



Cercinitis

Summary :

Ancient Cercinitis is located in the Crimean Peninsula. It was an Ionian colony founded probably in the 6th c. BC. Since written testimonies are either obscure or non-existent, archaeological evidence is the primary tool for the reconstruction of the city's past. Cercinitis was a member of the Athenian League and later it was annexed by the Taurian Chersonesos till its capture by the Scythians in the 2nd c. BC. Agriculture and fishing formed the basis of the economy of Cercinitis, while Olbia and Chersonesos were its main trade partners. Excavations have also illuminated some aspects of religious life and allowed a secure reconstruction of the city's urban planning and fortification system.

Other Names

Carcine, Καρκινίτις

Geographical Location

Crimean Peninsula

Historical Region

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1.1 Location

The location of ancient Cercinitis is securely identified today on the north-western coast of the Crimean peninsula within the western part of the modern town of Eupatoria, a former well-known Soviet children's resort. Most of the remains of the ancient city lie underneath modern buildings. It occupied a square of approximately 5,5-6 ha. on the extremity of the cape on the west edge of the Eupatoria Bay. The ancient harbour was situated to the north-east part of the city on the position of the modern sea-port.

1.2 Name

In written sources the city name appears in two variants. Greek authors called it "Καρκινίτις".¹ Roman writers referred to "Carcine" or "Καρκίνα".² In local epigraphic sources it was named "Κερκινίτις".³ The latter variant reflected a change in the dialect from Ionic to Doric, which took place at the end of the 4th c. BC., obviously due to the considerable influx of Dorian settlers from the [Tauric Chersonesos](#).⁴ The name "Καρκινίτις" might be associated either with the natural abundance of crabs in the Eupatoria Bay or with the shape of the ancient city harbor.⁵ Some attempts to prove that the city was named after a local tribe or its founder seem to have been unsubstantiated.

1.3 Date of foundation

Ancient sources do not mention the possible metropolis of ancient Cercinitis or the date of its establishment. Thus, the only way to trace the initial date of its foundation is the investigation of archaeological evidence. Archaeological materials from the lowest layers of the city uncovered so far suggest that there had been a Greek settlement already in the third quarter of the 6th c. BC. To this date belong early finds of imported pottery consisted of painted Ionian [kylices](#) and fragments of the so-called [Clazomenian amphorae](#) decorated with floral motifs.⁶

1.4 Origin of initial settlers

For a long time there was no agreement among scholars regarding the character of the Greek population who founded Cercinitis. A Dorian origin of the first settlers found some supporters among specialists.⁷ However, archaeological finds from early layers undoubtedly testify that Cercinitis from the very beginning was an Ionian colony. This statement is further reinforced by the use of Ionian script on graffiti, by archaeological finds related to the [worship of Ephesian Artemis](#) and by the use of [Ionian](#) architectural elements on buildings. In conclusion, it should be comprehended that the suggested date concerning the foundation of the city could



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be connected with the mass migration of population from the Greek poleis, caused by the Persian invasion in [Ionia](#) in the third quarter of the 6th c. BC .⁸

2. History

The 6th and 5th c. BC history of the polis is quite obscure as there is no reference in the written testimonies. However, it can be stated that Cercinitis might have been member of the [Athenian \(Delian\) League](#) as its name is included in the Athenian Tribute list of 425 BC.⁹ Moreover, the reconstruction of the city-wall, dated in the end of the 5th c. BC is indicative of some military threat at that time. A graffito from Cercinitis threw light on the nature of this threat, as the payment of tribute to the [Scythians](#) is mentioned.¹⁰

The most important event of the city's history was its annexation by Taurian Chersonesos approximately in the third quarter of the 4th c. BC. According to the archaeological evidence this annexation was peaceful and, although Cercinitis possessed a quite powerful city-wall rebuilt in the middle of the 4th c., no destruction layers of this time here have been uncovered. Thus, this annexation might have been a military or political treaty between the two cities as Cercinitis continued to issue its own coins and obviously preserved for short time some sort of autonomy.¹¹ However, by the end of the 4th c. BC the city had been already enumerated among Chersonesian possessions in the North-Western Crimea in the so-called Chersonesian Oath.¹² Prosopographical material as well as the necropolis' finds testify that during the first half of the 3rd c. BC the number of the Dorian population in the city (obviously due to the influx of settlers from Chersonesos) rose quite considerably.

The advent of the 3rd c. BC marked a very uneasy period in the history for all Greek settlements in Crimea. Scythians pushed away from their former territories in the steppe region of Southern Russia and Ukraine by other powerful nomads such as [Sarmatians](#), penetrated in the Crimea and strengthened their pressure on the Greeks there. The Greek population of the [chora](#) had to evacuate their houses and to abandon their land-plots in order to move within the protective city-walls. By the end of the third quarter of the 2nd c. BC Cercinitis practically lost its whole chora. The consolidation of Crimean Scythians into a real kingdom with Neapolis (modern Simpheropol) as its capital and the continuously increasing Scythian threat might have caused the Greek population of the city to abandon it and to move to Chersonesos. Slab grave covers of the 2nd c. BC excavated in Chersonesos, bear close similarities to those found at the necropolis of Cercinitis, which indeed indicates the presence of refugees from this city there. Thus, Scythians settled on the site of former Greek Cercinitis, but they stayed there, according to archaeological evidence, only until the end of the 2nd c. BC when [Diophantos](#), general of the Pontic king [Mithridates VI](#) began his anti-Scythian campaigns.

Though Cercinitis was sometimes mentioned in the [periploi](#) of Roman time¹³ no archaeological layers, which might have proved the existence of the city in the 1st -2nd c. AD have ever been found. Roman troops stationed in Chersonesos at that time constituted the Moesian fleet (Classis Moesica) which was plying along the shores and could have used former Cercinitis harbour as an anchorage. Furthermore, the existence of some small fishers' settlements on the site should not be excluded.

3. Economy

Agriculture formed the basis of the city's economy. Contrary to Chersonesos, where wine-making and gardening were the main components of agricultural production, inhabitants of Cercinitis were particularly keen on the cultivation of cereals. Remnants of farmhouses discovered near the city as well as traces of land division demonstrate that the chora, when autonomous, had an approximate size of 8.000-8.700 ha.¹⁴ Thus, the production of grain was enough to satisfy not only local needs but also the requirements of export.¹⁵

[Fishing](#) was another important occupation. Salted sturgeon was a popular export from the northern Pontic cities to other areas inhabited by the Greeks. A graffito from Cercinitis mentions these occupations. Besides, the first city coins had fish-like shapes while later images of sturgeons were depicted on the [obverse](#).

In addition, stone masonry was a well developed craft due to the abundant limestone sources in the vicinity of Cercinitis.¹⁶



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Finally, in the course of the 6th-5th c. BC [Olvia](#) was the main trade partner of Cercinitis. This is proved by the adoption of Olbian fashion in the production of cast arrows as well as by the issue of fish-like bronze coins and finds of Olbian pottery.¹⁷ When Cercinitis became part of the Chersonesian possessions, Chersonesos played the role of a practically sole transit trade centre and it gradually became the main supplier of Cercinitis with various handicraft articles.

4. Religion

Until today no remnants of either a public temple or shrine have been unearthed in Cercinitis. However, dedications preserved on ceramic vessels allow a speculation with regard to the existence of designated public cult places devoted to various deities such as [Apollo](#), [Athena](#), [Cybele](#) and Ephesian Artemis.¹⁸ The Chersonesian influence is reflected in the religious life as well. Findings related to home sanctuaries discovered in Cercinitis stressed the adoption of Doric cults. Among them the cult of [Heracles Soter](#) was of primordial importance.¹⁹ The worship of chthonian deities such as [Demeter](#) and [Kore](#)-Persephone should also be mentioned.

5. Urban planning and buildings

The first settlers of Cercinitis were living in dugout dwellings. However, by the end of the first quarter of the 5th c. BC ground stone buildings had already replaced their more primitive predecessors.²⁰ The city's space followed a carefully drawn elaborate architectural plan and it consisted of approximately 17-18 rectangular standard blocks of buildings. Each block comprised 16-17 stone houses, which covered an average area of 100-115 m². Most of these houses were one-storeyed; they had three to four rooms around an inner yard and were intended for a single family.

The city space was delineated by a defensive wall; three main phases of the city's gradual geographical expansion can be traced, which were followed by the construction of new fortifications – in the first half of the 5th c. BC, in the end of the century and in the third quarter of the 4th c. BC.

1. Hecat., fr. 184; Hdt. IV, 55.

2. Plin., *NH*, IV, 84-85; Pomp. Mela, II, 4; Ptol., *Geogr.*, III, 5, 13.

3. *IOSPE*, I (2nd edition), 352, 401.

4. Виноградов, Ю.Г., Щеглов, А.Н., «Образование территориального Херсонесского государства», *Эллинизм* (Москва 1991) p. 333.

5. Кутайсов, В.А., *Керкинитида* (Симферополь 1992) p. 55.

6. Кутайсов, В.А., *Керкинитида* (Симферополь 1992) p. 44-47.

7. Дашевская, О.Д., «О происхождении названия города Керкинитиды», *ВДИ* 2 (1970) p. 125.

8. Кутайсов, В.А., «Керкинитида и Западный Крым в 6 в. до н.э. – 4 в. н.э.», *Stratum plus* 3 (2001-2002) p. 356.

9. См.: *IG*, I2, 63; Meritt B.D., West A.B., *The Athenian Assessment of 425 BC* (Ann Arbor 1934) p. 69, 87-88; Meritt, B.D., Wade-Gery, H.T., McGregor M.F., *The Athenian Tribute Lists I* (Cambridge 1939), A9, 165; Meiggs R., Lewis D. *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford 1969) p. 199; Кутайсов, В.А., *Керкинитида* (Симферополь 1992), p. 362; Avram, A., Hind, J., Tsetschladze, G., "The Black Sea Area", in Hansen M. G., - Nielsen, Th. H. (eds.), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004) p. 928.



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13. Arr., *P. Pont.*, 30, 5.
14. Кутайсов, В.А., *Керкинитида в античную эпоху* (Киев 2004), р. 38.
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Glossary :

-  **chora, the**
The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.
-  **ionic order, the**
An architectural order devised in Ionia and developed in Asia Minor and the Greek islands in the 6th century BC. Its columns have elaborately moulded bases, fluted shafts (with fillets, ending in fillets), and volute capitals. The entablature consists of an three-fasciae architrave, a continuous frieze, usually richly decorated with reliefs, and a cornice. The Ionic order was more elaborate in dimensions, comparing with the Doric.
-  **kylix, the**
The most essential ancient drinking cup. It bears a wide and shallow body raised on a stem from a foot. It always has horizontal handles disposed symmetrically, often swinging upwards. The interior, flat, round bottom of the vessel was used as surface for painted decoration. There are many different types of kylikes such as the Komast type, the Siana type, types A, B, C, the Droop and the Cassel cups.
-  **obverse**
The face of the coin which bears the more important device. Due to ambiguities that sometimes exist, many numismatists prefer to use the term for the side struck by the lower (anvil) die.
-  **periplus, the**
From the greek word "περίπλους" (sailing-around), roughly corresponding to the Latin circum-navigatio. For Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines it was a manuscript document belonging to ancient documentary genre that survived in late antiquity. used as a guide for sea travelers. Thw periploi listed in order the ports and coastal lines, with approximate distances between, even shelters, that the captain of a vessel could expect to find along a shore, market towns, neighboring tribes and their wares. They also contain historical and mythological information and for the most part they are works of erudition.

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