



Summary :

The Sedmimbratni tumuli, also known as the "Tumuli of the Seven Brothers", belonged to the Sindian aristocracy and constitute the most significant burial complex of Sindice. According to the archaeological finds, they date in the period between the second quarter – mid-5th c. and the first quarter of the 4th c. BC. Along with the tumuli of Nymphaion, they are the earliest burial monuments of the local aristocracy in the region of the Greek cities of the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

Other Names

Tumuli of the Seven Brothers

Geographical Location

Cimmerian Bosphorus

Historical Region

Maeotian and Sindian lands

1. Location

The Sedmimbratni tumuli,¹ whose name indicates the number of the visible mounds, are located in the region of Krasnodar of the Anapa district, in the south of the Russian Federation, within a short distance from the estuary of the Kuban River – the ancient river Hypanis.

More specifically, they are approximately 30 km to the northeast of the city of Anapa, ancient [Gorgippia](#), and about 15 km to the west of Varenikovskaya, which is identified with the settlement of the Sedmimbratni of the Asian Bosphorus. This settlement of the late 6th c. BC,² founded on the boundary between Sindian and Maeotian territories,³ is identified with the city of Labrys or Labryte, according to the currently accepted opinion of T. Blavatskaja.⁴

The Sedmimbratni tumuli are divided into two groups: the group of the Large and the group of the Small tumuli. The Large group includes seven tumuli to the west of the settlement's fortification moat. Tumuli No. 2 to No. 7 stand on a straight line (with an E-W orientation), while tumulus No. 1, the largest of all, is within 250 m to the south of the last tumulus to the west (No. 2). The Small Sedmimbratni tumuli are also seven in number, according to the excavator, and are within just 3 km from the same settlement.

2. History of Research

Research in the wider area, including a geographical survey and excavation of nearby monuments, started on June 4, 1864 by order of the military commander of the district. Among the first monuments excavated were the Sedmimbratni tumuli.

Archaeological research in the tumuli was carried out in 1875, 1876 and 1878 by the renowned Russian archaeologist and researcher of the East V. G. Tiesenhausen, member of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission. Among others, the archaeological reports⁵ include the designs and dimensions of the Large group, but unfortunately there is little information available about the Small group, whose designs were never found.

The excavations followed the method of sections, therefore the picture is incomplete. The research was focused on the central burials. In some cases, as it happens with tumuli No. 1 and No. 7, there is some evidence concerning the other burials of the same tumulus.

Most burials have already been looted before the onset of the archaeological research and, as a result, there is little information about artefacts. In particular, tumuli Nos 1, 3, 5 and 7 were almost completely looted. Only the horse burials and some grave goods survived. Tumulus No. 4 was only partially looted, while the only tumuli found actually intact were No. 2 and No. 6 of the Large



group.

3. Description

The general view of the Sedmibratni tumuli has been preserved in a drawing by F. Gross included in the reports of the Russian Archaeological Commission.⁶ The height of the Large tumuli ranges between 3.2 and more than 16 m. More specifically, according to E. Vlasova, the height of tumulus 1 reached 14.91 m, while those of tumuli 2 to 7 were 6.035 m, 3.195 m, 12.78 m, 6.745 m, 11.36 m and 6.39 m, respectively.⁷ However, even this information is sometimes puzzling. For example, I. Kruglikova supports that the height of tumulus No. 1 exceeded 16 metres,⁸ while that of No. 2 was 18 m, according to D. Williams and J. Ogden.⁹

The main characteristic of all tumuli is the presence of graves made of rectangular mud bricks, and internally covered with wooden beams. Tumulus 1 was the exception, since its grave was made of stone. According to the excavation report, the grave of one of the tumuli of the Large group was also made of stone, though no detailed description has been found. It seems that the stone graves of the Sedmibratni tumuli were the exception rather than the rule. Due to lack of information, it is impossible to decide whether the tumuli containing stone graves were earlier or later than the majority.

As a matter of fact, graves made of mud bricks and wooden roof are also found at the cemetery of Tuzla¹⁰ near [Hermonassa](#), and are a particular feature of the region. As a rule, all graves were at the centre of the tumulus and had at least two areas with individual burials.

A second feature of the graves was the burial of horses, whose number differs from tumulus to tumulus, probably correlating with the age and social position of the deceased. In particular, the burials of the Large tumuli included 2, 13, 5, 4, 12, 7 and 4 horses, respectively. All horse burials were accompanied by bronze horse tacks decorated with animal representations.

Among the main features of the graves is also the presence of weapons in every burial. This fact, along with the burials of horses with their tacks and the location of the tumuli near the Greek cities, are of particular significance for the military history of the entire region and particularly for the riders of the local tribes, who started from this time on to play an increasingly important role. It should be noted here that the presence of riding warriors as mercenaries in the army of the Cimmerian Bosphorus is usually connected with the presence of large tumuli near Greek cities, including burials of horses and weapons.

Another important feature is the existence of rich grave goods in the burials.¹¹ They included locally produced pottery vessels and imported gold and silver Attic vessels, a variety of metal grave goods and numerous gold coins, some of which are real works of art.

The examination of the finds with regard to their repertoire indicates the presence of motifs and topics found in Greek mythology, as well as others referring to local tribal traditions. The frequent combination of these motifs hints to the creation of a common artistic language in the region. In any case, discrimination among cultural influences seems to be impossible in the Sedmibratni tumuli. Researchers increasingly talk about a synthesis of cultural elements and artistic motifs, which by all means include those concerning the culture of Caucasian tribes.¹²

Of particular interest are the remnants of textiles, leather and fur in some burials, which complete our knowledge of both the burial practises and the clothing of the Sindians and the tribes of the wider region.

However, a separate approach for each tumulus provides a clearer picture of the burials and the grave goods.

Tumulus No. 2, dated to the middle or the second half of the 5th c. BC, contained a wooden roofed grave from mud bricks measuring 8.00 X 6.00 m.¹³ On the NE corner of the grave there was a partition; inside the space created there was a burial placed on a special platform of mud bricks. The body was covered with approximately 300 relief gold foils, possibly sewn on either the shroud or the clothes.¹⁴ Some of them depicted imaginary animals or were shaped like animal heads like, for example, rams or wild



goats. This category also includes foils depicting lions, panthers, boars, deer and roosters. Others were adorned with motifs from Greek mythology, as it happened with foils bearing the heads of Achelous and [Athena](#) Promachos. The discoid foils depicting Medusa were of a clearly apotropaic character.¹⁵ There were also foils with representations of warriors and wild animals, human heads as well as foils showing roses and other floral decorative motifs.

Remnants of a leather tunic decorated with metal foils, some of them gilded and one silver, have been preserved from the clothes of the deceased. Other foils had relief representations of eagles spreading their wings or deer with gilded horn edges, which were habitually used as pectoral ornaments (grivna). The shoulders and the chest were covered with a net from metal, tubular foils, egg-shaped beads and bladeliike gear.¹⁶

The neck was adorned with a gold necklace with spheroid and leaflike gear of 450-425 BC.¹⁷ Beside the skeleton was the weaponry, which included an iron spear, a sword and bronze arrow heads.

The grave also included **black-figure** vessels of the second quarter of the 5th c. BC as well as impressive bronze and silver vessels, among which was a silver **phiale** with relief representations of **Satyr** heads encircling the image of an **omphalus**. Among the findings was also a gold **rhyton** showing a relief lion head of mixed technique. An alabaster **pyxis**, a gold cup of the third quarter of the 5th c. BC as well as foils with relief representations, possibly decorating some wooden vessels, including a vessel depicting the myth of Bellerophon and dated to 470-460 BC, are among the grave goods of the burial. Bellerophon, who is stabbing Chimera with his spear, is depicted naked on the winged Pegasus, wearing a large-brimmed hat (petasos) on his head. The central representation is surrounded with a band depicting six figures wearing Greek clothes. The relation between the six figures and the central representation remains unknown.¹⁸

Tumulus No. 4 was also constructed in the 5th c. BC, and more precisely in 470-460 BC.¹⁹ Its grave was possibly similar to that of No. 2. A leather corselet with sewn flaky metal foils was traced in the burial pit, at the centre of the tumulus, in a special partition of the burial beside the skeleton. The corselet was adorned with a gold crescent foil in the neck, while another foil with the high-relief representation of the Medusa-Gorgon adorned the chest.

Gold rhyta were found in the area of the head as well as a silver Achaemenid rhyton ending in the full-relief representation of a winged billy-goat.²⁰

Among the most outstanding grave goods is an exceptionally made silver cup with incised representations on the inside and a gilded sitting Nike offering libations, a work of Attic production dated to 470 BC. The goddess, with her wings opened, is sitting on a seat with shapely legs. The representation is similar to those found on Attic vessels.²¹

The same tumulus also included a bronze lampstand produced by Locrians in the first half of the 5th c. BC.

Typical examples of the zoomorphic technique are some sewn foils, such as the gold sewn triangular foil of the mid-5th c. BC depicting an eagle devouring a hare, a symbol of the destructive and reviving power of the tree of life, which is schematically rendered in the lower part of the representation, or another one with representations of imaginary animals from the same period.²² The same category also includes a fragment of a gold rhyton ending in dog's head.

Of particular interest is Tumulus No. 6, which was probably constructed in the first decade of the 4th c. BC. Its central grave is made from mud bricks and is divided into three parts. The eastern part included a stone grave from limestone slabs, which contained a wooden carved sarcophagus with shapely legs²³ and an inclined cover, internally lined with woollen fabric. The western and the central spaces were used for grave goods, while the third, southern space, for burying horses.²⁴

In this case, the deceased was buried with all his weapons, including an iron, flaky corselet, a fur hat and fur shoes. The outfit was covered with 110 gold sewn foils with relief mythological representations. The weapons were found beside the body.



A bronze mirror of the second quarter of the 5th c. BC, **amphoras**, a red-figure **pelike** of the first quarter of the 5th c. BC and a **red-figure** askos of the early 4th c. BC were found in a separate compartment of the grave. The grave goods of the burial also included a small ivory box depicting **Aphrodite** and **Eros**.²⁵

Some of the most interesting finds of the tumulus are 50 pieces of woven woolen fabric²⁶ used for covering the sarcophagus. The fabric, whose overall length exceeded 3 m, was seamed with at least 11 bands and decorated with three-colour painted decorations showing polymorphic mythological representations. Some of the images had their names written above them in Attic dialect, such as Athena, Nike, one of the Erinyes, Jocasta, Eulimene, Phaedra, Mopsus and Hippomedon. At the same time, the representations of animals and birds with features of the zoomorphic technique, like the representations of a lion-like griffin, a panther, boars, etc., constitute typical examples of mixed cultural motifs. All representations are surrounded by bands with floral decorations and eggs. The fabric is dated in the 4th c. BC and was probably manufactured at some workshop of the northern Black Sea.²⁷ The sarcophagus also included four pieces of a different woolen fabric with woven representations of birds and deer. The fabric was placed near the deceased's feet and must have been one of the garments.

The rest of the group's tumuli are dated in the 4th c. BC. Tumulus No. 1 had a stone grave, internally covered with lime mortar. Mainly bone arrowheads and vessel fragments were found here.

Tumulus No. 3, probably the most recent of all, seems to have been manufactured very hastily between tumuli Nos 2 and 4, which indicates that the burial followed a specific affinal or social rank/order. The grave goods, apart from the numerous sewn gold foils, include the gilded handle of a small machaira (curved sword) or sword (0.60-0.70 m), with the relief representation of an eagle-like griffin,²⁸ an amphora from Thasos and gold rings, one of which was made in the 5th c. BC and was adorned with a seal from rock crystal and the incised representation of a swine as well as a second ring adorned with a seal from chalcedony and the incised representation of a bear.²⁹ It is assumed that it was the grave of the Sindian king Hecataeus, who is reported by Polyaeus (Polyaeus, *Strategemata* VIII, 55).³⁰ Gold boat-shaped earrings dated in 450-425 BC were found in Tumulus No. 7.³¹ Among others, the woman's burial of the grave included three **lekythoi**, namely one red-figure and two black-glazed, dated in the first quarter of the 4th c. BC.

4. Interpretation

As for the question concerning the persons buried in the tumuli, opinions are divided. The most prevalent view is that the Sedmibratni tumuli belonged to members of the Sindian aristocracy.³² E. Vlasova considers possible that they were burials of Sindian kings.³³ According to a different opinion, based mainly on certain burial habits common among all **tribes** of the region, the tumuli are considered **Scythian burial monuments**.³⁴

In archaeological terms, the extremely rich grave goods of the tumuli indicate both the wealth of local aristocracy and its established relations with the Greek cities of the northern Black Sea in the 5th and 4th c. BC.³⁵ At the same time, they have an indisputable importance for the Sindian history as well as for the history of the wider geopolitical zone, particularly the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

1. For a chronology of the tumuli, see: Власова Е. В., "Семибратние курганы", *Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства*, 3:2 (Санкт-Петербург 2001), pp. 130-131. The region of Sindice, which Hecataeus of Miletus first reported (Hec., 166), included the Tamanski Peninsula and part of the Black Sea coast as far as modern Gelendzhik.

2. For the settlement Sedmibratni see: Анфимов Н. В., "Новые данные к истории азиатского Боспора", *СА VII* (Москва 1941), pp. 258-267; Анфимов Н. В., "К вопросу о населении Прикубанья в скифскую эпоху", *СА XI* (Москва 1949), pp. 241, 257-258; Анфимов Н. В., "Исследования Семибратнего городища", *КСИИМК* 51 (Москва 1953), p. 102.

3. For the Sindians, the Maeotians and their culture, see: Loukiachko S., "Entre Asie et Europe", in: *L' or des Amazones: Peuples nomads entre Asie et*



- Europe VIe siècle av. J.-C. – IVe siècle apr. J.-C., Musée Cernuschi, musée des arts de l'Asie de la Ville de Paris, 16 mars – 15 juillet 2001 (Paris 2001), pp. 59-65.
4. Блаватская Т. В., “Посвящение Левкона Г”, *РА 2* (Москва 1993), pp. 41-42.
 5. ОАК за 1878 г., pp. VII-VIII.
 6. See: Гайдукевич В. Ф., *Боспорское царство* (Москва-Ленинград 1949), p. 49, fig. 4.
 7. Власова Е. В., “Семибратние курганы”, *Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства*, 3:2 (Санкт-Петербург 2001), p. 127.
 8. Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгияния. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 89.
 9. Williams D., Ogden J., *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the classical World, Catalog of an Exhibition of Greek gold Jewelry from the Collections of the British Museum and the Hermitage Museum* (St.-Petersburg - New-York 1994), p. 128.
 10. Власова Е. В., “Семибратние курганы”, *Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства*, 3:2 (Санкт-Петербург 2001), p. 129.
 11. For the grave goods of the Sedmibratni tumuli, see: Кошеленко Г. А., Кругликова И. Т. Долгоруков В. С., *Античные государства Северного Причерноморья* (Москва 1984), p. 254, pl. LXVII, nos 1, 2, 4, 5, 11.
 12. See: Эрлих В. Р., Шамба Г. К., “К вопросу о влиянии прикубанского искусства на звериный стиль Центральной Абхазии”, *Материалы и исследования по археологии Кубани*, 5 (Краснодар 2005), pp. 164-171.
 13. For a diagram of the burial chamber, see: Williams D., Ogden J., *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the classical World, Catalog of an Exhibition of Greek gold Jewelry from the Collections of the British Museum and the Hermitage Museum* (St.-Petersburg - New-York 1994), p. 128, fig. 46.
 14. Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгияния. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 89.
 15. Williams D., Ogden J., *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the classical World, Catalog of an Exhibition of Greek gold Jewelry from the Collections of the British Museum and the Hermitage Museum* (St.-Petersburg - New-York 1994), p. 131, no. 74.
 16. Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгияния. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 89.
 17. Williams D., Ogden J., *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the classical World, Catalog of an Exhibition of Greek gold Jewelry from the Collections of the British Museum and the Hermitage Museum* (St.-Petersburg - New-York 1994), p. 131, no. 71.
 18. Горбунова К. С., “Серебряные килики с гравированными изображениями из Семибратних курганов”, in: Гиль Е., Шишло Б. (edit.), *Культура и искусство античного мира* (Ленинград 1971), pp. 23-26.
 19. Minns E. H., *Scythians and Greeks*, (Cambridge 1913), p. 206; Schefold K., “Der skythische Tierstil in Südrussland”, *ESA 121* (1938), p. 19; Гайдукевич В. Ф., *Боспорское царство*, (Москва-Ленинград 1949), p. 47.
 20. See Гиль Е., Шишло Б. (edit.) *Культура и искусство античного мира*, (Ленинград 1971), p. 108.
 21. Горбунова К. С., “Серебряные килики с гравированными изображениями из Семибратних курганов”, in: Гиль Е., Шишло Б. (edit.), *Культура и искусство античного мира* (Ленинград 1971), pp. 20-23.
 22. *L'or des Amazones: Peuples nomads entre Asie et Europe VIe siècle av. J.-C. – IVe siècle apr. J.-C.*, Musée Cernuschi, musée des arts de l'Asie de la Ville de Paris, 16 mars – 15 juillet 2001 (Paris 2001), pp. 40, 41.



23. Кошеленко Г.А., Кругликова И.Т., Долгоруков В.С. (edit.) *Античные города Северного Причерноморья* (Москва 1984), p. 320, pl. CXXIX, no. 5.
24. Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгиппия. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 90.
25. Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгиппия. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 90.
26. For pieces of woolen fabric with representations of four-in-hand from the Sedmibratni tumuli, see also: Блаватский В. Д., *Античная археология Северного Причерноморья* (Москва 1961), p. 65, fig. 24.
27. See: Stefani; L., *ОАК 1878-1879* (Санкт-Петербург 1881), p. 120, pl. IV; Jacobsthal; P., *Ornamente griechischer Vasen*, (Berlin 1927), p. 148; Герцигер Д. С., “Покрывало из VI Семибратнего кургана”, *ПЭ* 13 (Ленинград 1972), p. 108; Герцигер Д. С., “Античные ткани в собрании Эрмитажа”, in: *Памятники античного прикладного искусства* (Ленинград 1973), p. 76, fig. 4.
28. Кошеленко Г.А., Кругликова И.Т., Долгоруков В.С. (edit.) *Античные города Северного Причерноморья* (Москва 1984), pp. 267, 279, pl. LXXXI, no. 25.
29. Неверов О. Я., *Античные инталии в собрании Эрмитажа* (Ленинград 1976), p. 84, nos 17, 92, and no. 47, including relevant bibliography.
30. Власова Е. В., “Семибратние курганы”, *Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства*, 3:2 (Санкт-Петербург 2001), p. 131.
31. Williams D., Ogden J., *Greek Gold: Jewelry of the classical World, Catalog of an Exhibition of Greek gold Jewelry from the Collections of the British Museum and the Hermitage Museum* (St.-Petersburg - New-York 1994), p. 131, no. 75.
32. See: Кругликова И. Т., *Синдская гавань. Горгиппия. Анапа* (Москва 1975), p. 90; Анфимов, Н.В., *Древнее золото Кубани* (Краснодар 1987), p. 98.
33. Власова Е. В., “Семибратние курганы”, *Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства*, 3:2 (Санкт-Петербург 2001), pp. 129-130.
34. See: Граков, Б.Н., *Скифы* (Москва 1971).
35. For these relations, see: Зеест И. В., “Внутренняя торговля Прикубанья с Фанагорией”, *МИА* 19 (Москва 1951), pp. 107-109; Кругликова И. Т., “Некрополь поселения у дер. Семёновка”, *СА* 1 (1969), from p. 98 onwards; Масленников А. А., *Население Боспорского государства в VI-II вв. до н. э.* (Москва 1981), p. 19; see also: Анфимов Н. В., “Новые данные к истории азиатского Боспора (Семибратнее городище)”, *СА* VII (Москва 1941), pp. 258-267; Анфимов Н. В., “Исследования Семибратнего городища”, *КСИИМК* 51 (Москва 1953), pp. 99-111. In particular, for the relations between Sindice and the Bosporus, refer to the inscription from Nymphaion found during the 2000 AD excavations, where Leucon of Bosporus is also reported as the ruler/archon of the entire Sindice: Соколова О. Ю., “Новая надпись из Нимфея”, *Древности Боспора* 4 (Москва 2001), pp. 370-371.

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	Власова Е.В. , "Семибратние курганы.", <i>Боспорский феномен: Колонизация региона, формирование полисов, образование государства, 3.2</i> , Санкт-Петербург 2001, 127-132
	Герцигер Д. С. , "Покрывало из VI Семибратнего кургана", <i>ТГЭ</i> , 13, 1972, 97-109
	Герцигер Д. С. , "Античные ткани в собрании Эрмитажа", <i>Памятники античного прикладного искусства</i> , Ленинград 1973, 71-99
	Горбунова К.С. , "Серебряные килики с гравированными изображениями из Семибратних курганов", Гиль, Е. – Шишло, Б. (eds), <i>Культура и искусство античного мира</i> , Ленинград 1971, 18-38
	Коровина А. К. , "К вопросу об изучении Семибратних курганов", <i>СА</i> , 2, 1957, 174-187
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	Силантьева Л.Ф. , "Семибратние курганы и их значение для изучения культуры синдов", <i>Тезисы докладов научной сессии Государственного Эрмитажа</i> , Ленинград 1967, 46-48

Glossary :

	amphora, the
	from the greek words "αμφί"(on both sides) and "φέρο" (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 Tyrrenian, the SOS type.
	black figure technique
	Decorative technique of vase painting. It involves painting figures in black silhouette on the pale clay, while the anatomic details are given in incised lines.
	lekythos, the
	A perfumed oil container with a narrow mouth and one vertical handle. There are lots of variants of this shape. They are predominant during the 5th c. BC. A common find is also the aryballoid lekythos with a globular and squat body. White lekythoi were used solely as votive offerings in burials.
	omphalos phiale
	An open, flat bottom shallow bowl with a hemispherical bulge (omphalos= navel) at its bottom.
	pelike, the
	another version of the amphora. It appears for the first time in 520 BC. It consists of a globular body, a short neck, a projecting thick rim, vertical handles and a short base. Due to its stability, merchants used to store in it valuable ointments for sale.



	phiale
A shallow vessel with an open rim.	
	pyxis, the
Small vessel with a lid. Women kept inside cosmetics or jewels. It bears no handles except for the skyphoid pyxis of Sicily.	
	red figure technique, the
Decorative technique in pottery, in which the figures are represented in red colour on the vase's dark background, while the details of the clothes and of the anatomy are given with incised lines.	
	rhyton, the
libation vessel with an outlet at the bottom of the vessel allowing the slow outflow of the liquid.	