

## **ANCIENT PORTS OF ABDERA IN AEGEAN THRACE**

As early as the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the colonists of Thrace created their towns either on slopes close to natural ports either artificially or naturally fortified. Thus between the river Nestos and Evros were founded Abdera<sup>1</sup> and other cities like Dikaia, Maroneia, Orthagoreia, Mesembria, Zoni, Drys and Sali (Fig. 1).

Abdera with Maroneia and Ainos were among the most secure and richest cities of Thrace. Abdera's wealth resulted largely from her commercial relations with the native population of Thrace and with the rest of the world. To increase the commercial activity of the region it was necessary to create a fleet of vessels and also a port for their protection. It's clear that Abdera's coastal location played a significant role in this, because the natural promontory on which the town was built had many inlets and bays. These could be used as harbours for anchored ships.

During the Persian War, Herodotus mentions that the Thracian fleet was surrendered at the port of Abdera, a fact that implies this port was one of the most important at the area.<sup>2</sup>

Geomorphological research has proved that the shore line in ancient times was to be found to the north and east of the present line formed by the river Nestos and that the sea frequently invaded the ancient city at the point, where today we think that the colonists first settled.<sup>3</sup> In this area today there is an uncultivated marsh, which is probably the original site of the first port. Present sea level is obviously very different from the ancient one.

In this area,<sup>4</sup> a section of the Northern fortified enclosure, two consecutive

constructions of the wall are located.<sup>5</sup> Somewhere can see the archaic wall which runs from East towards West in a similar fashion but not exactly parallel to later the wall.

The port was bounded and protected from the north by this particular stretch of the wall,<sup>6</sup> which led down to the sea. The presence of the sea<sup>7</sup> here can be shown by the rounded sherds and by the thick layers of sea sand which contains shells, and above all by the layer of rough stones at the level of the foundations, which seem to have started at sea level.

The section that is directed westwards, stops and forms an isolated widening<sup>8</sup> where it meets the sea. Either this was to combat the waves or to be used as a base for a fort, which would have acted as an observation point for the port.

The case for the presence of the archaic port in this position is substantiated by the discovery of a shipshed,<sup>9</sup> which is constructed at the end of the sixth or at the beginnings of the fifth century, because its layer of destruction contained pottery, mainly pieces of amphoras to the last half of the fifth century BC. It can be considered as one of the older known shipsheds.

This building had a roof of coloured (black or red) clay tiles which fell at the destruction layer. A colonnade was found at the east part of the north side of the shipshed. It was formed by square blocks of poros<sup>10</sup> (as bases of the columns, that today have disappeared –except one).

A solid wall of regular masonry continued at the west end. The present length is at least 30m and the inclination 10°. South of it was found the western part of the enclosure wall, which runs North to South and forms the sea wall<sup>11</sup> that follows the ancient shore line and marks the limits of the sea in the 5th and 4th century BC, when the archaic wall was destroyed possibly by flood and thus abandoned.

A strong wall that was discovered about two hundred meters south of the shipshed, in an excavation of 1965 carried out by Lazaridis,<sup>12</sup> is made up of large granite boulders. This wall seems to have been used as a quay, which might have been connected with the presence on the slope beyond the buildings what with some reservations have been interpreted as a series of shops. The building phases date back to the 5th and 4th century BC.<sup>13</sup>

Further south in the area of the small modern port of the community of Abdera, below the naturally strong hill, there was an artificial port which protected ships from eastern and southern winds (Fig. 2).

The breakwater even though destroyed has preserved up to a point its original shape and perhaps its size (fig.3). The western limit of the port was probably further West and North in the region where today there are alluvia. Its length is approximately 180 m. and it runs from East to West.

Underwater excavation on the mole identified two building phases (A, B, Fig. 4). Both of them recognized on the north face of the breakwater, built of enormous granite boulders roughly worked; the older may date to the classical times. It is almost certain that this was used until the Byzantine period with some additional repairs. Two horse-shoe shaped towers meet the southern side of the mole, where it turns to the North at this point.

A third harbor was located at the eastern bay, in the area of Agios Giannis. Here the town's eastern fortification wall runs towards the seashore and forms a semicircular tower, 6 m. in diameter. Of this tower two building phases are also preserved; all the ashlar blocks have collapsed towards the East and South side, possibly from an earthquake. Various axe-shaped tenons (joints) and more architectural details can be seen on the tower stones (Fig. 5).

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**NOTES**

1. Δ. Λαζαρίδης, Άβδηρα και Δίκαια, *ΑΕΠ*, 1971 και Χ. Κουκούλη, *ΠΑΕ* 1982, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992.
2. Ηρόδοτος, 6.46.7.
3. Χ. Κουκούλη-Χρυσανθάκη, *ΑΕΜΘ*, 1987, 409.
4. This excavation belongs to the Archaeological Society of Athens under the direction of Ms. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki.
5. *Έργον* 1989, 101 και *Έργον* 1990, 98-100, εικ. 137.
6. Χ. Κουκούλη, *ΠΑΕ* 1991, σελ. 196, πίν. 119.
7. *Έργον*, 1990, 101.
8. *Έργον*, 1990, 101, εικ. 139.
9. Χ. Κουκούλη, *ΠΑΕ*, 1991, 193-195 και *ΠΑΕ* 1992, 162.
10. *ΠΑΕ* 1992, πίν. 66α, β.
11. Χ. Κουκούλη, *ΠΑΕ*, 1991, 195 πίν. 120 α,β.
12. Δ. Λαζαρίδης, *ΑΔ* 20Β, 1965, 459, πίν. 559.
13. Χ. Κουκούλη-Χ. Σαμίου, *ΠΑΕ* 1989, 226 και *Έργον* 1989, 103.

**ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Fig. 1 The ancient cities-harbours of Aegean Thrace.
- Fig. 2 General view of the ancient mole (photo by N. Lianos).
- Fig. 3 The two building phases of the ancient mole.
- Fig. 4 The phase A of the mole.
- Fig. 5 The ancient mole, general view.

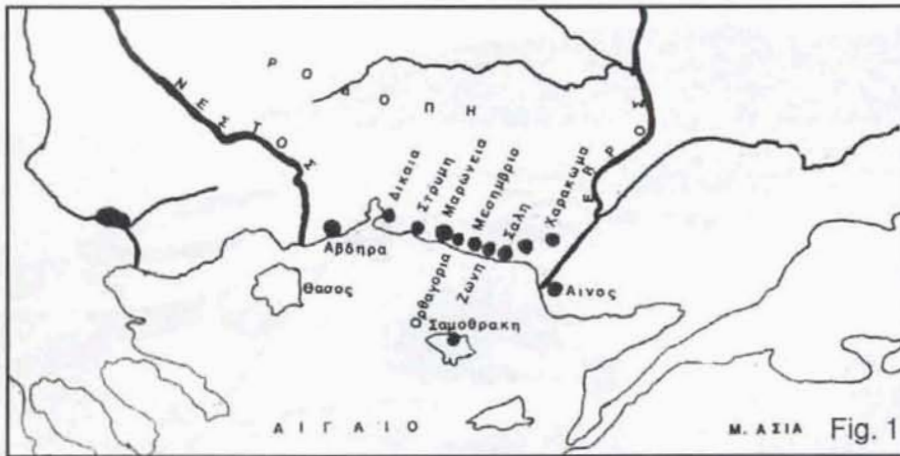


Fig. 2

Fig. 3

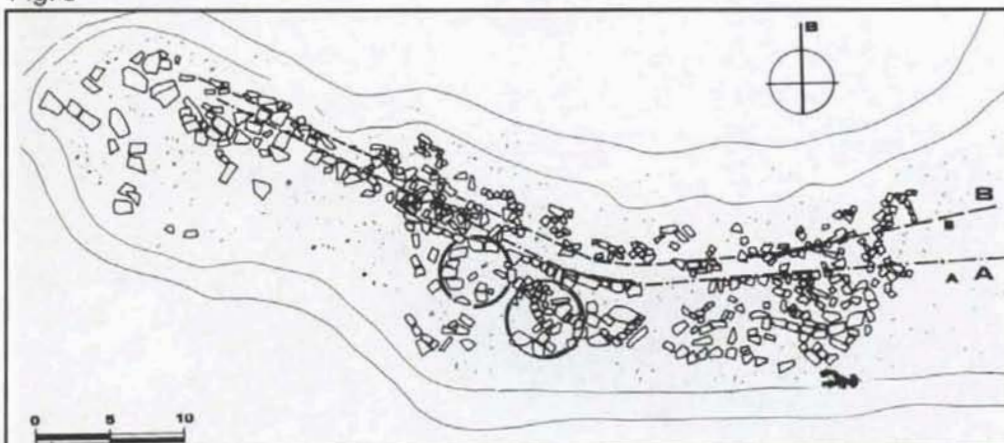




Fig. 4



Fig. 5