

THE ORIGIN OF GREEKS FROM THE DNIESTER ESTUARY

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Abstract: The aim of this article is the interpretation of child burials discovered during archaeological excavations conducted by the Nicolaus Copernicus University (Toruń, Poland) in the village of Roksolany, Ukraine (Nikonion). The remains of children had been placed inside Greek storage vessels deposited within the settlement's borders. The authors touch upon the cultural provenance of such burials within the context of Greek presence on the North-western shores of the Black Sea. The contacts of indigenous societies living in the Black Sea coastal region with the Greeks during the colonization period are an important issue. Considering the above the state of research on the North-western coast of the Black Sea needs a reinterpretation.

Keywords: Greek, Roksolany site – Ukraine, child burial, Black Sea coastal region

The mechanisms behind Greek settlements on the shores of the Black Sea were a complex matter. A considerable amount of influence can be attributed to the actions of the Kingdoms of Lydia and Persia. At the interface between the interests of Greek Poleis and the near-eastern monarchies there emerged processes that impacted the movement of Greeks to the Black Sea region. The settlers could have hailed from different regions, which could have been dependent on the geopolitical situation as well as the internal politics of certain societies, but also the stasis, the exclusion or simply the search for wealth¹. This article is an attempt to show that process on the mouth of the Dniester river (Fig. 1).

The archaeological site in Roksolany (Ukraine), which is presented here, is of a complex nature. The current state of research of the site doesn't allow for the stating of an unambiguous claim whether the settlement in Roksolany is the ancient Nikonion. This identification was proposed by P.O. Karyshkovskiy which he based on the texts of ancient authors and the state of research at the specific point in time². Until now no inscriptions that could prove that identification. No epigraphic sources have been registered on the site which might point to the settlement in Roksolany being the polis of Nikonion³. When looking at the archaeological material one can clearly distinguish three phases concerning the use of the settlement in Roksolany/Nikonion, as well as the adjacent territory on the eastern side. The first settlement phase (the second half of the 6th century BC)⁴ is confirmed by the remains of the dugouts, possibly half-dugouts⁵ and contemporary infant burials in amphorae (Fig. 2.). The second phase (the 4th century till the

¹ For example on terminology, socio-political role of *stasis*, different strategies and models of colonisation with critique: Malkin 2016; 2017; about strongly interesting interrelations between material culture and identity, in the colonial context: Antonaccio 2005; in general: Tsatskheladze 2006; Scheidel 2003; Morris 2005; Osborne 1998.

² Карышковский 1966, p. 149–162.

³ The term “*polis*” is used by Ps. Skylax (68) in urban sense.

⁴ Секерська, Буйських 2018, p. 37.

⁵ Mielczarek 2016, p. 83.

first half of the 3rd century BC) can be distinguished on the basis of the remains of houses made of stone and clay, as well as the contemporary cemetery which consisted of thirty complexes of graves in the eastern territory, beyond the settlement. The third phase (the 1st century BC till the end of the third century AD⁶) is constituted by the remains in the place of the necropolis from the second phase, the cemetery from the period when the Roman garrison stationed in the ancient town of Tyras. The town located on the opposite bank of the Dniester was occupied by the Romans between the second and the third century AD and probably governed by Lower Moesia. The cemetery during the third phase was used by the local population that possessed both Greek and barbarian cultural characteristics.

The condition of studies on the cultural situation in the territory where the site is located in Roksolany village reflects the variety of researchers' opinions concerning the Greek settlement on the northern coasts of the Black Sea. The previous interpretation of posed problem is determined by the linear development of the Greek settlement on the site in Roksolany which is stipulated in literature, as well as the idea of the continuous development of this settlement-which took place between the 6th century BC and the 3rd century BC.

Within this notion, the researchers made various attempts to interpret the archaeological material, particularly the remains of architecture, graves, ceramics and coins. There is a view in literature which associates the burials in the territory of the settlement with the Roman period and the local barbarised population⁷. These burials, however, had been located within the necropolis outside of the settlement in Roksolany and have been dated to the beginning of our era⁸. This fact made the authors analyze the residential settlement and burials within the settlement in Roksolany/Nikonion. The key issue was to determine the cultural origin of burials, their chronology as the earliest stage of Greek presence in Roksolany/Nikonion.

The beginning of the first phase of settlement in Roksolany site can be dated approximately from 550/540 to 520 BC. The phase finished at the end of the 6th century BC, at the latest in the first decade of the 5th century BC. People lived in dugouts and half-dugouts⁹. This tendency was confirmed by Ochotnikov's research¹⁰. Half-dugouts or dugouts are also known from the following sites: Nadlimanskoye, Mayaki, Zatoka, Roksolany, etc.¹¹. Moreover, they confirm the early presence of Greek residential constructions on the coast of the Dniester Estuary.

The settlement in Roksolany during the first phase does not have defensive walls or other stone constructions. Despite this fact, there is a visible division into a residential area and "burial area" in which *enchytrismoï* were found¹². Around the dugouts there were traces of burrows left

⁶ Sekerskaya 2001, p. 68; Бруяко, Дзиговский, Секерская 2008, p. 181.

⁷ Sekerskaya N. P. 2001, p. 89.

⁸ Бруяко, Дзиговский, Секерская 2008, p. 180–181.

⁹ Mielczarek 2016, p. 83–92.

¹⁰ Okhotnikov 2001, p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibidem*; dugouts and half-dugouts were typical form of the oldest Greek dwelling houses in the northern Pontus Euxinus region; they are known from Istros: Alexandrescu 1990, p. 56–60; Berezan: Kryzhitskii 1982, p. 20; Tsetskhladze 2004, p. 230; Olbia: Kryzhitskii 1982, p. 11–12; Tsetskhladze 2004, p. 230–236; Bosporan cities: Butjagin 1997; Solov'ev and Butyagin 1998; Butyagin 2001; Tolstikov 1992, 59–62; Tsetskhladze 2004, p. 236–240.

¹² For example, at the site of Oropos in Attica, the small funerary vessels were found at the bottom of pits, with a diameter around 0.90 m, at depth varied from 0.95 to 1.30 m. What is interesting they belong to the early Archaic period horizon and were found within the limits of the settlement (Vlachou, 2007, p. 220–226). Also at Eretria neonates, infants and children *enchytrismoï* of the same period were scattered in the vicinity of the dwellings close to the shore and in the north part of the settlement (Andreïomenou 1981, p. 209–211; p. 216–220; Mazarakis Ainian 1987, fig. 1, 4, 6, 12 with text) Funerary vases were placed at the bottom of shallow pits, with no particular orientation and mostly without offerings (Vlachou 2007, p. 227; Andreïomenou 1981, p. 210, p. 213).

in which probably amphorae had been kept. The settlement consisted of approximately 20 half-dugouts and dugouts¹³. A population of about 100 people could live there owing to their size of 11 up to 40 square meters¹⁴. Traces of numerous burrows which did not contain any inventory, could prove to be and be treated as places where the first settlers dug transport amphorae into the ground in order to use them as places for storing, for example, grain or water. The amphorae, which were very common on Greek sites and treated as disposable containers, could have been used for a longer period of time in situations when there was a shortage of containers for food. They were taken by the inhabitants who moved from this settlement to a safer place. The analysis of planigraphy concerning dugout and half-dugout residential objects and ceramic vessels indicates that the settlement was abandoned after the first phase of its use.

The “burial area” itself, is located approximately 30–50 meters east of the settlement but on the same hill and can be dated approximately from 550/540 to 500/480 BC (the burials were excavated in 2007; amphorae used for *enchytrismo*i originated from Klazomenai and Chios). Interestingly, the burials contained no sepulchral equipment¹⁵. There were found six infant burials which were partly damaged by a further exploitation of this area (in the 4th century BC caused by a construction of houses and in the modern times by the growing of vines, as well as the operation of kolkhoz). However, the burials are not the first burials which were discovered on the site. M.S.Sinitsyn¹⁶, a Russian researcher, mentions that in 1957 during the preparatory work, for the purpose of growing vines in the south-eastern part of the site, agricultural workers came across the remains of several burials. The graves were severely damaged by ploughing which reached a depth of 80 centimeters. As a result, human bones, fragments of amphorae and black glazed ceramics, flat stones of irregular shape were thrown up on the surface.

The presented here infant burials are the only graves that were preserved and documented on the site (Fig. 3). These are burials in amphorae, called “*enchytrismos*”¹⁷. Ancient writers¹⁸ noted the symbolism inherent in pot burials, the pot taking the role of the uterus. Such burials using domestic and trade pots for the interment of non-adults were found – depending on the age – at specifically reserved zones within the cemetery, for example the burials of such type were identified in Orgame where they had been located within a separate sector of the archaic necropolis¹⁹ or scattered sometimes among adult burials²⁰.

¹³ Mielczarek 2016, p. 84.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ The same situation was observed on many sites, for example: Panskoye (Stolba, Rogov 2012, p. 37); Olbia (Petersen 2010, p. 59, p. 60) and in general see Vlachou 2012, p. 383.

¹⁶ Sinitsyn 1966, p. 44–45.

¹⁷ In general, about *enchytrismo*i in the Archaic period see Kurtz, Boardman 1971, p. 71–72.

¹⁸ On eschatological and symbolic aspects: Dasen 2002, p. 167–186; Dasen, Ducate-Paarmann 2006, p. 239–261; Radev 2000, p. 44–45.

¹⁹ Lungu 2004, p. 85–97; 2010, p. 265–286; Mănuclu-Adameșteanu 2003, p. 350–352.

²⁰ As in many other Greek necropoleis of the Archaic period in the Black Sea region infants and especially neonates were commonly inhumed in transport amphorae, see: Kastanajan 1959, p. 285–286 and Carter 1998, p. 108 with references; for example: Panticapaion – Kastanajan 1959, p. 280, p. 285–286; Theodosia – Petersen 2010, p. 254–255; Phanagoria – Treister, Vinogradov 1993, p. 557–558; Orgame, Istros – Lungu 2004, 2007, 2010; Berezan – Treister, Vinogradov 1993, p. 539; Vinogradov 1994, pp. 21–23; Kryzhytskyy, Krapivina, Lejpunskaja, Nazarov, 2003, p. 468; Petersen 2010, p. 115–116. In Olbia *enchytrismo*i burials were reported for the Archaic, Classical and Roman periods, but were virtually absent in Hellenistic period (Papanova 2005, p. 226–228; 2006, p. 188). The opposite was observed in Nymphaion where child *enchytrismo*i were not attested until Hellenistic period and then were very rare (Petersen 2010, p. 199–250, p. 276). Sorokina noted that in the Tuzla cemetery child *enchytrismo*i were not found (Sorokina 1957, p. 50–51). For Apollonia Pontica there are detailed information about burial practices but dated from the second half of the 5th century BC. Child *enchytrismo*i are attested there and gained in popularity in 4th century BC (Baralis, Papnayotova, Bogdanova,

The *enchytrismo* burials were at the depth of 0.5 m in a cultural layer under humus. In burials 1, 2, 5, 6 the used amphorae were of group type VI or V from Klazomenai dated to the second half of the 6th century; burials 3 and 4 were put in amphorae from Chios from an early period of the 6th century BC till the end of the 6th – the beginning of the 5th century BC²¹. In this way infants were buried (infans I – neonate). Because of the poor condition of the remaining bones, it is impossible to determine the cause of death²². There are fragments of a skull, as well as some long bones left. Skeletons were placed in transport amphorae in burrows without stones around the grave. Under amphorae 1, 2, 3, 4 there was found intentional filling made of tiny pebbles²³ and river gravel from the Dniester (Fig. 4–5). The burials are aligned south-north although their individual orientation, except burial 1, is NW-NE. In the Graeco – Roman world mortality was highest in childhood, especially in infancy, the first week of an infant’s life being decisive for its survival. Aristotle even points to this as a major reason that a newborn was not given a name before it become a week old and had better chances of survival²⁴. Differing sanitary, social and economic circumstances must have played extremely important role here. Although it is difficult to infer social structures based on the presence of infant and child burials, the separation of infants and children from the rest of the dead is rather significant for the functioning of the communities²⁵. As a matter of fact, in Greek societies of archaic and classical era, no special interest was invested in infants and small children until the 4th century BC, when iconographic and textual references seem to have held a particular implication in burial customs²⁶.

Russian researchers, N.P. Sorokina and N.I. Sudarev analyzed infant burials from the cemeteries of European and Asian Bosphorus²⁷. As a result two ritual traditions of infant burials are distinguished for the north Black Sea region. According to the first one, the infant burials practically show no difference compared to the adult population. This tradition is characterized by small number of burials without goods. Its fullest representation is found in the necropolises of Apollonia, Tomis, Istros and Olbia. According to the second one, burials are done in vessels and as a rule, contain no goods. However, the situation is of more complex nature. M. Damyanov has quite recently suggested that the northwestern part of the Black Sea region should be seen as a some kind of community with shared burial customs in the first phase²⁸. According to her opinion in Berezan, Orgame and Istros primary cremation was common and predominant burial rite of the first settlers. One should noticed that child inhumations in the form of *enchytrismos* were also a significant feature at exactly these localities. Contrary to N.P. Sorokina’s and N.I. Sudarev’s opinion, there is attested evidence for cremations, both on Berezan and Olbia, though the bulk of burials are inhumations. On both sites the presence of *enchytrismo* in amphoras was observed²⁹.

Gyuzelev, Nadev, Gospodinov 2016) Nevertheless, one should noticed that child *enchytrismo* were observed on the majority of the Black Sea sites as well as in the great part of the Mediterranean world.

²¹ Based on Monachov 2003, p. 148–149, tab. 101, 4–5.

²² About the possible causes of infants death see: Bourbou, Themelis 2010, p. 113–114; Bourbou 2001, p. 187–193.

²³ Vlachou considers such practise as common: Vlachou 2012, p. 383.

²⁴ Aristotle HA 587b.

²⁵ Vlachou 2012, p. 382.

²⁶ *Ibidem*; burials of infants and children are often seen as a reflection of the dominant role of family: Binford 1971, p. 7, p. 13–16; about change in the differential burial of the children within the area of the family’s life space with the examples from Athens (mostly) but also from other parts of Greece: Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, p. 44–45; 1995, p. 442–443; also Golden 2004, p. 145–157.

²⁷ Sorokina, Sudarev 2000, p. 193–200.

²⁸ Damyanov 2005, p. 77–78; Petersen 2010, p. 115–116.

²⁹ Treister, Vinogradov 1993, p. 539; Vinogradov 1994, p. 21–23; Kryzhytskyy, Krapivina, Lejpunskaja, Nazarov, 2003, p. 468; Petersen 2010, p. 115–116, for Olbia pp. 41–120. In Solovyov 1999, p. 80 there is an information

The *enchytrismo*i were also found in Orgame as well as in Istros³⁰. A rather significant number of burials in vessels found in the necropolises of various Pontus centres, which are considered Miletus apoikias on the one hand and the fact that this rite has not been observed in Miletus, on the other hand, encouraged us and allow us to come back to the question about citizens of other, island and costal poleis, participating in colonization. Can we trace the identity of the first Greek settlers?

In the literary there is a view that Nikonion was colonised by Miletus³¹. However, in the Dniester region, Greeks were to established three cities: Nikonion, Tyras and Ophioussa. The latter has an interesting and important meaning. The origin of the name is clearly Ionian but not attested in Miletus or in its territory. Ophioussa is identified with Tyras or rather as absorbed by the Tyras and is mentioned by Ps. Skylax³², by Strabo³³ (as *polis*) and by Pliny³⁴. It has been also tentatively located on an island at the mouth of the Dniester³⁵. Interestingly one of the Cycladic islands, modern Tinos bore that name in antiquity³⁶. The word “Ophioussa” appears also in the context of the Greek, Phocaean settlement in the 8th/7th century BC on the Iberian Peninsula near Lisbon³⁷.

The first settlers from Tinos (the Cyclades archipelago) or other island could have arrived at Dniester Estuary bringing Ophioussa there which was later brought to the southern bank of the estuary as Tyras. The same tradition of burying the dead, which contain *senchytrismo*i, was observed in this area, on the Cycladic Islands (Andros and Tinos, Paros, Naxos)³⁸, on the Aegean islands, including Crete³⁹, Astypalaia⁴⁰ and Rhodes⁴¹ in the Dodecanese, especially dated from 8th to 5th century BC.

There is a possibility that some of inhabitants of the islands and coasts of Asia Minor could have been defeated at stasis (civil war), which was very common characteristic of the mid-sixth-century BC or as a result of the hostile, constant Persian influence and pressure. For that reason, they set out to find a new place to live on the coast of the Black Sea. We are neither able to reconstruct the exact way the settlers travelled from the Cyclades archipelago to the territory around the Dniester Estuary, nor determine how long it lasted. However, we may assume that they could not settle in the already existing Greek towns on the south coasts of the Black Sea, in Colchis, or Bosphorus. It is possible that only a small number of those who had set off from the home island got to the Dniester Estuary. The remains of the dugout settlement from the second half of the 6th century BC in the territory around the estuary, including the settlement in Roksolany and the

that *enchytrismo*i burials on Berezan necropolis amounted to 7%. According to Petersen, in Olbia *enchytrismo*i amounted 16% of all burials (Petersen 2010, p. 63).

³⁰ Mănuțu-Adameșteanu 2003; Lungu 2004, 2007, 2010. *Enchytrismo*i were also found in the hinterland of Orgame and Istros, (Teleaga, Zirra 2003, p. 19–30).

³¹ For example: Sekerskaya 2001, p. 68 (with reference to previous article); Hansen, Nielsen, 2004, p. 936.

³² Ps. Skylax, 68.

³³ Strabo, 7.3.16.

³⁴ Pliny HN 4.12 (26).82

³⁵ Hansen, Nielsen 2004, p. 941.

³⁶ Aristotle F595 (Rose), *apud* Pliny HN 4.66.

³⁷ Roller 2006, p. 11.

³⁸ For example Kaklamani 2017 with references.

³⁹ For example Pomadère 2010.

⁴⁰ This an exceptional and extraordinary cemetery, not easy to compare. A large area on the slope of the hill of Kylindra was reserved for the burials of the newborn and children up to the age of three years old. More than 2754 burials have been excavated there, all *enchytrismo*i. The rite is dated there from the Geometric period through the Roman times. The funerary vases were disposed on several layer, mostly without any offerings; Vlachou, 2012, p. 384; Michalaki-Kolia 2010, p. 161–205; Clement, Hillson, Michalaki-Kolia 2010, p. 17–21.

⁴¹ For example: D'Acunto 2017, p. 447.

burial area containing infant burials in amphorae which was discovered there, let us think that the first Greek settlers at the Dniester Estuary were maybe the inhabitants of Tinos, or possibly other islands and Asia Minor. Similarities to the burials are found in the Aegean Islands as well as in the centers established by the inhabitants of the Aegean Islands on the western coast of the Mediterranean Sea⁴². In literature, the authors wrongly regard Miletus⁴³ as the metropolis of the first Greek settlers on the Dniester Estuary and not a single case of that kind of infant burials has yet been observed in Miletus.

The first phase of the settlement ended up in its abandonment. The phase lasted almost throughout the entire 5th century BC. It is possible that the inhabitants moved to a safer place.

Houses appeared again in Roksolany in the 4th century BC. At the same time Roksolany necropolis started to be used. It is located near the today's Rokosolany village. The cemetery stopped to be used at the beginning of the 3rd century BC but *enchytrismos* rite is only attested in the archaic period connected with the first settlement phase. Another remark should be added. The matter is much complex than it seems at first. A. Mazarakis Ainian noticed, that in some sites like Volos, Halos in Thessaly, Eretria, Athens there are "reserved" children's burial areas or even cemeteries in the periphery of the inhabited territory⁴⁴. This could possibly be considered in the case of Roksolany in the first, archaic phase of settlement but of course on much smaller, modest scale.

The problem of identification of the oldest archaeological sources lies, among others, in the lack of statistical data dealing with the percentages of Greek pottery compared to the local products as well as the structure and provenience of Greek pottery itself on this particular site. Until the half of the 5th century when Persians were forced to give access to the Black Sea to the Delian League there couldn't have been Scythian influences. The issue of provenance of Greek settlers on the northern coasts of the Black Sea, especially in the regions near the mouth of the Dniester river, should be considered having in mind the chronological and cultural frames that determining that entire region. The states in the region such as Lydia and later Persia had significant influence – political and economic – on the settlement process. This pertains to the areas they haven't held control over, but that had nevertheless been located within their spheres of influence. The entirety of settlement processes must consider the interactions between the settlers and the local populace. There are no examples of Greek settlements located in previously unpopulated areas. One can presume that the local populace, its contacts and knowledge of the environments and its natural resources was invaluable to the Greeks and could have been the deciding factor in the establishing of settlements.

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⁴² In general, from the early stages of the colonial settlement *enchytrismo*i were the prevailing rite of disposal of children in the western Mediterranean and in Sicily: for example: Ridgway 1992, p. 51; Shepherd 2006, p. 312.

⁴³ Hansen, Nielsen 2004, p. 935–936.

⁴⁴ Mazarakis Ainian 2006–2007, p. 367.

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