mix is difficult to establish with accuracy, and would require a careful re-examination<sup>6</sup>.

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5 Ongoing research by C. Tzochev in collaboration with C. Kallintzi, E. Kefalidou, and M. Georgiadis, within the Archaeological Project at Abdera and Xanthi.

6 C. Tzochev studied the amphoras from Adzhiyska Vodenitsa in 2003–2005. The results of his work differ from

Even if one successfully wrestles with the methodological pitfalls listed above, demonstrating that Thasos is the best represented amphora producer at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa would still not imply a special link, nor even direct commercial relations. Thasos was one of the largest wine-exporters in the Aegean. Thasian amphoras make up a large portion of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC deposits at many settlements in Thrace and the Black Sea area. This was not the result of Thasian settlers spreading their own products, but of a well-organised export-oriented industry and an increased demand for renowned wines (Tzochev 2015; 2016, 89–97). The agents of this commerce remain anonymous, but there is no evidence that Thasian citizens were involved in the long-distance distribution of Thasian amphoras. Furthermore, a claim that the Thasian amphora imports at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa are unusually high can be only made if we compare Adzhiyska Vodenitsa with other sites in the same area. Sadly, none of the few excavated contemporary settlements in the Thracian plain provides comparable published information.

To sum up, the evidence of transport amphoras indicates that the settlement at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was integrated in north Aegean trade, but this evidence cannot be used to support the idea of a Thasian foundation, or any special relations, including direct commercial links, with Thasos.

## From colonisation to mobility and migration (BD, CT)

Demonstrating that Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was not a Thasian colony contributes to the broader debate about how to interpret the site. Much of this debate revolves around the hypothesis that the site was an *emporion* under the control of a local ruler. The discussion is heavily shaped by the interpretations of the Pistiros inscription, with archaeological data playing a subsidiary role, sometimes even used to support contrasting opinions. To a certain extent, this is due to the fact that the term ‘*emporion*’ has various ancient uses and modern definitions (cf. Bresson, Rouillard 1993; Hansen 2006; Demetriou 2011; 2012; Gailledrat et al. 2018) and there are no robust criteria for recognising an *emporion* based on archaeological data. Still, whatever definition of *emporion* one chooses, it entails a community acting as an intermediary in regional trade. Adzhiyska Vodenitsa has yielded plenty of evidence for local consumption but so far nothing suggests that it supplied the immediate surroundings nor the wider area of the east Thracian plain.

One thing is hard to argue with: Adzhiyska Vodenitsa had a resident community of ‘Greek’ people. The strongest evidence of this are the inscribed grave markers found at the site and its vicinities (Domaradzki 1993, 42–43), the Greek names scratched on local vessels (e.g., Domaradzka 2007, cat. no. 7; 2013 cat. nos 7, 10)<sup>7</sup>, and the typical cooking pots, which enabled this community to maintain their habitual ways of cooking (Bouzek, Musil 2010, figs 4.72.1; 4.73.14; 4.80.4; 4.76.35). However, a community of foreigners does not necessarily imply a community of merchants.

We see Adzhiyska Vodenitsa as a multi-cultural city under Odrysian economic and political authority. It is impossible to say whether this city was an exceptional case or the norm in the interior of Thrace, as settlements of the 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC in the region are heavily underexplored. Cities are by their nature places where people of different backgrounds mix. If we move from a narrative of colonialism to an appreciation of migration as a feature of human history, then the presence of foreigners at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa does not appear exceptional. There is clear archaeological as well as historical evidence for foreign military men (Sears 2013), architects and stone carvers (Tzochev

those published by members of the Czech team (Tušlová et al. 2010). Although he was included as a co-author of the main publication of the amphora material (Bouzek et al. 2007), this was done without his knowledge or consent.

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that most of the Greek names appear on Attic pottery, which may have arrived at the site already inscribed (see a tabulated summary of the *graffiti* in Dimova 2015, 326–331, Table 21).

2022), painters (Dana 2024, 47–50) and other craftspeople coming to Thrace for various periods of time.

## Conclusions

The hypothesis that Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was founded by settlers from Thasos or its putative daughter-city Pistiros, or had any special relations with Thasos, was based on a chain of propositions, including that: a) Thasos expanded in the Thracian interior after losing its conflict with Athens, b) Thasos paid tenfold tribute in silver as a result of a profitable foundation on the continent, and c) the site at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was founded at that time. These propositions were supported with archaeological interpretations, namely that the fortification wall was built in the 440s BC and has close parallels on Thasos, and that the coins and transport amphoras show strong relations with Thasos. We have shown that none of these ideas stands up to scrutiny. The settlement at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was certainly well connected to north Aegean trade networks, but nothing shows a special link with Thasos.

Ironically, although the narrative about Pistiros and Thasos was built upon far-fetched presumptions, it played a positive role in the study of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa. It did so by opening an opportunity. Domaradzki developed his ideas about the Thasian link between 1993 and 1995, and in 1995 he attended a conference on Thasos organised by the French School at Athens. There he met Roland Étienne, then director of the School and soon after, Étienne visited Adzhiyska Vodenitsa at Domaradzki's invitation. This was the beginning of a collaboration, which in 1997 brought to Bulgaria a French archaeological mission and funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The conference “Pistiros and Thasos: Economic Structures on the Balkan Peninsula”, held in 1998 (Domaradzka et al. 2000), was an important step in this collaboration, which also involved fieldwork, specialist analyses, and publications. Hence the opportunity was well seized and beneficial in many ways, and we recognise that all this valuable research and exchange of ideas would not have happened without the Thasian affair.

We hope that reconsidering the link between Thasos and Adzhiyska Vodenitsa will lead to a more balanced view of the role Thasos played in inner Thrace. But we also see this as a step towards reconsidering the colonial model on which previous interpretations of Adzhiyska Vodenitsa have been built. Greeks settling in the interior to exploit its richness is not the only way to explain the existence of a city with a mixed population and active trade. Revising the foundation narrative is just a starting point: 37 years of excavations have yielded plenty of material to take it from here and move towards a better understanding of this fascinating and important site, with all that it can reveal about urban life, consumption, exchange, and interactions between ‘Greeks’ and ‘Others’.

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## Abbreviations

CH – *Coin Hoards*, 10 vols. London: Royal Numismatic Society, 1975–2010.

IGCH – Thompson, M., Morkholm, O., Kraay, C.M. 1973. *An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards*. New York: American Numismatic Society.

SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, consulted online at <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/sego/> (7 October 2025).

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