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UDK 737.1.041(398Damastion):81'373.21]"-04"
Original scientific paper

THE NAME OF DAMASTION¹

Damastion was a mining and minting town in the interior of the Balkans near abundant silver mines founded by fugitives from Aegina and Mende, after they had been expelled from their native cities by the Athenians during the turmoil of the Peloponnesian War (Strabo 7.7.8 and 8.6.16). Founded shortly after the Peace of Nicias of 421 B.C., in challenging times of restructuring of powers and regrouping of fugitives and exiles on both sides, and during an acute shortage of silver required for financing the impending war operations, the town seems to have been exceptional in several respects, including its name. It appears that Damastion was named after its founder; Damastas or Damastes, considerably earlier than the practice of naming a foundation after its founder became common in Hellenistic times. In this paper I address the circumstances that likely prompted or perhaps encouraged such a choice for the new foundation's name.

Key words: *Damastion, Greek colonization, Peloponnesian War, Aegina, ancient silver mines, Greek coinage, Olynthus*



Ancient Greek cities mentioned in the text. The area of probable location of Damastion is darkened.

¹ I wish to express my gratefulness to *John D. Morgan III*, a professor at the University of Delaware, epigraphist and historian, and my husband, for his suggestion about the origin of the name of Damastion, which goes back to 2002, and for our productive discussion of this topic.

2. The evidence

2.1. The evidence for the name of the town, Damastion

The primary testimony to the town's name is provided by its remarkable silver coins, bearing on the reverse the inscription ΔΑΜΑΣΤΙΝΩΝ, i.e., the ethnic name of the town's inhabitants in the standard form of the genitive plural.

[for the EDITOR: place the illustration either here, OR after the entire description of the coin types]



Fig. 1 The coinage of Damastion: tetradrachm, drachm and tetrobol.

The coins of Damastion are known in three denominations, with the smaller ones unambiguously indicating the town's mining activity:²

- The tetradrachms: Obv/ Apollo. Rv/ ΔΑΜΑΣΤΙΝΩΝ around a tripod.
- The drachms: Obv/ a female head. Rv/ ΔΑΜΑΣΤΙΝΩΝ around a peculiar representation of a square ingot of silver with a handle.
- The tetrobols: Obv/ Apollo. Rv/ ΔΑΜΑΣΤΙΝΩΝ arranged on the sides of a miner's pick.

The only extant literary source that mentions Damastion is Strabo's Geography. The town's name appears in two instances: in the description of Illyria in Book 7 and in the description of Aegina in Book 8. The passage in book on Illyria, in which Strabo had vaguely placed Damastion far inland, beyond the Illyrian tribes dwelling in the hinterland of large Greek colonies Apollonia and Epidamnos/Dyrrhachium and near

² May 1939, throughout, provided a detailed study of the coinage of Damastion, in which he sequenced the coin dies and defined the groups of issues and their relative chronology, dating the activity of the mint approximately to the 4th century B.C.

the silver mines controlled by barbarian tribes of both Thracian and Illyrian descent, the Perisadyes and the Encheleans also called Dassaretii (7.7.8), had long been the only known reference to the town.

τῆς γὰρ Ἐπιδάμνου καὶ τῆς Ἀπολλωνίας μέχρι τῶν
 Κεραυνίων ὑπεροικοῦσι Βυλλιόνες τε καὶ Ταυλάντιοι
 5 καὶ Παρθῖνοι καὶ Βρῦγοι · πλησίον δέ που καὶ τὰ ἀργυρεῖα
 τὰ ἐν Δαμασίῳ, <ῶν> Περισάδυές τε συνεστήσαντο τὴν
 δυναστείαν καὶ Ἐγχελέ(ων) οὖς καὶ Δασαρητίους
 καλοῦσι · πρὸς δὲ τούτοις Λυγκησταὶ τε καὶ ἡ Δευρίοπος
 καὶ ἡ τριπολίτις Πελαγονία καὶ Ἔορδοι καὶ Ἐλίμεια
 10 καὶ Ἐράτυρα.

Fig.2 Strabo 7.7.8, edition by Baladié 1989.)

*'For, above Epidamnos and Apollonia as far as the Keraunian mountains, live the Bylliones, the Taulantii, (5) the Parthini and the Brygi. In the vicinity are also the silver mines in Damastion, where the Perisadyes established a joint rule with the Encheleans who are also called Dasaretii. Near these peoples, there are also the Lyncestai, the territory of Deuriopos, the "tripolititis" Pelagonia, the Eordi, Elimeia (10) and Eratyra.'*³

Strabo's second reference to Damastion, discovered around 1930 in the palimpsest *Vaticanus Graecus* 2306 (f. 209) of the Vatican library⁴, provided an augmentation to the passage about Aegina (8.6.16) and revealed that the Aeginetans, together with the Mendaeans, founded (*oikisan*) Damastion.

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... οἱ δὲ φυγά)δες μετὰ
 Μενδαίων Δαμά(στ)ειον ᾧκισαν τῆ(ς) Ἰλλυρίδος περὶ
 τὰ ἀργύρ(ε)ια ὧν ἐμνήσθημεν ἐν τοῖς Ἰλλυρικοῖς.

Fig.3 Strabo 8.6.16, edition by Baladié 1978.)

*'... The fugitives, together with the Mendaeans, founded (oikisan) Damastion in Illyria, near the silver mines that we have mentioned in the chapter on the Illyrians.'*⁵

³ The quotation of Strabo's text is taken from the edition by Baladié 1989; the translation of the quoted passage from French into English is mine.

⁴ *Aly* 1932, pp. 8-9; *Aly/Sbordone* 1956, pp. 16 and 212.

⁵ The quotation of Strabo's text is taken from the edition by Baladié 1978; it remains the only edition that included the augmentation discovered by *W. Aly*. The translation of the quoted passage from French into English is mine.

2.2. The Greek origin of the name of Damastion

The additional passage (8.6.16) provides the clue to unravelling this town's many peculiar and, apparently, exceptional features, including its name.⁶ Damastion, hence, was neither an indigenous Illyrian town nor did its coins convey the name of an otherwise unrecorded Illyrian tribe, as had earlier been conjectured based on the only available piece of information in Strabo's description of Illyria (7.7.8.).⁷ These conjectures were prompted by a conventional following of a flawed rendition of the name of the other barbarian people of obviously Thracian descent mentioned in the same passage, the Perisadyes, who, besides the Illyrian tribe of Encheleans/Dasaretii, had control over the mines near which Damastion was founded. In consequence, the Thracian element in Strabo's account passed unrecognized, but the Illyrian was unduly emphasized. The geographical framework in which the town should be sought was thus distorted and skewed towards the West and Southwest, into purely Illyrian territories.⁸ It was accordingly presumed that the name of the town, Damastion, or of the tribe, allegedly the Damastini, which were supposedly located within these territories, must have been of purely Illyrian origin, even though almost nothing is known about the Illyrian language. Krahe's proposal that the name might be of Greek origin was dismissed.⁹

2.3. The evidence for a Greek personal name *Damastas / Damastes*

It was normal for a Greek colony to obtain Greek name. Since *Damastas* or *Damastes* is an attested Greek personal name, it is most likely that the new foundation by the Aeginetans and Mendaeanes was named after its founder. The following list provides an overview of the recorded instances of Greek personal name *Damastas* or *Damastes*, the "tamer". The name is infrequent but clearly attested. There is no other Greek personal name from which the town name Damastion could derive.

Δαμάστας

- Atrax, Thessaly, Pelasgiotis: LGPN III.B 9231; SEG 32.594; Hellenistic period.
- Larisa, Thessaly: LGPN III.B 9232; SEG 35.611; 4th c. B.C.
- Epidauros, Argolis: LGPN III.A 1492; IG IV², 1 103, line 153; c. 365-335 B.C.
- Sparta, Laconia: LGPN III.A 9128, SEG 40.348 B 9; 3rd c. B.C.

⁶ About Damastion as a Greek foundation: *Ujes Morgan* 2018, throughout; see also *Ujes* 2002, pp. 103-104, and *Ujes Morgan* 2011, pp. 490-491. Damastion was mentioned as a Greek colony in the following: *Papazoglu* 1967, p. 17, *Nicolet-Pierre/Gjongecaj*, 1995, pp. 305-306, *Figueira* 2004, p. 622.

⁷ For discussion of the rendition of Strabo's text by Meineke and the consequent conjectures and constructs, see *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 24-25.

⁸ The difficulties that exclude the purely Illyrian territories from the search for Damastion are the following: first, the lack of silver mines because of the geological structure of those territories and, second, most importantly, the absence of the smaller denominations, which normally circulate and get hoarded only in the narrow area around the place where they were issued thus pointing to the location of their mint; however, Damastion's small denominations are concentrated in southern Kosovo, where there are also abundant silver mines, see: *Ujes/Romić*, pp. 91-93, *Ujes* 2002, pp. 121-123 and *Ujes Morgan* 2011, pp. 491-495.

⁹ *Krahe* 1925, p. 128, proposing it originated from the stems "da-" and "ma-s-t". Rejected by *Fraser* 1926, p. 88, who considered it unlikely that a Greek name could have been given to a place in the barbarian hinterland.

Δαμάσστας

- Atrax, Thessaly, Pelasgiotis: LGPN III.B 9230; SEG 35.540; 1st half of the 2nd century B.C.

Δαμάστης

- Sigeion, Troas: Pauly-Wissowa no.3; LGPN V.A 13231; FGrH 5 (s. Διώξιππος); DFHG vol. II, Damastis Sigeensis; active ca. 400 B.C.

- Oropos, Boiotia: two inscriptions, LGPN III.B 23266; Petrakos, I. Orop. 431, 3, 5; Marcadé II 83-4, I. Orop. 432; SEG 18.161; 225-175 B.C.

- Thasos, Thrace:

- LGPN I 38458; Etud. Thasiennes 4, nos. 4-11 ; ca. 400 B.C.

- LGPN I 38467; Etud. Thasiennes 4, nos. 518-531; 1st half of the 4th c. B.C.

- Thasian amphora handles, 4th-1st century B.C.:

- Labraunda, Caria: SEG 30.1271; Säflund, Labraunda II,2, 119.

- Thasos: SEG 41.722 (restored).

- Odessos, Thrace: SEG 45.2209.

- Scythia Minor: SEG 54.669(11); Histria VIII, 1, 13-14, 30, 44-45.

- Pergamon, Mysia: Perg. Forsch. 11, II, 425-426.

- Unknown provenance: SEG 40.1606. Dedication to Poseidon, bronze dolphin, 2nd-1st century B.C. Seen in the Antiquities Market (The European Fine Art Fair, Maastricht 13-21 March 1993; H.A.C. Kunst der Antike, Basel, no. 90).

3. Damastas / Damastes and Damastion

According to the information provided by Greek literary sources, the data traditionally of fundamental importance to remember about any colony were the following: the date of foundation, the metropolis and the name of the founder.¹⁰

3.1. The origin of the founders of Damastion and the date of the foundation¹¹

The augmentation to Strabo's passage about Aegina (8.6.16) states that the Aeginetans, together with the Mendaeans, founded (*oikisan*) Damastion, which means that the town effectively was a Greek colony (*apoikia*).¹² The same passage indicates that Damastion was founded when the Aeginetans were fugitives, which sets the foundation in the time of the Peloponnesian War, more precisely in the period after they had been expelled from their native island in 431 B.C. (Thuc. 2.27, Paus. 2.29.5, Hdt. 6.91.1) and before 405 B.C., when the Spartan admiral Lysandros restored their island to the

¹⁰ Malkin 1987, p. 4, stressing Thucydides' information about the participants in the Peloponnesian War, their origins and their war partnerships, Thuc. 7.3-5 and 7.57.

¹¹ For an analysis of the events that preceded the foundation of Damastion, from the expulsion of the Aeginetans by the Athenians in 431 B.C. to the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C., including the discussion of the circumstances of the Mendaeans, see *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 25-28.

¹² For differences in approach to Greek colonization and to the use of relevant terminology, see *Malkin* 2016, pp. 28-33 and 46-47. I keep the traditional terms "foundation", "colony" and "*apoikia*".

surviving Aeginetans (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.9). The expelled Aeginetans found refuge with the friends and allies of the Spartans (Thuc. 2.27.3, Diod. 12.44.3, Paus. 2.29.5 and 2.38.5). Their major group was reportedly entirely murdered in 424 B.C. in an attack by the Athenian fleet in Thyrea, in Cynouria, where the Spartans settled them (Thuc. 4.56-57); yet some captives might have survived in the Athenian prisons until released following the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C. (Diodorus 12.65.9); some might have remained scattered in locations in Thyreatis; some other might have fled to their only colony, Cydonia, or even to Naucratis in Egypt, where there was an ancient Aeginetan trade outpost.¹³ It remains unknown which groups of the Aeginetans were able to participate in the foundation of Damastion and where they temporarily dwelled before undertaking the founding venture. It is, however, certain that the scattered remnants of the decimated Aeginetan population were in an extremely difficult position throughout the two and a half decades of their expulsion.

The Mendaeans were allies of the Athenians, but those who joined the founding venture most likely were the pro-Spartan oligarchs who instigated a failed uprising against the Athenians in 423 B.C. and had to escape their city (Thuc. 4.123.1-2, 129.2). The Athenians retook Mende, but the oligarchs found shelter in nearby Scione, which was under an Athenian siege (Thuc. 4.129-131). They stayed in Scione under the siege for a couple of years, together with many other exiles and refugees and a Spartan garrison. In 421 B.C., a special clause of the Peace of Nicias granted releasing to all the Spartans and their allies besieged in Scione (Thuc. 5.18.8). It seems probable that the exiled Mendaeans survived, but their city had still been held by the pro-Athenian faction that would have them prosecuted and, most probably, executed in accordance with the orders Nicias had issued already in 423 B.C. (Thuc. 4.130.7). Thus it does not seem likely that they could have returned to their native city any time before 404 B.C., when the Athenians surrendered and the war ended. Their status of exiles and metics probably encouraged them to participate in the venture of founding Damastion.¹⁴ There can hardly be any other set of circumstances and reasons that could have led any Mendaeans, the Ionians originating from Eretria and traditional allies of the Athenians, to join the Aeginetans.

It appears plausible that only during the brief period of cessation of hostilities after the Peace of Nicias in 421 B.C., when it became possible for exiles and fugitives on both sides to regroup and reorganize, the two groups of the settlers of Damastion were able to unite their efforts and set off to a remote barbarian land with rich silver mines. The foundation of Damastion is, therefore, most likely to have occurred shortly after the Peace, ca. 420 B.C. or sometime during the several following years, before the hostilities resumed.¹⁵

¹³ *Figuera* 1988, throughout; see also *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴ *Sutherland* 1943, p. 146, about the role of metics and private initiative in Greek trade.

¹⁵ Previously proposed chronology of the foundation of Damastion: *Nicolet-Pierre/Gjongecaj* 1995, p. 330: "after 431 B.C."; *Ujes/Romić* 1996, p. 79 and *Ujes* 2002, p. 104: "shortly after the Athenian intervention against Mende"; *Figueira* 2004, p. 622: "after 431 B.C."

3.2. The practice of naming a foundation after the founder

Naming Damastion after its founder in the early 410's B.C. might seem unusually early, since it has usually been considered that the practice of naming a colony after its founder started with Philip II of Macedonia, i.e., in 356 B.C. with *Philippoi*, and became common with Alexander the Great, continuing throughout Hellenistic times. However, there are recorded instances showing that already before the 4th century B.C., in Archaic and Classical times, Greek foundations were sometimes named after their founder (*oikist*). Such instances are uncommon and occurred in exceptional sets of circumstances: in the cases of tyranny¹⁶, empire/monarchy¹⁷ and leaders of the fugitives who lost their metropolis.¹⁸ Normally, in compliance with traditional Greek religious practices, the metropolis would have selected a founder (*oikist*) and send him to Delphi, where he would be authorized, by an oracle of Apollo, with supreme religious power and responsibilities for all the decisions and practices required for effecting a founding of a new colony. Accordingly, a founder had the power of an absolute political leader and military commander; usually, he was worshipped as a hero after his death.¹⁹ In critical circumstances, he could have been entitled to naming his foundation after himself.²⁰ Such was the case with the foundation of Phanagoreia, on the northern Black Sea coast, by Phanagoras, a leader of fugitive Teians escaping from an invasion by Cyrus the Great in mid-540's B.C. (Stephanus of Byzantium s.v. *Phanagoreia* referring to Hecataeus; DFHG *Hecataeus* 164; FGrHist I F212).²¹ The Teians permanently left their metropolis never to return and could rely only on their founder, who was granted an exceptional honor: to name the new city after himself.²² This historically recorded instance provides a close analogy with the circumstances of the foundation of Damastion.²³

3.3. Damastas/Damastes, the eponymous founder of Damastion

Damastion was founded in most difficult times for its settlers. The Aeginetans had lost their metropolis, and the Mendaeans oligarchs had lost their status in the city of their origin. It seems that in such circumstances, which imposed a complete reliance of

¹⁶ Apollonia in Illyria, which was first named Gylakeia after its founder *Gylax* (Steph. Byz. s.v. *Apollonia* and *Gylakeia*) sent probably by the Corinthian tyrant Periander ca. 600 B.C., is an example of an eponymous foundation under tyranny.

¹⁷ Amphipolis and Heraclea in Trachis are considered examples of "imperial" and "state" ventures of the 5th century B.C., see note no. 28 below.

¹⁸ For eponymous founders of Greek colonies see *Malkin* 1985, throughout, esp. p. 115, 117, 129-130 for the contexts and reasons that rendered such a practice acceptable.

¹⁹ *Graham* 1999, pp. 29-39, *Malkin* 1985, pp. 114-115 and 127-129, *Malkin* 1987, Chapter I, pp. 17-91, esp. pp. 89-91.

²⁰ *Malkin* 1985, p. 115, 123, 129; *Malkin* 1987, p. 87.

²¹ *Malkin* 1985, pp. 121-123.

²² *Malkin* 1987, p. 203, n. 91: the founder was entitled to name the colony, based on Thucydides' information (4.102.3) about the foundation of Amphipolis by Hagnon.

²³ The somewhat comparable account by Herodotus (4.147-149) about the foundation of Thera (Santorini) by Theras, the Spartan leader of fugitive Minyae, is legendary but probably has historical grounds, see *Malkin* 1985, p. 117, *Malkin* 1987, p. 195.

the settlers on the power and person of the founder, it was acceptable and maybe even appropriate to name the colony after him.

The origin of Damastas / Damastes remains enigmatic. The fact that Strabo mentions Damastion in his account about Aegina (8.6.16), suggests that the Aeginetans were the dominant group of settlers, which, possibly, hints at the Aeginetan origin of the founder, Damastas. But, it can not be excluded that the founder, Damastes, was one of the wealthy Mendaeian oligarchs.

There is also a third possibility: that Damastas / Damastes was a Chalcidian, i.e., an Olynthian. Neither group of the founding settlers was backed by the city of their origin, which would normally organize, coordinate and support the founding venture, but there are indications that assistance came from Olynthus. The Chalcidians of Olynthus were on the side of the Spartans and had already in 423 B.C. received families of the members of pro-Spartan factions of Scione and Mende, and perhaps their most valuable possessions, too, before the Athenian fleet attacked those two cities (Thuc. 4.129-131, Diodorus 12.72.9). Thus, it seems probable that the Mendaeian oligarchs went to Olynthus after they had been released from Scione in 421 B.C. upon the Peace of Nicias. There is no extant information directly connecting the Aeginetans with Olynthus, but city could have provided a safe haven for the groups of fugitives of the Spartan allies before and after the Peace of Nicias of 421 B.C.

Most importantly for understanding the relationship between the two cities, there is a striking connection between the Damastian and the Olynthian coinages. Besides the similarity of their weight standards²⁴, coin types, stylistic and technological elements, the dates of the beginning of issuance of the tetradrachms of both cities are either coinciding or very close – the Olynthian ca. 400 B.C. and the Damastian shortly afterwards, ca. 395 B.C.²⁵ – which all points to a strong political connection of the two cities.²⁶ Since the whole enterprise was evidently centered around the extraction and trade of silver, much needed in view of the impending continuation of war, the Olynthians likely had a strong commercial interest in assisting the founding of Damastion and keeping close ties with it. It was feasible for the Olynthians to provide to the Aeginetans and the Mendaeians the kinds of organizational support that were required by the Greek tradition and religion, and the logistic assistance for the long-distance venture. For these reasons, Olynthus appears as a probable proxy- or substitute- metropolis of Damastion.²⁷ Consequently, and because of the exceptional general circumstances, there is a slight possibility that

²⁴ Their weight standards are peculiar but related; the weight of a Damastian tetradrachm seems to be 3 drachms and 4 ½ obols on the Olynthian standard, showing the exchange rate of sixteen Damastian tetradrachms for fifteen Chalcidian/Olynthian tetradrachms (ca. 217.50 - 217.60 g); *Ujes Morgan* 2018, p. 34.

²⁵ For an overview of the previous proposals for the chronology of the beginning of issuance of the Olynthian/Chalcidian tetradrachms, mostly placed ca. 400 B.C. on the basis of analysis of political conditions, see *Psoma* 2001, pp. 189-221 and also *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 30-32. For the beginning of the coinage of Damastion ca. 395 B.C.: *May* 1939, pp. 38-39, 45, also 63; *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 32-33.

²⁶ *May* 1939, p. 38, rejected the idea that Damastion was an Olynthian colony; however, he suggested that Damastion provided silver for the Olynthian coinage, especially for early series of the tetradrachms: pp. 42-43.

²⁷ *Ujes Morgan* 2018, pp. 35-36.

Damastas / Damastes might have been a prominent Olynthian public figure, selected by his own polis to effect the enterprise of founding of a colony of special trade interest,²⁸ even though the settlers were of different origin.²⁹

4. Conclusion

The exceptionally difficult circumstances of the Peloponnesian War, which led to the joint foundation of Damastion by two different groups of colonists, both fugitives of war with no metropolis and nowhere to return, also led to the naming the town after its founder, Damastas or Damastes, whose origin and efforts escape closer determination, but whose valiant leadership earned him the exceptional honor to name the new town after himself.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: The coinage of Damastion: tetradrachm, drachm and tetrobol.

Fig. 2: Strabo 7.7.8, edition by Baladié 1989.

Fig. 3: Strabo 8.6.16, edition by Baladié 1978.

Sources and credits

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Fig. 2 and 3: Scanned from the printed source, used in accordance with the Fair Use principle for scholarly and educational use.

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²⁸ The possibility that an Olynthian official could have performed his civil duty as a founder of a colony of special interest (not of a standard agricultural type) is, to some extent, reminiscent of the "state" or "imperial" founding ventures of the mid-5th century B.C., i.e., during the Peloponnesian War, such as Amphipolis in 437 B.C. by the Athenians for silver supply and control of strategic routes (Thuc. 4.102), and Heraclea Trachinia in 426 B.C. by the Spartans for its strategic position (Thuc. 3.92), see *Graham* 1999, pp. 37-39. In these instances, the notable citizens, to whom the temporary roles of founders were assigned, kept their original citizenship and returned to their metropoleis after they had completed their duty, which does not seem applicable to the case of the founder of Damastion.

²⁹ The account about the foundation of Thera by Theras, the Spartan leader of fugitive Minyae, suggests that the idea of a founder whose origin is different from that of his colonists was known and, in difficult situations, acceptable; see above, footnote 23.

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Online resources for the quoted onomastic data

Digital Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum (DFHG): <http://www.dfhg-project.org/>

Lexicon of Greek Personal Names (LGPN), an Oxford Classics Research Project, Oxford University: <https://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/>

Searchable Greek Inscriptions, The Packard Humanities Institute: <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/>

Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (SEG): www.brill.com/sego