

THE TOWNSITE OF SEMIBRATNEYE (LABRYS): RESULTS OF EXCAVATIONS OF 2001–2005

The site of Semibratneye (Labrys) is located 28 km northeast of what is now the city of Anapa (ancient Gorgippia) in the valley of the Lower Kuban River. The settlement is of about 9 hectares, facing onto the river with its broader northern section about 360 m long (Fig. 1). The southern part of the site is rectangular, measuring about 180 × 150 m. The archaeological exploration of the site has a long history. The first small excavation was conducted here in 1878 by Vladimir G. Tizengauzen, who had previously excavated the famous so-called Semibratniye (*Seven Brothers*) barrows where kings of the Sindoi were buried. He was the first to describe the ancient ruins located 3 km from those barrows.¹ The second phase of the investigations of the fortified settlement comprised the fieldworks of Nikita Anfimov in 1938–1940, 1949–1952 and 1954–1955 (in the northern and northeastern sections of the site).² The total thickness of the cultural layers of the late 6th century BC – 1st century AD (four building periods) amounted to 3.3 m. Anfimov dated the earliest layer to about the end of the 6th – beginning of the 4th century BC. Defensive walls of the 5th – 4th century BC with rectangular towers up to 2 m high belonged to the same building period. The oldest layer was separated from the level dated to the 2nd quarter – end of the 4th century BC by a layer of fire and destruction. The latter probably were related with the warfare in the land of the Sindoi after which this territory was incorporated into the Bosporan kingdom. Later the city was devastated again in the end of the 4th century BC and its earliest fortifications were finally destroyed. The third building phase is dated to the end of the 4th – first half of the 3rd century BC while the final urban building period spanned the second half of the 3rd – late 1st century BC. With that final period, a new fortress constructed in the mid-3rd century BC was connected. Only in the northern area of the site, also the remains of

¹ *ОАК за 1878–1879 гг.* (СПб. 1881) VIII–IX.

² Н. В. Анфимов, “Новые данные к истории Азиатского Боспора” (N. V. Anfimov, “New Evidence on the History of the Asiatic Bosporus”), *СА* 1941: 7, 258–267; idem, “Раскопки Семибратнего городища” (“Excavations of the Semibratneye Townsite”), *КСИИМК* 1951: 37, 238–244; idem, “Исследования Семибратнего городища” (“Investigations of the Semibratneye Townsite”), *КСИИМК* 1953: 51, 99–111.

small and poor dwellings of the 1st century AD have been discovered. Owing to a recently found dedicatory inscription of the Bosporan king Leukonos I (389/88–349/48 BC) the name of the city may possibly be reconstructed as *Λάβρυς. The inscription tells of Leukonos' victory over Oktamasades, who attempted to dethrone his father Hekataios, the king of Sindoi (cf. Polyaen. 8, 55).³

In 2001, the excavations at the site were resumed under the direction of the author of this paper. At present, the results of five field seasons are available for discussion. The building remains of the Hellenistic period were investigated first. In the northern section of the site, the foundation of a round tower (over 5 m in diameter) was uncovered near the eastern corner of the fortress of the 3rd–1st century BC.⁴ The stone masonry of the tower laid with the use of lime mortar was preserved up to a height of 0.64 m with a thickness of 0.8 m. The studies of this structure lead us to the conclusion that the local architects were quite familiar with the advances in Greek fortification. Judging by coin finds, the lower chronological limit of the last fortification period is c. the mid-3rd century BC when construction of defences was being carried out throughout the entire territory of the Bosphorus. Perhaps the defensive system of Labrys had survived until King Polemon's military activities in the Asiatic Bosphorus at the end of the 1st century BC. At least, the fact that of 45 coins found in 2001–2005 fourteen are dated to the 1st century BC attests to a vibrant urban life during that period.⁵ The latest of the coins is dated to the period of the rule of Mithridates VIII (39/40–44/45 AD).⁶

³ Т. В. Блаватская, “Посвящение Левкона I” (T. V. Blavatskaya, “Dedication of Leukonos I”), *РА* 1993: 2, 34–48; С. Р. Тохтасев, “К чтению и интерпретации почитательной надписи Левкона I с Семибратнего городища” (S. R. Tokhtas'ev, “Reading and Interpretation of the Dedicatory Inscription of Leukonos I from the Townsite of Semibratneye”), *Hyperboreus* 4 (1998): 2, 286–302; Ю. Г. Виноградов, “Левкон, Гекатей, Октамасад и Горгипп” (Yu. G. Vinogradov, “Leukon, Hecataeus, Oktamasades and Gorgippos”), *ВДИ* 2002: 3, 3–22; В. П. Яйленко, “Вотив Левкона I из Лабриса” (V. P. Yaylenko, “The Votive of Leukonos I from Labrys”), *ДБ* 2004: 7, 425–445.

⁴ В. А. Горончаровский, “Новые данные о Семибратнем городище на Кубани” (V. A. Goroncharovski, “New Evidence on the Semibratneye Townsite”), *Боспор Киммерийский. Понт и варварский мир в период античности и средневековья* (Керчь 2002) 65–67.

⁵ В. А. Горончаровский, “Проблемы хронологии Семибратнего городища” (V. A. Goroncharovski, “Problems of the Chronology of the Townsite of Semibratneye”), *Боспорский феномен: проблемы хронологии и датировки памятников*. Ч. 2 (СПб. 2004) 59.

⁶ Анфимов (п. 2) 26.

In the southern area of the city, the remains of a *temenos* of the first half of the 3rd century BC have also been discovered. Part of the external wall of this sacred precinct, uncovered to a length of almost 18 m, consisted of massive limestone blocks ranged in a line. In that section of the wall, a gateway over 3 m wide was found. In a small yard nearby there was a two-stepped limestone altar (Fig. 2). The upper slab of the altar measured 1 × 1 m. On the west, the altar had an additional small step.⁷ Besides a terracotta mask, fairly noteworthy among the finds from this building complex is a trade weight (419.18 g) of the Euboic-Attic standard with the grafito “M” (abbreviation of $\mu\nu\hat{\omega}$).

Researches of the recent three years have shown that the occupation of this urban area began in the second quarter of the 5th century BC.⁸ It was related to the construction here of the defensive wall. The fortifications of that period included a rectangular gate tower preserved to the height of up to 0.94 m and an adjoining stone staircase about 2 m wide and 5.4 m long in its base. The preserved four steps of the latter were inclined at an angle of 30°, suggesting that it gave onto the top platform of the tower at a height of about 3.5 m. The walls of the tower were 0.85 m thick with a three-layered structure: two faces laid of blocks set with their uneven sides inwards and a filling layer of rammed clay and rubble between them. The internal room of the tower was probably intended for housing the permanent guards of the city’s entrance rather than for any defensive purposes. The long-term presence of a few persons here is suggested by the remains of a hearth (0.6 × 0.55 m) with layers of ash and food remains uncovered in the south-western corner of the tower.

A similar defensive structure with a gate tower and a staircase is known only in the Thracian city of Pistiros founded by the Greeks in the second quarter of the 5th century BC. It is situated on a flat bank of the Maritsa River more than 300 km inland from the sea.⁹ J. Bouzek, who compared the

⁷ Cf. a huge three-stepped altar discovered by V. Tizengauzen: *OAK за 1878–1879 г.* (СПб. 1881) IX.

⁸ Горонcharовский (п. 6) 58.

⁹ M. Domaradzki, “An Interim Report on Archaeological Investigations at Vetren-Pistiros, 1988–1994”, *Pistiros I. Excavations and Studies* (Prague 1996) 18–19, Fig. 1. 4; 1. 8; 2. 2; Я. Г. Бузек, “Эмпории во Фракии, их значение в системе этнокультурных отношений и их параллели в других странах периферии греческого мира” (J. G. Bouzek, “Emporia in Thracia, Their Significance in the System of Ethno-Cultural Interactions, and Their Parallels in Other Countries at the Periphery of the Greek World”), *Международные отношения в бассейне Черного моря в древности и средние века* (Ростов-на-Дону 2003) 16–18.

fortifications of Pistiros with various defensive structures in northern Greece, came to the conclusion that the former resemble mostly the city walls of Thasos. The impulse for sending a party of settlers deep into a barbarous territory may have resulted in the defeat of the revolt against Athens by the inhabitants of the island in 465 BC.¹⁰ The erection of similar fortification structures during the same chronological interval in a Greek city in the land of the Sindoi can hardly be accidental. There are grounds to suppose that either a Thasian architect took part in building of Labrys or that there were some colonists from Thasian possessions on the Thracian coast seized by the Athenians.¹¹ In any case, the composition of finds from the early layer,—numerous fragments of black-glazed ware (up to 18% of the total ceramic assemblage not counting the amphorae) and a number of graffiti composed of 1–5 letters (including two with so-called trade marks)—suggests that at this stage the city existed as a Greek centre in Sindica.¹² Probably, Labrys was founded by the Greeks according to a special agreement as a result of peaceful contacts with the Sindoi.

The earliest fortifications in the northern and southern areas of the city survived only for a short while until they were destroyed during military activities at the beginning of the second quarter of the 4th century BC. A thick layer containing ashes, charcoal and sling stones is related to those events. In addition, a lentiform lead sling shot (weighing 55.6 g) was found here.¹³ After Labrys and the Sindian lands had been included into the structure of the Bosporan Kingdom, new fortifications (preserved now to a height of about 1.6 m) were built using the previous defensive walls as foundations (Fig. 3). The link between the two building periods is expressed by the turn of the defensive wall at the place where presumably there was a gate. In the area in front of the latter on the city's side, any

¹⁰ J. Bouzek, “The Position of the Pistiros Fortifications in the Development of the Ancient Poliorcetics and Stonecutting Techniques”, *Pistiros I. Excavations and Studies* (Prague 1996) 44.

¹¹ Compare: П. Балабанов, “Крепостного строителство в древна Тракия” (P. Balabanov, “Fortification building in ancient Thracia”), *Крепостното строителство на Българските земи* (София 2000) 35.

¹² V. Goroncharovskii, “Study of the Semibratnee city site (Labris)”, *Black Sea Area in the Hellenistic World System* (Tbilisi 2005) 77–78.

¹³ In this connection note the following information on ten lead sling shots without figures nor inscriptions found by chance at the Semibratneye townsite: Д. А. Скобелев, “К вопросу о находках снарядов пращи на юго-западе Краснодарского края” (D. A. Skobelev, “On the Problem of the Finds of Sling Shots from the South-West of Krasnodar Kray”), *Parabellum* 2003: 4, 102.

building remains were absent. The only exception was the foundation of a wall (1.28 m wide) which was attached to the defences in the 2nd quarter of the 4th century BC *i. e.* soon after the construction of the latter. The wall was located near the entrance to the tower, so its purpose may have been to narrow the approach to the gate from the city's side.¹⁴ Close nearby there was a pit with fragments of Heracleian amphorae. These included several examples with early stamps with the names of Διονυσίο[υ], Κερκίν[ου] and Δαμοφό[νου] dated to 375–365 BC.¹⁵ The absence of dwelling houses within the area adjoining the defensive wall testifies to an adherence to principles of the fortification according to which it was necessary to reserve an empty space (Philo, *Parasceuastica et polir.* 10).

The defensive system of Labrys was destroyed again at the end of the 4th century BC. Judging by the three-stepped stone staircase leading to the level above which the fortifications were destroyed, the southern part of the city remained undefended during the following period.

Future archaeological studies of Labrys undoubtedly promise to yield essentially new information on the early stage of Graeco-Sindian relations and the subsequent development of this region.

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¹⁴ A similar situation was revealed during excavations of the defensive wall of the 4th century BC in Ampurias: E. Samarti-Grego, “J. Trilla. Nuevos datos la historia y topografía de las murallas de Emporion”, *Madrider Mitteilungen* 33 (1992) 102 Fig. 1.

¹⁵ С. Ю. Монахов, *Греческие амфоры в Причерноморье* [S. Yu. Monakhov, “Greek Amphorae in the Black Sea Area”] (Саратов 1999) 253, 307.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1. Two-stepped altar at the *temenos* (view from the South)

Fig. 2. Remains of the fortification structures in the southern section of the townsite (view from the West), 5th–4th cent. BC

