

**SOME IMPORTANT FEATURES OF TOWNS'  
DEVELOPMENT IN THRACE**  
(the examples of: *Seuthopolis*, *Kabyle* i *Philippopolis*)

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The problem of beginnings and geographical distribution of towns in ancient Thrace has been the subject of scientific debates for a quite a long time. The most frequent questions asked in these debates could be presented as follows:

- 1) What type of settlements in Thrace can be labelled as town?
- 2) What about the Thracian fortresses situated on hilltops? (Gočeva 1986)
- 3) When was the beginning of towns in Thrace? Was it before the invasion of Macedonian king Philip II or perhaps towns in Thrace arose just after this invasion?
- 4) What was the geographical distribution of towns in Thrace?
- 5) What was the architectural presentation of towns in Thrace and was it distinct from other regions of the ancient world?
- 6) What was the impact of the Greek colonization on the Thracian urban settlements on the Black Sea coast?

Unfortunately, we have very little information on the language (and its different dialects) used by the ancient Thracians. Nevertheless, there is certain that a city was designated as '*bria*'. In this article the area of Black Sea coast had been omitted, because the Greek colonization diametrically changed the Thracian settlements on this area. On the other hand, in the inner regions of Thrace can be found some settlements which can be qualified (by some criteria) as towns. First of all our attention have to be called on such the urban settlements as *Seuthopolis*, *Kabyle*, *Philippopolis* and the Thracian town in *Sborjanovo* (Kitov, Agre 2002, 63; Gergova 1992).

One of the best known urban settlements in Thrace is *Seuthopolis*<sup>1</sup>. This town is situated in Kazanlak Valley on the river of Tundja (ancient Tonzos) at the distance of ca. 8 km West of the town of Kazanlak and ca. 3 km South West of the village of Koprinka. The second very important urban settlement in Thrace was *Kabyle*<sup>2</sup>, situated near the modern Bulgarian town of Jambol. Undoubtedly, the next important urban settlement in Thrace was *Philippopolis* (later on Roman *Trimontium*)<sup>3</sup> - it means the modern Bulgarian town of Plovdiv. The earliest traces of settlement in this area can be found on the hilltop of *Trichamietto* and can be dated on the Bronze epoch. There were several archaeological excavations in this area (especially on *Nebet tepe*) in the 20th century. Nevertheless, we do not have an unmistakable information on this settlement. Most probably the Thracian settlement was named as *Pulpudeva* or *Evmolpia*.

I think that it would be interesting to compare the above-mentioned most important urban settlements in Thrace in order to find some features common to all of them. At the same time I would like to draw Your attention to some features of these Thracian towns, which were distinct and different from other ancient towns (especially from the Greek towns). I would like to examine such the questions as site, power, *primordia urbis*, religion, planning, walls and economic significance of Thracian towns.

## Site

The earliest traces of settlement can be found on hilltops - as well in *Kabyle* as in *Philippopolis* (*Nebet Tepe* and *Trichamieto*). Thanks to its geographical position, *Philippopolis* fulfills all the criteria of fortresses in Thrace (Kitov, Agre 2002, 63). However, later on the urban settlement had been located on the lower areas. In the case of *Philippopolis* it was under the hill of *Trichamietto* and *Kabyle* was situated in the meanders of river Tundja. On the other hand, the town of *Seuthopolis* was situated on the plain - in Kazanlak Valley in the meanders of river Tundja, which created the natural obstacle against the potential enemy.

## The center of power

The town of *Seuthopolis* functioned as the center of power, because it was the seat of Seuthes III (and the 'capital' of his state). The similar was the situation of *Kabyle*. We do not have the sufficient information on *Philippopolis*, but most probably this town also functioned as the center of power. Of course the character of power itself in Thrace was diametrically different from the well known model of Athenian democracy. There was the monarchy in Thrace and the ruler combined both the political, administrative and religious power in his hands. For instance, in *Seuthopolis* the ruler inhabited the separate quarter of the town, which was separated from the rest of the town by the solid wall. The ruler lived in the great building, which at the same time fulfilled functions of center of power and of the temple. Also the town of *Kabyle* was the seat of Thracian rulers.

## Primordia urbis

There were different beginnings of towns in Thrace. In the case of *Philippopolis* (*Nebet Tepe*) and *Kabyle* the beginnings of settlement can be found as early as in the Bronze epoch. However, these settlements were not towns for sure. We can not establish when the town of *Philippopolis* had been created. In the case of *Kabyle* the center of settlement was placed on the hill of *Zajci vrach* (where was the temple and acropolis) and on the hilltop of *Hisarlak*. There is the problem with datation of the settlement on the hill of *Zajci vrach* - is this settlement existed already in the 5th century B.C. (Kitov, Agre 2002, 67). or perhaps the ceramics (which can be dated on the early Iron epoch) derives rather from the temple (as gifts) and after the destruction of the temple these ceramics was carried down in the way of erosion. Perhaps the hilltop of *Zajci Vrach* was not settled before the creation of the Western wall (as was the opinion of M.Domaradzki), which can be dated most probably on the third quarter of the 4th century B.C (Domaradzki 1991, 59; Velkov 1982 b, 7).

There is more than one opinion in the modern historiography on the beginnings of *Kabyle* - was this town created before or after the Macedonian invasion. Nevertheless, in the both above-mentioned examples the continuity of settlement can be testified. However, there is very difficult to establish if these towns were created on the way of a slow urban development or were created thanks to the external factor i.e. the Macedonian invasion and the decision of foreign ruler - Philip II.

On the other hand there were quite different beginnings of the town of *Seuthopolis* in Kazanlak Valley. This town had been created as a result of a

political will of the ruler Seuthes III. Nevertheless, this town was not created on the waste land, because the traces of a small Thracian village can be found in this place. "The analysis of the archaeological and numismatic material put the beginnings of town on at about 325 - 323 and its rise on the last decennials of 4th century and on the first decennial of 3rd century B.C." (Čičikova 1991, 66-67).

### **The religion**

There were temples in all towns analysed in this article. In *Philippopolis* the temple (on *Nebet Tepe*) existed already in the first millenium or even earlier. In *Kabyle* the old temple was situated on the hilltop of *Zajci Vrach* and in the 4th century B.C. in town existed the altar dedicated to Artemis - Hekate (known as "*Fosforion*"). On the other hand, in *Seuthopolis* the temple was situated under the same roof with the seat of a ruler - in the separate quarter of the town.

### **The planning**

Unfortunately, we have very little information on the plan of *Philippopolis*, in spite of the archaeological excavations conducted there for a long time. During the second half of the 4th century B.C. the new town was built, which was situated under the hilltop of *Trichamieto*. On the other hand the town of *Kabyle* in the second half of the 4th century B.C. looked like other Hellenistic towns: it had the central square place (agora), temples, streets and monumental buildings. So, *Kabyle* became the town in our (modern) meaning of town. In *Seuthopolis* quite interesting plan of streets had been created: one street was along with the defensive walls and other streets (as in the Hippodamic plan of a city) crossed with each other and formed *insulae*. There was the fortress in the Northern corner of *Seuthopolis* (4620 m<sup>2</sup>), which was separated from the city by the defensive wall. In this fortress just one building was situated - the palace of Seuthes III, which was united with the temple.

### **The defensive walls**

It is extremely difficult to date the defensive urban walls on *Nebet Tepe*. The walls were made of great stones and the thickness of walls was even 2,8 - 2,9 m. The second defensive wall is also very difficult to date, because it was rebuilt several times. In *Kabyle* the stone urban walls were probably at about 2 km long. The defensive walls in *Seuthopolis* were pentagon in shape.

### **The economic significance**

Undoubtedly, the Thracian towns fulfilled a very important role in the economic life of the given tribal population. *Kabyle* was situated on the important merchant route from the Aegean Sea up to the mountains of *Stara Planina*. *Seuthopolis* was situated in the area of very fruitful Kazanlak Valley, which always fulfilled an important role in the history of ancient Thrace. There were situated tombs of Odrician rulers, so this area is known in Thracology as the "Thracian Kings Valley". On the other hand, the town of *Philippopolis*, situated on the river Marica, was the greatest urban settlement in the region of modern Southern Bulgaria - also played an important role in the long distance trade. The Thracian towns took an active part in the long distance trade especially with the Greek colonies. Besides, these towns minted its own coins<sup>4</sup>.

## Concluding remarks

In order to summarize our analysis, first of all I would like to say that the number of towns in the inner regions of Thrace was not so great, indeed. In the area between Danube and *Stara Planina* the first towns were established by the Romans and the existing Thracian settlements were rural in character. However, the already existing urban settlements fulfilled very important role in the given area. These towns were political centres as the seats of rulers. These towns played the economic role also, especially in the trade - not only local but the long distance trade as well. The Thracian towns in the Hellenistic time were built in concordance with this epoch. They had defensive walls, the central square and the houses. These towns can be analysed also as the propagators of Hellenistic culture in Thrace.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned Thracian towns were not created on the waste land. On the contrary, in case of *Philippopolis* and *Kabyle* the traces of settlement can be found already in the Bronze epoch. In the one theory there was simply the slow evolution of these settlements up to the urban stage. However, in the other theory only Macedonian invasion was responsible for creation of towns in Thrace. Perhaps the further archaeological excavations would enable to decide which theory is closer to the real situation in Thrace.

## NOTES:

1. See Bibliography.
2. See Bibliography.
3. See Bibliography.
4. For instance see: Dimitrov 1984b.

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