

THE ASSUMED “PISTIROS” EMPORION. PRELIMINARY INQUIRIES ABOUT ITS TRADE PURVEYORS

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Abstract: Preliminary inquiries about the assumption of preferential trade relations between Thracian hinterland and Apollonia Pontica.

Cuvinte-cheie: „Pistiros”, Bulgaria, hinterland tracic, emporion grec, relații comerciale, epocă elenistică

Rezumat: Anchetă preliminară asupra presupuselor relații comerciale preferențiale dintre „Pistiros” și Apollonia Pontica.

Located right in the heart of the Thracian hinterland, the Vetren settlement, at first identified as possibly corresponding to the one of ancient Pistiros² on the basis of a Greek inscription discovered in the close vicinity, soon afterwards proved to be ambiguous³. For lack of conclusive epigraphical sources⁴, excavation campaigns have brought to light a rather diversified range of ceramic finds of Greek type, the determination of origin(s) of which would allow to get a concise idea of its main trade purveyors, either issued from the North-Aegean littoral or from the West-Pontic shoreline, as suggested by the mention of one Apollonia within the text of the sibylline inscription, thus allowing to identify this Euxine port of trade as the possible founder of far inland assumed “Pistiros”.

So, we have no choice but to deal with locally excavated archaeological finds, at least with those of well-identified places of manufacture, best suited to settle individually between the two involved geographical poles. For that purpose, we had recourse to XRF-analyses of discriminating varieties of ceramic samples, in order to compare the chemical data between finds from Vetren -name of the nearest modern site- on one side and its two assumed main suppliers on the other one, viz. both Northern Aegean and West-Pontic shoreline centered

on Apollonia⁵. For each variety of selected ceramic finds, the results of data processing will be summarized in a dendrogramme.

In spite of the persistent uncertainty about the very appellation of the site, the range of manufactured items excavated there might have been delivered, either from the North-Aegean littoral through waterway via the Hebros course⁶ or overland via the Nestos valley and the Rhodope mountains⁷; or overland from the Burgas gulf according to the supporters of an Apollonian origin. In order to test it, the archaeometrical process at first consisted, on selected samples, in testing the presence among the finds from the assumed “Pistiros” of specimens of ceramic products attributed to regional workshops of the Apollonia-Mesambria area.

For that purpose, three categories of ceramic products were preselected, viz. : 1) one variant of transport

¹ Study started under the guidance of the Mission Archéologique Française d'Apollonia Pontica, headed by Dr. A. Baralis, Musée du Louvre.

² See Loukopoulou 1999, p. 371; Gotsev 2019.

³ See Chankowski 2010 and 2012; Bouzek, Domaradzka 2013, p. 22–24.

⁴ On the “Pistiros” inscription, see Pistiros I (1996), p. 205; Bravo, Chankowski 1999; Bouzek, Domaradzka 2013, p. 22–24.

⁵ The preliminary archaeometrical results presented here fit with those formerly obtained on a small disparate sample of pottery finds from Apollonia (Blondé, Picon 2003), which at first seemed to have been locally made judging from the archaeometrical data including those of the common wares collected by the excavators (Bouzek *et alii* 2007), whereas the quality of the b.g. fine ones, considered of higher standard than the one of West-Pontic finds, rather led the excavators to interpret them *a priori* as imports of North-Aegean origin (Bouzek *et alii* 2013, p. 96 *infra*).

⁶ On the trading links between Maroneia and the upper Hebros valley, see Bravo, Chankowski 1999, p. 310–311. Through river course, then by sea, the transport duration from “Pistiros” to Thasos is estimated of one month duration after Gotsev 2019, p. 98.

⁷ Judging from the preponderance of Thasian amphoras put forward by Bravo, Chankowski 1999, p. 312. Conversely, one must have in mind that the area of manufacture of jars of Thasian type obviously widely extended beyond the island across the North-Aegean littoral.