

FROM DUGOUTS TO HOUSES: URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN LATE ARCHAIC OLBIA PONTICA

Alla Bujskikh*

Keywords: Black Sea region, Olbia Pontica, Histria, dugout, adobe house, regular city plan.

Abstract: The earliest building phase in Olbia, Borysthene and the settlements of the Olbian *chora* is represented by primitive dugouts, carved in the underground. Around the last quarter of the 6th century BC the dugouts in Olbia were replaced with above-ground houses, with a square plan and adobe walls, also cut in the clay subsoil at different depths. These houses appeared simultaneously with the new regular city planning system, implemented at Olbia a short time later than at Borysthene. Similar houses from the same period are also known to have existed in Histria. This situation demonstrates an idea about the common manner of spatial and urban development of the Greek colonies in the late Archaic – early Classical era North-Western Pontic region.

Rezumat: Prima fază de construcții de la Olbia, Borysthene și din așezările din *chora* olbiană este caracterizată de prezența bordeielor simple, săpate în pământ. În jurul ultimului sfert al secolului al VI-lea a.Chr. aceste bordeie sunt înlocuite la Olbia de locuințe din chirpic cu un plan rectangular, dar care în continuare sunt ridicate pe sol tăiat la diferite adâncimi. Aceste noi locuințe apar în aceeași perioadă cu un sistem stradal regulat, implementat la Olbia puțin după cel de la Borysthene. Locuințe asemănătoare sunt atestate în aceeași epocă și la Histria. Cazurile analizate aici indică faptul că la sfârșitul epocii arhaice - începutul epocii clasice a existat o manieră comună a dezvoltării urbane a coloniilor grecești din regiunea nord-vest pontică.

The earliest stage of inhabited dwellings in the Olbian *polis* is represented by a well-known type of primitive house, found at a deeper level than the ancient soil, the so-called dugout. According to most recent data Olbia was founded in 620/610 – 590 BC.¹ The earliest traces of human activity synchronous to the period of founding (construction and cult) on the territory of the Olbian Upper city were discovered at the Western *temenos*² (Fig. 1, 1). However, the earliest building structures found among the excavated, which were used for habitation and household purposes, can now be dated no earlier than the second quarter of the 6th century BC. The dugouts had a very simple plan, circular or rectangular, sometimes oval-shaped, with the same basic elements of interior spatial organization – “tables”, “benches”, small pits for standing vessels and amphorae, wall household and oven niches, steps.³ As a rule they were partially cut in the clay underground (semi-dugouts), usually at a depth of 0.5 – 1.1 m, and few examples were completely subterranean, buried up to the roof. That means that the aboveground walls, usually erected from adobe bricks, had different heights – that together with the underground parts could not have been taller than 2.0 m. Adobe was also used in building the roof, covered with reeds. The roof of a rectangular building could have had one slope with an inclination of almost 40°, sometimes up to 50° to protect a dwelling from seasonal precipitation.⁴

Lengthy debates in specialised literature about these buildings, which were uncommon for the period of the Greek colonization in the extensive region of the Black Sea coast, traditionally focus on the most important topic: how did the Milesians, who founded the Olbian *polis*, build and use such primitive dwellings for everyday life, while being well-acquainted with the customary Greek house-building in their mother *polis*? For example in another Greek colony on the North-Eastern Black Sea coast, Phanagoreia (founded by Teian colonists), a suggestion of reconstruction pictured the earliest dwellings as simple two-story houses with cellars made of mud-bricks.⁵ That means that the evolution of the building process in Phanagoreia, from the researchers' point of view, started without a dugout period. Cellars with adobe walls, which were part of the whole building, appeared simultaneously with mud brick houses. But the scholars who study the process of Greek colonization in the North-Western part of the Black Sea, especially the foundation and spatial development of the Olbian *polis*, consider that the early building activity situation is more complicated, especially on the topic of the

* The Institute of Archaeology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, e-mail: allabuy@ukr.net

¹ Bujskikh 2013, p. 223.

² Rusyaeva 1994, p. 81, with reexamined dating: Bujskikh 2013, p. 224, footnote 14.

³ General information see: Buiskich, Buiskich 2001, p. 667 ff.

⁴ Proposed reconstructions see: Kryzhitsky 1982, pp. 13-14, fig. 2.

⁵ Kuznecov 2010, pp. 450-452.