Gerhard Poellauer

Latest investigations in the homeland of the Amazons at the river Thermodon

Copyright © 2000 EBOOKS.AT
Klagenfurt - Austria
ISBN: 3-902096-50-0

Thermodon - Themiskyra

Thermodon = Terme Çay

Most of the ancient writers refer to the notice that Asia Minor was the homeland of the Amazons. Specially the region at the river Thermodon was considered as the land of the Amazons. Actually, this area was no land of fantasy for the Greeks, but it was absolutely certain where this river lay - in the north of central Asia Minor, in today's Turkey. Approximately 50 kilometers (31 miles) east of the coastal town Samsun and about 20 km (12,4 miles) east of the mouth of the Yesil Irmak (in antiquity: Iris) the river Thermodon flows into the Black Sea. The name of this river persisted all this long time; today the river is called Terme Çay. In ancient times this river was reputed many features. So it shall split into 96 branches which join only short of the mouth. In truth there are two creeks of rather the same size (Terme Çay, Carsamba Çay), which join about 25 km (15,5 miles) before emptying into the Black Sea.

Lower course of the Terme Çay

Fertile plain

Horses

The Greek geographer Strabon (1st century BC.), who was born in the neighborhood - in Amaseia - was enthusiastic about the abounding fertility of the river plain with its numerous herds of cattle and horses. In fact, today you perceive the same impression there.

Grazing horses at the river Terme Çay

Course of the river Thermodon

The well-known astronomer and geographer Ptolemaios (2nd century AD.) assumed that this river has its source at the south side of the Pontine Mountains, which it passes through. In fact, that is not true. The Thermodon is a very short river but abounding in water which rises at the north side of the Pontine Mountains. The Greek writer and historian Xenophon (4th century BC.), who passed through this region as the leader of a Greek mercenary, described the Thermodon as broad as the river Iris. But actually today the Iris is much broader. Xenophon mentioned that the breadth of the rivers are about three Plethren (about 90 m). In my own estimation this statement is true for the river Iris at its mouth. But the Thermodon is not half as broad. Perhaps this difference can be explained by a river regulation in modern times. I could not verify the information that the river Thermodon is unusually cold and that in this river crystal and jasper can be found.

Themiskyra

At the Thermodon there has been Themiskyra, the city of the Amazons. This information we already find in Aischylos (5th century BC.). Skylax, a Greek seaman and geographer (4th century BC.), called Themiskyra a »Polis Hellenis« (translated: Greek city). The historian Appian (2nd century AD.) has given an account of the siege of this town by the Roman general Lucullus in the year 73 BC. After this episode we haven't any more information about the existence of this town. Themiskyra was also the name of this plain where the city lay. This plain began 60 stadia, that are about 12 km (7,5 miles), east of the city Amisos (today Samsun).

Terme = Themiskyra ?

Until now, there have not been found any traces of the ancient city Themiskyra. It is suggested at that place where today the city Terme exists. This town spreads along both sides of the river Terme Çay, about 3 km (1,9 miles) off its mouth into the Black Sea.

In my opinion a notice by Apollonios Rhodios (3rd century BC.) speaks against this localization. He mentioned that near Themiskyra there exists a promontory (Themiskyreia Akra). Actually, in the environment of the city Terme there is no promontory. Moreover, the Greek historian Diodor (1st century BC.) has handed down the information that Herakles sailed from the mouth of the Thermodon upstream to Themiskyra. A further

indirect argument against the localization of Themiskyra near the mouth is mentioned by Strabon. He reported that the river has much deposited at the mouth. In fact, the plain at the coast is very marshy and there exists a some meters deep alluvium. The city Ephesus at the west coast of Asia Minor gives a clear idea of these proceedings. There you can observe how dramatically the alluvium changed the coast land. The former harbor is now far inland. Therefore it seems much more probable to seek ancient Themiskyra more inland.

Kocamanbasi

Investigating the region along the river Terme Çay I found 9 km (5,6 miles) south of Terme, near the village Kocamanbasi, roughly in the center of the fertile plain at the river Thermodon, midway between the Black Sea coast and the inaccessible mountain area, an artificial hill. It is a place of strategic importance, because there you get a perfect survey of the whole region up to the Black Sea, and thus it is a very suitable spot to control the whole plain along the river Thermodon!

Hill near Kocamanbasi

Although this hill is overgrown, it is easily to recognize that it has artificially been constructed. The substructure is formed by the natural rock which has been smoothed. On the northern façade of this monument there is a peculiar shaped niche which strongly suggests to religious significance.

Cultic niche

Superstructure

Construction detail

On top of this hill there is a flat platform, which consists of finely trimmed, large stone blocks.

The relatively small size of this monument and the mysterious niche in the substructure conveys the idea that this building must have been an Early Bronze Age place of worship. Because of its geographic site a connection with the famous Amazon city Thermodon doesn't seem to be devious.

Karpu Kale

High up in the rugged mountain range, the so-called Amazonian mountains, near the spring of the Thermodon (today Terme Çay), there are the ruins of a fortress, which is extremely inaccessible. Though unapproachable and very destroyed, it still represents a mighty monument, which conveys that this fortress must have been an important place.

Approaching the very inaccessible ruins

Mighty broadside of Karpu Kale

Stairs up to the platform

Peculiar doorway

A well-contrived system of stairs which had been cut into the rock leads up to the platform, otherwise there is no way to climb up there. From the upper platform there is a great view over the surrounding countryside. Through a peculiar doorway you enter the extensive inner area of this building.

The complex conveys the impression that it was the last - very hidden - refuge of the Amazons, very alike the »Macchu Picchu« of the Inca.

Horses

Further indications: The Greek orator Lysias (4th century BC.) mentioned that the predominance of the Amazons was due to the facts that the Amazons were the first ones who rode on horseback, and that they were the first ones who used iron weapons. It is at least remarkable that even today in the plain of the Terme Çay there are lots of horses.

Iron

At second, the mountains to the south and southeast of this plain bear iron ores. Strabon mentioned iron-mines in Cabira (today Niksar) and mines near Pharnakeia (today Giresun?). Greek and Ottoman historians refer to iron exploitation in Canik Daglari, that is that mountain range, which closes up the Thermodon plain to the south.

Secluded landscape

At last, it must be pointed out that this landscape is very secluded. In the South and East high mountains shut this plain off, in the West the plain is marked off by the broad river Iris, and in the North it is separated by the Black Sea, where the coastline is very marshy.

By all means, a thorough and complete investigation of all those archaeological traces will bring much enlightenment.

Tekkeköy

At Tekkeköy, some kilometers east of Samsun, there are impressive remains of a mighty fortress. This place is very interesting for two reasons. Firstly, there have been excavated very remarkable Early Bronze Age tombs. Secondly, this place is dominated by this mysterious fortress.

Fortress of Tekkeköy

Rather hidden, about two kilometers (1,2 miles) off the coast, there are the imposing remains of this fortress. Only by using a well-contrived system of stairs there is a way up to the platform of this castle.

Stairs up to the platform

Steep staircase

From the topmost platform you can overview the western part of the Thermodon-Iris plain. Around this fortress the ancient town had expanded. An impressive ascent leads to the upper town. This road had been cut into the rock.

Ascent to the upper town

Tekkeköy = Lykastia ?

Until now, this monument has amazingly been neglected by official research. Actually, in connection with Amazon tradition it seems probable that these are the remains of the Amazon town Lykastia, which shall have been situated to the west of Themiskyra.

Aretias - Island of the Amazons

Aretias = Giresun Adasi

According to ancient tradition the cultic center of the Amazons was an island near the south coast of the Black Sea. It is not at all difficult to identify this island because there is only one island along the whole coast - Giresun Adasi, about 2 km (1,2 miles) northeast off the coastal town Giresun.

The island Giresun Adasi

Mystic Stone of Hamza

This one and only island along the whole south coast of the Black Sea is a place of mystic appearance. Even today cultic rites are performed there, it seems that there is a continuity from the Bronze Age till today. It was the sacred island of the Amazons, in the Middle Ages there has been a Byzantine monastery, and today it is a place of pre-islamic rites. There is the mystic Stone of Hamza where wishes shall become true, and every year there is a festival which is dominated by women.

The mystic Stone of Hamza on the island Giresun Adasi

On this island there was the temple of the Amazons. The ancient writers handed down a rather detailed description of this temple: It was a roofless stone temple. Outside this temple there was an altar built of pebbles and inside this temple there was a sacred black stone where the Amazons immolated horses.

Quite in the center of this island there is a place where huge stones are artificially lined up. This place suggests that it might have been the place of worship of the Amazons.

Place of worship of the Amazons?

Ikiztepe and Asar Kale

West to the fertile Thermodon-Iris plain there is a very similar plain, where the mighty stream Kizil Irmak (in antiquity: Halys) flows through. In this region there have been excavated several Early Bronze Age sites, whose archaeological finds are very similar to those which were discovered in the Thermodon-Iris plain. The most important place is Ikiztepe, quite in the center of the plain near the coast.
In the last years there has also been excavated an imposing Early Bronze Age sepulchre.

Sepulchre of Ikiztepe, seen from the front

This tomb consists of several chambers. The walls are formed by finely trimmed square stones.

Inside the tomb of Ikiztepe

Because of the fact that the archaeological finds there are largely identical with those from the Thermodon-Iris plain - which is associated with the Early Bronze Age Amazon culture, it seems possible that this had been the tomb of an Amazon queen. Until now, excavation results haven't yet been published. The conclusions will certainly be of high significance.

Fortress Asar Kale

Some kilometers to the south you encounter the impressive remains of the fortress Asar Kale. This rather inaccessible castle is situated at a strategically very important spot - in a narrow ravine which shuts off the fertile Halys plain from central Turkey.

The fortress Asar Kale

Near this fortress there are two mysterious rock monuments with four pillars. These monuments had been cut into the steep rock, one of these had been built in unreachable height.

Sanctuary with four pillars in unreachable height on the left bank of the Halys river

Sanctuary with four pillars on the right bank of the Halys river

Most probably, these buildings were sanctuaries. The fact that there are two sanctuaries, one on each bank of the river Halys (today Kizilirmak), is reminiscent of the ancient account that the Amazons had always been reigned by two queens.