

# COMPARING THE SOURCES OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE. THE SETTLEMENT AT NEO RYSIO (THESSALONIKI) AND THE MACEDONIAN EXPANSION TO THE EAST OF THE AXIOS

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**Keywords:** *ancient Macedonia, Thracians, Early Iron Age, Archaic period, Neo Rysio, Thessaloniki, Thermaic Gulf, Macedonian expansion.*

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is twofold: one the one hand, it presents the results of a new systematic archaeological excavation that has been taking place since 2016 near the village of Neo Rysio, about 17 km south-southeast of Thessaloniki. The site, called "Trapeza of Neo Rysio – Kardia", has until now yielded architectural remains and finds of several categories belonging to a settlement that was in use in Early Iron Age and the Archaic period. On the other hand, it attempts an approach to the well-known question of the time during which the regions to the East of the Axios River passed under Macedonian control. The reason for the latter is that the abandonment of the specific settlement, according to its finds so far, and the coming of the area under Macedonian control, according to the recent research, appear to have taken place in the same period.*

## Introduction

The ability to confirm and crosscheck information from both archaeological and literary sources constitutes one of the most crucial desiderata in the study of antiquity. However, the more back we go in time the more unrealizable this proves to be. The textual sources become more scant and vague, while at the same time archaeological evidence can harder verify the literary sources or be verified by them.

On the other hand, while it sometimes seems that these two sources of historical knowledge are in accordance with each other, it is not always clear

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whether what we have is actually a concordance or mere coincidence. All the more so if the literary evidence on the specific matter is not clear and precise.

It is with such a case that we will be dealing with in this paper, motivated by the very title of this volume. We shall examine an ancient settlement in central Macedonia, which appears to have been abandoned in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. In about the same period, as textual evidence tends to suggest, a remarkable event took place – the passing of the wider area from the Thracians to the Macedonians. Could the claimed abandonment of the specific settlement be related to the claimed coming of the area under Macedonian control in the specific period, or what we have is just a coincidence?

### **The ancient site at Neo Rysio, Thessaloniki**

#### *The site*

The settlement in question is a flat-top site (*trapeza*), situated in the northernmost part of Crousis (the region that occupied the western part of the main body of Halkidiki, bordering the Thermaic Gulf), and just to the south of the fertile Anthemous valley, about 17 km south-southeast of Thessaloniki (**Fig. 1**, nr. 78). It is called “Trapeza of Neo Rysio – Kardia”, due to the names of the two neighbouring modern villages, and has been systematically excavated<sup>1</sup> since 2016.<sup>2</sup>

The site covers an overall area of about 1.4 hectares and its oval shape is almost aligned with the north-south axis (**Fig. 2**). It comprises two levels, conventionally called “Upper” and “Lower” Trapeza (**Fig. 3**) and resting on a broader base. The site’s highest point, on the SE end of the Upper Trapeza, has an elevation of 136.7 metres above sea level. The almost 8-shaped Upper Trapeza has a maximum length of 213 m and a maximum width of 27 m.

The current form of the site – divided into two levels – is rather difficult to be explained, for how and when it took shape is shrouded in obscurity. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that parts of ancient constructions built on the bedrock protrude over a long part of the slope surrounding the Upper Trapeza (**Fig. 4**). In some cases two walls of different phases can be discerned as having the same direction as the bedrock (**Fig. 5**). These constructions could belong to buildings that collapsed when the level was destroyed, or to a construction that partly surrounded the upper level, or even a combination of both. The destruction of the Upper Trapeza’s edges might be due to quarrying, since over almost its entire length, the bedrock displays traces of cutting, and a toothed shaping. On the other hand, to date, no building activity can be substantiated in the Lower Trapeza. Consequently, it is only the Upper Trapeza that until now can be considered to have certainly hosted the settlement and its buildings. How larger

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<sup>1</sup> By the International Hellenic University, under the direction of the author.

<sup>2</sup> Although known for about a century, the “Trapeza of Neo Rysio – Kardia” has never been systematically investigated. Limited surface surveys were occasionally conducted, yielding a few pottery sherds dating, as it is reported, from the Late Bronze Age to the Classical period (REY 1917–1919, p. 137–138; FRENCH 1967, p. 14, 60; GRAMMENOS, BESIOS & KOTSOS 1997, p. 22–33, nr. 44 (Kardia); SOUEREF 1996, p. 445; 2003, p. 38–40; 2011, p. 117–124).

this Upper Trapeza was in Antiquity remains unknown. Today its area is about 0.4 hectares.

So far, the whole site has been surveyed, actually twice, while excavation work has been carried out in four areas of the Upper Trapeza (in its northern and southern sides, as well as in the centre of it) and one of the Lower (**Fig. 2**). Despite the fact that the four sections of the Upper Trapeza cover a relatively small part of its whole area (about 550 m<sup>2</sup>), they constitute quite a representative portion of it – both in its ends and in the middle – and thus the composite image they provide, which is actually uniform throughout, is reliably indicative as regards the nature of the site as a settlement. This is confirmed by both the architectural remains and the portable finds. We actually have a fairly indicative image of the town planning, as well as the arrangement and dimensions of the buildings, while finds like the numerous loom weights and the bronze ornaments tend to imply everyday activities.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The buildings*

The settlement must have been a rather densely populated one, at least in its last construction phase. It was dominated by buildings of several sizes, which could host at least five rooms. Especially in one of the central sections of the excavation, we gain a good image of the settlement's town planning, since the existence of roads and intersections is clearly visible (**Fig. 6**). A large main road, cleared over a length of more than 15 m, separates different buildings and has a width that varies between 2.30 and 2.80 m. Its direction is NW-SE. Narrower roads intersect it at right angles, from both NE and SW.

On both sides of these roads, the ruins of buildings have been revealed. Their image is quite similar to the image of the buildings on all the other three excavated parts of the site. Each building consists of many rooms, which are rectangular (**Fig. 6–10, 12**). To date a total of 28 rooms have been excavated in the four sections of the excavation. Their walls have an average extant height of 0.50 m, while their average width is 0.50–0.60 m. These extant parts of the walls are totally made of local stone, which was undoubtedly the main building material in the settlement.

While there are no secure traces of a second floor so far, it is worth noting that in some of the rooms two floors of different periods were revealed; this is, for example, the case with Room 1 (**Fig. 6**, NW corner), where 0.20 m below the first floor an earlier one was found. The access to this room was probably from the large road to its east, as might be concluded from the concentration of flat stones suggesting a doorstep in the eastern wall. The assumption that some parts of the site must have had at least two different building phases is reinforced by other observations as well. For instance, there are several cases of a space that was initially open, but at some time closed by the construction of walls perpendicular to those of already existing neighbouring buildings, thus creating new rooms (**Fig. 9**).

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<sup>3</sup> For the finds, see below.

The construction materials of the roofs are not known, and it is noteworthy that the tiles found so far are very few. This would rather lead to the assumption that the roofs were probably made of branches, straw and reeds. After all, the earth in some rooms displays remnants of clay masses, on which imprints of branches and reeds are visible. I would not exclude the existence of seaweed as well. The site was not very far from the sea and seaweed has until recently been used in the roofs in several coastal areas and islands in Greece, for the natural insulation it offers.

As far as the size of the rooms is concerned, the length of the inside walls usually varies between 1.50 and 2.70 m. There are some exceptions of much larger rooms (the width of which could reach 4 m and the length even 7 m – e.g. **Fig. 9**), but in some of these cases the rooms were shaped in a later phase, in the way described above.

In some of the rooms irregularly shaped pits were excavated. On the bottom of the pit in one of these rooms (Room A1) the bedrock bears several round and ovoid hollows (**Fig. 10–11**). Many vases were found in it, in quite good condition, together with more pottery fragments, iron tools, bones, and clay masses. Touching two of the room's walls are constructions with adobe walls. One of these is conical, with a diameter of about 0.24 m, and the other ovoid (**Fig. 12**). No traces of burning were detected either in or around them; however, three almost whole vases and a big loom weight were found near the former, while generally the room yielded a relatively large quantity of pottery, as well as stone and metal tools.

Another room in the same building complex that deserves special mention, Room A8, yielded several vases in quite good condition, a concentration of rather large loom weights (**Fig. 14**, centre, above), as well as three bronze objects, part of a hair-slide and two copper pendants (**Fig. 17**). These objects are connected with women's activities. Another room displays other particularities: a large round stone with an elliptical shallow recess carved in its NE corner; and in its SW corner, a semi-circular construction with clay masses and fragments of four cylindrical clay objects.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The finds*

The period during which the settlement at Neo Rysio was inhabited may be defined thanks to a quite wide variety of finds. Notwithstanding the short excavation period so far,<sup>5</sup> thousands of pottery fragments, as well as many finds of several other categories have come to light, during both the surface surveys and the excavation. The vast majority of the pottery dates from the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period (mainly 10<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC). The Late Bronze Age (1600–1100 BC) is also represented, though with far fewer sherds, while those from the Classical and Hellenistic periods scarcely extend into double digits.

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<sup>4</sup> For the results of the excavation so far, see in detail MANOLEDAKIS 2022; forthcoming a; forthcoming b.

<sup>5</sup> The field season lasts for one month each year, since it is a mainly educational excavation.

As expected, pottery prevails (**Fig. 13–14**): hand- and wheel-thrown, plain, monochrome, grey "Thracian", eggshell, but also decorated. In the latter case, the decoration can be geometric, banded, relief or incised. Among the most characteristic and helpful for the dating of the site's use are the fragments with the typical in the wider area around the Thermaic Gulf Protogeometric and Sub-Protogeometric decoration, from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (**Fig. 13**). The most popular motifs are, as expected, the concentric circles and semicircles, which, created with a compass, are few in number, namely four or five, contrary to the Geometric vases of southern Greece. Other motifs, like the checkerboard pattern, are also encountered.

Two other categories of pottery that are characteristic in central Macedonia are the grey "Thracian" and eggshell ones. As regards plain and monochrome pottery, fragments of pithoi and big vases like amphorae and oenoches, frequently with double or twisted handles, are quite numerous, and were used for economic and other everyday activities, like storage. Many of them were found placed in an excavation in the bedrock (**Fig. 15**). Most of these local pottery categories are encountered in several sites in central Macedonia as well as along the Axios valley.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, some of these sites have been identified as manufacture centres of such pottery.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that several rooms yielded also fragments of trade amphorae, which indicates commercial activities of the settlements' inhabitants. As is usually the case in northern Aegean, most trading amphora fragments come from East Greece, probably Chios (they may be dated from the whole 7<sup>th</sup> as late as the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), while there are also Attic (probably Euboean as well?) SOS-type amphora fragments (second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC). Other imported pottery fragments include two Proto-Corinthian ones, the one from an aryballos or alabastron, dated from the late 8<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (**Fig. 16**).

Apart from the pottery, other finds that are worth mentioning are three bronze objects, part of a hair-slide and two copper pendants (**Fig. 17**). The exact dating of such finds – which belong to the wide category of the so-called Macedonian bronzes – is not easy, since the period they were produced lasted for many centuries. Parallels of these last have been found in cemeteries in Thessaly (dated to 950–850 BC)<sup>8</sup> and in Thermi (6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, according to the other finds).<sup>9</sup>

Of special interest are the loom weights of Neo Rysio (e.g. **Fig. 14**). They are quite numerous and found almost all over the site, but their most significant characteristic is their exceedingly big dimensions (up to 0.20 X 0.10 m) and weight (up to 2.2 kg). Other finds of the site include stone tools, iron blades and tools, such as wedges that are probably connected to stone quarrying, of apparently

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<sup>6</sup> One can acquire a quite representative image by seeing the papers in TIVERIOS, MISAILIDOU-DESPOTIDOU, MANAKIDOU & ARVANITAKI 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See TIVERIOS 2012, with the whole bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> EFSTATHIOU-BATZIOU 2011, p. 596–597 and Fig. 7.

<sup>9</sup> MOSCHONISSIOTOU 1991, p. 285, 292 Fig. 6. See also Fig. 2 on <https://www.aigai.gr/el/history/aiges/vergina.html>.

unknown period, parts of millstones, spindle whorls, pestles, parts of adobes, braziers, fragments of glass vessels, bones and seashells.

The variety of finds, combined with the surrounding landscape of the site – close to a fertile valley as well as to the sea – may give a quite good image of the occupations of its inhabitants, which would include farming, livestock farming, maybe fishing, but also pottery, since in some rooms fragments of vases that were damaged during their construction and were not used have been found.

They also provide evidence of the chronology of the site. The afore-mentioned pottery categories may give only a broad chronology for the site, since they are unstratified, but it is clear that the finds after the mid-late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC are extremely scanty,<sup>10</sup> something that apparently leads to the conclusion that the settlement had been abandoned by this period of time. This means that it was not among the twenty-six settlements that, according to Strabo (7.21, 24), were synoecized in Thessaloniki in 316/5 BC.<sup>11</sup> As already pointed out, the excavated parts of the settlement may cover a relatively small part of its whole area, but they constitute a representative portion of it, since they include parts of the northernmost and the southernmost edges of the long site, as well as two wide sections in the middle. Furthermore, as is the case with the architectural remains, the finds also provide a uniform image throughout the settlement. Thus, we have had almost no finds after the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, not even during the two surface surveys.

#### *A question regarding the settlement's abandonment*

The abandonment of the settlement in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First of all, the site has a remarkable view, which is unobstructed in all directions necessary for a settlement, especially in that period: towards the sea, offering a quite good control of the Thermaic Gulf; towards the whole Anthemous valley, with all its numerous settlements and the large fertile areas, parts of which were certainly used by the site's inhabitants; and towards the fortress on the summit of Mt Hortiatis, the significance of which for the defence of the entire area around Thessaloniki is attested from the Archaic period to the Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup>

This view offers the impression that the settlement at Neo Rysio had an indisputable strategic importance; an impression that is reinforced when we proceed to comparisons with other contemporary sites that are known. Between the Axios River in the northwest and the western coast of the main body of Halkidiki in the southeast, more than 90 sites of settlements and installations have been identified within an average radius of 20 km from the Thermaic Gulf (**Fig. 1**). These sites were inhabited in the prehistoric, ancient and Byzantine periods. Some

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<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that there are no more recent finds which could denote any kind of use of the site in modern periods, as is the case with some other sites around Thessaloniki which have been used, for example during World War I by the allies as military camps.

<sup>11</sup> According to the geographer, these settlements were situated in the NE Thermaic Gulf, including the southern coast of Crousis, which included the area of our site.

<sup>12</sup> MANOLEDAKIS 2007a, p. 44–48, 92–95; 2008, p. 22–31.

grew up on flat land but mainly they were developed on mounded (*toumbes*) or flattened tells (*trapezes*), either artificial or natural, primarily for defensive reasons, for want of built fortifications.

The vast majority of these sites have not yet been systematically archaeologically investigated, but only surveyed, and not always properly. As things currently stand, excavations have been carried out at fewer than 10 settlements, while almost 20 have been studied through more limited trial or rescue excavations. Therefore, the dating of the use of most of these sites is based only on pottery sherds collected during surface surveys, which besides have not been always systematically conducted.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in a study that is going to be published soon,<sup>14</sup> these sites have been categorised according to their habitation period, based on their until now revealed finds – even if surface ones. Then, tables were created ranking the ancient settlements' visibility to other (contemporary) settlements, using viewshed analysis (VSA) to gauge the overall landscape visibility of a settlement and the intervisibility between sites.<sup>15</sup> These tables reveal that the site at Neo Rysio was consistently among the top three as regards these factors, during its whole period of habitation.

Furthermore, equally remarkable is the fact that, always according to the chronologies provided mainly by the survey finds for the sites around Thessaloniki, at Neo Rysio we have the only case of an ancient settlement around Thessaloniki that seems to have been abandoned near the transition from the Archaic to the Classical periods. Besides, the specific site had a quite large area as compared to the others. Finally, it cannot pass unnoticed that in the four areas of the site investigated so far, neither traces of extensive fires nor numerous weapon items, like arrowheads, have been revealed, which would indicate a violent abandonment.

Why then would such a gifted settlement be deserted so early? The question is reasonable but until now impossible to answer, and this early and “silent” abandonment of the site towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is indeed puzzling. Unless there was an important historical event that happened in the period in question, which could to some extent shed light on the matter. But are we aware of such an event? The truth is that we do, even if again with some reservation as regards the exact period.

### *The Macedonian expansion to the east of the Axios*

During the Early Iron Age, as well as biggest part of the Archaic era, namely in the period of the habitation of the settlement at Neo Rysio, the wider area around Thessaloniki was possessed by Thracian tribes. Judging by the few and

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<sup>13</sup> For all these sites, see most recently SOUEREF 2011. I must admit that I have not seen myself the pottery from all these sites. I rely on the data provided by the reports of the archaeologists who have surveyed them, which are collected in SOUEREF 2011.

<sup>14</sup> See DONATI & MANOLEDAKIS 2024.

<sup>15</sup> VSA is a GIS-based technique that has been widely adopted by archaeologists to assess the potential impact of visibility in prehistoric and ancient landscapes, including its role in the territorial formation of settlements and sanctuaries, regional defence networks and the prominence of built tombs in the local environment (PAPANTONIOU & KYRIAKOU 2018; PAPANTONIOU & BOUROGIANNIS 2019).

rather general information of the ancient sources, our area of study might have been inhabited by the Thracian tribe called Croussaioi, according to Hellanicus (Dionysius Hal. 1.47, 49), since it was apparently situated in the Croussis (Herodotus 7.123; cf. Thucydides 2.79.4; Strabo 7.21; Aelius Herodianus, *De prosodia catholica*, s.v. Κρουσίς; Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnika*, s.v. Κρουσίς. Βρουσιάς in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 140b. 29).<sup>16</sup>

However, around the period of the abandonment of the site at Neo Rysio, the Macedonians appear to have passed the river Axios moving eastwards, and thus expelled the Thracian tribes and gained control of the wider area in question. When exactly the passing of the area to the east of the Axios into the hands of the Macedonians took place is not clear. Our only source on the event is Thucydides (2.99), who states that “the coastal part of Macedonia was first acquired by Alexander I (498–454 BC) and his ancestors”. Obviously, Thucydides’ words are far from adequate. Apart from other issues that are left obscure, the phrase “and his ancestors” gives only a *terminus ante quem* for the conquest of the areas in question. How much before should we look for? Which exactly were the acquired areas in the coastal Macedonia and when was each of them conquered? If some of them were first acquired by other kings, why does Thucydides mention only Alexander I?

Unfortunately, the historian does not go into detail regarding the matter of the Macedonian expansion to the east, since this is beyond the scope of his work. That the only Macedonian king mentioned by name in his passage is Alexander I may have to do with the fact that he was the father of the king whom he is referring to (Perdiccas), since he was involved in the events he is narrating. But it may also have to do with the fact that it was under this king (Alexander I) that Macedonia managed to expand as far as the Strymon, namely to the areas which Thucydides narrates in this part of his work as being invaded by Sitalces. Who the earlier kings were, in the reign of which Macedonia acquired (obviously gradually) the rest of the areas, starting from Bottiaea and Pieria, as he says, is not important for him.

Consequently, the question of when the wider area of the settlement at Neo Rysio – practically the Anthemous valley – passed under Macedonian control is very difficult to be answered. Most scholars tend to connect this with the Macedonian expansion to the east of the Axios, since natural boundaries like rivers are usually considered to have played a crucial role in determining political borders, simplistic as such a view may be.

Anyway, the specific issue has been troubling scholars for many decades and is apparently very difficult to be solved, based only on Thucydides’ passage. This notwithstanding, several scholars have attempted to combine this passage with other evidence, sometimes epigraphic, more recently also archaeological, and put forward their theories. Until the previous decade, the two dominant views placed the passing of the Axios by the Macedonians either in the late 6<sup>th</sup> or in the early

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. TOMASCHEK 1890, p. 36–37.

5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and usually in relation to the beginning and the end of the Achaemenid dominion in the northern Aegean.<sup>17</sup>

The most significant indirect source is Herodotus' statement (5.94) that Amyntas I (ca. 547–498 BC), the father of Alexander I, offered Anthemous to Hippias, the tyrant of Athens that was expelled in 510 BC. This seems to provide a more precise *terminus ante quem* for the conquest of the region around Anthemous (and thus also for the passing of the Axios) by the Macedonians, because the latter should have rather possessed the area in order to be able to offer it, even if not completely, since in ca. 512 BC the Macedonian kingdom was made a Persian vassal state.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, less than ten years ago, another theory appeared, this time based mainly on archaeological evidence, according to which the areas to the east of the Axios must have been conquered by the Macedonians before 570 BC.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, a significant change in funerary practices that is observed in some sites of Macedonia around 570 BC, affecting primarily grave goods, has been invoked. This change entailed the appearance of extremely wealthy graves.<sup>20</sup> The theory in question is based primarily on the examination of the Archaic period graves excavated at Archontiko between 2000 and 2010, the earliest of which are dated from ca. 570 BC, according to the excavators,<sup>21</sup> and their comparison with contemporary graves from Vergina (Aegae) and Sindos.

Many grave goods of the Sindos cemetery display close affinities with those from Archontiko,<sup>22</sup> which has been considered of special significance, since Sindos is situated some kilometres to the east of the Axios (**Fig. 1**, nr. 10). Moreover, it has been observed that the new customs appear also in the cemetery of Agia Paraskevi (**Fig. 1**, nr. 77), a site very close to Neo Rysio, in the Anthemous valley. There as well, the earliest graves have been dated from ca. 570/560 BC.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Shortly after 512 BC: HAMMOND & GRIFFITH 1979, p. 58–59, 64 (N.G.L. Hammond); BORZA 1990, p. 84–89, 100; VASILEV 2011, p. 96–99. In 480/79 BC: ERRINGTON 1990, p. 6; HATZOPOULOS & LOUKOPOULOU 1992, p. 15–30; HATZOPOULOS 1996, p. 171–172; TOURATSOGLU 2010, p. 10, 36–38; SPRAWSKI 2010, p. 133; ARCHIBALD 2013, p. 46–48, 60. Other opinions: Not long before the beginning of the Persian occupation: ZHRNT 1984, p. 358–361. Even earlier by ANDRONIKOS 1987–1990, p. 32–33. Around 700 BC by TIVERIOS 1991, p. 242–243.

<sup>18</sup> OLBRYCHT 2010, p. 343–345; XYDOPOULOS 2012 in detail, with the whole argumentation and all the relevant theories regarding Herodotus' information. In this case, Amyntas' offer must have had the approval of the Persians (see HAMMOND & GRIFFITH 1979, p. 55–59; HAMMOND 1989, p. 42–43; BORZA 1990, p. 85–89, 118), although such a Persian interest cannot be adequately explained.

<sup>19</sup> SARIPANIDI 2017, p. 93–124, esp. p. 117; 2019, p. 383 and 400–406. See also CHRYSOSTOMOU 2018, p. 102–104. I sincerely thank Dr Vasiliki Saripanidi for our extremely helpful and constructive discussions on the issue of the Macedonian expansion.

<sup>20</sup> For this transformation, see SARIPANIDI 2017.

<sup>21</sup> CHRYSOSTOMOU & CHRYSOSTOMOU 2012, p. 491 (580 BC); CHRYSOSTOMOU 2018, p. 85 (570 BC).

<sup>22</sup> SARIPANIDI 2017, p. 88–90, with the relevant bibliography.

<sup>23</sup> SISMANIDIS 1987. More bibliography in SARIPANIDI 2017, p. 90.

The similarity in the funerary practices at Sindos and Agia Paraskevi with those at Archontiko and Vergina in the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC has thus led to the conclusion that “by 560 BC the Macedonian territory must have comprised the strip around the head of the Thermaic Gulf, at the western part of Mygdonia and the Anthemous Valley”.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that “there is compelling – in my own view, conclusive – evidence that these parts were already conquered (by the Macedonians) around 570 BC”.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, it has been suggested that this Macedonian expansion among others practically dictated the funerary change in question. “More precisely, this change must have served the promotion of a new political ideology that aimed to legitimize new sociopolitical conditions that were shaped after the first Macedonian expansion to the east of the Axios River”.<sup>26</sup>

If this theory is correct, this would be of major importance for us, since the Anthemous valley is the region that hosts also the site at Neo Rysio, where, as already mentioned, we have almost no finds after the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. But how easily can this theory be confirmed?

The similarity in the burial practices in these four sites to the west and east of the Axios may be indeed significant, but in my opinion not enough to lead to safe conclusions regarding the territorial expansion of Macedonia. As has frequently been pointed out, the cultural environment does not necessarily indicate a specific ethnic identity. To invoke a recent study, the Macedonian (political) expansion to the east of the Axios “cannot be confirmed by archaeological data, despite the fact that” the excavated tombs in Archontiko are strikingly similar to those that have been discovered in Vergina, Sindos and Agia Paraskevi. “These similarities perhaps indicate a common cultural environment, regardless of the inhabitants’ ethnic identity in these regions (either Thracians, Macedonians, or Greek colonists)”;<sup>27</sup> “but nothing more”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, we can just talk about interactions between different ethnic/cultural identities in the area to the east of the Axios, but not about territorial expansion of Macedonia based on the archaeological evidence.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, it is not strange that the necropolis at Souroti, where graves dated from the same period (from the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC on) have also been revealed, displays a different image. Souroti (**Fig. 1**, nr. 69) lies very close to Agia Paraskevi, just about 4 km to its SE, almost as far as the latter from Neo Rysio to the same direction. It thus belongs to the same area of the Anthemous valley and, if the afore-mentioned assumptions of political character were correct, one could

<sup>24</sup> SARIPANIDI 2017, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> SARIPANIDI 2019, p. 383.

<sup>26</sup> SARIPANIDI 2019, p. 398, 400–404; cf. SARIPANIDI 2017, p. 93–124.

<sup>27</sup> XYDOPOULOS 2012, p. 26–27. Thus, I don’t think that there was such a dramatic change in funerary practices needed to legitimize new political conditions (see above).

<sup>28</sup> XYDOPOULOS 2018, p. 75–77. *Contra* SARIPANIDI 2017, esp. p. 117.

<sup>29</sup> XYDOPOULOS 2018, p. 76–77. He thus thinks that the only concrete data that we have to date this expansion is the offering of Anthemous to Hippias in ca. 505 BC as a *terminus ante quem* (XYDOPOULOS 2012, esp. p. 26), proposing that the Macedonians must have reached the western banks of the river around the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (XYDOPOULOS 2018, p. 73).

expect similar wealth in the graves of its necropolis with that of Agia Paraskevi. However, this is not the case.<sup>30</sup>

Besides, according to an earlier, not much different theory, the Macedonians may have exterminated or expelled those who would have resisted, but they would have spared most of the earlier inhabitants, especially those of the Greek and mixed Greek-indigenous cities, such as Anthemous and Sindos. Part of the local populations would have remained in their lands as subject allies, with the obligation to provide the king with some form of tribute and men for the army.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the land to the east of the Axios was a cultural melting pot, something that could have created problems to the exercise of the central Macedonian power.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the necropoleis excavated so far are not as many as one would wish in order to draw safe conclusions about a territorial expansion of Macedonia. Not to mention the fragmentary investigation of the necropoleis themselves until now.<sup>33</sup> For these reasons, I would not (yet) be willing to easily accept that the Macedonians conquered the lands to the east of the Axios around or before 570 BC, based only on the evidence from the above-mentioned necropoleis.<sup>34</sup> More evidence is needed. What I could do, though, is contribute to the whole discussion on the time of the Macedonian expansion to the area of Anthemous the case of the settlement at Neo Rysio. A settlement that, according to the excavation results so far, seems to have been abandoned some time in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Of course, as has already been mentioned, the excavated parts of the settlement at Neo Rysio may constitute a representative portion of it, but they still cover a relatively small part of its whole area, (about 13% of the Upper Trapeza). Thus, as things currently stand, it would be frivolous to support that the abandonment is certainly connected to the Macedonian expansion. However, the time coincidence is noteworthy. If this is not just a coincidence, then we should face

<sup>30</sup> ALLAMANI-SOURI 2012, p. 283, 290, with the previous bibliography, who has argued, like SARIPANIDI (2017, p. 90, n. 125) that this indicates just “an economically and politically less prominent community”.

<sup>31</sup> HATZOPOULOS 1996, p. 70, 169–179, 193–194, 204–206, 466. Cf. HATZOPOULOS & LOUKOPOULOU 1992, p. 30–31, 65–67, 117–122;

<sup>32</sup> HATZOPOULOS 1996, p. 172–173; cf. HAMMOND & GRIFFITH 1979, p. 59; HAMMOND 1989, p. 42–43; XYDOPOULOS 2012, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> SARIPANIDI herself admits (2017, p. 120) that “the excavated graves at Agia Paraskevi dated from 560 to 480 BC are not very likely to represent the entire population of the site during this period. This is even more true of the 52 graves at Sindos. Indeed, the 474 contemporary graves at Archontiko are said to have covered so far only about 5% of the total surface of the site”.

<sup>34</sup> Which is certainly not “compelling or conclusive” (see above). Indeed, there is still some uncertainty detected in the relevant bibliography. For example, Chrysostomou mentions that the change at Archontiko takes place *after* 570 BC (CHRYSOSTOMOU 2018, p. 89), but then argues that the Macedonians had expanded their territory to the east of the Axios *before* 570 BC (CHRYSOSTOMOU 2018, p. 102), without offering any documentation for such a conclusion, citing back Saripanidi (2017), who seems to have been based significantly on his publications for her theory (SARIPANIDI 2019, 383, n. 15). He also admits that the local populations to the east of the Axios, as well as the Greeks of the colonies, were not expelled by the Macedonians, but co-existed with them, who settled in (other) settlements to control their new territories (CHRYSOSTOMOU 2018, p. 104).

the question of how exactly the settlement's abandonment is connected to the Macedonian expansion. To date, no indications of a violent abandonment have been found, as has already been pointed out. What exactly led the inhabitants to leave the settlement in the specific period of time, and where did they go? And why was such a gifted site never inhabited again?

It is only continued research that might be able to shed more light on the matter. Equally, the investigation of the settlement's cemetery, the location of which is still unknown, would also offer some data on the identity of the settlement's population. For the time being, what we have is a new systematic excavation around the Anthemous valley, as well as another interesting piece of archaeological evidence that could possibly join in the discussion on the time of the Macedonian expansion to this area, supplementing the existing and still insufficient written and archaeological data.\*

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\* I declare that I have the copyright of all the images, apart from Figure 2, which is from Google Earth.

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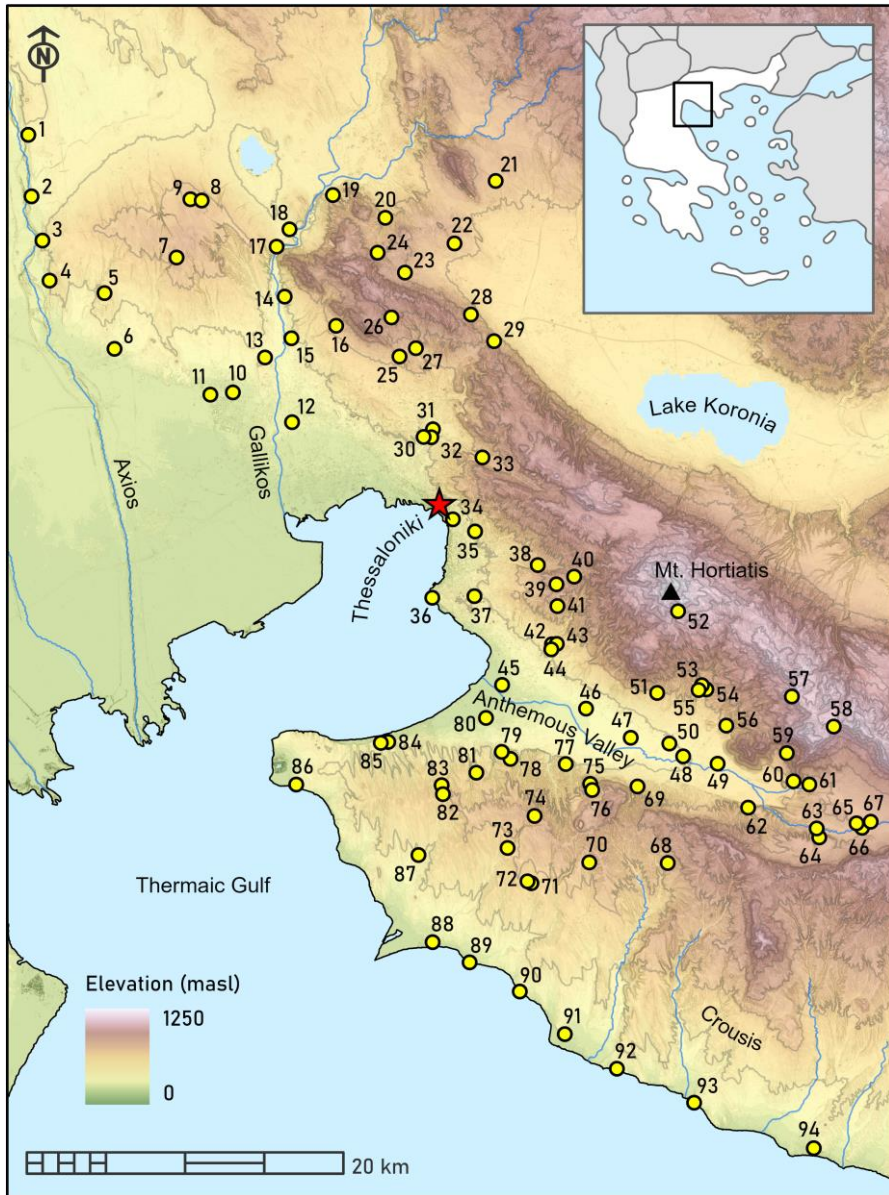


Fig 1. Map of the Theraic Gulf with location of ancient settlements (after J. Donati and M. Manoledakis, created by J. Donati).



**Fig 2.** Satellite image of the “Trapeza of Neo Rysio – Kardia”. The sections of the excavation are clearly visible.



Fig 3. The “Trapeza of Neo Rysio – Kardia”. View from the southeast.



Fig 4. Detail of the slope surrounding the Upper Trapeza (western side). Parts of ancient built constructions seem to protrude over the slope.



**Fig 5.** Detail of the slope surrounding the Upper Trapeza (western side) with sections of masonry over the bedrock. Two walls of different phases can be discerned.



**Fig 6.** Plan of the southern section of the central part on the Upper Trapeza.



**Fig 7. Plan of the northern section of the central part on the Upper Trapeza.**



**Fig 8. Excavated rooms in the central part of the Upper Trapeza.**



**Fig 9. Room A10 from the southwest. One can notice that the west and south walls (below in the image) do not belong to the same phase as the north and east ones. The latter belonged initially to a building extending to the east: a wall going to the east creates a right angle with it in its southern end.**



**Fig 10. Room A1 from the southwest: the irregular pit with some of its finds.**



**Fig 11. Room A1 from the southwest: round and ovoid hollows in the bedrock.**



**Fig 12. Room A1 from the north. The two constructions with adobe walls and feet are clearly visible.**

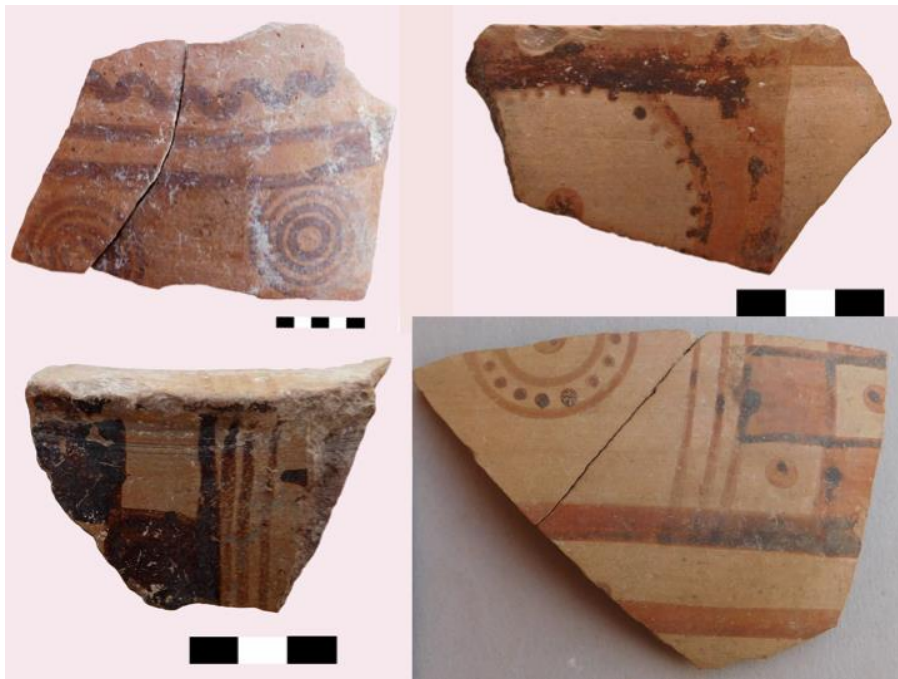


Fig 13. Pottery fragments with geometric decoration.



Fig 14. Hand- and wheel-thrown vases of local workshops and two loom weights.



Fig 15. The northern section of the excavation from the south: two amphorae and a stannoid vase placed in the bedrock.



Fig 16. Fragments of imported pottery from East Greece (above, on the left), Attica (below, on the right) and Corinth (above, right and below, left).



**Fig 17. Bronze objects from Room A8.**