

## Fortification wall

The cognitive, emotional and spiritual tale about the 3200 year old Nesebar, one of the oldest towns in Europe, should certainly begin with the fortification wall, built by the Thracians Nipsei and Skirmiadi people. Shrouded in mysticism, Nesebar peninsula keeps the secrets and the imprints of ancient civilizations. It is amazing to see remains, withstanding so many turbulent vicissitudes.



One of the first known name of Nesebar - Melsambria, was given to it in the 12th century BCE by the Thracians Nipsei who lived there, honoring the name of their ruler, Melsas, according to the written sources. The Thracians Nipsei were first mentioned by Herodotus in connection with the campaign of Darius I against the Scythians. The name

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comes from the city of Nipsa in Thrace. Xenophon, Thucydides (on the Thracian Odrysian state), Strabo, Pliny, also mention the Nipsei.

The first fortress walls of Nessebar were built by the Thracians in the 8th century BCE. With the time, after the arrival of the first Dorian settlers at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the town grew significantly and the need for stronger walls appeared. In the the 5th century BCE, the fortification walls were expanded. Romans also strengthened the walls. Nowadays, the best preserved ruins are from the 5th century ACE, during the rule of Byzantium.

In the years 519 - 512 BC, according to archaeological and historical sources, the first Dorian settlers, citizens of Calchedon and Byzantion, arrived in Melsambria, banished by the Persians and forced to emigrate from their native places in search of a better place to live.

They were accepted by the hospitable Thracians living in Melsambria and with the permission of the Thracian ruler, settled in the city. Over time, the number of the Dorians grew and they formed a colony by the end of 494. The city developed rapidly and a need for a stronger fortification wall led to its construction in the 5th century BCE. The wall was made of huge white square stones and respected every attacker. This was the reason, mainly, that during five centuries Mesembria was not conquered by its numerous enemies - inland Thracians, Hellenes, Getae, etc. The biggest enemy of Mesembria, however, was Apollonia (today's Bulgarian city of Sozopol), where Ionians settled, with whom epic battles were fought in the 2nd century BC.

The new settlers of the Nessebar peninsula adopted the Thracian name of the founder of the city, the legendary Thracian king and priest, Melsas. It is assumed that the first wave of settlers came from Megara, which is why ancient sources mention note that the city had three metropolises - Megara, Calchedon and Byzantion.

The wealth, fame and influence of Nessebar throughout the ages are due to its convenient geographical location, as well as the flexible politics of its citizens, which led to impressive moments in its economic and cultural development.

In the 3rd century BCE Messambrians continued to court the neighboring powerful Thracian rulers. Shortly after the middle of the 3rd century, the Celtic king Kavar was among them. By order of the neighboring Thracian city of Kabyle in Mesambria, they struck an issue of silver tetradrachms in his honor.

Rome was present in Mesembria as early as 72 BCE, at the time of the Second War of Rome with Mithridates VI Eupator and the march of Marcus Lucullus against the

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Western Pontic cities. At the end of the 1st century BC Messambria struck bronze coins with the image of Octavian Augustus and the Thracian king Remetalc I. During the Roman imperial era, the city enjoyed the privilege of deciding its own destiny and had the right to be a "free city". The affairs of the city were looked after by the six strategists, who were annually elected by the National Assembly and the Council of Elders. They were responsible for coinage and external contacts.

The city developed rapidly during the Byzantine and the Bulgarian Middle Ages. After the establishment of the Bulgarian state, Mesemvria often changed its rulers - Bulgarian or Byzantine.

For the first time, Mesemvria became a Bulgarian city was in 705, according to the agreement between Khan Tervel and Emperor Justinian II. It was noted in the Viking sagas, even, that Messemvria's port was the Bulgaria's main commercial gateway to the world. Its loss by Byzantium in the second half of the 8th century was felt particularly acutely. Therefore, Khan Krum, immediately after the victory in the Varbish Pass over Emperor Nicephorus in 812, headed for Messemvria and captured it. The second person in the state, Kavhan Irtais, became the governor of Nessebar, which speaks of the importance of the city for Bulgaria. Nessebar, as the city was called by the Bulgarians, with its commercial port and an important fortress, defended the approaches to Stara Planina (the Balkan mountain) in its lowest part from Byzantine landings. The city reached its greatest prosperity during the reign of the Bulgarian king Ivan Alexander, when it grew to such an extent that it occupied a huge part of the land outside the peninsula. Most of the churches were built in this period.

Messemvria was often a refuge place for the members of the Byzantine imperial family. After 1366, the Bulgarians used the current name of the city - Nessebar. In 1453, the city had fallen in the hands of the Turks, a few months before Constantinople was captured. It remained under Turkish domination until 1878.

In the 14th and 15th centuries ACE, Nessebar was often changing its rulers, but it was always the center of architecture, art and literature along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Monasteries all the time supported the upward cultural development of the city in the Ottoman Empire until the 18th-19th century. After that, the unique Bulgarian cultural institutions - Chitalishte (community cultural centers), recognized by UNESCO as part of the world cultural heritage, took care for the cultural life of Nessebar. This is what makes Nessebar a phenomenon on the Balkan Peninsula in the Middle Ages. A place, where Bulgarian traditions and culture are preserved without major disturbances. This was also important for the Ottoman conquerors - to have a city with

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an active economy and port activity. Nessebar remained an economic center, trading with the vast Ottoman empire, Europe and Egypt.

The attractive power of Nessebar was that it offered the advantage of living protected behind the walls of a very pleasant city with many public buildings, windmills, baths and fountains, waterworks and sewers, an amphitheater and temples, where there are goods from all over the Aegean and Mediterranean basins. The objects discovered during excavations testify to a lively trade with the entire old world. It did not matter much who ruled the city. It was important that taxes were bearable and that there was fair justice.

In 1366, the knights of Amadeus of Savoy captured and looted the city, and then sold it for 15,000 gold ducats to Byzantium.

Today, Nessebar continues to create romance and magic through art and culture. One of the significant events there is the annual Thracian Mysteries festival, held on August 30 and 31. The festival is inspired by the archaeological and historical discoveries that reveal the identity of the city, the heritage and the messages of previous generations. It captivates more and more audiences with the beauty of ancient spirituality.



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