Author: Marianna Mastrostamati

The original Greek text was translated by Mary Eliopoulou.

The name of the city formulated in the plural number and is considered to have its origin from the ancient Greek word als and alas (salt) – alata (salts)» in the Greek Demotic language a l a t i (salt) – a l a t i a (salts), which enunciate as Alatzata and Alatsata either due to Turkish alteration of the language (e.g. in Turkish, the word “kalderim” (meaning cobbled road - originated from the Greek kallidromon) or according to a Greek dialect. [1]

During the Ottoman Empire, the word is referred to as the adjective «the alatsatikos» which was a tax collected on salt. The older pronunciation and spelling of the name «Alatzata» seems to disappear at the end of the 19th century. The phoneme –tz then turned to the refined and elegant form of the Greek phoneme -ts.

In the List of Subscribers (1834) of the book «Essay of Epistolary Cannes» written by the Director Avramios Omirolou, of the Evangelical School of Smyrna, the name of the city is written in the literary form as Alassata and in the dative case: «In Alassatois». The origin of the name according to the wise headmaster George Zolotas from Chios island is attributed to the salt meadows with the shallow waters in the back of Agrilia bay (subsequently named Yiakin Tuzlou or Yiakini) where the curdled salt remained in the area and covered the ground for about three kilometres. This adaptation is supported by Constantinos A. Vlamos and Fanis N. Kleanthis in their books and also from oral testimonies referred to the collection of the salt in this specific region.

There is a Turkish theory based on a legend concerning the origin of the name. According to this legend, the region took its name either from an alatza At (in Turkish Alaca At) meaning «red horse» or from a horse of Selcuk breed Alatza (in Turkish Alaca), with which a man galloped in the region. The bystanders then called him “Alatzatli” (in Turkish Alacaatli meaning «the man with the red horse». [2]

The earliest text in which the name of the region is referred under the chapter entitled: «The Saplitzas port on the East coast and the shores of Alatza At» (in Turkish- Bu bölüm Anadolu kiyilarinda Saplica limani ve Alaca at kiyilarini anlatir) is the book «Navigation Guide» (in Turkish Kitab-i Bahriye), written by Pirie Reis (1470-1554) a great Turkish Admiral navigator, cartographer and poet. Saplitza is the oldest name of the bay Mersini (in Turkish Mersin Koyu), Pirie Reis gives the following description of the name Alatza At.

«Alaca At is a bay to the south. This bay is visible from the sea as white milk between two hills ....» (in Turkish: Ve Alaca At kibleye karşu bir körfözdür. Ol körfözün denizden alameti budur. Iki tarafada ak süd gibi püsteler vardur...)

The paradox in relation to the name of the bay which is «red horse» to the metaphor of «white as milk» was created possibly by the oral information that Pirie Reis may have had for the name of the region. Hearing the Greek word Alatzata, a Turk understands a «red horse». Why, then, did the bay from the sea appears «like white milk»? Possibly this could have been the curdled salt covering the shores of the bay. Eventually the name of the city is pronounced in Turkish and Greek with the pronunciation of phoneme -ts «Alaçati».

Agrilia (in Greek meaning wild olive tree) was the seaport of Alatsata city. The name of Agrilia was given by the residents of Alatsata. Agrilia took the name from the perennial wild olive tree growing on the bay's west side, where the homonymous village was founded in 1850.

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[1] The Revd. Oeconomos Constantinos A. Vlamos – Alatsata of the Ionic Peninsula, Thessaloniki 1946.

Fanis N. Kleanthis. Alatsata, My Lost Homeland , Athens 1987

[2] Πηγή www.alacatibelediyesi.com

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