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The cult to the *oikistes* on the earliest Messambrian coinage*

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Култът към ойкиста върху най-ранните месамбрийски монети

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Abstract: The present article deals with the earlier Messambrian drachm that is said to have been struck in the second quarter of the 5th century BC. The coin has images on both sides that are interpreted as that of the mythical *oikistes* Melsas. Based on the specifics in the iconography of both images, as well as the impact of the Kalchedonian coin iconography as part of close interrelations between metropolia and apoikia, the previous interpretation is questioned. The study reached the conclusion that it was the historical *oikistest* that was depicted on the obverse and the eponymous hero on the reverse, respectively. The issuing of the coin was due to the introduction of the cult to the latter.

Keywords: Messambria Pontica, Early coins, Founder's cult, Melsas



It is well-known that among the most important cults in the Hellenic *poleis* of coastal Thrace was the cult of the founder (οἰκιστής). As his name is associated with colonisation and the founding of each *apoikia*, he was devoted to the establishment of the social, political, and religious order of the world of the ἄποικοι. Additionally, the sooner his cult was established and institutionalised, the sooner the society would be able to establish its identity and enter the Hellenic world. Messambria Pontica was not an exception to this. Quite on the contrary, unlike the rest of the Western Pontic cities, the cult of the founder found its manifestation in various types of sources, such as the ancient literary sources (discussed in Nawotka 1994, 321-324, Boshnakov 1994, 87-94; Boshnakov 2003, 161-169), sculpture (Маразов 2004), epigraphic monuments (IGBulg. I², 345), and especially in coinage (Герасимов 1950, 26; Karayotov 2009,

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19-20; 99-103). It seems that by this diversity of various types of monuments, the cult to the Messambrian *oikistes* is among the most well-evidenced cases not only among the Western Pontic *poleis*, but also in the other coastal cities in Thrace as a whole. As numismatics is one of the major instruments of political propaganda and the message promoted on coins was not confined within the limits of the polis and its *chora*, the Messambrian elite used the coinage very intensely for this purpose in the pre-Roman period, by which it differs significantly from the rest of the Western Pontic cities.

The implication of the cult to the *oikistes* on the Messambrian coinage has been studied entirely or partly by G. Hill, T. Gerasimov, and S. Topalov, but mostly by I. Karayotov. Thus, in 1928 G. Hill suggested that the miniature head included in the quadrants of the four-spoked wheel depicted on the reverse of a silver drachm kept in the British Museum should be identified with the head of the *oikistes* Menas or Melsas. He dated the coin issue to the end of 5th century BC and called it "Asiatic" (Hill 1928, 6). This identification was accepted in 1950 by T. Gerasimov when dealing with some issues of the Messambrian coinage, but he assumes that this very coin was in fact a modern forgery (Герасимов 1950, 26). The contribution of Gerasimov to the topic concerns another representation of a youthful helmeted head depicted on the obverse of a silver obol dated to the end of 4th century BC, which he assumed was not the head of Athena, but of the "mythical founder of Messambria Menas or Melzas" (Герасимов 1950, 26). It is worth mentioning that both images are not recognised as such in the literature until the series of publications by I. Karayotov, who was also initially hesitant (see for example SNG BM Black Sea).

Before continuing with I. Karayotov's contribution to the problem, one should mention the name of S. Topalov, who contributes mostly to the publishing of various types of coins that concern the topic (Топалов 2001).

The question of the presentation of the cult to the founder of Messambria on the local coinage has received its impetus in Ivan Karayotov's studies. In a series of publications, of which some possess similar or the same content and/or the same title, he discusses the manifestation of the phenomenon on a number of issues of both silver and bronze coinage from the very beginning till the very end of the pre-Roman Messambrian coinage (Karayotov 1994; Karayotov 2009). His studies reveal that the cult to the *oikistes* was one of the most sustainable types in the iconography of the local coinage and appeared as early as the first coin issues and was continuously promoted through the centuries. His works and analysis also reveal that the cult to the founder had undergone certain changes, some of them considerable through the ages (Карайотов 2002, 11-14; Karayotov 2007a; 2007b; Карайотов 2008; Карайотов 2010, 53-54) that may be regarded as due to the political and social needs of the Messambrian society which reflected on the iconography of the coinage. A special study is intended by the author on this problem elsewhere, given the great number of coin issues and questions that arise, as well as the limitations of the article. Among the earliest coinage of Messambria stands out a silver drachm by its denomination as well as iconography. As this drachm is still unique, the questions that arise outnumber the answers that it provides. This contribution is an attempt to address some of them.

Before starting, it should be mentioned that, according to Ivan Karayotov, all the images that may concern the cult to the founder depicted on the coins should be identified with the legendary Messambrian *oikistes*, Melsas. His main argument for this is the inscription of Julia Hekate from the middle of the 2nd century AD, which reads: Μεσεμβρία (sic) δέ μν (sic) πατρίς ἀπὸ [M(?)]έλσα καὶ βρία (IGBulg I², 345). It seems, however, that the problem is more complex, as the literary sources might reveal the name of another founder also named Menas (Μένας), which may have been reflected on the Messambrian coin iconography with the use of two different images of the founder which are specific and different from each other. A good example for this is a silver drachm which is assumed as the earliest known Messambrian drachm and the study of whose iconography is the main goal of this article. The iconography itself is as follows:

Obv. Crested Corinthian helmet facing with bulging dots in the apertures for the eyes.

Rev. Four-spoked wheel with swastika (*tetraskelē*) and a male head in profile inserted within two of the quadrants.

AR, Drachm, 3.08 gr, Priv. coll. (Karayotov 2007a, 24, 31, Fig. 3).



Fig. 1. Drachm of Messambria, 3.08 gr, Priv. coll.

(http://morskivestnik.com/compass/news/2011/082011/082011_38.html, accessed 4.5.2021).

This drachm derives from a private collection, and therefore its archaeological and numismatic contexts are unclear. The only information available is that it probably originates from one of the Messambrian *katoikiai* located at the modern village of Kosharitzza, 10 km north of Messambria and ca. 6 km off the Black Sea coast. Not much is attested there archaeologically, only a possible fortress dated roughly to antiquity (Гюзелев 2009, 199). The coin has been published almost simultaneously by S. Topalov (Топалов 2001, 54-55) and I. Karayotov (Карайотов 2002, 11-14). In both publications, some questions arise concerning the iconography, the interpretation of the images depicted, reasons for issuing, as well as the date of the coin itself. In some cases, as it will be observed below, the individual descriptions and interpretations differ significantly.

Up until now, the specifics of coin iconography and interpretation have been commented on exclusively by I. Karayotov in almost every publication that concerns the founder of Messambria. On the obverse, his analysis is focused on the depiction of the bulging dots in the apertures for the eyes, which he believes is a clear indication that it was the portrait of the *oikistes* that was depicted rather than merely the protective armament of the warrior (Karayotov 2007b, 356). The latter may be found to have been used extensively in the following Messambrian silver and bronze coinage and is assumed to have become the symbol (παράσημον) of the city (Karayotov 2009, 99). Karayotov's interpretation, which is in line with that of S. Topalov (Топалов 2001, 54, 56-57) is plausible and acceptable, although some scepticism still remains. Indeed, the dots may reveal the head of a person, but it is also possible that their depiction might have been mistaken by the engraver who simply followed the prototype of the coinage. As all of the issues of the earlier Messambrian coinage have such dots in the image of the obverse, this may be an argument for the proposed interpretation.

The iconographic type of a helmet presented *frontally* as the main image of the obverse of all the coin issues is unusual for the Hellenic coinages (Hind 2007, 24). This may be applied also to the iconography with the frontally-presented helmeted head that seems to have served as a prototype of the frontal helmet iconography. Nonetheless, as a whole the use of the helmeted head in the Messambrian coin series is explained in light of the iconographic tradition that is attested by the coin issues of some Asiatic coastal *poleis* and their *apoikiai* with the depiction of the Corinthian helmet in profile and bulging dots in the apertures for the eyes on the obverse. Pointed out as explicit examples in the literature are the coins issued by Phocaea and Massalia, with the eyes also underlined by clearly visible dots and therefore presenting the founders Phocos and Protis, respectively (see for example Карайотов 2010, 54-55 quoting Bodensedt 1973, 43 and Furtwängler 1999, 177). This iconography, however, is not defined within the limits of the coinage of Phocaea and its *apoikiai* at that time. Some golden staters, although not numerous, reveal that it also spread on the coinages of other Asiatic coastal *poleis*, one of

which is of particular interest to our study: Cyzicus. Similar to the Phocaean electrum stater is another one issued in Cyzicus (von Fritze 1912, 81, pl. II, 36). Given the well-defined interest of the latter in the Western Pontic coast through the centuries as revealed by the coins found (see for example Карайотов 2003), as well as the undisputed Cyzicene impact over the earlier Messambrian coinage as it will be revealed by the author elsewhere, I would rather prefer to see a certain Cyzicene influence over the Messambrian iconography rather than the one proposed by I. Karayotov. Both examples, however, reveal a certain trend that spread in the coin issues of the coastal Asiatic *poleis*, or at least in some of them, with the depiction of the helmet in profile and additional marks indicating the mint; on the Cyzicene issues, the image of a tuna beneath the helmet is depicted. The examples, however, reveal that different types of personages are depicted on the coins. Thus, it may be the mythical eponymous hero that was represented on the Phocaean and Cyzicene coin series, but on the Massalian coinage Protis was displayed, who was the leader of the Phocaean colonists (Plut. Sol. 2; Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* - Ath. 13.36). These examples, although few, reveal that there is no strict rule in the presentation of the founder and, at least in the *apoikiai*, the historical founder may have replaced the mythical founder or the eponymous hero. The tradition with the representation of the eponymous hero also spread on the Kalchedonian¹ coin series with the addition of the head of Kalchas on the obverse of some coin issues. Unlike the aforementioned, however, his head is not helmeted and therefore his image as a parallel as it has been suggested (Карайотов 2010, 53) cannot be accepted without hesitation.

The opinions expressed in the literature are divided about the identification and the description of the small male head inserted in one of the quadrants on the reverse of the Messambrian drachm. In fact, the descriptions proposed by I. Karayotov and S. Topalov differ significantly. Thus, according to I. Karayotov, a male head that is depicted in a helmet with cheek-pieces as the features of the head is of the Archaic style (Karayotov 2007b, 354; Karayotov 2009, 20). He believes that this is the image of the mythical founder Melsas, who was shown on both sides of the coin (Карайотов 2008, 233; Karayotov 2009, 20).

Another description and interpretation is proposed by S. Topalov. He cites the image as that of a "head of youth on left" which is interpreted as the head of Apollo with a question mark (Топалов 2001, 54).

When studying the coin, however, one would note that the representation in question was neither helmeted, nor youthful. Instead, I am more inclined to see it as a bearded male facing left, with underlined features of the face such as the eyes, the nose, the cheeks, the huge beard, and even the hair which is curly and bound with *taenia*. In fact, all of them would not be visible if the head was helmeted. I. Karayotov is, however, correct that these features are presented in the Archaic style. As such, this image differs significantly from the rest represented on the Messambrian coinage and is the only one of this kind in the heretofore-known Messambrian coin iconography. As this iconography is not particularly linked with that of Apollo, the proposed interpretation by S. Topalov is untenable. The other interpretation, however, that the founder was also depicted on the other side of the coin, is also doubtful given the specifics of this image as well as the differences in both images. I believe these differences demonstrate the different messages that were imprinted. In fact, Karayotov's kind of interpretation is questioned by S. Topalov when dealing with another coin issue that will be discussed below. He assumes that it is hard to believe that the same personage should be presented in different ways on both sides of the same coin issue (Топалов 2001, 57).

I believe that a clue for the discussion who is depicted on the reverse of the Messambrian drachm may be proposed by the aforementioned Kalchedonian drachm with its image on the obverse:

¹ Since on all city coins the name is written Kalchedon, this from will be kept here in the text instead of Chalcedon.

Obv. Bearded and bared male head left.

Rev. Wheel with four spokes within shallow incuse circler.

AR, Drachm, Kalchedon, 3.52 gr, Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 175, Lot 118, Date: 09.03.2009.



Fig. 2. Drachm of Kalchedon, 3.52 gr, Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 175, Lot 118; Date: 09.03.2009 (<https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=586091>, accessed 4.5.2021).

One can easily note that the bearded and bared male head represented on the obverse is in unambiguous Archaic style with the typical Archaic face, beard, smile, almond-shaped eyes, and underlined eyebrows. On some issues, the head might have had a special headdress (diadem?), but this is unclear. It is assumed that this iconography appeared as early as ca. 480 BC (LHS Numismatik AG, Auction 102, Lot 254/ 29.04.2008) and was used through the next century, down to ca. 340 BC (Price 1993, 85). In the following issues, although some minor changes occurred, the image remained almost intact as the engraver tried to follow the prototype as strictly as possible in every detail, while the *ethnikon* ΚΑΛΧ was inscribed within the quadrants of the wheel on the reverse. I would rather assume that the coin type with the missing ethnic name should be dated to before 387/6 BC, which is the earliest date proposed for the group of the coins with the *ethnikon* (SNG BM Black Sea, p. 85).

The iconography of this coin type has already been discussed in the literature, and it is assumed that the represented head is that of Kalchas, the eponymous hero of Kalchedon, although in some cases a question mark is quoted (see Robu 2014, 225-226, n. 486 and the bibliography cited there). The origin of this hero is debatable since antiquity (see for this Hesychius, *FGrHist* 390 F 21), but he was most probably a Megarian hero whose cult was brought by the Megarian ἄποικοι when establishing the new *apoikia* named after him (see the discussion in Robu 2007, 144-146); in later literary sources, the name of a certain Archias appeared as the historical founder (Pomponius Mela, I, 19, 101), who was either a Megarian (Hind 1999, 82) or a Thasian (see Robu 2014, 223). The establishment of the oracular temple of Apollo in Kalchedon refers to the figure mentioned in the *Iliad*, Κάλχας, who has “his own prophetic powers which Phoebus Apollo had bestowed upon him” (Hom. Il. 1.69). In this very paragraph, Apollo is presented as the divine ancestor of Kalchas. In fact, the promotion of a certain Megarian hero as the eponymous hero of a newly founded *apoikia* is not confined only to this case and may be found in the Western Pontic region as well; an example is the case with the eponymous hero of Anchialus, who is found in a list of maritime heroes set in a sanctuary at Megara and dated from the late 6th to the beginning of 5th century BC (Robu 2013, 72-74).

The close link between Kalchas and Apollo is revealed by another Kalchedonian coin: a silver hemidrachm, which was issued in the same time as the previous drachm.

Obv. Head of a youth left.

Rev. Wheel with four spokes within a shallow incuse circle.

AR, Hemidrachm, Kalchedon, 2.35 gr, Emporium Hamburg, e-Auction 521, Lot 9, Date: 14.08.2015.



Fig. 3. Hemidrachm of Kalchedon, 2.35 gr,
Emporium Hamburg, e-Auction 521, Lot 9, Date: 14.08.2015
(<https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=2583064>, accessed 4.5.2021).

One can easily observe the similarities between the two issues on the obverse as well as on the reverse. Thus, both images are central for the coinage and are depicted in the same specific Archaic manner, with the Archaic face and smile, almond-shaped eyes, and hairstyle. On the obverse, the same image is represented with the lack of the *ethnikon* ΚΑΛΧ, which may indicate a date of the coin issue prior to 387/386 BC, the earliest date of its use (SNG BM Black Sea, 84-111). It seems that this issue was very short-lived, as I am aware of only two specimens of it so far. It also seems that both issues under discussion may have constituted a group which belongs to the earliest Kalchedonian coinage, a group which is very distinct from the rest of the coinage with its Archaic style. I am more inclined to date it to the 480s to the second quarter of 5th century given the trend observed during the late 6th century to first decades of 5th century BC in the coinages of other coastal Asiatic metropoleis with the use of the Archaic style in some specific cases. The coinage of the aforementioned Phocaea and Cyzicus also provide numerous examples in this respect.

The image on the obverse has already been discussed in the literature and the opinions are divided between two possible solutions. It is suggested that it is either of the son of Kalchas, or Apollo (Robu 2014, 225-226, n. 486), but the *taenia* employed clearly refers to Apollo. An argument for this may also be the impact of that god and his shrine over the lives of the Kalchedonians and whose importance was not confined only within the city limits but also abroad. The Apollo sanctuary at Kalchedon was well-known in antiquity and apparently was built from the very moment of the city's foundation or very soon after, as Lucian quotes it as the oldest in the city (Luc. Alex. 10: ἐν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερῷ, ὅπερ ἀρχαιότατόν ἐστι τοῖς Χαλκηδονίοις). In some studies, it is proposed that the Apollo's worship was even pursued in two different places—the temple of Apollo with the epiclesis of the Megarian Πυθαῖος, which was located in the countryside, and the oracular temple of Apollo Χρηστήριος that was situated in the city proper (Rigsby 1987, 95-96). A recent study, however, reveals that it was most probably just a single temple that was located in the city, in which the god was celebrated under the two *epikleseis* (Robu 2007, 154-155). Kalchedon was the only Megarian *apoikia* with an oracular sanctuary of Apollo, and it is suggested that the prophetic powers bestowed by Apollo upon Kalchas were transferred to the temple from the very beginning (Robu 2007, 143-146). Indeed, Apollo might have been the most important god given his importance for the colonisation process as the protector of the colonists as a whole, but in Kalchedon his importance was also based on the close link with the eponymous hero Kalchas, which allowed him to be a seer and, as such, the driving force for the Kalchedonian colonisation itself by sanctioning these initiatives. I would not be surprised if the *Apollonion* might have also hosted a sacred precinct or cult statue of Kalchas. It may be assumed that the cult to the oracular Apollo along with Kalchas created the basis for the Kalchedonian polis ideology, and it may even be a key stone. One should consider that in the time when this coin emission was issued, the city was involved directly in a colonisation process, with the establishment of Messambria Pontica (Hdt. 6.33.2; Skymn. 738-742). Therefore, I would not be surprised if some of the oracles concerning the establishment of the Dorian settlements in the Pontic area might have been given by the oracle in Kalchedon (on the importance of Apollo in the Pontic area, see Antonetti, Fraysse, Geny 1999, 17-24), and a closer link between the Dorian cities located on the Asian coast when concerning the Pontic colonisation may be deduced.

Given certain cultural transfers that usually happened in the *metropolia-apoikia* relations, I am not only inclined to accept the assumption that the youth head with *taenia* of Archaic style was that of Apollo, but also to suggest that the head on the coin in fact represents the head of the statue of Apollo that was set up in his sanctuary and probably served as a prototype. Whether this may also be applied to the head of Kalchas, who might appear on the Kalchedonian coin, is unclear, but I think it is less likely, as up to now we have no evidence about a statue of his through the centuries.

However, in the first decades of the 4th century BC, i.e. in the time of strengthening the newly-founded Messambria, Kalchedon issues provide another iconographic type of Apollo on their silver drachm emissions:

Obv. Youthful male head (of Apollo?), right.

Rev. Wheel with four spokes, with K-A-Λ and ivy leaf within the quadrants

AR, Hemidrachm, Kalchedon, 1.95 gr, SNG Stancomb 10; SNG BM Black Sea 89.



Fig. 4. Hemidrachm of Kalchedon, 1.95 gr, SNG Stancomb 10; SNG BM Black Sea 89.

It may be observed that the iconographic type of the Archaic style was abandoned and replaced by that of a youthful male head that follows the new artistic trends in sculpture. So, the question that arises is whether this change is due to purely artistic reasons or to the god receiving a new *epiklesis* which impacted on his iconography. Was this Apollo Χρηστήριος, the oracular god who replaced the initial Megarian Apollo Πυθαῖος in the polis ideology? It is difficult to answer this question given the scarcity of evidence available, but it may be noteworthy to mention that it was only in the representation of Apollo that these changes occurred, as the iconography of Kalchas of Archaic style remained untouched at that time (SNG BM Black Sea, p. 85).

To summarise, in the earliest 5th-century Kalchedonian coinage, the two most important and significant institutions in the city are presented—the cult of the eponymous hero and that of Apollo. The coinage promoted the close ties between them, which is underlined by their place in the iconographic scheme, and especially by the same manner of representation. I am more inclined to assume that the Archaic stylisation of both images is more or less due to the statue of Apollo set up in the sanctuary rather than vice versa or the existing Archaic tendencies in the art.

So, it may be assumed that by depicting Apollo and Kalchas on the coins, the Kalchedonian elite in fact refers to the colonisation process and the role of the city as a metropolis in the undertaking of colonisation activities that eventually would lead to the establishment of Messambria Pontica. It may also be an allusion to the Homeric texts that mention Phoebus Apollo and Kalchas.

It seems that the manifestation of this polis ideology on the coinage continued in this manner in the first half of the 4th century BC as already revealed above, with the depiction of the old image of Kalchas and the new one of Apollo. Indeed, the time when this coinage was struck was turbulent in Kalchedonian history, when the city, if not entirely destroyed, suffered at least heavily under the onslaught of Persian troops of Darius I on his return from the Scythian expedition; it was later sacked by the Persian satrap Otanes (Avram 2004, 979). These events may also imply the necessity of propagating the polis ideology.

After this short review on Kalchedon, we should turn to the Messambrian drachm. All the

examples discussed reveal that the influence of the Kalchedonian coinage and the ideas that it brings over the iconography of Messambria are beyond doubt, at least in these early years (see for this especially Карайотов 2010). This is logical, bearing in mind that the Kalchedonians were among the ἄποικοι that founded the Pontic *apoikia*. A good example for this is the assimilation of the four-spoked wheel on the reverse (see Head 1911, 511; Карайотов 2004, 89–90). It seems, however, that it is not the only element of the Kalchedonian iconography that was transferred to the Messambrian. Thus, the earliest Messambrian silver obols with the depiction of the founder on the obverse and the four-spoked wheel on the reverse are identical to the iconography on the Kalchedonian drachms at that time. Thus, we may suspect that the manifestation of the polis ideology of the newly-founded Messambria Pontica on one of most important media was mainly based on the political instrumentum used in the metropolis. Despite this, however, it seems that the Messambrian coinage did not entirely follow the iconography of Kalchedon. One such major distinction is the presence of the helmeted head on the obverse *en face* unlike the Kalchedonian and Cyzicene coins where the head—helmeted or not—is shown in profile. As noted above, this makes the Messambrian iconography unique and therefore easily discernible from other coinages not only in the region, but also among those that impacted on the Messambrian coinage. In this manner, the new polis ideology was promoted, which allowed the elite of Messambria to assert its new identity while disregarding a Kalchedonian origin. As Hind shows, the depiction of the helmet was in direct connection with *Messambrianoi* mentioned in the Iliad, and therefore a link with the heroic Hellenic past was ensured politically (Hind 2007, 24), and a clear distinction was also made by the Kalchedonian metropolis. The invention of the new symbol that became the παράσημον of the city was done, however, within the limits of the Kalchedonian iconographic coin tradition. As this tradition insists on the image of the eponymous hero Kalchas in the older, Archaic tradition, I am following I. Karayotov's assumption that the bearded head of the Archaic style that is depicted on the reverse of the Messambrian drachm was that of the eponymous hero of Messambria. This identification may also find arguments in the similarities in both images that, unlike the other eponymous heroes, are not helmeted and share similar facial features. It is unclear, however, if he was Melsas, as I. Karayotov insists. One should keep in mind that the eponymous hero might not be the founder himself.

Unlike Karayotov's idea, I am more inclined to identify the image on the obverse as that of the historical founder rather than of the eponymous hero. Indeed, the iconography with the representation of the *oikistes* on the obverse and the eponymous hero on the reverse, although rarely, is known in contemporaneous coinages, such as in that of the Calabrian Tarentum with the depiction of Phalanthos (the *oikistes*) riding a dolphin and the eponymous hero Taras, seated and holding a distaff and a cantharus on the respective obverse and reverse of a silver drachm issued in ca. 450 BC (SNG Ashmolean 222). However, I am not aware so far of issues with the depiction of the head of the mythical founder, eponymous hero, or other, on both sides of the same coin. Even if such a specimen may exist, it is worth noting in our case that such a tradition is not familiar to the Kalchedonian coinage at the time, whether earlier or later. In the example drawn by I. Karayotov with the coinage of Massalia, it is evident that the head of the *oikistes* depicted on the obverse was that of Protis, the leader of the Phocaeen colonists, and not the eponymous hero. All this gives me a good reason to suggest that in the case with the Messambrian drachm, the most suitable figure that was represented on the obverse was that of the historical founder, i.e., the leader of the Kalchedonian colonists who founded Messambria in 513/512 BC. In his polemic on the view advanced by K. Nawotka on the fabrication of the Melsas legend at a later date, I. Karayotov suggests the following:

Even if we assume that a Dorian founder was hidden by [a] helmet [depicted] *en face*, he should have been traditionally some noble, already former, citizen of Byzantium or Chalcedon, from where the colonists came into two waves on the present-day Nesebur Peninsula. The 'later authors', quoted thoroughly by Dr. Nawotka would have recovered namely his name. Such was the case of Apollonia. (Karayotov 2007b, 356; Карайотов 2008, 229).

In fact, the later authors, such as Strabo for example, indeed reveal the name of the leader of the colonists, who I believe is the historical founder of Messambria:

εἵτα Μεσημβρία Μεγαρέων ἄποικος, πρότερον δὲ Μενεβρία, οἷον Μένα πόλις, τοῦ κτίσαντος Μένα καλουμένου, τῆς δὲ πόλεως βρίας καλουμένης θρακιστί (Strabo 7.6.1).

Despite the uncertainty that Strabo's work provides (see the analysis in Boshnakov 2003, 161-169), in some cases it seems that he had accessed some local sources that remained unknown to us. This may be one of them providing the name of the founder Μένας, whose name was very popular in Bithynia as will be shown elsewhere by the author. These observations, as well as the fact that the Kalchedonians founded Messambria, make Strabo's words not seem implausible. Therefore, I am inclined to assume that on the obverse of the Messambrian drachm is depicted the helmeted head of the historical founder, most probably the Kalchedonian noble Menas, while on the reverse is the head of the eponymous hero of Archaic style. Whether the latter was a certain Thracian king named Melsas as proposed by I. Karayotov at this very early time is unclear for me, and more arguments are needed for such identification.

It has already been noted in the literature that the Messambrian drachm is unique for the earlier coinage of the city; all the other coin issues are obols and possible hemidrachms. This, with the more complex iconography of the drachm, raises the question about the purpose of this coinage.

It is assumed that the drachm belongs to the earliest coins issued in Messambria dated roughly to the second quarter of the 5th century BC (Karayotov 2009, 20). A more precise date is proposed by S. Topalov based on the evolution of the coinage of neighbouring Apollonia that would have impacted Messambria, too, in ca. 480/475-470 BC (Топалов 2001, 60). Therefore, the place of this drachm in the Messambrian coinage should be studied within the context of the obols and hemidrachms that were issued at that time and had the same iconography: a head with a crested helmet on the obverse and a four-spoked wheel with or without *tetraskelē* on the reverse (КараѲотѲ 1998, Karayotov 2007b, 353-355, 361; КараѲотѲ 2011, 57). Surprisingly, the particular reasons for this coin issue have never been discussed, as it is only suggested with a question mark that this may be a commemorative coinage (Топалов 2001, 60), which I believe is the case. The iconographic type of the head with the crested helmet also finds its place on the obverse of other Messambrian coins, such as the silver obols (Karayotov 2009, 20), but on the drachm it is depicted in a more elaborate manner, so we may assume that there was another reason for issuing the drachm; the portrait of the historical founder had already found its place on the Messambrian coinage. The new portrayal on the reverse, which is depicted in an Archaic style and is the only one such type in the iconography of the Messambrian coinage, may provide the answer. Given the analysis above, I would rather assume that it was the introduction and establishment of the cult of the eponymous hero that is commemorated by this coinage. Therefore, from that time on in Messambria Pontica the cult of the historical founder and the cult of the eponymous hero coexisted in most of the cities. In Thrace, a very good example for this is Abdera, with the cult to the historical founder Timesios and that of the eponymous hero Abderos which appeared for the first time in the Second Paean of Pindar.

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