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5. Emporion Pistiros between greater powers: 450-278 B.C. An attempt to sketch its history¹

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with Pls. 3-7

Abstract: The history of survival of emporion Pistiros between various mightier powers from 5th to the early 3rd century B.C. can be explained in the frame of the system of political interrelations in Thrace; how the small emporion had to ensure its existence by balancing among much mightier neighbours? How it was possible to found a strongly fortified city so far inland, even if apparently accessible for small boats on the Hebros – Maritza River, needs an explanation.

Key words: Pistiros; Thrace; Odrysians; Triballoi; Athens; Macedonia; Philip II; Lysimachus; Celts.

1. The foundation of the emporion and the Odryssian empire

The place of later emporion Pistiros was probably visited as early as the end of the 6th century B.C. and it may have served already at that time as a place where Greek merchants met their clients; the first uncertain part of its history belongs to the time of Teres.² The founder of the Odrysian empire was commander of a cavalry unit in Persian army during the Greco-Persian wars. He died in his 92nd year shortly after mid-5th century B.C. His empire was a loose federation, even subdued tribes kept their autonomous rules, "paradynastes", and after his death the local rulers had even more power in their hands. Teres was for a short time succeeded by Sparadokos, called by Thucydides (IV, 101) a brother of Sitalkes.

¹ This is enlarged and updated version of the contribution prepared by J. Bouzek and L. Domaradzka to the Xth congress of Thracology in Komotini and Alexandroupolis, October 2005.

² For general historical surveys of Thrace at this period, cf., esp.:

MIHAILOV, G. 1991: 'Thracians', CAH III, 2, 591-61;

ARCHIBALD, Z. H. 1994: CAH vol. VI, 2, 444-465, 'Thracians and Scythians';

ARCHIBALD, Z. H. 1998: 'The Odrysian Kingdom of Thrace', Orpheus Unmasked, Oxford;

ASHERI, D. 1988: 'Herodotus on Thracian Society and History', Fondation Hardt 35;

BOUZEK, J., DOMARADZKA, L. (eds.) 2005: 'The Culture of Thracians and their Neighbours, Proceedings of the International Symposium in Memory of Prof. Mieczysław Domaradzki, with a Round Table "Archaeological Map of Bulgaria"', BAR Internat. ser. 1350, Oxford;

FOL, A. 1972: 'Političeska istoria na Trakite ot kraja 2 chil. pr.n.e. do kraja na 5 vek rp.n.e.', Sofia;

FOL, A. 1975: 'Trakija i balkanite prez rano eledenističeskata epoha', Sofia;

ISAAK, B. 1986: 'The Greek Settlements in Thrace until the Macedonian Conquest', Leiden;

JORDANOV, K. 1998: 'Političeskite otnošenija meždu Makedonija i trakijskite d'ržavi, Political relations between Macedonia and the Thracian states, 359-281 BC', in: *Studia Thracica* 7, Sofia;

STRONK, J. P. 1995: 'The Ten Thousand in Thrace', Amsterdam;

LOUKOPOULOU, K. D. 1989: 'Contribution à l'histoire de la Thrace Propontique', Athens;

TOPALOV, S. 1994: 'The Odrysian Kingdom from the Late 5th to the mid-4th Century BC, Contributions to the study of its coinage and history', Sofia;

VELKOV, V., DOMARADZKA, L. 1994: 'Kotys I (383/2-359) et l'emporion Pistiros et les rois de Thrace au IVe s. av. J.C.', in: *BCH* 118, 1-15; cf. also the discussion in *BCH* 123 1999;

YOUROUKOVA, Y. 1992: 'Monetni sokrovishta ot balgarskite zemi I. Monetite na trakijskite plemena i vladiteli', Sofia.

The building of the fortified Greek city so far inland (**Fig. 4: 1**) could not be accomplished without a kind of consent of the local ruler, and the Vetren monumental tomb, built in the same masonry technique (of identical stone and with identical traces of working tools) as the city walls, may well have been his grave. The Vetren tomb (**Pl. 10**) is one of the earliest of its kind, dated to ca. 400 B.C., so the interment was roughly one generation (ca. 30-40 years) later than the foundation of the city, what might be a reasonable period of friendly coexistence of the emporitai with the local ruler. Beyond doubt, the emporitai had certainly to pay for the permission to settle there by some taxation, as they did later to Kotys.

The successor of Teres and Sparodokos, Sitalkes, is mainly known in connection with the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta, which started in 431 B.C. The Athenians managed to gain Sitalkes on their side through certain Nymphodoros from Abdera, but Sitalkes did not intervene in the Peloponnesian war directly. In 424 B.C. he fought against the Triballoi and was defeated. He might have died in the battle, but according to other sources he was enthroned by his nephew Seuthes I, who ruled as his successor till ca. 410 B.C. and was one of the most powerful kings of his time. Most of the Greek towns in Thrace paid tribute to him, while some were forced to do so by war. Certainly Pistiros also had to pay taxes to him. After Seuthes the Odrysian king Medokos is mentioned (in other sources Amadokos). He reigned until the early eighties of the 4th century B.C.; his coins were probably struck at Maroneia. The Odrysian empire was no more unified as it used to be during Sitalkes and Seuthes I; other Odrysian 'paradynasts' ruled at the same time. Before Kotys belongs notably king Habryzelmis, known from one Athenian decree from 386/85 B.C. and from coins minted at Kypsela at the mouth of the Maritza, where the centre of his kingdom may have been. He ruled only shortly, probably till 383 B.C. The excavations at Pistiros gave the picture of some more friendly time during the early 4th century B.C., in which no destruction happened, with the exception of several floods.

2. Thasos, Maroneia and the Athenian confederation

Emporion Pistiros was founded in the third quarter of the 5th century B.C., after the defeat of Thasos by the Athenians and probably slightly prior to the foundation of Amphipolis. The founders of Pistiros and those who became the emporitai, while also keeping their citizenship in their native cities, were Thasians, Maroneians and citizens of Apollonia. It is still a question whether the small Apollonia, apoikia of the Thasians, is mentioned in the famous inscription, or the mighty city of Apollonia Pontica. Though the first interpretation still has more credibility among scholars, the latter was active in inland trade and coins of Apollonia Pontica have also been found at the emporion.

All these cities were members of Athenian confederation, but apparently they tried by founding the emporion their own mercantile policy against their mightier "ally". In 463 B.C. the Athenians managed to occupy the golden mines at Pangaion, which until that time belonged to Thasos, and - after some less successful attempts - in 437 B.C. they succeeded in founding Amphipolis at the mouth of Strymon.

3. The reasons for choosing the site and the foundation

There were apparently several reasons for choosing the site for the foundation of the emporion. It had in its vicinity mining areas (copper, iron, even gold) and enough wood, it was on the river at a place where several roads leading from west to east along the river, southwards across the Rhodopes (**Fig. 4: 2**), and northwards across the Haemus Mountains, crossed. It was situated in the marginal part of the Odrysian kingdom, and it could also use for its trade activities the northern routes to the second-in-rank Thracian kingdom of the time, the

Triballoi. Rivers were important for the transport of heavy loads. Hebros was navigable for small boats in antiquity; Pistiros was probably the last harbour on the river. Wagons and chariots were useful on the Thracian plain especially; we know them from illustrations (Šapl-dere) and from traces of wheels at the Pistiros Eastern Gate.³ The mountain routes connecting inner Thrace with the Aegean cities, studies in detail by the late M. Domaradzki, were more apt for pack animals.⁴ While Upper Strymon had difficult sections for navigation, its role should also be considered.

The founders apparently had *ktistes*, who divided their *kleroi* like in other Greek cities, and the division of plots – with only small changes – was kept during the whole existence of the emporion. The magnificent fortification was closely similar to those of Thasos and Samothrace (Figs. 5: 1-2), while the system of canals (Fig. 5: 3) much resembles that of Amphipolis. The excavated houses at Pistiros find their parallels at Olynthos (cf. esp. CAHIL 2002), but the colonnade along the main E-W street is unique phenomenon at this age and deserves thorough study.

4. Pistiros, Kotys and his Odrysian successors

Some three decades after the death of the local ruler buried in the Vetren tomb, the mighty king Kotys in his program to unification of Odrysian Thrace in all the territory south of the Haemus may have also attacked the city, partly destroyed its walls, and set fire on its houses, if this were part of his war against his Thracian opponents, to whom the emporitai paid taxes, successor of the prince buried in the Vetren tomb (cf. Pl. 10). The emporion may, however, also be destroyed by the Triballoi during their campaign against Abdera in 376/5 B.C.

The Odrysian empire under Kotys I represented the apogee of Thracian political power: it competed with Macedonia and in coastal areas with the second Athenian confederation (founded at 378/7 B.C.). But Kotys closed with the emporitai the well-known contract for common benefit. He protected the city and its properties, apparently not without financial reward.

The new fortifications of Pistiros were less strong, the dependence of the city of Kotys I probably closer, the taxation probably a little bit higher, but the autonomy of the emporion was confirmed by the contract and the system worked long for common benefit; the final client had to pay the difference anyway. As far as we know from the Demosthenes' mention in his speech Against Aristocrates, the revenues from the emporia in Thrace were high, but the customers of Greek merchants paid the higher price willingly.

After the murder of Kotys in 359 B.C. his son Kersebleptes did not manage to keep all of his father's empire; he ruled only over south-eastern Thrace. The area west of the Maritza up to Abdera was under the rule of Amadokos II, son or grandson of Medokos, and of his son Teres II; they struck their coins at Maroneia. On the lower Mesta (Nestos) and west of it a third Odrysian king Berisades ruled after 357/6 B.C. His sons succeeded him in this area; the most important of them was Ketriporis, an ally of the Athenians in their war with Philip II.

The contract with Kotys was confirmed by his successor, as known from the famous inscription. The king whose name has not survived in the inscription was most probably Amadokos, the ruler of the central part of the Odrysian empire. The Greek emporion lived in no isolation from their Thracian neighbours. Though some of them were denied access into the fortified city according to the inscription, they lived in its close vicinity. Perhaps even

³ J. BOUZEK in: *Pistiros I*, 1997, 221-2, *Pistiros II*, 344-5; Z. H. ARCHIBALD, 'The Odrysian river port near Vetren' in: *Talanta* 32-33, 2000-2001, 253-276. Cf. also D. CONČEV, 'La navigabilité de l'Hebros/Maritsa dans l'antiquité', in: *Latomus* 21, 1962, 848-852.

⁴ Cf. esp. M. DOMARADZKI AND CH. POPOV, 'Strassen und Wege in Thrakien während der späten Eisenzeit', in: *15 godini raskopki v Karasura, Karasura I*, ed. M. WENDEL, Weissbach 2001, 131-140.

those Greeks who were not full-right *emporitai* had to settle outside the walls. All graffiti known from Pistiros are in Ionic dialect, the only exception being a graffito Kora (in Doric), found in an extramural house situated just westwards of the western city wall.

But not only Greeks lived within-the-walls. The population on this periphery of the Greek world was apparently of mixed character, as it was also the situation in most Greek colonies situated on the territory of mightier neighbours. The graffiti found at Pistiros show Greek and Thracian names as well. A large part of the loom-weights found in the city (which were made in the households, with female fingerprints) are of Thracian type, unknown in Greek cities, including the North Aegean Greek colonies; the *escharai* – altars are also of type characteristic for Thrace. So the *emporitai* married local women frequently and accepted some Thracians into the city, even if the full “citizenship” was reserved to those mentioned in the inscription (or perhaps to those to whom it was granted by the council of the *emporitai*). It seems that the share of the Thracian population enlarged by time.

5. Pistiros under Philip II and Alexander

The main danger for the weakened Odrysian empire came from the Macedonian king Philip II. He managed to build up his country to be the main power in the Balkans. Between 358 - 342/1 B.C. also all three Odrysian kingdoms came under his supremacy.

Philip II apparently conquered the town of Pistiros in the forties and to some extent damaged the city walls, but no fire was set, and the *emporitai* accepted the new ruler without larger problems. This was in all probability under similar conditions, as no important change in the architecture and trade links of the *emporion* can be noticed. Philip apparently let it flourish as an important centre of metal extraction and working and of trade along the Hebros River and also with the north. The bullae found in the city may well have been of wax diptycha securing the property of mines around the city, as they are known also from other 4th century – Hellenistic metalworking areas, the seal imprints published in *Pistiros V*, ch. 18, belonged to documents on papyrus confirming contracts between the *emporitai* and with their partners.

As late as 335 B.C. Philip's son Alexander campaigned in northern Thrace and had to fight the Triballoi again, until their king Syrmos acknowledged Macedonian supremacy. In 330 B.C. the Odrysian prince Rebulas rose against the Macedonians (he was in contact with anti-Macedonian politicians in Athens) and later another prince, Seuthes III, constructed for himself in the Valley of Roses and finally built there strongly fortified town called Seuthopolis. Seuthes' power grew after the unsuccessful campaign of Alexander's representative in Thrace, Zopyrion, against the Geti and the Scythians, during which Zopyrion fell.

After the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. in Babylon, Thrace fell under his commander Lysimachus who defeated Thracian Seuthes III, though the defeat was not complete and Seuthes kept his autonomous position. In 313 and 310/9 B.C. Lysimachos had to fight against uprising Callatis, supported by Odessos and Histria, and especially the year 313 B.C. was full of dramatic events. Besides the war with Callatis Lysimachos fought Seuthes in the Balkan Mountains and in Perinthos he fought Pausanias, a general of another diadochus governing in Asia Minor, Antigonos.

6. Pistiros and Lysimachus

Under Lysimachus, with changes of commercial network in central Thrace in favour of places situated more to the east and the north, the city lost much of its importance. This might have

mean that the trade with the north became less profitable for the emporitai; at least the archaeological evidence shows a slight impoverishment of the city between 325 and 310 B.C.

Very serious blow was the sack of Pistiros around 310 B.C. Pistiros probably participated in these struggles on the wrong side and was destroyed. The triangular arrowheads found in the destruction levels of ca. 310 B.C. were not Celtic weapons and the Celts were not responsible for the penultimate destruction of Pistiros. After this blow, however, the city was reconstructed in a more modest way, using the spolia of earlier buildings even for their tiled roofs. Still, the reconstruction was made possible apparently by the protection of Lysimachus, who managed to defeat all his enemies, but the structure of his empire never reached a political unity comparable to that of Ptolemy's Egypt or Macedonia. The character of Pistiros changes: the city became less of Greek character, less successful in trade activities; it impoverished.

Those Thracians, who returned enriched from Alexander's campaign apparently enjoyed special position even in Lysimachus' empire, while he moved his centre eastwards. In 309/8 B.C. Lysimachus founded his residential town on Thracian Chersonesus, called after himself Lysimacheia.

The situation at Lysimachus' court was even more unbalanced than in the courts of other diadochs. Characteristic for this time is the fate of Arsinoe II, daughter of Ptolemy I married to Lysimachus; because of her he repudiated his first wife. He gave to his young and gracious wife several Macedonian towns, financed her costly buildings (she built a.o. the circular Arsinoeion in Samothrace) and even renamed ancient Ephesos Arsinoeia in her honour after he conquered it in 286 B.C. The elderly Lysimachus came completely under her influence. When Lysimachus' son from the first marriage resisted her beauty, she repeated the story of Putifar's wife with Joseph, and Arsinoe even reached the execution of son by his father. Commotion from this event shook Lysimachus' empire and contributed to his failure in the war with Syrian Seleukos Nikator, in which Lysimachus fell in 281 B.C.

His empire broke into pieces. Shortly afterwards Seleukos was killed by his half-brother Ptolemaios Keraunos, who talked Arsinoe into a second marriage to ensure the legitimacy of his rule over Thrace. The relation between Arsinoe and Ptolemaios Keraunos was not good and gradually got even worse. In 280 B.C. Arsinoe fortified herself in Kassandreia and her eldest son escaped to Illyria. Ptolemaios Keraunos conquered Kassandreia, killed both her younger sons in her arms and in the following year he was himself killed by the Celts, who carried his head on a pole in front of their army.

7. Pistiros and the Celts

The Celts destroyed Pistiros completely, and it ceased to exist as an urban centre. The final destruction of the city is well dated by the large hoard of 552 coins, mainly by Lysimachus (cf. **Pl. 1: 3-5**), including his last issues, by swords and spearheads of Celtic types and by the late Duchcov fibula found just on the destruction; the emporion was completely destroyed by the Celtic campaign led by Kommontorios in 279/8 B.C. The city was also looted, and only by chance the hoard of silver and gold coins was not found by the looters.

Some of the Celts returned to Central Europe with their booty (cf. BOUZEK, *Pistiros III*, 249-254, SCHÖNFELDER 2007 and **Pl. 21 below**, while others founded in 278 B.C. their kingdom in the south-eastern part of Thrace (its capital was Tyllis); from there they attacked their neighbours and collected fees, as did the related Galatians in Asia Minor. These dramatic events, especially the Celtic attacks and looting, closed the Golden Age of Thrace politically and culturally.

In balancing between mighty neighbours – Odrysians, Triballoi, Athenians and Macedonians Pistiros was rather successful for some 160 years, but only after this bad

example other Greek cities learned how to appease the wild warriors – by paying them for peace and by hiring them as mercenaries. After this destruction only a modest settlement with metal smelting workshops existed at Pistiros, and the place was finally abandoned after another flood during the first half of the 2nd century B.C.

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Pl. 1. Hoard of 552 coins dating the final destruction of the city.

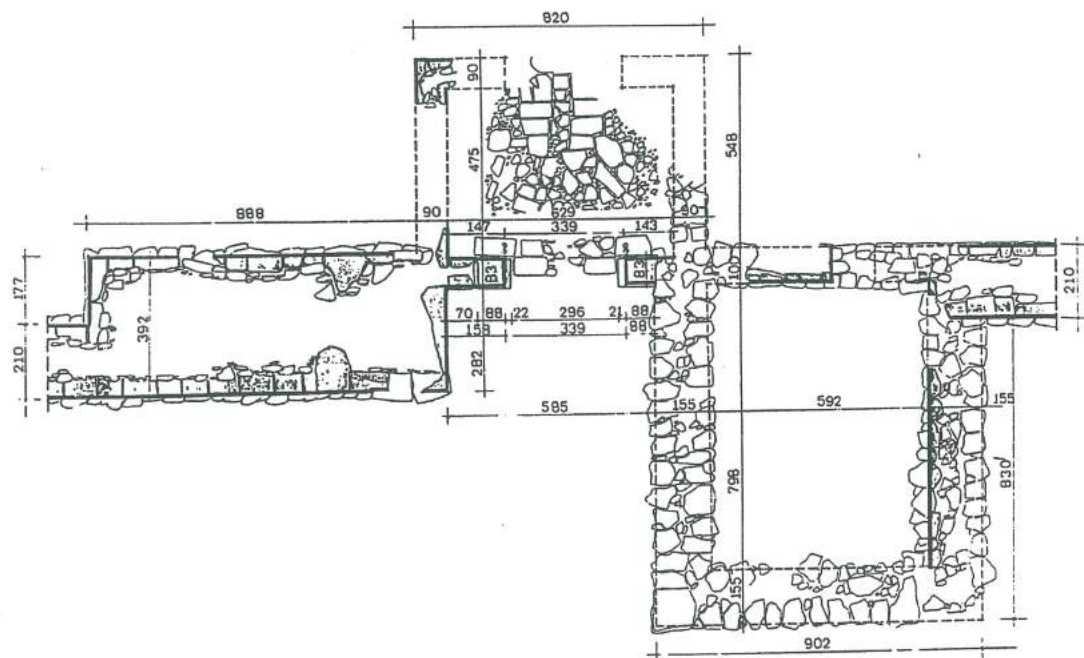


Fig. 5: 1. Plan of the Eastern Gate of Pistiros.

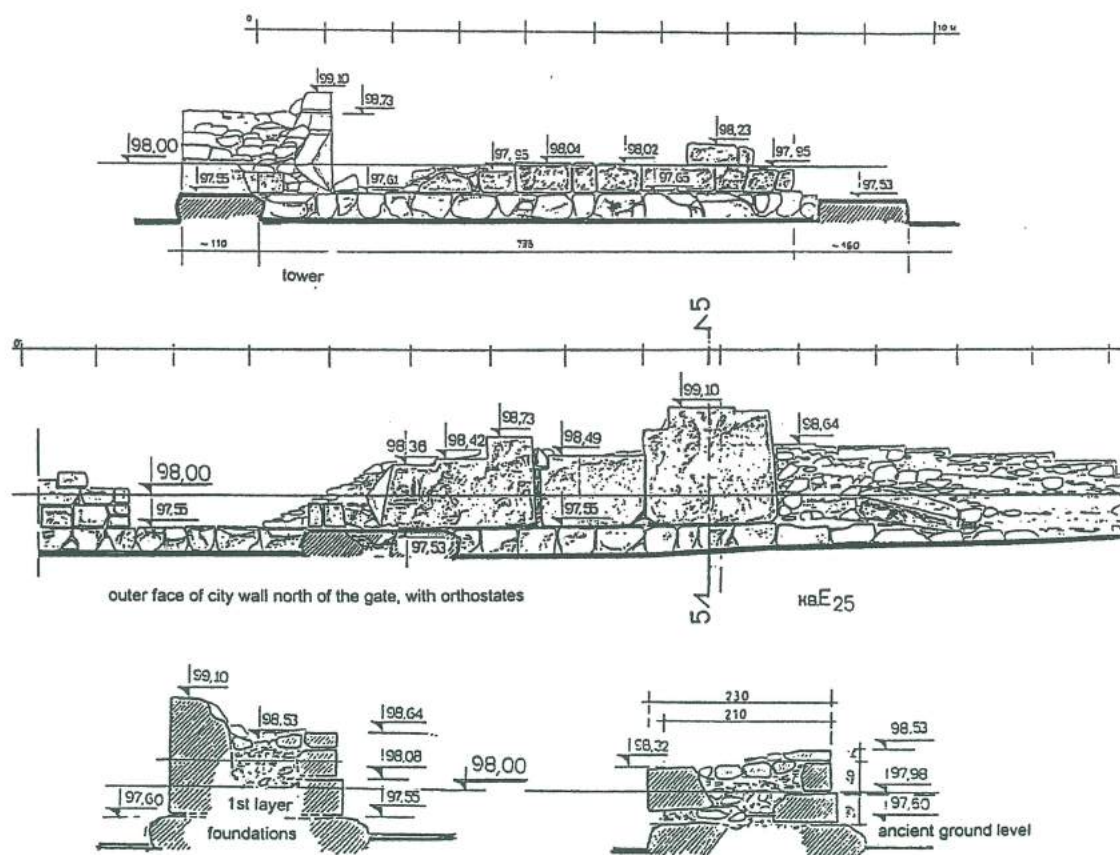


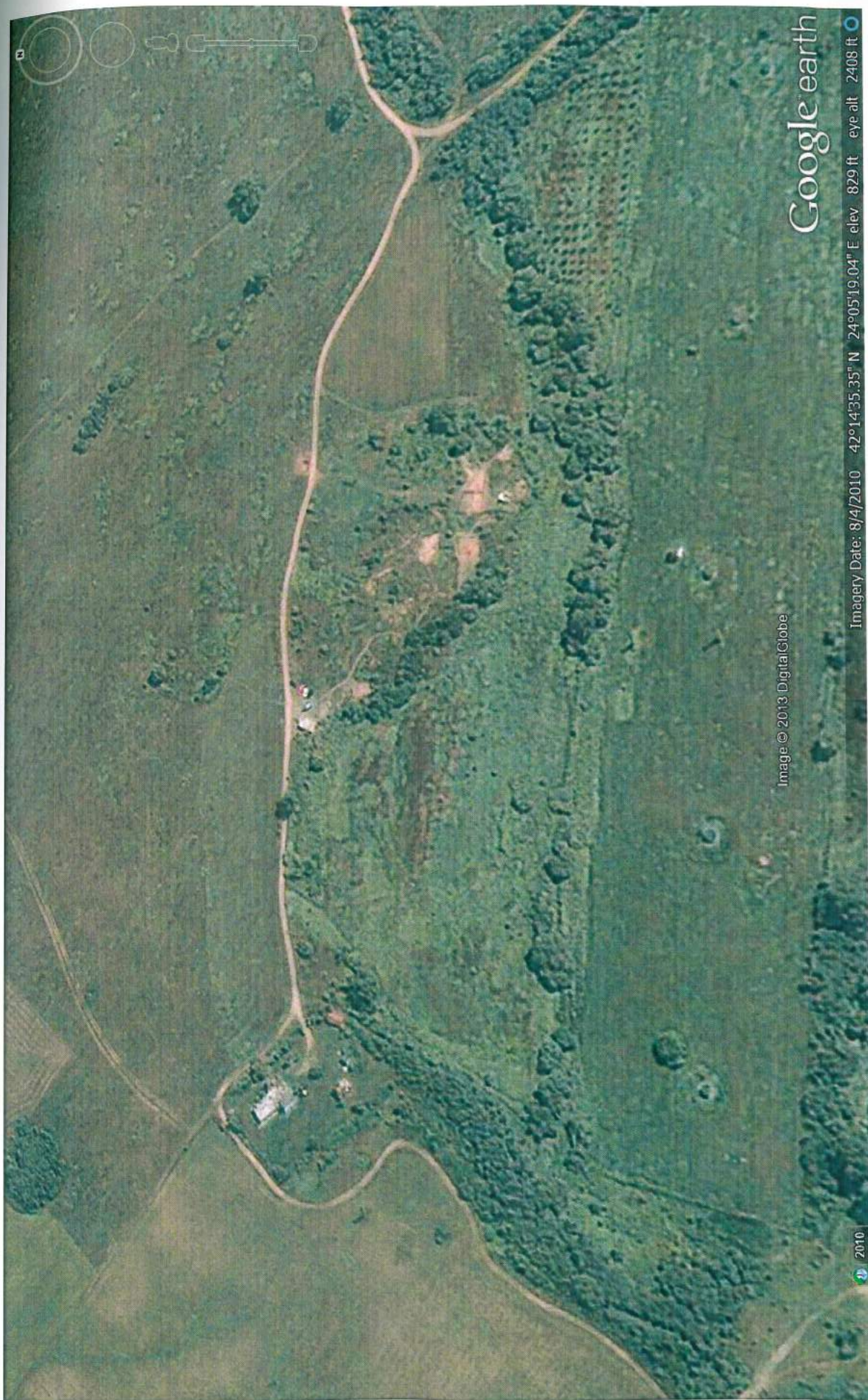
Fig. 5: 2. View and section of the city wall at the Eastern Gate.



EMPORION PISTIROS. AREA OF THE EASTERN GATE

Compiled by Vera Kolarova (+)

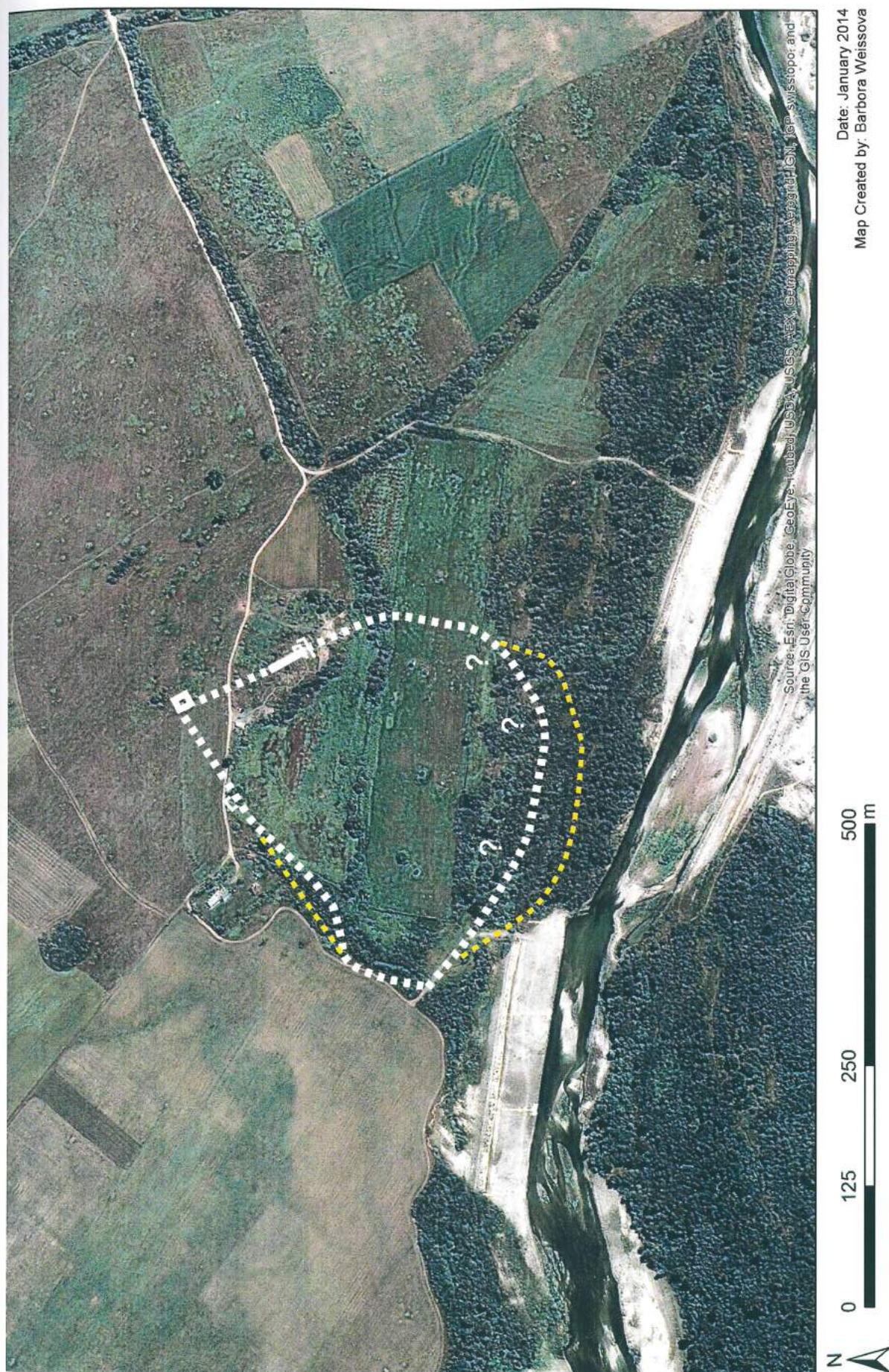
Fig. 5: 3. The area of the Eastern Gate.



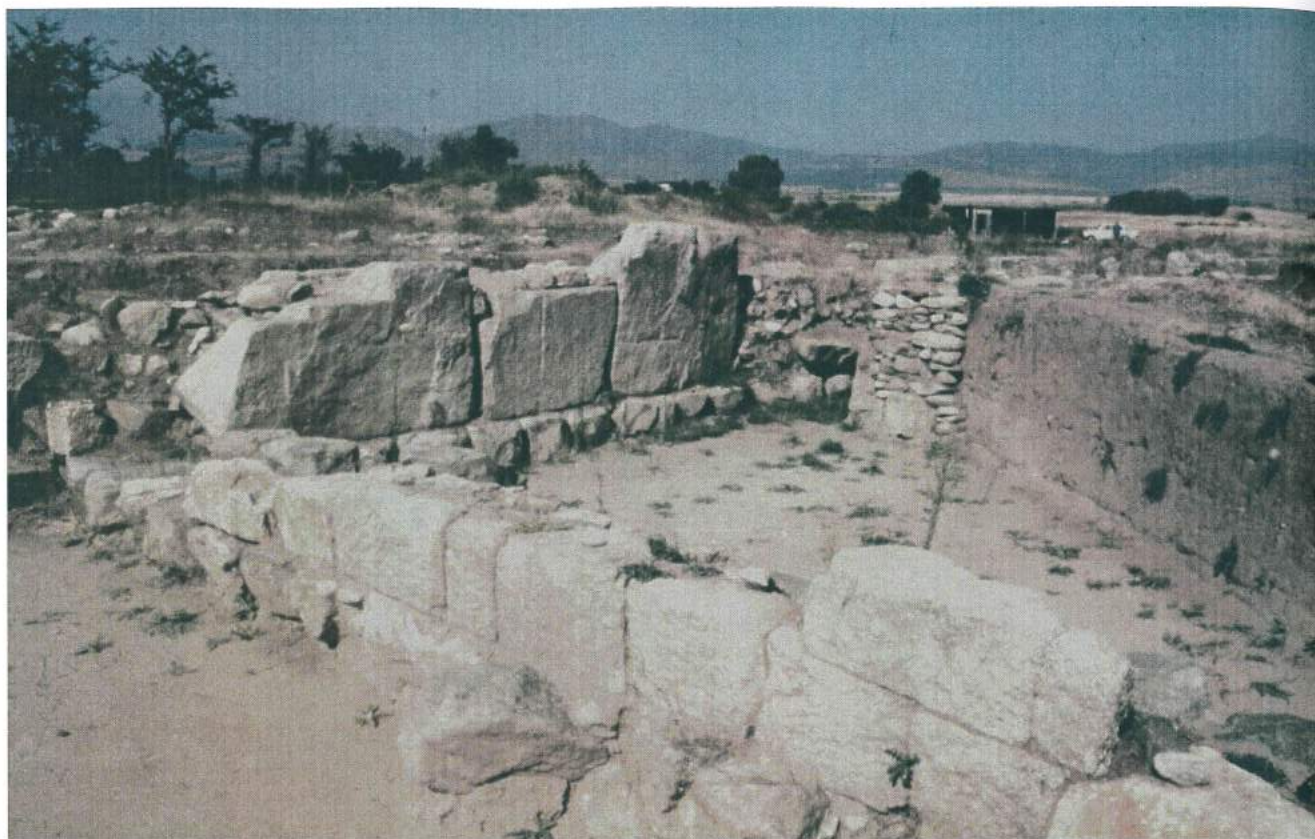
Aerial view of the area of Pistiros, showing the extent of the ancient meander of Maritsa which destroyed most of the area of the ancient city.
Source: Google Earth.



Fortification wall of emporion Pistiros, tentative reconstruction. The NE part of city wall is well preserved and of the northern and NW part some dressed blocks from the first upper row mark the line together with the foundation boulders. The incurved line in the west arose when at the edge of the terrace the foundation stones from the ruins collapsed downwards; the original line was straighter. Straight sections of the wall can be supposed also in the southern limits of the city.



In the southern part where nearly nothing remained of the ruins two tentative attempts of probable reconstruction of the line are marked. While there seem to be some traces of the city wall preserved in the SW corner, the vague traces of it in the south offer two possibilities and the SE line completely destroyed by the river is only calculated as joining the southern end of the preserved section with the SE bent.



1



2

- 1 Foundations of the tower with heavy orthostates of the wall in the background, seen from the east.
2 Eastern Gate viewed from the north.



1



2

1 The main E-W Street seen from the east across the gate.

2 The preserved line of the city wall north of the Eastern Gate, viewed from SW.