



Hermonassa

Summary :

Greek town in the Cimmerian Bosphorus (Taman Peninsula), east to the Kerch Gulf, in the Krasnodar-krai, Russia.

Other Names

Harmoneia

Geographical Location

Krasnodar-krai, Russia

Historical Region

Cimmerian Bosphorus

1. Sources

Pseudo-Scymnos records the name of the town as Harmoneia.¹ Eustathios² provides details on the circumstances of its foundation. Arrian refers to Hermonassa and mentions that the city has a port.³ Strabo discusses its location in the Cimmerian Bosphorus.⁴ Dionysios Periegetes⁵ and Pliny⁶ also provide important information about the town's foundation. Pomponius Mela stresses the importance of the town in the first half of the 1st c. AD.⁷ The town is recorded in the 4th c. by Rufius Avienus⁸ and Ammianus Marcellinus.⁹ *Tabula Peutingeriana*¹⁰ and *Cosmographia Ravennatis*¹¹ refer to the town as an urban centre of importance next to an imperial road. In the 7th c., Stephanus Byzantius states that Hermonassa is part of the territory of Psestoi, a local population.¹²

1.2. Name and position

Arrian narrates the story of the name of the town: it derives from Hermonassa, wife of a certain Semandros of [Lesbos](#). He brought some Aeolians with him and died while the town was being built. His wife assumed power in the town and named it Hermonassa.

The town is located on a high coastal plateau, at the south coast of the [Taman peninsula](#), on the location of the modern town of Taman.¹³ Strabo mentions the location of the towns around lake Taman (Corcondamitis), formed by the Taman peninsula and the southern branch of the Kuban River (Antikeites or Hypanis).¹⁴ Both [Strabo](#) and Pliny mention that a navigator coming from the south encounters Hermonassa on the right-hand side of the Cimmerian Bosphorus (modern Kerch strait).

2. History

The time of the foundation of Hermonassa remains debatable. Scylax does not mention the town. The information in Eustathius is conflicting;¹⁵ a variant is that a Semandros-led group of *oikistai* from Mitylene founded the town. The author gives another version which is also found in later geographers, such as Pliny and Dionysios Periegetes who show that Hermonassa was founded by Ionians from [Miletus](#), under the leadership of a certain Hermon, hence the name of the town.¹⁶ The discovery of [Archaic pottery](#), black and red-figure vases¹⁷ and two conical objects dated to the third quarter of the 6th c. - one of them bears the signature of a craftsman from Eleutherna in Crete¹⁸ - show that the [colony](#) must have been founded likely by the early 6th c. at the latest and became an important town in the region.¹⁹ The Cretan inscription on one of the conical objects attests to the presence of a group of Cretans who might have participated in the setup of the colony together with the Ionian and Rhodian colonists. It is possible that the conflicting information about the Mytilenian or Milesian colonists refers to a mixed group of Ionian and Aeolian *oikistai* who participated in the foundation of the colony. An Ionic capital, product of Ephesian craftsmen, and possibly originating from a temple in the town dedicated to [Ephesian Artemis](#) and dated to the first quarter of the 5th c. B.C., is a good indication of the predominantly Ionian origin of the colonists of Hermonassa.²⁰ Moreover, a 4th c. list of 40 Ionian names adds to the general impression of a chiefly Ionian



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involvement in the foundation.²¹

Diodorus narrates that the [dynasty of the Archaeanactids](#) began to reign in [Panticapaeum](#), the most important town in the Cimmerian Bosphorus, in 438/437 B.C.²² It is likely that around 480 B. C. the Greek towns in the area formed a political and economic union in a state-like form which was governed by different leaders such as the family of the Archaeanactids.²³ In a short time, Hermonassa became the most important town on the Asiatic shore of Bosphorus after [Phanagoria](#), which was a "πόλις ἁ ξιόλογος", as Strabo states.²⁴

The history of Hermonassa in the Classical and Hellenistic periods is poorly known. The political circles of Hermonassa maintained a very good relationship with the Bosporan kings, as evidenced by a 1st c. AD marble statue-base bearing the name of Pythodoris, the second wife of King [Polemon](#) of Bosphorus; she erected the statue in honour of her benefactress, the empress Livia.²⁵

In the Roman period the town continued to be of some importance as a defence structure. An inscription from the reign of Rhoemetalkes (131/132-153/154) shows that a tower was built at that time to reinforce the defence of the town.²⁶ Although under constant pressure from northern populations, the town continued to be a point of some importance for the weaker Bosporan kingdom in the 4th and 5th c. Nevertheless, excavations of the 4th and 5th c. AD levels at the northern part of the site have revealed the ruins of a mudbrick hearth and a few pits filled with debris. Red-glazed plates, some decorated with stamped crosses, fragments of glass vessels, and 3rd c. AD Bosporan coins have been unearthed.²⁷ In the 6th c., and under the Justinianic revival of some parts of the Crimean peninsula, a number of buildings within the town were reconstructed and a new street network was created.²⁸ Soon the area fell into decline and the town area was abandoned.

3. Economy

Lake Corocondamitis belonged to Hermonassa, as indicated by Anonymus, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*²⁹ which to a certain extent confirms the view of Strabo on this matter. Hermonassa was a [fish](#) trade centre, as evidenced by the discovery of large pithoi.³⁰ The great amount of pottery and pottery kilns indicate an important ceramic production centre at Hermonassa.³¹ The town's [chora](#) was 8 km in length; it was defined by one main and two secondary borders which encompassed farms and probably farm towers. Hermonassa was by far the most important agrarian centre in the region.³² The sizable quantity of 5th c. BC silver [coins](#) found in the town and the necropolis attests to intensive trade with other Bosporan centres.³³

4. Necropolis and burials

Hermonassa had a tumuli necropolis. Several burials of the second half of the 6th c. BC were found, showing the early existence of the necropolis.³⁴ The excavations yielded a fair number of Greek votive inscriptions. A finely executed marble sarcophagus with a pitched lid, acroteria, and a [frieze](#) of rosettes dates to the early 3rd c. BC.³⁵ The town had a Greek-Sindic aristocracy as shown by a 4th c. marble sarcophagus found in the tumulus from Kissaya bora, near Taman.³⁶

5. Religion-cult

As a colony of a predominantly Ionian origin, Hermonassa held Apollo as its patron god, worshipped in different hypostases. [Apollo](#) 'the Healer' (Ietros) was the most common and temples and altars were dedicated to him.³⁷ [Aphrodite](#) was worshipped under the name of Apaturus. A temple was erected in the 5th c. BC.³⁸ The cult of Aphrodite continued in the Roman period when repair work was conducted on the temple in AD 105.³⁹ [Artemis](#) was worshipped under the name of Agrotera.⁴⁰

6. History of investigation

The ancient town is almost entirely covered by the modern town of Taman. The excavations reached a depth of 12 m yielding nine



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distinct levels of occupation from the 6th c. BC to the 4th c. AD in the town area. The following main complexes have been excavated: the necropolis (by V. V. Sokolov, A. A. Miller, N. P. Sorokina, V. P. Gaidukevich, 1919-1920; 1930-1940; 1958-1959) and the town area (by K. E. Grichevich, B. A. Rybakov, I. B. Zeest, A. K. Korovina, D. B. Shelov, S. I. Finogenova).

The latest excavations at Hermonassa by the Pushkin Museum have been directed towards the uncovering of the early Russian town Tmutarakan.⁴¹

1. Ps. Scymn. *Per.* 5.586-589. The town must have been recorded in Ephorus and Demetrius of Kallatis.
2. Eustathios in *Comm. ad Dionys. Per.* 1. 549
3. Arr. *Per. Pont. Eux.* 16.6.1: ἀπὸ δὲ Κορδύλης ἐς Ἐρμόνασσαν πέντε καὶ τεσσαράκοντα. καὶ δεῦρο ὄρμος.
4. Strab. *Geogr.* 11. 2. 10.
5. Dion. *Per. Oik. Per.* 553. The author adds that the town was beautifully built (εὐκτιτος) and was founded by the Ionians, like Phanagoria.
6. Plin. *HN* 6.6: *oppida in aditu [Bospori primo] Hermonasa, dein Cepoe Milesiorum, mox Stratoclia et Phanagoria.*
7. Pomp. Mela, *De Chorogr.* 1. 112: *Quatuor urbes ibi sunt, Hermonassa, Cepoe, Phanagoria, et, in ipso ore, Cimmerium.*
8. Ruf. Avien. *Descr. Orb. Terr.* 720: *sedet eminus ingens Phaenagore, et muros attollitur Hermonassa haec maris.* The author considerably uses the information of Dionysius from Alexandria.
9. Amm. Marc. 22. 7. 30: Phanagorus et Hermonassa studio constructae Graecorum.
10. Tab. Peut. 9. 1., *Hermonassa.*
11. Rav. *Cosmogr.* 368. 76, *Ermonasa.*
12. Steph. Byz. s. v. Ψηροσί: "ἔπειτα δ' Ἐρμόνασσα καὶ Κῆπος [πόλις], τρίτον δὲ τὸ Ψηροσῶν ἔθνος" (citing Apollod.).
13. On the location of the town, west of Phanagoria: Griechevich, K. E., "Gorodishte Taman", in: Griechevich, K. E (ed.), *Opit metodologii arheologichskoi nauki*, (Sevastopol 1826) p. 19-26; Gaidukevich, V. E., *Das Bosporanische Reich*, (Berlin-Amsterdam 1971) p. 34. Hermonassa remained the most important town in the Taman peninsula.
14. Strab. *Geogr.* 11. 2. 9 makes the clear distinction between the town of Corocondame (today Cape Tuzla) and the lake of Corocondamitis, in which a branch of the Hypanis River flows.
15. Eustath. *Comm. ad Dionys. Per.* 1. 549.
16. Eustath. *Comm. ad Dionys. Per.* 1. 549; Dion. *Per. Oik. Per.* 553 = Latyshev, V. V., *Izvestia drevnih pisateli grecheskih is latinskih o Skifii i Kavkaze*, I-II, (St. Petersburg 1850-1906) (further on SC 1) p. 183; 198; Plin. *HN* 6. 6; Dion. *Per. Oik. Per.* 553.
17. K.S. Gorbunova, *Black-figured Attic Vases in the Hermitage* (Leningrad 1983); Sidorova, N.A., Tugusheva, O.V., and Zabelina, V.S., *Antique Painted Pottery in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts*, Moscow, (Moscow 1985); Sidorova, N. A., "Archaic painted pottery from



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Hermonassa" (in Russian), *SoobCMII* 8 (1989) p. 110-125; Pichikyan, I. R. "Two red-figure vases from Hermonassa" (in Russian), *SoobCMII* 8 (1989) p. 126-136. At a depth of 9 m. the excavations revealed 6th c. B. C. Rhodian Wild Goat Style pottery, fragments of Rhodian *kylikes* adorned with rosettes surrounded by red stripes; Zeest, I. B., "Arhaicheskie sloi Germonassy" *KSIA* 83 (1961) p. 53-58; id. "Razkopki Germonassy" *KSIIMK* 74 (1959) p. 58-63. The rich Rhodian material could indeed be an indication of the considerable Rhodian colonists' contribution to the foundation of Hermonassa.

18. Treister, M. J., Shelov-Kovedyaev, F. V., "An Inscribed Conical Object from Hermonassa", *Hesperia* 58 (1989) p. 289-296;

19. On the date see: Bernhard, M. L., Sztetyok, Z., s.v. "Hermonassa", in: *PECS* p. 389; Koshelenko, G. A., Kuznetsov V. D., in Lordkipanidze P., Leveque, P. (eds.) *Le Pont-Euxine vu par les Grecs: Sources écrites et archéologie. Symposium de Vani (Colchide)-septembre-octobre 1987* (Annales littéraires de l'université de Besançon 427 (Paris 1990) p. 67-84; Koshelenko, G. A., Kuznetsov, V. D., "Greek colonization of the Bosphorus" in G. R. Tetskhladze (ed.): *The Greek colonisation of the Black Sea area. Historical interpretation of archaeology* (Historia Einzelschriften 121) (Stuttgart 1998) p. 249-264; Tsetskhladze, G., "Greek colonisation of the Black Sea area: Stages, models and native populations", in G. R. Tetskhladze (ed.): *The Greek colonisation of the Black Sea area. Historical interpretation of archaeology* (Historia Einzelschriften 121) (Stuttgart 1998), p. 9-68

20. Arzamanov, G. F., "An Ionic capital from Hermonassa" (in Russian), *VDI* 4 (1989): 49-54.

21. Shkorpil, V. V., "Bosporskoe nadpisi naidenyie v. 1913 g.", *IAK* 54 (1914) p. 67-70.

22. Diod. Sic. 12. 31.

23. Boeck, A. *CIG* 2, p. 91-92 suggests that the progenitor of the Archaeanactids comes from Mytilene, identifying him with the person who built the Sigeion fortifications. That would explain, in Boeck's view, the foundation of Hermonassa through the continuation of a tradition of *oikistai* from Mytilene.

24. Strab. *Geogr.* 11. 2. 10.

25. Boltunova, A. I., has published a 1st c. AD marble statue-base, *VDI* 1, (1989) pp. 86-92.

26. Shkorpil, V. V., "Bosporskoe nadpisi naideniie v. 1916 g.", *IAK* 54 (1914) p. 111

27. Zeest, I. B., "Raskopki Germonassy", *KSIIMK* 58 (1955) p. 114-121; Belin de Ballu, E. *Histoire des colonies grecques du littoral nord de la Mer Noire*, Paris (1960) p. 106 nr. 414. M. J. Treister; Vinogradov, Y. G., "Archaeology on the Northern Coast of the Black Sea", *AJA* 97: 3 (1993), p. 558.

28. Proc. *De Aedif.* 3. 7. 10. The mud brick wall, the grain pits and a hearth are tentatively assigned to the 6th c. along with a possible re-planning of some buildings along a central street, Zeest, I. B. *op. cit.*, p. 114-121; Belin de Ballu, E., *op. cit.*, p. 102.

29. Anon. *Peripl. Pont. Eux.* 23 (*FHG* V 182). This important natural resource must have been belonged to the town from the very beginning.

30. Zeest, I. B., *op. cit.* 116-117.

31. Gaidukevich, V. E. *op. cit.*, p. 153; For the trade with other centres see: Monachov, S. Iu. "Amphorae from Unidentified centres in northern Aegean (the so called Proto-Thasian series, according to I. B. Zeest)", *BSS* 21 (2002) p. 247-259

32. Solovyov, S. L., "The Chora of Hermonassa", *Ancient West and East* 5: 1-2 (2006) p. 121-142.

33. Sorokin, N. P., "Razkopki nekropolia Germonassy v 1956-1957 godakh", *KSIA* 83 (1961) p. 40-52.



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34. Sokolov, V. V. "Karta drevnykh poseleniy mogilnikov v raione stanityi Tamanskoi", *ITUAK* 56 (1919) 39-63; Gaidukevich, V. P. "Tamanskii nekropol' (raskopki 1931, 1938 i 1940 g.)", in: *Nekropoli nekotorykh Bosporskikh gorodov [Materialy i issledovaniia po arkhologii SSSR]*, 69 (1959) p. 154-187; Sorokina, N. P., "Raskopki nekropolia Germonassy v 1956-1957 godakh", *KSIA* 83 (1961) p. 46-52; Mongait, A. L., *Archaeology in the USSR*, (tr. M. W. Thompson) (1961) p. 200-201; Sorokin, N. P. *op. cit.*
35. Gaidukievich, V. E., *Das Bosporanische Reich*, p. 221.
36. Miller, A. A. "Tmanskaia expedititsia", *GAIMK* (1930) p. 19. The discovery was made in the Kissaya bora tumulus.
37. *IOSPE* 2 no. 345. An agonothetes, Mestor, dedicates a statue to Apollo in the 4th c. BC.
38. An inscription on a statue base mentions that Akas, daughter of Pairisades, dedicates a statue to Aphrodite; Latysev, V. V., "Epigraficheskyye novosti iz iujnoi Rossyi", *IAK* 18 (1906) p. 125; another inscription records a dedication of a statue during the reign of Spartokos III (*IOSPE* 2 no 349). It might have belonged to a large building in town (temple) elaborately decorated with fight scenes between Heracles and the Giants; Harko, L. P. "Fragment friza s izobrajeniem gygantov i s stanityi Tamanskoi", *SA* 7 (1941) p. 81-93.
39. *IOSPE* 2 no 352. The restoration seems to have focused on the columns hall. In the 2nd c. at Hermonassa, the cult of Aphrodite became an imperial cult, part of the official state religion; Finogenova, S., Tokhtasiev, S. "Ein neues Zeugnis des Aphrodite-Kultus in Hermonassa", *Hyperboreus* 9 (2003) p. 83-88.
40. Lurie, S. Ia., "Kult materi i devi v Bosporanskom tsrastve", *VDI* 3 (1948) p. 207-212; Rozanova, N. P., "Posviatitelnaia nadpis Artemide Efesskoi naidenaia v Pantikapee v. 1940 g.", *VDI* 3 (1960) p. 130-132. A temple was dedicated to the Goddess (Shkorpil, V. V. "Bosporskoe nadpisi naidenyie v. 1912 g.", *IAK* 49 (1913) p. 63.
41. General information on research at Hermonassa: Gaidukevich, V. E. *op. cit.* passim; more recent: Treister, M. J. Vinogradov Y. G., "Archaeology on the Northern Coast of the Black Sea", *AJA* 97: 3. (1993), p. 521-563.

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Glossary :

	chora, the The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.
	frieze (1. architecture), (2. painting) 1. The part of the entablature resting on the architrave and below the cornice. In the Doric order the frieze is decorated with two alternative motives, namely the triglyph and metope, while in the Ionic order the frieze is a decoratively carved band. 2. Decorative horizontal band that sweeps parts of a vessel or the highest part of the walls in a room.

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Pseudo-Scymnos, *Perieg.* 5. 586-589



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Strabo, *Geography*, 11.2.9-10

Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, 6.6

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Ruf. Avien. *Descr. Orb Terr.* 720

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 22.7.30

Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, 3. 7. 10

Stephanus of Byzantium, *Ethnika*, s.v. Ψησσοί

Anonymous, *Periplous Ponti Euxini*