The first inhabitants of the Chalcidice were called “Thracians” by the Greeks in the south. Hekataios called it ἡ ἐν Ἐπαρχηκερύνησος (the peninsula in Thrace). Thucydides used the name Chalcidice to denote the southwestern part of the main peninsula, the land of the Chalcidians (Thuc. 1.65.2), but the name Chalcidice was used for the whole peninsula only from the second century AD onwards.

Chalcidice contained a few settlements in the Neolithic period, but this number increased dramatically in the Bronze Age and for the first time many of them were located by the sea, obviously for reasons of trade. Some of these Bronze Age settlements continued into the Early Iron Age, while a few new settlements were founded nearby. However, only a few remains, habitation or cemeteries, of the Early Iron Age have been excavated, primarily at the sanctuary of Poseidon at Poseidi of Pallene, the sites of Mende on Pallene and Torone on Sithonia, and the cemetery at Koukos of Sykia on Sithonia.1 These excavations are relevant to the long modern debate about the origin of the early settlers.

Some scholars,2 following the historian Polybius,3 believe that the area was named after settlers from Chalkis on Euboia. Other scholars have argued from Herodotus’ repeated reference to a Χαλκιδικόν γένος that this entity was a Greek group who settled in the area during the migrations of the second millennium (Hdt. 7.185), and therefore the name Chalcidice was not related to Chalkis on Euboea.4 Zahrnt, meanwhile, suggested that

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1 For the excavation data and relevant bibliography, see M. Tiverios, “Greek Colonisation of the Northern Aegean,” in G. R. Tsetskhladze, ed., Greek Colonisation. An Account of Greek Colonies and other Settlements Overseas (Boston, 2008), pp. 4–17. Furthermore, another Early Iron Age site has been recently excavated at Frachthi in Sithonia by S. Asouchidou.
the area was settled by a tribe from the north,⁵ while others suggested an Ionic tribe from the south.⁶ Others have even suggested that the name Chalcidice derived from “chalkos,” (copper) because of the rich mineral resources of the area.

The most compelling argument rests on references in ancient Greek literature which record the relations of the colonies with Chalkis and Eretria,⁷ linguistic similarities between Chalcidice and Chalkis,⁸ and especially the archaeological evidence (imported proto-Geometric and Geometric pottery from Euboea, similarities in architecture etc.). It strongly implies that Ionians from Euboea began to settle in Sithonia and Pallene from the tenth century onwards, during the period of migrations known as the first wave of Greek colonization. Later, colonists mainly from Euboea, Chalkis, and Eretria, founded new colonies in Chalcidice.⁹

Abundant wood from the forests of Chalcidice, the rich resources of the area, and relatively safe natural bays attracted these Greeks from the south to the coasts of the peninsula. Eretria founded Dikaia and Mende (Thuc. 4.109.3 and Hdt. 7.22.3) and many other colonies (Thuc. 4.123.1) on the prong of Pallene. Strabo even recorded that the whole peninsula of Pallene was the area of Eretria (10.447). Potidaia was founded by Periander’s son, Euagoras, and other Corinthians (Thuc. 1.56.2; Diod. 12.34.2; Strab. 7.330, fr. 25; Plut. Per. 29.6; Schol. in Aristoph. Equ. 438.). Chalkis founded colonies in Sithonia and Andros on the prong of Akte and the eastern coast of the area.

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⁷ Strabo 10.1.8; ATL 1 266–7, 482–3; Diod., s.v. Torone; Plut., Aetia Graeca iii.