

THE FIRST THRACIAN URBAN AND RURAL DWELLINGS,
AND STONECUTTING TECHNIQUES

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Late Bronze Age civilisation in Thrace reveals a very high level of cultural development, and some fortified urban nuclei are known from southern Thrace and also from the Thracian lowland, as from Nebettepe of Plovdiv. Late Bronze Age Kastanas and Assiros seem to have had parallels in Thrace (especially Koprivlen).

Thracian Early Iron Age forts are known in the southern Thracian mountains in the 1st millennium BC, but their traces consist only of fortifications and of some rock carvings with solar symbols. They functioned as cult and assembly centres, and were thus similar to those sanctuaries which were the centres of Greek *ethnê* in the non-*poleis* parts of Greece. Thanks to the ongoing project of cataloguing all Bulgarian sites, whose first steps were organised by the late Mieczyslaw Domaradzki, much more is now known about the settlement network in the Iron Age than formerly: a useful general survey has been published by A. Gotzev (1997). The situation seems to have remained similar over large parts of Thrace even in the later Iron Age. The Thucydidean 'towers' were apparently small forts with some military and governmental function, but were not yet real towns in as much as their industrial and trade activities were limited.

Hecataeus and Herodotus already knew several cities of Thracians in the Chalcidice and east of it, notably those of the Edonians. We know only some of their cemeteries, such as Sindos, archaeologically; similar early Thracian urban settlements in Bithynia and Mysia are known only modestly, but since they were already called cities by the early Greek historians, they should be seriously considered as such (see especially Herodotus 2. 2. 23; 1. 24. 2; 1. 126. 1). Those situated east of the Vardar-Axios seem to have developed from earlier settlements on the *toumbas*, *selištne mogili* (settlements mounds) like Kastanas, Assiros and the Toumba of Thessaloniki (see especially the series of Kastanas publications edited by B. Hänsel). New excavations have revealed more of them in the Chalcidice, where the first Greek colonies were founded as early as the Ionian cities in Asia Minor: Torone is one of the best examples of this class (Bouzek 1997, 87-8; 151-2; 246-8). Koprivlen may also have a history similar to Assiros and Kastanas: there are similar imports

of 6th century Greek pottery as in analogous sites further south, and also a Late Bronze Age predecessor (Bozkova *et al.* 1998; Fig. 1).

While Nebettepe of Plovdiv – prior to Philip – was probably one of the towers of Thucydides (judging from its size), other representative sites such as Vasil Levski and on the Mandren lake (Balabanov 1984) were places where influential *reguli* lived and had their representative manors. Debelt was probably a trading place (Balabanov 1986; *cf.* Tsetskhladze 1998a, 59-60). Vasil Levski is an exceptional site (Domaradzki/Kisjov 1990; Kisjov 1990; 1992; 1994; Fig. 2). Much Late Archaic Greek pottery was found there; the large building was built of ashlar masonry of soft limestone of a superior quality of execution (Figs. 3, 2-3; 4, 1), well comparable with Greek standards of the time. As in many other parts of the world, the soft stone was worked earlier than the harder stones.

The beginnings of Pistiros as a trading post (see *contra* Tsetskhladze 2000) also belong to the time of the earliest graves with Greek imports at Duvanli (Fig. 5), at the time of the ‘princely’ building at Vasil Levski (Filow 1935; Bouzek 2000). Pistiros may already have been one of the Greek trading posts in central Thrace at that time – during and after the Persian occupation of Thrace and northern Greece, before the battles of Marathon and Salamis opened up easier access to the Odrysians for the Greeks (especially the Athenians). According to Domaradzki, Duvanli was the royal cemetery of the Odrysians, not, as had hitherto been thought, of the Bessi (Domaradzki/Kisjov 1990; Domaradzki/Taneva 1998). Odrysian kings often formed alliances with Greek cities (Maroneia, Athens, etc.) out of common interest; common interest also led them to tolerate the existence of the *emporion* Pistiros, perhaps partly because many of its founders were Maroneians, from a city with traditionally very good relations with the Odrysian kings (Domaradzki 1996, 30-1; Velkov/Domaradzka 1996, 210-6). The beginnings of Pistiros were also similar to the earlier foundation of Greek colonies elsewhere.

After its monumental fortifications were built in the third quarter of the 5th century BC, Pistiros became undoubtedly an urban structure. The stonecutting technique used on the city walls is identical with that of the Thracian tomb situated only a few hundred meters away (Venedikov 1946; Fig. 4, 2). As this is precisely the time of the growth of monumental tomb construction in Bulgaria south of Stara Planina, stonecutters from Pistiros may well have been the teachers of local Thracian artisans (*cf.* Tsetskhladze 1998b, 66-80, esp. 79-80). Fourth century Pistiros had a regular plan: streets lined with colonnades and a sophisticated sewerage system with well-built canals. From the famous inscription (Velkov/Domaradzka 1996) and from graffiti we know that it also had some kind of self-government, a city council. Seuthopolis as a new foundation was a real city with a regular plan, fully urban when compared with Greek *poleis*, but with Thracian specifics such as hearth-altars, a phenomenon also known from Pistiros, and a royal palace (Domaradzki/Taneva 1998, 39-40; Dimitrov/Cicikova 1978; Dimitrov 1984). Kabyle was slightly different

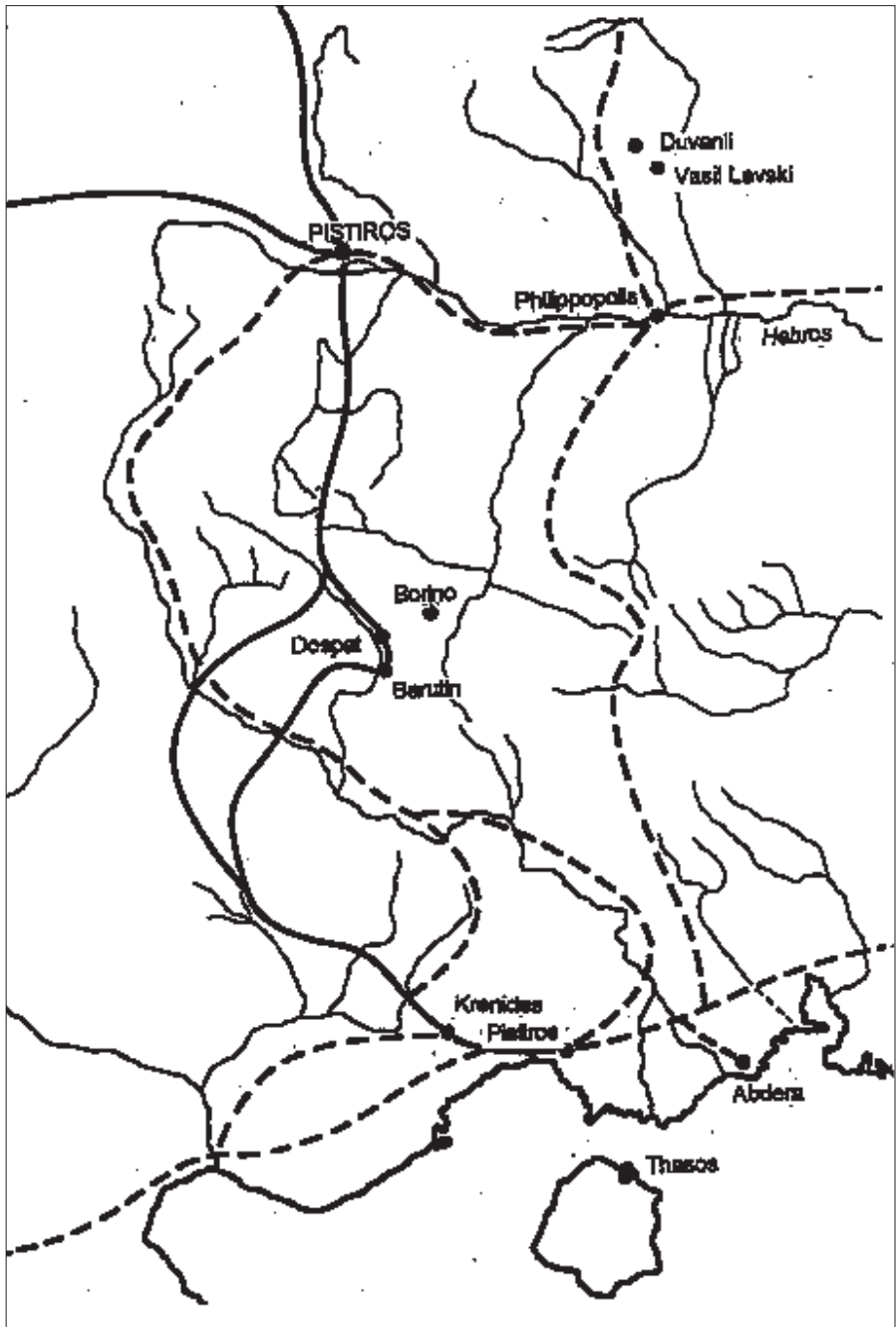


Fig. 1. Map showing the possible main routes of Greek penetration from the Aegean coast into central Thrace.

on account of its geographic position, but it too was a real city, at least from the time of Philip II (Velkov 1982; Domaradzki/Taneva 1998, 16-21). Pernik (Krakra: Cangova 1981, 52-106) is less well-known, but its urban character cannot be doubted; its fortifications are similar to those of Amphipolis, later in execution than those of Pistiros first phase. The situation of Nebettepe of Plovdiv is even less well known, but the city may have existed here well before Philip II (Pejkov 1994; 1995; for the chronology *cf.* Domaradzki/Taneva 1998, 22-9). Other urban centres of the 4th century BC existed at Simeonovgrad (Asara) and Mezek (Kaletto), but they are much less well-known archaeologically. The house at Mandren lake investigated by P. Balabanov has already been mentioned among the Thucydidean *turseis*.

The citizens had to have laws and assemblies. The Pistiros inscription was for the Greeks, but Thracians could see and probably read it publicly, and other inscriptions from the area and from Seuthopolis (such as that of Berenike and her sons) were made public for the Thracian citizens of these towns. The phenomenon of public inscriptions shows that the community of citizens was based on written laws and a juridical system; this is even clearer evidence of city status than is urban planning (*cf.* Archibald 1998, 308-11).

North of Haemus is situated the Thracian city of Sboryanovo, which flourished in the 3rd century BC (Stoyanov 1997; this volume). The known fortifications (Fig. 6) show its special importance, but the interior of the city is only partly excavated, and modest – parallels to Sboryanovo exist in south-eastern Romania, but it may best be considered the capital of a royal dynasty of the Getae whose cemetery was situated at Sveshtari. The Sumen settlement may also have been of an urban character, but it has not been investigated thoroughly enough to give a clear picture, and is probably later than Bobata near Osmar (Antonova 1995, 15; Domaradzki/Taneva 1998, 43). Another important site was on the hill Caravec (Domaradzki/Taneva 1998, 43).

The developments of ashlar masonry and of urban buildings in Thrace, which went hand in hand, are only now becoming known in more detail; they are new and interesting fields of study. The purpose of this introductory note is to arouse the interest of scholars in this new evidence.



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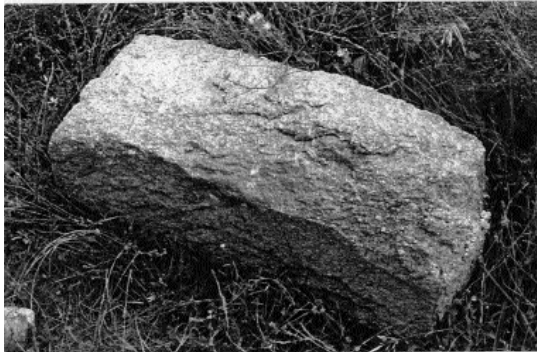


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Fig. 2. Vasil Levski. Photographs, J. Bouzek.
1. General view;
2. Fragments of tiles.



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Fig. 3. Vasil Levski. Photographs, J. Bouzek.
1-2. Ashlar blocks of soft limestone;
3. Fragments of tiles.



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Fig. 4. Pistiros-Vetren. Photographs: J. Bouzek.

1. Ashlar block of limestone;

2. Ashlar block from the entrance of Thracian tomb at Vetren.

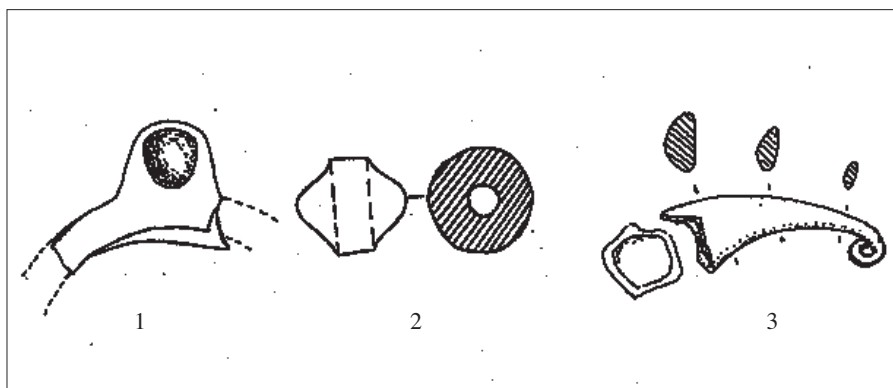


Fig. 5. Selection of the earliest finds from Pistiros.

1. Nozzle of lamp, *ca.* 500 BC;

2-3. Bronze bead and fragment of fibula, 6th century BC.

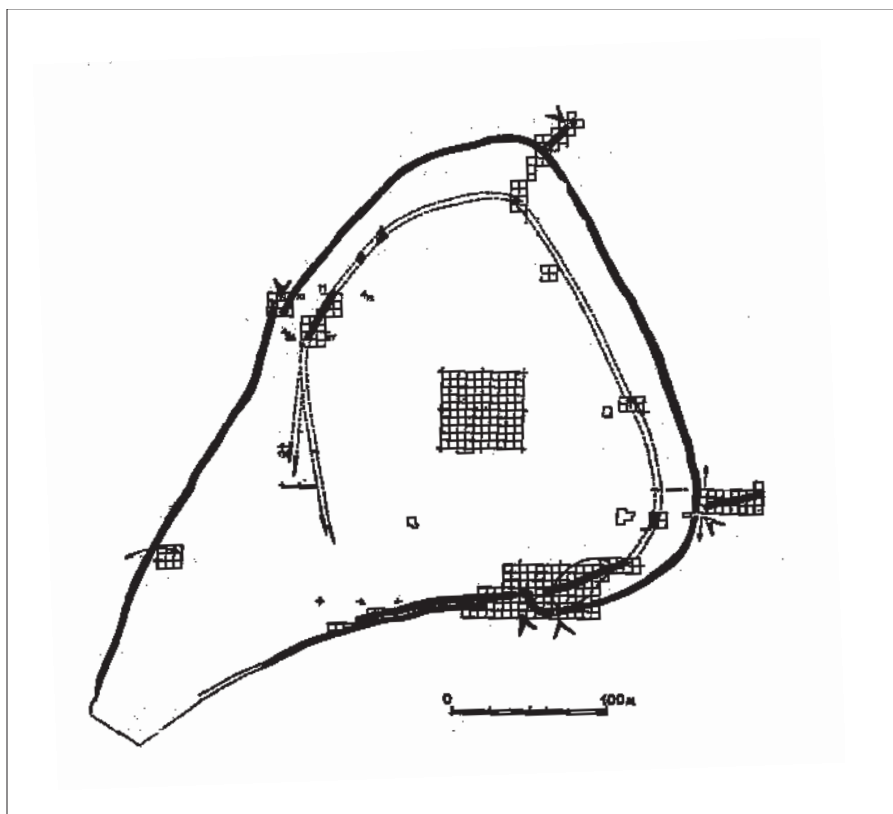


Fig. 6. Map of Getic city of Sboryanovo. After Stojanov 1997.

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