In Search of Territories in Southwestern Thrace: The *Peraia* of Samothrace, the Strategy of Korpilike and the *Civitas* of Traianopolis

Maria Gabriella PARISSAKI

Abstract: The present communication focuses on the region lying between the Ismaros Mountain to the west and the lower course of the Hebrus River to the east. Knowledge of the region has importantly grown during the last decades, through excavations and field research but also through the publication of the epigraphic corpus of Aegean Thrace in 2005 (*IThrAeg*). Despite this growth of knowledge, however, some basic desiderata remain. Among them, the better understanding of the evolution and size of the three major administrative units attested in the region during the Roman times; namely, the *peraia* of Samothrace, attested since Hecataeus’ and Herodorus’ times, the strategy of Korpilike – attested only once in the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy – and the *civitas* of Ulpia Traianopolis, founded by Trajan in the realm of his important administrative reorganisation of the Roman province of Thrace.

Key words: administrative organisation, Samothracian *peraia*, Corpili, strategies, Traianopolis.

INTRODUCTION

In the region lying between the Ismaros Mountain to the west and the lower course of the Hebrus River to the east – that is the region corresponding in broad lines to the “Hebrus Prefecture” of the modern Greek state – no major urban settlement developed until well into the Roman times. Here the Hebrus estuary defined the region’s character and historical development by offering no effective protection from the north and no good harbour on the shore. Thus, from the 7th century BC till the early 2nd century AD – that is from the period of the Greek colonization of the north Aegean shore till the foundation of Traianopolis and Plotinopolis further to the north – ancient sources mention only the fort of Doriskos and a number of settlements attached to the island of Samothrace and forming its *peraia*.

The region’s ancient development also determined to a certain extent the character and pace of modern research. Excavations, field surveys and publications mainly focused on the major Greek colonies lying to the west of the Ismaros Mountain, that is Maroneia (Psoma et al. 2008, with earlier bibliography), the settlement at the Molyvoti Peninsula, sometimes identified as ancient Stryme (Arrington et al. 2016, where the problem of the site’s identification is also discussed), and Abdera (Chryssanthaki 2007). To the east of the Ismaros Mountain, excava-
tions focused mainly on two of the most important settlements of the Samothracian _peraia_ – that is Zone⁴ and Makri (Ευστρατίου / Καλλιντζή 1994) – and to a limited number of _tumuli⁵_. Of the two Roman foundations, only Plotinopolis, lying by the modern city of Didymoteichon, has been partially excavated; but Traianopolis, safely identified with the archaeological site by the modern community of Loutra, remains unfortunately largely unexplored. In the field of publications, finally, the coinage of Plotinopolis is currently under preparation by Marina Tasaklaki (see her article in the present volume); and a stele of a gladiator, recently published by Athanasia Tsoka, seems to be the only important addition to the epigraphic corpus of Aegean Thrace published in 2005 (Τσόκα 2013-2014). Despite this slow but steady growth of knowledge, much, of course, remains open to further research; among them a better understanding of the exact location, size, evolution and inter-relation of the basic administrative units that are attested in the region during the Roman period; that is the Samothracian _peraia_ – attested in our sources since the 5th century BC but still existing at least till the 3rd century AD – the strategy of Korpilike, only attested once during the 2nd century AD, and of course Traianopolis, founded by Trajan as its name clearly indicates. It has to be stressed that this paper is not about settling long standing problems by offering definitive answers, but more about presenting available data as currently understood.

### The Samothracian _peraia_

Interest in the Samothracian _peraia_ started basically in the beginning of the 20th century AD. An article devoted to the _peraia_ was published by Perdrizet in the REG of 1909; a few years later, in 1918, Gawril Kazarow excavated a part of what was to be identified as Zone (Perdrizet 1909; Kazarow 1918). From then onwards, scholars have gathered and painstakingly analysed all literary and epigraphic evidence that span from the time of Herodotus to Late Antiquity, trying to locate the six _polismata_ mentioned by name – that is Mesambria, Zone, Drys, Sale, Tempyra and Charakoma – and, of course, the Serrheion promontory. In 1989, François Mottas published a most important article that greatly contributed to the better understanding of the region's topography by presenting the most plausible identifications (Mottas 1989). But up to that date, all contributions on the Samothracian _peraia_ resulted from an "a-chronological" approach, where the evidence offered by Hecataeus, Herodotus and Thucydides was added to that offered by Strabo and Titus Livius, disregarding the many upheavals that took place in this quite important – from a strategic point of view – zone. The most important contribution of the “post-Mottas” period lies exactly in this notion of evolution. Thus in an article published by Tsatsopoulou in the 10th Congress of Thracology held in 2005 a chart was published clearly tabulating this evolution (Tsatsopoulou 2007, 655, pl. 1; Tsatsopoulou 2009, 410, fig. 1). References to Zone and Drys, seem to follow more or less the same general pattern: Zone – identified today to the archaeological site of Şaplı-dere – was first mentioned by Hecataeus, as attested by Stephanus of Byzantium, by Herodotus at the beginning of the 5th century BC, and in inscriptions of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, like a catalogue of cities from Delphi and a decree of Samothrace for Aristomachos; Drys – whose exact identification still eludes us, but which is to be searched by Serrheion

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2 Zone was excavated by Andreas Vavritis and later by Polyxeni Tsatsopoulou; for bibliography on excavation reports and for the site in general, see below note 5.

3 For an overview on the _tumuli_ of Aegean Thrace, see Τριαντάφυλλος / Τερζοπούλου 1996. Further to the north, the famous _tumulus_ of Doxipara was unearthed and excavated in recent years; see Τερζοπούλου 2013.

4 For the ongoing excavations at Plotinopolis (modern Didymoteichon), see Κουτσουμανής et al. 2009 with earlier bibliography; an impressive building of probably public character and a hydraulic structure are among the most important discoveries.

5 In earlier times, scholars considered that Zone and the Serrheion promontory should be located at modern Makri; this identification was largely based on their belief that the only archaeological site available to the west of Makri was the one excavated by Kazarow at 1918 at the mouth of the Şaplı-dere stream, which they identified as Mesambria. This identification was seriously questioned by J. and L. Robert, who pointed out the strong presence of coins of Zone found at the site of Şaplı-dere (more than 2,000 coins), see indicatively BullÉpigr 1976, 464; 1978, 312; 1980, 319 and 1981, 326. The identification of Şaplı-dere with Zone became thereof widely accepted, see e.g. Mottas 1989, 88-89. For the literary and epigraphic evidence on Zone, see Isaac 1986, 130-131; _IThrAeg_ p. 505-511; Tsatsopoulou 2007 and 2009; Psoma 2008, 125-126; Zahrnt 2008.
and Zonaia mountains – was also mentioned by Hecataeus, as attested by Stephanus of Byzantium, in the catalogue of cities from Delphi mentioned just above, and in two decrees dated to the early 3rd century BC. Thus references to these two settlements – that are to be located at the westernmost part of the coastal strip between the Ismaros and the Hebrus – seem to date exclusively to the Late Archaic, Classical and Early Hellenistic periods. References to Sale, on the other hand, cover all periods from Late Archaic to Late Roman Times. The name occurs in Herodotus, in Livy and also in the *Itineraria* of the Roman period; to these *Itineraria* we owe the valuable information that *mutatio* Sale lay on the *via Egnatia*, 15 miles to the west of Traianopolis, thus suggesting a generally accepted identification with the archaeological site at the promontory of Makri. On the easternmost end of this coastline, the two settlements of Tempyra and Charakoma, seem to occur only from the 3rd century BC onwards. Tempyra is generally identified today with the modern city and port of Alexandroupolis, where important finds of the Roman period are from time to time unearthed; among them we should mention an inscription, a *horos* of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods of Samothrace, found at the eastern part of the modern city. But Charakoma – only mentioned once by Strabo – still eludes a generally accepted identification (see Isaac 1986, 132-133; Psoma 2008, 126-127). Finally, an article published by Zahrnt one year later than the article of Tsatsopoulou, that is in 2008, offered one further contribution, by putting forward the idea that Mesambria – only occurring once in Herodotus – may be discarded as a name of a settlement and be rather interpreted as a direction mistakenly understood by later copyists (see Zarhnt 2008).

Are we to see in this shift from west to east a simple shift to the urban development of the Samothracian *peraia* or are we to interpret it as a sign of a deeper change that also affected its size and character? The second alternative seems suggested by the fact that in 188 BC, at the end of the war against Antiochus III, Livy (38.41.8) mentions Sale as a *vicus Maronitarum*, thus clearly indicating that an important change has occurred in the meantime. But this process might have started earlier. An inscription, originating from the sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace and published by McCredie (1968, 220-221), informs us that the island acquired a sacred land at the opposite shore during the reign of Philip and his son – either Philip II/III and Alexander III/IV respectively – that was later restituted by Lysimachus; this land is probably to be identified to the ἱερὰ χώρα mentioned above; and the Gallic invasions of 279/78 BC may also have had an impact on the region’s development, as suggested by Selene Psoma (2008).

As things stand and on available evidence, therefore, the following development may be suggested: for the period spanning from approximately the 6th century BC and till the Early Hellenistic period, the *peraia* of Samothrace may have extended from the Serrheion promontory to that of Makri, where the settlement of Sale is to be identified. No indication exists that during this first period the *peraia* extended to the east of Makri. But Macedonian expansion and the Hellenistic kingdoms’ desire to effectively control the route running along the north Aegean shore, seem to have put a serious strain on Samothrace, which may have found it hard to constantly control the zone on the opposite coast. The founding of Orthagoria at about the middle of the 4th century BC – to

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6 Drys was located just to the west of Zone, according to Skylax; Drys παρὰ Σέρρειον is mentioned in the Athenian tribute list of 422-421 BC, while Drys and Zone are mentioned in a catalogue of towns from Delphi, dating to the beginning of the 4th century BC; for the literary and epigraphic references on Drys, see Isaac 1986, 129-130; *IThrAeg*, p. 501-502; Psoma 2008, 125.

7 On Sale, see Isaac 1986, 131; *IThrAeg*, p. 129; Psoma 2008, 125-126. According to Mottas (1989, 88) and on the evidence of distances given by the Roman *Itineraria*, Sale is to be identified with modern Makri.

8 At about the same period, Tsatsopoulou suggested that Mesambria should be searched not on the coast but on the immediate hinterland of the Samothracian *peraia*, see Tsatsopoulou 2007, 656 and pl. 4.

9 In this part of the coastal strip, the southern slopes of the Zonaia Mountains offered a relative protection from the north. Field surveys have revealed a number of forts in the mountainous regions of Iumaros and Zonaia that seem to have operated as a barrier zone, see Tsatsopoulou 2007, 651-652.
be placed somewhere between Maroneia and the Serrheion promontory – may have been a first blow; Gallic invasions may have aggravated the situation and Maronitan pressure was felt too. That the island did possess a _péraia_, though, is clearly indicated by the Samothracian decrees for Hippomedon and Epinikos, which refer to an _ochyroma_ and a _chorion_ on the opposite shore (IThraEg TE 63 and TE 64; Psoma 2008, 127, # 31). In Roman times, though, and on the evidence of Strabo’s testimony, only the region around Tempyra (= Alexandroupolis) seems securely connected to the island. The _vicus_ of Sale, still present in our sources, is never again explicitly associated to Samothrace. Under this perspective, the usual definition of the Samothracian _péraia_ as the coastal strip of land stretching from the Serrheion promontory to the Hebrus estuary may never have been the case; and it certainly does not apply for the Roman period, here under consideration.

### The Strategy of Korpilike

The Roman conquest of Macedonia and, even more so, the creation of the client-kingdom of Thrace at about the middle of the 1st century BC led to a new reality. From that date onwards all land lying outside the Greek settlements of the north Aegean shore went under the direct control of the client kingdom of Thrace and as such was probably organised into strategies; this system was maintained after the provincialisation of Thrace in AD 46 and functioned till the reign of Trajan at the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Unfortunately, the name of the strategy or strategies that lay along the lower course of the Hebrus River has/have not survived in our sources for the period spanning from the middle of the 1st century BC to the end of the 1st AD. Then, Claudius Ptolemy includes in his work _Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑ φήγησις_ a catalogue entitled “strategies of Thrace” (στρατηγίαι Θρᾴκης). In this catalogue strategies are organized in four distinct groups; in the second, covering the region along the border of Thrace with Macedonia and along the north Aegean shore, Ptolemy mentions the strategy of Maidike – clearly to be connected to the tribe of the Maedi and thus placed along the Strymon valley – the strategy of Drosike, the Koiletike, then the Sapaike – clearly connected to the Sapaei and thus placed in the mountainous region above Abdera and Maroneia – and then the strategy of Korpilike. From Claudius Ptolemy’s catalogue, moreover, it becomes clear that the strategy of Korpilike bordered to the west with the Sapaike, to the east with the Kainike and to the north with either Samaiké or Bennike.

Setting aside this general arrangement, valuable information can also be derived from the name of the strategy, to be associated to the Thracian tribe of the Corpilī. Most scholars agree today that the Corpilī are first mentioned by Livy in his 38th book; there Livy describes the well-known and many times commented upon attack of Thracians against Manlius Vulso and his army just after the Roman victory over Antiochus III and the treaty of Apameia in 188 BC. In a narrow pass, difficult to identify though certainly lying to the east of the Hebrus River, the army was attacked by the Corpilī, Maduateni, Astae and Caeni. Two of these tribes – the Astae and Caeni – are certainly located to the east of the Hebrus, but the names of the other two – the Maduateni and Coreli – occur here for the first and only time. If we accept the emendation of Coreli to Corpilī, this would date their emergence at the beginning of the 2nd century BC. But the first cer-
The ambiguity of ancient sources – east or west bank of the river – is also reflected in modern views; some scholars locate the tribe and the strategy on the east side of the Hebrus (Tacheva, Delev), some on the west (Detschew, Fol) and only a few suggest that the river may not have been such a barrier after all20. That the strategy extended to the western side of the river is, I think, clearly indicated by the identification of the defiles that may have functioned as the western limit of the homonymous strategy. To the east, the Hebrus River does indeed offer the best possible natural boundary. But the possibility that a part at least of the strategy also extended to the east of the river should not be excluded; Strabo clearly equates Korpilike to Aspinthis and in ancient Thrace we also know of other tribes and cities extending on both sides of a river; the Maedi, e.g., dwelled on both sides of the Strymon, while the urban centre of Tipeiros lay to the west bank of the Nestus while its chora extended to the east21. The strategy, though, should not have extended much further than the region of Ainos; for a more eastward location would have left too much space for the strategy of Sapaikes and not enough for the strategy of Kainike, to be placed to the west of Astike and the chora of Perinthos22. To the south, the strategy probably touched the Aegean shore, leaving outside the Samothracian perai of Roman times, as defined above. The most difficult limit to define is, of course, the northern one. The only scholar to have ever proposed a more concrete definition towards this direction was Alexander Fol, who considered that the strategy of Korpilike extended up to the line of Zlatograd-Didymoteichon (Fol 1975, 85-86, esp. 86). Though not substantiated, such an extent would have corresponded to the size of the other strategies mentioned in the catalogue of Claudius Ptolemy.

**Traianopolis and its territory**

The location and extent of the strategy of Korpilike brings us to the last part of our presentation, the definition of Traianopolis’ territory. The city was founded by Trajan at the crossroads of the Via Egnatia with a
vertical artery running along the Hebrus River and leading to the Via Diagonalis\textsuperscript{23}. The city proper developed on flat terrain to the west of a hill – St. George Hill – which offered not only a convenient location for the city's acropolis but also control of the surrounding area. The extent of the city's territory has been the subject of only short references, due to the lack of any direct relevant information (e.g. \textit{IThrAeg}, p. 534). Available data – which amounts to a couple of inscriptions and coins and which still largely depends on the study of the region's geological formation – will be only briefly repeated here.

Two inscriptions found at Traianopolis (\textit{IThrAeg} E433) and at modern Alexandroupolis (\textit{IThrAeg} E447) respectively and dating from the reign of Septimius Severus and Caracalla refer to works of maintenance of the city's road network, allocated among the various phylai\textsuperscript{24}. A reference to the road leading to the Hebrus river at l. 22-23 of inscription \textit{IThrAeg} E433 (ἡ ὁδὸς μὲχρ’ Ἐβρου ποταμοῦ), offers an indication that the city's territory may have extended at least till there; this conclusion seems further corroborated by coins depicting a reclining male figure, usually identified to the river god Hebrus\textsuperscript{25}. To the west the defiles of Makri – identified to those mentioned by Appian as the defiles of the Corpili\textsuperscript{26} – seem to set a reasonable limit; just to the west of these and, more precisely, by the site of modern Aetolophos a milliarium was set up by the city of Ulpia Topeiros (\textit{IThrAeg} E395). The most difficult limit to define at the present state of our knowledge seems to be the northern one; we may conjecture – but at the present state of our knowledge, we have to stress that this is only a conjecture – that the city's northern limit may have lain at the region of modern Souflì, where the eastern slopes of the Rhodopes Mountain almost reach the west bank of the Hebrus river. This would have left enough space for the territory of Plotinopolis, a city also founded by Trajan at the confluence of the Hebrus and the Erythroapotamos.

Thus defined, the territory of Korpilike and that of Traianopolis seem to have partially, if not substantially, overlapped. And this brings us to the last and most difficult question: that of the fate of Ptolemy's city. As things stand, we may perhaps suggest that either the strategy of Korpilike antedates the foundation of Traianopolis and was totally abolished with its creation, or that the strategy continued to exist for a certain period of time, restricted perhaps to the more remote and mountainous areas of the Rhodopes; but for the time being, other possibilities should not be excluded either. It is only to be hoped that excavations, a more careful study and a better understanding of the region's archaeological map and, most of all, comparisons with the other strategies and cities of Thrace, will lead us to a better understanding of the region's development during this period.


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