

To the Problem concerning the Origin of Krounoi-Dionysopolis

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The problems of the Greek colonisation on the Thracian seacoasts and in particular on the Western coast of the Black Sea, have been widely discussed both in Bulgarian¹ and in foreign² historiography. Some of the proposed ideas on the origin and the historical development of the ancient settlements on the Western Pontic coast are indisputable, but others evoke discussion because of the appearance of unknown facts from newly discovered archaeological, epigraphic or numismatic material, or on account of a different interpretation of the written sources.

To the circle of disputable questions, in our opinion, belongs also the problem concerning the origin and the historical development of Dionysopolis - the ancient settlement on the Northern Bulgarian Black Sea coast in the region of the present-day town of Balchik. In the specialized literature the prevailing point of view is that Dionysopolis was founded by the Greek colonists³, but we actually think that there also exists another possibility.

The data available up to now enable us to describe the following picture of the early stages in the development of the ancient settlement. The archaeological sources from the region show presence of inhabitants at least since the middle of the Chalcolithic Age (final stage of Hamangia culture)⁴. Reliable evidence of this are the anthropomorphic idol and vessel found near Balchik, dated to the first half of the fifth millennium B.C.⁵ For the time being, no material from the later Chalcolithic, Bronze and Early Iron Ages has been found. Since it is believed that the cultural processes taking place in the Northeastern Bulgarian lands during that period of time are typologically similar, we assume that around Dionysopolis we may expect the same historical development as in the rest of Dobrudja. A Thracian city is likely to have been established here in the second half or towards the end of the second millennium B.C.⁶, i.e. long before the beginning of the Greek colonisation on the Western coast of the Black Sea. The presence of settlement life from the second half of the sixth century B.C. onward, attested by the archaeological material⁷, is accepted by some scholars⁸ as evidence of the date of the founding of the Greek colony. There is an opinion that the colony was founded over a much older Thracian settlement⁹. Most of the contemporary authors, however, are inclined to assume that the city was established by the Greeks in an uninhabited area¹⁰. This conclusion is based on the fact that so far archaeological excavations have produced no evidence of occupation before the sixth century B.C. Hence, the

place had not been inhabited by the Thracians before the arrival of the Greeks. In our opinion, the now absence of archaeological evidence does not prove an explicit interruption in the settlement life of the territory. Even more, it is already clear that the Greek colonies were established over or around the older Thracian settlements on the sea coast¹¹.

The written sources giving information on the historical development of the territory are not very detailed. The ancient literary tradition preserved the toponym Krounoi/Krounos as a previous name of Dionysopolis. However, the earliest written evidence is in fact considerably later. It is dated to the first century B.C. and is given by Pseudo-Scymnos¹². According to him and to the *Anonymous Periplus Ponti Euxini*¹³, the city was renamed because of the statue of Dionysos, which was washed ashore. Strabo gives only the name Krounoi¹⁴, but Pomponius Mela mentions both "portus Crunos" and the Urbs of Dionysopolis¹⁵. Plinius also states that Dionysopolis succeeded a city named Krounos¹⁶. Arrianus¹⁷, Appianus¹⁸, Claudius Ptolemaeus¹⁹ and Ammianus Marcellinus²⁰ mention only Dionysopolis. Stephanus Byzantinus is the last ancient author who gives the two city names²¹.

Only the above-mentioned authors have written anything about Dionysopolis or its region. It is important to say that none of them explains who founded the ancient settlement Krounoi or Dionysopolis or when. Hence, we do not have at least one explicit information about the origin of the city as a Greek colony. If the settlement had been really founded by the Greeks, the ancient authors would have mentioned this fact as they have explained the origin of the other cities on the Western Black Sea coast. Besides, none of the sources gives information on the administrative structure or the religious beliefs in the region, which could be interpreted as ties with some possible metropolis. The existing sources are quite brief and all of them belong to the short and dry geographic descriptions of the Thracian Black Sea coast. Obviously, Krounoi-Dionysopolis was not of interest to the ancient writers, except for its geographic localization and that is why all the authors include it only in passing in their works. One more, albeit indirect evidence that Krounoi-Dionysopolis was not founded as a Greek colony, is that Scylax in his *Periplus* does not mention Krounoi-Dionysopolis in the list of Greek cities²². This omission would have seemed strange, if the city had been truly established during the Greek colonisation. Moreover, Scylax was chronologically the nearest to those events. The only author who mentions Dionysopolis in a list of the Greek towns on the Western coast is Appianus²³. His evidence concerns the campaign of Marcus Lucullus against the Pontic cities. Probably because all the listed towns were members of the West-Pontic Koinon and were already quite well known, the author does not give any information on their origin. He just mentions their names.

The analysis of the written sources shows that we have no clear information, synchronous to the epoch of the Greek colonisation, concerning the founding of

Krounoi-Dionysopolis as a Greek colony. We have no reasons to accept the idea that a Greek city was established over an older Thracian settlement. In our opinion, this settlement had been a Thracian city before the colonisation and it continued to exist as a Thracian settlement even after the colonisation. The population was already mixed, as Pseudo-Scymnos states²⁴, but there are no facts supporting the hypothesis that the Greeks were predominant after the colonisation. The reasons for the "surviving" of the Thracian settlement are several. On the one hand, this is due to the uninterrupted Thracian presence in the course of millennia along the Northwest Black Sea coast. The lasting cultural tradition led to the development of a specific ethnocultural community, having its own particular social structure and religious beliefs. On the other hand, it is also important that the big colony of Miletos - Istros - was founded near Krounoi-Dionysopolis. The settlement played a significant role in the region of the Northwestern Black Sea and offered good opportunities for economic and social prosperity. In comparison with Istros, Krounoi-Dionysopolis was an economically undeveloped settlement, which was also a reason for the few Greeks here.

We could obtain essential information on the characteristic features of the ancient city from the analysis of the religious beliefs and cults in the region. Unfortunately, there are no preserved literary sources about the deities worshipped here. This lack of information on the cults in Krounoi-Dionysopolis can be compensated to some extent by the interpretation of the known epigraphic monuments²⁵ from the region. The earliest ones belong to the fourth century B.C.²⁶ Most of the inscriptions from the region are dedicated to Dionysos. Some inscriptions are dedicated to Aphrodite, Demeter, Heracles and Zeus Dolichenos, and not a single monument has been found bearing a dedication to Apollo. What could be the reason for this? If we accept the theory that Krounoi-Dionysopolis was founded by the Greek colonists and most probably by the Milesians²⁷, how could we explain the absence of Apollo cult here. It is known that Apollo was undoubtedly the principal deity introduced by the Milesians in all their colonies²⁸. So, if Krounoi-Dionysopolis was founded by Miletos, it is clear that a cult of Apollo would be attested here. Why Krounoi-Dionysopolis differs so explicitly from the other settlements on the Western coast of the Black Sea? An obvious explanation seems to be that Krounoi-Dionysopolis was not established by the Greeks and therefore the presence of the Apollo cult in the city must not be expected. Preserving its Thracian characteristics, the settlement managed to preserve also the cult of the Thracian god and to impose it as the supreme deity in the region. Dionysos became the eponym of the settlement and from the fourth century B.C. onward its name, according to the inscriptions, became Dionysopolis. It must be said that the change of the name cannot be reliably dated. However, from the available epigraphic information and the earliest reference to the new city name²⁹, we may conclude that this happened in the fourth century B.C. This means

that in the fourth century B.C. the cult of Dionysos must have dominated for long time to have caused a change in such a conservative language field as toponymy. We may ask what is the reason for the spreading of this cult. We believe that it was due to the increasing role of the Thracian ethnic presence during this period in the North-eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, an important component of which were the Krobyzoi. Pseudo-Scymnos³⁰ and the *Anonymous Periplus*³¹ state that Dionysopolis was located between the Krobyzoi and the Scythes, while Hellenicus³² says that the Krobyzoi immortalised. Probably this means that the Thracian Dionisiac religion was well known in the region and that the Thracian Dionysos, quite different from the Hellenic Dionysos, was the supreme Orphic deity here. The Orphic tradition is a sufficient reason to give the city the name of the god. The toponym Dionysopolis could be a Greek translation of the old Thracian city name which was not preserved from the ancient literary tradition or simply the best translation-designation³³ of the cultural processes in this part of the Thracian lands. The oral aristocratic Thracian Orphism was democratised through its main cult of Dionysos in the most advanced regions of Thrace during and after the fifth century B.C.³⁴ The Thracian Black Sea coast was undoubtedly one of these regions. Later, from the fourth century B.C. onward it is almost impossible to say what that Thracian cult of Dionysos was and who exactly worshipped the God. The inhabitants of the Black Sea coast became more and more mixed, and probably everyone had his own notion of Dionysos. The Thracian Dionysos and the Hellenic Dionysos coexisted from the very beginning of the processes of Hellenization in Thrace. Being one of the contact zones between the two cultures - the Thracian and the Hellenic - the Black Sea coast offers an interesting and different pattern of historical development, having its own specific features and syncretic nature. The religious syncretism led eventually to some extent to the profanation of the cults. However, the Thracian Dionisiac faith was beyond any doubt that "unified system of religious thinking"³⁵ according to which Dionysos was the "idea-metaphor"³⁶ of the Thracian cosmic deity.

The raised question concerning the origin of the ancient Pontic settlement Dionysopolis is quite complicated and it is very difficult to offer its final explanation. We believe that Dionysopolis was a Thracian settlement before the Greek colonisation and was not established by the Greeks as a Greek colony. According to the published inscriptions from the region, no cult of Apollo was attested in the city, which is the most important evidence that the settlement was not founded by Miletos. The supreme god here was Dionysos which was probably due to the strong Orphic tradition in the Northeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula.

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12. Ps. Scymn., 751-757.
13. *Anonym. Peripl. Ponti Eux.* 78-79.
14. Strabo VII 6,1.
15. Pomp. Mela II 2, 22.
16. Plin. *N.h.* IV 11, 44.
17. Arr. *Peripl. Ponti Eux.* 24.
18. App. *Illyr.* 85-86.
19. Claud. Ptol., *Geographia* III 10, 3.
20. Amm. Marc. XXVII 4, 12.
21. St. Byz. S.v.
22. Scylax *Peripl.* 67.
23. App. *Illyr.* 85-86.
24. Ps. Scymn. 751-757.
25. G. Mihailov, IGBulg. I², 49-76.
26. G. Mihailov, IGBulg. I², n. 19 bis.
27. B. Isaac, *op. cit.*, 259, note 292.
28. Zl. Goceva, *Le culte d'Apollon*, Dialogues d'histoire ancienne, 18, 2, 1992, 164.
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30. Ps. Scymn. 751-757.
31. *Anonym. Peripl. Ponti Eux.* 78-79.
32. Hellan. Fr.73.

33. This term was introduced by prof. Al. Fol, cf. Al. Fol, *The Thracian Dionysos. Book two: Sabazios*, Sofia 1994, 367.

34. Al. Fol, *op. cit.*, 350-385.

35. *Ibidem*, 355.

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