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ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗ 1985



M. Vickers

## THERME AND THESSALONIKI

*Studies in honor of Ch. Edson, Institute for Balkan Studies 158,  
Thessaloniki 1981, 327-333*

The site of Therme and its relationship to Thessaloniki is one of the oldest problems of Macedonian topography. One school argues for Therme having been a fore-runner of Thessaloniki on the same site, while another believes that Therme must be sought elsewhere. The question has still not been finally resolved and in recent years claims have been put forward in support of both points of view<sup>1</sup>. It is not suggested that the question will be settled here, but it may be useful to look briefly at the history of the problem and to eliminate from the game some of the pieces that have no right to be there, as well as to admit one or two new ones. Needless to say, this article owes much to Charles Edson's stimulating discussion of the problem<sup>2</sup>.

Therme is known from literary sources, as well as from the gulf to which it gave its name<sup>3</sup>. As we shall see, the weight of literary evidence is in favour of Thessaloniki having been built on the site formerly occupied by Therme, but this idea was challenged during the nineteenth century. G. L. F. Tafel<sup>4</sup> was the first to suggest that Therme and Thessaloniki may have been two different places. M. Dimitzas<sup>5</sup> then argued from the apparent absence at Thes-

1. *E.g.* in favour of the identification of Thessaloniki with Therme: G. Bakalakis, 'Therme-Thessalonike', *Antike Kunst*, Beih. i (1963) 30-4, pls 17-18; Ph. Petsas, 'Αιγαί—Πέλλα—Θεσσαλονίκη', *Symposium 'Ancient Macedonia', Thessaloniki, 1968* (Thessaloniki, 1970) 226; M. Vickers, 'The town planning of Roman Thessaloniki', *ibid.*, 245; M. Zahrt, *Olynth und die Chalkidier* (Munich, 1971) 188-9. Against: N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Macedonia* i (Oxford, 1972) 150-1.

2. C. F. Edson, 'Notes on the Thracian phoros', *Classical Philology* xlii (1947) 88-105. Professor Edson regards 'the old city of Salonica as the most probable site' of Therme.

3. For full references, see G. L. F. Tafel, *De Thessalonica ejusque agro dissertatio geographica* (Berlin 1839) 8-17, and E. Oberhummer, *RE* v, A, 2391-2, s.v. Therme.

4. Tafel, *op. cit.*, 16.

5. M. Dimitzas, *Ἀρχαία γεωγραφία τῆς Μακεδονίας* (Athens, 1874) 263; *idem*, 'H



saloniki of any monument earlier than the fourth century A.D. that the site of Therme should be sought at Sedhes between Mikro and Megalo Karabournou, where there were some ruins still visible. Another reason why Dimitzas wished to place Therme here was the proximity of hot springs at Loutra Sedhes. These were the only hot springs in the neighborhood of Thessaloniki, and since the etymology of the name Therme seemed to require them, the identification with Sedhes was for a long time accepted—to the extent, indeed, that its official name is now ‘Thermi’.

Three other theories concerning the site of Therme deserve a brief mention. The Toumba at Kalamaria (once known as Agios Elias), on the eastern outskirts of Thessaloniki, was identified with Therme by S. Pelekides<sup>6</sup>, who had discovered evidence for sixth and fifth century settlement there. Then, in 1940, K. A. Rhomaios<sup>7</sup> put forward the curious notion that Therme was a collective name for a whole series of unwalled settlements, ‘ἀτειχίστους κώμας’ which extended from Thessaloniki as far as Sedhes. His outlook was no doubt coloured by his own excavations at Mikro Karabournou which yielded houses (of uncertain period) and sherds from the Early Iron Age down to the fourth century, if not beyond<sup>8</sup>. Finally, N. G. L. Hammond<sup>9</sup> has recently argued for the Cape at Mikro Karabournou having been the site of Therme, basing his case on the fact that Pliny appears to refer to Thessaloniki and Therme as distinct towns. Hammond’s point is the only one that requires discussion. It will soon be clear that the others are completely untenable in the light of the literary and archaeological evidence.

The literary evidence has been discussed by Professor Edson (though he overlooks Pliny)<sup>10</sup>. The position of Therme is established beyond question

*Μακεδονία ἐν λίθοις φθεγγόμενοις καὶ μνημείοις σωζομένοις* (Athens, 1896) 403-4, 422. O. Tafrahi, *Topographie de Thessalonique* (Paris, 1913) 7 was undecided, but Dimitzas’ view was followed by *inter alios* H. G. Lolling in I. von Müller, *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* iii (Nördlingen, 1889) 224; R. Kiepert, *Formae orbis antiqui* xvi (Berlin, 1908) 3, and Oberhummer, *op. cit.*, 2392. It was opposed by M. Hadji Ioannou, *Θεσμαῖς, ἤτοι περὶ Θεσσαλονίκης* (Athens, 1879) 11-12 (non vidi; quoted by A. Letsas, *Ἱστορία τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης* [Thessaloniki, 1961] 18, n. 4), and P. N. Papageorgiou, *BZ* vii (1898) 58. The discovery of the archaic temple (see below) neatly put paid to Dimitzas’ main argument.

6. That the identification emanated from Pelekides is clear from the fact that the excavation of Τοῦμπα Καλαμαρίας is reported in identical terms in *BCH* xlv (1921) and *JHS* xli (1921) 274.

7. K. A. Rhomaios, ‘Ποῦ ἔκειτο ἡ παλαιὰ Θέρμη’, *Makedonika* i (1940) 1-7.

8. *Idem*, ‘Ἀνασκαφὴ στὸ Καραμπουρνάκι τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης’, *Ἐπιτύμβιον Χ. Τσοῦντα* (Athens, 1941) 358-87.

9. Hammond, *op. cit.*, 151.

10. Edson, *op. cit.*, 100-104.



on the north-east coast of the Thermaic Gulf, between the River Echedorus (Gallikos) and Cape Aenea (Megalo Karabournou) by the anonymous author of the *Periplus* falsely attributed to Scylax of Caryanda, composed around the thirties of the fourth century B. C.<sup>11</sup>. Herodotus speaks of Therme as a base for Xerxes' fleet in 480<sup>12</sup>, a fact which in itself disposes of the theory that Therme was located at Sedhes or Loutra Sedhes, which are both situated well inland. Strabo (c. 63 B. C. - A. D. 19) speaks of the River Axios as flowing into the sea between Chalastra and Therme<sup>13</sup>. Edson considers Strabo to have been reproducing a pre-Hellenistic source, possibly Hecataeus<sup>14</sup>, and this, taken together with fragment 24 of Book vii: 'that after the River Axios is the city of Thessaloniki, which was formerly called Therme'<sup>15</sup>, points to the conclusion that Thessaloniki was founded on the site of Therme, despite Fragment 21 which states that the twenty-six communities that took part in the synoecism of c. 316 were destroyed. Since two, and possibly three of the six communities actually mentioned are known to have continued in existence, Fragment 21 is clearly unreliable<sup>16</sup>.

The scanty Byzantine sources give much the same picture. The scholium to Thucydides states that 'the present city of Thessaloniki was formerly called Therme'<sup>17</sup>, and Malalas, speaks of 'Thessaloniki which was formerly called the town of Therme'<sup>18</sup>. Even the apparent difficulties in Stephanus Byzantius where the entry under Thessaloniki reads 'which was formerly called Halia'<sup>19</sup> can be explained away by means of Meineke's ingenious emendation of *αλία* in R (= ΑΛΑ or ΜΑ) to [Θέρ]μα<sup>20</sup>. Hammond<sup>21</sup> makes too much of the fact that Stephanus also refers to Therme in its own right (as having been

11. Pseudo-Scylax, *Periplus* 66, in C. Müller (ed.), *Geographi Graeci Minores* i (Paris, 1855) 52. Cf. Edson, 'Strepsa (Thucydides i. 61, 4)', *Classical Philology* 1 (1955) 185-6, n. 32.

12. Hdt vii. 124. Cf. Edson, 'Notes on the Thracian Phoros', 101.

13. Strabo vii, frg. 20 (ed. A. Meineke [ed. ster., Leipzig, 1907] 459).

14. Edson, *op. cit.*, 104, n. 114.

15. Strabo vii, Frg. 24 (ed. Meineke, 461): 'ὅτι μετὰ τὸν Ἀξιὸν ποταμὸν ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη ἐστὶ πόλις, ἢ πρότερον Θέρμη ἐκαλεῖτο'. Cf. Edson, *loc. cit.*

16. Edson, *op. cit.*, 102, n. 101.

17. Schol. Thuc. i. 61, 2, cited by A. W. Combe, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* i (Oxford, 1945) 213:

18. Malalas, *Chronographia* vii. V80D (ed. Dindorf [Bonn, 1831] 190): Θεσσαλονίκη τὴν πρῶην λεγομένην κόμην Θέρμας.

19. Stephanus Byzantius (ed. A. Meineke, i [Berlin, 1849] 311): 'Θεσσαλονίκη: ἥτις ἄρα ἐκαλεῖτο Ἀλία'.

20. *Ibid.*, n. 7.

21. Hammond, *op. cit.*, 151, n. 3.



mentioned by Thucydides and being the eponym for the Thermaic Gulf), for he could hardly have left it out of his compendium.

There is only one Byzantine literary source which at first sight seems to prevent a positive identification of Thessaloniki with Therme. This is the fact that Procopius<sup>22</sup> refers in his *De Aedificiis* to Justinian fortifying various cities in Macedonia, including one called Θέρμη. If this Therme was in the neighbourhood of Thessaloniki, and was being fortified in the sixth century A.D., then Thessaloniki clearly could not have been founded on its site. Edson<sup>23</sup> observed that this Therme could have been anywhere in Macedonia, and that if indeed it was near Thessaloniki, then there would be little point in fortifying it since the population could easily have found refuge in an emergency in Thessaloniki itself. I have suggested elsewhere<sup>24</sup>, however, that Procopius was almost certainly not referring to our Therme. Very few of the forty-six sites that he mentions are known otherwise, but from those that are known it is clear that they are listed from west to east. The first recognisable name is Βασιλικὰ Ἀμύντου (no. 3 on the list), which probably signifies Aegae/Edessa. The next group of places that can be fixed with any certainty are Αὐλών, Βολβός and Βριγίζης (nos. 6-8), which are all situated near Lake Bolbe, 40-50 km east of Thessaloniki. Θέρμη is twelfth on the list, and must have been situated somewhere between Lake Bolbe and Neapolis/Kavala (no. 14). If this is the case, then we can cease to regard Procopius' testimony as being relevant in the Therme/Thessaloniki controversy.

Apart from the literary evidence, the discovery of an archaic Ionic temple on what is now Odos Krystallis, some two hundred metres south west of the Dioikitirion, well within the area of Hellenistic Thessaloniki<sup>25</sup>, makes it clear that long before the latter was founded, there was a settlement of some pretensions on the same spot. G. Bakalakis has published a preliminary account of the finds and a fuller treatment is promised<sup>26</sup>. *Disiecta membra* have been discovered over the years in various parts of the city. Capitals from the external order have been found near the University<sup>27</sup>, in the suburbs

22. Procopius, *De aedif.* iv. 4, 3 (ed. J. Haury/G. Wirth [Leipzig, 1964] 118).

23. Edson, *op. cit.*, 104.

24. M. Vickers, 'Where was Procopius' Therme?' *Classical Review* n.s. xxiv (1974) 10-11.

25. See the 'Sacred area' in the plan, M. Vickers, *JHS* xcii (1972) 161, fig. 4.

26. G. Bakalakis, *op. cit.* 30-34, pls 17-18. Cf. K. A. Rhomaïos, *Makedonika* i (1940) 3-4; Edson, *op. cit.*, 103; Letsas, *op. cit.*, 22; Vickers, *Symposium, 'Ancient Macedonia'*, 245, *idem*, 'Hellenistic Thessaloniki', *JHS* xcii (1972) 164.

27. G. Bakalakis, 'Νεάπολις—Χριστούπολις—Καβάλα' *ArchEph* 1936, 17. n. 1, figs. 25-6; Ch. Makaronas, *Makedonika* i (1940) 476 and n. 1; *BCH* lxxxvi (1962) 814; Bakalakis, 'Therme-Thessalonike', 31-3. pl. 17, 2, 3.



of Poliochni<sup>28</sup>, and in the church of the Panagouda near the Arch of Galerius used as the base of an episcopal throne<sup>29</sup>, and a similar, though smaller capital perhaps from the pronaos or opisthodomos, was found in the University area during the last war<sup>30</sup>. At the site of the temple itself were found Ionic column bases and drums<sup>31</sup>, fragments of ovolo and astragal mouldings<sup>32</sup>, and a small marble head from a relief<sup>33</sup>. Other discoveries of published earlier material from the city include some black glaze pottery of the fifth and fourth centuries found near the north wall of the basilica of St. Demetrius<sup>34</sup>, a terracotta plaque of a youth on a dolphin of the second half of the fifth century<sup>35</sup>, and several archaic silver coins.

These coins bear the type of either a complete Pegasus or a protome on the obverse, and have an incise reverse. They were first attributed to Therme by B. V. Head<sup>36</sup> and his identification has won wide acceptance<sup>37</sup>. M. Zahrnt, however, has recently sounded a note of caution concerning this attribution<sup>38</sup> and he is probably right to do so since it is based merely, on stray finds and there is no indication on the coins themselves as to their origin. It is a short step from accepting the coins as belonging to Therme to believing

28. *ArchDelt* xvii (1961-2) Chron., 209; *JHS Arch. Reports 1961-62*, 14; *BCH* lxxxvi (1962) 814, Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, 33.

29. L. 1.70 m., w. 0.80 m., h. 0.70 m., upper diameter of column 0.70 m. Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, 31, pls 17, 1, 4; *Makedonika* vii (1967) 287, pl. 3b.

30. L. 1.42 m., w. 0.59 m., h. 0.40-0.52 m. Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, 33, pl. 18, 1, 4.

31. *Ibid.*, fig. 2. There is a general view of all the architectural fragments in *Makedonika* ix (1969) pl. 16.

32. Bakalakis, *op. cit.*, 31, 33, pl. 18, 2, 3 (ovolo), 5 (astragal).

33. Bakalakis, 'Θερμαῖος', *ArchEph* 1953-4; [1955] 227, *idem*, 'Therme-Thessalonike', 34, pl. 18, 7; *Makedonika* vii (1967) 287, pl. 3a.

34. Bakalakis, *op. cit.* 33; *idem*, 'Θερμαῖος', 227.

35. *Ibid.*, 222 fig. 1; *idem*, 'Therme-Thessalonike', 34.

36. B. V. Head, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, Macedonia, etc.* (London, 1879) xxvii-xxviii, 136-8; *idem*, *Historia Numorum* 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1911) 203.

37. *E.g.* by E. Babelon, *Traité des monnaies grecques et romaines* i (Paris, 1901) 1243, pl. LVIII, 4-9 (including several found at Thessaloniki); J. Svoronos, *Journal international d'archéologie numismatique* xix (1918-19) pl. xiv, nos 1-18; H. Gaebler, *Antiken Münzen Nord-Griechenlands* iii<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1935) 116-7, pl. XXVI, 21-23, 25-28, 30; S. W. Grose, *Catalogue of the McClean Collection* ii (Cambridge, 1926) pl. 113, 17 (found at Thessaloniki). Similar coins found at Olynthus were attributed by D. M. Robinson and P. A. Clement to Therme, *Excavations at Olynthus* iii (Baltimore, 1931) 28, *ibid.* ix (1938) 316-17. Only H. Dressel and K. Regling, 'Agyptische-Funde alt-griechische Münzen', *Zeitschrift für Numismatik*, xxxviii (1927) 118, n. 4, and M. Zahrnt have questioned the attribution to Therme.

38. *Op. cit.* 188, n. 196.

that they prove Therme to have been a Corinthian colony<sup>39</sup>. Until further evidence appears it may be as well to reserve judgement on this point.

The name of Therme is another problem, and no completely satisfactory explanation for it has yet been given. In an attempt to apply a variation of the hot springs theory, Edson following Tafel, has claimed that there is evidence in the Byzantine sources 'for hot springs within Thessalonica itself'<sup>40</sup>. The 'evidence' in question is in a 9th or 10th century version of the *Passions* of St. Demetrius<sup>41</sup>, which I have discussed at length elsewhere<sup>42</sup> and which unfortunately for our purposes refer to the caldarium of the public baths (τὸ δημόσιον λουτρὸν) near the basilica of St. Demetrius: 'τοῦ τῶν θερμῶν ὑδάτων οἴκου'. This reference ought now perhaps to be dropped from the debate.

Yet another explanation has been proposed by Bakalakis<sup>43</sup>, who maintains that Therme does not derive its name from hot springs, but rather from the 'inner warmth of a local deity' which was given expression in the name Θερμαῖος. The cult, he says, passed over into the cult of Dionysus. This is an extremely tenuous argument, and despite the apparent wealth of Dionysiac connections that can be adduced for later Thessaloniki<sup>44</sup>, there is no substantial evidence so far as Thermie is concerned. A marble phallus once considered to come from the archaic temple<sup>45</sup> is now thought to come from outside the city<sup>46</sup>, and the terracotta plaque of a youth on a dolphin<sup>47</sup> is not even known with any certainty to be from Thessaloniki. The arguments, moreover, for connecting it with, say, Arion are easily as strong as those for assigning it to the otherwise unknown Διόνυσος Θερμαῖος.

There is now a new piece of evidence that has been brought into the

39. As proposed by Head, *BMCat*, xxviii and *Historia Numorum* 203.

40. Edson, *op. cit.*, 101, n. 93.

41. Migne, *P. G.* cxvi (Paris, 1891) 1184.

42. M. Vickers, 'Sirmium or Thessaloniki? A critical examination of the St. Demetrius legend', *BZ* 1xvii (1974) 337-350, esp. pp. 341-3.

43. Bakalakis, 'Θερμαῖος', *Arch Eph* 1953-54, i [1955] 221-9; *idem*, 'Therme-Thessalonike' 34.

44. *Idem*, 'Παυσίλιπος von Thessalonike', *Provincialia, Festschrift für R. Lauer-Belart* (Basel, 1968) 3-5.

45. *Idem*, 'Θερμαῖος', 227; *idem*, 'Therme-Thessalonike', 33, pl. 18.6; *Makedonika* vii (1967) 287.

46. It is probably the one from near Amphipolis: *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1940, 281 (a reference I owe to Professor Bakalakis).

47. See n. 35. above.



argument by L. Robert<sup>48</sup>. It is an extremely fragmentary inscription of Roman date now apparently missing, but seen by Robert in the old museum at Thessaloniki in 1932. One line clearly reads 'ὕδατων εἰς θεραπ[εῖαν]' and Robert points out that it is a good ancient reference to 'l'aménagement d'eaux curatives, donc thermales, qu'il est naturel de situer dans la ville', and although therapeutic springs are not of necessity hot springs, he is probably correct in his conclusion. He is careful to point out, however, that the inscription could just as easily refer to a place outside the city itself but within its territory, and so we cannot be wholly confident in using it as evidence for the identification of the site of Thessaloniki with that of Therme. It is, though, the best evidence that we have apart from the literary sources.

But we are still left with the problem of Pliny's apparent assertion that Thessaloniki and Therme were different places: 'medioque litoris flexu Thessalonice liberae condicionis—ad hanc a Dyrrhachio CCXLV—, Therme in Thermaico sinu'<sup>49</sup>. Since, however, all the other authorities point to the two cities sharing the same site, it would seem that Pliny, who was not infallible, made a mistake<sup>50</sup>. He probably quoted from two separate sources without realising that they were contradictory.

In conclusion, the strong likelihood is that Hellenistic Thessaloniki was founded on the site of archaic and classical Therme.

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48. L. Robert, 'Les inscriptions de Thessalonique', *Revue de Philologie* xlviii (1974) 220-221.

49. Pliny *NH* iv, 10 (ed. C. Mayhoff [Leipzig, 1906] 312). Mayhoff's text needs to be emended (to CCLXVII) in the light of both Strabo viii. 7. 4 ('267 miles') and the recent discovery at the River Gallikos near Thessaloniki of a milestone set up by the pro-consul Cn. Egnatius, which gives the distance to Dyrrhachium as 260 Roman miles (C. Romiopoulos, 'Un nouveau milliaire de la Via Egnatia', *BCH* xcvi [1974] 813-6).

50. Cf. S. D. F. Detlefsen, *Die Anordnung der geographischen Bücher des Plinius und ihre Quellen* (Berlin, 1909) 7.