



Bizone

Summary :

Ancient Bizone was located to the south of the town of Cavarna. The ancient sources concerning this small town are limited, while its ancient remains have been found under medieval fortifications. It was probably a colony of Mesembria but Bizone's ethnic identity has not been clarified yet. However, it played an important role regarding the exchanges between the Greeks and the local Thracian tribes. Moreover, the archaeological record has provided evidence on religious activities and burials.

Other Names

Cavarna (modern)

Geographical Location

Northwestern Bulgaria

Historical Region

Western Black Sea Coast

1. The written testimony

The ancient sources about Bizone are limited.¹ For the first time, Bizone was mentioned in the honorary decree of Agathokles from [Histria](#) dated to 200/180 BC.² The inscription says that the army of the Getic king Zoltes reached Bizone, besieged the city and started plundering its *chora*. In 71 BC, [Marcus Lucullus](#) seized Bizone, as mentioned by Salustius (*Hist. fr.* 4.19). [Strabo](#) (7.6.1) wrote that Bizone was located half way between [Callatis](#) and [Apollonia](#), and was destroyed by an earthquake presumably in the second half of the 1st c. BC. Later, the devastating earthquake was mentioned by Pomponius Mela (*De chor.* 2.2.22) and by [Plinius Secundus](#) (*NH* 4.11.44), while [Arrian](#) (*Peripl.* 24) gave the exact location of Bizone: 80 stadia to the north of [Dionysopolis](#). In the 1st century BC, Pseudo-Skymnos (*Orb. Descr.* 758-760) wrote that according to some people, Bizone was a small barbarian town, while according to others it was a colony of [Mesembria](#). The same information was given in the Anonymous Periplus of the Black Sea (*Anon. peripl. Pont. Eux.* 75-77). This particular evidence may attest to the [Thracian](#) ethnic presence in Bizone, in addition to the Greek colonists, and most likely, the town was not clearly specified as a Greek colony because of its ethnically diverse population. In addition, the Thracian presence is confirmed by the archaeological evidence and in the settlement name itself: Bizone, which is of Thracian origin.³

2. The archaeological record

2.1. Religious life - Ethnicity

The records about the religious life in the town of Bizone are very scarce. According to a fragmentary inscription, the Great Gods of Samothrace were worshipped in Bizone in the 2nd century BC, while another inscription attests the cult of the Mother of the Gods.⁴ Ancient Bizone was located on Cape Chirakman and its slopes, which is situated to the south of the town of Cavarna. Intensive archaeological explorations were conducted for several decades.⁵ The cultural strata of ancient Bizone were discovered under the monumental remains of a fortified medieval town. Thracian material of the Early Iron Age (11th – 6th c. BC) was found below the Classical and Hellenistic strata. Stratigraphy confirms that the Mesembrian colony was established most likely in the 5th c. BC on the location of a Thracian settlement and thus, Bizone became a town inhabited by [Greeks and Hellenized Thracians](#). Some historical sources testify that during the Hellenistic period [Scythian tribes](#) controlled the neighboring regions, while Celtic material of the Hellenistic period may suggest that Celtic tribes who reached Thrace settled in the area of Bizone. Therefore, the comprehensive ethnic situation of the town and its vicinity may have been very complex.

2.2 Trade - Underwater explorations



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Bizone played an important part in the trade between the Greeks and the local Thracian tribes, which is proved by more than 1,400 amphora stamps discovered in Bizone and its area. The amphorae originated from [Sinope](#), [Rhodes](#), [Herakleia Pontica](#), [Kos](#), Thasos, [Chersonesos](#), [Paros](#) and [Cnidus](#) and testify the intensive trade relations with Pontic and Aegean production centers. Underwater archaeological explorations in the harbor of Bizone provided additional information about the ancient town. However, only few intact structures related to ancient Bizone have been discovered so far. A well-preserved monumental building of the Hellenistic period constructed on the southern slope of Cape Chirakman was explored. A Hellenistic sarcophagus richly decorated with terracotta figurines depicting various Greek deities was found in an area that may have belonged to the necropolis of Bizone. Also, a cult complex of more than 120 ritual pits dug into the bedrock, dated to the 1st millennium BC, was discovered near Bizone. The pits contained sherds, animal bones, carbonized grain and traces of fire. One ritual pit contained 17 gold appliques dated to the late 4th or the first half of the 3rd c. BC.

2.3. Tumuli

The Thracian ethnic presence in the vicinity of Bizone is well attested by some neighboring Thracian settlements and a number of tumuli.⁶ A settlement that existed from the Early Iron Age to the Late Antiquity is located in the Adata locality to the west of Bizone. Another settlement of the Hellenistic period is located nearby, adjoining a rampart constructed in the 3rd c. BC. In the beginning of the 20th century, a remarkable gold treasure was found in a low tumulus near the Chervenata Mogila Tumulus, which is one of the largest burial mounds in the region located on the plateau just opposite Bizone. The treasure included a wreath, a phiale, a statuette of a lion and a complete set of appliques of horse-trappings, dated to the second half of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd c. BC. Another tumulus was investigated in the Dimyashtite Mogili locality near the town of Kavarna. It contained the remains of a rectangular barrel-vaulted tomb, dated to the 4th – 3rd c. BC. Another tumulus located 2 km to the west of Bizone was investigated; it contained an intact aristocratic burial of the late 4th c. BC. Two flat Thracian graves of the 2nd – 1st c. BC and a tumulus containing a "primitive" tholos tomb of the Hellenistic period were excavated in the same area.

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1. Cf. a recent brief study on Bizone: Avram, A. et al., "The Black Sea Area", in M. H. Hansen – T. H. Nielsen (eds.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004) p. 932, No. 683.
 2. Pipidi, D., "Inscripțiile antice din Dacia și Scythia Minor", in *Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor grecești și latinae* Vol. I (București 1983) p. 82-93; Cf. also: Pipidi, D., "Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte Histrias in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit", *Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft* 34 (1962) p. 11-34; Russu, I., "Zoltes și Rhemaxos. Tracii, sciții și Istria în sec. III – II î.e.n.", *Apulum* 6 (1967) p. 123-144.
 3. Detschew, D., *Die thrakischen Sprachreste* 2 (Wien 1976) p. 61.
 4. Mihailov, G., *Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae* 2 Vol. I (Serdicae 1970) Nos. 7 ter et 8.
 5. Мирчев, М. и др., "Бизоне – Карвуна", *Известия на Варненското Археологическо Дружество* 13 (1962) p. 21-109; Василев, В. и др., "Разкопки на нос Чиракман, гр. Каварна", *Археологически Открития и Разкопки – 1976* (София 1977) p. 135-137; Тончева, Г. и др., "Теракотите от Бизоне", *Векове* 9:2 (1980) p. 53-58; Салкин, А., "Каварна и районът през древността (II хил. пр.н.е. – IV в. от н.е.)", in *Каварна от древността до Освобождението* (София 1984) p. 44-61; Василев, В., "Чиракман", *Векове* 14:3 (1985) p. 13-23; Василев, В. и др., "Разкопки на нос Чиракман", *Археологически Открития и Разкопки – 1984* (Сливен 1985) p. 248-249; Василев, В. и др., "Разкопки на нос Чиракман", *Археологически Открития и Разкопки – 1985* (Велико Търново 1986) p. 189-190; Сотиров, И. и др., "Разкопки на нос Чиракман край гр.Каварна", *Археологически Открития и Разкопки – 1990* (София 1991) p. 156-157; Тонкова, М. и др., "Бизоне", www.fastionline.org; Салкин, А. и др., "Каварна", www.fastionline.org; Сотиров, И. и др., "Чиракман", www.fastionline.org
 6. N. Theodossiev, "Thracian Tumulus near the Town of Kavarna", *Helis* 3:1 (1994) p.109-122.



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Glossary :

	amphora, the
from the greek words "αμφί"(on both sides) and "φέρω" (carry): vessel with long ovoid body and a considerably narrower neck made in various sizes from the smaller perfume oil container to the large storage receivers of liquids and solids. It stands on a small foot and it bears two invariable vertical handles on either side. Some of the distinguished types of the amphorae are these whose lower part is tapering to the point (narrow bottomed), the neck type, the Nicosthenian, the Nola, the Panathenaic, the Tyrrhenian, the SOS type.	
	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.	
	phiale, the
A (metal, rarely clay) shallow vessel with an open rim. Used primarily in libations.	

Sources

Strabo, *Geography*, 7.6.1

Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis libri*, II.2.22



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Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, 4.11.44

Flavius Arrianus, *Periplous*, 24

Pseudo-Skymnos, *Ad Nicomedem regem (Orbis Descriptio)*, 758-760

Anonymous Periplous of the Black Sea, 75-77