

## *Polis barbaron* in the Black Sea area in archaic and classical periods

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## *Polis barbaron* in the Black Sea area in archaic and classical periods

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While describing the eastern Black Sea shores Pseudo-Scylax mentions "a big barbarian town, from where Medea was" in the Phasis valley, within 180 stadia from its mouth (Ps.-Scyl., 81). Such an barbarian urbanistic formation does not occur elsewhere in the Black Sea area in this periplus. Moreover, barbarian towns are rarely mentioned by pre-Hellenistic Greek authors.

Xenophon's "Anabasis" is the most informative source about urbanistic formations of the Black Sea area. Mentioning settlement met on his way from the hinterland of Asia, being in the environs of Trapezus, in the milieu of the tribes neighbouring to the Colchians, which were perhaps in genetical kinship with these last, Xenophon distinguishes several types of the settlements.<sup>1</sup> *Kome* is used most frequently, though the author uses some other definitions, as follows: *polis*, *polisma*, and *chorion*. Thus, the town of the Drylai (V,2,27), and that of the Mossynikoi, containing an acropolis and defensive system (V,4,15), are classified as poleis. In some cases the names of the towns are given as well. For instance, Gymnias – the capital of the Scythinoi (V,7,18), Metropolis – the capital of the Mossynikoi (V,4,15). The former is defined as πόλις οἰκουμένη καὶ μεγάλη καὶ εὐδαίμων (densely settled, big, and rich), being a residence of the ruler of the country.

*Polisma* occurs among the Chalyboi (V,7,17). It seems to be a fortified settlement. *Chorion* could be defined as a settlement of the same type, though in V.4.31 a polis and a chorion are used synonymously. Choria could exist independently (V,4,31; V,5,2), but sometimes they are included in the complicated defensive systems (V,5,23). One of the choria in the land of the Dryli represented their capital at the same time (V,1, 3-7). Simultaneously in the country of Taochi

<sup>1</sup> Микеладзе Т. К. Анабазис Ксенофонта. Тб. 1967, с. 53-54 (на груз. яз.); Микеладзе Т. К. К истории Местного населения Юго-Восточного Причерноморья, Местные этно-политические объединения Причерноморья в VII-IV вв. до н.э. Материалы IV Всесоюзного симпозиума по древней истории Причерноморья. Цхалтубо-Вани 1985. Тбилиси, 1988, с. 197-198.

there was a chorion that is not classified as a town by Xenophon and was devoid of dwelling houses (IV,7,2), i.e. it represents a temporary shelter.

Noteworthy is the evidence of Urartian sources, namely reports about campaigns organized by Sarduri II in 750-748 and 744-742 BC.<sup>2</sup> Towns of Qulkha are mentioned there, as well as a royal town of Ildamusa and castles of various governors. In this case a differentiated classification is observable, which correlates with the data preserved in "Anabasis".

Juxtaposition of data given by both Urartian sources and Xenophon allows us to reconstruct a definite hierarchy of settlements: simple village type settlements (χώμη) – defended sites (πόλισμα, χωρίον) – towns (πόλις) – capitals (μητρόπολις) or "royal towns".

As for other regions of the Black Sea area, Herodotus mentions the polis Gelon in the country of the Budinoi (Hdt., IV, 109).

Thus, for the topic of our paper of great importance is the fact that a part of settlements arisen in the indigenous milieu was interpreted as polei in the urbanistic sense. What conclusions could be drawn out of the archaeological materials? The regions of the south-east Black Sea area visited by Xenophon are archaeologically unknown. That's why we are not aware of the type of settlements defined as *polis*.

We have much more information about Colchis. At the same time, dealing with the evidence given by Pseudo-Skylax, it should be noted that in spite of the importance of mentioning by him of a local big town together with the Hellenic towns in Colchis, he gives, regrettably, no hint neither on the structure, nor the external appearance of this polis. The localization of the town is disputable either.

As a rule, πόλις μεγάλη βάρβαρον of Pseudo-Scylax is identified with Kutaisi or Kutaia (Κυταιίς, Κυταία) of later authors,<sup>3</sup> and the distance given by him (80 stadia from the mouth, i.e. 35 km) is thought to be an error of the copyist.<sup>4</sup> In the vicinity of modern Kutaisi a series of settlements has been surveyed dated to the

<sup>2</sup> Меликишвили Г. А. Урартские клинописные надписи, Москва, 1960, с. 278-282.

<sup>3</sup> Подр. см. Лордкипанидзе О. Д. К вопросу о первом упоминании г. Кутаиси в письменных источниках, Местные этно-политические объединения Причерноморья в VII-IV вв. до н.э. Материалы IV Всесоюзного симпозиума по древней истории Причерноморья. Цхатгубо-Вани 1985. Тбилиси, 1988, с. 150-171; М. Инадзе, Из истории торговых взаимоотношений древней Колхиды, Кавказско-ближневосточный сборник, II, Тбилиси, с. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Т. С. Каухчишвили, Сведения греческих писателей о Грузии, 1. Тбилиси, 1967, с. 36 (на груз. яз.).

8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Banoja, Chognari, Parnali, Godogani, etc.).<sup>5</sup> Regrettably these settlements have not been yet fully excavated. On the territory of Kutaisi proper archaeological excavations revealed traces of the 8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century-settlement, as well as remains of metallurgical workshop.<sup>6</sup> But the available archaeological materials revealed on the territory of Kutisi do not allow us to suppose the existence of a big economic and political centre there, and this picture differs widely from the evidence of Greek sources of the Hellenistic times<sup>7</sup> (noteworthy is the fact that the Hellenistic period is presented here in a very small scale). This contradiction would be, possibly, solved in future by archaeological study. Actually, none of the settlements known to us could be defined as πόλις μεγάλη βάρβαρον.

There exist several other opinions about the location of this town. Namely, M. Inadze, mainly tending to the above mentioned point of view about the identification with Kutaia, does not rule out that Pseudo-Scylax had ment some other urbanistic centre, located on the Rioni bank, not far from the sea shores.<sup>8</sup>

According to another point of view, this big barbarian town was located in the interfluve of the Pichori and Rioni, at the site of Namarnu, the location of which corresponds with the distance given by Pseudo-Scylax.<sup>9</sup> This settlement was found in 1968, though archaeological excavations were carried out there later, in 1980-1984, 1986, and 1988. The settlement represents a system of artificial hills surrounded by a ditch; the diameter of the central hill is 160 m; while the ditch around it is 55-80 m wide. As for the diameter of the ditch surrounding the whole system, it is 4-5 m wide. The central hill is surrounded by four hills of various dimentions. Archaeological excavations revealed cultural layers dated from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age through the Early Hellenistic period. The uppermost layer is dated from the early Christian period. In the layers of the Classical period a significant amount of imported pottery was found (Samian

<sup>5</sup> Лордкипанидзе О. Д. Античный Мир и древняя Колхида, Тбилиси, 1966, с. 42-43 (на груз. яз., с русск. и англ. рез.); Гамкрелидзе Г. А. Древние поселения Центральной Колхиды, Тбилиси, 1982, с. 17-18 (на груз. яз., с русск. рез.).

<sup>6</sup> Лордкипанидзе О. Д. Ук. соч., с. 42-44; Berdzenishvili D., Kvirkvelia G., Lanchava O., De nouveaux matériels pour l'histoire ancienne de Kutaissi, Sur les traces des Argonautes. Actes du 6<sup>e</sup> symposium de Vani (Colchide) 22-29 Septembre 1990, Paris, 1996, p. 338-339.

<sup>7</sup> подр. см. Лордкипанидзе О. Д. К вопросу о первом упоминании ...

<sup>8</sup> Инадзе М. П. Греческая колонизация Восточного Причерноморья. Тбилиси, 1982, с. 21 (на груз. яз., с русск. и франц. резюме); Инадзе М. П. Древнеколхидское общество. Тбилиси, 1994, с. 59, сноска 4 (на груз. яз., с русск. и англ. рез.).

<sup>9</sup> Григолия Г. О локализации "Большого Колхидского города", Дзеглис Мегобари (Друзья памятников культуры, 33, 1973, с. 50-58.

amphorae, shards of the black-glazed kylikes, scyphoi, etc.).<sup>10</sup> The excavated dwellings represented plastered wooden constructions, characteristic of all Colchian settlements of the pre-classical and Classical periods.

The planning, scale, and amount of Greek imports distinguishes this site from a number of ordinary settlements of inner Colchis. This gives us ground to qualify it as a redistributive centre via which Greeks had various contacts with the Colchian world.<sup>11</sup>

Namarnu is not considered to be the only site of this type in the eastern Black Sea area. One can name the Pichori settlement (Gali District), occupying 10 ha, where the central hill is surrounded by two concentric circles consisting of eleven artificial hills. Its central part is occupied by an artificial hill, surrounded by eleven hills – satellite ones – in two concentric circles. Each hill, as well as the whole system is surrounded by ditches. Archaeological excavations, carried out since 1981, revealed 8 layers on the central hill, dating from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC through the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC.<sup>12</sup>

In the opposite corner of the Colchian littoral the Namcheduri settlement is situated. It represents a vast system of settlements covering some 100 ha, Namcheduri proper being the centre of it. This last is located on the right bank of the river of Ochkhauri. The artificial hill was surrounded by a ditch and palisade from the inner side of the ditch. In several sections of the palisade rectangular towers were built in. The settlement functioned from the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium through the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>13</sup> It is thought that in the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC the Namcheduri settlement represented an acropolis of the vast settlement.<sup>14</sup>

One can name a whole series of other settlements. One of them, namely, the Qulevi settlement will be discussed later at this symposium.

<sup>10</sup> Папуашвили Р., Папуашвили Н. Раннехристианские памятники на холмах Намарну, Гурия, III, с. 107-118 (на груз. яз., с русск. и англ. рез.).

<sup>11</sup> Kvirkvelia G., Greek trade with indigenous societies of the northern and eastern Black Sea areas, Trade on the Black Sea in the Archaic and Classical periods: historical perspective of the Silk Road. The 9<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on the ancient history and archaeology of the Black Sea area, 20-23 September 1999, Vani. Tbilisi, 1999, p. 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> Барамидзе М. В. Пичорское поселение, Причерноморье в VII-V вв. до н.э. Материалы V Международного симпозиума по древней истории Причерноморья, Ваши-1987. Тбилиси, 1990, с. 234-239; Baramidze M. V., Djibladze L. V., Le site de Piçori: chronologie et périodisation, Sur les traces des Argonautes. Actes du 6<sup>e</sup> symposium de Vani (Colchide) 22-29 Septembre 1990, Paris, 1996, p. 241-245.

<sup>13</sup> Микеладзе Т. К., Хухутаншвили Д. А. Древне-Колхидское поселение Намчедури, Тбилиси, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Там же, с. 9; Лордкипанидзе О. Д. У истоков древнегрузинской цивилизации. Тбилиси, 2002, с. 137 (на груз. яз.).

In a word, in the pre-colonial times a series of settlements arose in both coastal and inner parts of Colchis, differing from others by their topography. This could indicate a certain social and political differentiation of the local society, and a kind of leadership of definite clans (O.Lordkipanidze).<sup>15</sup>

The more eloquent is the picture for the classical period.

In the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC Colchis reaches the peak of the development. Good examples are represented by finds from Vani and Sairkhe. On the grounds of these data problems of existence of the state and socially stratified society could be successfully solved (O. Lordkipanidze). On the grounds of evidence preserved in Strabo's "Geography" (XI,2,8), the definite administrative division of the country is supposed.<sup>16</sup>

The most eloquent is the situation archaeologically attested in the Vani region.<sup>17</sup>

Besides Vani proper, settlements of the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries are revealed in the neighbouring villages of Dablagomi, Sulori, Mtisdziri, and Shuamta. All these sites give one and the same picture: clay plastered wooden structures, typically Colchian pottery shapes, and metal artefacts. Mainly the same traditions are observed in the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. On several settlements traces of iron production are found. In Mtisdziri there were found remains of a wooden fortified construction, dating from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup>-first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is supposed, that this site served to control the communications leading to Vani.<sup>18</sup>

Of great interest are aristocratic graves, excavated in Dablagomi and Mtisdziri, differing from the Vani ones. On the background of the existed redistributinal system with the centre in Vani (principally observed on the grounds of Greek imports), one can speak about the hierarchy of settlements and, consequently, the hierarchy among the regional aristocracy.

Archaeological situation in Sairkhe seems to be the same. Here, as in Vani, there were found graves of the representatives of local power, containing rich inventory among which Greek imports are preserved.<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy, that

<sup>15</sup> Лордкипанидзе О. Д. Ук. соч., с. 137.

<sup>16</sup> Лордкипанидзе О. Д. Древняя Колхида (Миф и археология), Тбилиси, 1979, с. 56-59; Лордкипанидзе О. Д. У истоков древнегрузинской цивилизации, 159-160; ср. Инадзе М. П. К вопросу о скептухиях Колхидского царства, Сообщения АН Грузии, XXV, 6, 1961, с. 783-789.

<sup>17</sup> Подр. см. Kvirkvelia G. La région de Vani aux VIII<sup>ème</sup>-V<sup>ème</sup> siècles. – Le Pont-Euxin vu par les Grecs. Sources écrites et archéologie. Paris, 1990. p. 253-256.

<sup>18</sup> Гамкрелидзе Г. А. Древние поселения Центральной Колхиды. Тбилиси, 1982, с. 132-133 (на груз. яз., с русск. и англ. рез.).

<sup>19</sup> Надирадзе Дж. Саирхе. Древнейший город Грузии. Тбилиси, 1990 (на груз. яз.).

parallels with the Vani region are observed in the hierarchy of graves belonging to the local elite. In the village of Itkhvisi there were discovered graves of the representatives of aristocracy of the lower level.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, archaeological materials obtained in Colchis confirm the data preserved in Greek literary sources (namely, in Xenophon, and Pseudo-Scylax) on the existence of some towns on its territory, and even definite hierarchy among them.

Of interest is archaeological evidence obtained in the northern Black Sea area.

Archaeological sites of pre-Greek (pre-Scythian) period on the territory of the forestal steppe zone of the Dnieper and Bug interfluvium are represented by open-type settlements, fortified settlements and burials (the last stage of the so-called Chernoles culture and transitional Zhabotiv stage).<sup>21</sup> The settlements are not of big scale. As a rule, they are located on the naturally defended places. The nucleus of such settlements is composed of fortified sites with the diameter of 40-100 m, surrounded by ditches, ramparts, and wooden walls. Chernoles settlement is the most impressive one with the diameter of 1,5 km, surrounded by triple lines of fortification,<sup>22</sup> as well as the Subotovo settlement, on which traces of bronze production were revealed.<sup>23</sup>

From the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards the situation drastically changed in the region under discussion. In the Tyasmin and Ros basins, as well as in the interfluvium of the Ros and Irpen a series of settlements had appeared by the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Usually their dimensions are limited to 6-20 ha. Though in the valleys of each great river a settlement arose, oversizing the rest of the settlements and characterized by a complicated planning.<sup>24</sup> This is the Matronino settlement in the Tyasmin basin (occupying 200 ha), and the Trakhtemirov settlement in the Ros basin (occupying 500 ha). In the Bug basin the Nemirov settlement is distinguished, occupying 110 ha. The most impressive is the

<sup>20</sup> Гагошидзе Ю. Итхвисское погребение, Вестник Государственного Музея Грузии, XXV-В, 1968, с. 31-46 (на груз. яз.).

<sup>21</sup> Ильинская В. А. Раннескифские курганы бассейна р. Тясмин (VII-VI вв. до н.э.), Киев, 1975, с. 56-72; Тереножкин А. И. Киммерийцы, Киев, 1977, с. 204-205.

<sup>22</sup> Мелюкова А. И. Культуры предскифского периода в лесостепной зоне. Археология СССР, Степи европейской части СССР в скифо-сарматское время. Москва, 1989, с. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Павленко Ю. В. Раннеклассовое общество. Генезис и пути развития, Киев, 1989, с. 219.

<sup>24</sup> Петренко В. Г. Правобережье Среднего Приднепровья в V-III вв. до н.э. САИ, вып. В1-4, Москва, 1967, с. 9сл.; Петренко В. Г. Локальные группы скифообразной культуры в лесостепи Восточной Европы. Археология СССР, Степи европейской части СССР в скифо-сарматское время. Москва, 1989, с. 68-69.

seetlement found on the right bank of the Dneiper, in the Vorskla basin. This is the famous Belsk settlement, which covers the vast territory (4020 ha). The hight of the ramparts reaches at places 7,5-9 m, while the depth of the ditches is 5,5m. This very strong defended complex consists of three separate sites and nine residential districts. The remains of a huge production is revealed. It is thought that the population of the settlement reached 40-50 000. It is defined as a political, economical and cult centre of the left Dnieper reaches. Some scholars identify this settlement with Gelon mentioned by Herodotos.<sup>25</sup>

In the planning of some above mentioned settlements an acropolis is distinguished. The defensive system consists of ramparts, ditches and additional wooden constructions. On the large settlements special cult constructions had been revealed (Matronino, Pastyrskoe, Trakhtemirovo, Belsk). Around these very centres the most rich graves belonging to aristocracy were situated. Among the grave goods there were found Greek items.

In the steppe zone of the Black Sea area, namely, in the lower reaches of the Dnieper, by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the first well-defended Scythian settlement arose. It is thought unanimously that this settlement soon developed into the production, trade and political centre of Scythia.<sup>26</sup> The Kamenskoe settlement occupies 12 sq. km. From the steppe side the settlement was defended by ramparts and ditches. In its south-eastern part the citadel was situated covering ca. 30 ha. The most characteristic feature of the settlement are remains of metallurgical production, connected with almost all excavated buildings.

By the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century another scythian settlement arose in the Don delta. This is the Elizavetovskoe settlement occupying ca. 55 ha. It is defended with a strong system of ditches and ramparts. More than 20 constructions have been found on the territory of the settlement, represented by dugouts and semi-dugouts.<sup>27</sup> It is supposed that this settlement had several functions simultaneously. It was: a) a large centre of wholesale in the Don delta; b) the central settlement of the Don basin and north-eastern Azov sea area; c) an administrative

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<sup>25</sup> Шрамко Б. А. Бельское городище скифской эпохи (город Гелон). Киев, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Граков Б. Н. Каменское городище на Нижнем Днепре, МИА, 36, 1954.

<sup>27</sup> Брашинский И. Б., Марченко К. К. Строительные комплексы Elizavetovskogo городища на Дону, СА, 2, 1978, с. 204-220; Брашинский И. Б., Марченко К. К. Elizavetovskoe городище на Дону – поселение городского типа, СА, 1, 1980, с. 211-218.



centre of the same region, a seasonal, and maybe even constant residence of tribal upper society; e) a shelter in the case of war.<sup>28</sup>

Summarizing the above said, we come to the conclusion that one part of settlements existing in the indigenous milieu of the Black sea area, was perceived by the Greeks as poleis. Of course no features of political and social organization characteristic of pure Greek society, rather some features and peculiarities expressed in their function as political and economic centres were meant. This is well illustrated by archaeological data.

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<sup>28</sup> Мелюкова Л. И. Скифские памятники степи Северного Причерноморья. Археология СССР, Степи европейской части СССР в скифо-сарматское время. Москва, 1989, с. 61.