Gorgippia: A Bosporan Polis in Ancient Sindike

Ekaterina M. Alekseyeva

In the 6th century B.C., Ionian and Aeolian colonists founded the first Greek poleis (city-states) on the shores of the Cimmerian Bosporus (modern Kerc Strait). At the end of the 5th century or the beginning of the 4th century B.C., these poleis merged into a vast state, uniting the lands of eastern Crimea, the Taman peninsula, the Sea of Azov region, and a significant part of the northern Caucasus, right up to the modern city of Novorossiysk. The capital of this state became Pantikapaion, located on the modern Kerc peninsula. Other large cities of the Bosporus were Theodosia, Nymphaion, and Myrmekion, within the territory of the Crimea; Hermonassa and Phanagoria on the Asiatic side of the strait; Tanaïs at the mouth of the Don River; and Gorgippia in the foothills of the Caucasus, in the land of Sindike.

Gorgippia has recently been the focus of a large, multi-disciplinary program of archaeological research (Treister and Vinogradov 1993:560-62). The ancient city (40 hectares) and its necropolis (60 hectares) are now completely over-laid by the center of the modern resort of Anapa, whose reconstruction precipitated the large-scale investigation of the underlying city. The Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences has been working in Anapa since 1960, and an open-air archaeological park has been created, with exhibits of excavated parts of the ancient city on view.

Several aspects of the site have been studied in the course of the last two decades. The domestic quarters have been explored (entailing the excavation of 2.5 percent of the city’s area), over 400 burials in the necropolis have been excavated, and the composition of an ethnopoetical map of the city’s environs is under way. This article presents some highlights of this recent activity.

The History of the City

Gorgippia became a large polis in the beginning of the 4th century B.C. Like any ancient city, it possessed a chora, or open land, which lay in the highly fertile region of Kuban, today the breadbasket of Russia. From the city’s seaport, grain flowed into other centers of the Black Sea region and of the Mediterranean. The Greek orator Delpharkhos reported in 344 B.C. that a bronze statue of Gorgippus, after whom the city is named, was erected in the Athenian agora in gratitude for his supplying grain to the Athenians during their lean years.

This city-state was, however, preceded by an earlier settlement, nameless so far, that arose no later than the last quarter of the 6th century B.C. These first colonists settled on the shore of modern Anapa Bay. Their pit dwellings were replaced in the course of time...
by houses of unfired brick on sturdy stone foundations up to a meter wide. In the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. the city stretched along the sea for about 400 meters; originally, it was fortified with a ditch and, at the end of the 5th century B.C., with a stone wall 2.4 meters wide.

In the first quarter of the 4th century B.C. the city burned down (over the course of its existence it burned down and was rebuilt no less than four times). Just at that time the Bosporan state was expanding, conquering new lands along the foothills of the Caucasus, and the small Greek polis on the shore of Anapa Bay was subsequently rebuilt, at twice its previous size. The new city plan survived the centuries, its main streets and blocks remaining unchanged until the final destruction of the city in the mid-3rd century A.D. (Fig. 2).

Gorgippia experienced heydays, notably in the second half of the 4th century B.C. and in the 2nd century A.D. In the 4th century B.C. it was suddenly inundated by newcomers, most likely Bosporan Greeks, who received a special right of citizenship along with their land. It was in the interest of these new settlers that the state undertook land expansion, similar to that of the self-governing Greek poleis, who strove to expand their holdings.

The second period of expansion was characterized by an enormous wave of domestic construction. Large houses were built, with five to seven deep basements that occupied up to two-thirds of the total area of the whole structure. The basements extended partially into the bedrock, reaching depths of up to three meters. The construction of these multiple-basement houses destroyed all traces of previous occupation.

The sudden fire and subsequent destruction of the city in the mid-3rd century A.D. (the latest coins found date to 238/240 A.D.) can be connected with the early movement of Gothic tribes to the west, although Gorgippia could also have suffered from invasions by the neighboring Alans to the east. When the wooden flooring in the houses burned, everything in the aboveground living rooms—including household utensils left behind by the inhabitants—collapsed down into the deep basements, crushing anything objects situated there. The ruins were not cleared away as was done in previous periods, thus preserving for us priceless, rich complexes of finds.

In earlier centuries, the site of a burned house was usually leveled and new construction began in the same location. But the city was not reconstructed after the fire of A.D. 240; we pinpointed only the erection of several temporary sheds with crooked walls, attached to surviving masonry. However, large coin hoards found in Anapa’s environs contain Bosporan issues of A.D. 285–342 and prove the revival of intensive life near the devastated ancient polis. Gorgippia was destroyed completely by the Hun invasion of the 370s A.D.

Reused architectural components, including various elements of all three of the Classical orders, appeared again and again during excavation of the foundations of later structures. Among the sculptural works found in the city in recent years, a marble head of Aphrodite from the Hellenistic period (Fig. 1) and a bronze figure of Mercury, probably dating to the 1st century A.D. (Fig. 3), stand out. Although there is a general paucity of small sculptural images from the ancient cities of the eastern Black Sea region, Gorgippia has become distinguished for finds of this sort (Leskov and Lapshanskij 1987:166–68, nos. 245–247).

The Form of the City

From inscriptions, we know that Gorgippia was enclosed by defensive walls, of which only fragments remain. A repeatedly rebuilt, powerful stronghold on the northeastern edge of the city is currently under investigation; within this structure is a large intact house. At the moment of greatest danger in Gorgippia’s last period of existence, the stronghold barred access to one of the city’s main highways, a street 8 to 9 meters wide. This stronghold probably protected the harbor section.

Gorgippia was one of the most important centers in the Bosporan state, and controlled its own large port. The shipowners were united in a separate union of exporters, under the personal protection of the king, as an inscription testifies (CIRB 1134, found in the city; Rootony 1951:148, no. 41, with a new interpretation). Over the course of the centuries, Gorgippia maintained its separate status, attested by the fact that the city was granted the right to have its own mint, as well as by the vice-regency of members of the royal family.

The city lay at the borders of the state, and conquered borders were protected. Approaches to the city were safeguarded by separately situated fortifications, which continued the fortress system of the Taman peninsula. Individual village fortresses of the Gorgippian chora were also fortified; some were built as tower-houses, while for others separate towers were constructed. The town of Semibratne, lying between Gorgippia and the Taman peninsula, was enclosed by sturdy walls over 4 meters wide; apparently, it also served as a shelter for the conquered land of Sindike, which was extremely important for the Bosporan state and in which Gorgippia lay. Semibratne was situated near the Sea of Azov, at the mouth of the large Kuhun River, whose bed is now dry.

Burials and Burial Goods

Recent studies of the Gorgippian necropolis and of burial grounds in the environs of the city have yielded a large number of magnificent finds. This work has also allowed us to conduct surveys important for reconstructing the history of the region. For example, the funerary structures employed at the various burial grounds vary widely. Near Gorgippia, burials in stone coffins with slab covers predominate; they are surrounded by stone circles on the original surface and are completely covered by small broken stones. Sometimes, in place of a coffin, burial pits were carved into bedrock. Such structures could
A Child's Burial from

The necropolis of Gorgippia has recently yielded several especially interesting burial complexes belonging to the early centuries A.D. Most notable is a child's burial (1st century A.D.), which contained a terracotta mask of Dionysus (Fig. 4d), two clay flasks in the shape of anthropomorphic female half-figures (Fig. 4b, c), and a large selection of high-quality gold jewelry.

Outstanding among these ornaments is a round medallion with a depiction in relief of Aphrodite Ourania (Fig. 4d). She is shown with a staff (a symbol of power), a quiver (apparent above her left shoulder), and two animals (a dog tearing a fox to pieces), companions of Artemis. Two images of Zeus, or cupids, peck over her shoulders.

Stamped ornaments of gold and silver with depictions of Aphrodite and the Erotes (pl. of Eros) are typical of the cities of Panthonoia, Chersonesos, and Olba in the 1st-2nd century A.D. In the Kuban River region, similar discs decorating fibulas (pins) have been found in burials of the 1st century A.D. In Gorgippia, similar silver and gold medallions are known from previous excavations; admittedly, they are not as well executed.

Stylistically, these medallions originate in a group of widely known Hellenistic ornaments, such as those of the 1st century B.C. found from Galyb in Egypt. These pieces include depictions of Aphrodite and Artemis in the ornaments themselves and on medallions for their manufacture. Stamps for the manufacture of plaques with Aphrodite and the Erotes are known also in the Bosporus; a find from Triglia is traditionally dated to the 1st-2nd century B.C. In 1987 a bronze stamp for similar plaques was found in Gorgippia.

Among other items in the child's burial were two gold anklets, bracelets with interwoven ends (Fig. 4e), and a predominant type of children's ornament widespread from the second half of the 1st century A.D. on: an amulet twisted from a gold sheet with two eyes soldered on, its surface divided by horizontal bands of soldered coiled wires, with granulation in between (Fig. 4d); a gold spring-coil fibula with a sherdlike back, dating to the 1st century A.D.; and two gold earrings, one smooth-wired and the other twisted from four wires (Fig. 4f).

Comparative Material

Fig. 4d: See Akhshyeva 1982:11-22, fig. 14, 44-85; fig. 4b, 48; Lescow and Lapushchik 1987:164, no. 244; and The Treasury of Nomadic Treasures 1991:145, no. 195. In terms of the level of execution and detail (the hair, the neck and shoulders)), the earring can be compared to the central metal piece of the gold funerary wreath from sarcophagus 2 of crypt 2 of the 1975 excavations in the Gorgippia necropolis (first half of the 1st century A.D.). See also.


At Galyb, Artemis is depicted without additional figures, with a quiver over her right shoulder (e.g. 1932: Pl. 7, 65-66; Millet 1979:5-37, Pl. 20-21; Artseum 1988:161; idem as Aphrodite, with Erotes has without a quiver (1932: Pl. 6, 59-61); Lufkin 1980:424-26; fig. 129, Artseum 1991:191-65.

Fig. 4e: Stepanish 1990:245, nos. 104-5, figs. 352-51.

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**First and Second Century A.D.**

Two gold rings, found in a burial of the early centuries A.D., had garnet insets (Fig. 5a, b), which are on the whole characteristic of jewelry decorations of the early Imperial period. One of them (Fig. 5b), with an open-work setting with intertwined twisted wires, is ornamented with a drop-shaped garnet. Below are three small round settings whose insets are lost. This motif was still widespread in the late Hellenistic period.

From still another burial come a gold ring with a cameo on an amethyst (Apollo with a bow behind his back; Fig. 7) and earrings of coiled wires (Fig. 6a). The setting of the ring is typical for the 1st century A.D., but the intaglio dates to an earlier period. Judging by the style and quality of execution, it should be counted among the better images of the late Classical and early Hellenistic period, and it undoubtedly deserves separate publication.

**Jewelry from the Necropolis**

Again from a 1st century A.D. burial comes a gold necklace clasp decorated with a filigree of curled spirals around a central glass inset (Fig. 8). A gold disc depicting Medusa the Gorgon, with two eyeslets at the sides, served as the clasp of a necklace of a loop-in-loop type from a burial of the 2nd century A.D. (Fig. 9).

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**Footnotes**

(Walters Art Gallery 1979:71, no. 262-87), pin from the same burial (Walters Art Gallery 1979:103-104, no. 299), and inset earrings of Syriac workmanship of the 1st-2nd century A.D. from the Levant (Dropper-Liptitz 1988:270-271, fig. 294). Another close analogy is a ring with twisted spirals of gold wires with a serpent's head and a similar garnet inset, which also comes from Syria (Beirut) and dates to the 2nd century B.C. (Dropper-Liptitz 1988:274).

Fig. 6: See Zaukoff 1983:127ff, 194ff, Pls. 32ff, 46ff.

Fig. 8: Similar clasp with analogous ornament, but executed in the open-work technique, decorates a gold necklace from Egypt with a pendant of Dometian, dated to a.D. 96/79 (now in the British Museum), and a necklace (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) of unknown provenience (Meller 1976: Pl. 12, Higgins 1980: Pl. 50, Steffanelli 1992:248-49, nos. 127-28, figs. 175, 299).

Fig. 9: Analogous clasp from the British Museum and the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, of unknown provenience, also dated to the 2nd century A.D. (Walters Art Gallery 1979:114, no. 319, Higgins 1980: Pl. 58h, Steffanelli 1992:250, no. 13, figs. 182, 231, no. 141, fig. 197). Another clasp of the same period (now in the Walters Art Gallery) comes from a Roman necropolis (Walters Art Gallery 1979:114, no. 318, Steffanelli 1992:253-54, no. 145, fig. 190).
hold up to 10 interments. Stone burial constructions from the environs of the city, dating from the 6th century B.C. onward, can be considered to be autochthonous survivals from the Bronze Age. Nothing similar was found in either the necropolis of the early Greek, pre-Gorgippian settlement within Anapa or in the necropolis of Gorgippia. It appears that the Greek colonists who founded the polis lived there in isolation and did not venture beyond it.

With the expansion of the city in the 4th century B.C., however, the local material culture in the environs of Gorgippia became almost indistinguishable from the Greek. The city had a large market, and all the area inhabitants made use of it from the moment the polis was founded; therefore, autochthonous burial structures outside the city were often filled with objects made by Greek craftsmen.

Even the necropoleis of Gorgippia itself reflect certain neighboring ethnic influences. In the 1st century A.D., there suddenly appeared crypts constructed of stone blocks (Fig. 10), as well as large, deep square pits sunk into the rock and covered either by logs or by huge slabs. Many of these tombs contained stone sarcophagi. Almost all of them were looted in antiquity, but the intact remains of one burial bear witness to the wealth and luxury of adornment. These tombs find parallels in graveyards of a Sarmatian tribe, the Aeonoi, living in the north Caucasus. The sudden appearance in Gorgippia of tombs of the new type is connected with a new wave of inhab-

tants. These possibly were Aeonoi troops who had fought under the Bosporan ruler Cotys against his brother Mithridates III.

Within the settlement, the early necropolis was absorbed by the city blocks of the later Gorgippia, consequently it is impossible to keep track of chronological and territorial changes there. However, a section of prestigious and wealthy burials was revealed, situated as close to the city as possible. The graveyard lay at the exit of a wide, possibly main, street that merged with the trade road leading to neighboring poleis and tribes. In the remaining section of the graveyard, interments with grave goods reflecting medium prosperity are neighbors to those without any grave goods; however, the latter may have been looted in antiquity.

Objects from the later burials of the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. are illustrated in the boxes that accompany this article. They attest to the quality of the small finds from this period in Gorgippia's eventful history. Studies of not only the necropolis, but the city itself and its surrounding environs are ongoing. The story of Gorgippia's past has just begun to be told.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author sincerely thanks M. J. Teiser, who accepted completely the painstaking task of analysis, dating, selection of analogies, and attribution of the gold ornaments found in the necropoleis of Gorgippia.

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