



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

Περίληψη :

Phanagoria is a city of the Bosporan kingdom, situated in Asiatic side of the Straits of Kerch (Bosporus Cimmericus). Founded by Greek colonists from Teos in the middle of the 6th century BC, the city existed for ca. 1600 years. The archaeological excavations revealed remains of the ancient city.

Άλλες Ονομασίες

Phanagoreia, Phanagoreion, Phanagoria, Phanagorou polis, Phanagore, Phanagura, Phainagora, Agrippeia

Γεωγραφική Θέση

Taman Peninsula -Black Sea (modern Krasnodar)

Ιστορική Περιοχή

Bosporus Cimmericus

1. Geographical location

Phanagoria constitutes the largest ancient Greek city on Russian territory; it was one of the most important ancient cities along the [northern coast of the Black Sea](#). It is located on the shore of the Taman Peninsula (between the Black and the Sea of Azov in the Crimea) one km west of the settlement of Sennoi. The city had a privileged location – it had access to the Greek Bosporan cities across the strait as well as the territory of the Sindian and Maeotian tribes of the Taman Peninsula. The river Kuban (ancient Hypanis), flows in the west coast of the Sea of Azov not far from Phanagoria. In ancient times this region resembled an archipelago because of the branches of the river Kuban mentioned by many ancient authors.¹

The ancient settlement spans an area of 65 ha., it has the shape of a rectangle and expands on two plateaus (upper and lower), descending to the sea gulf. Unfortunately one third of the site has now been overflowed by the advancing sea. Underwater investigations showed that in ancient times the coast protruded into the sea for 250-300 m. During the long history of this city (more than 1600 years) a deep stratigraphy has been formed, often reaching the thickness of 7 m. for each cultural period. No modern construction has been built over the surface of the city remains.

2. Etymology

There is a certain Phanagorus (Phanagores, Phainagoras), mentioned in the ancient literary tradition,² who comes from the city of [Teos](#); it is believed that he was the founder of Phanagoria; thus, the city was named after him. The name of the city varies in different sources (Phanagoreia, Phanagoreion, Phanagoria, Phanagorou polis, Phanagore, Phanagura, and Phainagora).

3. Date of foundation

It is known that during the 7th and 6th c. BC the Ionian cities of Asia Minor undertook defensive wars against eastern empires ([Lydia](#), Persia). The citizens of the city of Teos, threatened by the possibility of Persian invasions, decided to move *en masse* to a new land. Their known migration to Abdera in Thrace is dated in ca. 545 BC. Historians suppose that at the same time a group of the refugees from Teos under the direction of a certain Phanagorus moved to the



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

Taman peninsula and founded Phanagoria. Hence, this coincidence led to the dating of the foundation of Phanagoria at the same time as Abdera, namely in the middle of the 6th c. BC. This supposition does not contradict the archaeological evidence. More specifically, fragments of [middle of 6th c. BC Ionian pottery](#) have been uncovered in the earliest levels of the "upper city". On the other hand, the ancient sources, concerned with the destiny of the Teians, do not mention the establishment of Phanagoria. Thus, it is assumed that it was founded by the Teians from Abdera and not directly from Teos.

4. History

The literary sources regarding the history of Phanagoria are scarce. The earliest belong to the 6th c. BC. [Hecataeus of Miletus](#) mentions Phanagoria as a city located on an island and named after a Phanagorus.³ The most detailed description of the location and of the significance of Phanagoria is given by [Strabo](#) (11. 2. 10): «Sailing into Lake Corocondamitis [modern gulf of Taman] one comes to Phanagoreia, a noteworthy city,⁴ and to [Kepoi](#), and to [Hermonassa](#), and to Apaturum, the sanctuary of [Aphrodite](#). [...] All the people who are subject to the potentates of the Bosphorus are called Bosphorians; and [Pantikapaion](#) [modern Kerch] is the metropolis of the European Bosphorians, while Phanagoreion is the metropolis of the Asiatic Bosphorians. Phanagoreia is well reputed for being an **emporium** for the commodities that are brought down from the Maeotis [modern Sea of Azov] and the barbarian country that lies above it, and Pantikapaion for those which are carried up thither from the sea.»⁵

In the beginning of the 5th c. BC Phanagoria, being the biggest city of the Asiatic part of the Strait of Kerch, was unified with Pantikapaion and other cities on both shores of the strait and formed a common state – the [Bosporan kingdom](#). The [Archaeanaktids](#) ruled from 480 BC up to 438 BC. Then, the [Spartocids](#) came to power till the end of the 2nd c. BC. This was the period of Phanagoria's greatest prosperity, probably a result of the [grain trade](#) with the Mediterranean, and especially with Athens. Grain was produced mainly in the [fertile Taman land](#), and in particular in the **chora** of Phanagoria. Huge quantities of valuable materials came to Phanagoria from the Mediterranean. Phanagoria was the most important centre of the transit trade: part of the goods (clothes, wine, olive oil, jewellery etc.) coming here was transported to inner regions of Kuban and further right up to Ural Mountains.

In the 1st c. BC Phanagoria was included in the huge [Pontic kingdom](#). But in the war, that [Mithridates VI Eupator](#) waged against Rome, Phanagoria supported the Romans. Appian in *Mithridatica*⁶ describes in detail this important episode that led to the end of Mithridates' rule:

"When he [Mithridates] had recovered from his illness and his army was gathered (it consisted of sixty picked cohorts of 6,000 men each and a great multitude of other troops, besides ships and strongholds that had been captured by his generals while he was sick), he sent a part of it across the strait to Phanagoria, another trading place at the mouth of the sea, in order to take possession of the passage on either side while [Pompey](#) was still in Syria. Castor of Phanagoria, who had once been maltreated by Trypho, the king's eunuch, fell upon the latter as he was entering the town, killed him, and summoned the citizens to revolt. Although the citadel was already held by Artaphernes and other sons of Mithridates, the inhabitants piled wood around it and set it on fire, in consequence of which Artaphernes, Darius, Xerxes, and Oxathres, sons, and Eupatra, a daughter, of Mithridates, in fear of the fire, surrendered themselves and were led into captivity. Of these Artaphernes alone was about forty years of age; the others were beautiful children. Cleopatra, another daughter, resisted. Her father, in admiration of her courageous spirit, sent a number of row-boats



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

and rescued her. All the neighbouring castles that had been lately occupied by Mithridates now revolted from him in emulation of the Phanagoreans, namely, [Chersonesus](#), [Theodosia](#), [Nymphaeum](#), and others around the Euxine whose location was ideal for purposes of war».⁷

After the end of the war, Phanagoria was declared independent by Rome as a sign of recognition for its role in the victory of Romans. Appian also says that «Pharnaces [son of Mithridates], for delivering Italy from much trouble, was inscribed as a friend and ally of the Romans, and was given Bosphorus as his kingdom, except Phanagoria, whose inhabitants were set free and independent because they were the first to resist Mithridates when he was recovering his strength, collecting ships, creating a new army and military posts, and because they led others to revolt and were the cause of his final collapse».⁸ Later Pharnaces besieged and captured intractable Phanagoria, despite the will of the Romans. Appian informs his readers (120): "Pharnaces besieged the Phanagoreans and the towns neighbouring to the Bosphorus until the former were compelled by hunger to come out and fight, when he overcame them in battle; yet he did them no other harm, but made friends with them, took hostages, and withdrew".

According to epigraphic and numismatic sources,⁷ either when [Polemon I](#) (14-9/8 BC) ruled or during the reign of queen Dynamis (9/8 BC – AD 7/8) Phanagoria was renamed in honour of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (general and son-in-law of [August](#)) into Agrippeia. At the same time Pantikapaion became Kaisareia – in honour of August.

In the 3rd – 4th c. Phanagoria fell into economic and cultural decline as the archaeological evidence attests. The process of the "[Sarmatization](#)" of Phanagoria intensified progressively, while excavations conducted at the necropolis unearthed many non-Greek features in burial customs.

The 4th c. was crucial for the history of Phanagoria: the hordes of the nomadic [Huns](#) intruded into the Black Sea littoral. Phanagoria was destroyed and burnt and most of the inhabitants perished. The Hunic devastation ended the Graeco-Roman period of the Phanagorean history. Phanagoria managed to be rebuilt after this invasion.

Despite the fact that during the Middle Ages the city could not reach its former glory, it played, however, a remarkable part among the other cities of the Northern Black Sea shore. Phanagoria was one of the administrative centres of Khazar Khaganat situated at that time between Volga and Dniepr. It is not accidental that the Byzantine emperor Justinian II ruling in Constantinople in 685-695 and 705-711 was exiled to Phanagoria.⁹

In the 7th c. Phanagoria was proclaimed the capital of Great Bulgaria initially geographically identified with the former Bosphoran kingdom. The march of the Bulgarian khan Asparukh to the Danube to settle the future Bulgarian homeland started just at that point.

5. Economy

So far, it has been proved that Phanagoria minted its [coins](#) from the end of the 5th century with interruptions up to the 1st c. BC. The coin bears the inscription *Phanagoritōn* ('of Phanagoreans') or abbreviations such as *Pha*, *Phana*. From the beginning of the 1st c. AD onwards the coins bore the inscription *Agrippeōn* ("of Agrippaeans").

The craft industry was well developed in Phanagoria. It was concentrated in the southern part of the city, although single workshops were also discovered in other parts. In one of these workshops, archaeologists found part of the lime



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

cast for a life-size bronze statue with the pattern of a foot. Apparently, the sculptor himself should have lived there too. In a part of his house used as workshop, fragments of marble statues were found. In another workshop dated to the 6th c. BC a "coroplastes" – a producer of [terracotta figurines](#) - worked. The kilns and moulds for producing these figurines, as well as the products themselves are preserved. The work of the master was suddenly interrupted: moulded, but not yet fired figurines were found scattered around the kiln.

The archaeological material found during the excavations amounts to hundreds of thousands of pieces. Among the most common categories of finds are fragments of [amphorae](#). In the course of hundreds of years, wine, olive oil and dry substances were imported to Phanagoria from many cities of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ([Klazomenai](#), [Chios](#), [Lesvos](#), [Rhodes](#), [Samos](#), Thasos, Corinth, [Heracleia](#), [Sinope](#), [Knidos](#), [Kos](#), etc.). [Amphorae](#) (up to the present more than 3000 amphora stamps were found) not only reveal the route of the trade contacts of Phanagoria, but also allow to trace fluctuations in the volume of this trade. For example, during the time that grain trade reached a peak with Athens, a huge amount of amphorae carrying different Greek products in exchange for the grain exports, was uncovered. In Phanagoria the so-called "house of the grain trader" of the 5th c. BC was excavated, with a big amount of pithoi dug in the ground and used for the storage of grain; in the same place about one ton of burnt grain has also been found.

In the southern part of the city, there was a whole quarter of craftsmen with well-preserved pottery kilns (amphorae, bowls, lamps, fishing and loom weights). Pottery manufacture from local clay existed in Phanagoria already in the end of the 6th c. BC. In the 5th c. BC local craftsmen produced tiles for architectural decoration.

Local residents were actively engaged in [fishing](#) as numerous finds of fishing weights as well as bronze fishing hooks testify. Viticulture was also developed based on the discovery of wine-pressing complexes and wine cisterns.

Many other goods, which were not produced locally, were imported in Phanagoria from the Mediterranean. The majority were cult objects (marble statues and terracotta figurines of the gods), luxury vessels made of bronze, and precious stones, jewellery articles, painted pottery etc.

6. Social organization

After its foundation Phanagoria was initially a typical Greek polis, i.e. an independent city-state, with its government, council (*boule*), citizen's assembly (*demos*), agricultural territory (*chora*) and borders. It should be assumed, that after being incorporated in the structure of the centralized Bosphoran kingdom with Pantikapaion as its capital, the autonomous functions of the democratic polis should have been reduced under that tyrannical form of ruling (it concerns first of all maintenance of the city's own armed forces as well as the regulation of foreign policy and trade).

The epigraphical sources testify to the presence of a "ruler of island" (*ho epi tes nesou*) in Phanagoria, of a "head of chancellery" (*aphegesamenos tou grammateiou*), of a "lochagos" and of a "politarches".¹⁰ However, in Phanagorian [honorary decrees](#) of the 2nd c. AD *boule and demos* are still mentioned.¹¹

In one of the Phanagorian inscriptions certain *pelatai* are mentioned, who live as servants to any temple (of Aphrodite's or of [Artemis](#)' Agrotera).¹² In *pelatai* the dependent farmers are included. It was a social category which also existed in other parts of the ancient world. The manumissions, mentioned in some inscriptions of Phanagoria, prove the existence



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

of slavery.¹³

Phanagoria being the capital of the Asiatic part of Bosphorus was in constant contact with barbarian Sindian-Maeotian population. Therefore, especially during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC some part of local population penetrated into the city, and even got Phanagorian citizenship by means of mixed marriages. The 5th century BC Phanagorian hand-made pottery is similar to the Sindian-Maeotian one. That is also evident by the appearance of representatives of local tribes among the inhabitants of Phanagoria. It is known that barbarian tribes provided contingents of warriors to Bosphoran rulers, took part in the economic life of the country, and its aristocracy mixed up with the Bosphoran upper class. The so-called *tamgas* (the insignia of the Iranian noblemen) are frequently discovered in the territory of the Greek cities.

7. Religion

It is known from the dedicatory inscriptions and from the descriptions of the ancient Greek authors, that the cults of [Apollo Iatros](#) and Aphrodite Urania or Apatura were the most important cults in Phanagoria¹⁴ as in other Bosphoran cities.¹⁵ Strabo says in his description of Phanagoria:¹⁶ "There is also in Phanagoreia a notable temple of Aphrodite Apaturus. Critics derive the etymology of the epithet of the goddess by adducing a certain myth, according to which the Giants attacked the goddess there; but she called upon Heracles for help and hid him in a cave, and then, admitting the Giants one by one, gave them over to Heracles to be murdered through 'treachery'". It is told in one of the dedicatory inscriptions, found in Phanagoria, that a certain Apollodorus, son of Phanagores, during the reign of the Bosphoran king Pairisades I (344/3 – 311/0 BC) set the statue, in honour of Aphrodite Urania "the mistress of Apaturus".¹⁷ Furthermore, dedicatory inscriptions were found, certifying the worship of Apollo Iatros (it was an all-Bosphoran cult), [Heracles](#), Artemis Agrotera or [Artemis from Ephesus](#) in the Greek cities of the Taman Peninsula and in Phanagoria. The temple of an unidentified goddess was located in Thiannea¹⁸ - the suburb of Phanagoria, and in the suburb Dioclea there was a temple of Apollo.¹⁹ The big amount of terracotta fragments, connected with the cult of [Demetra](#) and [Kore](#), Kabiroi, Aphrodite and Artemis, points to the gods worshiped in Phanagorian temples. In the Roman period many of the Bosphoran kings were leading priests of the [imperial cult](#).²⁰ The citizens consolidated frequently into religious communities (*thiasoi*). There have survived many lists of members of these *thiasoi* on inscriptions.²¹

Both literary sources and the archaeological evidence demonstrate the existence of Jewish and Christian communities here. In particular, the Phanagorian synagogue, known an inscription from AD 51, is one of the oldest in the Northern Black Sea shore. Hundreds of Jewish tombstones with the depiction of the menorah were found in the course of archaeological excavations in the necropolis of the city. Judging by the epigraphical evidence, there existed an Astara-Sanergos temple somewhere in the vicinity of Phanagoria.²²

8. Culture

We know little about the cultural life of the city. According to the archaeological and epigraphical evidence, a hellenistic [gymnasium](#) existed in Phanagoria,²³ which was also mentioned in a Roman inscription.²⁴ Moreover, some poets lived in the city, whose poems were inscribed on inscriptions.²⁵ Also remains of Hellenistic [houses](#) were excavated



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

featuring traces of multicolored decorated plaster. The latter suggests a demand for luxurious structures as well as the skill of local artists.

9. Urban planning and architecture

The excavations in Phanagoria started in the 19th c. At that time archeologists were interested only in barrows for luxurious finds to embellish the collections of the Emperor's Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Systematic scientific excavations started in 1936, when the famous Russian archaeologist V. D. Blavatskij was in charge of the expedition; the following directors were M. M. Kobylina, V. S. Dolgorukij, and in more recent years V. V. Kuznetsov. In the course of the centuries the stone ruins of Phanagoria were removed by local residents and the soldiers in order to build houses, churches and forts. The marble was burnt to produce lime, so, in the middle of the 19th c. there were no buildings on the surface, and many inscriptions perished. However, the excavations led to the establishment of the chronological limits of the existence of the city, its boundaries, the location of the necropolis and so on.

Furthermore, excavations pointed that the city was surrounded on three sides by a stone wall with gates. The city had a regular planning, its streets and walls of the buildings were oriented strictly on cardinal directions. The agora was centrally located and there stood public buildings, statues and the temple of Aphrodite (?). According to Appian there existed an acropolis at the highest point of the city. He also mentions the fortress that was attacked by Phanagorians who rebelled against Mithridates Eupator.²⁶ Probably, the fortress was wooden, because the insurgents managed to burn it.

In the course of the archaeological explorations of Phanagoria numerous remains of the buildings, belonging to different periods were found. In the Archaic period most of the houses were built from adobe bricks, and later from stone, although adobe was always in use (since the Taman peninsula was not particularly rich in stone sources). During the classical period (4th c. BC) large and well-made houses were built measuring around 200 m². The most important streets and squares were paved with stone, while the less important ones with sherds. The most interesting public building is a gymnasium in the western outskirts of the city with remains of its colonnade, painted plaster and tiled roof as well as the aforementioned temple of Aphrodite. Public wells and pottery kilns were also unearthed.

The city reached its maximum size in the period of its prosperity, between the 4th and the 2nd c. BC.

Phanagoria is surrounded by a huge necropolis, which includes different types of burials – from plain earth-tombs to stone vaults covered by a high burial mound. The excavations of the Phanagorian necropolis indicated that the Phanagorians were buried according to their financial status. There were different types of burials: pit graves; tombs made of tiles; simple stone tombs; crypts cut in the virgin soil; chamber tombs, where sarcophagi made of cypress wood or marble were placed. Some of the tumuli of the necropolis (for example Bol'shaja Bliznitsa) contained unique finds, such as magnificent jewellery (gold embellished rings, earrings, bracelets, pectorals, silver dishes, terracotta figurines etc.). Children were often buried in amphorae.

One third of the area of the ancient city now lies under the waters of Taman gulf. Underwater explorations, which started in the end of the 1950s and are intensively conducted nowadays, showed that the seabed of the gulf (area of 20 ha.) is littered with remains of ancient buildings. In one particular area numerous marble architectural remains were found which were attributed to a large building: part of the **architrave**, the threshold, and column drums. Also, a fragment of a female marble statue was found. Last but not least, some well-preserved Greek inscriptions recently



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

came to light.

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1. See Hecat. Mil. fr. 164 *FHG* (212 *FGH*); Strabo 11. 2. 10; Dionys. *Perieg.* 549; Ammian Marc. XXII, 8, 30.
 2. See for example already in the 6th c. BC Hecat. Mil. fr. 164 *FHG* (212 *FGH*). Ps.-Scymn. 886-889; Anonymi *Periplus Ponti Euxini* 73 (46); Eusthat. *Comm. ad Dionys. Perieg.* 549.
 3. Hecat. Mil. fr. 164 *FHG* (212 *FGH*).
 4. Cf. Plin. *NH* 6. 18.
 5. Transl. H. L. Jones.
 6. Appian. *Mithr.* 108, Cf. Paul. Oros. 6.5.2.
 7. Transl. H. White.
 8. Appian. *Mithr.* 113.
 9. Theophanes *Chronographia* sub anno 704.
 10. *CIRB* 1000.
 11. *CIRB* 979, 982, 983.
 12. *CIRB* 976.
 13. *CIRB* 985-986.
 14. *CIRB* 971, 972.
 15. *CIRB* 1041, 1045
 16. Strabo 11. 2. 10.
 17. *CIRB* 971.
 18. *CIRB* 976.
 19. *CIRB* 975.
 20. *CIRB* 981-983 (*arhiereus tōn Sebastōn*).
 21. *CIRB* 987-988.
 22. *CIRB* 1015.



Phanagoria (Antiquity)

23. CIRB 991.
24. CIRB 983.
25. CIRB 991-992.
26. Appian. *Mithr.* 108

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Phanagoria (Antiquity)

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Γλωσσάριο :

	amphora, the from the greek words "αμφί"(on both sides) and "φέρω" (carry): vessel with long ovoid body and a considerably narrower neck made in various sizes from the smaller perfume oil container to the large storage receivers of liquids and solids. It stands on a small foot and it bears two invariable vertical handles on either side. Some of the distinguished types of the amphorae are these whose lower part is tapering to the point (narrow bottomed), the neck type, the Nicosthenian, the Nola, the Panathenaic, the Tyrrhenian, the SOS type.
	architrave or epistyle The lowest part of an entablature resting on the columns capitals and supporting the frieze.
	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.
	emporion, the Places where trade was conducted, usually small settlements of urban character on the borders or along the coasts and the commercial routes. With the same term are characterized the trade districts, the markets outside the walls of a city and/or settlements being themselves trade centers.
	gymnasium The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.

Πηγές

Appian, *Mithridatica*
CIRB

Παραθέματα