

The Domestic Architecture in the Greek Colonies on the Western and Northern Shore of the Black Sea (end of the 7th Century-end of the 1st Century BC)

-abstract-

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Key words: domestic architecture, Greek colonies, above-ground houses, dugouts, semi-dugouts, types, plans.

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The domestic architecture typical for the Greek colonies situated on the western and northern shore of the Black Sea, on the course of three major historical periods (Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic), reflects, on one hand, the gradual changes which have shaped the architecture of the major Greek cities and, on the other, the regional peculiarities generated by internal and external factors like the climate, the environment, the available resources, the activities carried out by the people who have inhabited these colonies, their mentality and their social status. The present work is an attempt to realize an investigation which analyzes the available information on the architecture of the Greek households from the moment they were discovered at these sites. The research has focused on the preserved elements of these structures and their ground plans, in order to establish a typology and determine the specific functions of the interior chambers.

The first chapters of this paper give a general presentation regarding the previous work carried out on the archaeological remains of houses, the moment these Greek colonies were founded, their historical stages and the development of the archaeological diggings in their area. The progress realized while unveiling the residential blocks in these archaeological sites is also being discussed. The following chapter presents the geographical features of the western and northern region of the Black Sea shore, exposing the advantages of this region in terms of geographical position, climate as well as the available resources in the area (sources of water, raw materials) and the factors which favored agriculture, fishing and navigation. The fifth chapter discusses the evolution of the Greek dwelling, since the archaic period until the end of the Hellenistic period, following the social, economical, political and cultural factors which have shaped this construction over a long period of time.

The leading chapter of this paper presents the overall evolution of domestic architecture within the Greek colonies, starting with the archaic period until the end of the Hellenistic period (end of the 7th century-end of the 1st century BC). The features of these domestic structures are chronologically analyzed, taking in account the way such constructions were discovered in the Greek colonies on the Black Sea shore. These ancient cities are mentioned here in order, from south to north, as follows: Apollonia Pontica, Mesambria, Odessos, Dionysopolis, Callatis, Tomis, Histria, Orgame, Tyras, Nikonion, Berezan, Olbia, Kerkitis and Chersonesos.

The houses discovered in the colonies situated in this part of the ancient Greek world, are divided in two orders: above-ground and underground or partially underground. The latter are usually called dugouts or semi-dugouts. Such houses can be encountered during all of the Greek

periods. However, their plans and shape can differ based on the period during which they were built.

Dugouts and semi-dugouts were widely used during the archaic period (end of the 7th century- the last quarter of the 6th century BC). A great number of these structures have been discovered in the Greek colonies situated on the northern shore of the Black Sea (Nikonion, Berezan, Olbia Kerkinitis), but they have also been identified in the colonies situated on the western shore (Odessos, Tomis, Histria). However, in the ancient cities placed on the western shore of the Pontus (Apollonia Pontica, Histria, Orgame), the above-ground houses prevail. Both house types had oval, circular or rectangular shaped plans (the latter is frequent for above-ground buildings). For the construction of both types, friable materials were used. Their walls were built of wattle (a mixture of clay and reed), mud bricks and, rarely, stones. In the case of dugouts, the trench sides represented the walls which were strengthened with wattle and daub or with the help of timber joists (Odessos, Tomis). The roofs consisted of reed covered by stone fragments and, sometimes, tiles (Apollonia Pontica). In most cases, for the construction of above-ground buildings, stones in an earth binding were used for building the foundation and mud bricks or sun-dried bricks for the elevation. The floors consisted of packed earth or clay. The typical dwellings for this period did not have more than two or three rooms or a standardized shape, since their plan had to be adapted to the geography and climate of the region. Nevertheless, spaces with specific functions have been identified within the house. Such specialized spaces were the storing pits placed in the area surrounding the houses (Tomis, Nikonion, Olbia-Berezan). If the house had three rooms, it's possible that certain domestic activities (like cooking) could have been carried out in a space separated from the actual living space (Nikonion, Berezan).

The common archaic houses were single-unit dwellings with a multifunctional character, which rarely had two chambers (Histria). These chambers, together with the storage pits placed in the surrounding area, formed a domestic complex. The use of advanced techniques in constructing private buildings could only be identified at Berezan, during the archaic period. Here, the houses had an appearance similar to that of dwellings discovered in the major Greek cities. These buildings had a rectangular plan and were composed of two or three rooms placed around a central courtyard which had a single entrance from the street. Inside the house, several amenities (hearths, braziers, storage pits, altars) could be found and, sometimes, even furniture ("tables", benches, niches). Rare amenities have been identified at Berezan and these could not

even be encountered in evolved dwellings from the later periods (for example: the smoke evacuation system used within the cooking space). Berezan is an exception for this period. A lot of the houses discovered here were dugouts or semi-dugouts. Most likely, these houses were dug into the ground because this was a simple and practical technique, while most of the raw materials were at hand. At the same time, such dwellings conferred warmth during cold seasons and coolness during warm seasons. It is clear that the first inhabitants of these colonies have built their houses in a practical and rational way.

Over the course of the classical period (end of the 6th century-the first quarter/mid 4th century BC), several changes take place affect the domestic architecture typical for the ancient Greek cities. Above-ground houses become widely used, while dugouts or semi-dugouts cease to exist. Within the major Greek cities (like Athens, Delos, Olynthus), the rectangular-shaped house with a single entrance and a central courtyard becomes the common dwelling. Based on the way interior chambers were placed around the central courtyard, the standard house typology could be established. This involved four house types (*pastas*, *prostas*, *peristyle houses*, *Herdraumhaus*). The emergence of such houses in continental Greece has also influenced the way houses were constructed on the western and northern shore of the Black Sea. Here, the houses continue to be built using the already mentioned materials and therefore having a modest character. However, some of the above-ground houses are now built entirely of stones. In comparison to the previous period, the domestic architecture registers a real progress of the construction techniques. The house walls were now being built using mud bricks or sun dried bricks on stone socles (Odessos, Histria, Nikonion, Berezan, Olbia) or entirely of stones (Apollonia Pontica, Odessos, Tomis, Histria, Nikonion, Olbia, Kerkinitis). The houses had a rectangular-shaped plan and they consisted of three or four rooms placed around a small interior courtyard. In this region, the houses did not follow a certain architectonical order. Only in the case of Apollonia Pontica, houses of the *pastas* type and houses with a *peristyle* courtyard have been identified. An exception to the rule is Chersonesos where, unlike the rest of the ancient cities in the classical period where mostly above-ground houses were discovered, in its early phases of existence, 13 semi-dugouts with an elliptical shape have been identified. These were constructed using the materials typical for the archaic period. Another novelty of the classical period consists in the appearance of certain interior amenities inside the above-ground houses. Such amenities are the cisterns for collecting water (Apollonia Pontica, Olbia), the fountains

(Odessos, Histria), the storage pits (Histria), the cess-pits (Orgame) as well as the pavements covering the surface of the courtyard or the alleys surrounding the houses (Tomis, Kerkinitis). While some houses still had pits within their space used for the storage of household objects or food, in others separate spaces were built, specifically for storage purposes. This is how the houses with basements emerge. Such buildings are only specific to this region where their use will generalize over the following period. For the classical period, houses with basements have only been identified at Odessos, Nikonion and Olbia. The basements were built using almost the same techniques and materials (mud bricks or stones) as in the case of the above-ground chambers of the house and they were used both for storage and for living (Nikonion, Olbia). The access to the basement was made either from one of the ground rooms of the house, either from the central courtyard, using a stone or a wooden staircase. Therefore, over the course of the classical period, new architectural elements are introduced within the household (like the basements, cisterns, fountains, pavements), while the houses themselves tend to follow an already standardized way for building houses in the major Greek cities.

At the end of the classical period and the beginning of the Hellenistic period (the end of the first quarter/mid 4th century-the end of the 1st century BC), new Greek colonies are being founded during the Doric colonization process (cities like Mesambria, Callatis, Chersonesos, established at the half/end of the classical period). The already existing Greek cities, on the western and northern shore of the Black Sea, reach their maximum development and expansion during the Hellenistic period. The standard house types become generalized in all of the Greek colonies situated in this area. Therefore, several houses of the *pastas* type (Apollonia Pontica, Olbia), with a *peristyle* courtyard (Mesambria, Callatis, possibly Histria, Olbia, Chersonesos) and possibly *Herdraumhaus* (Kerkinitis) have now been identified. Some features become indispensable within the Hellenistic houses discovered in these Greek colonies: the central courtyard (usually paved and surrounded by a colonnade on three of its sides – the *pastas* – or on all four sides – the *peristyle*; it could also have been simple, without a colonnade), a single entrance coming from the street (mediated by a narrow passage or *prothyron*), the chambers placed around the courtyard on two or three rows, the basements situated under some of the ground chambers of the house (they could be reached from the courtyard with the help of a stone staircase), the amenities placed in different spaces of the house (stoves, hearths, niches, altars, cisterns, drain channels, fountains and even windows). A real progress is registered in the way

Greek houses were being constructed. Except for the already existing types (the *pastas* or with a *peristyle* courtyard), a new type of construction emerges on the western and northern shore of the Black Sea. It is the so-called house with *oikos*. In this case the term is used to define the actual living space inside the house. Such houses had a central courtyard, small in dimensions, with no colonnade. The special feature within these houses is a large room (*oikos*), which exceeds the other chambers in dimensions, situated on the north side of the courtyard. It's possible that this chamber had a multifunctional character. Houses of this type have been identified in almost all of the above mentioned colonies (Callatis, Tomis, Histria, Orgame, Tyras, Nikonion, Olbia, Kerkinitis, Chersonesos). No matter the house type, all dwellings had a few chambers with pre-established purposes, like the basements and the *andrones*. As in the previous period, basements were used both for storage and for living. The *andron* was an important room within the living space and one of the few chambers of the house in which case the purpose could be determined. This was the room where guests were welcomed and where the *symposium* took place. Also, it was determined to be a specifically masculine space (*andronitis*). This room could easily be identified because of its decorations (a mosaic decorating the floor, painted walls) and furniture (which is usually not preserved). Such chambers have rarely been discovered in the Greek houses discovered in the colonies situated in this area. Some of the cities, where houses that had *andrones*-like chambers were discovered, are: Mesambria, Callatis, Olbia, Kerkinitis, Chersonesos. In some cases, the *andron* did not have a decorated floor. Instead, it was covered by a simple pavement and had raised platforms on the edges for placing the couches (Olbia, Kerkinitis).

As the new types of houses become generalized, the domestic complexes also experience an increase in their dimensions. In the Greek colonies discussed above, houses now occupied a surface of 85-115 m² (Apollonia Pontica, Mesambria, Kerkinitis), sometimes reaching 200-250 m² (Olbia) or even 600-650 m² (Olbia, Chersonesos). These houses were different from the standard types because of their regional peculiarities. One of these local features is the existence of the basement inside the house. As already mentioned, other features include: the water-collecting cisterns (build of stones at Apollonia Pontica and dug into the ground, inside the basements, at Olbia), the niches used for placing representations of divinities (Olbia), the domestic altars occupying a certain space inside the courtyard (Berezan, Olbia, Kerkinitis, Chersonesos), a street grid or parallel alleys enclosing the residential block (for example at

Kerkinitis, where the house entrances were only placed on hidden alleys). Together with the new house types, a new construction technique appears to have been used during this period. This was called the substructure system and it was especially used for building the foundations of houses. This technique comes in use at the half of the 4th century BC and it could only be identified at Histria, Nikonion, Olbia and Kerkinitis. The substructures consisted of alternative layers of clay and ashes, which could easily be distinguished from the elevation walls. At Nikonion, Olbia and Kerkinitis, the house walls directly superposed these layers. It is therefore possible to assume that this system was used in order to strengthen the ground where the building was to be erected or simply because it was a cheaper way to build the foundations. The situation is different in the case of Histria, where several layers of this kind crossed each other and only a few of them were actually superposed by walls. Giving the fact that the land was swampy in this area (the north-west plateau of the ancient city), it is possible that the substructure system, also called the Olbian foundations system, was simply used to stabilize the ground in order to erect buildings in the area.

Another important fact is the appearance of new types of Hellenistic houses which do not follow the rules set out by the standard types (*pastas*, *prostas* or with a *peristyle* courtyard). The new types were represented by simple houses which consisted of several chambers placed around the interior courtyard, with Γ or Π shaped plans and a south-east or south-west orientation. Houses with such plans have so far only been identified at Olbia, in the sector called NGS, and at Kerkinitis. It is also worth mentioning that only in the case of these colonies, reconstructions of the house plans were made, therefore enabling observations regarding the arrangement of the interior chambers. It is therefore possible to have similar houses built in the other Greek colonies as well. Future research and an attempt to reconstruct the plans of the houses already discovered in these cities, can unveil new details regarding the existing types (this is the case for Apollonia Pontica, Odessos, Callatis, Tomis, Histria, Tyras, Nikonion).

The present paper gives an overall presentation regarding the architectural features of houses during the Greek periods, their plans and the types which have been determined based on their archaeological remains as they were discovered on the western and northern shore of the Black Sea. A lot of the data related to the houses discovered here are still missing because of the way research was conducted in many of these Greek colonies and due to the difficulties registered during archaeological excavations. Since many of the Greek colonies in this area are superposed

by modern cities (Apollonia Pontica, Mesambria, Odessos, Callatis, Tomis, Tyras, Kerkinitis), most of the houses and the public buildings have been discovered during rescue excavations. Therefore, the data regarding the urban plans of these cities remains incomplete. In addition, the previous research carried out within these ancient sites was not fully or properly published and, as a result, many of the materials discovered inside the houses as well as the house plans remained unpublished. Such is the case for Apollonia Pontica (modern Sozopol) and Odessos (modern Varna). An exception is Mesambria, where two of the houses discovered within the residential area of the ancient city were published in detail together with the archaeological materials discovered in their interior space. Another problem is that for most of the houses discovered in this area plans or reconstructions were not realized (Apollonia Pontica, Odessos, Callatis, Tomis, Histria) which makes it harder to interpret the way spaces were arranged inside the house and how they were used. The information provided so far by the archaeological discoveries enabled a few theories regarding the house types and the way space was organized inside the house. At the same time, regional peculiarities could be determined. Future research and excavations in these Greek colonies could provide more information regarding the general appearance of residential quarters as well as new data on the architecture of the houses built within them. The only Greek colonies which benefit of a more detailed research on the existing residential blocks and the on the semblance of houses, are Nikonion, Olbia, Berezan and Kerkinitis (at Nikonion and Kerkinitis only private buildings were found, but no public buildings). The houses typical for this part of the ancient Greek world can also offer relevant information regarding the social relations taking place within the communities inhabiting these cities (inside the family, but also between the family and the society), the everyday activities practiced by the inhabitants, their social status and the way private space was perceived by the society.