

SARMATIANS ON THE STEPPE

ORIGINS AND LANGUAGE OF THE SARMATIANS

*The language of the Sauromatae is Scythian, but not spoken in its ancient purity [...]*¹⁹

Cimmerian-Scythian Prelude

The first peoples known by name, the Cimmerians and the Scythians, appeared on the south Russian steppe in the 9th-8th centuries BC. The language of the Scythians was first proven to be an Iranian tongue by Zeuss in 1837; an attribution confirmed by Müllenhoff in his study published in 1866²⁰. Although the validity of this linguistic attribution was seriously debated at the time²¹, the classification of the so-called Scythian-Sarmatian-Alanian language as Iranian is no longer challenged by any serious scholar. In addition to the linguistic corpus made up of geographic, tribal and personal names, the language of the Caucasian Ossets, the still living descendants of the Sarmatians/Alans, serves as an excellent starting point for linguistic studies²². The cumulative evidence indicates that the Scythian-Sarmatian tongue can be assigned to the northern Iranian languages. The tongue spoken by the Scythians and by the related Sauromatae/Sarmatians and Alans had no doubt undergone significant changes during their long sojourn on the steppe. It yet remains to be determined whether the differences between Scythian and Sarmatian is merely one of chronology or whether they were dialects of the same language²³. Neither can there be any doubt today that the Cimmerians were close relatives of the Scythians, perhaps a group of the same people²⁴.

An Iranian presence can be demonstrated on the steppe well before the appearance of the first peoples known by name and this Iranian hegemony remained unbroken until the Hun conquest. As this is not a specialist work on linguistic studies or steppe prehistory, the earliest history of the Eurasian Steppe shall be covered but briefly here in order to set the ethnogenesis of the Sarmatians and earlier kindred peoples in

¹⁹ Herodotus IV.117.

²⁰ Zeuss 1837, *non vidi*, cited by Makkay 1998a, 493. – Müllenhoff 1866.

²¹ e.g. Nagy 1909.

²² Academic research on this issue began in the late 19th century, following in the footsteps of Miller, the father of Ossetian studies (Miller 1881/1882/1887). There is an ongoing debate among linguists whether Ossetian is a direct descendant of the Scythian-Sarmatian-Alanian branch, see Harmatta 1951, 311-312, with the earlier literature, for example. However, there can be no doubt that they were cognate languages or dialects of cognate languages.

²³ Harmatta 1951, 312. – Abaev 1971, 11. – Zgusta 1955, 245-266. Zgusta assembled a compendium of the personal names known from the Greek towns on the northern Pontic. Based on his analysis of the material, he distinguished an earlier and a later Iranian dialect. The more archaic names, appearing in the inscriptions from Olbia and Chersonesus, could be linked to the Scythians, while the later one represents the linguistic heritage of the Sarmatians. The latter principally occurred in the inscriptions of the eastern towns on the northern Pontic (Panticapaion and Tanais, as well as Phanagoreia and Gorgippia on the Taman Peninsula).

²⁴ See Makkay 1998a, 261, for an overview. Even though the ethnic kinship between the Cimmerians and the Scythians is beyond doubt, some scholars maintain that the Cimmerians spoke a Thracian-Phrygian tongue, despite the linguistic and archaeological evidence to the contrary (e.g. Vásáry 2003, 30). The Thracian-Phrygian hypothesis was most likely »inspired« by three remarks made by Strabo: »The Kimmerians, or a separate tribe of them, called the Treres«, and »The Kimmerians and Treres frequently made similar incursions« (I.3.22). Strabo also remarked that the »Treres, who were also Thracians« (XIII.1.8), explaining why the identification seemed logical. It must in all fairness be added that only a handful of Cimmerian names are known. Abaev mentions three royal names, Tugdamme/Lygdamis, his son Sandakhshatru, and Teuspa, whose Iranian etymology can be convincingly demonstrated. At the same time, Abaev does not mention or discuss the origins of the name Cobus, also recorded by Strabo (Abaev 1965, 126). The Cimmerian-Scythian ethnic kinship is unanimously borne out by the location of Cimmerian toponyms, the etymology of their names, the period's Assyrian inscriptions, the classical sources and the archaeological record. See Ivančik 1999, with further literature.



Fig. 11 Cimmerian(?) hunters on an Etruscan vase from the 6th century BC. – (After Gold 1991, 57).

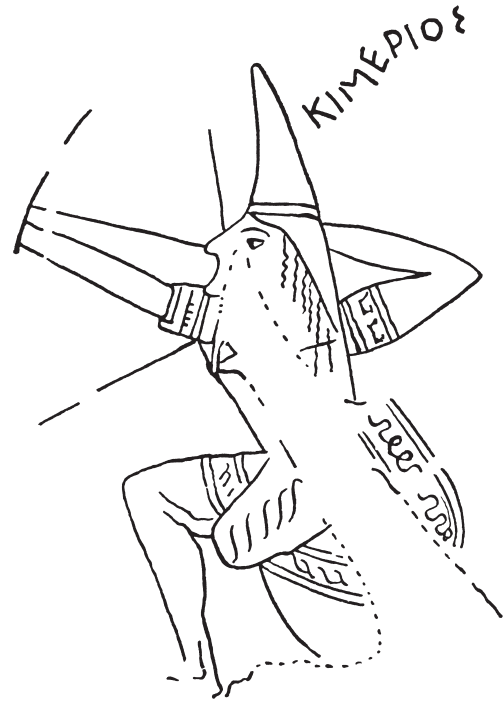


Fig. 12 Cimmerian warrior on a Greek vase from the 6th century BC. – (After Grakov 1977, fig. 71).

context. A detailed discussion is, in any case, unnecessary since the publication of Makkay's excellent analysis in 1998, which also has an exhaustive bibliography on the subject²⁵.

There are a number of ancient sources describing the Cimmerians (**figs 11-13**). Although the Cimmerians appear in Homer's epic²⁶, these references are based on a separate strand of tradition dating from after the disappearance of the Cimmerians²⁷. In contrast, the Akkadian inscriptions, some of which can be dated to within a year, were contemporaneous reports. The Cimmerians appear as *gimirrāja* in the Assyrian sources, which mention the battles they fought south of the Caucasus (**fig. 14**). The intelligence reports sent to the Assyrian king Sargon II (722-704 BC) claimed that King Rusa I of Urartu made an unsuccessful attempt to subjugate a people called *Gamir* or *Gamirra*, but suffered a crushing defeat in 714 BC²⁸. During Sennach-

²⁵ Makkay 1998a. His model seems acceptable to us and thus we have drawn exhaustively from his studies, especially regarding the period preceding the appearance of the Cimmerians/Scythians: »Most prehistorians are aware of the fact [...] that between 1000/500 BC and 500 AD, the western steppe (through the Timber Grave-Cimmerian-Scythian-Sauromatian-Sarmatian-Alanian sequence) was characterised by a stubborn adherence to its traditions, perhaps to an even greater extent than would be expected, instead of rapid, haphazard cultural shifts« (Makkay 2004, 95, with the literature published since 1998).

²⁶ The journey to the Underworld in Homer's *Odyssey* is generally associated with the Cimmerians' land: »[...] where is the land and city of the Cimmerians, wrapped in mist and cloud. Never does the bright sun look down on them with his rays either when he mounts the starry heaven or when he turns again to earth from heaven, but baneful night is spread over wretched mortals« (Homer 11.14-19). However, we have to be cautious about this information. Makkay 2010, 51-55, convincingly

argued that the place mentioned by Homer can be identified with Greek Hemierion (Latin Chimerinus), probably a Greek site. Recent research has shown that much of the information contained in the works of classical authors was often little more than an elaborate narrative woven from a medley of traditions. The two main sources were the Greek traditions of the Bosphorus and the Tyras area, to which additional colours were added by Scythian folklore. One typical element of the latter, for example, was the suicide of the Cimmerian leaders (Ivančik 1999, 86-87), to which an excellent parallel can be quoted from the Nart epic, which similarly concludes with the suicide of the heroes.

²⁷ The current state of Cimmerian research is best reflected by Ivančik's work (e.g. Ivančik 1996; 1999), who beside offering an interpretation of the written sources, has also discussed the archaeological record and the lack of linguistic data. In his view, there is virtually no difference between the material culture of the early Scythians and the Cimmerians.

²⁸ D'jakonov 1951, 340-341.



Fig. 13 Cim-
merian(?) warriors on
a relief from Nim-
rud. – (After Davnja
1994, 91).

erib's reign (703-681 BC), the Cimmerians turned west and toppled the Phrygian Kingdom (696 BC?). In 679 BC, the army of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) defeated Teuspa, the Cimmerian ruler. The Cimmerians soon found themselves facing Gyges (687-652 BC), the Lydian king, whom they defeated and even the king himself fell in battle. The Cimmerians are last heard of in Anatolia when the Scythians led by Madyes (see below) defeated the warriors led by Cobus²⁹.

The Cimmerians appear in the Bible as Gomer, a name originating from *Gimmirai(a)*. The Bible claims a father-son relationship between Gomer and another people, the Ashkenaz³⁰, the latter being identical with the *Askuzai/Iskuzai/Iskuza*, i. e. the Scythians living by Lake Urmia appearing in the cuneiform inscriptions of Sargon II³¹. It is hardly mere chance that light cavalry troops composed principally of archers were organised in the Assyrian, Urartian and Median army during the late 8th and 7th centuries BC³²: the appearance of the Cimmerians and the Scythians can be suspected as the main reason for the army's reform.

Led by Bartatua (675-645?), who can probably be identified with Herodotus' Protothyres³³, father of the Scythian Madyes (645-615?), the Scythians appear in Sakasene in the south-western corner of the Caspian Sea, from where they set off westward.

In the light of the above, it is unsurprising that the Cimmerians and the Scythians are often regarded as kindred peoples³⁴ or even one and the same people³⁵. This is similar to the perceived relationship between the Scythians and the Sarmatians, as will be shown below.

²⁹ Strabo I.3.21.

³⁰ »The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah.« (Genesis 10: 2-3); »[...] call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashchenaz.« (Jeremiah 51:27).

³¹ Ghirshman 1954, 96-97.

³² Hazanov 1971, 64.

³³ Herodotus I.103.

³⁴ e. g. Harmatta 1946/1948, 131.

³⁵ e. g. Abaev 1965, 125-127.

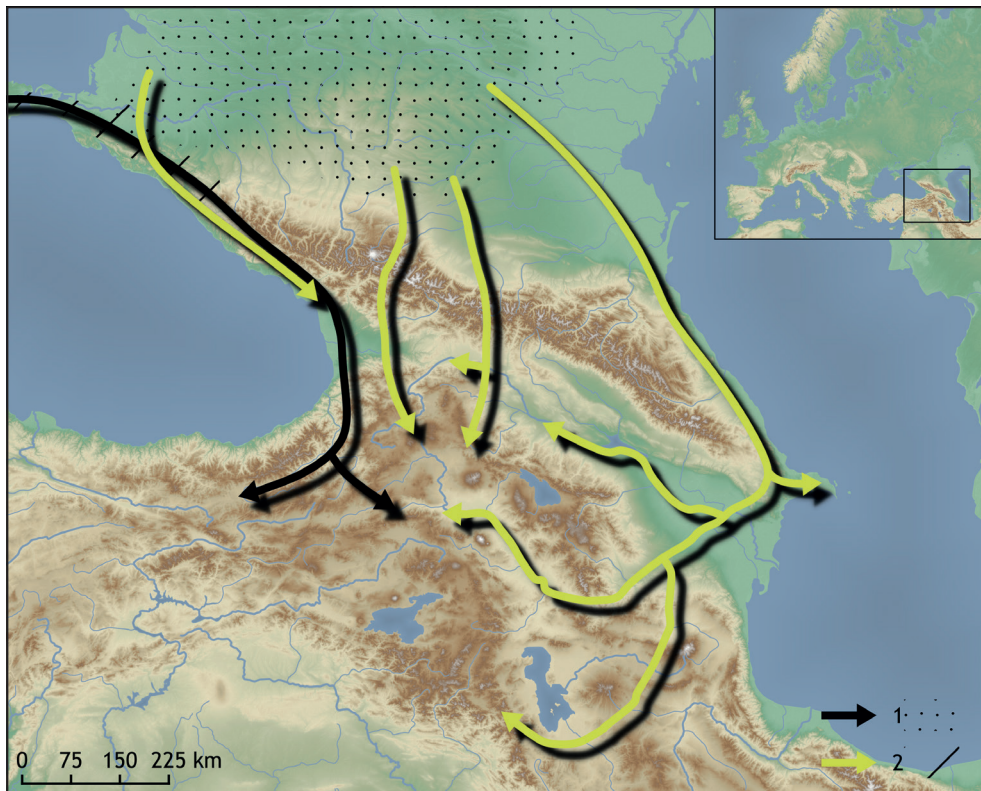


Fig. 14 Reconstruction of the Transcaucasian campaigns of the Cimmerians and Scythians based on E. I. Krupnov's studies. – **1** the Cimmerians' route. – **2** the Scythians' route. – (After Grakov 1977, fig. 72).

In the mid-7th century BC, the Greeks colonised the northern coast of the Black Sea³⁶, no doubt motivated by the abundance of cereals and fish for which there was great demand on the Greek mainland owing to the exhaustion of the cultivable fields. The Greeks founded several towns in quick succession (the first ones being Isthria, Olbia and Pantikapaion – **fig. 72**). Most of these colonies were founded by Miletus. From this time onward, the Scythians maintained direct contact with the Greek colonies of the northern Pontic. The Greeks' interest turned towards their barbarian neighbours, first the Scythians and, later, the Sarmatians, explaining the wealth of information on these peoples in the classical sources. The first among these is Book IV of Herodotus' *Histories*³⁷.

The history of the Sarmatians is inextricably intertwined with that of the Cimmerians and Scythians, in part as chronological antecedents and in part because the latter were the Sarmatians' linguistic-ethnic forebears (see also the next chapter). The first question to answer is where the ethnogenesis of these peoples took place, that is, to identify the region where these peoples first appeared. We may only speak of ethnogenesis if a particular people assert an ethnic identity, or if their environment regards them as an

³⁶ The Greeks first called the Black Sea Αἴθιοπος, »inhospitable«, a name derived from the sea's Iranian name (*Axšaina*, »blue«, »dark grey«), which was adopted by the Greeks owing to its similar sound. The new name, Εὐξεινος (»hospitable«) soon supplanted the earlier one. Vasmer has shown that the change can be explained by the Greeks' naming taboo: the Greek sailors believed that the old name boded ill and they therefore tried to tame the waters with the new name (Abaev 1979, 282-283 n. 3, quoting also Vasmer's study. Cf. Strabo VII.3.7).

³⁷ The most comprehensive overview of the Greek colonisation is still Gajdukevič 1949, which has since been supplemented with the new findings in this field: *Antičnye* 1984. A still useful overview of the sources referring to the Barbarian peoples of the Pontic is to be found in Rostovcev's works, the best among these being Rostovtzeff 1922, 64-65. One new assessment of the interaction between the Greeks and the Barbarians is Greki 2005, and Ascherson 1995, although written for a broader public, also contains much useful information.

ethnic group or a closed group³⁸. Herodotus' description of the Scythians is relevant in this sense because in his eyes, the »Scythians« embodied not only a political, but also an ethnographic, linguistic and cultural unit³⁹. The linguistic and cultural unity of a particular group must by all means be considered in terms of ethnic identity. A search for the location where the Cimmerian/Scythian ethnogenesis occurred should, obviously, take stock of the linguistic evidence and collate it with the archaeological record in order to provide an answer.

The so-called Scythian-European isoglosses – phonetic, lexical, grammatical and morphological, i.e. the linguistic features that can be correlated with each other – clearly indicate that the ancestors of the Scythians/Sarmatians separated from the communities speaking an Indo-European tongue (principally the Slavs, the Germanic peoples and the Latins) at a much later date than the Indo-Aryans and other Iranian peoples⁴⁰. The presence of northern Iranian tribes in the European steppe zone can be documented not later than the second half of the 2nd millennium BC; Scythian-Latin linguistic contact cannot be dated to a later time than this period when the Latins migrated to Italy⁴¹. According to Abaev, this chronology more or less corresponds to the date suggested by the north Pontic Scythian myth of origin as recorded by Herodotus, recounting that Targitaos, the Scythians' forefather, son of Zeus and the river Borysthenes (Dnieper), lived a thousand years before Darius' campaign against them, i.e. in the mid-2nd millennium BC⁴². Even though chronological accuracy can hardly be expected from a myth, the rough date more or less coincides with the one suggested by the linguistic record.

The archaeological finds go back to an even earlier period. The earliest finds of the so-called Kurgan cultures have been brought to light in the area between the Volga and Dnieper. The Kurgan groups advanced westward in the 3rd millennium BC, and the subsequent cultural development of this population, believed to speak an Iranian tongue, took place in this region, as testified by the Pit Grave (Jamnaja), Catacomb (Katakombnaja), Timber Grave (Srubnaja) culture sequence, and the unbroken continuity until the archaeological horizon of the 8th-7th centuries BC that can be identified with the Scythians. There can be no doubt that the emergence of the Cimmerians and the Scythians should be sought in this region⁴³, meaning that theories involving the migration of the Scythians/Sarmatians to the European steppe from Central Asia are untenable. The ancestral homeland of the Scythians – and of their descendants, the Sarmatians – can thus be sought in the northern Pontic⁴⁴. The evidence outlined in the above – the isoglosses, the continuity reflected by the archaeological record, and the testimony of one Scythian myth of origin (see below) – can only be accommodated within this model. Moreover, only this model offers a plausible explanation for why Ossetian, the modern descendant of the Scythian/Alanian language, has preserved a number of archaic Iranian elements that are either lacking from the other Iranian languages (those which broke away from the ancestral homeland at an earlier date and migrated farther) or appear in a distorted form. The isoglosses can be demonstrated, not only in linguistics, but also in the Scythian/Ossetian-Latin mythology, and furnish

³⁸ The concept of *ethnos* as a social unit made up of communities forming an ethnic unit has been discussed by Makkay 1998a, 46-47. Typically enough, Herodotus (II.158) recorded that the Egyptians regarded all peoples speaking a tongue other than Egyptian as barbarians, distinguishing themselves from the other peoples.

³⁹ Herodotus' Book IV is analysed from this perspective by Harmatta 1941, 31-32.

⁴⁰ Abaev 1965, which is devoted to the Scythian-European isoglosses; see p. 3 for an explanation of the concept of isoglosses in general.

⁴¹ Abaev 1971, 10-11.

⁴² Abaev 1965, 122.

⁴³ Makkay 1998a, 260-276, with a detailed discussion. In addition to a comprehensive overview, Makkay also reviews earlier studies, especially the ones by D'jakonov, who had argued that the Cimmerians, who bore Iranian names, and the Scythians, their direct descendants, both originated from the Srubnaja (Timber Grave) culture.

⁴⁴ Alekseev 2003, 38-72, with an overview of the different hypotheses and an exhaustive bibliography. It must in all fairness be noted that Alekseev himself favours an Asian origin. At the same time, researchers starting from a linguistic analysis, e.g. Pogrebova 2006, give arguments in support of the European origins of the Scythians.

conclusive proof that it was not the Scythians who arrived from Asia, but the other Iranian tribes who migrated from southern Russia to India, Persia and Central Asia⁴⁵.

Let us take a closer look at the Scythian myths of origin. Most scholars are still puzzled by the fact that Herodotus recorded not one, but three variants of this myth. The first one is recounted as follows:

The Scythians say that their nation is the youngest in the world, and that it came into being in this way. A man whose name was Targitaüs appeared in this country, which was then desolate. They say that his parents were Zeus and a daughter of the Borysthenes river (I do not believe the story, but it is told). Such was Targitaüs' lineage; and he had three sons: Lipoxaïs, Arpoxaïs, and Colaxaïs, youngest of the three. In the time of their rule (the story goes) certain implements – namely, a plough, a yoke, a sword, and a flask, all of gold – fell down from the sky into Scythia. The eldest of them, seeing these, approached them meaning to take them; but the gold began to burn as he neared, and he stopped. Then the second approached, and the gold did as before. When these two had been driven back by the burning gold, the youngest brother approached and the burning stopped, and he took the gold to his own house. In view of this, the elder brothers agreed to give all the royal power to the youngest⁴⁶.

The reference to the Borysthenes (Dnieper) locates this variant to the northern Pontic.

Herodotus also recounts another myth that likewise speaks of an origin in the Pontic:

This is what the Scythians say about themselves and the country north of them. But the story told by the Greeks who live in Pontus is as follows. Heracles, driving the cattle of Geryones, came to this land, which was then desolate, but is now inhabited by the Scythians. Geryones lived west of the Pontus, settled in the island called by the Greeks Erythea, on the shore of Ocean near Gadira, outside the pillars of Heracles. As for Ocean, the Greeks say that it flows around the whole world from where the sun rises, but they cannot prove that this is so. Heracles came from there to the country now called Scythia, where, encountering wintry and frosty weather, he drew his lion's skin over him and fell asleep, and while he slept his mares, which were grazing yoked to the chariot, were spirited away by divine fortune. When Heracles awoke, he searched for them, visiting every part of the country, until at last he came to the land called the Woodland, and there he found in a cave a creature of double form that was half maiden and half serpent; above the buttocks she was a woman, below them a snake [fig. 15]. When he saw her he was astonished, and asked her if she had seen his mares straying; she said that she had them, and would not return them to him before he had intercourse with her; Heracles did, in hope of this reward. But though he was anxious to take the horses and go, she delayed returning them, so that she might have Heracles with her for as long as possible; at last she gave them back, telling him, »These mares came, and I kept them safe here for you, and you have paid me for keeping them, for I have three sons by you. Now tell me what I am to do when they are grown up: shall I keep them here (since I am queen of this country), or shall I send them away to you?« Thus she inquired, and then (it is said) Heracles answered: »When you see the boys are grown up, do as follows and you will do rightly: whichever of them you see bending this bow and wearing this belt so,

⁴⁵ Abaev 1965, 122-123.

⁴⁶ Herodotus IV.5. We shall not discuss the various implements falling from the sky and the interpretation of this narrative; the countless studies on this theme would fill a small library.

make him an inhabitant of this land; but whoever falls short of these accomplishments that I require, send him away out of the country. Do so and you shall yourself have comfort, and my will shall be done«. So he drew one of his bows (for until then Heracles always carried two), and showed her the belt, and gave her the bow and the belt, that had a golden vessel on the end of its clasp; and, having given them, he departed. But when the sons born to her were grown men, she gave them names, calling one of them Agathysus and the next Gelonus and the youngest Scythes; furthermore, remembering the instructions, she did as she was told. Two of her sons, Agathysus and Gelonus, were cast out by their mother and left the country, unable to fulfil the requirements set; but Scythes, the youngest, fulfilled them and so stayed in the land. From Scythes son of Heracles comes the whole line of the kings of Scythia; and it is because of the vessel that the Scythians carry vessels on their belts to this day⁴⁷.

That the two myths were indeed known to the Scythians and the Greeks is amply proven by the depictions in which these characters and events are portrayed (fig. 16). It must nonetheless be noted that Herodotus also presents a third myth, according to which the Scythians had migrated to their present lands from Asia:

There is yet another story, to which account I myself especially incline. It is to this effect. The nomadic Scythians inhabiting Asia, when hard pressed in war by the Massagetae, fled across the Araxes river⁴⁸ to the Cimmerian country (for the country which the Scythians



Fig. 15 Depiction of the snake-limbed goddess on a gold mount from the Bolšaja Cimbalka kurgan. – (After Skythische Kunst 1986, 144).

⁴⁷ Herodotus IV.8-10.



Fig. 16 Detail of the cup from the Kul-Oba kurgan (after *Skythische Kunst* 1986, figs 185-187). Raevsij (1985, 17-20) correlated the scenes with Herodotus' account of the Scythian myth of origin. The two older brothers are unable to string the bow (one has injured his mouth, the other his foot), and the youngest is awarded kingship.

now inhabit is said to have belonged to the Cimmerians before), and the Cimmerians, at the advance of the Scythians, deliberated as men threatened by a great force should. Opinions were divided; both were strongly held, but that of the princes was the more honourable; for the people believed that their part was to withdraw and that there was no need to risk their lives for the dust of the earth; but the princes were for fighting to defend their country against the attackers. Neither side could persuade the other, neither the people the princes nor the princes the people; the one party planned to depart without fighting and leave the country to their enemies, but the princes were determined to lie dead in their own country and not to flee with the people, for they considered how happy their situation had been and what ills were likely to come upon them if they fled from their native land. Having made up their minds, the princes separated into two equal bands and fought with each other until they were all killed by each other's hands; then the Cimmerian people buried them by the Tyras river, where their tombs are still to be seen, and having buried them left the land; and the Scythians came and took possession of the country left empty⁴⁹.

Scholars favouring an ancestral homeland in Asia generally refer to this account, also quoting various archaeological finds to bolster their theory. The debate has by now reached the point where the chronology of various artefacts and find assemblages is pushed back in time both by the advocates of a European ancestry and the adherents of an Asian one, the idea being that the earlier a particular find from the region claimed to be the homeland is, the more it confirms their hypothesis. As a matter of fact, archaeology is by itself unable to settle the issue of origins without a consideration of the linguistic evidence. This remains the case despite the fact that most of the innovations introduced by the Scythians are of a demonstrably Asian origin because the latter can be interpreted as a consequence of the Transcaucasian campaigns (fig. 14)⁵⁰. As we have mentioned above, the archaeological record preceding the Scythian period reflects an unbroken continuity from the Pit Grave culture through the Catacomb and the Timber Grave cultures to the 8th-7th centuries BC, which is the archaeological horizon correlated with the Scythians. An ethnogenesis in the European steppe zone is also supported by the reports of classical authors, according to whom, the Iranian tribes that separated from the Iranian block (the »Scythians« who remained in their homeland) originated from Scythia⁵¹.

Physical anthropological evidence provides further clues for resolving the question of origins. The Scythian skulls examined so far do not differ from the anthropological material of the preceding Timber Grave (Srubnaja) culture of the Bronze Age. The anthropological record indicates a uniform anthropological type across the entire territory in the Bronze Age later occupied by the Scythians (including the Lower Volga region and the Saka lands in Kazakhstan, Choresm and the Altai region). This situation changed in the Scythian period when Mongoloid traits first make an appearance in the eastern regions, principally in Tuva and, to a lesser extent, in the Altai region and in Kazakhstan, and to a minimal extent in the Lower Volga region⁵².

No major changes can be noted in the species of the domestic animals raised in the northern Pontic. The appearance of two new species, domestic ass and domestic cat, can undoubtedly be explained by the cultural influence of Greek colonisation⁵³.

⁴⁸ According to Herodotus, Araxes empties into the Caspian Sea.

⁴⁹ Herodotus IV.11.

⁵⁰ It is beyond the scope of this present study to discuss these campaigns more than in passing. See Alekseev 2003, 97-129, with a detailed overview of the relevant literature.

⁵¹ e.g. »Parthi Scythia profecti« (»where the Parthians seceding from Scythia«; Curtius Rufus IV.12.11), »Scythae, qui Parthos condidere« (»the Scythians, founders of the land of the Parthi-

ans«; Curtius Rufus VI.2.14), »Parthi – Scytharum exules fuere« (»the Parthians were originally exiles from Scythia«; Iustinus XLI.I.I), »Persae, qui sunt originitus Scythae« (»the Persians, who are originally of Scythian extraction«; Ammian XXXI.2.20), after Abaev 1965, 124.

⁵² The latter in a Sauromatian context – Debec 1971, 8-9.

⁵³ Calkin 1971.

The above scientific data indicate that the ancestors of the Saka⁵⁴/Scythian peoples dispersed from their earlier homeland during the Bronze Age. Inhabiting the Kazakh steppe, the Pamir Mountains and the Tien Shan region, the Saka were an Asian steppe people related to the Scythians. The references to the Saka clearly show that this name was a generic term for denoting population groups (tribes?) with often differing life-styles. The same holds true for the Massagetae living on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya region. Like the Scythians and the Saka, the Massagetae included both nomadic and agrarian groups⁵⁵.

The linguistic record of the Saka (or Khotanese-Saka) from the 7th-10th centuries AD offers additional evidence for the date of the dispersal. On the testimony of the inscriptions, the dispersal had most certainly taken place before the 4th century BC, because by this time the language spoken by the Saka was a separate dialect, meaning that the tongues spoken by the European Scythians and the Asian Saka had separated much earlier and developed independently⁵⁶, which in turn implies that a part of the population had broken away during the Bronze Age at the latest⁵⁷. There can be no doubt that these groups migrated eastward, as shown by the distribution of Iranian hydronyms, and especially the river names formed from the word *dan* («river») such as Don, Dnieper (Danapr), Dniester (Danastr) and Danube (Danuvi) which abound on the northern Pontic littoral, but are entirely lacking in Central Asia⁵⁸.

The linguistic evidence harmonises with the archaeological record. Only one single major migration can be noted on the Eurasian Steppe during this period that can be associated with the Scythians and the Saka (as well as other Asian Iranian nomads) in the light of the archaeological finds.

In sum, we may say that the European steppe was ruled by Iranian-speaking peoples from the Bronze Age onward (Kurgan cultures). The eastern branch of this large linguistic unit (the Andronovo culture) advanced as far as Central Asia before the close of the Bronze Age at the latest. A linguistic separation can be noted between the Cimmerian/Scythian population emerging during the 9th-8th centuries BC at the western «end» of this unit and of the eastern groups, principally the Saka. The Sauromatian/Sarmatian ethnogenesis took place somewhere in the borderland between these two worlds, although closer to the Scythians.

Scythian-Sarmatian Relations: The Sarmatian Ethnogenesis

About the Sauromatae, the story is as follows. When the Greeks were at war with the Amazons (whom the Scythians call Oiorpata, a name signifying in our tongue killers of men, for in Scythian a man is «oior» and to kill is «pata»), the story runs that after their victory on the Thermodon they sailed away carrying in three ships as many Amazons as they had been able to take alive; and out at sea the Amazons attacked the crews and killed them. But they knew

⁵⁴ According to Herodotus (VII.64), the Persians called all Scythian tribes by the name Saka.

⁵⁵ Jablonskij 1996 is a good compendium of the references to the Saka. Stepnaja polosa 1992 gives an important overview of the research on the Saka and the Massagetae, and for a discussion of the various hypotheses on the relation between the Andronovo culture (the eastern branch of the Kurgan complex) and the ethnogenesis of the Saka, as well as an exhaustive bibliography, see Vajnbjerg/Gorbunova/Mošková 1992, 25-26.

⁵⁶ The 8th-10th century inscriptions from East Turkestan suggest that linguistic changes resembling the ones occurring in the Scythian language at a fairly early date did not take place in the Saka (or Khotanese-Saka) language. One of these was the so-called Aryan rhotacism, the transformation of an «r» before i(y) into «k». This letter is lacking from the *Avesta* and can only

be observed in the case of non-Persian names in the Persian inscriptions. At the same time, the phenomenon can be documented in the names recorded by Herodotus, e. g. *Ripaxsaya* → *Λιποξαις*. – See Abaev 1965, 12-13, and Abaev 1971, 12.

⁵⁷ According to Abaev 1972, 36-37, the Iranian languages split into two major groups at the turn of the 2nd and 1st millennia BC: one encompassing the Scythian-Cimmerian, Proto-Sogdian and Proto-Bactrian; the other Proto-Mede and Persian. The peoples speaking the latter migrated south through the Caucasus and occupied the Iranian Plateau. The Proto-Saka split from the Scythians in the first half of the 1st millennium BC and advanced eastward to the Chinese border. It seems likely that the Bactrians, Sogdians and a few other Iranian groups arrived in Central Asia at roughly the same time.

⁵⁸ Abaev 1971, 11; 1979, 355-356.

nothing about ships, or how to use rudder or sail or oar; and with the men dead, they were at the mercy of waves and winds, until they came to the Cliffs by the Maeotian lake; this place is in the country of the free Scythians. The Amazons landed there, and set out on their journey to the inhabited country, and seizing the first troop of horses they met, they mounted them and raided the Scythian lands.

The Scythians could not understand the business; for they did not recognize the women's speech or their dress or their nation, but wondered where they had come from, and imagined them to be men all of the same age; and they met the Amazons in battle. The result of the fight was that the Scythians got possession of the dead, and so came to learn that their foes were women. Therefore, after deliberation they resolved by no means to slay them as before, but to send their youngest men to them, of a number corresponding (as they guessed) to the number of the women. They directed these youths to camp near the Amazons and to imitate all that they did; if the women pursued them, not to fight, but to flee; and when the pursuit stopped, to return and camp near them. This was the plan of the Scythians, for they desired that children be born of the women. The young men who were sent did as they were directed.

When the Amazons perceived that the youths meant them no harm, they let them be; but every day the two camps drew nearer to each other. Now the young men, like the Amazons, had nothing but their arms and their horses, and lived as did the women, by hunting and plunder.

At midday the Amazons would scatter and go apart from each other singly or in pairs, roaming apart for greater comfort. The Scythians noticed this and did likewise; and as the women wandered alone, a young man laid hold of one of them, and the woman did not resist but let him do his will; and since they did not understand each other's speech and she could not speak to him, she signed with her hand that he should come the next day to the same place and bring another youth with him (showing by signs that there should be two), and she would bring another woman with her. The youth went away and told his comrades; and the next day he came himself with another to the place, where he found the Amazon and another with her awaiting them. When the rest of the young men learned of this, they had intercourse with the rest of the Amazons.

Presently they joined their camps and lived together, each man having for his wife the woman with whom he had had intercourse at first. Now the men could not learn the women's language, but the women mastered the speech of the men; and when they understood each other, the men said to the Amazons, »We have parents and possessions; therefore, let us no longer live as we do, but return to our people and be with them; and we will still have you, and no others, for our wives.« To this the women replied: »We could not live with your women; for we and they do not have the same customs. We shoot the bow and throw the javelin and ride, but have never learned women's work; and your women do none of the things of which we speak, but stay in their wagons and do women's work, and do not go out hunting or anywhere else. So we could never agree with them. If you want to keep us for wives and to have the name of fair men, go to your parents and let them give you the allotted share of their possessions, and after that let us go and live by ourselves.« The young men agreed and did this.



Fig. 17 Amazons in battle on a 3rd century sarcophagus (Vatican Museum, inv. no. 933). – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

So when they had been given the allotted share of possessions that fell to them, and returned to the Amazons, the women said to them: »We are worried and frightened how we are to live in this country after depriving you of your fathers and doing a lot of harm to your land. Since you propose to have us for wives, do this with us: come, let us leave this country and live across the Tanaïs river.« To this too the youths agreed; and crossing the Tanaïs, they went a three days' journey east from the river, and a three days' journey north from lake Maeotis; and when they came to the region in which they now live, they settled there. Ever since then the women of the Sauromatae have followed their ancient ways; they ride out hunting, with their men or without them; they go to war, and dress the same as the men.

The language of the Sauromatae is Scythian but not spoken in its ancient purity, since the Amazons never learned it correctly. In regard to marriage, it is the custom that no maiden weds until she has killed a man of the enemy; and some of them grow old and die unmarried, because they cannot fulfil the law⁵⁹.

It would be tempting to immediately follow Herodotus to the land of the Amazons (fig. 17), but we must delay doing so for the moment. What concerns us here is the relationship between the Scythians and the Sarmatians. The conclusion suggested by the quotation above is that classical authors regarded the Sarmatians as descendants of the Scythians. In other words, the relationships between the Scythians and the Sauromatians/Sarmatians cannot be reduced to the wars between them or to a peaceful co-existence. One case in point is that the earliest historical reference to the Sarmatians (or, more precisely, to the Sauromatae) is made in the context of Scythian history.

In his account of the Persian campaign led by Darius I against the Scythians, Herodotus mentions that the Scythians' eastern neighbours, the Sauromatae, also participated in this war. The Sauromatae appear in several passages:

⁵⁹ Herodotus IV.110-117, italics added for emphasis.



Fig. 18 Location of various peoples during the Sauromatian Age. According to Herodotus' report, the Scythians ruled over the lands on the right bank of the Don. During his campaign, Darius passed through the lands of the Sauromatians and reached the wooden town of the Budini. The land beyond the Budini was a great desert. – (E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár; map M. Ober, RGZM).

Across the Tanaïs it is no longer Scythia; the first of the districts belongs to the *Sauromatae*, whose country begins at the inner end of the Maeotian lake and stretches fifteen days' journey north, and is quite bare of both wild and cultivated trees. [...] The eighth is the Tanaïs river; in its upper course, this begins by flowing out of a great lake, and enters a yet greater lake called the Maeotian, which divides the Royal Scythians from the *Sauromatae*⁶⁰.

Herodotus thus locates the population he calls the *Sauromatae* to the left bank of the Tanaïs (Don). He notes that the *Sauromatae* had lived there at the time of Darius' campaign against the Scythians:

Convinced that they alone were not able to repel Darius' army in open warfare, the Scythians sent messengers to their neighbours, whose kings had already gathered and were deliberating on the presumption that a great army was marching against them. The assembled kings were those of the Tauri, Agathyrsi, Neuri, Maneaters, Black-cloaks, Geloni, Budini, and *Sauromatae*⁶¹. (fig. 18)

The Asian Scythians warred with Cyrus in 529 BC and, later, with Darius in 519 BC. Cyrus' expedition to the Amu Darya (Oxus) region is narrated by Herodotus and Strabo, both of whom probably drew from Hecataeus. The reason for Darius' campaign was perhaps to avenge Cyrus who had been slain in battle against the Massagetae. In connection with Darius' campaign of 519 BC, Polyaeus recounts that three Saka kings, Sacesphares (Sausafar), Amorges and Thamyris, had forged an alliance against the Persians (figs 19-20)⁶².

⁶⁰ Herodotus IV.21 and IV.57, italics added for emphasis.

⁶² Herodotus I.201-214. – Strabo XI.8.6. – Pol. *Strat.* VII.12.

⁶¹ Herodotus IV.102, italics added for emphasis.

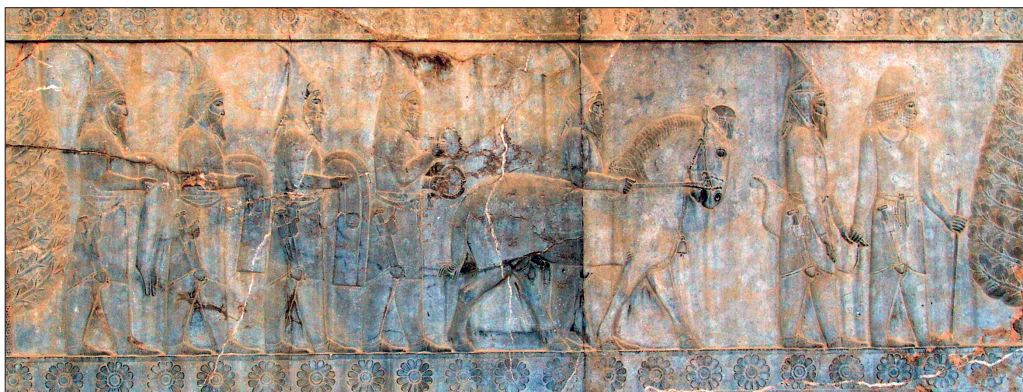


Fig. 19 The Persian campaign against the Asian Scythians/Saka is commemorated on reliefs portraying the nomads wearing their typical costume. One of these reliefs is the Tribute Procession on the eastern stairway of the *apadana*, the audience hall of Persepolis. The Saka Tigraxauda appear as the eleventh delegation. – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).



Fig. 20 The trilingual Behistun Inscription commemorates the ascension of Darius I and the organisation of his empire. The Saka are shown among the vanquished peoples. – (After Seipel 2000, 14; Curtis/Tallis 2005, 261 no. 465).

Adopting a new strategy, the third campaign led by Darius (Hystaspes) against the European Scythians in 512 BC may in part have been prompted by the Persians' failure to pacify the nomads. The main goal was the Persian king's effort to cut off the Greeks from the cereal-growing and cattle-breeding regions, as well as the sources of fish. In this sense, the expedition was part of the preparations for the great campaign against the Greeks. The Persians were well informed about Scythia and were fully aware that there would be severe food shortages in the Greek city-states of the Balkans and Asia Minor if exports from the Pontic were to cease⁶³. Darius marched across the eastern half of the Balkan Peninsula, crossed the Lower Danube and entered the steppe.

⁶³ Tolstov 1948a, 106-109.

Herodotus provides a detailed account of the expedition in Book IV of his *Histories*, based on information gathered a few decades later. The Persian troops marched deeper and deeper into the steppe, but the Scythians refused to give battle, resorting instead to the classical nomadic tactic of retreating, removing all food, filling up the wells and destroying the pastures. The Persians were eventually forced to withdraw. Herodotus informs us that after the Scythians had turned to other peoples for help:

[...] the kings who had come from the nations deliberated, and their opinions were divided. The kings of the Geloni and the Budini and the Sauromatae were of one mind and promised to help the Scythians; but the kings of the Agathyrsi and Neuri and Maneaters and Black-cloaks and Tauri [refused to come to their assistance].

The Sauromatae were not simply allies, but fought side-by-side with the Scythians in the same army, as recorded in two passages in Herodotus' narrative. The Scythians divided their forces into two bodies. After joining the body commanded by Scopias, the Sauromatae were given the following orders:

[...] if the Persian marched that way, this group was to retire before him and fall back toward the Tanaïs river, by the Maeotian lake, and if the Persian turned to go back, then they were to pursue and attack him.

The Scythian-Sauromatian alliance resorted to the scorched earth stratagem, the classical tactic of nomadic warfare:

[...] the advance guard of the Scythians found the Persians about a three days' march distant from the Ister; and having found them they camped a day's march ahead of the enemy and set about scorching the earth of all living things. When the Persians saw the Scythian cavalry appear, they marched on its track, the horsemen always withdrawing before them; and then, making for the one Scythian division, the Persians held on in pursuit toward the east and the Tanaïs river; when the horsemen crossed this, the Persians crossed also, and pursued until they had marched through the land of the Sauromatae to the land of the Budini. As long as the Persians were traversing the Scythian and Sauromatic territory there was nothing for them to harm, as the land was dry and barren⁶⁴.

Herodotus' detailed account is by all means accurate and reliable, and it is therefore quite certain that the Sauromatian lands of the late 6th century BC can be sought on the left bank of the Don, on the shores of the Sea of Azov. It is not mere chance that from his reading of the classical texts, Rostovcev concluded that the Sauromatian ethnogenesis had taken place in the region of the Sea of Azov. K. F. Smirnov accepted this model of autochthonous Sauromatian ethnogenesis⁶⁵. At the same time, a wholly uniform archaeological material can be demonstrated on the steppe extending between the Don and the Volga, whose appearance can be dated to the close of the 7th century and the early 6th century BC. This horizon has been convincingly identified as the heritage of the Sauromatians (see the next chapter). The single question remaining is whether the uniform archaeological find material justifies the extension of the lands inhabited by the Sauromatians to include the vast steppe between the Don and the Volga (stretching to the Ural), despite the

⁶⁴ Herodotus IV.119-123.

⁶⁵ Rostovcev 1918, 29. 33-35. – Smirnov 1984, 10-11.

fact they are mentioned only at the western fringes of this territory without any reference to areas farther to the east.

It seems to us that there is no serious obstacle to this. Suffice it here to recall the evidence on the Scythians, the Saka and the Massagetae. The same holds true for the Sauromatians/Sarmatians: the name was both the name of a specific tribe(?) and, at the same time, a generic term for a tribal alliance(?) of several tribes(?); and has been used in this sense by classical authors and modern scholars alike. (The other tribes in this alliance and their society shall be discussed elsewhere. We do not wish to overwhelm our readers with a discussion of these issues here and in any case, the name occurring in the earliest sources is definitely Sauromatian/Sarmatian/Sirmatian.)

It is quite obvious from the above that the history of the Sauromatians/Sarmatians is inextricably bound up with that of the Scythians, from whom they were directly descended⁶⁶.

The Sarmatian linguistic record is rather meagre and not one single longer text has survived. Even so, there can be no doubt that the Sarmatians had indeed spoken a »Scythian tongue«, belonging to the northern branch of the Middle Iranian languages.

The etymology of the ethnonym Sarmatian and Sauromatian has still not been clarified reassuringly⁶⁷. Several explanations have been proposed. According to one, the name can be derived from *saora* (»sword«, »blade«), a word known from the *Avesta*, and it means »sword-bearer« or »sword-bringer«. Another explanation derives the name from *sau-rom* (»black-haired«⁶⁸) or from *sau-roma* (»black-fleeced«⁶⁹). Yet another etymology is *sarah* (»head«, »master«) and it has also been suggested the name Sauromatae was in fact the Avestan translation (*sairima*) of Herodotus' »Royal Scythians«. Tolstov believed that the name of the Sarmatians could be derived from *sawr* or *swar* from the *sawr – swar – Sanskrit svarga* (»sky«) and Iranian *khwar* (»Sun«), and meant »people of the Sun«, suggesting that Choresm could be derived from the same word and meant »Land of the Sun«⁷⁰.

In sum, the Sauromatae/Sarmatians were the direct descendants of the Scythians whose language was part of the northern branch of the Middle Iranian languages. Their ethnogenesis took place on the steppe extending between the Don, the Volga and the Ural rivers.

SAUROMATIAN OR SARMATIAN?

A Few Words on Chronology

Before turning to the earliest period of Sarmatian history, we shall briefly review the periodisation and chronology of the entire Sarmatian period; a bone of contention for over a century now in archaeological studies. The periodisation of the entire Sarmatian steppe period is not an easy task because of the »smaller« regions making up this vast territory. These regions, both separated and linked by waterways, are often the

⁶⁶ In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising that the possibility that the Sarmatians were semi-nomads from Central Asia has also been raised (Harmatta 1994, 566). However, not one single shred of reliable evidence has yet been produced in support of this theory.

⁶⁷ For the various etymologies, see, e.g. Müllenhoff 1892, 101-125 esp. 120, and Vasmer 1923, 51. See also Vernadsky 1951, 342-343, and Zgusta 1955, 264-265, for good overviews of the theories proposed so far.

⁶⁸ Seeing that Ammianus Marcellinus described them as blond-haired (31.2.21), the expression should rather be translated as »wearing black headgear«.

⁶⁹ Dumézil 1978, 7, has noted that the name *Sau-dara-tai* in the Protogenes Decree from Olbia (Latyshev 1916, no. 32, 54-55) would support this interpretation, in which case the name would have the same meaning as *melankhlainos* (»black robed«; cf. Herodotus IV.20.100-102.107.119.125).

⁷⁰ Tolstov 1948a, 80.

size of half the European continent or even larger. Several groups (tribes?) lived across this immense region. One cardinal question is how the securely dated find assemblages, principally the products made in workshops of the high civilisations of Antiquity, reached the regions lying closer or farther away from these centres and from the main trade routes. Another is the identification of the products traded for these articles by the barbarian groups (gold, honey, furs, hides, animals, cereals, fish, slaves, etc.), and the importance of these products for the trade partners.

The two and, in some cases, three legitimate dates of some artefacts on which chronological schemes are based must also be borne in mind. These are: the date when a particular artefact of precious metal was actually crafted in one of the Greek cities; the time that had elapsed before it reached the barbarians; and the date of its deposition in a burial, sometimes one or more generations later.

A brief overview of the currently accepted periodisation seems in order at this point, together with a discussion of how this periodisation evolved. For a long time, Soviet and post-Soviet research employed a very precise (although not always consistent) terminology for the Sarmatian cultures that also marked successive chronological phases. (A few of these categories were adopted in Hungarian Sarmatian studies, although usually in a grossly misunderstood form.) The labels given to a particular culture or period did not always refer to one and the same cultural unit or time-range, depending on the region or period in which they were used. As a result of the occasionally slow and at times unusually rapid east to west migration of the Sarmatian tribes, one period may have »ended« in the Don-Volga interfluvium before it had even »begun« in the Dnieper Valley (one case in point being the 3rd century BC, to be discussed at greater length below) (**tab. 1**). The chronological framework used in this study is one of the generally accepted periodisations (in the chart referred to as Grakov/Smirnov/Moškova). Although widely accepted, this periodisation can only broadly be regarded as a »generally accepted« framework. Even a cursory glance at more recent studies reveals that Russian and Ukrainian scholars have proposed a number of modifications or entirely new frameworks, often at great variance from the »classical« one⁷¹. (Being outsiders, we shall not comment on this debate.)

Finally, it must also be borne in mind that the history and the archaeological heritage of the Sarmatians of the Carpathian Basin have also been divided into various chronological horizons. These periodisations are absolutely independent from the steppe system described above. The Sarmatians arrived in Hungary during the steppe Middle Sarmatian Age and remained in the Danube Basin until well after the end of the Late Sarmatian Age on the steppe.

The Earliest Sauromatian / Sarmatian Finds (6th to Mid-3rd Century BC)

If we begin the presentation of the archaeological material with the cultural precursors, we must go back to two points: 1) the late Srubnaja (Timber Grave) period (12th-9th/8th centuries BC) and the southern distribution of this culture in the Don-Volga interfluvium (the Lower Volga region), and in the North Pontic region (**fig. 21**); and 2) the Ural group of the Andronovo culture distributed over an extensive territory. These two Bronze Age cultures played a decisive role in the emergence of Sauromatian culture and the ethnogenesis of the Sauromatian/Sarmatian people. The boundary between the Srubnaja and the Andronovo populations is blurred and cannot be precisely determined (**fig. 22**). Many Andronovo traits can be demonstrated in the Srubnaja culture and vice versa: strong cultural influences from the Srubnaja culture are apparent in the contact zone material of the neighbouring Andronovo culture. The relatively poor state of research

⁷¹ Good examples for the »new chronology« can be quoted from *Sarmatskie kultury 2004*, which contains the papers read at a relatively recent conference on Sarmatian research. The last three columns of the chart reflect the overall confusion in this field.

| Age | Rykov 1925 | Rau 1927-29 | Grakov / Smirnov / Moškova | Skripkin | Berlizov | Zuev | Ščukin | Age |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|---|----------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4 th c. AD | k u r g a n s | Stage B | Šipovo culture = Alan culture Late Sarmatian | | E | Alan Late Sarmatian period | Late Sarmatian culture | 4 th c. AD |
| 3 rd c. AD | | | | | D | | | 3 rd c. AD |
| 2 nd c. AD | | | | | C3 | | | 2 nd c. AD |
| 1 st c. AD | | | | | C2 | | | 1 st c. AD |
| 1 st c. AD | y | Stage A | Middle Sarmatian = Susly culture | | C1 | Susly Middle Sarmatian period | Susly culture | 1 st c. AD |
| 1 st c. BC | | | | | 70 B2b | | | 1 st c. BC |
| 2 nd c. BC | S u s l | A | Early Sarmatian = Prohorovka culture | | B2a | Prohorovka period | Prohorovka culture | 2 nd c. BC |
| 3 rd c. BC | | | | | B1 | | | 3 rd c. BC |
| 4 th c. BC | Prohorovka kurgans (Rostovcev) | | heyday | | A1 | Break of cultural tradition (hiatus) | Period of Prohorovka cups | 4 th c. BC |
| 5 th c. BC | Blumenfeld Kurgan A12 (Grakov) | Sauromatians ? | Sauromatian = Blumenfeld culture | | | Filippovka period | Blumenfeld culture | 5 th c. BC |
| 6 th c. BC | | | | | stabilisation | Blumenfeld period | | 6 th c. BC |
| | | | transitional | | | | | |

Tab. 1 The chronological table illustrates the diversity of the different periodisation schemes. – (Based on Ščukin 2004, fig. 2).



Fig. 21 The most important sites of the Srubnaja (Timber Grave) culture during the pre-Scythian period; distribution of the Srubnaja culture and of the Andronovo culture. – (After Grakov 1977, fig. 74; map M. Ober, RGZM).

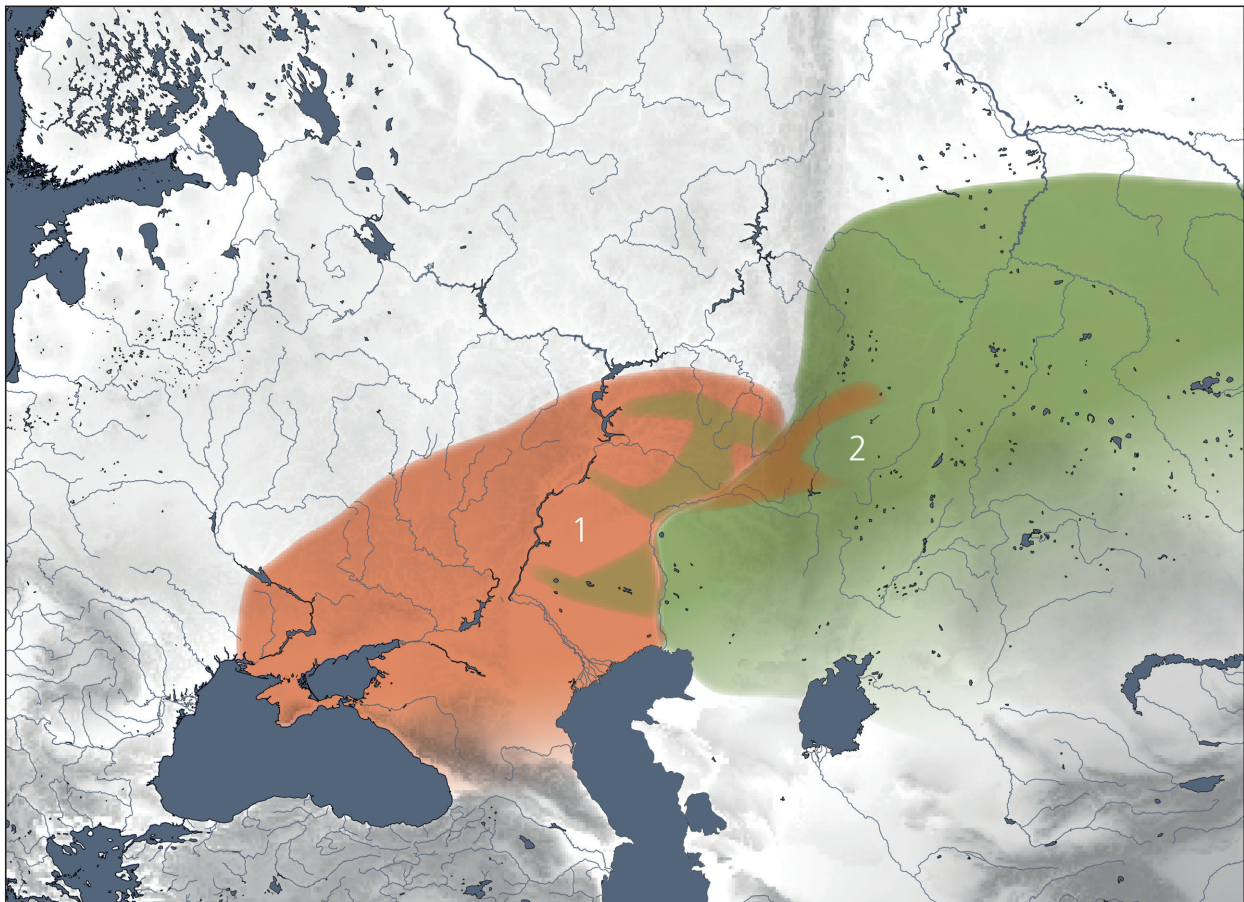


Fig. 22 The contact zone and cultural interaction between the Srubnaja (1) and the Andronovo culture (2) can be sought along the lower reaches of the Ural and in the Lower Volga region. – (After Smirnov 1964, fig. 76; map M. Ober, RGZM).

in the Lower Volga and the South Ural region⁷² poses additional problems when attempting to define the boundary between the two. The current evidence would suggest that the boundary lay west of the lower reaches of the Ural River and in the north, along the western slopes of the Ural Mountains, roughly along the border between Uralsk and Bashkiria (Bashkortostan). The two Bronze Age populations both emerged on the same cultural substratum, an earlier period of the Kurgan cultures. Both pursued a nomadic life-style, coloured by the agrarian villages of sedentary groups.

The material of the Srubnaja culture underwent a gradual transformation along the Volga and the Dnieper in the 8th-7th centuries BC, the turn of the Bronze and the Iron Age. The burials from this period can be labelled as reflecting the »transition«⁷³ to the Sauromatian burials (fig. 23). The west to east orientation of the burials, which later became the norm among the Sauromatians, began to spread during this period under cultural influence from the Andronovo culture. The archaeological record is rather patchy: the evidence indicates the »disappearance« of settlements⁷⁴ and, at the same time, the continuity of vessel forms and pottery ornamentation, as well as of artefact types, from the Srubnaja period onward⁷⁵.

⁷² The South Ural region is here used to denote the southern reaches of the Ural River and not the Ural Mountains.

⁷³ The transitional period is variously called Cimmerian period (e. g. Dvorničenko/Korenjako 1989) and Late Srubnaja period (e. g. Mamontov 1980).

⁷⁴ In all fairness, it must be noted that very few settlement sites are known from the other periods. The lack of settlements in this region is generally attributed to the nomadic life-style.

⁷⁵ For the research of the transitional period (8th-7th centuries), see Smirnov 1964, 174-188; 1957, 10-12.

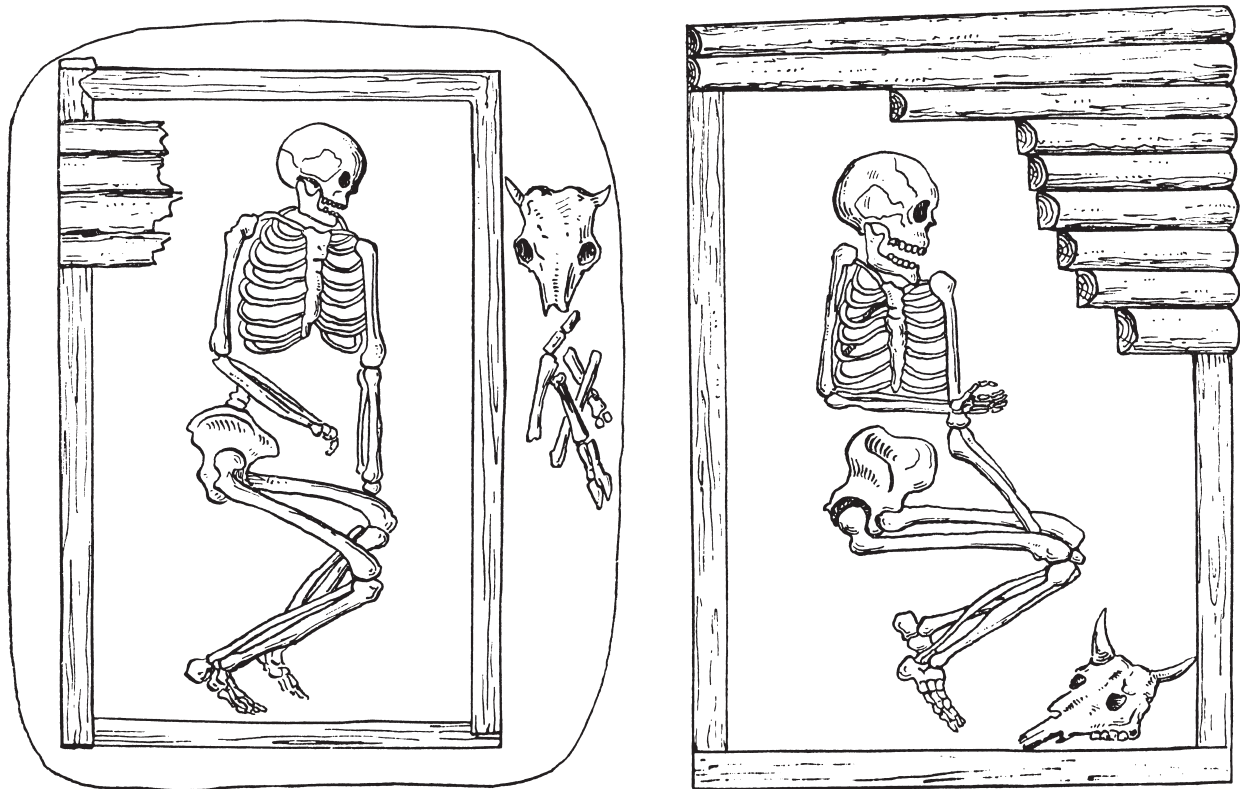


Fig. 23 The population of the Srubnaja culture buried its dead in timber burial chambers. Two burials from the northern Donets region. – (After Grakov 1977, fig. 84).

The references to the conditions in the 6th century BC in the works of Herodotus and Hecataeus would suggest that the left bank of the Lower Don was definitely occupied by the Sauromatians, meaning that the finds from this period can be linked to this people. It is also clear that this material culture was not restricted to the Lower Don region, but distributed over a much wider territory, including mainly the Lower Volga region. The finds from the South Ural region also share countless similarities with this material culture. The origins of the find assemblages can be traced back to the 7th century BC.

Archaeological research identified the archaeological heritage of the Sauromatians – sharing many similarities with that of the Scythians – at a fairly early date. The burials that could be plausibly associated with the Sauromatians in the Lower Volga region were first singled out by Rau who made the ethnic attribution to the Sauromatians based on Herodotus' descriptions quoted in the above⁷⁶. Grakov first labelled these assemblages the Blumenfeld culture and linked the finds to the Scythians, but later he accepted the view that they represented the heritage of the Sauromatians⁷⁷. The current consensus is that the 7th-6th century archaeological finds from the steppe between the Volga and the Don, the Lower Volga and the foreland of the South Ural region can be associated unambiguously with the Sauromatians.

An important question is the relation between the Sauromatians and the population of the preceding period. Several elements of the Srubnaja culture can be noted in the Sauromatian burials, such as traces of a fire cult, large grave pits with funerary timber structures and log walls ringing some of the graves under the

⁷⁶ Rau 1929.

⁷⁷ Grakov 1947, with the earlier literature.

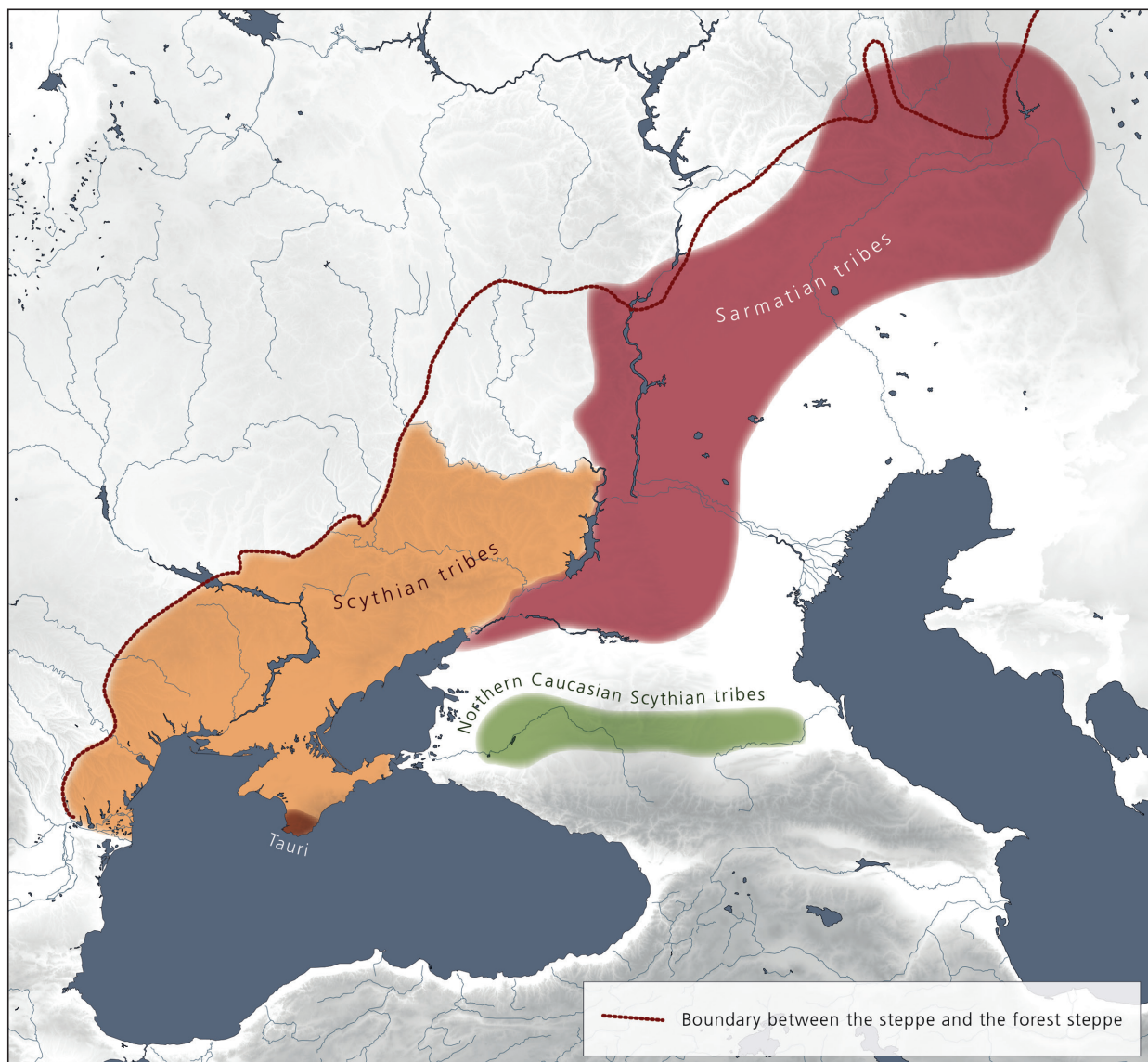


Fig. 24 Distribution of Scythian and Sauromatian/Sarmatian finds in the 7th-3rd centuries BC. – (After Meljukova/Moškova 1989, map 1; map M. Ober, RGZM).

kurgans. At the same time, considerably more Andronovo traits can be noted in the material culture of the Uralian Sauromatians than among the groups settling along the lower reaches of the Volga⁷⁸.

Any overview of Sauromatian culture (figs 24-25) must take note of the fact that, in common with the transitional period between the early 8th and the 7th centuries, there are no permanent settlements in the Sauromatian territory during the entire span of the Sauromatian Age. Only the pottery sherds collected at Ahtube suggest a possible temporary campsite⁷⁹. Herodotus' remark that »as long as the Persians were traversing the Scythian and Sauromatian territory there was nothing for them to harm, as the land was dry and barren«⁸⁰ explains how the region's inhabitants could easily deplete and evacuate the land when necessary.

⁷⁸ Smirnov 1957, 10-12.

⁷⁹ Smirnov 1989, 168.

⁸⁰ Herodotus IV.123.

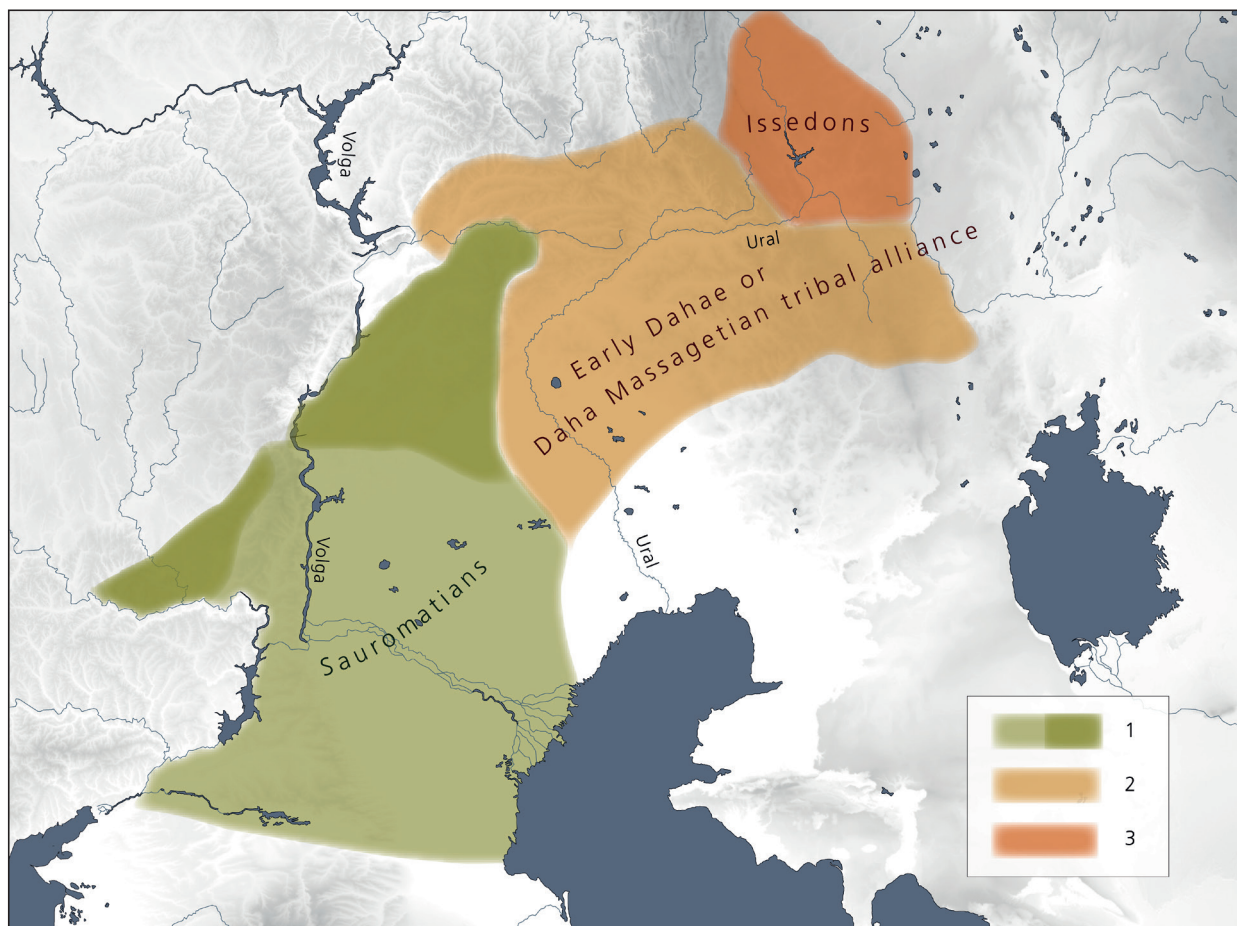


Fig. 25 The distribution of the earliest Sauromatian/Sarmatian finds: **1** finds of the Volga-Don group. – **2** distribution of the Samara-Uralian type finds. – **3** finds of the eastern Uralian group. – (After Smirnov 1984, fig. 1; map Z. Toldi).

The burials are all kurgan graves, without exception (figs 26-27)⁸¹. Two main variants can be distinguished: some burials (secondary graves termed *vpusknoe pogrebenie* in Russian) were dug into an earlier barrow, while others were kurgans raised by the Sauromatian population for their dead (primary graves – *osnovnoe pogrebenie*). The grave pit is generally rectangular or, more rarely, oval. The former include a few extremely wide grave pits. Most were west to east orientated, although the occasional east to west orientation has also been documented. The graves were covered with timber. The grave chamber sometimes resembled a tent.

Although a horse was sometimes deposited in the grave, the deceased were most often buried only with the horse harness (the bit) (fig. 27). Cauldrons and stone altars, as well as censers (*kuril'nica*) occurred regularly among the grave goods (figs 28-29). The latter were often placed in the grave of women buried with a rich array of grave goods, such as mirrors, bone spoons, shells with mineral pigment, and the like. In addition to traces of burning on the altars and censers, evidence of fire cult practices is furnished by the remains of a fire kindled above the grave, the charcoal pieces and ashes thrown into the grave and the ochre

⁸¹ The description of the burial rites and the finds is based on Smirnov 1989, 165 pl. 5, 63-70, complemented with the findings of more recent research.

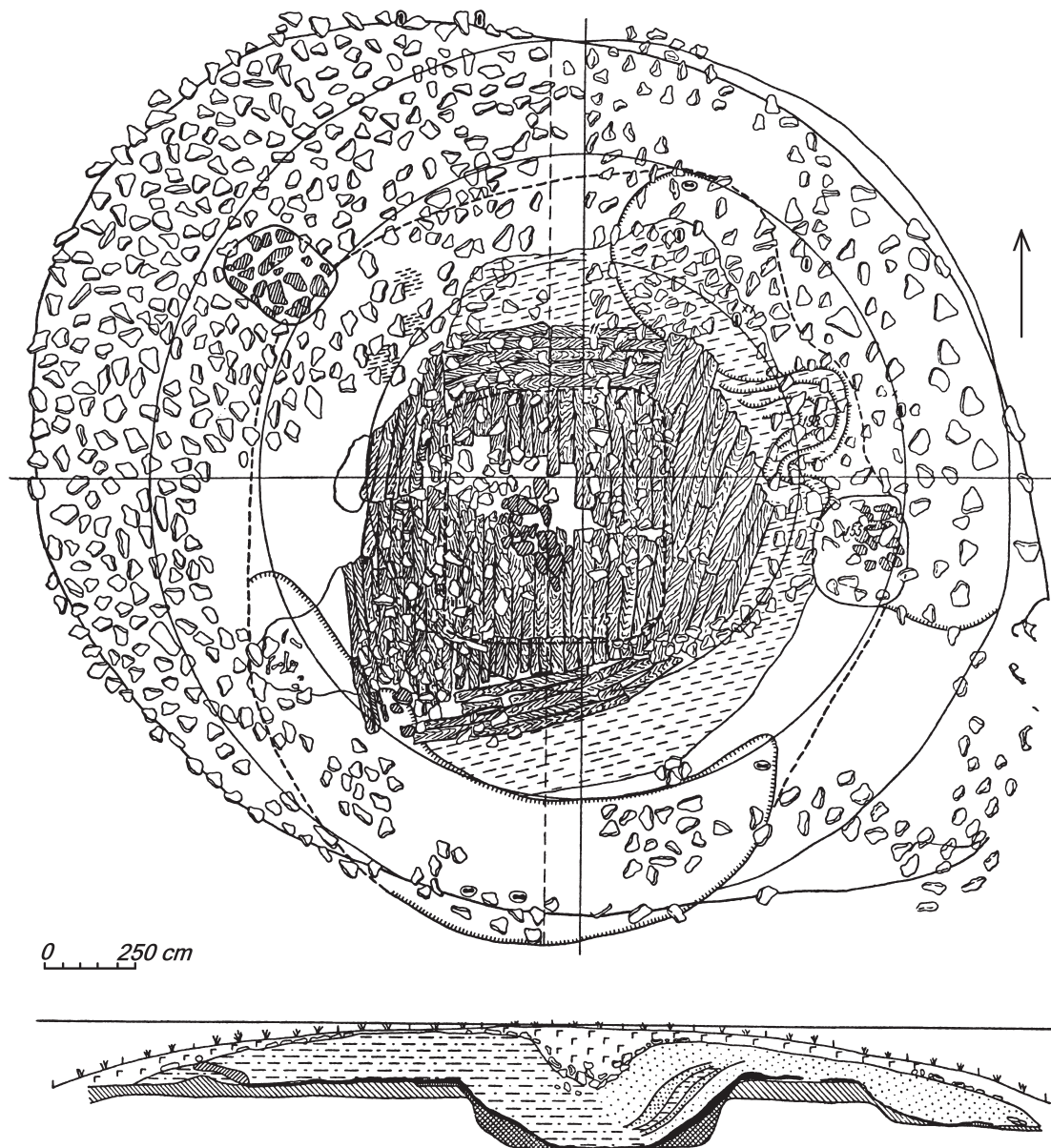


Fig. 26 Burial chamber of Sauromatian Age under a stone-packed kurgan in the South Ural region. – (After Smirnov 1964, fig. 31).

lumps found beside the deceased. Horses were one of the main sacrificial animals among the Sauromatians of the Ural region: the horse bones found in the grave or in the earth of the burial mound were the remains of the funeral feast.

Weapons were also frequently placed in burials. Quivers filled with arrows, swords and daggers were believed to be wielded by warriors in the netherworld (fig. 30), while spears, mail and helmets were rarely accorded to the deceased.

Interestingly enough, weapons were also placed in female burials, not only male ones. Roughly 20 per cent of the female burials contained weapons, mostly arrowheads and the occasional sword or dagger⁸². This

⁸² Smirnov 1975b, 155.

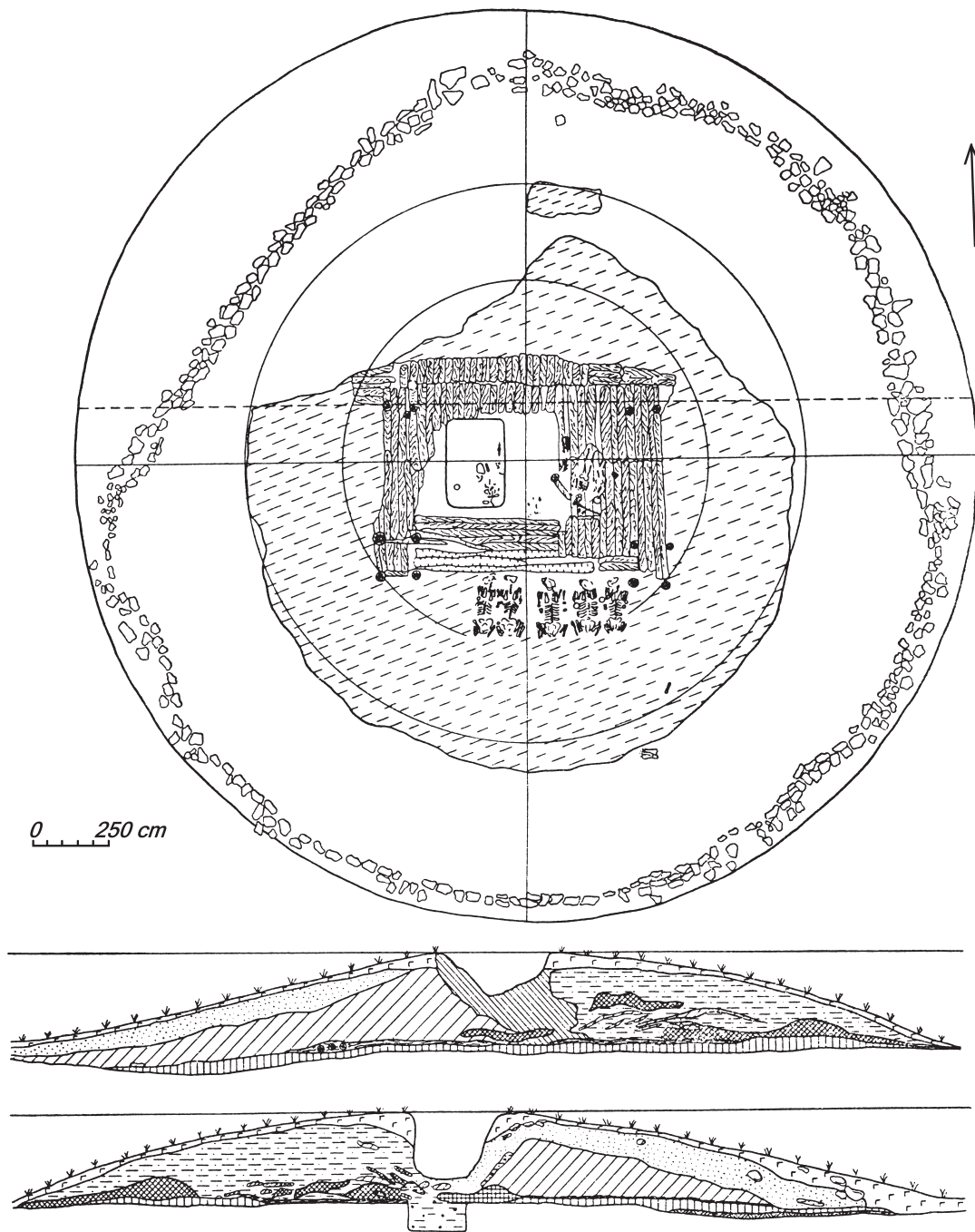


Fig. 27 Sauromatian kurgan burial ringed with stones in the South Ural region. Horses were also deposited in the grave. – (After Smirnov 1964, fig. 25).

circumstance, beside the concentration of ritual artefacts in female burials, and the recurrent topos of the Amazons in the writings of the classical authors led some scholars to assume the leading role of women in Sauromatian society. This widely accepted view, rarely challenged, was founded on Grakov's article on the matriarchate⁸³. It must here be noted that the phenomena suggesting a »matriarchate« declined visibly

⁸³ Grakov 1947.



Fig. 28 Typical Sauromatian finds. – (After Smirnov 1964, figs 70a, 5; 74, 3. 7-8. 10; 75, 4; 78, 1-2. 6; 80, 2. 4. 12. 18).



Fig. 29 Stone altar from Staročerkasskaja stanica dating from the 6th century BC. – (After L'Or 2001, 81 no. 5).

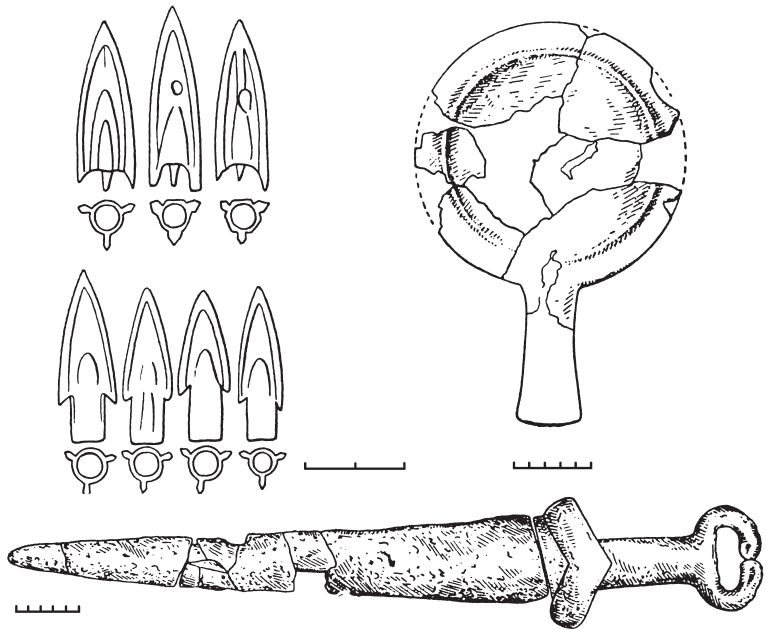


Fig. 30 Typical Sauromatian finds. – (After Smirnov 1964, fig. 15, 2. 4-5).

after the Sauromatian Age, but re-surfaced again during the Middle Sarmatian Age around the turn of the millennium.

The find assemblages designated as Sauromatian leave little doubt that the Sauromatians emerged from the same ethnic and cultural substratum as the Scythians, roughly simultaneously with the latter (see the previous chapter). The two cultures hark back to the same ancestry; they are both direct descendants of



Fig. 31 Half a metre tall wooden statue of a stag covered with gold foil from Filippovka. – (After Zolotye 2001, 68 no. 2).



Fig. 32 Selection of finds from Filipovka: gold bracelet, wooden cup with gold mount, openwork gold mount portraying a stag from the rim of wooden cup, dagger and gold torc. – (After Zolotyie 2001, 71. 85 nos 7. 31; Sokrovišča 2008a, 84. 86. 88 nos 7-8. 14).

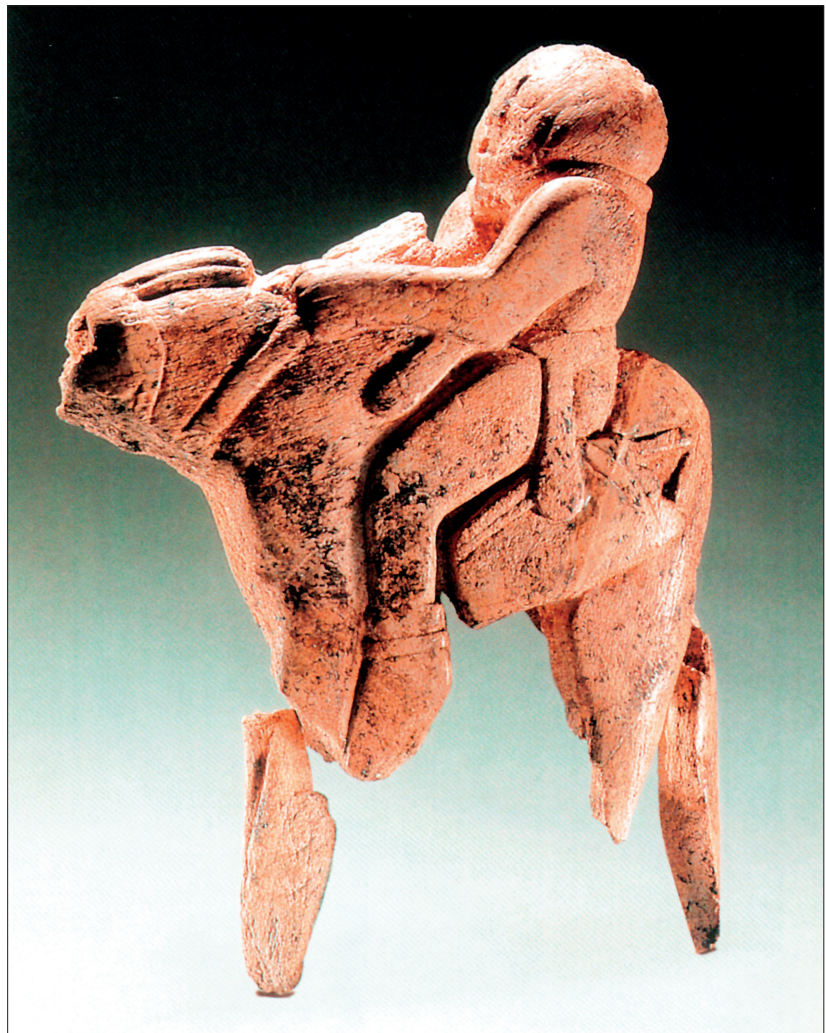


Fig. 33 Bone figurine portraying a mounted warrior from Grave 1 of Kurgan 3 at Filippovka. – (After Zolotye 2001, 147 no. 123).

the Kurgan cultures of the steppe. The relation between the two peoples is so strong that, were it not for Herodotus' distinction between the two, their archaeological heritage could easily be classified as the legacy of a single population.

Any discussion of the archaeology of the Sauromatian Age must include the royal burials. The two lavish kurgan burials best known for their golden stag figurines (**fig. 31**) uncovered at Filippovka near Orenburg in the South Ural region, without doubt, contained the most richly furnished graves of the period (the transition between the Sauromatian and Early Sarmatian Age) that have been discovered to date. Even though the »royal« kurgan (Kurgan 4) had been plundered, the graves dug into the mound had been spared. The latter were excavated by Jablonskij, who found exquisite gold jewellery adorned in the animal style, dress ornaments and weapons (long spear, quiver and scale armour), as well as a remarkable double cup of silver decorated with rams' heads (**figs 32-35**) and an Achaemenid silver jug (**fig. 36**)⁸⁴.

⁸⁴ Yablonsky 2007. See also Firsov 2007 and 2009 for good overviews of the graves of the Sauromatian elite in the catalogue to the Scythian exhibition that toured Germany and Hungary. The remarkable finds from Bis-Oba and Ilek reflect the far-flung con-

tacts of the people inhabiting this bustling region of the steppe, the gate of the thoroughfare between east and west: Phoenician glass, an Indian mirror, a Persian neckring, a northern Pontic horse bit, etc.

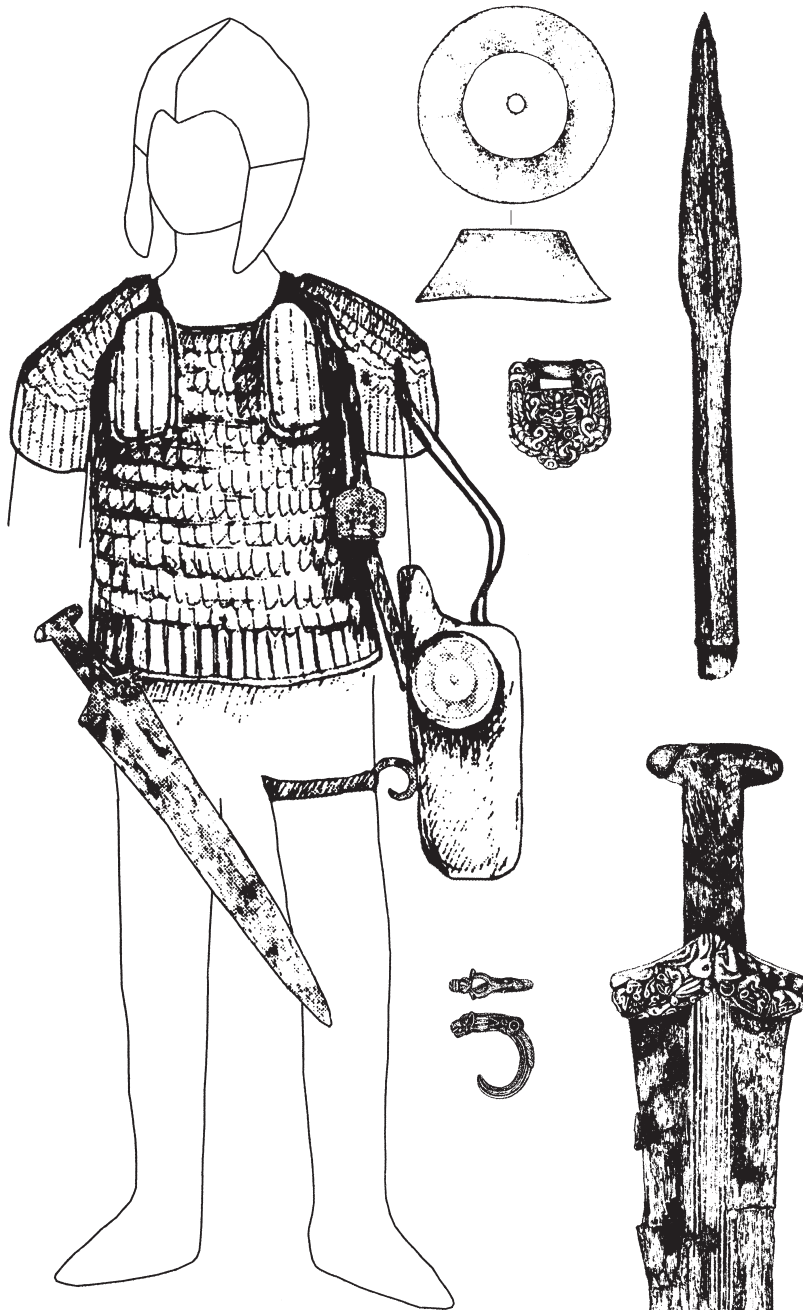


Fig. 34 Reconstruction of the armament of the Filippovka warrior. – (After Jablonskij/Rukavišnikova 2007, fig. 9).

The So-Called Sauromatian / Sarmatian Animal Style

The most distinctive trait of the material discussed here is the so-called Sauromatian animal style, bearing many resemblances to the Scythian one. The Sauromatian animal style, a distinctive variant of the Scythian-Siberian animal style, was not merely a set of decorative designs used for adornment, but an expression of the beliefs shared by both craftsmen and their customers, a visual vocabulary well understood by the entire community. The occurrence of artefacts decorated in this style is virtually restricted to the burials of high-ranking warriors and wealthy priestesses.



Fig. 35 Sacrificial assemblage with a double cup of silver decorated with ram heads from Grave 5 of Kurgan 4 at Filippovka. – (After Sokrovišča 2008a, 53 fig. 24).

The animal style emerged and flourished without any Bronze Age precedents in the regions discussed here. Its origins are still hotly debated. We shall not enter into the particulars of this debate, which has generated enough articles to fill a small library, but shall describe briefly the principal views. The phenomenon dubbed the Scythian-Siberian animal style was distributed over a vast territory extending from the north-western frontier of China to the Carpathian Basin. (The widespread distribution of this style is in itself an indication that this huge Eurasian territory was controlled by related peoples during this period.) Emerging in the 9th or 8th century BC, the animal style blended the most diverse cultural elements, explaining why it has been variously derived from Ionia, the Near East and Iran, and why it has been likened to the Ordos bronzes of north-western China. The most frequent motifs are »flying« deer, curled felines and birds with outspread wings⁸⁵.

In the course of its development, several regional variants of the animal style emerged, one of which is represented by Sauromatian art appearing in the 6th century BC (figs 28-29. 31-32. 35. 37). Animal depictions adorn gold dress ornaments, quiver suspension mounts, harness ornaments and bits, weapons and stone altars, as well as wooden and clay vessels and a variety of other artefacts. The Sauromatian craftsmen skillfully depicted all manner of creatures, ranging from predators (wolves, panthers, bears) and predatory birds (eagles and mythological creatures, such as griffins) to hoofed animals (horses, sheep, camels, deer, moose, ibex and wild boar). The distinctive traits of various animals were often blended into fanciful creatures. One characteristic element of the Scythian-Siberian animal style is the tendency to fill the void areas of the animal, such as the limbs, with decorative elements, often with the outlines of another creature (for example a bird head), which also served to highlight these parts. The bodily parts of predatory and herbivorous animals were often combined into imaginary creatures, which is an expressly Sauromatian trait not encountered in Scythian art. Another specific trait is that the animal combat scenes are static, in contrast to the Siberian and later Sarmatian pieces characterised by dynamism and vitality. Smirnov believed that Sauromatian animal art, incorporating both western (Pontic) and eastern (Siberian) elements, had developed under external cultural influences.

⁸⁵ Perevodčikova 1994, 58-73, with further literature.

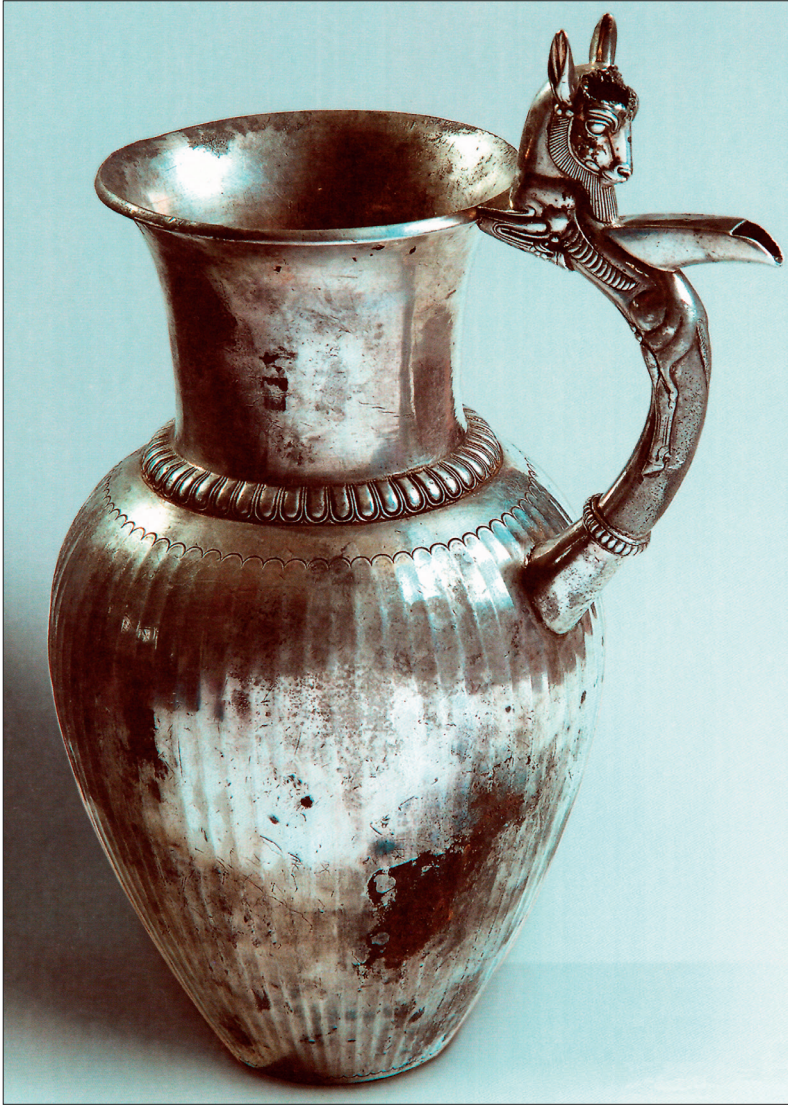


Fig. 36 Achaemenid silver jug from Grave 4 of Kurgan 4 at Filippovka. One handle broke off before the deposition in the grave (after Sokrovišča 2008a, 90 no. 15). The Lydian envoy on the relief at Persepolis bears similar articles (cf. Balahvancev/Jablonskij 2008; the photo of the reliefs at Persepolis is by E. Istvánovits/V. Kulcsár).

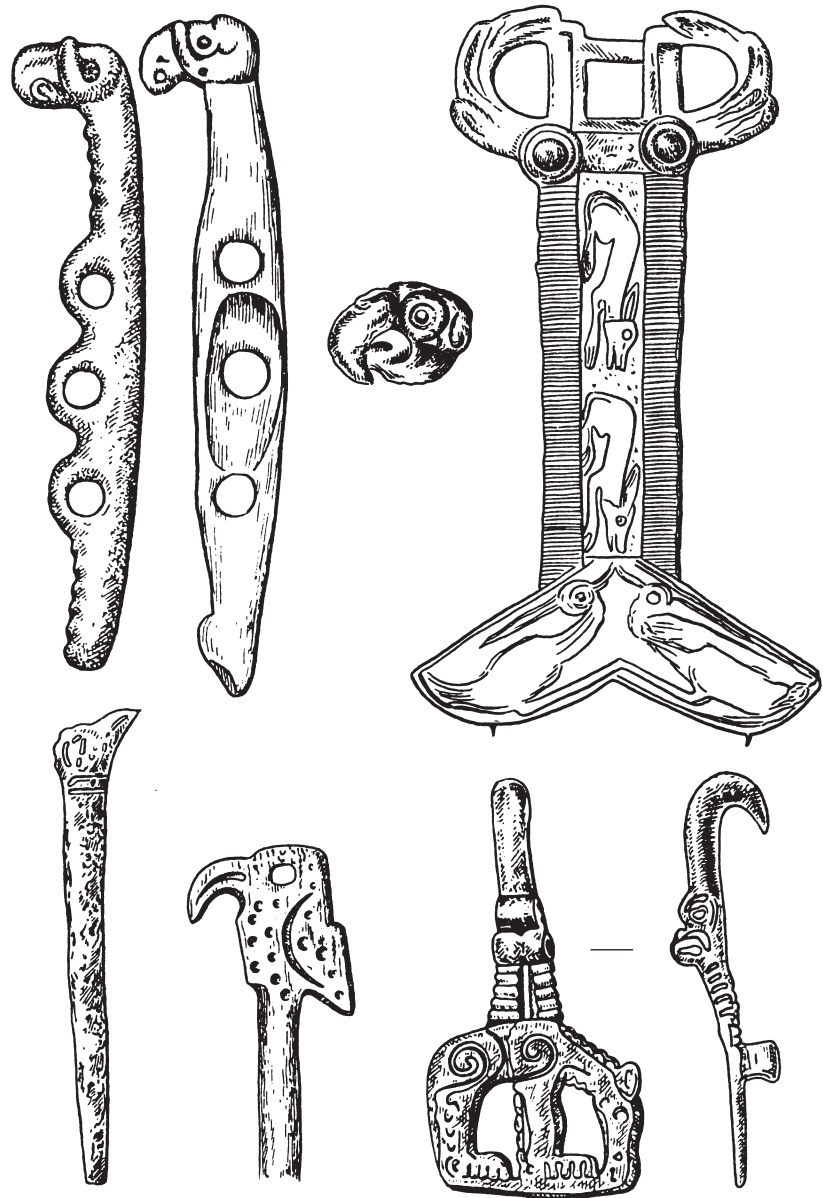


Fig. 37 Artefacts made in the typical Sauromatian animal style. – (After Smirnov 1964, figs 50, 1; 77, 1-3. 17-18. 23).

Several regional variants can be distinguished⁸⁶, the major variants being the animal depictions of the Lower Volga and the South Ural region (fig. 38). The craftsmen working in these regions preferred to portray different animals and their styles also diverge from each other in many respects. Bone carvings were more popular in the Volga region, while bronze was the preferred medium for animal depictions in the Ural region. The two styles also differ regarding their cultural affinities. The artefacts from the Lower Volga region can be likened to the art of Scythia and the northern Caucasus, while the pieces from the South Ural region tend to resemble the pieces from Siberia, Central Asia and the Kama region⁸⁷. Interestingly enough, a few artefacts made in the Sauromatian animal style have also been found in the Carpathian Basin. One good example is a bone carving portraying a predator, perhaps a wolf, discovered in a refuse pit of the Scythian

⁸⁶ Smirnov 1964, 216-246. – Čežina 1983.

⁸⁷ Čežina 1983.

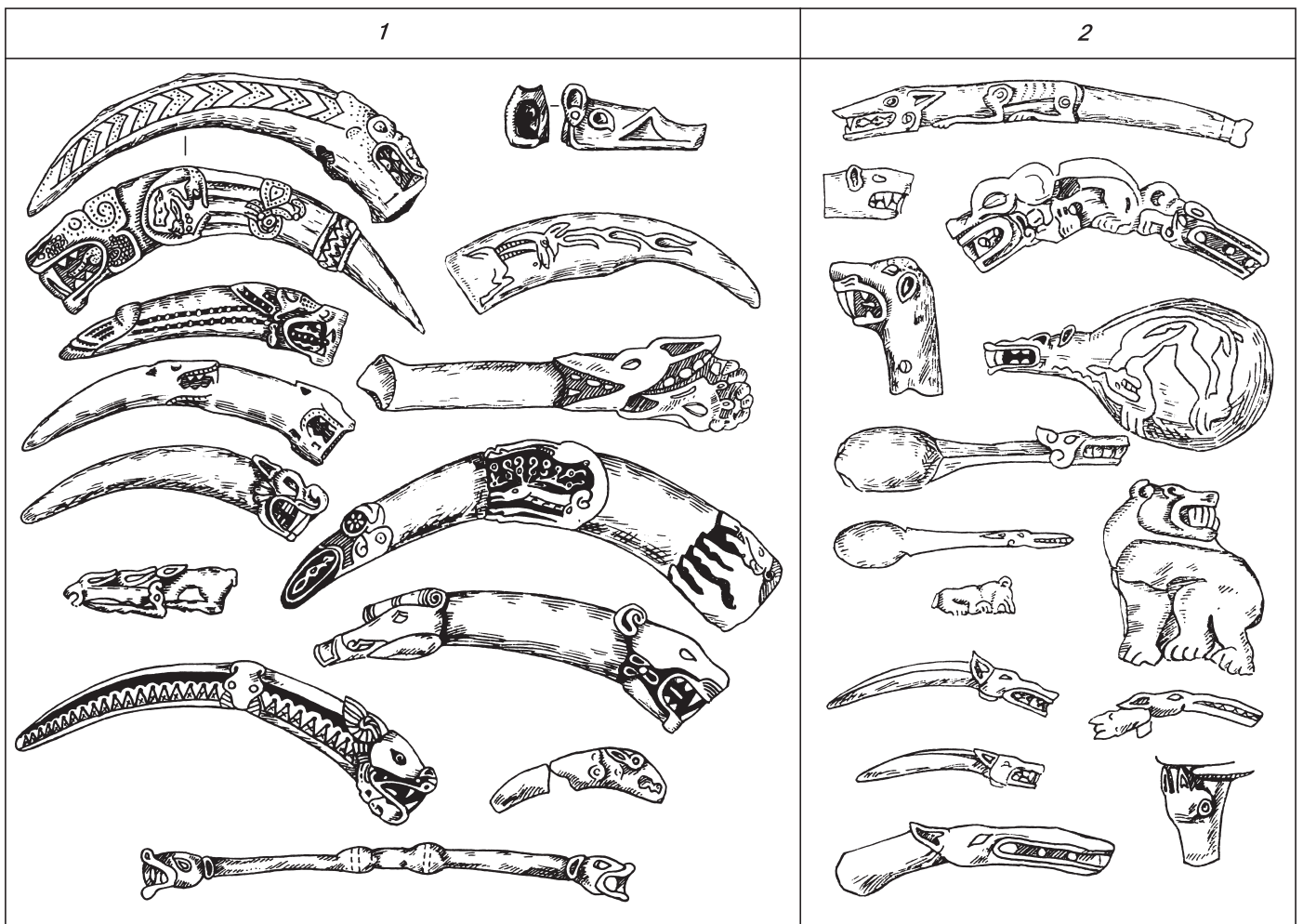


Fig. 38 Regional groups of the Sauromatian animal style: **1** Lower Volga region. – **2** South Ural region. – (After Čežina 1983, pl. 1).

period at Lajosmizse, Site 26, one of the sites excavated along the M5 Motorway. Kemenczei identified the carving as Sauromatian in nature (fig. 39)⁸⁸.

Were the Sauromatians Actually Sarmatians?

The Sauromatian archaeological material is distributed in the Don-Volga interfluvium, the Lower Volga and the South Ural region. The distance between the south-western (the Don Delta) and the north-eastern corner (the upper reaches of the Ural River) of this vast distribution is some 1,600 km, its breadth is roughly 320 km, while its circumference is approximately 3,700 km (figs 24-25). As a comparison, the circumference of modern France is about 3,100 km. Despite the many similarities, two major groups can be distinguished in the archaeological material of the eastern and western part of the Sauromatian distribution, as we have

⁸⁸ Kemenczei 2009, 64. – Istvánovits/Kulcsár 2011, 80-81.



Fig. 39 The Sauromatian animal style in the Carpathian Basin: bone carving portraying a wolf from Lajosmizse, Site 26. – (After Istvánovits/Kulcsár 2011, fig. 6).

| rite | Volga-Don group | Samara-Uralian group |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| kurgan burial | widespread | widespread |
| secondary burial in kurgan | widespread | widespread |
| grave niche | not found | rare |
| catacomb | not found | rare |
| rectangular grave pit | widespread | widespread |
| wide grave pit | widespread | widespread |
| W-E orientation | dominant | dominant |
| E-W orientation | infrequent | infrequent |
| S-N orientation | not found | from the 6 th -5 th centuries |
| timber cover | widespread | widespread |
| elaborate timber constructions | not found | widespread |
| stone packing | not found | occasionally |
| evidence of a fire cult | widespread | widespread |
| primary cremation | not found | occasionally |
| double and multiple burials | rare | rare |

Tab. 2 The main features of the burial rite practised by the two Sauromatian groups.

seen, for example, in the case of animal art. One of these is the Volga-Don group, the other is the Samara-Uralian.

The main differences can be summarised as follows: catacombs and niche graves made their appearance in the Samara-Uralian group alongside south to north orientated burials (the latter documented from the 6th-5th centuries BC onward). In addition to the general practice of covering the grave with timbers, remains of more elaborate timber structures have also been uncovered in this region and stone played a more important role than in the westerly regions. Cremation burials have been found exclusively in the eastern distribution⁸⁹. The main features of the burial rite practised by the two Sauromatian groups are summarised in **table 2**.

Scholars are divided regarding the interpretation of the divergences between the Volga-Don and the Samara-Uralian group. Smirnov believed that the Samara-Uralian group had evolved under stronger in-

⁸⁹ Smirnov 1989, 165.

fluence from the Andronovo culture, providing a part of the explanation for the divergences, while the other dissimilar traits could be attributed to contact with the east (Chorezm and Achaemenid Persia). In contrast, the Sauromatians of the Volga region inherited and preserved several features of the Srubnaja culture, reflected in both the burial rites and the material culture, best exemplified by the graves of the »transitional« period in the 8th-7th centuries BC⁹⁰. Smirnov noted that the similarities (especially regarding burial rite)⁹¹ outweighed the dissimilarities by far, and he therefore asserted that the two groups were identical⁹².

More recently, however, Russian and Ukrainian scholars have begun to emphasise the distinctness of the Volga-Don and the Samara-Uralian group, as well as their separate origins. It has been claimed that the new archaeological assemblages only appeared in the second half of the 6th century to the beginning of the 5th century BC in the South Ural region and that this material could be associated with an immigrant population of mounted nomads from the east that had no affinity whatsoever with the region's preceding Bronze Age culture⁹³. This line of reasoning was first put forward by Rostovcev, who conjectured that the ethnogenesis of the Sauromatians occurred by the Sea of Azov through the mingling of the Scythians with the local Maeotian aborigine population, which had adopted the Scythian culture and language. Being a mounted nomadic people from Central Asia, the Sarmatians cannot be identified with this population⁹⁴. In other words, Rostovcev claimed that the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians were two different peoples with nothing in common, save for the fact of being neighbours. Consequently, the two peoples had two diverse, well-definable material cultures. In this model, the Sauromatian distribution is restricted to the Don-Volga interfluvium and the Lower Volga region, while the Sarmatians, coming from Central Asia, represented an entirely different nomadic population that had arrived in the South Ural region from the east.

The question of whether or not the two populations were related is crucial because it has a bearing on the ethnogenesis of the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians: of whether the two peoples share a common ancestry or whether they should be regarded as separate peoples originating from different regions.

Returning to the archaeological finds, this issue raises two questions. The first is whether the Volga-Don and the Samara-Uralian group are two separate cultural entities, whether they represent two cultures or whether they are regional groups of the same culture. Assuming that the two groups are in fact separate cultures, the other question is whether they represent two kindred peoples or populations of different ancestry.

In the absence of detailed comparative studies, there is no conclusive answer to the first question. For lack of anything better, the entire find horizon is still treated as the heritage of the Sauromatians.

It is therefore undecided for the time being whether the two groups were part of the same cultural complex. Despite these uncertainties, several theories have been put forward regarding the second question. Many researchers believe that a territory as vast as the one in question could hardly have been ruled by a single tribe. Herodotus' oft-quoted passage recorded that the Sauromatians' land lay at a distance of fifteen days' journey from the Sea of Azov:

When one crosses the Tanais, one is no longer in Scythia; the first region on crossing is that of the Sauromatae, who, beginning at the upper end of the Palus Maeotis, stretch northward a distance of fifteen days' journey⁹⁵.

⁹⁰ Smirnov 1957, 10-12.

⁹¹ The burial rite must be taken into account because it is one of the elements whose study can contribute much to identifying a particular ethnic group.

⁹² Smirnov 1984, 10-11; 1989, 165.

⁹³ Železčikov/Pšeničnjuk 1994, 6.

⁹⁴ Rostovcev 1918, 33-35. – Rostovtzeff 1922, 113-114.

⁹⁵ Herodotus IV.21.

Herodotus could hardly have been referring to the regions east of the Volga or the South Ural region⁹⁶. It has been suggested that the South Uralian material can perhaps be associated with the Issedons, the Proto-Aorsi, the Roxolani, the Dahae or the Doha-Massagetes⁹⁷.

The fiercest debate raged around Rostovcev's model, mentioned briefly in the above⁹⁸. Rostovcev argued that the matriarchal traits of Sauromatian society, emphasised by the classical Greek authors, suggested a society contrasting markedly with that of the Sarmatians', the latter having more in common with Scythian society, and that the two peoples, the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians, could hardly have been identical. In his view, »the Sauromatians were probably conquered by the Sarmatians«⁹⁹. He cited the radically different portrayals of the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians by classical authors (Herodotus and Hippocrates) as additional proof against the possible equivalence of the two peoples. Rostovcev argued that later authors peppered earlier descriptions of the Sauromatians with their own observations on the Sarmatians.

In his influential monograph, Smirnov challenged Rostovcev's views and emphasised that the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians were one and the same people, although he did not reject the separateness of the Uralian and the Volga group. The contrasting models proposed by the two doyens of steppe-Sarmatian research led to a proliferation of studies in this field.

Skripkin accepted Rostovcev's idea that the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians were two separate peoples and strove to substantiate his hypothesis with archaeological data¹⁰⁰. In his view, the differences between the two main material types identified as Sauromatian and the arguments presented in the above indicated that the Lower Volga region had been inhabited by Sauromatians, while the find material from the South Ural region – for which he suggested the label Prohorovka culture – could be associated with the Sarmatians. Skripkin argued that the Prohorovka type finds reached the Lower Volga region and the northern Pontic as a consequence of military campaigns. True enough, the Prohorovka culture, corresponding to the Early Sarmatian Age, had appeared at an earlier date in the Uralian region, perhaps as early as the 4th century BC, than along the Volga. The westward migration of the Sarmatians, in the course of which they became masters over most of the European steppe, began from this territory. A genuine mass migration took place from the South Ural to the Volga region¹⁰¹. The question is whether this implies two peoples of differing ancestry or the growing power of the eastern branch of the same tribal alliance.

There is no ready answer to the question of whether the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians were one and the same people or not, owing to the contradictory passages in the literary sources. Partly contradicting himself, Rostovcev argued that »Sarmatian« and »Sirmatian« were perhaps variants of Sauromatian. Classical authors tended to use the earlier name when quoting earlier works, while the later one was used for denoting the new conquerors in the 3rd century BC. Pliny, for example, called them *Sarmatae* when quoting a legend of the Roman or Late Hellenistic Age, and referred to them as *Sauromatae* when writing of events

⁹⁶ This point has been noted by several scholars, e. g. Očir-Gorjaeva 1993, and Jablonskij 2007, 6 n. 7, with an excellent overview of the different opinions on this issue.

⁹⁷ In his seminal 1964 monograph, Smirnov did not take a definite stand on the ethnic association of the southern Uralian assemblages. In another study written ten years later, he argued that the left bank of the Ural was settled by the Doha-Massagetes, while the river's right bank by the Issedons (Smirnov 1975a, 153).

⁹⁸ In Hungary, the problems of the Sauromatian-Sarmatian identification were discussed by Harmatta, who believed that compared to the Sauromatians, the Sarmatians originated farther to the east, although he did not present convincing arguments to support this view. See Harmatta 1949, 131; 1970, 8-9.

⁹⁹ In other words, the nomadic Sarmatians arriving from the east vanquished the Sauromatians, who had emerged from the Maeotians under Scythian influence (Rostovtzeff 1922, 113-114).

¹⁰⁰ Skripkin 1988, esp. 28, with the earlier literature. Many scholars, including Moškova, Abramova, Zaseckaja and others, accepted Smirnov's views on an autochthonous population (Smirnov 1989, 170-171), while the younger generation of scholars tends to second Rostovcev's migrationist hypothesis, which has become the general view in post-Soviet studies. The latter has been discussed in detail by Skripkin.

¹⁰¹ Skripkin 1988, 28-29. – Moškova 1994, 19.

preceding the Hellenistic Age. A similar tendency can be noted in the works of Pomponius Mela, who was rather inconsistent in his usage of the ethnonyms Sauromatian and Sarmatian¹⁰². Scholars accepting Rostovcev's theory usually note that Ovid drew a sharp distinction between the two ethnonyms.

The question is far from simple. Although Ovid described the population in the Lower Danube region as *Sauromatae*, he used the adjective *sarmaticus* or *sarmatis* in every case¹⁰³. It seems likely that Ovid adopted the old name (Sauromatians) from the Pontic Greeks. In Book 1 of the *Tristes*, he uses the term *Sarmatis* and, when inflecting it, the more archaic Greek form *Sauromates* instead of the more appropriate *Sauromata*¹⁰⁴. It has been argued that Sauromatian and Sarmatian were synonyms in Ovid's usage, who employed both the Latin and the Greek form. His public (Roman readers) were apparently familiar with both forms. A similar usage can be noted in the works of Statius, Martial and Juvenal among the poets and in the works of Strabo and Pliny among the historians¹⁰⁵. The use of both forms can be explained by the fact that the Greeks preferred the form Sauromatian, while the Romans tended to use Sarmatian. Pliny regarded the two as one and the same people¹⁰⁶.

While the relevant sources could be listed *ad infinitum*, it would not bring us any closer to settling this issue. It is obvious that the use of the two ethnonyms was not consistent. In some cases, a personal preference for the Greek or Latin form undoubtedly played a role, as did the use of earlier literary works. The similarity between the two names was a source of constant confusion, but this can hardly be used as an argument either for the equation or the separation of the two peoples.

The comparison of the anthropological material is at least as important as that of the archaeological material. Very few anthropological samples from the 9th-7th centuries BC are available for study and their assessment is still in its infancy. The study of a few small series indicates that the anthropological make-up of the burials from the South Ural region and from the Don-Volga interfluvium differs, with the latter containing more Mongoloid elements. At the same time, it is also clear that even at the initial stage of anthropological studies the so-called Cimmerian type of the 9th-7th centuries BC survived until the spread of the Sarmatian find material and that the Cimmerian type can be documented as far as the Danube. The Cimmerian type can be characterised as Europid, brachycranial individuals with low-vaulted cranium, slight horizontal profile of the face and well-pronounced nasal bones¹⁰⁷.

It seems to us that the arguments claiming the separateness of the archaeological material and the interpretation of the sources to this effect are not wholly convincing, and neither is the slightly controversial evaluation of the anthropological samples. The linguistic evidence expressly suggests the contrary. No persuasive explanation has been given for the resemblance of the two ethnonyms, especially considering the fact that the ethnonym Sarmatian – no matter what its meaning (see the previous chapter) – was a self-denomination, indicated not only by the Iranian origin, but also by the fact that some Bosporan kings were called Sauromates (Sauromates I, 93-123 AD; Sauromates II, 173/4-210/11 AD). If the name *Sauromata* had only been used by the Greeks and the Romans to denote the Sarmatians (similar to the generic term »Scythian« applied to the successive nomadic peoples of the steppe from the Sarmatians to the ancient Hungarian tribes¹⁰⁸ and, on occasion, to Germanic peoples, too), and the Sarmatians had denoted themselves by an entirely differ-

¹⁰² Pomp. Mela I.2 and I.19 (*Sauromatae*), III.4 (*Sarmatia*), II.1 (*Sauromatae*), I.3, III.6 (*Sarmatae*). See also Rostovcev 1925, 111 n. 3.

¹⁰³ Podosinov 1976, 29-30. To complicate things further, he claimed that the name »Sarmatian« had been transferred to a new tribal alliance emerging by the Pontic in the 2nd century BC.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly enough, this argument was voiced by the very same scholar (Podosinov 1976, 30-31), who cast his vote in

favour for the separateness of the two peoples and quoted Ovid to support this view.

¹⁰⁵ Kuklina 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.80: »the Sarmatians, called by the Greeks Sauromatians«. Cf. Harmatta 1941, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Jablonskij 2010, 83-102. – Balabanova 1988, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.80. – Anon. *Gesta Hungarorum* 1. Scythia.

ent name, it is most unlikely that a king would have borne a name entirely alien to his ancestry (despite his being an immigrant in a Greek colony).

Any advances in this field can only be made through a sober comparison of the Volga and the Uralian group. It seems to us that despite its distribution over a vast territory, the material in question is the legacy of the same, or closely related peoples. As far as the equivalence of the Sauromatians and the Sarmatians is concerned, it seems inconceivable to us that one had been forged into a people by the Sea of Azov, while the other in Central Asia, or that the two peoples would be entirely unrelated. In our view, the two names denote variants of one and the same people.

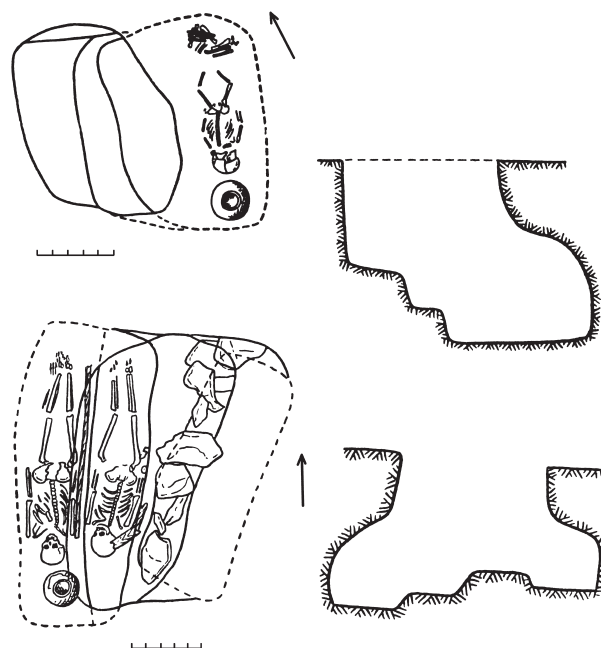


Fig. 40 Early Sarmatian (Prohorovka) niche graves. Mečetsaj, Kurgan 7, Graves 12 and 14 (South Ural region). – (After Smirnov 1975a, figs 48-49).

THE BEGINNING OF THE SARMATIAN EXPANSION

Early Sarmatian Find Assemblages (4th? to Mid-2nd Century BC)

For a long time, up to the 6th-5th centuries BC, the Scythians maintained good relations with the Sauromatians¹⁰⁹. By this time, a new archaeological phenomenon known as the Prohorovka culture had formed or had been in the process of forming in the Ural region, which is generally correlated with the Early Sarmatian Age, the next major epoch after the Sauromatian Age¹¹⁰.

In contrast to the Sauromatian cemeteries, the Early Sarmatian burial grounds are characterised by an astonishing diversity of funerary rites. However, a few constant, shared elements can be distinguished in the rite, one of these being the south to north orientation of the deceased, adopted after cultural influences from other regions, perhaps from the east¹¹¹, the creation of side-niches in the grave pit (**fig. 40**) and the deposition of sheep front legs as food offerings. There were few deviations from the standard orientation: one instance can be noted in the family kurgans, when the relatives were laid around the head of the family or the kindred (**fig. 41**)¹¹². Several burial grounds used by a particular kindred have been investigated, both smaller and larger ones, in which family and many individual graves both occur, some of which were dug into earlier Bronze Age kurgans. Narrow, rectangular grave pits and grave pits with a ledge or a side-niche are the most common grave forms.

¹⁰⁹ In the following, we shall draw a distinction between the Scythians and the Sauromatians/Sarmatians. The latter are regarded as a people or tribe (or even as peoples or a tribal alliance) breaking away from the former tribal alliance who lived an independent life.

¹¹⁰ For a good overview of the period's finds, see Smirnov 1989, 169-177. The Siracian finds from the Kuban region have been reviewed by Marčenko 1996. For the modern publication of Prohorovka, the eponymic site, see Jablonskij 2010.

¹¹¹ Smirnov 1984, 44. It has recently been suggested that some of the new elements in the burial rite such as the south to north orientation and the appearance of side-niches can perhaps be explained by the arrival of a population from northern and north-western China. See Tairov 2006, with a summary of the relevant literature.

¹¹² Smirnov 1989, 171. – Vlaskin 2000, 15, with further literature.

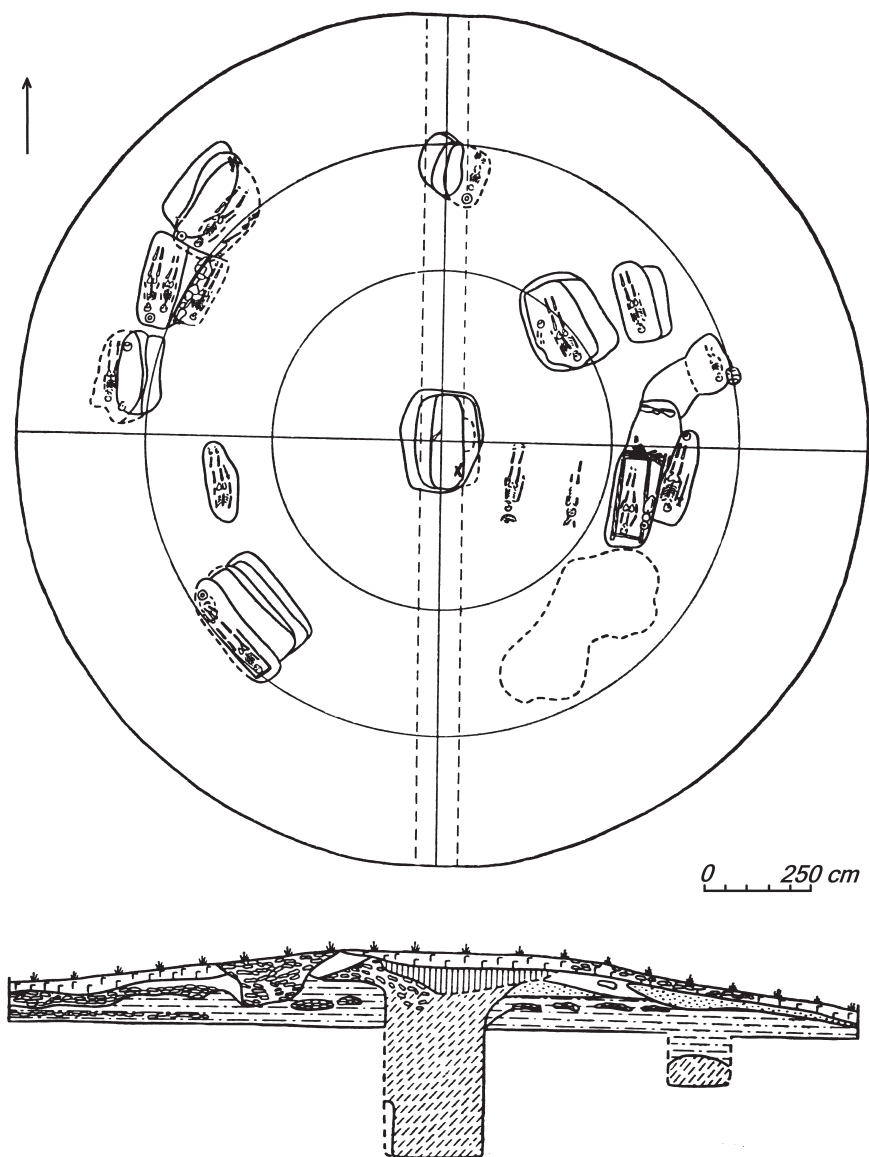


Fig. 41 Family grave group. Mečetsaj, Kurgan 7 (South Ural region). – (After Smirnov 1975a, fig. 40).

Warrior graves are quite common. These burials generally yielded both a long and a short sword, quivers containing arrows (at first tipped with bronze, then later with iron), spears, helmets and coats of mail (fig. 42, 1-5). Horse harnesses continued to be deposited in the graves, occasionally with ornate *phalerae* (fig. 42, 11-13. 16). Mirrors (fig. 42, 16), various toiletry articles and spoons with zoomorphic handles were often part of the grave goods (although the earlier animal style virtually disappeared from the decoration). The cult of fire continued to be practised. Stone altars disappeared, to be replaced by small clay incense burners (*kuril'nica*) (fig. 42, 8-9). New contacts were forged (fig. 43), reflected by imports from the Greek towns on the north Pontic and a few vessel types arriving from the Maeotians¹¹³. In the Kuban region, dynamic trade between the nomads of the north-western Caucasus and the Bosphorus are indicated by the high number of *balsamariums* (small perfume bottles), amongst others¹¹⁴. Greek and Maeotian influences

¹¹³ See section »The Siracian Migration: Maeotians and Greeks in the Kuban Region« for a detailed discussion of the Maeotians. ¹¹⁴ Zaharov 2000, 30.

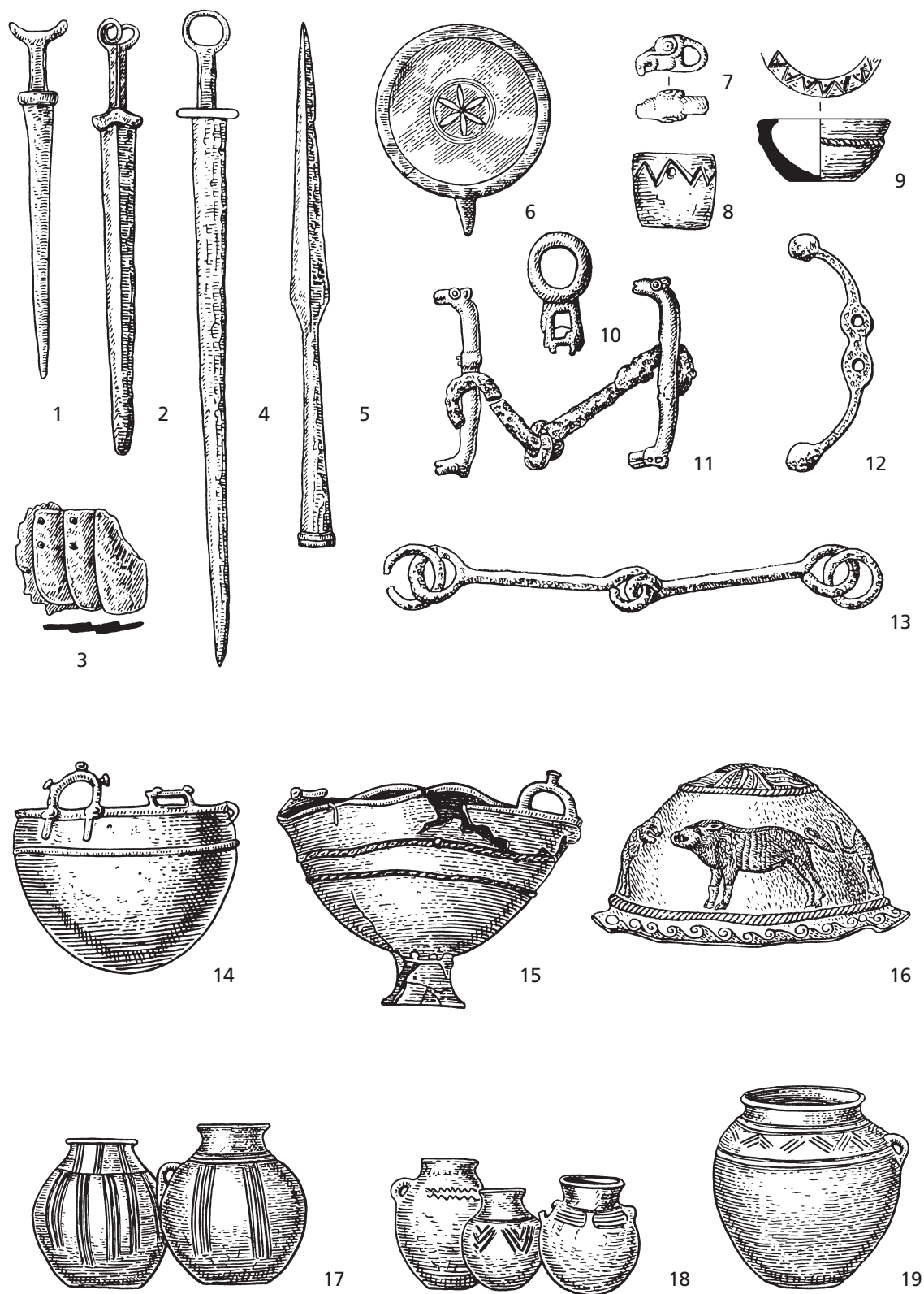


Fig. 42 Typical finds of the Early Sarmatian (Prohorovka) period. – (After Stepi 1989, pls 65. 67-69. 72).



Fig. 43 The silver gilt cup from Grave 3 of Kurgan B at Prohorovka. The cup's provenance is controversial. – (After Jablonskij 2010, 70. 301 fig. 1243).

were remarkably strong in the culture of the Siraci of the Kuban region, often to the extent that an ethnic attribution is almost impossible.

On the Boundary of the Old and New Worlds

A gradual migration to the west and south-west can be noted in the South Ural, the Lower Volga and the Lower Don regions, the foreland of the northern Caucasus during the 4th-3rd centuries BC. This was probably set in motion by the westward outflow of the nomads of the Ural region (**fig. 44**)¹¹⁵.

A closer look at the burials in the Sauromatian lands reveals that some kind of change occurred, reflected principally by the demographic data. The number of burials increased, suggesting a population growth. In his study on the period's demography, Železčikov discussed the changes in the population of the South Ural region and the regions beyond the Volga. While roughly 2,000 burials were known from the 6th-4th centuries BC by the early 1980s, this figure was about 5,000 for the period between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC, dropping to about 1,000 by the 1st century BC - 1st century AD. Although the number of burials known from all three periods has obviously increased since then, the proportions have remained more or less the same. Železčikov based his demographic study on these figures, concluding that the population of the region in question numbered about 10,000 at one time during the earliest period. This population swelled to about 20,000 by the start of the Sauromatian/Sarmatian migration, and then declined sharply, dropping to roughly between 5,000 and 7,000 by the turn of the millennium (**fig. 45**)¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁵ Klepikov/Skripkin 1997, 33.

¹¹⁶ The figures cited here correspond to the carrying capacity of c. 60 per cent of the 1 million km² area (c. 3.7 million hectares). A vast territory of this size is suitable for pasturing flocks of 4 million sheep, or herds of 300,000 horses or 240,000 cattle. Knowing that one individual consumes roughly 25 sheep during the year, a stock of 100 animals can be counted per individual for sustenance and for ensuring the necessary re-

production of the animal stock. However, this figure must be doubled in view of the need to acquire various commodities through trade, meaning that one should calculate with 200 animals per individual. An area of at least 180-190 hectares is necessary for pasturing a flock of this size. The above data confirm the correctness of the population estimates based on the number of excavated burials (Železčikov 1984).



Fig. 44 The beginning of the Sarmatian migration in the 4th-3rd centuries BC. Green: Bosporan Kingdom. – (After Maslennikov 1981, fig. 12; Abramova 1992, fig. 1; map M. Ober, RGZM).

The expansion was apparently triggered, or perhaps downright necessitated, by the population growth during the 4th-3rd centuries BC. The region's carrying capacity was limited and the increasing population was forced to search for new pastures. The exact date of the expansion is one of the most keenly debated and controversial issues of Sarmatian research. The demographic calculations quoted above are in themselves insufficient for proving that the Sarmatians crossed the Tanais (Don), the river marking the boundary between Asia and Europe (in the sense used by the historians of Antiquity), at a fairly early date in the 5th-4th centuries BC and conquered the earlier Scythian lands, establishing what became known as European Sarmatia. Let us take a closer look at the evidence for the Sarmatian migration.

Comparable data sets are lacking for the Volga and the Ural region, even though this would be crucial for determining whether there were any changes (and if so, to what extent) in the demography of the two regions. Be that as it may, several traits of the material culture and of the burial rites specific to the population living in the Ural region make their appearance along the Volga from the 4th century onward. The interpretation of this phenomenon, i. e. whether this should be conceptualised as a local development under influence from neighbouring peoples or as the outcome of mass immigration, is the subject of vigorous debate referred to in the previous chapter. Insofar as these phenomena are regarded as a local development, we may speak of the unbroken survival of the Sauromatian/Sarmatian population. If, however, the changes are ascribed to the conquest of the Volga population by the Uralians, who then continued their expansion to the west, this also means the acceptance of the theory that the nomadic Sarmatians of the east subjugated

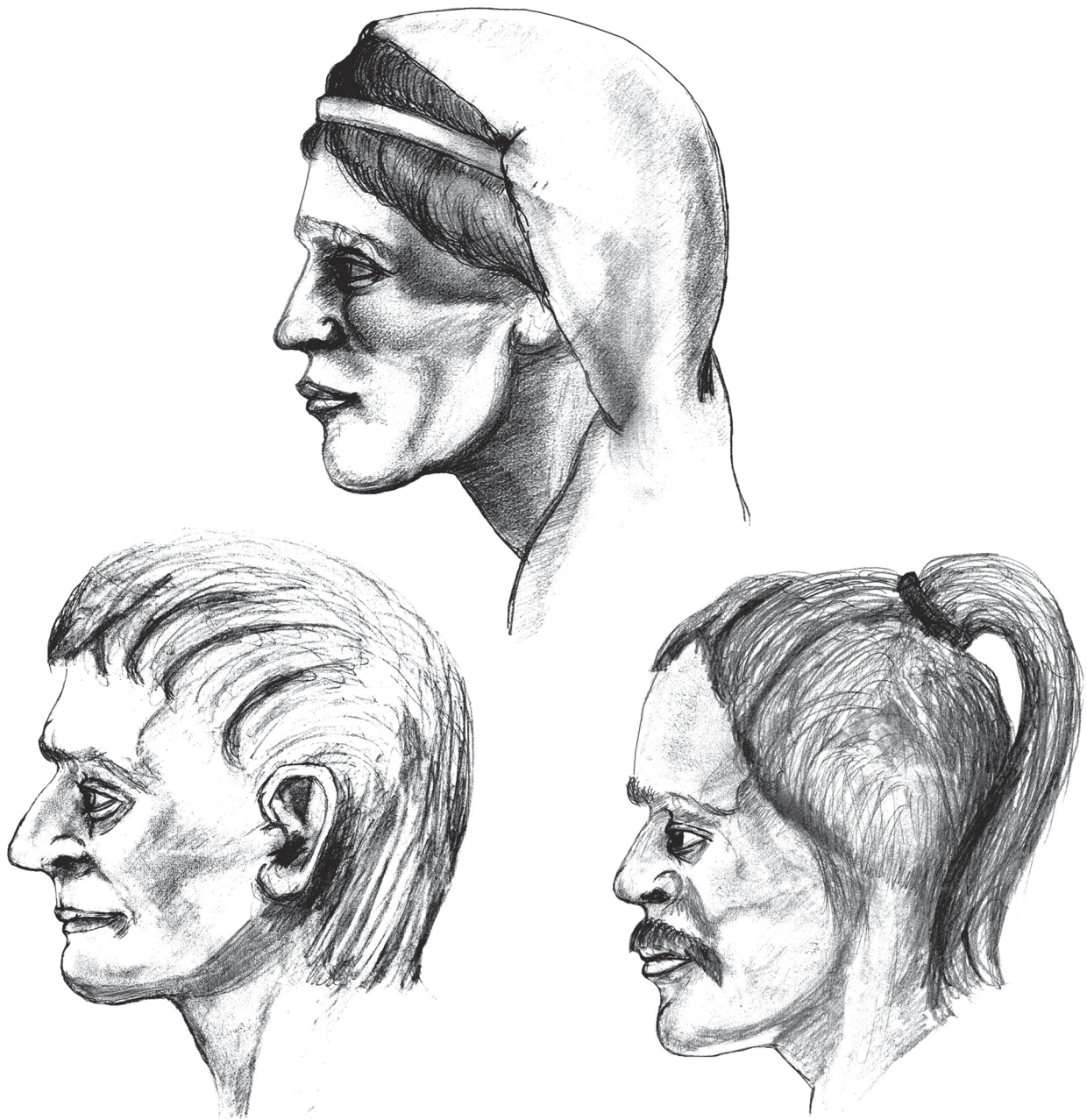


Fig. 45 Facial reconstruction of some skulls from the Prohorovka cemetery. – (After Jablonskij 2010, 178-180 figs 82-84).

the Sauromatians who had evolved from the Maeotians under Scythian influence and were thus a people unrelated to the Sarmatians.

These, then, are the two main, irreconcilable theories. However, there is also a third possibility, namely that the expansion and conquest can be seen as a rivalry between two tribes or groups of the same population, which seems to us to have been the case.

The innovations and/or migrations starting from the Ural region did not halt at the Don. Early Sarmatian material is distributed over a much larger territory than the archaeological finds of the Sauromatians. The Sarmatians crossed the Don and advanced as far as the Dnieper in the west and the northern Caucasus in the south (**fig. 46**). It has been repeatedly suggested that the Dahae (Dahaeans) of Central Asia also have

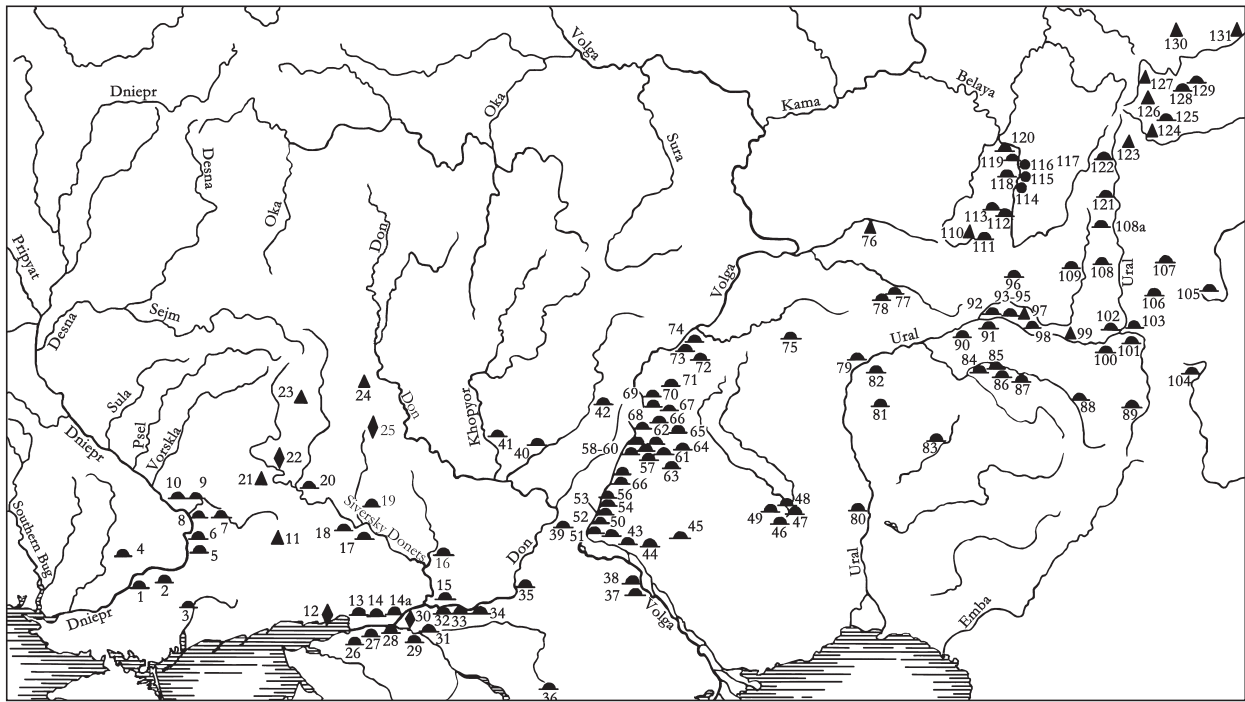


Fig. 46 Distribution of the finds of the Early Sarmatian (Prohorovka) period. – (After Stepi 1989, map 13).

an Uralian Sarmatian ancestry, indicated by the Prohorovka elements in their burial rite and a few artefact types. It is therefore possible that a part of the southern Uralian population migrated to the region south of Aral Sea during the 4th century BC¹¹⁷. The Parthian Empire was founded by the Parni tribe, who had seceded from the Dahaeen tribal alliance (fig. 47), which explains the nomadic elements in Parthian warfare, many of which survived into the Sassanian period as well¹¹⁸.

The westward and south-westward migration was not without precedence. In the 6th-4th centuries BC, there is ample evidence for the interaction between the indigenous population of the northern Caucasus (the Koban and Kajakent-Horočoj cultures) and the Sauromatians/Sarmatians. The anthropological material would suggest that in addition to the appearance of certain artefacts and various elements of the burial rite, the sporadic presence of Sauromatians may also be assumed. Vinogradov has aptly noted that the north-eastern Caucasus was not a *terra incognita* to the Sarmatians at the time when they began their westward migration¹¹⁹. Evidence for the contacts between the two populations is furnished by Koban type bracelets, a Caucasian helmet, a horse-bit and some beads in the Volga region (fig. 48), and by the presence of vessels of the Volga region type in the Caucasus¹²⁰.

It seems unlikely that the situation had differed much on the right bank of the Don. However, the close relationship between the Sauromatians/Sarmatians and the Scythians, and the resemblances between their material culture make studies in this field rather difficult. It must be borne in mind that these two peoples were virtually identical and that regional differences can be explained by the different cultural influences in various areas of their vast settlement territory.

117 Balahvancev 2005, 66, with the earlier literature.

118 Nikonorov 2005, 141-142.

119 Vinogradov 1963, 13-35, esp. 33-35 with a survey of the grave goods and burial rites, as well as the earlier literature.

120 Smirnov 1964, 269.



Fig. 47 Parthian bronze statue from Shami (Khuzistan, south-western Iran) in the Iranian National Museum in Tehran, believed to portray Surena, the hero of the Battle of Carrhae (1st century BC-1st century AD; after Seipel 2000, 230).

What can be stated with certainty is that the earlier material culture changed profoundly by the time the migration began. As we have pointed out earlier, the new find assemblages were classified as the Prohorovka culture. Earlier traits, more typical for Scythian culture, gradually faded. The »simpler« and more »lavish« grave assemblages indicate a social differentiation: the burials of a mounted aristocracy can be easily distinguished (fig. 49), as can the burials of sacral persons (both men and women).

In the following, we shall examine the date of the appearance of the Sarmatians in Europe (here used in the Antique sense, meaning west of the Don), the period's political situation and the role played by the Sarmatians in the events of the 4th and 3rd centuries. The material culture of the Sarmatians during this period will be depicted with broad strokes.

Written Sources on the Appearance of the Sarmatians in Europe in the First Half of the 4th Century BC

We must be aware that the information contained in the written sources on the Sauromatian/Sarmatian expansion is extremely fragmentary, often confusing and rarely accurate in detail. The geographers and historians of Antiquity generally acquired their information on the barbarians second-hand or used the accounts of their predecessors, which was sometimes reiterated in a distorted form. One notable exception is Herodotus, who gathered his data first-hand; one of the main reasons that his writings are so crucial. The patchiness and unreliability of the available sources is the main reason for the fierce debates over their interpretation and for the widely differing conclusions drawn from them. One of the major problems is posed by the inconsistent usage of the Sauromatian/Sarmatian ethnonym, tangled beyond any hope of unravelling the strands (see above). The data on the western expansion of the Sauromatians/Sarmatians have been interpreted variously by different scholars, whose views are briefly reviewed here.

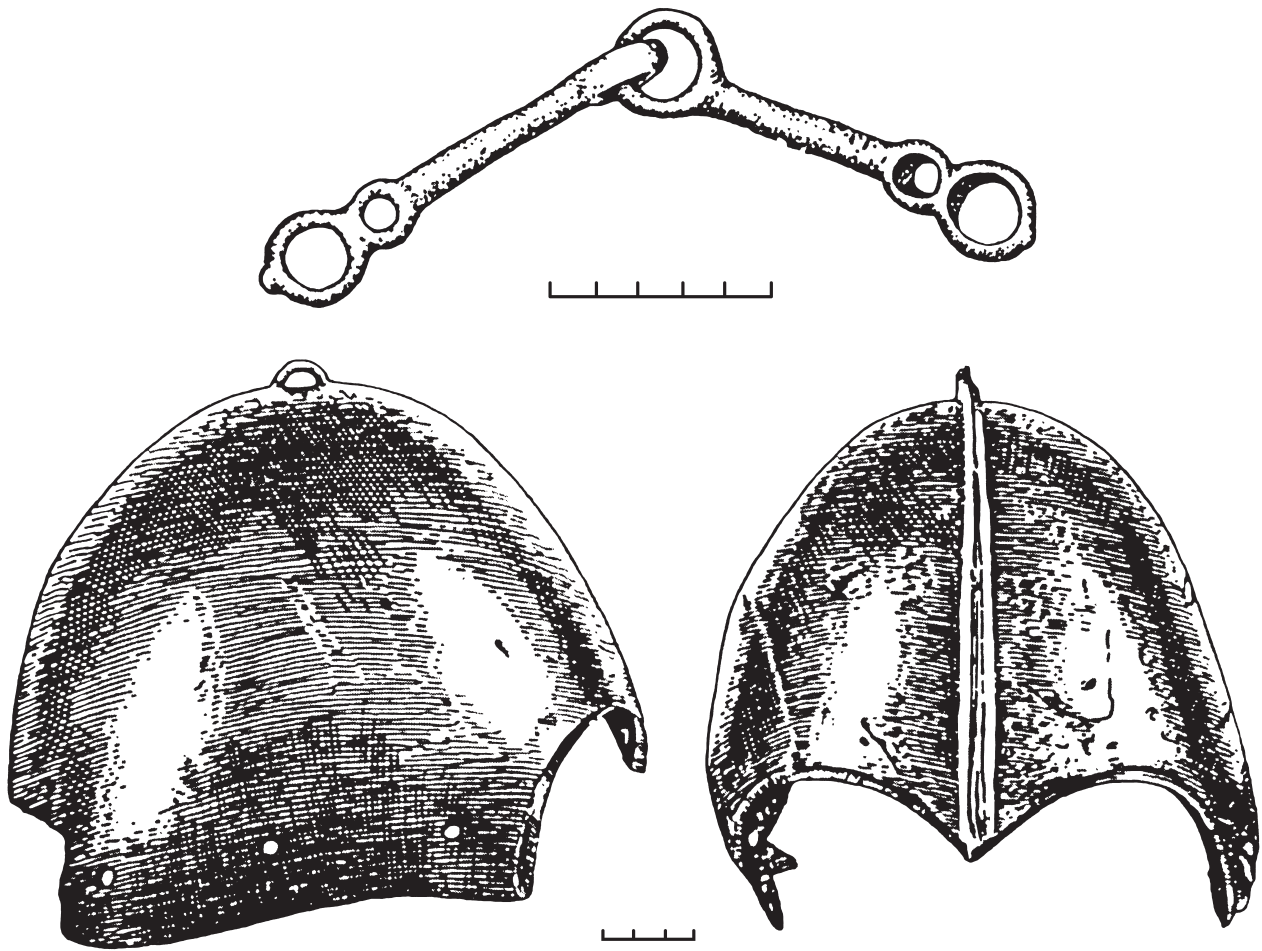


Fig. 48 Caucasian artefacts from burials of the Volga region: horse-bit from Blagodarovka, bronze helmet from Starye Pečury. – (After Smirnov 1961, figs 42, 4; 43, 5).

Let us first look at the passages suggesting that the Sauromatians/Sarmatians had crossed the Tanais (Don) as early as the turn of the 5th-4th centuries BC. Hippocrates, a contemporary of Herodotus, who recorded information not available in other works, claimed that »In Europe there is a Scythian race, called Sauromatae, which inhabits the confines of the Palus Maeotis, and is different from all other races«¹²¹. This corresponds to Herodotus' narrative on the origins of the Sauromatae, who, so we are told, were descended from the union between the Scythians and the Amazons. In this account, Herodotus locates the Sauromatians' ethnogenesis to the region west of the Don and north of the Sea of Azov¹²².

However, Hippocrates' information cannot be accepted as conclusive proof. It has been said of him that while his ethnographic observations were indeed excellent, he knew little about the eastern basin of the Black Sea and his information on that region was questionable. According to another view, he was more interested in the natural resources of the region and was less concerned with ethnic conditions¹²³. There is a general consensus that his references to the Sauromatians should be treated with caution.

According to Pseudo-Scylax, a geographer probably living in the first half of the 4th century BC¹²⁴:

¹²¹ Hippocrates 17.

¹²² Herodotus IV.110-117.

¹²³ Rostovcev 1925, 22-23. – Zgusta 1955, 27-28.

¹²⁴ Rostovcev 1925, 25. It must be noted that this source is uncertain and Pseudo-Scylax may have lived in the 4th or 3rd century BC.



Fig. 49 Nomad warriors of the steppe in the 4th century BC. – (After Zolotye 2001, 43 fig. 21; E. F. Korol'kova's reconstruction).

In the Maiotis lake, as one sails straight in [i. e. from the Pontic], are on the left Scythians [...] [And after the Scythians], the Syrmatae nation and the river Tanaïs which bounds Asia and Europe¹²⁵.

The Syrmatae are thus described as living in Europe, on this side of the Tanais, while the Sauromatians are placed beyond the Tanais¹²⁶. This scrap of information is again uncertain, in part because there is no linguistic confirmation of whether or not the Sirmatians can be identified with the Sauromatians or the Sarmatians. Scholars are strongly divided on this issue, with some casting their vote in favour of the identity of

¹²⁵ Pseudo-Scylax 68.

¹²⁶ »And from Tanais river begins Asia, and the first nation of it is in the Pontos, the Sauromatai. And among the Sauromatians is a nation ruled by women« (Pseudo-Scylax 70).

the two, some against it¹²⁷. The Sirmatians are presented as living by the Tanais by Eudoxos¹²⁸, writing at roughly the same time as Pseudo-Scylax. The identity of the author of another *periplus* («sailing-around», i. e. a sailing manual for circumnavigating seas) is debated (he is sometime quoted under the name Pseudo-Scymnus). In the chapter covering Asia, he claims that the Sarmatians (and the Iazamatai, a tribe that can perhaps be identified with the Sarmatians) lived by the Tanais, although he does not specify on which bank of the river. Specialists of classical philology generally regard his account as a compilation of data from the 4th-2nd centuries BC, with the description of the eastern territories drawn from the early 4th century works of Ephorus and the account of the western region adopted from the writings of Demetrius of Callatis:

At the Tanais, which is the boundary of Asia and divides the continent in two, there are first the Sarmatians inhabiting two thousand stades of land. Next, according to Demetrius, comes a Maeotian tribe known by the name Yazamatae, whom Ephoros calls the tribe of the Sauromatians. It is said that the Amazons, who arrived here after the Battle of Thermodon, coupled with these Sauromatians; and it is from them that they received the name «ruled by women» [Γυναικοκρατούμενοι]¹²⁹.

Another early source on Sarmatia is Heraclitus Ponticus (390-310 BC). Although his original writings did not survive, we know from writers quoting him that he mentioned a lake in Sarmatia, never flown over by birds; any bird approaching it was killed by the stench emanating from the lake. The «Putrid Lake» can be identified with Lake Sivaš, a system of lagoons known for its stench even today¹³⁰. In other words, there are no reliable sources that the Sarmatians had crossed the Don in the first half of the 4th century BC. In contrast, their expansion toward the south and the south-west is amply documented both in the literary sources and in the archaeological record.

In the Shadow of the Bosporan Kingdom

Before turning to the history of the Sarmatians west of the Don, a brief review of the history of the Bosporan Kingdom is necessary. This state had a profound influence on the history and culture of the Iranian tribes, the Scythians and, later, the Sarmatians and a host of other less easily identifiable barbarian peoples living in its neighbourhood, partly in symbiosis.

The Greek colonisation of the northern Pontic began in the 7th century BC. By the 6th-5th centuries the entire coast was colonised, from modern Bilhorod Dnistrovs'kyj (Belgorod Dniestrovskij) to Novorossijsk (fig. 7). The city of Pantikapaion/Panticapaeum (modern Kerč), which eventually subdued the neighbouring settlements, was established on the shore of the Kerč Strait (Cimmerian Bosporus), the tongue of land

¹²⁷ Rostovtzeff 1922, 114. Zgusta 1955, 26, noted that the Sirmatians can perhaps be identified with the Scythians.

¹²⁸ Rostovcev 1925, 25, argued that the author was Eudoxos of Cnidus, a contemporary of Pseudo-Scylax. Conversely, Latyšev 1947/1952-1992/1993, 187 (273) agreed with other scholars that this piece of information, originating from Eudoxos of Rhodes, active in the mid-3rd century, was preserved in the work of Stephanos Byzantinos (Steph. Byz. I. frag.). Yet a third suggestion was made by Pecz 1902/1904, vol. I, 703, namely, that the *periplus* of the geographer Eudoxos, written around 280 BC, had already been falsely attributed to Eudoxos of

Cnidus in Antiquity, the astronomer and mathematician living a century earlier. It is quite obvious from the above that the uncertain data recorded in works whose authorship is similarly uncertain can hardly be decisive in settling the crucial question of when the Sauromatians/Sarmatians extended their sway to the region west of the Don.

¹²⁹ Scymn. 874-885, translated from the Russian. For a detailed discussion, see Harmatta 1941, 16-18.

¹³⁰ Latyšev 1947/1952-1992/1993, 189 (275). – Mačinskij 1971, 45.

extending from the eastern end of the Crimean Peninsula. The city extended its sway across the straits to Asian Bosphorus and founded the Bosporan Kingdom (fig. 44). The rise of the Bosporan Kingdom can first and foremost be attributed to the wheat demand of Athens and various other Greek towns from which the colonists arrived. The wheat grown on the fertile southern Russian territory, vegetable oil and the abundance of Pontic fish provided a secure economic foundation for the prosperity of the Bosporan Kingdom and the neighbouring city-states. The region's prosperity and its politics were determined by the actual situation of wheat exports; alongside other peoples, the cereal producers included Herodotus' Scythian farmers of the steppe. Modelled on Hellenic-Persian kingdoms, the northern Pontic state existing by the 480s BC was first ruled by the Archaeanactid and, later, by the Spartocid Dynasty. One trait peculiar to this political entity was that it represented a mixed, Greek-barbarian (Iranian) culture from its very birth. A part of the Scythian elite from the neighbouring areas settled in Pantikapaion and the kingdom's other cities; they were eventually succeeded by the Sarmatian elite. Both groups buried some of their dead according to the mixed Iranian-Hellenic rite. The syncretic culture created from the blend of ancient Greek and Scythian-Sarmatian traditions, a phenomenon first described and discussed by Rostovcev and, later, by successive generations of scholars, gave rise to the region's singular styles of warfare, fashion and metalwork – the latter, for example, had a profound impact on the jewellery of the Migration period¹³¹.

The Siracian Migration: Maeotians and Greeks in the Kuban Region

On the concordant testimony of the literary sources and the archaeological evidence, the migration from the Don region swept southward and south-westward (fig. 44). The relevant written sources and the archaeological material provide important clues on when and how this migration took place.

The first, presumably reliable source on the changes in the region is Demosthenes' speech against a certain Phormio from the 320s BC, from which we learn that the merchant travelled to the Bosphorus on business. His journey was unsuccessful because the Bosporan king and the Scythians were at war, and he was thus unable to sell his goods. It is in itself unusual that the Scythians, who generally appear as allies of the Bosporan Kingdom, are in this case mentioned as foes. The complications in trade perhaps foreshadowed the cataclysms that soon came to pass¹³².

Led probably by King Aripharnes, the Sarmatian (perhaps Siracian?) migration reached the Kuban region, a region adjacent to the Bosporan Kingdom, in the second half of the 4th century BC. According to Diodorus of Sicily, whose informant participated in the events, the Sarmatians somehow became involved in the Bosporan civil war¹³³.

Following the death of Paerisades I, the Bosporan king, in 310-309 BC, his sons, Satyrus, Eumelus and Prytanis, vied for the throne¹³⁴, which had been inherited by Satyrus II. His younger brother Eumelus set his sights on the throne:

[...] Eumelus, after concluding a treaty of friendship with some of the barbarians who lived near by and collecting a strong army, set up a rival claim to the throne¹³⁵.

¹³¹ Conferences are regularly organised every one or two years in St. Petersburg for discussing the cultural situation widely described as the »Bosporan phenomenon« (боспорский феномен). The series »Bosporskij fenomen«, published since 1998, is devoted to new research on the Antique towns and the neighbouring Barbarian peoples. Gajdukevič 1949 remains one of the best studies written on the Bosporan Kingdom; a

fresh overview of briefer period has been published by Saprykin 2002, with the earlier literature.

¹³² Demosth. *Formio* 34.8. – Vinogradov 2005, 276-277.

¹³³ Diod. XX.22-24.

¹³⁴ Desjatčikov 1977, 45-46.

¹³⁵ Diod. XX.22.

Fighting on Eumelus' side was Aripharnes, who commanded a sizeable army of 20,000 horsemen and 22,000 foot soldiers, according to Diodorus' report, while Satyrus had enlisted 4,000 Greeks and Thracians, 20,000 Scythian foot soldiers and no less than 10,000 horsemen¹³⁶. Although facing a formidable force, Satyrus defeated Aripharnes' army and chased the king and the rebel Eumelus into the fortress by the Thates (a river known also as Psathis, a northern tributary of the Kuban)¹³⁷. However, Satyrus was wounded while besieging the fortress and died shortly afterward. Eumelus thus ascended to the throne and murdered his entire family, including Prytanis, his other brother, to ensure his power. Satyrus' son, Paerisades, was the only survivor. Six years later, the usurper Eumelus was crushed to death by his own chariot.

It is unclear who exactly Aripharnes and his »barbarians« were and whether or not they were Siraci. Diodorus' account specifies Αριφάρνης ὁ τῶν Θρακῶν βασιλεύς, but the exact meaning of Θρακῶν is unclear. Most philologists agree that this is a slip of the pen. The real question is whether it is a misspelling of Θατεῶν (the Maeotian tribe mentioned by Pomponius Mela, named after the mentioned River Thates) or Σιρακῶν. It seems quite certain that this population was independent of the Bosporean Kingdom and not one of its subjects¹³⁸. During the battle with Satyrus, Aripharnes commanded the troops in the middle of the army, as was the Iranian custom, while Eumelus fought »only« on the left wing, indicating that his role was secondary. The pretender to the Bosporean throne is not even mentioned in the account of the siege of Aripharnes' fortress. The name Aripharnes is Iranian (meaning carrier of the Aryans' [warriors'] *farn*), but not Scythian, and thus the passage in question most likely refers to the presence of the Sarmatians (Siraci)¹³⁹.

The Scythians were the main allies of Satyrus and Prytanis. The conflict described in the above was probably not simply a struggle for the Bosporean throne, but a major episode of the war between the Scythians and the Sarmatians, who had begun their westward expansion. Other sources, although far more uncertain than the above, are the indirect references by Lucian and a 2nd century AD writer suggesting that this conflict marked a turning point in the orientation of the foreign policy of the Bosporean Kingdom, with the Sarmatians replacing the Scythians as their main allies¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁶ Diod. XX.22. It is uncertain to what extent these figures are reliable; it seems more likely that they illustrate the order of magnitude. See Makkay 1998b, 37-82, for a discussion of the round figures. His arguments are confirmed by the following passages in the written sources. Lucian (*Tox.* 48) mentions a man by the name of Arsacomas, who gathered an army and is said to have »raised something like 5,000 cavalry and 20,000 heavy and light armed«. Strabo XI.5.8 mentions that the Siracian king Abeacus commanded a cavalry of 20,000. The consistency of these figures is by all means striking, even though they probably merely indicate an order of magnitude, which in this context means that a sizeable army had been assembled. The figures probably also reflect the proportions between the armies: Aripharnes apparently had a larger army than the one the Scythians could muster and his cavalry was twice as large (Desjatčikov 1977). – Lucian of Samosata also described the Bosporean army (*Tox.* 54). He recorded that Eubiotus was the »head of a miscellaneous army of Greeks, together with 20,000 each of his Alanian and Sarmatian allies«. The united forces of Eubiotus and Adyrmachus, chief of Machlyene, who had been tricked by the Scythians, numbered »an army of 90,000 men, one third of whom were mounted bowmen«. At the same time one of the Scythians laid down an oxhide and »raised something like of 5,000 cav-

alry and 20,000 heavy and light armed« (Luc. *Tox.* 48). »We Scythians (I [i. e. Toxaris] say we, because I myself took part in this enterprise and was maintaining a hundred horse on the hide) – we Scythians, then, numbering in all not much less than 30,000 men, including cavalry« (Luc. *Tox.* 54). Lucian also recorded the military strength of the Sarmatians: 10,000 Sarmatian mounted warriors and »infantry being estimated at three times that number« rushed upon the Scythians stationed on the two banks of the Tanais (Luc. *Tox.* 39). According to Strabo (VII.3.17), the Roxolani sent 50,000 men to assist Palacus against Diophantus. Pompeius Trogus records that after Philip defeated the Scythians, »twenty thousand young men and women were taken, and a vast number of cattle« (Iustinus IX.2.15). While countless similar passages could be quoted, the above clearly illustrate that the figures generally indicate the order of magnitude.

¹³⁷ Zubarev 2005, 444 fig. 7.

¹³⁸ Desjatčikov 1977, 46.

¹³⁹ Marčenko 1996, 113-114, for a detailed discussion of the text and the identity of the population in question. See also Jacobs 1987 for *farn* (called also *χvar*nah*).

¹⁴⁰ For a good recent overview, with a discussion of earlier views and an exhaustive bibliography, see Vinogradov 2005, 278-282.

If Aripharnes, with his Iranian name, was indeed a Siracian – which seems to be the case – then the Siraci can be regarded as the first Sarmatian people known by name, whose migration can be reconstructed with some accuracy¹⁴¹.

The setting of the above events, the Kuban Valley and its broader area, was later settled by the Siracian tribe of the Sarmatians. It is therefore quite likely that from the very moment of the Sarmatian conquest, the region was populated by the Siraci. Writing about the Kuban region and the shores of the Sea of Azov, Strabo noted that:

Of the portions thus divided, the first is inhabited, in the region toward the north and the ocean, by Scythian nomads and wagon-dwellers, and south of these, by Sarmatians, these too being Scythians, and by Aorsi and Siraci, who extend towards the south as far as the Caucasian Mountains, some being nomads and others tent-dwellers and farmers [...] As one descends into the foothills [of the Caucasus], the country inclines more towards the north, but its climate is milder, for there it borders on the plains of the Siraces¹⁴².

The expansion of the Sarmatians into the Kuban region is indicated principally by the archaeological finds, closer examination of which suggests that, as mentioned above, the Sauromatians/Sarmatians had established contact with the indigenous population of the north-eastern Caucasus in the 6th-4th centuries BC¹⁴³. However, we can hardly speak of a migration during this early period, seeing that the finds in question are few and far between.

Clearly, Sarmatian assemblages first appear in the Caucasian foreland, specifically in the Kuban region, from the second half of the 4th century BC. The dating of these assemblages is unquestionably secure in the light of the Greek imports such as amphorae and other pottery wares deposited in the graves¹⁴⁴. On the testimony of these finds, the arrival of the Sarmatians had really begun in the second half of the 4th century BC, although the low number of burials indicates that this should be conceptualised as an infiltration at first¹⁴⁵. A significant increase in the number of burials, reflecting a mass immigration, can be noted from the 3rd to 2nd centuries BC, east of the Sea of Azov. At the beginning, the grave goods and burial rites show a blend of Sauromatian and Prohorovka traits. Intermixing with the local population was soon underway and as a result of the cultural interaction, the material gradually began to differ from the contemporary find assemblages of the northern Pontic.

The graves dating from the 3rd-1st centuries BC dug into the earlier kurgans in the central part of the Caucasian foreland (north of the Upper Kuban-Malka-Terek Valleys) reflect another route of the Sarmatian migration to the east of the Kuban. Here, the newcomers co-mingled with the local nomadic population of the Scythian period. The separation of the finds is virtually impossible, the best ethnic indicator is the catacomb grave rite. The finds reflecting a Sarmatian presence are more scarce than in the Lower Kuban region¹⁴⁶.

Let us return to the Lower Kuban region, which was unquestionably under Sarmatian control. Here, the neighbours of the Bosporan Kingdom are specified as the Maeotians. Little is known about the origins of the Maeotians, despite the fact that they played a significant role in the history of the eastern Pontic. The Maeotians lived in the Kuban Valley and to its south, as well as on the Taman' Peninsula.

¹⁴¹ We have not come across a linguistic study on the possible relevance of the similarity between *Sirmatian* and *Siracian*, despite the fact that it might be instructive to examine this resemblance in the light of the above. Cf. the similarity between *lazamata* and *lazygian* discussed in section »The lazyges«.

¹⁴² Strabo XI.2.1, XI.5.7.

¹⁴³ Vinogradov 1963, 13-35 esp. 33-35.

¹⁴⁴ Marčenko 1996, 84-85.

¹⁴⁵ Marčenko 1988, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Abramova 1992, 23; 1993, 99-102.

However, there are several opposing theories concerning the origins of the Maeotians. Some argue that »Maeotian« is an essentially geographic term and denotes all the tribes living along the Maeotis (the Sea of Azov). Most scholars agree that it was a generic term for linguistically related tribes. It has also been suggested that the Maeotians were the ancestors of the Adyghe, a modern Caucasian people, although this theory has not been convincingly substantiated. It has also been hypothesised that the Maeotians spoke an Iranian tongue. According to yet another theory, the Maeotians were the remnants of Indo-Iranians who had remained in the region¹⁴⁷.

Returning to the appearance of the Siraci in the Kuban region, the indirect evidence must also be considered in addition to the testimony of the written sources and the Sarmatian find assemblages. Although research into the fortifications of Maeotian settlements is still in its infancy, the investigations of Hillfort 2 near the Lenin Farmstead and Hillfort 2 near Starokorsunskaja reveal that the fortifications at both sites were constructed in the later part of the 4th century BC, or towards its end (fig. 50)¹⁴⁸.

The construction of the hillforts was no doubt necessitated by some external danger and it seems logical to assume that this threat was the Sarmatian migration. The success of the Sarmatians' expansion is indicated by the fact that the ditch and rampart system was destroyed shortly after its construction and a part of the ditch was backfilled. The destruction of Gruševskoe gorodišče (hillfort) in the Stavropol area in the early 3rd century BC, dating also from the Scythian period, and the burial of the Kazinka hoard can in all likelihood also be linked to the dynamic Sarmatian expansion¹⁴⁹. The militarisation of Maeotian society in the wake of these external threats is best reflected by the fact that some 70 per cent of the 4th century BC graves contained arms¹⁵⁰, while only 30.9 per cent of the immigrants' burials can be interpreted as warrior graves¹⁵¹. How, then, should the question of Siracian immigration be conceptualised out of the chaos of the available data? Two major hypotheses have been proposed in this respect.

1. Abramova believes that the emergence of the Siracian tribal alliance was a fairly long process that took place along the Kuban River, the implication being that the presence of Siraci can hardly be assumed in the Volga and in the Southern Ural region because the people designated as Siraci in the texts were forged from an intermingling with the local population¹⁵². Knowing that the local population was made up of Maeo-

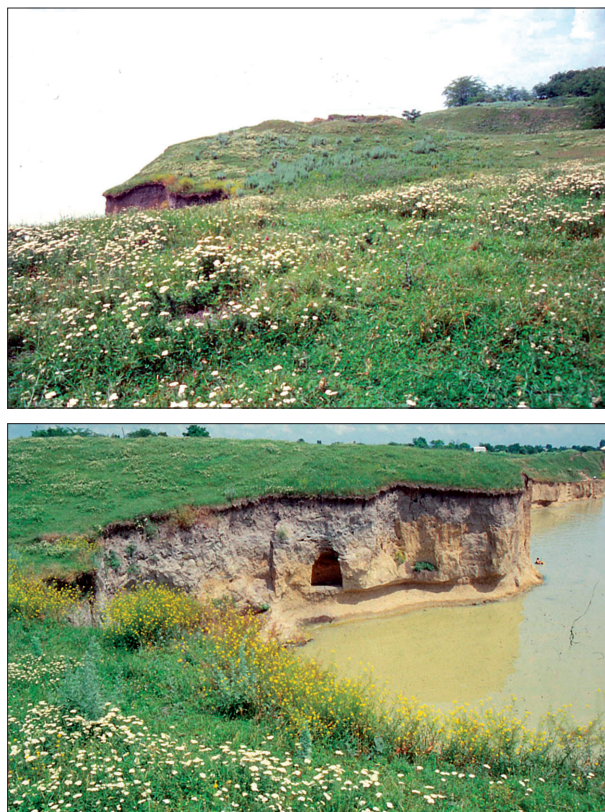


Fig. 50 Maeotian hillfort at Starokorsunskaja in 1997. – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

¹⁴⁷ Kameneckij 1989, esp. 225, for a survey of the different views and the population groups, accompanied by a series of excellent maps. As we have already pointed out, it has been suggested that the Maeotians played a vital role in Sauromatian ethnogenesis insofar as the Sauromatians had indeed emerged from the mixing between the Scythians and the Maeotians.

¹⁴⁸ The section on the Sarmatians of the Kuban region is essentially based on Marčenko 1996, esp. 6-7. 84-85. 113-138.

¹⁴⁹ Abramova 1992, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Marčenko 1996, 116-117.

¹⁵¹ The latter refers to the finds from the period between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD. Ždanovskij 1985; 1988.

¹⁵² Abramova 1992, 24.

tians, the Maeotians of the Kuban region were thus members of the Siracian tribal alliance¹⁵³. Counter to Abramova's hypothesis, this does not exclude the identification of Aripharnes' people as Siraci. Abramova argued that in view of the long ethnogenesis, Aripharnes' people could hardly have been the Siraci at the turn of the 4th-3rd centuries BC because the population of the Volga region had not arrived in the Caucasian foreland before the 4th century BC¹⁵⁴. In our opinion, if, however, there was contact between the two regions from the 6th-5th centuries BC and if the onset of the migration can indeed be dated to the 4th century, King Aripharnes, an Iranian name, may have been ruler of the Siraci.

2. In his study on the state of Sarmatian and Maeotian research in the Kuban region based on recent archaeological investigations, Marčenko accepted the identification of the Sauromatians with the Siraci. He argued that the Sarmatian population was a mixed one from the very moment it appeared in the region. The Siraci probably represented the elite of the region's population. There are two major concentrations of Sarmatian finds in the Kuban region: the first in the Middle Kuban region (extending from Nevinnomysk in the Laba-Kuban interfluvium to the Laba mouth); the second in the steppe along the river's right bank in the Lower Kuban region. Conditions in these regions differ markedly from those of the »genuine« steppe north of the Don and the Manyč: the climate is milder and the land is more suited to arable farming.

Favourable geographic conditions most likely stimulated the relatively rapid blend of the earlier Maeotian population with the newly arrived Siraci in this region. The region's history in this period was determined by the proximity of its powerful neighbour, the Bosporean Kingdom. The interaction left its imprint on both cultures. Parallel to the cultural influence from the Bosporeans, a certain degree of »Sarmatisation« can also be noted in the kingdom, as can the appearance of Maeotian elements. Barbarian finds occur among the grave furnishings in the cemeteries of the Greek towns on the Taman' Peninsula (Hermonassa, Tyrambe, Phanagoreia, Kepoi, etc.), as do certain elements of the burial rite of the steppe nomads. Some of these burials have been dated to the 4th century BC, confirming the lower chronological boundary of the Sarmatian expansion in the Kuban region¹⁵⁵. The coin finds would suggest that the boundary between the Siracian settlement territory and the Bosporean Kingdom in the late 4th to early 3rd centuries BC ran along the western end of the Taman' Peninsula, roughly along the Staronižnesteblievskaja-Krymsk-Novorossijsk line (fig. 44)¹⁵⁶.

The fortunes of the Bosporean Kingdom changed profoundly in the mid-3rd century BC when grain exports to Athens diminished, perhaps owing to Egyptian trade in the same commodity¹⁵⁷. Following prosperity under the reign of Paerisades I, the kingdom faced a series of difficulties and was forced to expand eastwards, encroaching on the lands of the Maeotians. As a result, the Maeotians and Siraci forged a closer alliance, reflected by the visibly strong mutual influences apparent in the Sarmatian and Maeotian burials of the Kuban region, testifying to the intensive interaction between the indigenous Maeotians and the Sarmatians. The two peoples eventually joined forces against the Bosporean Kingdom, with the Siraci heading the tribal alliance. This reconstruction of the events is accepted by most scholars despite the lack of any written sources.

153 Smirnov 1964, 290.

154 Abramova 1992, 24.

155 Desjatčikov 1973, 69-76.

156 Aptekarev 1987.

157 In his oration against Leptinus, Demosthenes mentioned that one-half of the grain consumed in Athens – 400,000 *medimni* of grain corresponding to 16,380 tons – arrived from the Bosporus (Demosth. *Lept.* 20.32). This figure was valid for the reign of King Leuco (387-347). Shipments of grain to Athens were duty-free during this period. Strabo noted that »in still earlier times the Greeks imported their supplies of grain from here, just as they imported their supplies of salt-fish from the

lake. Leuco, it is said, once sent from Theodosia to Athens two million one hundred thousand *medimni*« (VII.4.6). This figure of 2.1 million *medimni* equals 86,000 tons. That Demosthenes often wrote about the Bosporus is hardly mere chance because his mother was probably a Scythian woman; for details see Skrzinskaja 1977, 35; 1998, 174-176. According to Blavatskij 1964, 54, in the 3rd century BC, Egypt exported a total of 10.5 million *medimni* of grain during a single year, about 28 times the amount exported by the Bosporeans to Athens. The Bosporean grain was eventually replaced by the enormous quantities of Egyptian produce arriving from a much closer region.

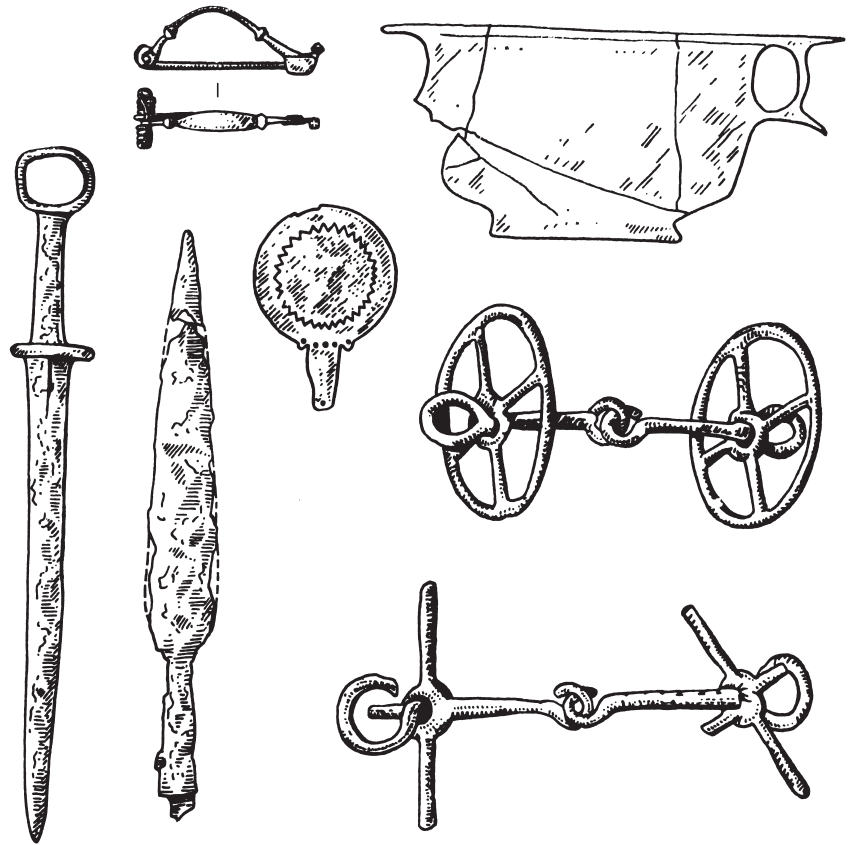


Fig. 51 The cohabitation of Maeotians and Siracians is reflected by the typical artefacts of the nomadic Sarmatians in the find material of the sedentary Maeotians. Selection of finds from Maeotian sites. – (After Stepi 1989, pl. 93).

One indication of the leading role of the Sarmatian Siraci is that Iranian toponyms abound, not only east of the Laba (the original settlement territory of the Siraci), but also well beyond the Lower Kuban region, down to the Pontic coast, i.e. in the Maeotian lands, as well. The linguistic evidence would suggest that these toponyms reflect a linguistic stage preceding the arrival of the Alans¹⁵⁸.

The Maeotians and the Siraci clashed with the Bosporan Kingdom, and, as a result of the hostilities, a part of the cereals produced by the Maeotians formerly traded with the Bosporan Kingdom now reached the nomads who appeared in growing numbers in the Kuban region¹⁵⁹. The grave goods from Maeotian burials attest undeniably to increasing Sarmatisation. Parallel with this, the gradual settlement of the Sarmatians under Maeotian influence can likewise be demonstrated (figs 51-54)¹⁶⁰.

Strabo's passages on the Albanians¹⁶¹ contain relevant information regarding the foreign contacts of the Siraci, especially with the Caucasus:

*Against outsiders the nomads join with the Albanians in war, just as they do with the Iberians, and for the same reasons; and besides, they often attack the people, and consequently prevent them from farming*¹⁶².

¹⁵⁸ Vinogradov 1965, 117, with further literature. However, it must here be noted that, as already pointed out, the language spoken by the Maeotians has not been identified yet and that the possibility that they were an Iranian people cannot be rejected out of hand. In this case, however, the Iranian names gain an entirely different perspective.

¹⁵⁹ Marčenko 1996, 120.

¹⁶⁰ Ždanovskij 1988.

¹⁶¹ In this context, the term Albanians denotes the inhabitants of the south-eastern Caucasus.

¹⁶² Strabo XI.4.5, italics added for emphasis.



Fig. 52 The Siracians of the Kuban region used the distinctive wheel-turned grey wares produced by the Maeotians. – **1** Maeotian vessels (after Stepi 1989, pl. 96). – **2** pottery from the hillfort at Starokorsunskaja (photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

We know from the *Kartlis Chovreba*¹⁶³ that in the mid-3rd century BC (a date surmised from the fact that the events recounted take place after Alexander the Great's campaigns), Farnavaz, the first Iberian king¹⁶⁴, employed Siracian mercenaries (the Ovses mentioned in the original text are generally identified with the Sarmatians) and that his sister married the tribe's leader. Relations between the two families are illustrated by the fact that many of the Farnavaz Dynasty's early rulers bore western Iranian names, such as Saurmag, Hsefarnug, Radamist, etc¹⁶⁵. Another proof for Iberian-Siracian relations is the story recounted in Georgian chronicles, according to which Saurmag was deposed by a conspiracy shortly after he had ascended the Iberian throne (sometime in the late 3rd - early 2nd century BC). The fallen king fled to the mountain tribes of

¹⁶³ History of Kartli (Georgia), a collection of Georgian chronicles recording the history of the Georgians from the beginnings to the 14th century. The first part, »Lives of the kings of Kartli«, ends with the 5th century. This section is attributed to Leonti Mroveli, active in the 11th century (Mroveli 1979, 29-30, see also the notes on pp. 61-64).

¹⁶⁴ Iberia was an ancient state lying beyond the Caucasus, neighbouring Albania. The country was inhabited by the ancestors of the Georgians.

¹⁶⁵ Abaev 1949, 86, has argued that the name of King Saurmag (late 3rd - early 2nd century BC) was a variant of the ethnonym Sauromatian.

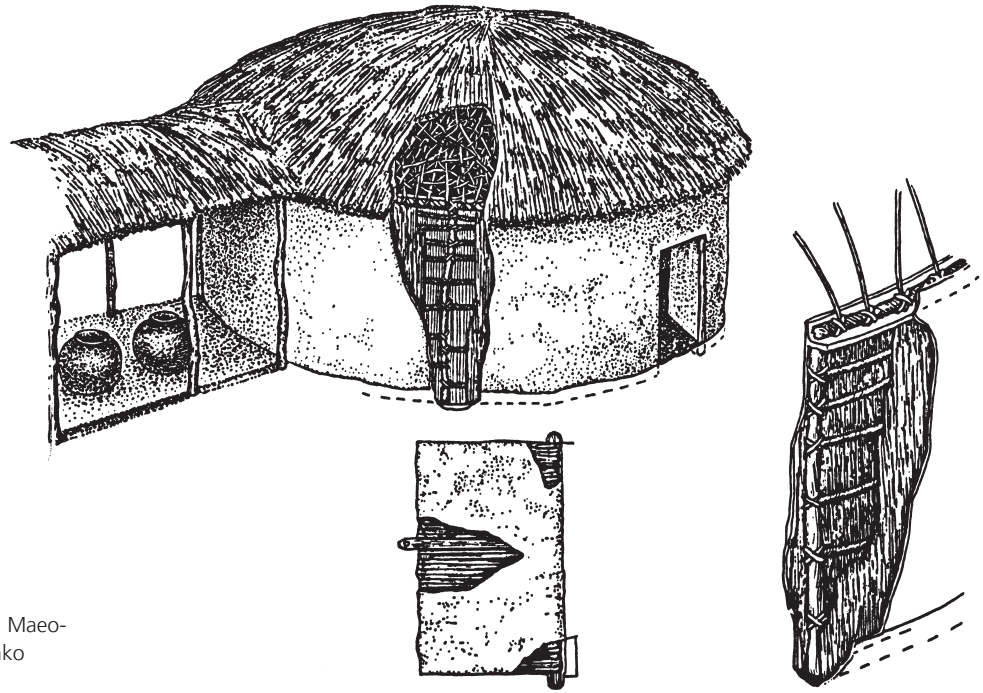


Fig. 53 Reconstruction of a Maeotian building. – (After Ševčenko 1995, fig. 2).

the Caucasus and pleaded for help from his cousin, the king of the Ovses (possibly the Siraci), who readily granted his wish¹⁶⁶. The events recounted in the Georgian chronicles harmonise with Strabo's account that:

[...] the plain of the Iberians is inhabited by people who are rather inclined to farming and to peace, and they dress after both the Armenian and the Median fashion; but the major, or war-like, portion occupy the mountainous territory, living like the Scythians and the Sarmatians, of whom they are both neighbours and kinsmen [...] ¹⁶⁷.

The Sarmatian Conquest West of the Don

The history of the European steppe in the 3rd century BC is one of the weak points of Sarmatian studies. The most important issue is the date of the conquest of the northern Pontic, however, this runs into serious difficulties owing to the lack of finds.

The mid-4th century BC saw the flourishing of the Scythian state in the northern Pontic. King Ateas (**fig. 55**) controlled the region from the Don to the Danube: »It appears that Ateas, who waged war with Philip the son of Amyntas, ruled over most of the barbarians in this part of the world«¹⁶⁸. The king fell in the lost battle fought against Philip. The greater part of the Scythians fled to the Lower Dnieper region¹⁶⁹ and the

¹⁶⁶ For the interpretation of the data contained in the *Kartlis Chovreba*, see Vinogradov 1963, 140-141.

¹⁶⁷ Strabo XI.3.3, italics added for emphasis.

¹⁶⁸ Strabo VII.3.18. In 339, the Scythian king Ateas fought against Philip II, father of the Alexander the Great. – Alekseev 1992, 163.

¹⁶⁹ The hillforts by the Lower Dnieper which on the testimony of the archaeological record were destroyed in the late 1st to early 2nd centuries AD were constructed at this time.

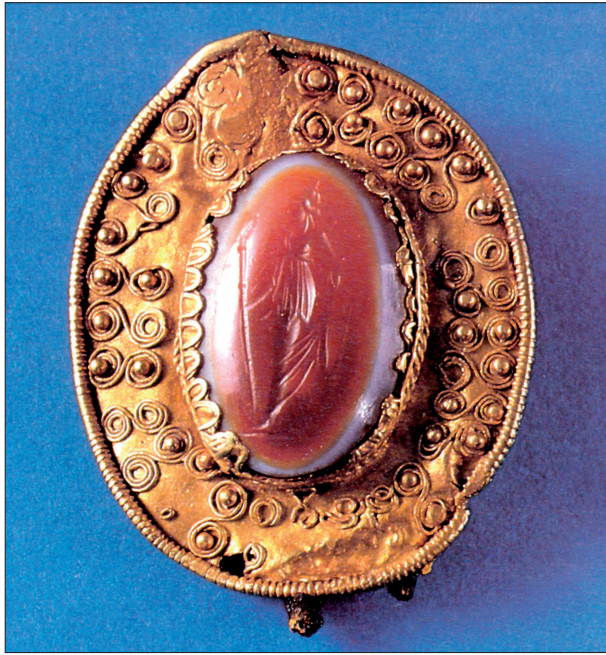


Fig. 54 Brooch of the so-called Maeotian-Sarmatian type dating from the 3rd-2nd century BC from the kurgan by stanica Brjuhoveckaja. – (After Šedevry 1987, 49 no. 144).



Fig. 55 Coin minted by King Ateas. – (After Murzin/Rolle 2000, fig. 1).

Crimean steppe, while smaller groups retreated to the Dobrudja region, south of the Danube. In the 3rd century BC, the Scythian state declined unexpectedly.

These events are reflected by the sudden »disappearance« of lavish Scythian kurgans in the archaeological record, as well as by the absence of Scythian material culture in the northern Pontic. The archaeological assemblages from the region decrease perceptibly.

Some scholars regard the defensive rampart-ditch system constructed at Perekop near the town of Taphrai as an indication of the Scythians' retreat to the Crimea¹⁷⁰. The centre of the Crimean Scythian lands (Scythia Minor) was the fortified settlement at Kermenčik in modern Simferopol (**fig. 56**), suggested by a stone stele bearing a depiction of a mounted nomadic warrior and an inscription proclaiming the name of Scilurus, the Scythian king. The Scythian mausoleum containing the royal burials and other evidence strongly suggests that the site can be identified with Scythian Neapolis (*Neapolis Scythica*), the Scythian capital described by Strabo, which is also mentioned in the Diophantus Inscription (see the next chapter)¹⁷¹. It would appear that the centre of the Scythian political entity was relocated to the Crimea¹⁷², where the Scythians came into close contact with the Tauri, the peninsula's earlier inhabitants, with whom they joined forces when raiding the Greek cities. It is therefore hardly surprising that classical writers soon coined a new name for them, the Tauroscythae¹⁷³.

¹⁷⁰ The meaning of Greek τάφρος is »ditch« (Gajdukevič 1949, 531 n. 2).

¹⁷¹ Cf. Gajdukevič 1949, 531-534 n. 2-3.

¹⁷² Zin'ko 1991.

¹⁷³ According to Pliny (*NH* IV.XII.85), there were altogether 30 tribes in the Crimea, 23 of which inhabited the peninsula's interior. The Scythotauri were among the latter. Pliny probably obtained this information from Agrippa, although he did not specifically mention this. Ovid (*Ep.* III.2.45-47) also mentioned a Scythian elder, who begins his narrative: »There's a place in Scythia, our ancestors called Tauris, | that's not so far away from

the Getic lands. | I was born in that land«. Identified with the Kizil-Koba culture, the Tauri were a tribe living in the southern Crimea and the Crimean Mountains, whose heritage includes graves containing funerary chests of stone slabs. Although their origins are obscure, they were probably descended from the Srubnaja culture, also making them Iranians. Following the peninsula's occupation by the Scythians, the Tauri were probably assimilated by the newcomers, with the name Tauroscythae perhaps reflecting one phase of this process. The ethnic blend began sometime in the 2nd century BC. See Hrapunov 1995, 9-28, with ample literature.

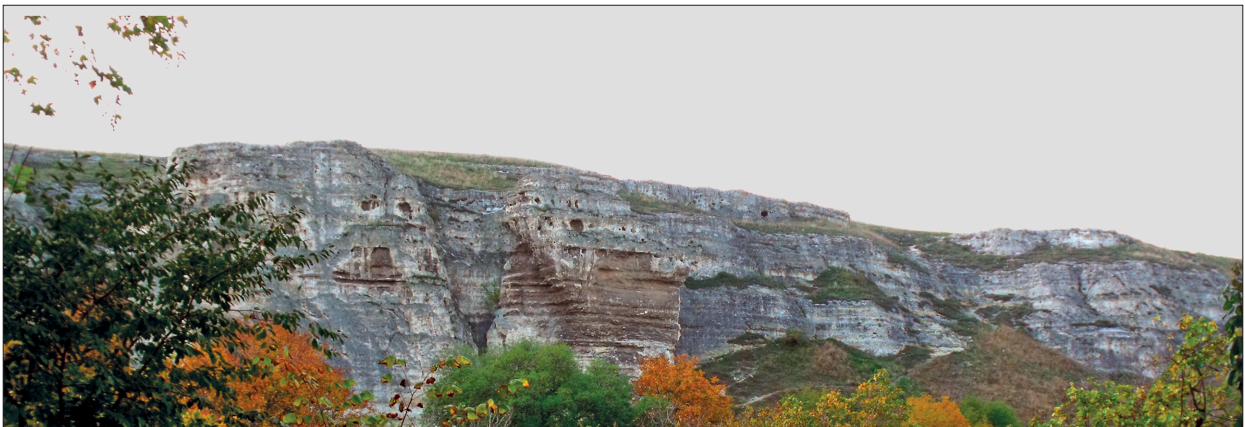


Fig. 56 The Late Scythian capital (Neapolis Scythica) in modern Simferopol. – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

Another Scythian kingdom was established in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC slightly farther to the west, which also incorporated the Greek city of Tomi, according to Pliny¹⁷⁴. The Scythian lands in the Lower Danube region were known as Scythia Minor in the Greek sources at roughly this time:

But on account of the large number of people who left Little Scythia [the Crimea] and crossed both the Tyras¹⁷⁵ and the Ister and took up their abode in the land beyond, no small portion of Thrace as well came to be called Little Scythia; the Thracians giving way to them partly as the result of force and partly because of the bad quality of the land, for the greater part of the country is marshy¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷⁴ Pliny (*NH* IV.XI.44) noted that all the lands of Thracia from the mouth of the Istros to the Pontic and the towns of Histropolis, Tomi, Callatis and Dionysopolis had formerly belonged to the Scythians: »The whole of this region was occupied by the Scythian tribe called the Ploughmen [Aroteres]«.

¹⁷⁵ The name of the Dniester in Antiquity.

¹⁷⁶ Strabo VII.4.5.

The Danube (Istros) traditionally marked the boundary between the Thracian and the Iranian world. It was still described as the south-western border of Scythia long after the Scythians had disappeared from the region¹⁷⁷. At the same time, the agricultural areas (*chora*) surrounding the Greek cities of the northern Pontic became depopulated in the second quarter-mid-3rd century BC, with habitation continuing only in the fortified settlements. The area of the cities expanded, no doubt in consequence of the rural population's flight to these cities. The town walls were reinforced in several settlements, suggesting a fear of some external threat, although it is unclear whether the population dreaded an onslaught of the Sarmatians from the east or whether it was prompted by the enmity of the Crimean Scythian kingdom towards the Greek cities¹⁷⁸.

Whilst several explanations have been proposed, many questions remain unanswered. Was the chain of events precipitated by the Sarmatians' westward drive? Were the Scythians harassed by the Sarmatians, explaining why they turned into formidable enemies? Or should we rather assume the internal crisis of Scythian society as the main cause of the decline, coupled with Ateas' aborted campaign along the Danube? Did this precipitate the rapid Sarmatisation of the northern Pontic and the occupation of the steppe territories between the Danube and the Dniester by the Thracians? How did the early 3rd century expansion of the Celts (Galatians) affect the Scythians and the subsequent history of the northern Pontic¹⁷⁹?

The following models have been proposed to explain the crisis in the northern Pontic in the 3rd century BC¹⁸⁰: 1) living conditions deteriorated owing to a major desiccation; 2) the significance of the Pontic declined owing to the grain imports from Egypt, leading to an economic crisis¹⁸¹; 3) the Galatian conquest brought an end to the Scythian rule; 4) the crisis was caused by the Sarmatians' advance, encroaching on Scythian territories. The first model can be immediately rejected on several grounds¹⁸². In the last decades it has been suggested that there was a major climatic change on the steppe causing the desiccation, which in turn displaced the Scythians from their former lands¹⁸³. The main argument put forward by the proponents of this hypothesis is that both Scythian and Sarmatian finds are lacking from the region between the Don and the Dnieper in the 3rd century BC. The earliest Sarmatian burials west of the Don, identified at 62 sites, date from the 2nd-1st centuries BC¹⁸⁴. It must also be recalled that recent palaeoclimatic studies have demonstrated exactly the opposite, namely that the climate turned cooler and wetter from the mid-1st millennium BC¹⁸⁵. However, irrespective of whether there was indeed a desiccation or whether the climate became sub-Atlantic, it seems most unlikely that there were periods when regions such as the European grassy steppe or the Carpathian Basin were wholly uninhabited. Another argument against the desiccation theory is that palaeoclimatic studies have shown that a change of this type rarely has an immediate impact, but occurs over several years. At the same time, the archaeological evidence suggests that the decline and depopulation on the steppe was the outcome of a rapid event or chain of events. The other main case against a possible desiccation caused by climatic change is the economic prosperity of the Greek cities and the neighbouring barbarian settlements during the first third of the 3rd century¹⁸⁶, on the »eve« of the assumed desiccation, reflected also by the region's population growth (see above).

177 Podosinov 1976, 21. 25.

178 Vinogradov 2005, 283-290.

179 Polin 1992, 5.

180 A conference exploring this issue was organised in Rostov-on-Don in 1997. The papers read at the conference were published in Azov in the volume *Donskie drevnosti* 1997. For a discussion of the four main theories, see Brujako 1999.

181 Vinogradov 1997, 107, has convincingly challenged this argument, which has hardened into a commonplace in studies on the Greek towns. He also rejects the possibilities described under (1) and (3).

182 e.g. by Brujako 1999, 87-88, who has taken up a middle ground, noting that the three other explanations do not exclude each other, since all these conditions could have existed simultaneously.

183 Ievlev 1989. – Polin 1992, 122. – Polin/Simonenko 1997, 87.

184 Polin/Simonenko 1997, 95.

185 Matolcsi 1983, 296, with further literature.

186 Vinogradov 1997, 106-107, with further literature.

According to the second model, the economic importance of the Pontic declined following the growth of grain exports from Egypt, leading to a catastrophic recession. The economic crisis of the Greek towns on the Pontic may have spread to the lands inhabited by the barbarian peoples. However, it seems unlikely that this would have led to the sudden and total collapse indicated by the current evidence.

Concerning the third model, there are few signs of the Galatians' eastward migration in the archaeological record. However, the Protogenes Inscription (**fig. 57**) is a clear indication that they advanced as far as Olbia by the mid-3rd century BC:

Deserters were reporting that the Galatians [Celts] and the Sciri had formed an alliance, that a large force had been collected and would be coming during the winter/and in addition that Thissamatae, Scythians and Saudaratae were anxious to seize the fort, as they themselves were equally terrified of the cruelty of the Galatians¹⁸⁷.

The approximate date of the decline in the north-western Pontic and the Dniester region roughly coincides with the probable date of the event recorded in the inscription. Erected in the 220s or 210s BC, the decree commemorated the deeds of Protogenes, suggesting that the Galatian attack occurred in the middle of the century. What must be noted in this respect, without going into details, is that the epigraphic evidence suggests that the Celtic advance thrust forward from the Danube, Seret and Prut regions. While their number is not particularly high, La Tène finds have been reported from the outer side of the Carpathian Mountains. The Celtic presence is also confirmed by the toponyms in the Lower Danube region¹⁸⁸.

Finally, let us examine the perhaps most intriguing proposition, namely the Sarmatians' westward expansion (**fig. 46**). One of the literary sources concerning the Sauromatians claims that:

Many years later this people became powerful and ravaged a large part of Scythia, and destroying utterly all whom they subdued they turned most of the land into a desert¹⁸⁹.

The credibility of this passage is dubious at best and it is also uncertain as to what period it refers. Diodorus of Sicily lived in the late 1st century BC. It is unclear, however, what his quoted statement was based on. The passage has been touted as proof for dating the Sarmatian immigration to the late 4th-early 3rd century BC and for attributing the decline of the Scythian rule to this event¹⁹⁰. Other scholars have taken this passage to refer to Scilurus' Scythian kingdom, i. e. to the 3rd-2nd centuries BC¹⁹¹.

While Diodorus' quoted passage is uncertain to say the least, a long-known and securely dated epigraphic text is considerably more convincing. The inscription in question is a decree from Chersonesus whose missing portions were reconstructed by Vinogradov, who also offered an entirely new interpretation of the text. In his view, there was a Sarmatian raid around 280 BC (one purpose of which was to sell the captives as slaves), and thus this inscription can be regarded as the first written testimonial of Scythia's destruction by the Sarmatians¹⁹².

¹⁸⁷ Latyshev 1916, no. 32, 54-55 (English translation: Austin 1981, 172). The Protogenes Inscription (or Decree) is discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁸ For details, see Brujako 1999, 85-87, with an overview of the literature.

¹⁸⁹ Diod. II.43.7.

¹⁹⁰ Mačinskij 1971, 52-54.

¹⁹¹ Scilurus was the ruler of the greatly diminished Scythian kingdom in the Crimea (Scythia Minor), who also minted coins in Olbia in the early 2nd century BC. Gajdukevič 1949, *passim* esp. 300-301.

¹⁹² Vinogradov 1997.

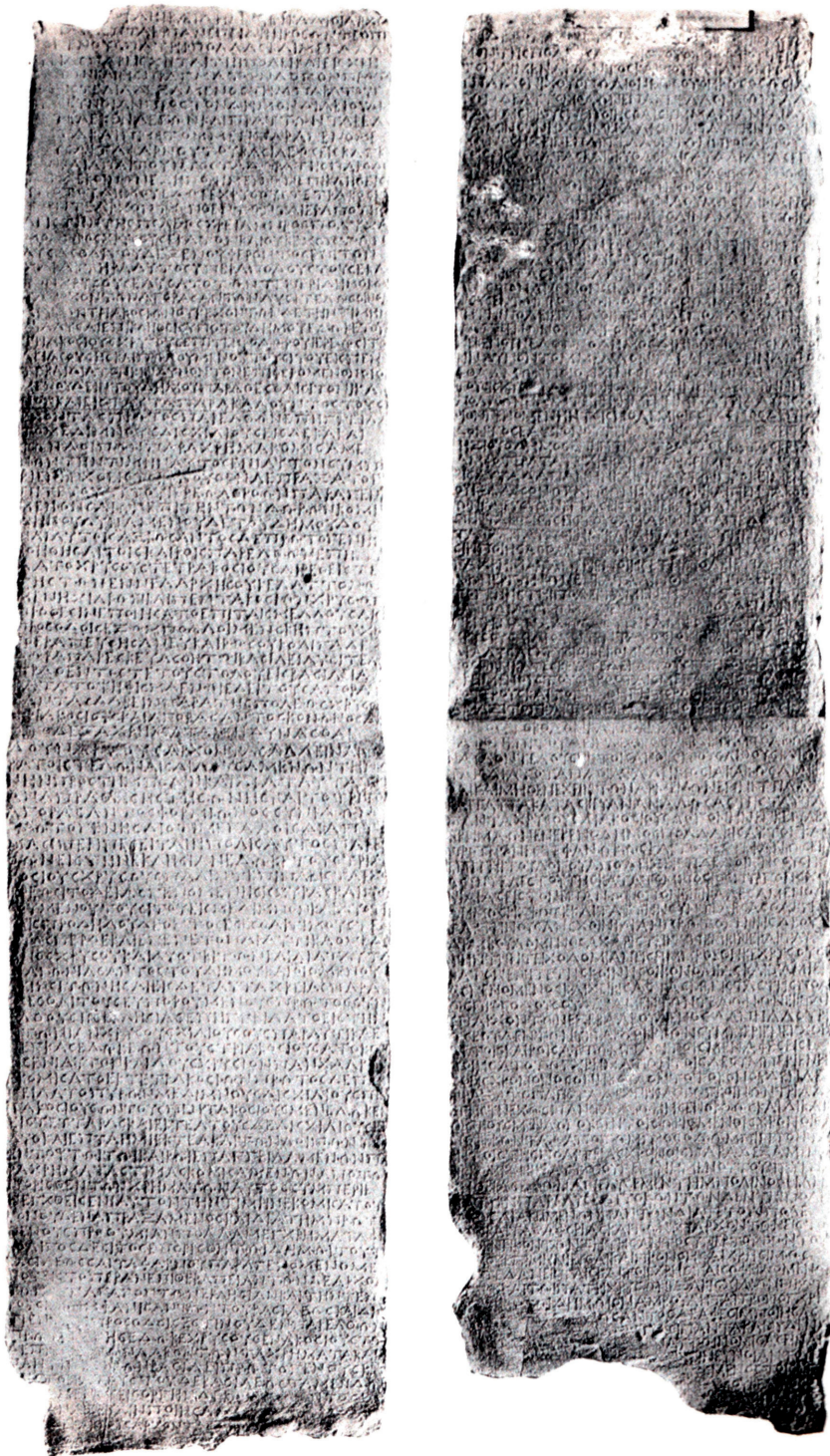


Fig. 57 The Protogenes Inscription from Olbia. – (After Latyshev 1916, pl. II).

Let us consider additional evidence on this issue. The participation of the Sarmatians in the Bosporan war of succession between Eumelus and Satyrus in the late 4th century BC¹⁹³ would imply that the newly-arrived Sarmatians had already conquered the Scythian lands at the Don delta or at least brought them under some degree of control. The destruction of the Scythian fortified settlement (*gorodišče*) at Elizavetovka (including

¹⁹³ See the section on »The Siracian Migration« above.



Fig. 58 The ruins of Tanais (modern Nedvigovka near Rostov): the southern part of the governor's palace. – (After Fornasier/Böttger 2002, 77 fig. 13).

the Greek trading quarter) lying by the Don delta can be dated to roughly the same period, the early 3rd century BC¹⁹⁴. The settlement played an important role in Greek trade. According to Diodorus, the Bosporan ruler Eumelus founded a colony with settlers from Callatis after the Scythians abandoned the settlement¹⁹⁵. The new trading colony proved to be short-lived because it soon fell prey to a nomadic assault from the east. The survivors perhaps fled to the newly-founded Greek colony of Tanais (**fig. 58**)¹⁹⁶. The rapid destruction of the Greek town founded on the site of the former Scythian settlement at Elizavetovka and the growth of Tanais is an eloquent reflection of the new ethnopolitical situation in the Lower Don region. The Sarmatians ousted the Scythians, the region's earlier inhabitants, who, as it has been already mentioned, established their new political centres in two regions: the Crimea and Dobrudja.

The shift of Scythian power can be attributed to the Sarmatian advance, as can the disappearance of Scythian finds from the greater part of the northern Pontic steppe. The differing situation at the mouth of the Dnieper, where a few settlements and cemeteries were only abandoned later, in the late 1st-early 2nd century AD, suggest that the Scythians maintained their rule over this region for a longer time and that the Sarmatians could occupy only the neighbouring regions¹⁹⁷.

At the same time, the lack of Sarmatian finds on the steppe west of the Don, where the earliest finds date from the 2nd century BC, is somewhat enigmatic. It seems to us that the situation is in a way similar to the case of the first Sarmatian wave appearing in the Carpathian Basin. It would appear that the arrival of the

¹⁹⁴ Marčenko 1990. For an identification of the occupants of the fortified settlement, see Brašinskij/Marčenko 1984.

¹⁹⁵ Diod. XX.22.

¹⁹⁶ Fedoseev 1996, 99-100. Lying by the mouth of the Don, Tanais (Nedvigovka near modern Rostov-on-Don) played a vital role in the trade between the Greeks, the Bosphorus and the barbarian peoples up to the Migration Period.

¹⁹⁷ Ščukin 1970.

nomads from the east, their incursions and the raids against the settlements of the local population, did not mean the area's simultaneous occupation (compare, e. g. the Mongolian invasion of Eastern and Central Europe – including Hungary – in the 13th century)¹⁹⁸.

Returning to the four possible reasons for the fall of the Scythian empire, in our opinion, the most likely seems to be the Sarmatians' dynamic westward advance in the 3rd century BC, in all probability starting around the beginning of the century. It may have been caused by the shifts in the region's economic conditions and the fact that the Scythians were engaged in a war on two fronts (against the Sarmatians in the east and the Celts in the west) which undoubtedly divided their forces.

An Overview of the Steppe

Several suggestions that the Sarmatians had originated from Central Asia¹⁹⁹ seem untenable to us. There can be no doubt that the region discussed here – the South Ural region and the territories to its west – had maintained contact with Central Asia and even with the Near East from the earliest Sauromatian period onward²⁰⁰. At the same time, it is practically impossible to gain a systematic overview of the extremely diverse find assemblages coloured by regional traits and the relevant sources, and it is therefore difficult to combine the many scraps of information coming from a vast territory into a coherent pattern. Seeing that the events taking place more or less simultaneously were probably influenced by each other, a brief overview of a few events of the 3rd century which perhaps had a bearing on the history of the steppe seems in order.

The downfall of the Seleucid state in 247 BC, roughly a century after it emerged on the ruins of the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great, was caused by the Parthians (**fig. 47**), a people related to the Scythians²⁰¹. The rise of the Parthian Kingdom followed the crippling economic crisis of its predecessor after two peripheral provinces of the Seleucid kingdom broke away. One of these became the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom, while the other was occupied by the Parni nomadic tribal alliance led by Arsaces. Supported by the nomadic aristocracy, the founder of the dynasty conquered Hyrcania (the southern, south-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea), thereby firmly establishing the economic and military might of the new empire (**fig. 59**). The new regional power emerging under the Arsacids grew into one of the most powerful states of the ancient world and the most formidable adversaries of the Roman Empire²⁰².

At roughly the same time, the Great Wall of China (**fig. 60**) was built under the Qin Dynasty, an event directly related to the growing strength of the northern nomads. Despite the many Chinese troops stationed on the border to ward off the attacks of their powerful enemies, a huge empire was forged from the alliance of the economically prospering and strong Hsiung-nu tribes by the close of the 3rd century^{202a}. Ousted from their territory by the Hsiung-nu, the Yüeh-chih marched from their former lands in Gansu province to Bactria through Dzungaria. The Wusun settled by Lake Balkhaš in the wake of the Yüeh-chih (**fig. 61**). It would appear that the Yüeh-chih tribe was the driving force of the nomadic peoples which toppled the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom between 140 and 130 BC²⁰³.

¹⁹⁸ Mačinskij 1971, 53.

¹⁹⁹ Rostovcev 1918, 33-35. – Rostovtzeff 1922, 113-114. – Harmatta 1994, 566.

²⁰⁰ Smirnov 1989, 169. – Skripkin 1988, 26. E. g. an Achaemenid seal found in the South Ural region can be quoted as an exotic illustration of these contacts (Smirnov 1989, pl. 71).

²⁰¹ e. g. Strabo XI.9.2.

²⁰² Koshelenko/Pilipko 1996, 131-132, with further literature.

^{202a} Ishjants 1996, 153, with further literature.

²⁰³ More details are given in the chapter on the Alans below.

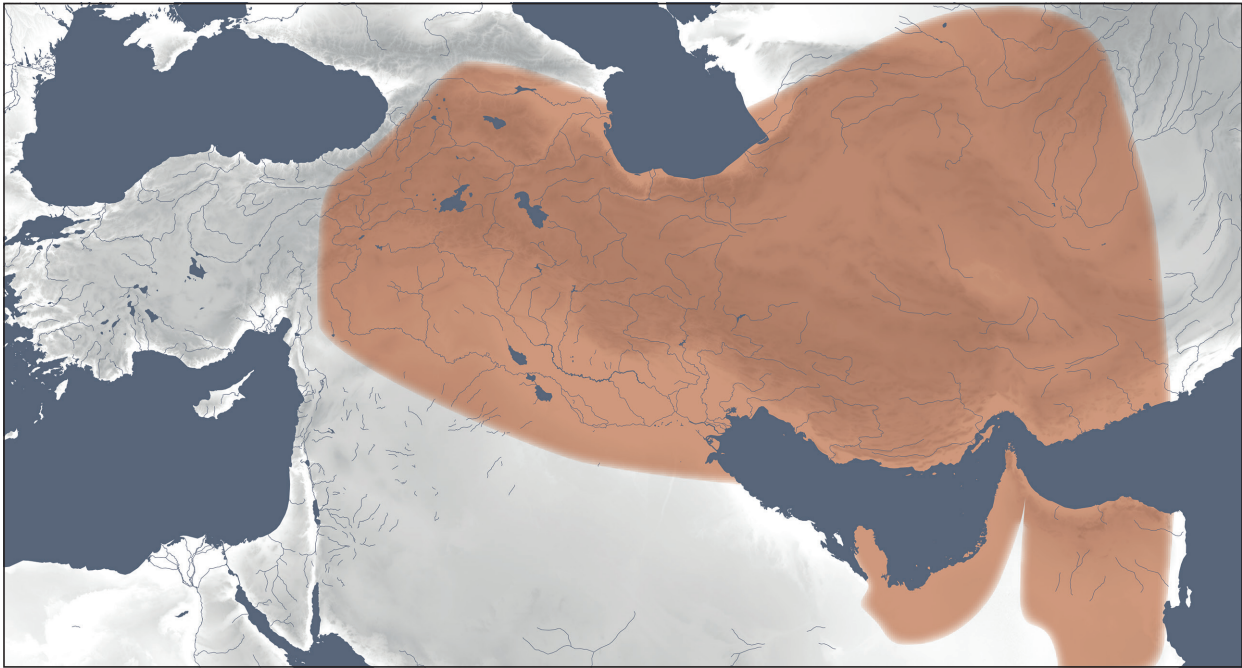


Fig. 59 The Parthian Empire at its greatest extension. – (After Central Asia 1996, map 3; map M. Ober, RGZM).

The migration of the European Sarmatians to the region between the Don and the Dnieper more or less coincided with the movements of the Asian nomads and the rise of the Parthian Empire. Without suggesting a direct link between the cataclysms on the northern Pontic steppe in the 3rd century BC and the rise of the Parthian and the Hsiung-nu Empires, it is nonetheless noteworthy that there was a general restlessness across the entire Eurasian Steppe zone at roughly the same time, whose reverberations could be felt in regions lying many thousands of kilometres away in consequence of the domino effect so often noted in nomadic societies.

It seems instructive to recall some data on the population of the South Ural region and of the Ural-Volga interfluvium (tab. 3).

Tab. 3 Data on the population of the South Ural region and of the Ural-Volga interfluvium.

| 6 th -4 th centuries BC | 4 th -2 nd centuries BC | 1 st century BC-1 st century AD |
|---|---|---|
| 2,000 burials | 5,000 burials | 1,000 burials |

The data at our disposal is insufficient for placing the events in a broader context. It is possible that the growth of animal herds following a prosperous period gave rise to a population growth, which in turn stimulated a dispersal. It is also possible that there was some external influence, namely the arrival of a new population. What we do know for certain is that the thrust towards the west originated from this region. While little is known about the relationships between the southern Uralian population and their eastern and south-eastern neighbours, one outcome of the interaction was the break in the Scythians' life on the Pontic and the occupation of Seleucid Parthia.



Fig. 60 The Great Wall of China. – (Photos V. Istvánovics).

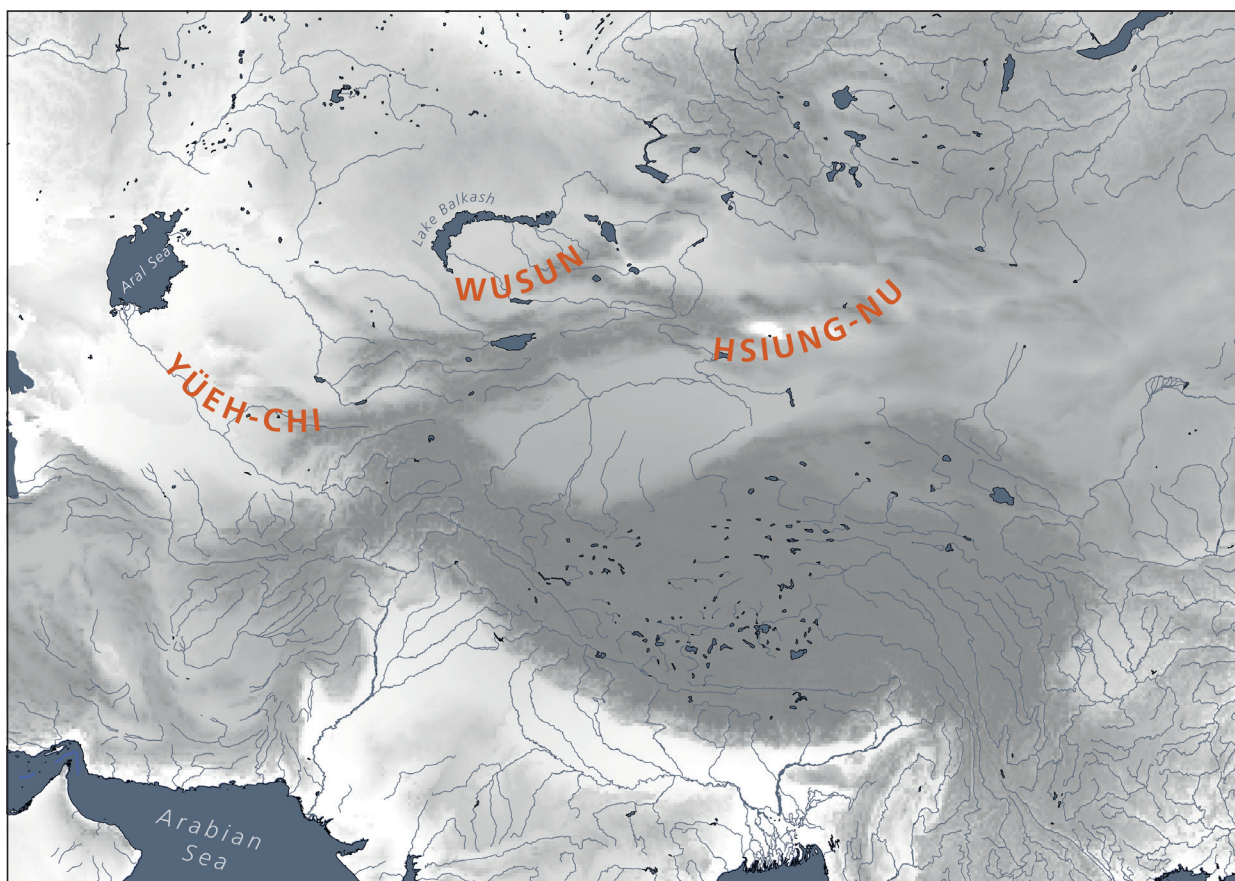


Fig. 61 The locations of the Hsiung-nu, the Wusun and the Yüeh-chi after the migration in the 3rd century BC. – (After Central Asia 1996, map 4; map M. Ober, RGZM).

THE SARMATIANS OF THE PONTIC IN THE 2ND AND 1ST CENTURIES BC

In the Sweep of Pontic Politics

From the 3rd-2nd centuries BC onward, the Sarmatians were significant actors in the politics of the northern Pontic and even of Asia Minor. Although not accurately datable, one early indication of the Sarmatian presence in the region, is an anecdote recounted by Polyænus, a rhetorician living in the 2nd century AD:

Amage²⁰⁴, the wife of Medosaccus king of the Sarmatians, who inhabit the maritime parts of Pontica, observing her husband to be totally given up to luxury, took the reins of government into her own hands. She determined causes, stationed her garrisons, repulsed the invasions of enemies; and directed every thing with so great ability, that her fame extended through all Scythia. The Chersonesites, who inhabit Taurica, and had been much harassed by a king of the adjacent Scythians, had heard of Amage's fame; and requested an alliance with her. In consequence of a treaty formed between the two nations, she wrote to the Scythian prince, not to repeat his ravages in the Chersonese: who treated her prohibition with contempt. When with a hundred and twenty men of tried courage, and extraordinary strength, each of them provided

²⁰⁴ The name Amage can be derived from Old Iranian *amākā*, meaning »strong«, »mighty« (Nefëdkin 2002, 560 n. 240).

with three horses, in one night and day she stretched a march of twelve hundred furlongs; and unexpectedly arriving at the palace, slew all the guard. And while the Scythians, confounded as in a moment of imminent danger, conceived her force to be much greater than it really was, Amage rushing into the palace, where she had made her first attack, slew the Scythian, his friends, and relations; and put the Chersonesites in free possession of their country. To the son of the Scythian prince she gave his hereditary dominions: cautioning him to take warning by his father's death; and not intrench upon the territories of his neighbours²⁰⁵.

The text was analysed by Rostovcev, perhaps one of the most outstanding scholars of classical Antiquity; his conclusions, as in many other fields of historical studies, are still influential in current Sarmatian studies. The Sarmatian tribe appearing in the anecdote lived under the rule of King Medosaccus in a region bordering on the Pontic coast. Rostovcev believed that the area in question could be identified with the coast between the Dnieper and the Moločnaja rivers, west of the Sea of Azov. The seat of King Medosaccus' kingdom lay somewhere near the Perekop Isthmus. The 1,200 stadia referred to correspond to roughly 220 km, from which the location of the Sarmatian centre can be determined, especially in light of the archaeological record that indicates that the Scythian capital, Neapolis Scythica, lay in the area of modern Simferopol (**fig. 56**).

Rostovcev noted that even though the events cannot be dated securely, they can be placed in a plausible historical context known from other sources. He dated the events to the second half of the 3rd-early 2nd centuries BC²⁰⁶. In contrast, Harmatta believed that the affair described in the Amage legend took place in the mid-2nd century BC²⁰⁷. In his study on the history of the north-western Crimea, Ščeglov challenged Harmatta's dating and, quoting the findings of archaeological research, especially the date of the destruction level of various settlements, dated the events even earlier than Rostovcev²⁰⁸. Saprykin has argued convincingly that the events must have taken place before 179 BC, when an agreement was reached that the protection of the estates of the townspeople living in Chersonesus would be guaranteed by Pharnaces I, ruler of Pontus (see below). This undoubtedly meant more reliable support than that of the »perfidious« barbarians, who regularly switched alliances²⁰⁹. However, the above conjectures are no more than speculation and only so much can be stated with certainty that the anecdote recorded by Polyaeus reflects a situation sometime in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. The narrative is fascinating because it illuminates the period's political climate in which the earlier alliance between the Greeks and the Scythians, based on trade and mutual military support, soured and the new dominant power, the Sarmatians, were called upon to protect the Greek cities, while the Scythians appeared as aggressors.

The so-called Protogenes Inscription, a section of which has already been cited in the previous chapter in connection with the Galatians, probably reflected a similar situation. The stone inscription (**fig. 57**) was erected by the grateful citizens in honour of Protogenes, a wealthy Olbian, to commemorate his magnanimous help given in a time of crisis. The inscription has been variously dated to the early 2nd century²¹⁰ and the second half of the 3rd -early 2nd century BC²¹¹. Protogenes came to the community's aid:

First when King *Saitaphernes* came to Cancytus and asked for the gifts due for his passage, and the public treasury was exhausted, he was called upon by the people and gave 400 gold pieces [...] And in the same priesthood when *the Saii came along to collect the gifts*, and the people was unable to give them, and asked Protogenes to help in this crisis, he came forward

²⁰⁵ Pol. *Strat.* VIII.56.

²⁰⁶ Rostovcev 1914.

²⁰⁷ Harmatta 1970, 19.

²⁰⁸ Ščeglov 1978, 128-129.

²⁰⁹ Saprykin 1997, 250-252.

²¹⁰ Harmatta 1949, 131-133; 1970, 10-11.

²¹¹ Šelov 1984, 12, with further literature.

and promised 400 gold pieces. When he was elected one of the Nine he made an advance of not less than 1,500 gold pieces to be repaid from future revenues, from which *many chieftains were conciliated in good time and not a few presents were provided for the king [Saitaphernes] advantageously*. When the equipment destined for the *king's* [Saitaphernes] palace was auctioned [...] Protogenes [...] gave the 300 gold pieces [...] When *king Saitaphernes* came along to the other side of the river to receive favours, and the magistrates called an assembly and reported on the presence of the king and on the fact that the [city's] revenues were exhausted Protogenes came forward and gave 900 gold pieces, and when the ambassadors, Protogenes and Aristocrates, took the money and *met the king, and the king took the presents but flew into a rage and broke up [his] quarters* and [treated?] the magistrates [unworthily? and so] the people met together and [were] terrified [...] Deserters were reporting that the *Galatians* [Celts] *and the Sciri had formed an alliance, that a large force had been collected and would be coming during the winter and in addition that Thissamatae, Scythians and Saudaratae were anxious to seize the fort, as they themselves were equally terrified of the cruelty of the Galatians* [...] ²¹².

What emerges clearly from the fragmentary inscription is that the once flourishing Greek colony was harassed by several barbarian peoples during this period. The Saii, the Thissamatae and Saudaratae are not mentioned elsewhere, either before or after the events recorded in the inscription. The tribal names suggest that they were Iranian peoples. Linguists have proposed several explanations for the meaning of the name Saitaphernes, the king residing somewhere near Olbia, on the basis of the context; both elements are undoubtedly of Iranian origin (*sai*, Xšay, »to shine«, »to rule«; *farnah*, »luck«)²¹³. Harmatta interpreted the tribal name Saii, also of Iranian origin, as meaning »colourful«, arguing that the colour of the horse species was often one of the elements in the name of horse-breeding nomads²¹⁴. Not being linguists, we cannot take a stand on this issue, however, Tomaschek's view (cited by Harmatta) is more tempting from a historical perspective. Tomaschek associated the name of this tribe with Avestan xšaya (»ruler«, »prince«, »king«), which is comparable to the etymology given for the name Saitaphernes. Accepting this interpretation can perhaps bring us closer to solving the riddle of the Royal Sarmatians mentioned by Strabo (see below). Yet another hypothesis proposed by Harmatta, was that the name Saii referred to several tribes rather than one tribe, at least judging from the mention of several chieftains (literally, »sceptre-bearers«)²¹⁵.

One indication of the relocation of the Sarmatian centre on the right bank of the Don can be found in a passage of Polybius, according to which the Sarmatian king Gatalos appears as a European king among the members of an international treaty concluded in 179 BC²¹⁶. (The treaty itself brought an end to the conflict between Pontus and its adversaries, Bithynia, Pergamum and Cappadocia.) Even this seemingly reliable piece of information has been challenged more recently because the boundary of Europe was drawn at different rivers in various periods. Beginning with Strabo, the border between Asia and Europe has been identified with the Tanais/Don. There is no consensus on whether Polybius accepted the Tanaic border or whether he followed the Ionian geographic tradition, identifying Europe with the region north of the River Phasis²¹⁷. An-

²¹² Latyshev 1916, no. 32, 54-55, italics added for emphasis. – Austin 1981, 171-172.

²¹³ Abaev 1979, 309. 314.

²¹⁴ Harmatta 1970, 10-12, with further literature; see also 1949, 131-132.

²¹⁵ Cf. Tacit. *Annal.* VI.33, who also calls the leaders »sceptre-bearers«.

²¹⁶ Polybius 25.2,13. This brief passage has served as the starting point for the reconstruction of elaborate alliances, most of which are speculative at best. These shall not be discussed here.

²¹⁷ Polin 1992, 93-94. The identification of the boundary between Europe and Asia changed from time to time. One case in point is the comparison of the above with Annaeus Seneca's remark that »here are the Danube and | the Rhine separating with their streams the peaceful | from the hostile, the former checking attacks from | the Sarmatians and forming the boundary between | Europe and Asia, the latter keeping back the | Germans, a nation ever keen for war [...]« (Sen. *Nat. Quest.* VI.7).

other problem in this respect is that the River Phasis is variously identified with the River Rioni in the Caucasus, with the River Arax and with the River Kuban²¹⁸. To further complicate the intricacies of the names used in Antiquity, it must be recalled that Polybius' Tanais is sometimes believed to be identical with the Kuban²¹⁹. In this case, regardless of whether the Kuban can be identified with Polybius' Phasis or Tanais, the Siraci living in the foreground of the Caucasus seem the most likely candidates; and Gatalos ruled over this people. Marčenko made an attempt to support this possibility with archaeological evidence, arguing that there are no (or, better said, very few) Sarmatian sites west of the Don, meaning that a royal centre could hardly have been located in this region. At the same time, the find assemblages attributed to the Siraci make their appearance in the Kuban region from the second half of the 4th century BC. The period's Siracian graves contain numerous artefacts from Asia Minor, suggesting that the Siraci had participated in the war concluded by the peace treaty which Gatalos had attended (figs 62-63). The Siraci were employed as mercenaries in other regions as well, for example in the Caucasus (see the above-quoted passage from the *Kartlis Chovreba*)²²⁰.

Finds from the First Half of the Sarmatian Age (Mid-2nd Century - Mid-1st Century BC)

Following the 3rd century hiatus, find assemblages attributable to the Sarmatians make their appearance in the northern Pontic up to the lower reaches of the Dnieper, in the 2nd century BC, or, as has been more recently suggested, from mid-century²²¹. Over 4,000 burials are known west of the Don, enabling the assessment of the finds, as well as – in theory – their chronological periodisation. At the same time, there are numerous marked differences between the different regions, especially between the material from the Don-Dnieper interfluvium, and the assemblages east of the Don.

In the east, i. e. in the region between the Don, the Volga and the Ural, there is a perceptible increase in the number of »primary« graves above which a kurgan was erected (although regional differences can be noted). The grave pits are wide, in many cases almost square shaped and the deceased were often laid to rest in a diagonal position in the grave. Catacombs, the typical grave constructions of the preceding period, disappear (though not in the Kuban region and the northern Caucasus), and the number of niche graves significantly declines. Burials were predominantly orientated south to north. East of the Don the typical elements of Sauromatian culture, lacking in the early Sarmatian Age, make a comeback. These include the diagonal deposition of the dead, the custom of placing intact, rather than broken mirrors in the grave, the re-appearance of a particular class of handmade pottery and the popularity of various articles decorated in the animal style. A number of remarkably richly furnished female burials evoke the »matriarchate« of the Sauromatian period²²².

At the same time in the Dnieper region, secondary burials dug into earlier kurgans dominate, while niche graves and catacombs are rare (although their number increases with time), and there are no diagonal burials. Family kurgans, a customary burial mode in the east, are also lacking. Grave goods were usually placed by the head in the Dnieper Valley. The grave assemblages include Middle La Tène brooches and Late Hellenistic import pottery. The most typical weapons accompanying the deceased are sickle-hilted daggers and swords, and iron arrowheads of the socketed and tanged variety (fig. 64). The deceased are generally

²¹⁸ Pecz 1902/1904, vol. II, 461.

²¹⁹ Polybius' mistakes were criticised already by Strabo (II.4.1-5), e. g.: »it is false that the river Don flows from the summer rising. For all who are acquainted with these localities inform us that this river flows from the north into the Mæotis« (II.4.5).

²²⁰ Marčenko 1996, 124-126.

²²¹ Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 83. The exact date of these assemblages has been debated by different generations and schools of scholars; it is yet impossible to refine the general broad date of the 2nd century BC.

²²² Skripkin 1990, 215-216.



Fig. 62 Reconstruction of the costume of the warrior buried in Grave 3 of the Bojko-Ponura kurgan dating from the first half of the 2nd century BC. The warrior was probably a high-ranking contemporary of Gatalos. – (After L'Or 2001, 158-159).



Fig. 63 Celtic helmet of the first half of the 2nd century BC from the burial of a Siracian warrior: Grave 3 of the Bojko-Ponura kurgan. The helmet reflects the contacts between the Siracians and the Celtic Galatians of Asia Minor. Galatians' warriors probably participated in Pharnaces I' campaigns on the Anatolian coast. – (After L'Or 2001, 160 no. 158).

orientated north to south. Several typical Prohorovka types, such as hand-built vessels, are lacking. Some scholars associate these burials with the lazyges and Roxolani²²³.

A new, distinctive ornamental style, the Sarmatian polychrome animal style, became popular during this period. The style survived until the first half of the 2nd century AD with its greatest popularity occurring in the 1st century AD. Its appearance is usually linked to the arrival of a new population²²⁴.

The Sarmatian Tribes

The history of the northern Pontic during this period was essentially determined by the conflict between the kingdom of Mithridates VI Eupator («the Great») and the Roman Empire. The life of the barbarian tribes was also affected and it also had a bearing on the information gathered about these tribes. In contrast to the often vague and jumbled pieces of information from earlier periods, the works by different classical authors now contain increasingly more references to the Sarmatian tribes. The historic and geographic record is complemented by the epigraphic evidence.

One obvious question is what other Sarmatian tribes are known aside from the Siraci? Writing a few hundred years after Herodotus, Strabo provided a systematic description of the tribes living on the northern Pontic coast:

[...] the whole country that lies above the said seaboard between the Borysthenes and the Ister consists, first, of the desert of the Getae, then the country of the Tyregetans, and after it the

²²³ Simonenko 1994, 15-16.

²²⁴ The finds of this group were recently reviewed by Mordvinceva 2003, who noted that some artefacts are known from Early Sarmatian contexts, while others from Middle Sarmatian ones. In her view, this group of finds appeared at the close of the

2nd century BC. The implication of the new dating is that the distribution of these finds can be linked to the arrival of a new population. In this case, however, this population had to arrive before the 1st century. For a critique, see Zaseckaja 2006.

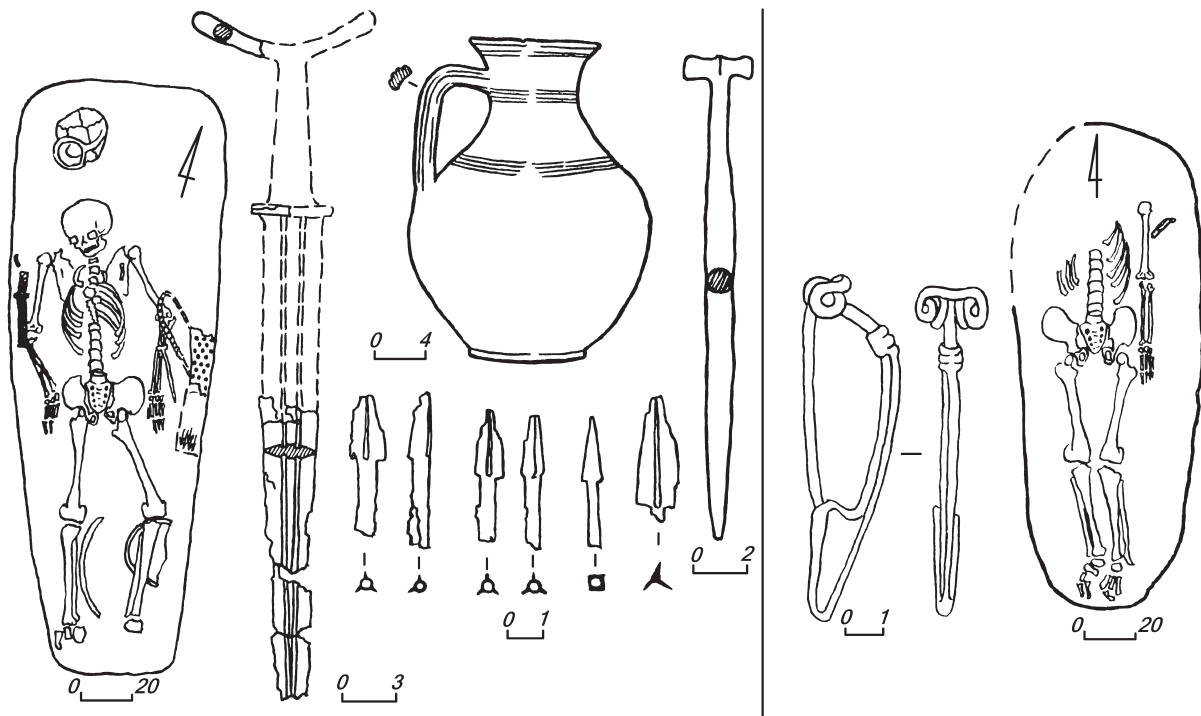


Fig. 64 Burials with grave goods typical for the first half of the Middle Sarmatian Age (mid-2nd century BC-mid-1st century AD) from Vinogradnoe and Volodimirovka. – (After Simonenko 1991, figs 1, 2; 2, 1).

country of the lazygian Sarmatians and that of the people called the Basileans («royals») and that of the Urgi, who in general are nomads, though a few are interested also in farming. [...] In the interior dwell, first, those Bastarnians whose country borders on that of the Tyregetans and Germans – they also being, one might say, of Germanic stock; and they are divided up into several tribes, for a part of them are called Atmoni and Sidoni, while those who took possession of Peuce, the island in the Ister, are called «Peucini,» whereas the «Roxolani» (the most northerly of them all) roam the plains between the Tanaïs and the Borysthenes. [...] but whether any people dwell beyond the Roxolani we do not know²²⁵. (fig. 65)

Strabo mentioned four Sarmatian groups, whose location was traditionally conceptualised as follows: 1) the Roxolani in the region between the Don and the Dnieper; 2) the Urgi, west of the Dnieper; followed by, 3) the Royal Sarmatians; and, 4) the lazyges. Recently, John Hind has suggested that the Sauromatians, the Iurkae, the Thyssagetae and the Royal Scythians mentioned by Herodotus east of the Don, had migrated westward and later appeared as Strabo's lazyges, Urgi, Tyragetae and Royal Sarmatians (Basileioi) living west of the Don and, shortly afterwards, north of the Lower Danube. This would also explain how the Siraci, Aorsi and Alans (the former Massagetae) fleeing the Hun onslaught, occupied the areas left vacant east of the Don²²⁶. The events of the Mithridatic Wars, in which the Roxolani were also involved, were mentioned in the so-called Diophantus Inscription (see below). In view of the latter and the fact that Strabo drew his geographic data from Artemidoros, his description of the tribal territories reflected conditions in the 2nd-1st centuries BC²²⁷.

²²⁵ Strabo VII.3.17.

²²⁶ Hind 2007.

²²⁷ Rostovtzeff 1922, 115. – Rostovcev 1925, 38-42. – Harmatta 1950, 3-4; 1970, 14-15. Although there are two different views concerning Strabo's sources, this does not affect the chronology outlined here.



Fig. 65 Germania, Getica, Sarmatia, Illyria and Thracia in Strabo's *Geography*. – (After Strabo, appendix).

Contrary to the above chronology, the recent archaeological record indicates that the finds which can be associated with these peoples first appeared on the right bank of the Dnieper around the turn of the millennium, spreading slowly to the Danube and the Carpathian foreland²²⁸. The fortifications built by the Scythians in the Dnieper region indicate that this advance was far from peaceful. These fortified settlements were abandoned in the late 1st-early 2nd centuries AD²²⁹, by which time a new Sarmatian wave reached the region from the Don, around the mid and second half of the 1st century AD²³⁰.

Despite the testimony of the archaeological record, the unanimous descriptions contained in the written sources, and the general reliability and credibility of Strabo's information, it would appear that at least three Sarmatian peoples – the Urgi, the lazyges and the Royal Sarmatians – had settled west of the Dnieper by the early 1st century BC at the latest (but most probably even earlier).

Polin and Simonenko proposed one possible explanation for resolving the contradiction. In their view, the three Sarmatian tribes were actually the one and the same people, and the Urgi and the Royal Sarmatians mentioned by Strabo were two groups of the Sarmatians. The reconstruction of Vipsanius Agrippa's map indicates that the boundary between Sarmatia and Dacia was marked by the Dnieper until the turn of the millennium²³¹. According to this, Sarmatians may have crossed the Dnieper not until after the death of Burebista and the dissolution of his state. This corresponds to the suggestion that Strabo's passage claiming that the Sarmatians lived west of the Dnieper had been inserted toward the end of the author's life²³².

228 Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 83.

229 Hrapunov 1991, 23-26.

230 Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 83.

231 Podosinov 2002, 55.

232 Polin 1992, 95-96. – Simonenko 1999, both with further literature. We are grateful to Simonenko for permitting us to read and quote from his unpublished doctoral dissertation.



Fig. 66 Reconstruction of Vipsanius Agrippa's map, 20 BC. – (After lazarus.elte.hu/hun/dolgozo/jesus/tt/romaiot.htm [5.5.2012]).

Only so much is certain from Strabo's description, that the Sarmatians and the Geto-Dacians²³³ were neighbours during this period. His description was, as you will recall: »desert of the Getae, then the country of the Tyregetans, and after it the country of the lazygian Sarmatians«²³⁴.

Regarding Vipsanius Agrippa's map, it must be borne in mind that it is not a genuine map, but a reconstructed cartographic work – another reconstruction has the Tanais as the frontier river between Sarmatia and Dacia (fig. 66). It is therefore instructive to examine the Geto-Dacian archaeological assemblages. Visiting Olbia in 95 AD, Dion Chrysostom could still see traces of the devastation wreaked by the Getae²³⁵, probably in 55 BC, when Burebista's kingdom reached its greatest extent: Romanian scholars claim that the eastern boundary was marked by the Hypanis (Bug). This would imply that they did not expand beyond Olbia and had only occupied the coastal area.

²³³ The term Getae is an ethnonym principally used in the Greek sources, while Latin sources preferred the ethnonym Dacian (Plin. *NH* IV.XII.80: »*Daci Romanis dicti*«). In Ovid's case, the Getae are identical with the Dacians. However, the two ethnonyms did not always refer to the same people. For example, Strabo drew a sharp distinction between the two. His Dacians were the western branch of the northern Thracian tribes, occupying the territory north-east of Scythia Minor in the Dobrudja (Strabo VII.3.12). The Getae are described as inhabiting the northern Pontic along the lower reaches of the Danube. Insofar as the two peoples are not identical, they

were closely related. The equation of the two ethnonyms began sometime around the turn of the millennium, when these peoples coalesced into major tribal alliances first led by the Getae and, later, by the Dacians (Skržinskaja 1977, 40-44).

²³⁴ Müller 2003, 436-437, has recently suggested that a nomadic Sarmatian influence can be demonstrated among the Bastarnae. The date of the relevant passages could provide additional confirmation for the relatively early Sarmatian expansion west of the Dnieper, but this theory based on indirect data of the written sources requires further examination.

²³⁵ Dio Chrysost. XXXVI.4, XXVI.6.

After Burebista's death around 40 BC, there is a marked increase in the written sources and epigraphic material indicating a Sarmatian presence in the foreland of the Lower Danube. The Sarmatians' activity was undoubtedly a direct consequence of the collapse of the Geto-Dacian kingdom.

Little more can be said in this respect, not least because of the lack of Sarmatian finds west of the Dnieper and, also, because neither are there Geto-Dacian assemblages. Insofar as the dating of the known finds is correct, the archaeological record is insufficient for determining either the ethnic affiliation of the population living there, or their political situation.

While Strabo's quoted passage has been analysed from many angles, far less attention has been accorded to another list of peoples by Appian for the period between 98 and 90 BC, when various tribes of the Pontic steppe were Mithridates' allies. Even though Appian does not specify their exact location, he is clearly writing about the western regions of the southern Russian steppe. The peoples listed by him include the Bastarnae and the Sauromatians, among whom he distinguished Royal Sarmatians (Basilidae), Iazyges and Coralli²³⁶.

In the absence of more recent comprehensive and convincing classical philological studies, the accuracy of the newly proposed theories can hardly be decided. Thus, the broad canvas initially painted by Rostovcev seems acceptable. A Sarmatian expansion can be assumed from the 3rd century BC, even if these were little more than raids at first. The *status quo* with the Sarmatian presence west of the Dnieper, described by Strabo, emerged in the 2nd century^{236a}. The situation described above then changed after Burebista's death around 40 BC.

Tracing the location of the Sarmatian peoples toward the east, the Roxolani are followed by the Aorsi on the left bank of the Don and on the shores of the Sea of Azov, while the Siraci continued to reside in the Kuban Valley. Moving northward, we can confidently assert that the Sarmatian lands – and the earlier Scythian territories – did not, with a few minor exceptions, extend into the forested steppe zone. At first, there was hardly any contact between the two regions: a situation which changed during later periods.

The Siraci

Abaev derived the tribal name of the Siraci from Iranian *sir-* («to dance», «to trot») and compared it to Ossetian *sirag* («to dance lightly, walking»). The name Siracos crops up in the epigraphic material from Olbia²³⁷. One interesting piece of information is that Darius' troops were lured into a waterless desert by a Saka horse-keeper by the name of Sirakos («deceitful leader»)²³⁸.

We have already mentioned the Siraci above (figs 62-63). This tribe was the single Sarmatian group that did not, apparently, participate in the westward migration, at least judging from the extant sources. These all locate their lands to the Sea of Azov, the Caspian Sea or the foreland of the Caucasus, save for a single vague passage in Pliny's work, according to which the Siraci lived in the western part of the northern Pontic coast²³⁹. As we saw, the Siraci were one of the important political actors on the scene. Around the turn of the millennium, however, their position on the right bank of the Kuban became unstable owing to the new Sarmatian (Aorsian/Alan) advance. The Siraci of the Kuban region withdrew to their fortified settlements and their

²³⁶ »The Sarmatian and Bastarnian wars restrained Mithridates« (Plutarch *De fort Roman* 11). »From Europe he [Mithridat] drew of the Sarmatian tribes, both the Basilidae and the Jazyges, the Coralli, and those Thracians who dwelt along the Danube and on the Rhodope and Haemus mountains, and besides these the Bastarnae, the bravest nation of all« (Appian. *Mithr.* X.69). These references were first discussed by Kulakovskij 2000, 51.

^{236a} Otherwise we would have to assume an incredibly swift migration. The Middle Danube region, the territory ringed by

the Carpathians, lies at least 1000km from the Dnieper even as the crow flies (and practically the double of this distance on land) across territories strongly dissected by rivers. In the model proposed by Polin and Simonenko, Iazygians would have crossed this vast territory *en masse* within 20-25 years, with an average of 40km covered per year.

²³⁷ Abaev 1979, 303.

²³⁸ Pol. *Strat.* VII.12.

²³⁹ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.83. – Skržinskaja 1977.

burials along the river's right bank disappeared gradually. The route of their withdrawal was determined by the earlier Bosporean alliance: they retreated to the Taman' Peninsula²⁴⁰. At roughly the same time, local groups can be distinguished in the formerly uniform archaeological material²⁴¹. The Aorsi encircled the Siraci from the north and the east, seeing that the greater part of the Caspian region was under their control²⁴², including the Derbent Pass, the second most important Caucasian pass. The Siraci, and especially the groups living in the middle part of the northern Caucasus, and in the Terek and Sunža basin, found themselves encircled on the steppe of the Caucasian foreland.

Even though relations between the two tribal alliances soured, there is evidence for cases of intermarriage between the Siraci and the Aorsi. One of these comes from Grave 20 of the Krestovyj kurgan near Alitub in the Don region. This is the burial site of a high-ranking woman from the 1st century BC, laid to rest according to the funerary rite practised in the Kuban region. Certain elements of the funerary rite are alien to the Don region, as are some of the grave goods, suggesting that the grave contained the burial of a Siracian woman²⁴³.

The Aorsi

The name of the Aorsi is generally derived from the Iranian word meaning »white« (Avestan *auruša*, Ossetian *ors*)²⁴⁴. Regarding the location of the Aorsi, let us again turn to Strabo's passages on the northern Pontic tribes, which have in part already been quoted in the case of Siraci:

Of the portions thus divided, the first is inhabited, in the region toward the north and the ocean, by Scythian nomads and wagon-dwellers, and south of these, by Sarmatians, these too being Scythians, and by Aorsi and Siraci, who extend towards the south as far as the Caucasian Mountains, some being nomads and others tent-dwellers and farmers. About Lake Maeotis live the Maeotae.

The next peoples to which one comes between Lake Maeotis and the Caspian Sea are nomads, the Nabiani and the Panxani, and then next the tribes of the Siraces and the Aorsi. The Aorsi and the Siraces are thought to be fugitives from the upper tribes of those names and the Aorsi are more to the north than the Siraces. Now Abeacus, king of the Siraces, sent forth twenty thousand horsemen at the time when Pharnaces held the Bosphorus; and Spadines, king of the Aorsi, two hundred thousand; but the upper Aorsi sent a still larger number, for they held dominion over more land, and, one may almost say, ruled over most of the Caspian coast; and consequently they could import on camels the Indian and Babylonian merchandise, receiving it in their turn from the Armenians and the Medes, and also, owing to their wealth, could wear golden ornaments. Now the Aorsi live along the Tanais, but the Siraces live along the Achard-eüs, which flows from the Caucasus and empties into Lake Maeotis²⁴⁵.

The numbers, as already mentioned above, are obviously grossly exaggerated, but they do indicate that the military forces recruited were quite large. The demonstration of power was part of the build-up to the war with Rome in 50-49 BC, when Pharnaces, Mithridates Eupator's treacherous son, who first made a deal with the Romans, later attempted to restore his father's kingdom.

²⁴⁰ Marčenko 1988, 80.

²⁴¹ Zaharov 2000, 39.

²⁴² Strabo XI.5.8.

²⁴³ Zaharov 2000, 39.

²⁴⁴ Cf. the ethnonym Alanorsi, »white Alan«, and the name of the Roxolani, also containing the root »white«. – Abaev 1979, 282. – Alemany 2000, 8-9.

²⁴⁵ Strabo XI.2.1, XI.5.8. According to Rostovtzeff 1922, 116, this piece of information was taken from Theophanes of Mytilene.

The Aorsi are here described as the eastern neighbours of the Roxolani and the northern neighbours of the Siraci. The boundary with the latter was probably the River Manyč, which can in all likelihood be identified with the Achardeus²⁴⁶.

Strabo claimed that trade with India and Babylon was controlled by the Upper Aorsi. Interestingly enough, Roman imports are lacking from the Lower Volga region where the Upper Aorsi were established during the 3rd-1st centuries BC, whereas they are more frequent among the Aorsi localised to the Lower Don region²⁴⁷.

Urgi and Royal Sarmatians

Perhaps the most controversial (possibly) Sarmatian tribes mentioned by Strabo are the Urgi and the Royal Sarmatians. The Urgi only appear in Strabo's writings. Abaev derived *urgos* from the Iranian word meaning »wolf« (cf. *varka*, appearing in both the *Avesta* and in Ossetian). He noted that it was a totem name, similar to the etymology of *saka* (»deer«)²⁴⁸.

It has been suggested that the Urgi were not a Sarmatian people, but a sedentary Scythian tribe that survived into the Sarmatian period in their hillforts along the Dnieper. They are usually linked to Herodotus' γεωργοι, the Scythian farmers. It would appear that a distorted form of their name was preserved by Strabo²⁴⁹. However, Hind has recently suggested that the Urgi should rather be associated with the lurkai, the neighbours of the Sauromatians in the Don region in Herodotus' time, who appear as Tyrcae in later sources²⁵⁰.

Quoting a passage from Appian, Smirnov sought to equate the lazyges with the Royal Sarmatians. Smirnov's concept is based on a misunderstanding because in the passage in question, Appian describes the Royal Sarmatians (Sauromatians) and the lazyges as related peoples, both the allies of Mithridates²⁵¹. Smirnov's mistaken interpretation was adopted by Simonenko, who compared Appian's list of tribes with the data contained in Strabo's above-quoted passages. Basing his arguments on the lack of punctuation in Strabo's work, he interpreted the passage as meaning »lazygians, [i. e.] the so-called Royals and the Urgi«²⁵². It seems to us that this issue can only be resolved by a new, more thorough classical philological re-assessment of the texts in question, uninfluenced by the findings of archaeological research.

Harmatta has pointed out that the Royal Sarmatians' land was ringed by the other tribes (lazyges, Urgi, Roxolani). He drew a parallel with the name of the Royal Scythians and the known model of nomadic tribal alliances in which the power of a central tribe was the cohesive force of the alliance²⁵³. Without delving deeper into this problem (seeing that there are no additional sources for resolving it), let us again refer to the possibility that the Saii and the Royal Sarmatians represent the same people – a possibility also raised by Smirnov²⁵⁴.

The lazyges

Holzer derived the name of the lazyges from Iranian **yazyu-ka-* (»priest presenting a sacrifice«; Old Iranian *yájyu-*, »respected«, »pious«, *Adhvaryu-*, »priestly«, Avestan *yazaite*, »sacrificed«), arguing that *k* is transformed into *g* in the Sarmatian language and *-ka* is a frequent suffix in Aryan. However, he does not entirely discard Vasmer's interpretation that the name can be derived from Iranian *yazu-*, Old Iranian *yahu-* (»in-

²⁴⁶ Vinogradov 1966.

²⁴⁷ Sergackov 1996, 113.

²⁴⁸ Abaev 1979, 308. – Hind 2007, n. 8, quotes Abaev 1949, 185, according to whom the word can be derived from **ugra*, »strong«.

²⁴⁹ Smirnov 1984, 120, with further literature.

²⁵⁰ Hind 2007, 242-243. – Herodotus IV.21-22 (lurkai → lurgoi → Ourgoi).

²⁵¹ Appian. *Mithr.* XII.69.293-294.

²⁵² Simonenko 1993b, 59-60.

²⁵³ Harmatta 1970, 12-14.

²⁵⁴ Smirnov 1984, 119.

defatigable«, »restless«), and also takes into consideration Müllenhoff's derivation from Avestan *yazata-*, »worthy of reverence«, and *yazu-*, »great«, »outstanding«²⁵⁵.

Following Müllenhof, who first suggested an etymology for the name of the lazyges, Minns, who can be credited with writing one of the first thorough studies on Scythian-Sarmatian history, assumed that the tribal name cropped up in the most diverse variants, a view seconded by Rostovcev and Sulimirski. Accordingly, the Ixomatae, the Ixibatae, the Iazamatae, the Iazabatae (and, in our view, perhaps the Iami mentioned by Hecataeus²⁵⁶) were different names for the same people who were always described as the westernmost Sarmatian tribe from their first very appearance in recorded history. This tribe was the westernmost one mentioned in the reports of classical authors. Its ancestry was shrouded in darkness, but in any case they coalesced into a tribe proper far east of the Danube²⁵⁷.

Beside the Roxolani, most scholars regard the lazyges as the period's other major tribal alliance. The latter are often identified with the Royal Sarmatians, a hypothesis which, as we have seen, is based on the misinterpretation of one passage and a philologically doubtful reading of the sources.

The identification of the lazyges' archaeological heritage in the regions east of the Carpathian Mountains is principally based on the distinctive orientation of the graves. One population group living on the Budžak steppe (Odessa and the Lower Danube region) and in Moldova is characterised by graves in which the deceased were laid to rest with the head toward the south (in contrast to the north to south orientation typical for the Dnieper region). These graves are generally dated to the early and mid-1st century AD, a date which is »later« compared to Strabo's description of the region's tribes reflecting conditions in the 1st century BC at the latest. The identification of the northern Pontic find assemblages with the lazyges is supported by the fact that the lazyges migrating to the Carpathian Basin also buried their dead with a south to north orientation. The disappearance of burials orientated to the south from the Pontic coast in the mid-1st century is generally explained by the migration of the lazyges²⁵⁸.

The Roxolani

Their name can be interpreted as *roxs-alan*, with *roxs* coming from Old Iranian *rauxšna* (»light«), and *alan* (*ālān*) from *aryana* (»Aryan«), meaning »light [white?] Alans«²⁵⁹. Strabo's description suggests that the Roxolani lived in the Don-Dnieper interfluvium. They are located in the Crimea in one of the period's most important epigraphic sources dated to the early 2nd century BC, the decree honouring Diophantus, a general of Mithridates VI, King of Pontus (**fig. 67**). The same event is also mentioned by Strabo, a rare instance in the case of sources of different types. In order to understand what had led up to this situation, we must make a brief detour back into the 4th century BC.

²⁵⁵ Holzer 1989, 201. 207, with further literature. Holzer embraced Dumézil's (e.g. 1978, 171-203) and Benveniste's hypothesis of the »three-fold ideology« of the Indo-Europeans and therefore tried to fit his etymologies into this tripartite social framework. He argued that, whichever etymology is accepted, all three indicate that the tripartite social system also existed among the Sarmatians and that the lazyges could be linked to the sacral sphere.

²⁵⁶ Latyšev 1947/1952-1992/1993, 300.

²⁵⁷ See Smirnov 1984, 119-120, summarising the above mentioned views.

²⁵⁸ Simonenko 1993b, 61-62, with further literature.

²⁵⁹ Miller 1887, 86. – Abaev 1979, 277. 280-281. – Alemany 2000, 8-9.



Fig. 67 Tetradrachm of Mithridates VI Eupator (120-63 BC) from 95 BC. – (After L'Or 2001, 133 no. 118).

The Mithridates Dynasty. Some Words on the Pontic-Bosporan Kingdom and the Scythians of the Crimea

The kingdom of the Mithridatidae was founded in the late 4th century BC. The founder, Mithridates I (302-266), traced his ancestry to the Achaemenids. Initially incorporating Cappadocia and Paphlagonia (the southern Pontic coast), the Pontic Kingdom expanded continuously and eventually conquered Bithynia and Sinope. The kingdom's rise began in the first quarter of the 2nd century BC, under the reign of Pharnaces I, reaching its greatest glory under the reign of Mithridates VI Eupator («the Great»), followed by an irrevocable decline. Cherishing visions of world dominion, Mithridates VI successfully enlarged his kingdom, annexing the Bosporan Kingdom and conquering Colchis, thereby ensuring his control over the Pontic (**fig. 68**). He engineered a coalition against Rome, with the participation of Armenia and Parthia. His relations spread as far as Syria. Egypt also joined the coalition. On the northern littoral of the Black Sea he rallied Olbia, Chersonesus and the northern Pontic barbarian peoples to his side, among others. The necessary financial resources were ensured by the conquest of the Bosporan Kingdom. Mithridates first turned against Rome in 89 BC, making the most of the fact that the

republic, fast growing into a major empire, was then riven by civil war²⁶⁰.

In 111 or 100 BC, Mithridates sent an army commanded by Diophantus to assist the Chersonesians after the Scythians, led by King Palacus, had occupied the city (we have seen from the legend of Amage that this flourishing Crimean city was regularly raided by the Scythians). The Scythians gained a foothold in the peninsula's interior: the Scythian fort of Palakion in the land of the Tauri was built at this time (in the Simferopol area). Strabo mentions three fortified settlements (Palakion, Neapolis and Chabon) built by King Scilurus and his sons (**fig. 69**)²⁶¹. Diophantus defeated the Scythians. The Scythians turned to the Roxolani for assistance during this war. According to the panegyric inscription (**fig. 70**), when Palacus «thought the occasion was to his advantage and was collecting all his own forces, dragging along also the tribe of the Reuxinalians». Diophantus crushed them: «[of the enemy's] infantry scarcely a one [was saved], and of the cavalry not many escaped»²⁶². The decree's text echoes Strabo's information – probably drawn from Poseidonius²⁶³ – who noted that:

²⁶⁰ For the most recent comprehensive monograph on the Pontic Kingdom, see Saprykin 1996.

²⁶¹ Strabo VII.4.7. A fourth hillfort (*gorodišče*) is known from an epigraphic source. Four major Late Scythian fortified settlements are known, however, only in one case could the settle-

ment site be identified with one of the forts mentioned in the written sources: Neapolis, identical with modern Kermenčik [Simferopol] (Hrapunov 1995, 51).

²⁶² Bagnall/Derrow 2004, 102-103.

²⁶³ Harmatta 1950, 6-7.

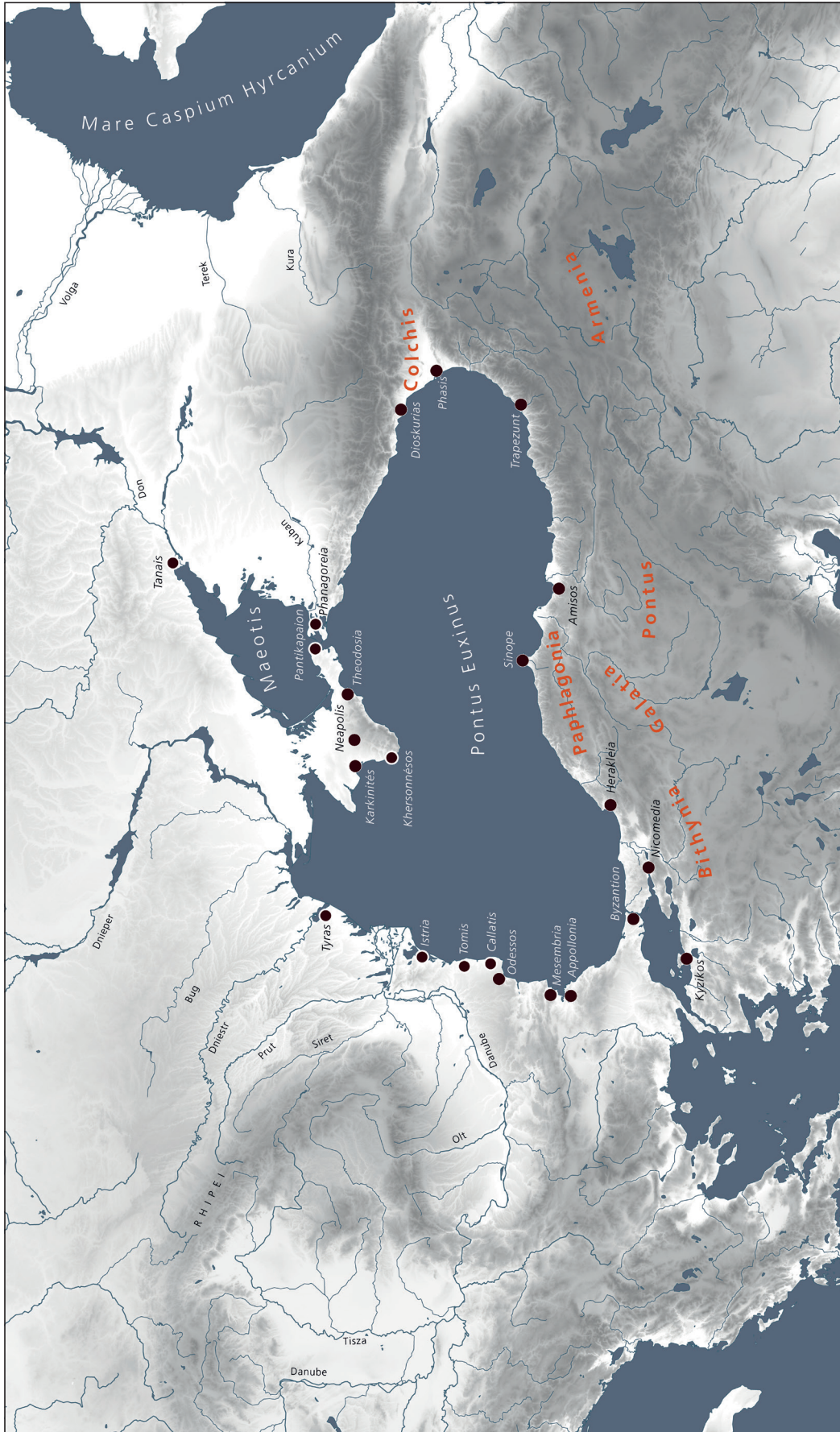


Fig. 68 The Pontic Kingdom at the time of Mithridates VI Eupator. – (After Molev 1995, map 1; map M. Ober, RGZM).



Fig. 69 Scilurus and his son, Palacus. – (After Bunjatjan et al. 1998, fig. 76).

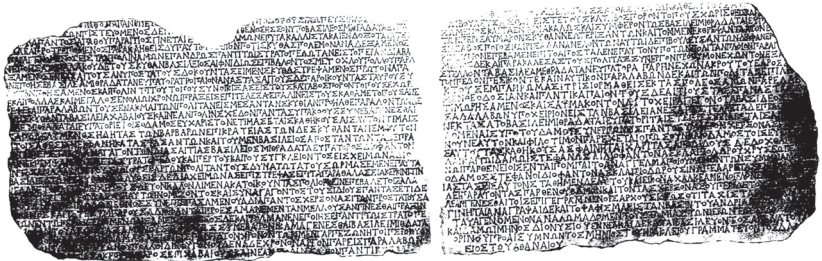


Fig. 70 The so-called Diophantus Inscription. – (After Latyshev 1916, pl. IV).

[...] The Roxolani, under the leadership of Tasius, carried on war even with the generals of Mithridates Eupator; they came for the purpose of assisting Palacus, the son of Scilurus, as his allies, and they had the reputation of being warlike; yet all barbarian races and light-armed peoples are weak when matched against a well-ordered and well-armed phalanx. At any rate, those people, about fifty thousand strong, could not hold out against the six thousand men arrayed with Diophantus, the general of Mithridates, and most of them were destroyed. They use helmets and corselets made of raw ox-hides, carry wicker shields, and have for weapons spears, bow, and sword; and most of the other barbarians are armed in this way²⁶⁴.

Strabo's Roxolani can be identified with the Reuxinalas appearing in the Diophantus Inscription, who appear as allies of the Scythian king Palacus in the battle against Chersonesus (**fig. 71**)²⁶⁵. Their defeat can be dated to between 110 and 106 BC²⁶⁶.

During the reign of Scilurus and his son Palacus (**fig. 69**), Olbia was subjugated by the Scythians and even minted coins bearing Scilurus' name. Neapolis Scythica (**fig. 56**) was firmly established as the Scythians' capital under their reign in the second half of the 2nd century BC, although ties with the population of the Lower Dnieper region were not severed, despite the Sarmatian conquest. Relations with Chersonesus and the Bosphorus soured owing to the growth of marine trade because the Greeks sought to control the bays suitable for harbours in the western Crimea. At the same time, the epigraphic record indicates that there

²⁶⁴ Strabo VII.3.17.
²⁶⁵ Skržinskaja 1977, 43.

²⁶⁶ Harmatta 1950, 6, with further literature.



Fig. 71 The ruins of Chersonesus (modern Sevastopol). – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).



Fig. 72 V. P. Tolstikov's reconstruction of the acropolis of Pantikapaion. – (After Davnja 1994, 233).

were Scythians living among the Greeks of the Bosphorus. We know that King Scilurus' daughter married a Greek aristocrat of Pantikapaion. The Bosporan queen Komosarye's second husband bore an Iranian name and it is possible that he came from the Scythian royal dynasty. The Diophantus Inscription mentions that a Scythian called Saumacus instigated a rebellion in Bosphorus. The rebels killed Paerisades, King of Bosphorus, and even managed to occupy Pantikapaion (fig. 72) and Theodosia for some time²⁶⁷.

Returning to the events of the Mithridatic Wars, Diophantus seized Neapolis and Chabon, the Scythian royal military headquarters²⁶⁸. Despite the alliance with the Roxolani against the Bosporans, the Scythians were increasingly threatened by the growth of Sarmatian power.

Sarmatian influence can be seen in the Crimean finds from the 2nd century BC onward (until the mid-3rd century AD)²⁶⁹. It must be emphasised, however, that »genuine« Sarmatian burials are rare and in most cases one can only speak of cultural influences. These include certain elements of the burial rite (such as niche graves), types of weapons, hand-built censers and tamgas appearing on house walls and on grave steles (fig. 73)²⁷⁰. The so-called Late Scythian finds (fig. 74) represent the heritage of a people abandoning

²⁶⁷ Hrapunov 1995, 53, with further literature.

²⁶⁸ Skržinskaja 1977, 72-74. – Symonovič 1983, 112.

²⁶⁹ Symonovič 1983, 101. The Sarmatians obviously reached the Crimea from Don-Dnieper interfluvium.

²⁷⁰ Hrapunov 1995, 68-69.



Fig. 73 »Encyclopaedia« of Sarmatian signs at the entrance to the Carskij (Royal) kurgan in Kerč. – (Photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

nomadism for sedentism and in this respect, the finds have much in common with the Sarmatian assemblages from the Carpathian Basin²⁷¹.

Archaeology of the Roxolani

Returning to the Roxolani, there have been many attempts to identify the traits specific to this people in the archaeological material and to distinguish the main divergences from the other Sarmatian finds. Smirnov had earlier claimed that the so-called diagonal burials were one of the hallmarks of the Roxolani and that this burial rite was only practised by this people. The most typical element of this funerary rite was the diagonal placement of the deceased in a large, wide and approximately square grave pit (**fig. 75**). It is but one indication of Smirnov's integrity, one of the most outstanding scholars of Sarmatian studies, that ten years after publishing his study, he was the first to reject this hypothesis, which had by then become widely accepted²⁷². The most recent study on the identification of the Roxolanian territory was written by Simonenko, who based the cultural attribution of the early Sarmatian finds on the left bank of the Dnieper to the Roxolani on Strabo's report. In contrast to the south to north orientation of the Sarmatian burials in the Don, Volga and Ural regions, the deceased were laid to rest with the head aligned toward the north in the graves he dated to the 2nd-1st centuries BC. A similar phenomenon can only be noted in a roughly contemporaneous group of the Lower Don region, whose funerary rites and finds share numerous similarities with the material from the Dnieper region. The typical finds include, e.g. Middle La Tène brooches and Prohorovka-type daggers and swords (**fig. 76**)²⁷³.

²⁷¹ See chapter »Sarmatians in the Carpathian Basin« for more on the migration of the lazyges.

²⁷² Smirnov 1984, 121-122, with the earlier literature.

²⁷³ Simonenko 1991.

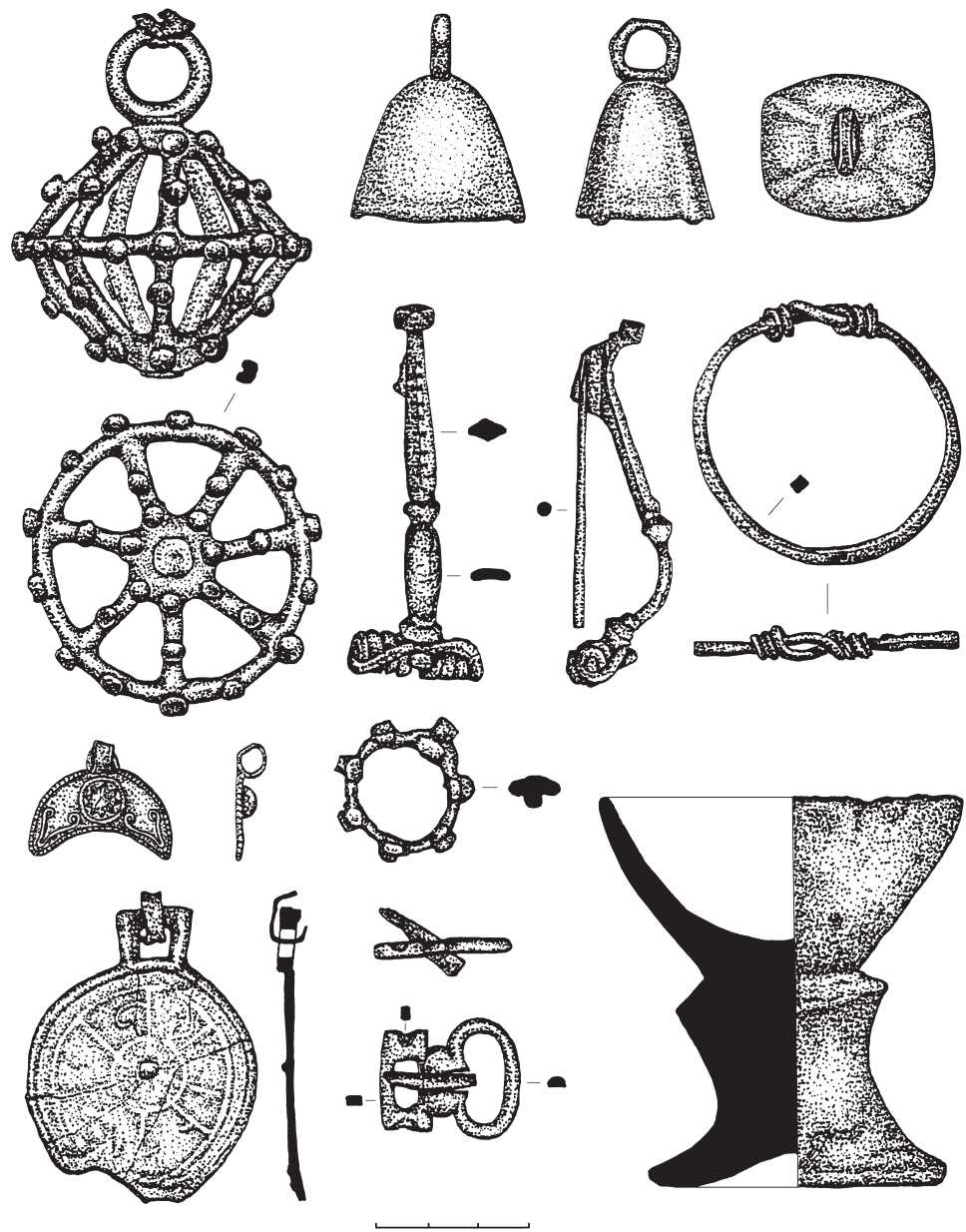


Fig. 74 Typical Late Scythian finds from Zavetnoe. – (After Guščina/Žuravlëv/Firsov 2001, figs 5-7).

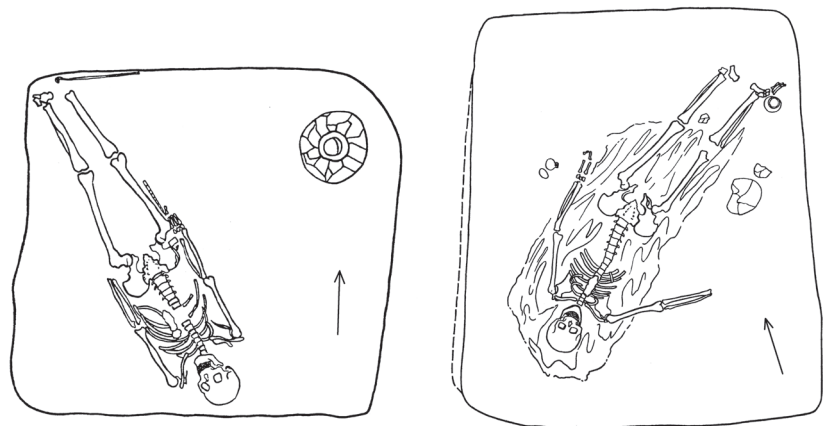


Fig. 75 Diagonal burials: Baranovka (Lower Volga region), Kurgan 28, Grave 1 and Kurgan 13, Grave 1. – (After Dvorničenko/Fëdorov-Davydov 1989, figs 18a; 36b).

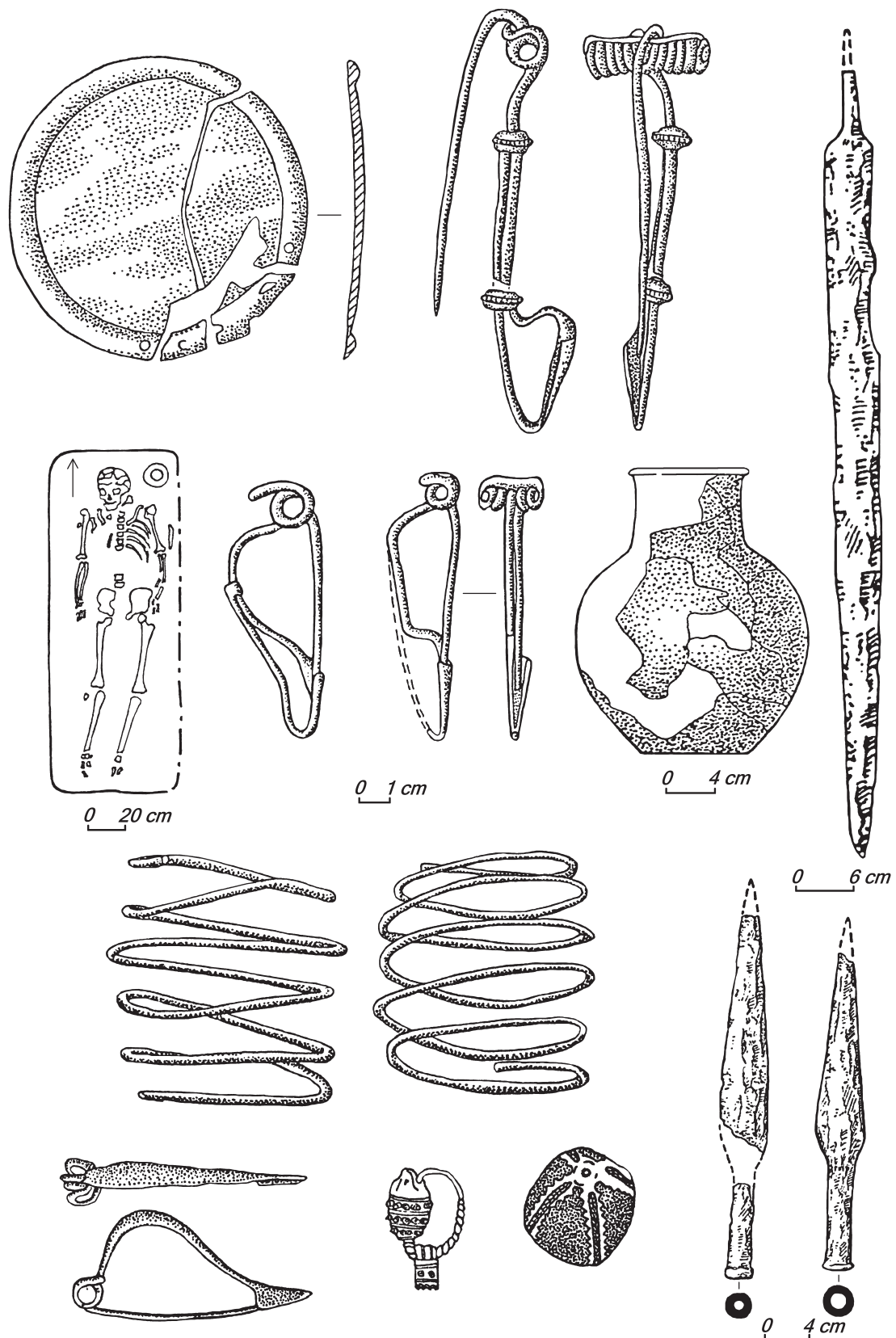


Fig. 76 Finds of the 2nd-1st centuries BC from the Don-Dnieper interfluvium. – (After Simonenko 1993a, figs 4-6).

POLITICS OF THE EUROPEAN STEPPE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1ST CENTURY BC TO THE 1ST CENTURY AD

The Lower Danube in Burebista's Time

As we have seen in the above, the first systematic description of the northern Pontic tribes by Strabo was written several hundred years after Herodotus. Strabo's report provides an ethnographic map of the area between the Danube and the Dnieper at the turn of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC (fig. 65)²⁷⁴. The northern Pontic was the setting of major changes during the second half of the 1st century BC and the earlier picture painted by the literary sources and the archaeological finds also changed accordingly.

In the previous chapter we have already met Mithridates VI Eupator (fig. 67), the outstanding Pontic ruler, who waged several wars with Rome as part of an ambitious bid to build a major empire and who succeeded in enlisting the barbarians of the Pontic littoral as his allies. Mithridates' bold plans are perhaps best illustrated by the fact that he seriously considered launching an attack into Italy. Following a string of successes, his military luck eventually deserted him in the 60s BC. The disasters struck one after the other: his allies turned their back on him and in 63 BC, the Bosporan Kingdom was devastated by an earthquake. The Romans had laid siege to Pantikapaion (fig. 72) and he was betrayed by his own son Pharnaces. To escape the humiliation accompanying the defeat, the king ordered his bodyguard to slay him. The Romans rewarded his son with the Bosporan Kingdom, but the Pontic Kingdom was never again united with the Bosporan Kingdom²⁷⁵.

Let us move to the north-western coast of the Pontic, specifically to the Lower Danube region. While there is an ongoing debate as to when exactly Burebista (also Boirebistas, Boerebistas and other variations) ascended the throne (in the 60s or 50s), we know that the Dacian ruler extended his sway far to the east in the later 50s and in the early 40s (perhaps between 55 and 48). He advanced as far as the Greek colony of Olbia by the mouth of the South Bug, and conquered the town together with several other Greek towns of the western Pontic coast down to Apollonia²⁷⁶. The short-lived Geta-Dacian kingdom soon collapsed:

[...] Certain men rose up against Boerebistas and he was deposed before the Romans sent an expedition against him; and those who succeeded him divided the empire into several parts. In fact, only recently, when Augustus Caesar sent an expedition against them, the number of parts into which the empire had been divided was five, though at the time of the insurrection it had been four. Such divisions, to be sure, are only temporary and vary with the times²⁷⁷.

²⁷⁴ It must, in all fairness, be noted that this picture is hardly as clear-cut as it appears to be. We should bear in mind that terms, such as tribe, people, etc., had an entirely different meaning in that age than today, and that our knowledge comes from the reports and description of Greek and Roman writers who were often unfamiliar with both the ethnic composition of the steppe (and the Great Hungarian Plain) and the peoples themselves. For a more detailed discussion, see Dobesch 1995, and Hind 2007 for the peoples of the Lower Danube region.

²⁷⁵ Saprykin 1996, 186-205.

²⁷⁶ While opinions are divided regarding the date of Burebista's accession, most scholars tend to agree on the date of the conquest of the Greek towns. See Crişan 1978, 43-54. 81-86. 122-130. – Alföldi 1943a, 10. The cessation of coin minting for roughly a century is generally linked to this event; coins again began to be issued from the mid-1st century AD when the town acknowledged the authority of Pharzoios (see below) (Karyškovskij 1988, 108).

²⁷⁷ Strabo VII.3.11. He also reported that the Dacian army, once 200,000 strong, had been reduced to 40,000 (VII.3.13). Even if the figures are not altogether reliable, they do reflect the weakening of Dacian power, see Kulakovskij 2000, 55.



Fig. 77 Coin minted by Cotiso or Coson. – (After www.acsearch.info/record.html?id=461861 [5.4.2012]).

Irrespective of whether or not the Dacian monarch was murdered, as has been sometimes assumed, or whether his kingdom disintegrated before or after Caesar's death, what is certain is that the earlier status quo changed from the 40s BC or slightly later²⁷⁸.

The events can be reconstructed tentatively at best from the scattered and vague references in the written sources; too many pieces of the puzzle are still missing. Even so, it is quite clear that control over the Lower Danube region passed gradually from the weakened Dacians²⁷⁹ to the Bastarnae, who were eventually ousted by the Sarmatians. The Romans extended their sway over the lands south of the Danube step by step, culminating in the creation of Roman provinces in Illyria and in the neighbouring territories (Pannonia, Moesia, Thracia and, finally, Dacia). Burebista's successors, Dicomes, Cotiso (or Coson) and Scorilo, remained dangerous foes of the Roman Empire. They managed to retain their eastern territories for some time. Cotiso (Coson) even minted gold coins (fig. 77), imitating Brutus' *denarii* in Olbia²⁸⁰. However, they were eventually forced to retreat. In 29 BC, M. Licinius Crassus, governor of Macedonia, acted as commander of the Roman army sent against the Dacians. Some years or even a decade later (the exact date of the campaign is not known), Cornelius Lentulus drove the Dacians from what later became Moesia and probably from the Danubian foreland as well. In 10 BC, the Dacians crossed the frozen river and raided the province²⁸¹. In 13 BC, a Roman senator (probably Marcus Vinicius) defeated the Dacians and the Bastarnae in battle²⁸². The repeated Dacian incursions were most likely precipitated by the lazyges' westward migration (to be discussed in the section on the occupation of the Carpathian Basin).

The Sarmatian Expansion in the Second Half of the 1st Century BC and the 1st Century AD: Dacian-Getan-Sarmatian Relations in the Lower Danube Region

These events, and especially the Roman campaigns against the Dacians, wrought major changes among the barbarians living west of the Dnieper. Although these territories were for some time still controlled by the Dacians and, later, by the Bastarnae, the Sarmatians had apparently crossed the Dnieper *en masse* by this

²⁷⁸ Alföldi 1942a, 145. For a good overview of the problems surrounding Burebista's decline and death, see Crişan 1978, 241-249, with the earlier literature.

²⁷⁹ Strabo VII.3.1.

²⁸⁰ Alföldi 1943b, 17.

²⁸¹ Dio LIV.36.2.

²⁸² Alföldi 1942a, 146. – Mócsy 1974, 23-27. – Mócsy/Fitz 1990, 32-33, all with a detailed discussion and ample literature. See also Vékony 1989, 75-79, for a Dacian perspective.

time, and soon reached the Lower Danube region during their westward expansion²⁸³. Both the Sarmatians and the Bastarnae mixed with the population of the neighbouring territories:

[...] the wagon-dwelling Scythians and Sarmatians. For at the present time these tribes, as well as the Bastarnian tribes, are mingled with the Thracians (more indeed with those outside the Ister, but also with those inside). And mingled with them are also the Celtic tribes – the Boii, the Scordisci, and the Taurisci²⁸⁴.

As Tacitus remarked »by the intermarriages, [the Bastarnae] are becoming in some degree debased into a resemblance to the Sarmatae«²⁸⁵. The Poienești-Lukaševka culture (fig. 78, 4) distributed along the middle reaches of the Dniester, the Prut and the Siret is generally identified with the mixed Thracian-Bastarnian population. The finds of this culture can be traced up to the late 1st century BC, i.e. until the Sarmatian expansion reached the Lower Danube²⁸⁶.

The Sarmatian expansion is well-documented in the period's archaeological record by the massive increase of Sarmatian find assemblages in the region between the Dnieper and the Danube in the mid-1st century AD²⁸⁷. Parallel with this process, we observe the appearance of the Zubovskij-Vozdviženskaja group on the southern bank of the Kuban and the beginning of the Zolotoe kladbišče (Golden Cemetery)-type burials on the northern bank of the Kuban²⁸⁸.

From the late 1st century BC, the Sarmatians posed a serious threat to the groups of the Zarubincy culture (fig. 78, 1) living in the Middle Dnieper region²⁸⁹, despite the fact that relations between the two populations had earlier been peaceful and that they were probably allies. However, at this time destruction levels appeared in the fortified settlements of the area. The Zarubincy groups retreated to the marshlands or withdrew to the forested regions in the north. The identity of the invaders assaulting the hillforts of the Zarubincy culture is indicated by finds of Sarmatian arrowheads²⁹⁰. The crisis of the classical Zarubincy culture in mid-1st century AD and the abandonment of the culture's cemeteries are linked to the Sarmatians' westward expansion²⁹¹; the arrival of the lazyges on the Hungarian Plain occurred roughly simultaneously (see below). At the same time, Sarmatian artefacts crop up regularly in the find assemblages of the 1st and early 2nd century AD from the forested steppe along the middle reaches of the Dnieper, suggesting that the nomads intermarried with the subjugated sedentary Zarubincy population²⁹².

The growing number of reports on the Sarmatians record that in 16 BC they swooped down on the right bank of the Danube (Ister), but were driven back across the river by Lucius Tarius Rufus, the Macedonian governor²⁹³. According to Lucius Annaeus Florus around the turn of the millennium (perhaps around 1-4 AD) »the Sarmatians range on horseback over wide-spreading plains. Them too it was deemed sufficient to debar from access to the Danube, and Lentulus was entrusted with this task«²⁹⁴. The Sarmatians again raided the province in 6 AD. Caecina Severus, commander of the Moesian army, was forced to return

²⁸³ Harmatta argued that the Sarmatians had appeared south of the Danube by the late 2nd century BC, indicated by the appearance of silver *phalerae* in north-western Bulgaria and Transylvania (Harmatta 1970, 26-29. 37-38). This view is not supported by more recent research findings.

²⁸⁴ Strabo VII.3.2.

²⁸⁵ Tacit. *Germ.* 46.

²⁸⁶ Kasparova/Maksimov 1993, 92-95.

²⁸⁷ Grosu 1990. – Bichir 1993.

²⁸⁸ Ščukin 2000, 223.

²⁸⁹ The ethnic affiliation of the culture runs into serious difficulties. The culture has been variously identified with the Bastarnae

and the Slavs. From our perspective, the Zarubincy culture is only relevant in terms of the Sarmatians' north-western expansion. For a fresh overview, with abundant literature, see Maksimov 1993.

²⁹⁰ Ščukin 1994, 196, with further literature.

²⁹¹ Ščukin 1994, 232.

²⁹² Sinica 2008, 18-19.

²⁹³ Dio LIV.20.3. The events described below are also discussed by Alföldi 1942a, 180-181, with the relevant sources and literature.

²⁹⁴ Florus *Epit.* IV.12.

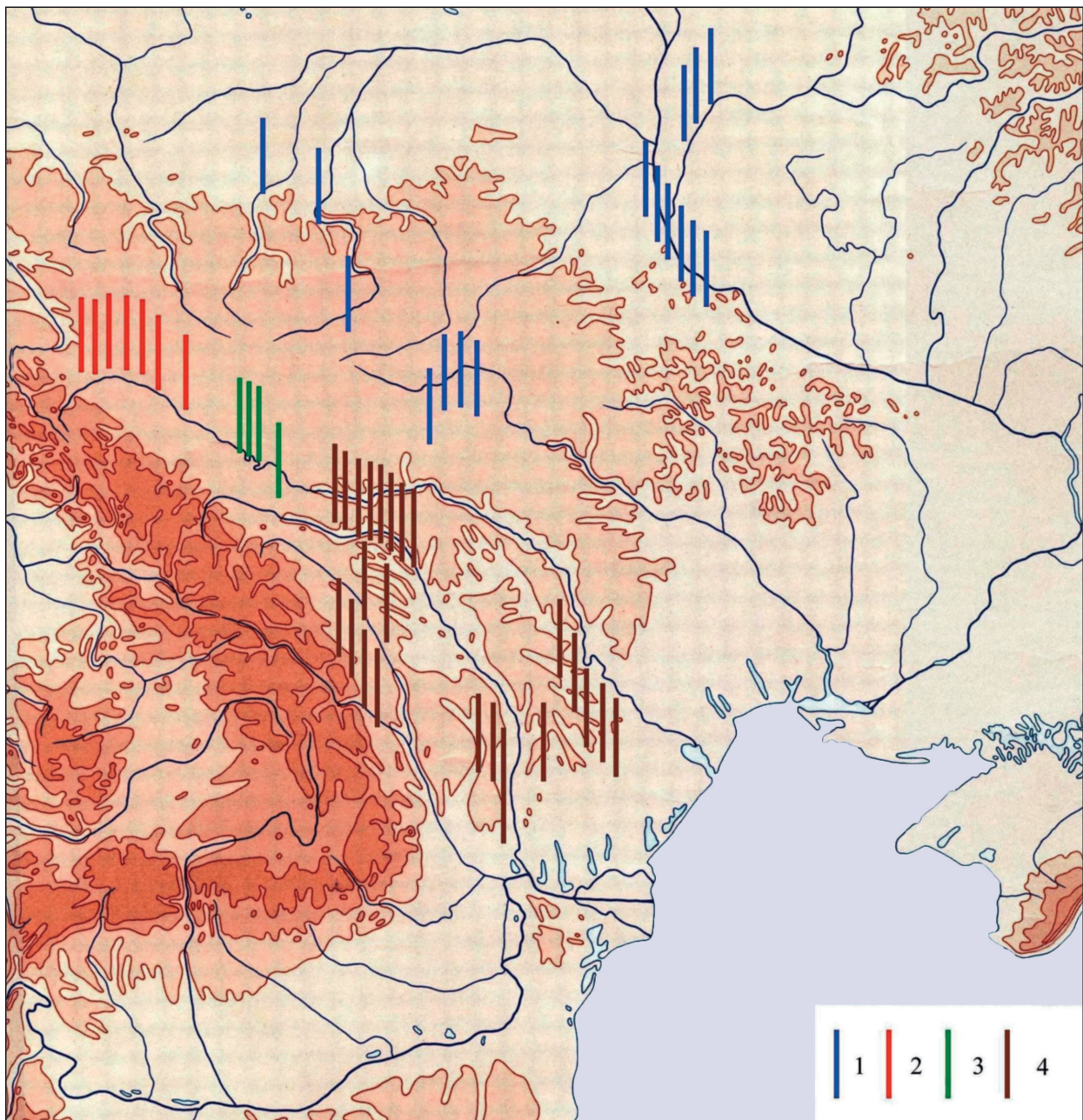


Fig. 78 The Sarmatians' neighbours in the Lower Danube region in the 1st-2nd centuries AD. – 1 Zarubincy culture. – 2 Przeworsk culture. – 3 Lipica culture. – 4 Poienești-Lukaševka culture. – (After Arheologia 1986, map 1).

to his base at the time of the Pannonian insurrection because the Dacians and »Sauromatians« »were ravaging the land« (Moesia, before the actual creation of the province)²⁹⁵. Augustus commemorated the region's barbarian peoples, among them, the Sarmatians, in his inscription:

Our friendship was sought, through ambassadors, by the Bastarnae and Scythians, and by the kings of the Sarmatians who live on either side of the river Tanais [...] ²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁵ Dio LV.30.4.

²⁹⁶ *Mon.Anc.* 31.

The Sarmatian presence in the Lower Danube region is confirmed also by Pomponius Mela. Writing around 44 AD, he described Sarmatia as extending to the Istros and populated by Sarmatians²⁹⁷. Similarly writing in the 40s, Quintus Curtius Rufus called the Scythians living north-east of Thrace a part of the Sarmatians, polemicising with others who did not regard them as belonging to the Sarmatian people:

The Scythian people located close to Thrace extend in a north-easterly direction, and are a member-tribe of the Sarmatians and not, as some have believed, neighbours of them. The Scythians also inhabit another area directly beyond the Ister and they touch the furthest reaches of Asia and Bactria²⁹⁸.

Seneca noted that »[...] the Danube must form the boundary between Sarmatian and Roman [land] [...]«²⁹⁹, while Pliny located the Sarmatians south of the Danube, expressly³⁰⁰.

As already mentioned, the other important people in the Lower Danube region were the Getae or the Dacians. Our most important source for this period is Ovid, the Roman poet banished to Tomi (modern Constanța) between 8 and 17 AD. He mentioned three barbarian peoples in his works: the Scythians, the Sarmatians and the Getae. The term Scythian is more of a geographic label. The Getae constituted the region's principal barbarian population, although the Sarmatians also had a strong presence in the foreland of the Lower Danube: »[...] since I've learnt how to speak Getic and Sarmatian«, boasted Ovid³⁰¹. The Sarmatians were mentioned 31 times in his poems. According to Ovid, the Getae lived on the right bank of the Danube, the Sarmatians on the left bank, at least judging from the fact that he mentioned that the Sarmatians crossed the frozen river near Tomi. The Getae never appear as inhabiting the far bank of the Istros, suggesting that they were confined to Dobrudja in the Lower Danube region, while the river's left bank was inhabited by the neighbouring lazyges and the Bastarnae. The lazyges are the single Sarmatian tribe mentioned by name³⁰².

Judging from Ovid's accounts, the Sarmatians played the leading role in the life of the towns of Scythia Minor. The various peoples living in the region were governed by petty kings in the last third of the 1st century BC after Burebista's demise. Southern Dobrudja was ruled by Roles, the central areas by Dapyx, while the Danube Delta in the north by Zyraxes. The latter two participated in the campaigns against Marcus Licinius Crassus, who in 29-27 BC marched against the Getan tribes of Lower Moesia, while Roles sided with the Romans, and was rewarded with rulership over the Getae of Dobrudja for a few decades. Shortly afterwards, Scythia Minor fell to the Odrysians, a people allied to the Romans, with whom the Getae had clashed several times. One of the battles was fought by the town of Aigisos (modern Tulcea) in the Danube Delta, which was later reconquered in 12 AD by Cotys, the Thracian king³⁰³. Owing to the Getae's repeated attacks, even the Roman fleet commanded by Vitellius had to be mobilised³⁰⁴. Fierce battles were fought between the Romans and the Getae for the town of Troesmis³⁰⁵. The province of Thracia was created from this region in 46 AD³⁰⁶.

Obviously, Rome still had to deal with the threat posed by the Dacians, who remained their main adversaries in the Carpathian Basin and its foreland. It is not mere chance that the Sarmatian restlessness in the

²⁹⁷ Pomp. Mela *De chor* III.28.

²⁹⁸ Curtius Rufus VII.7.3.

²⁹⁹ Sen. *Nat. Quest.*, Prologus 9 and VI.7.1: »here are the Danube and the Rhine separating with their streams the peaceful from the hostile, the former checking attacks from the Sarmatians and forming the boundary between Europe and Asia«.

³⁰⁰ Plin. *NH* IV.XI.41: next to the Scythians on the right bank of the Danube are »the Sarmatian Arraei called Areatae«.

³⁰¹ Ovid *Ep.* III.2.40.

³⁰² Ovid *Tr.* II.191 (misspelt as Ciziges). – Ovid *Ep.* I.2.77, IV.7.9. – Ovid *Ibis*. 135. Ovid's references to the three peoples – the Scythians, the Getae and the Sarmatians – are discussed in detail by Podosinov 1976. – Gostar 1961. – Podosinov 1976. – Hind 2007, 242.

³⁰³ Ovid *Ep.* I.8.15.

³⁰⁴ Ovid *Ep.* IV.7.19.

³⁰⁵ Ovid *Ep.* IV.9.75-81.

³⁰⁶ Dio *LI*.24-26. – Podosinov 1976, 33-34.

Lower Danube region was often linked to the Dacians' upheavals. Finding a solution to the Dacian question was one of Rome's main priorities until Trajan's rule, who finally settled the question. Until then, there are reports on several failed attempts to this effect. In the Lower Danube region, for example, the barbarians were probably pacified when, under Augustus' reign, »Aelius Catus transplanted from the country on the far side of the Ister into Thrace fifty thousand persons from among the Getae«³⁰⁷.

Tiberius Plautius Silvanus, governor of Moesia, experimented with a similar measure towards the end of Nero's rule. Enumerating his outstanding deeds, the *elogium* from Tibur recorded that:

He brought [into Moesia] over more than a hundred thousand of the peoples from across the Danube [from the northern bank] to pay tribute, along with their wives, children and chieftains or kings [...]³⁰⁸.

It has been suggested that the tribes in question were fleeing a new Sarmatian advance from the east³⁰⁹. Even though Rome succeeded in advancing her borders to the Danube after a series of lengthy diplomatic negotiations and military manoeuvres, the problem was far from resolved³¹⁰. We know that towards the end of Tiberius' reign (14-37), »Moesia was laid waste by the Dacians and Sarmatians«³¹¹.

The Getae of Scythia Minor and the Sarmatians maintained good relations and were allies. As we saw above, the Getae had probably settled in Dobrudja, while the Sarmatians inhabited the steppe extending along the left bank of the Danube³¹². Ovid mentions that the latter often crossed the frozen river with their livestock and wagons³¹³; Harmatta's assumption that the reason for the frequent crossings was perhaps that some of their winter camps lay in Dobrudja, on the right bank was based on this remark in the *Tristia*³¹⁴.

From his analysis of the 1st-2nd century AD tamga-like signs in Romania (35 symbols found at 16 sites), Corneliu Beldiman called attention to one important aspect of Getan/Dacian-Sarmatian relations, namely that a smaller portion of these signs occurs on artefacts of Pontic origin, while the majority are found on locally made artefacts of the indigenous population (fig. 79), indicating close ties between the Sarmatians and the Geto-Dacians³¹⁵.

»The Mighty Kings of Aorsia«: The Sarmatian Tribes in Pliny's Time

Compared to the situation known to Strabo, the lands occupied by the Sarmatian tribes had changed radically by the 1st century AD. Pliny offers a good description of the peoples living north of the Danube:

From this point all the races in general are Scythian, though various sections have occupied the lands adjacent to the coast, in one place the Getae, called by the Romans Dacians, at another the Sarmatae, called by the Greeks Sauromatae, and the section of them called Waggon-dwellers or Aorsi, at another the base-born Scythians, descended from slaves, or else the Cave-

³⁰⁷ Strabo VII.3.10.

³⁰⁸ CIL XIV.3608. – Levick 1985, 31.

³⁰⁹ The date of this event is debated because it is not known when Plautius Silvanus was appointed governor of Moesia. The events mentioned here occurred between 57 and 60 AD. For the events and their dating, see Vinogradov 1994, 164-165, with further literature; Mócsy 1974, 66.

³¹⁰ Mócsy 1974, 33.

³¹¹ Sueton. *Tib.* 41. – Alföldi 1942a, 181. – Vinogradov 1994, 151-152.

³¹² Podosinov 1976, 38-39.

³¹³ Ovid *Tr.* III.10.33.

³¹⁴ Harmatta 1970, 25. However, his arguments are not convincing and archaeological material does not refer to an enduring Sarmatian presence on the right bank of the Danube, either.

³¹⁵ Beldiman 1990.

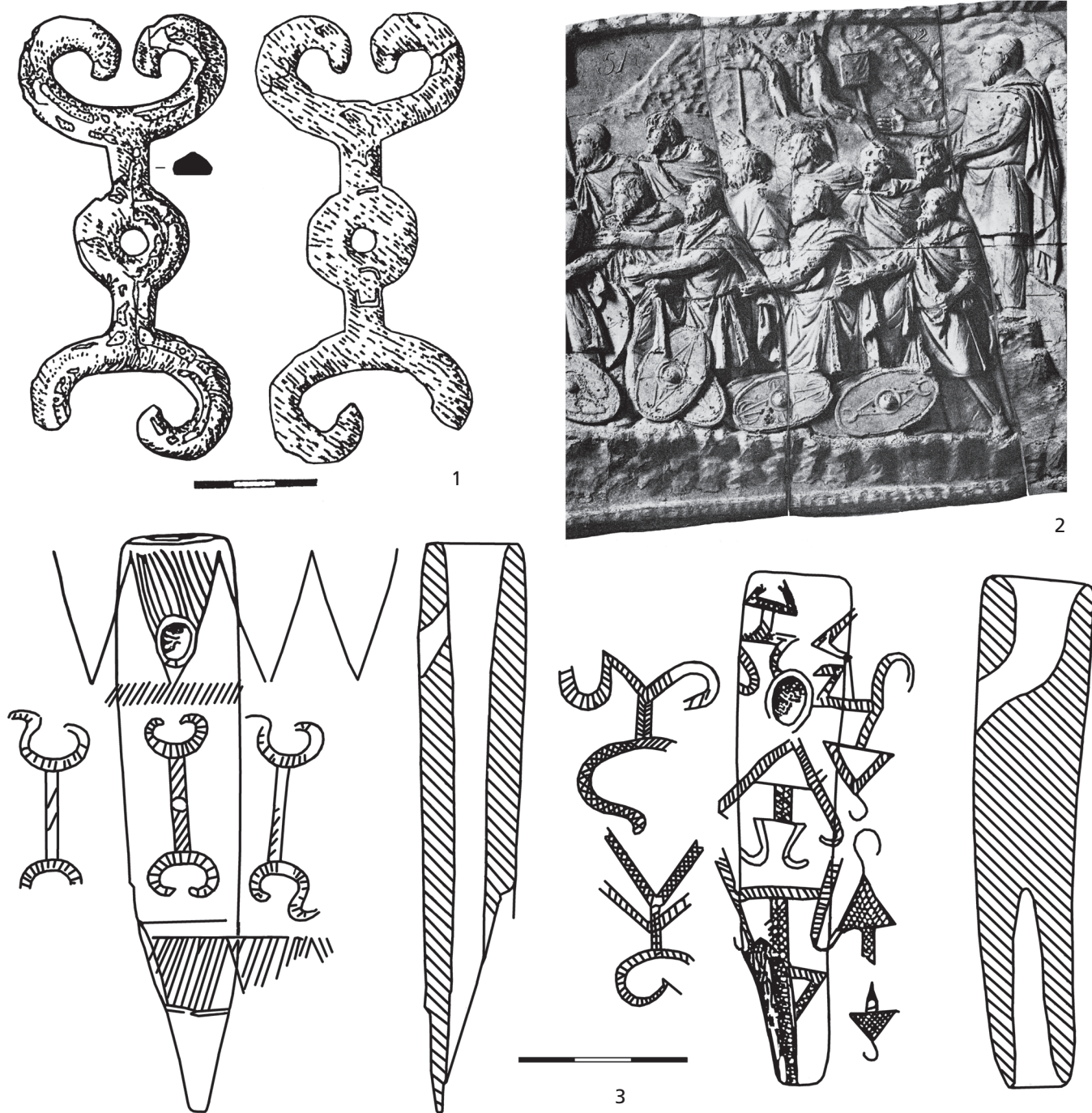


Fig. 79 Artefacts reflecting Sarmatian influence were found in Dacian context, especially on the *davae*. – **1** Tamga shaped gilt iron artefact, perhaps the side-bar of a bit, from Ocnița (after Babeș 1999, fig. 1). – **2** Dacians marching under a dragon banner on Trajan's Column (after Cichorius 1896/1900, pl. 55 fig. LXXV). – **3** horn with incised tamga signs from Poiana (after Babeș 1999, fig. 2).

dwellers, and then the Alani and Rhozolani. The higher parts between the Danube and the Hercynian Forest as far as the winter quarters of Pannonia at Carnuntum and the plains and level country of the German frontiers there are occupied by the Sarmatian lazyges, while the Dacians whom they have driven out hold the mountains and forests as far as the river Theiss.

From the river Maros, or else the Dora if it is that which separates them from the Suebi and the Kingdom of Vannius, the opposite side of the country is occupied by the Basternae and then other German tribes³¹⁶.

So, Pliny located the lazyges in the Carpathian Basin, the Aorsi-Hamaxobii, Roxolani and Alans in the region between the Dnieper and the Danube, while in a later passage he mentioned that the Siraci dwelt on the left bank of the Lower Dnieper³¹⁷. What remains to be established is the period to which Pliny referred. What is certain, is that this situation pre-dates 79 AD because we know that Pliny died that year, during the renowned eruption of Vesuvius. The date is crucial for the arrival and settlement of the lazyges in the Carpathian Basin (discussed at greater length below).

One good anchor for establishing the date is the fact that Pliny had personally met Mithridates VIII (III), the former king of Bosphorus, whose struggle for the throne is discussed in more detail below. Pliny undoubtedly gained his information on the Maeotians and Sarmatians (or a least some of it, especially the data that do not occur elsewhere) from the captive king hauled off to Rome in 49 AD, who was fully familiar with the extent of the Aorsian and Siracian lands³¹⁸.

The important geopolitical role played by the Aorsi in the events of the north-western Pontic in the mid-1st century AD is confirmed by a recently published document, the Mangup Decree. Originating probably from Olbia, the inscription was found in a secondary position, incorporated into an early medieval basilica. The excavator dated the inscription to 50 AD based on a comparison with the epigraphic, numismatic and historical evidence³¹⁹. The fragmentary text honours an unknown citizen of Olbia who, in addition to his other merits, asked for an audience with the governors of Moesia in order to mitigate the hardships following a bad harvest. He sent gifts to the barbarian kings. He also initiated a peace embassy to the »mighty kings of Aorsia«, who apparently resided somewhere in the broader area of Olbia: one of the kings was called Umabios, the other's name was not preserved owing to the mutilation of the inscription. In his reconstruction of the inscription, Vinogradov has convincingly argued that one of the Moesian governors can be identified with Tiberius Plautius Silvanus Aelianus, in which case the war recorded in the Mangup Decree took place in 62 AD, when, according to the Tibur *elogium*, the governor »put down an incipient movement of the Sarmatians, although he had sent a considerable portion of his army to take part in the invasion of Armenia« (the latter historical event provides a firm chronological anchor). What needs to be established is which Sarmatian tribe was affected.

The *elogium* also recorded that »kings hitherto unknown or hostile to the Roman people he brought over [the southern] river bank under his protection to pay homage to the Roman standards. [...]«. Another important piece of information was that:

To the kings of Bastarnae and Roxolani he [Plautius Silvanus] returned their sons, to the king of the Dacians his brothers, captured or carried off by the enemy; from some of them he received hostages; by which achievements he both assured the peaceful condition of the province and advanced it³²⁰.

³¹⁶ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.80.

³¹⁷ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.83.

³¹⁸ According to Pliny, the Sauromatians north of the Caucasus were the tribe with which »Mithridates took refuge in the principate of Claudius, and from him we learn that there is a neighbouring tribe, the Thali«. Plin. *NH* VI.V.16-17. – Cf. Skržinskaja 1977, 9.

³¹⁹ Sidorenko 1996, who disregarded or was unaware of an earlier study written two years earlier, which proposed that the events in question can be dated to 62 AD (Vinogradov 1994, 166-168).

³²⁰ CIL XIV.3608. – Levick 1985, 31.

Vinogradov concluded (mistakenly, in our view) that the Sarmatians who had been causing trouble for the Moesian governor could hardly have been the Roxolani, seeing that he was able to return the sons of the kings because they had been Roman captives. Even more important is the implication – made on the basis of logical arguments – that the other ruler of Aorsia, beside Umabios, was Pharzoios, whose son's or successor's grave can probably be identified with royal burial uncovered at Porogi³²¹. The authors of Antiquity make no mention of Pharzoios, and neither does his name occur in the epigraphic material; for the time being, his name is known only from coins (fig. 80). The numismatic evidence suggests that he reigned between 64 and 81 AD. His *aureus* was modelled on Roman coins and it is also possible that he introduced a new chronology, as was customary among the Hellenised rulers of the Pontic. Pharzoios was for a long time believed to have been a Scythian king who extended his sway over the Greek town. This is a not unreasonable conjecture given that the Crimean Scythian Scilurus had already reigned here between 140 and 110 BC and minted coins. However, the tamga sign appearing on his coins would rather suggest that he was a Sarmatian ruler. Supporting this suggestion is the fact that aside from Olbia, the coins minted by Pharzoios occur in the steppe areas of the north-western Pontic rather than in the Crimea, the region controlled by the Scythians³²². Conclusive evidence that Pharzoios was of Sarmatian stock was provided by the grave uncovered in Porogi on the left bank of the Dniester. The tamga appearing on the finds of the royal burial, identical with the sign appearing on Pharzoios' coins minted in Olbia, enabled the identification of the deceased as the issuer of the coins (fig. 81)³²³. It has since become generally accepted that Olbia was under Sarmatian rule, or at least protection, during the second half of the 1st century AD. It is still subject to debate which Sarmatian tribe Pharzoios and Inismeios, his successor (perhaps his son), had belonged to: the Alans or the Aorsi. In Vinogradov's view, he was one of the »mighty kings« of Aorsia. In a manner similar to the coins minted by his predecessor, the silver coins of Inismeios/Inensimeios, Pharzoios' successor, whose coins bear a developed version of his father's tamga, reflect the transition from Greek coins to a uniform Roman coinage in Olbia during the reign of Titus or Domitian³²⁴.



Fig. 80 Coins of King Pharzoios. – (After Rozanova 1956, pls 1, 5; 2, 2).

The First Appearance of the Alans in the Written Sources: The Trans-Caucasian Campaigns

In his list of peoples, Pliny mentioned the Alans, who had assumed an important role by this time³²⁵. Earlier reports of this people occur principally in poetic or literary works which cannot be accurately dated or

³²¹ Vinogradov 1994, 165-169, with further literature.

³²² Karyškovskij 1982; 1988, 114-116. Recent finds of Pharzoios' coins also fit into the known distribution, see Alekseev 2000.

³²³ Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 62-72.

³²⁴ Karyškovskij 1988, 119.

³²⁵ The relation between the Aorsi and the Alans (as well as the Roxolani) must be briefly touched here (although it will be discussed at greater length below). The question is whether the Aorsi, the Alans and the Roxolani were identical.

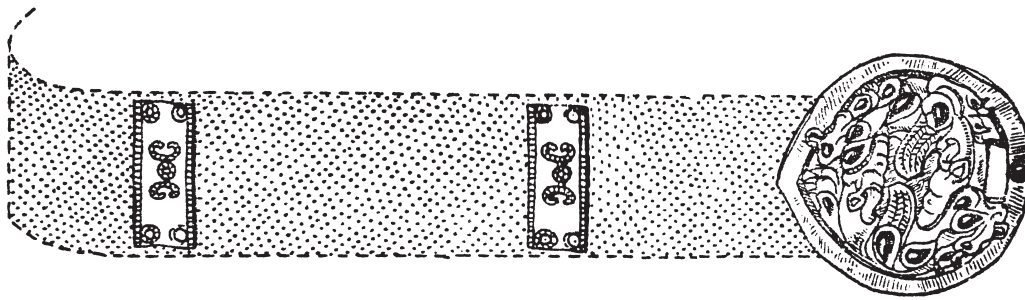


Fig. 81 Detail of the reconstructed belt with tamga mounts from the royal burial found at Porogi. – (After Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, fig. 27, 1).

localised to a particular region, or can only be contextualised with difficulty³²⁶. One noteworthy piece of information can be found in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. In the passages covering Caucasian geography, he wrote of Pompey's campaign against Mithridates VI. Pompey reportedly claimed that he had marched towards the Caspian Gates and pursued the »hardy Alans«. Although the events of the year 65 BC were also recorded by Plutarch, the latter made no mention of the Alans, and thus classical philologists believe that Lucan probably mistook the Albans for the Alans^{326a}. The matter would end there, had not Ammianus Marcellinus, a much later Antique writer, also recounted the same events and specified the Alans as Pompey's enemy. Ammianus narrated that Emperor Julian addressed his soldiers, evoking the victories of the Romans against the Persians and the Parthians.

For, to say nothing of Lucullus or of Pompey, who, having forced his way through the Albani and Massagetae, whom we call Alani, penetrated through this nation [the Persians] also so as to reach the Caspian lake³²⁷.

The first reference, pre-dating Pliny's description, can be dated to 35 AD, when Emperor Tiberius:

[...] persuaded both the king of Iberia and the king of Albania to make no delay, but to fight against Artabanus [the Parthian king, the emperor's adversary]; and although they would not do it themselves, yet did they give the Scythians a passage through their country, and opened the Caspian gates to them, and brought them upon Artabanus. So Armenia was again taken from the Parthians, and the country of Parthis was filled with war, and the principal of their men were slain, and all things were in disorder among them: the king's son also himself fell in these wars, together with many ten thousands of his army³²⁸.

This passage has given rise to a fierce debate. The Latin translation (and also the quoted English one) has Scythians instead of Alans, but the original Greek text³²⁹ correctly names the Alans, and thus there can be

³²⁶ e. g. in the writings of Seneca, Lucan, Martial, Valerius Flaccus and Lucian. For a good overview, see Gabuev 1999, 7-19. – Bachrach 1973, 3-8.

^{326a} Alemany 2000, 13-14. For the unreliable nature of Lucan's information, see also Gabuev 1999, 7-9. – Bachrach 1973, 4-5.

³²⁷ Ammian XXIII.5.16.

³²⁸ Jos.Flav. *Ant.Iud.* XVIII.4.4. To which we may add, just for the record, that Artabanus »afterwards raised a great army out of the Dahae and Sacae [i. e. also from the Iranian tribes], and fought with his enemies, and retained his principality«. *Ibidem*.

³²⁹ e. g. in the widely used critical edition by Benedikt Niese (1995). For the debate, see Gaglojti 1995, with further literature. The issue was eventually clarified by Perevalov 1998, 96-97. – Alemany 2000, 90-93. As we have pointed out, the Alans are mentioned in the 1st century by Valerius Flaccus (*Argon.* VI.42) and Sen. *Thyest.* 630, but these are poetic works in nature and cannot be securely dated (Kulakovskij 1899, 9).

no doubt that the Alans had appeared on the scene by this time³³⁰. It seems likely that the threat posed by the Alans prompted Emperor Vespasian to garrison two legions in the towns of Melitene and Satala in Galatia-Cappadocia, the province he had restored³³¹.

A few decades after the affair in 35 AD, the Alans next appear in 72 AD, on the north-eastern Pontic littoral, in the Don Delta and the region of the Sea of Azov, from where they set out on their Trans-Caucasian campaign:

Now there was a nation of the Alans, which we have formerly mentioned some where as being Scythians and inhabiting at the lake Meotis. This nation about this time laid a design of falling upon Media, and the parts beyond it, in order to plunder them; with which intention they treated with the king of Hyrcania; for he was master of that passage which king Alexander [the Great] shut up with iron gates [fig. 82]³³². This king gave them leave to come through them; so they came in great multitudes, and fell upon the Medes unexpectedly, and plundered their country, which they found full of people, and replenished with abundance of cattle, while nobody durst make any resistance against them; for Paeorus, the king of the country, had fled away for fear into places where they could not easily come at him, and had yielded up every thing he had to them, and had only saved his wife and his concubines from them, and that with difficulty also, after they had been made captives, by giving them a hundred talents for their ransom. These Alans therefore plundered the country without opposition, and with great ease, and proceeded as far as Armenia, laying all waste before them. Now Tiridates³³³ was king of that country, who met them, and fought them, but had like to have been taken alive in the battle; for a certain man threw a net over him from a great distance, and had soon drawn him to him, unless he had immediately cut the cord with his sword, and ran away, and prevented it. So the Alans, being still more provoked by this sight, laid waste the country, and drove a great multitude of the men, and a great quantity of the other prey they had gotten out of both kingdoms, along with them, and then retreated back to their own country³³⁴.

This is the first report of the Alans that is generally regarded as being wholly reliable despite the fact that its interpretation is not without its problems. (fig. 83) The Iberian king allowed the Alans to pass through the Darial, no doubt with the intention of exploiting the situation to his own advantage³³⁵. In this case, the assault against Media and Armenia could only have been possible if the Alans had swooped down through the Kura Valley, attacked the region between the River Arax, Lake Sevan and the Caspian Sea (Media At-

³³⁰ Rostovtzeff 1922, 116-117. – Czeglédy 1955, 128, with a complicated reference. Czeglédy associated this event with the preparations for Nero's Caucasian campaign, which in his view was not directed against the Albans, but the Alans: »As he brought into the city his Spanish legion, while that which Nero had levied from the fleet still remained, Rome was full of strange troops. There were also many detachments from Germany, Britain, and Illyria, selected by Nero, and sent on by him to the Caspian passes, for service in the expedition which he was preparing against the Albani, but afterwards recalled to crush the insurrection of Vindex« (Tacit. *Hist.* I.6). This interpretation was first suggested by Mommsen; the passage has been debated ever since. For an overview of the debates, see Sherk 1980, 992-994 n. 107, who argued that the creation of the province of Galatia-Cappadocia was in part inspired by the exaggerated reports of the Alan danger.

³³¹ Sherk 1980, 995.

³³² The pass in question is the Darial Pass, the famed gorge of the Caucasus, which many writers of Antiquity mistakenly called *Caspia via*, *Caspiae portae*, etc., despite the fact that these should refer to the Derbent Pass by the Caspian Sea. Its correct ancient name was *Caucasiae portae* and *Dar-i-Alanan* (»Gate of the Alans«, Darial) (Vinogradov 1994, 159 n. 51, with further literature). Armenian sources also generally designate the pass as »Gate of the Alans« (*drownk' Alanac'*) (Alemany 2000, 278).

³³³ With the ascension of Tiridates, the Parthian Arsacid Dynasty ruled Armenia from 66 (Tiracjan 1985, 69).

³³⁴ Jos.Flav. *Bell.Iud.* VII.7.4.

³³⁵ Košelenko 1985, 111.



Fig. 82 The Darjal Pass, painting by R. G. Sudkovskij. – (After BSE 1953, 250).

ropatena) and then turned back north-westward to reach Armenia, lying in the region of Lake Sevan and Lake Van. Considering the upheaval caused by the Alans' incursions in the life of the peoples beyond the Caucasus, it is hardly surprising that the events recorded by Josephus were also commemorated in the Georgian and Armenian chronicles. Moses of Chorene, an Armenian historian writing in the 5th century AD, blended real-life historical persons and events with folk legends:



Fig. 83 Political map of the Caucasus in the 1st century BC-1st century AD. – (Map M. Ober, RGZM).

At that time the Alans, having united with all the mountain peoples and having brought over to their side also half the land of Georgia, spread out over our land in a great host. King Artashēs also gathered a mass of his troops and there was war between these two valiant nations skilled in archery. The nation of the Alans [...] encamped on the northern bank of the river [Kura]. Artashēs came up and encamped to the south, and the river divided them. But because the Armenian army had captured the son of the Alan king and had brought him to Artashēs, the king of the Alans requested peace, offering to give Artashēs whatever he might ask. He promised to make a sworn and lasting treaty that the young men of the Alans would come no more on raids for plunder into Armenia. And when Artashēs refused to give back the youth, the prince's sister [Satinik] came to the bank of the river onto a large hillock and through interpreters called to the camp of Artashēs: »I say to you, valiant Artashēs, that you have conquered the brave nation of the Alans. Come, consent to the request of the starry-eyed Alan princess to give up the youth. For it not right for heroes to take the lives of the progeny of other heroes for the sake of vengeance, or by subjecting them to keep them in the rank of slaves and perpetuate eternal enmity between two brave nations.« When Artashēs heard such wise words, he went to the bank of the river, and seeing the beautiful maiden and hearing words of wisdom from her, he desired the maiden. He summoned his tutor Simbat and revealed to him the wishes of his heart – to marry the Alan princess, make a treaty and pact with that valiant nation, and to free that youth for the sake of peace. This pleased Simbat and he sent word to the king of the Alans that he should give the princess of the Alans, Sat'nik, in marriage to Artashēs. The king of the Alans said: »And whence will the brave Artashēs give a

thousand thousands and a myriad myriads in return for the noble-born princess of the Alans?«
This episode the story-tellers rehearse, as they sing their fables, in the following way:

Noble King Artashēs mounted a beautiful black horse,
and taking a strap of red leather with golden rings
and crossing the river like a swift-winged eagle
and throwing the strap of red leather with golden rings
he cast it around the waist of the Alan princess,
greatly paining the tender maiden's waist;
and he quickly brought her to his camp.

The truth of this is as follows. Because red leather is greatly prized among the Alans, he gave her much red leather and gold as dowry and received the maiden Sat'īnik – this is the strap of red leather with golden rings. Similarly, they also sing in their fables about the wedding:

A shower of gold rained down at the marriage of Artashēs,
it rained pearls at the wedding of Sat'īnik.

For our kings had the custom of going to the door of the palace at a marriage and scattering gold coins like the Roman consuls. So too the queens scattered pearls in the bridal chamber. This is the truth of the story³³⁶.

The Georgian chronicle adopted the Armenian variant and indirectly supports the controversial assumption that the event in question was the Alan campaign of 72 AD³³⁷.

The intensive Sarmatian movements of the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD were influenced by two major events, independent of each other: the pressure of the Alans' advance from the east and the weakening of Getan-Dacian-Bastarnian control west of the Dnieper³³⁸. The Sarmatians took advantage of the momentary power vacuum in much the same way as the lazyges of the Great Hungarian Plain. The broad tableau painted by the written sources is supported at several points by the archaeological evidence. The distribution of Early Sarmatian finds indicates that few sites lay beyond the Dnieper, while the distribution maps showing the situation a century later have sites dotting the river's right bank (fig. 84)³³⁹.

The Sarmatians as Actors on the Political Scene Between the Second Half of the 1st Century BC and the 1st Century AD

The events of the Sarmatian lands in this period were greatly influenced by the conflict between Rome and Parthia. Founded in the 3rd century BC, the Parthian Kingdom had grown into a major power by the 2nd century BC, with its borders extending to the east as far as the Indus at one time (fig. 59). In the late 2nd century, the empire stretched to the Euphrates in the west. There were permanent clashes between the two rival empires, Rome and Parthia. One of the sore points was control over Armenia.

³³⁶ Khorenats'i 1980, 191-193. – Alemany 2000, 285-291.

³³⁷ Mroveli 1979, 69-71.

³³⁸ Glebov 2001, 198.

³³⁹ Simonenko 1999, fig. 11. This author of several comprehensive studies on the Sarmatians of the northern Pontic (the

Ukraine) does not follow the conventional periodisation of the Sarmatian period. He assigned the finds from the 2nd-mid-1st centuries BC to the »Early Sarmatian« Age.

Fig. 84 Distribution of Sarmatian finds on the northern Pontic littoral in the 1st and the first half of the 2nd centuries AD. – (After Simonenko 1999, fig. 11; map M. Ober, RGZM).



The southern and northern Pontic coast became a focus of interest for the two rival states. The region was high on the military agenda under Caesar and Augustus, and even more so under Claudius and, after him, under Nero, Vespasian and Titus. It is not mere chance that the first Roman coins (issued under Nero) appeared among the finds of the Sarmatians of the Lower Danube at exactly this time³⁴⁰.

Given the location of the Sarmatian tribes, it is hardly surprising that they played a significant role in contemporary politics. Virtually all the neighbouring states seized the opportunity to enlist the mobile, battle-hardened Sarmatians as military allies; for their part, the Sarmatians had no scruples about fishing in troubled waters and were willing to send mercenaries to the »superpowers« warring with each other. It would appear that individual Sarmatian tribes were not particularly bothered by the fact that they sometimes found themselves facing their own brethren on the battlefield. For example, in 35 AD, the Sarmatians' southern neighbours, the Iberians and the Parthians were vying for the throne of Armenia. The Siraci were fighting for Iberia, the Aorsi for Parthia and Armenia. The events were narrated by Tacitus, who contemptuously remarked of Sarmatians that their »highest chiefs [sceptuchi, »sceptre-bearers«]³⁴¹, took bribes from both sides, after the fashion of their countrymen, and engaged themselves in conflicting interests«³⁴².

The masters of manipulating the barbarians were undoubtedly the Romans. The Bosphoran Kingdom, Thracia and the Pontic Kingdom were the major players on the Pontic coast. As both neighbours and the potential hinterland of the Roman Empire's eastern border constantly harangued by the Parthians, the region assumed a growing importance for Rome. Thracia and the Pontic Kingdom traditionally pursued a policy of

³⁴⁰ Barkóczy 1957, 501.

³⁴¹ For the »sceptre-bearers«, see the discussion of the Protogenes Inscription in the previous chapter.

³⁴² Tacit. *Annal.* VI.33. The identification of the tribes with the Siraci and the Aorsi was based on the fact that they launched their campaign from the northern Caucasus, where these peo-

les lived according to Strabo's report (XI.5.8). Cf. Vinogradov 1994, 159-160. Josephus Flavius' above quoted passage (*Bell. Jud.* VII.7.4.) perhaps also referred to this event, in which the Alans appeared as mercenaries in the conflict between the states of the southern Caucasus. It is unclear whether our sources described the same event or two directly related ones.



Fig. 85 M. I. Rostovcev claimed that the bronze bust found at Širokaja Balka near Novorossijsk (now in the collection of the Hermitage) portrays Queen Dynamis. This identification has been repeatedly challenged (cf. Parlasca 2009). – (After Fornasier/Böttger 2002, 32 fig. 14).

friendship with Rome. Beginning with Caesar, Rome sought to pacify the region and to bind the region's peoples, as well as the allied states of Thrace and the Pontus to Rome with dynastic ties. The ultimate goal was the creation of a Roman province. One of the great success stories was the marriage engineered between Aspurgos, the Bosporan ruler, and a Thracian princess in 14 AD³⁴³.

Following Rostovcev, most scholars agree that Aspurgos was probably of Sarmatian stock because his name was Iranian (*aspa-urğa*, »strong as a horse«) and because his coins bore a tamga beside his name. His forebears included Sarmatians: it seems likely that his mother was Queen Dynamis (**fig. 85**), grand-daughter of Mithridates VI, who played an important role in Pontic politics. Mithridates had taken pains to ensure that his sons married the daughters of the neighbouring Scythian and Sarmatian kings³⁴⁴. Aspurgos enlisted the tribe of the Aspurgiani in his political struggles. In Strabo's report:

Among the Maeotae are the Sindi themselves [...] and several others. Among these belong also *the Aspurgiani, who live between Phanagoreia and Gorgipia*, within a stretch of five hundred stadia³⁴⁵.

³⁴³ Saprykin 2000.

³⁴⁴ Rostovtzeff 1919.

³⁴⁵ Strabo XI.II.11, italics added for emphasis.

Aspurgos gave his sons a Thracian (Cotys) and an originally Persian name (Mithridates), the latter a popular name in the Pontic; the two names reflected the traditional double loyalties of the Bosporan Kingdom. Aspurgos defeated the Crimean Scythians and made them his vassals. He probably relied on the Sarmatians in the campaigns (hardly a coincidence) and made Ompsalakos, a Sarmatian, King of the Scythians as a token of his gratitude³⁴⁶. One sure sign that the Crimean Scythians had grown strong was that they had again begun minting their own money and, true to their earlier practice, they had again begun to threaten the Greek towns. Chersonesus turned to Emperor Nero for help. The task of subduing the Scythians fell to the Moesian governor Plautius Silvanus, who in the 50s and 60s AD »removed the king of the Scyths from his siege of Chersonesus beyond the Dnieper«³⁴⁷. The town was given an independent garrison and came under the authority of the governor. Plautius Silvanus' campaign highlighted the Alan danger to the Romans, who made every effort to cut off the Sarmatians of the Danube region from their brethren in the Caucasus. Nero's death and the civil war in its wake brought an end to the Romans' endeavours to this end against the Sarmatians/Alans and these plans were never revived in the same form³⁴⁸.

The Romans sought to secure alliance with the Bosporan kings. Aspurgos' son, Mithridates VIII (III), a late descendant of Mithridates Eupator, ascended the throne in 39 AD. At first, it seemed that Roman aspirations would be crowned with success. The new ruler first acted as a friend to Rome, but later turned against her. Sent to Rome to reassure Emperor Claudius, his brother Cotys disclosed his intentions. By 44-45 AD, armed open confrontation became the single course open to Mithridates. The Romans supported the treacherous Cotys, who was installed on the Bosporan throne by the cohorts led by Didius Gallus and Julius Aquila. This was the first time Roman soldiers had set foot on the Crimean Peninsula.

The second clash between the Siraci and the Aorsi known from the literary sources occurred at this time, in 49 AD³⁴⁹, as a consequence of joining two different alliances. Mithridates fled to the Siraci on the Asiatic Bosphorus (the Taman' Peninsula on the eastern side of the Kerč Strait), while the Romans forged an alliance with Eunones, King of the Aorsi:

Mithridates of Bosphorus, meanwhile, who had lost his power and was a mere outcast, on learning that the Roman general, Didius, and the main strength of his army had retired, and that Cotys, a young prince without experience, was left in his new kingdom with a few cohorts under Julius Aquila, a Roman knight, disdaining both, roused the neighbouring tribes, and drew deserters to his standard. At last he collected an army, drove out the king of the Dandaridæ³⁵⁰, and possessed himself of his dominions. When this was known, and the invasion of Bosphorus was every moment expected, Aquila and Cotys, seeing that hostilities had been also resumed by Zorsines, king of the Siraci, distrusted their own strength, and themselves too sought the friendship of the foreigner by sending envoys to Eunones, who was then chief of the Aorsi. There was no difficulty about alliance, when they pointed to the power of Rome in contrast with the rebel Mithridates. It was accordingly stipulated that Eunones should engage the enemy with his cavalry, and the Romans undertake the siege of towns.

³⁴⁶ Vinogradov 1994, 153-154.

³⁴⁷ CIL XIV.3608. – Levick 1985, 31.

³⁴⁸ Rostovtzeff 1922, 117.

³⁴⁹ This is assuming that the first clash can be identified with the Trans-Caucasian undertaking in 35 AD, in which the participation of the Siraci and the Aorsi is mere conjecture. However,

this conjecture is based on the analogous situation in 49 AD, when the two tribes faced each other on the battlefield because they served as mercenaries in opposing armies.

³⁵⁰ A Maeotian tribe living east of the Bosphorus between the Don and the Caucasus.

While the Aorsian cavalry harassed the army of the Zorsines, the Siracian king, the combined forces of Cotys and the Romans besieged the Siracian towns with enormous success. Disregarding the fortress of Aripharnes³⁵¹, which is of uncertain ethnic attribution, and Ptolemy's account of the Sarmatian towns in the Great Hungarian Plain, this is the first and last time that Sarmatian towns are mentioned. Tacitus recorded that the town of Uspe stood on high ground and was protected by walls and ditches. The walls were constructed from hurdles and wicker-work with earth packed in-between³⁵²:

Then the army advanced in regular formation, the Aorsi in the van and the rear, while the centre was strengthened by the cohorts, and native troops of Bosphorus with Roman arms. Thus the enemy was defeated, and they reached Soza, a town in Dandarica, which Mithridates had abandoned, where it was thought expedient to leave a garrison, as the temper of the people was uncertain. Next they marched on the Siraci, and after crossing the river Panda besieged the city of Uspe, which stood on high ground, and had the defence of walls and fosses; only the walls, not being of stone, but of hurdles and wicker-work with earth between, were too weak to resist an assault. Towers were raised to a greater height as a means of annoying the besieged with brands and darts. Had not night stopped the conflict, the siege would have been begun and finished within one day.

The Siraci were finally subdued by the Romans:

Next day they sent an embassy asking mercy for the freeborn, and offering ten thousand slaves. As it would have been inhuman to slay the prisoners, and very difficult to keep them under guard, the conquerors rejected the offers preferring that they should perish by the just doom of war. The signal for massacre was therefore given to the soldiers, who had mounted the walls by scaling ladders. The destruction of Uspe struck terror into the rest of the people, who thought safety impossible when they saw how armies and ramparts, heights and difficult positions, rivers and cities, alike yielded to their foe. And so Zorsines, having long considered whether he should still have regard to the fallen fortunes of Mithridates or to the kingdom of his fathers, and having at last preferred his country's interests, gave hostages and prostrated himself before the emperor's image, to the great glory of the Roman army, which all men knew to have come after a bloodless victory within three days' march of the river Tanais. In their return however fortune was not equally favourable; some of their vessels, as they were sailing back, were driven on the shores of the Tauri and cut off by the barbarians, who slew the commander of a cohort and several centurions.

In his dire situation, Mithridates turned to the Aorsi fighting on the Roman side for help. King Eunones intervened on Mithridates' behalf: he asked the Romans to treat the fallen Bosphoran king leniently, and, after an exchange of letters, he was taken to Rome³⁵³:

³⁵¹ Second half of the 4th century BC. See the earlier section on »The Siracian Migration«.

³⁵² The description suggests a wall construction resembling Maeotian buildings (fig. 53).

³⁵³ Mithridates lived in Rome until 68 AD, when he was executed on Galba's orders for participating in a conspiracy (Plut. *Galba*, 15. 15). As pointed out above, it seems likely that Pliny probably met him while he was a captive in Rome and obtained from him information on the Pontic that does not appear in the writing of other authors.

Meanwhile Mithridates, finding arms an unavailing resource, considered on whose mercy he was to throw himself. He feared his brother Cotys, who had once been a traitor, then become his open enemy. No Roman was on the spot of authority sufficient to make his promises highly valued. So he turned to Eunones, who had no personal animosity against him, and had been lately strengthened by his alliance with us. Adapting his dress and expression of countenance as much as possible to his present condition, he entered the palace, and throwing himself at the feet of Eunones he exclaimed, »Mithridates, whom the Romans have sought so many years by land and sea, stands before you by his own choice. Deal as you please with the descendant of the great Achæmenes, the only glory of which enemies have not robbed me.« The great name of Mithridates, his reverse, his prayer, full of dignity, deeply affected Eunones. He raised the suppliant, and commended him for having chosen the nation of the Aorsi and his own good faith in suing for mercy. He sent at the same time envoys to Cæsar with a letter to this effect, that friendship between emperors of Rome and sovereigns of powerful peoples was primarily based on a similarity of fortune, and that between himself and Claudius there was the tie of a common victory. Wars had glorious endings, whenever matters were settled by an amnesty. The conquered Zorsines had on this principle been deprived of nothing. For Mithridates, as he deserved heavier punishment, he asked neither power nor dominions, only that he might not be led in triumph, and pay the penalty of death. Claudius, though merciful to foreign princes, was yet in doubt whether it were better to receive the captive with a promise of safety or to claim his surrender by the sword. To this last he was urged by resentment at his wrongs, and by thirst for vengeance. On the other hand it was argued that it would be undertaking a war in a country without roads, on a harbourless sea, against warlike kings and wandering tribes, on a barren soil; that a weary disgust would come of tardy movements, and perils of precipitancy; that the glory of victory would be small, while much disgrace would ensue on defeat. Why should not the emperor seize the offer and spare the exile, whose punishment would be the greater, the longer he lived in poverty? Moved by these considerations, Claudius wrote to Eunones that Mithridates had certainly merited an extreme and exemplary penalty, which he was not wanting in power to inflict, but it had been the principle of his ancestors to show as much forbearance to a suppliant as they showed persistence against a foe. As for triumphs, they were won over nations and kings hitherto unconquered. After this, Mithridates was given up and brought to Rome by Junius Cilo, the procurator of Pontus. There in the emperor's presence he was said to have spoken too proudly for his position, and words uttered by him to the following effect became the popular talk: »I have not been sent, but have come back to you; if you do not believe me, let me go and pursue me.« He stood too with fearless countenance when he was exposed to the people's gaze near the Rostra, under military guard. To Cilo and Aquila were voted, respectively, the consular and prætorian decorations³⁵⁴.

Without doubt, the war affected a fairly large territory and several other peoples. Excavations at the Scythian settlements on the western Crimean coast have brought to light extensive destruction layers dating to the second quarter of the 1st century AD. The »Late Scythian« rulers (who were descended from the Sarmatians)

³⁵⁴ Tacit. *Annal.* XII.15-21.

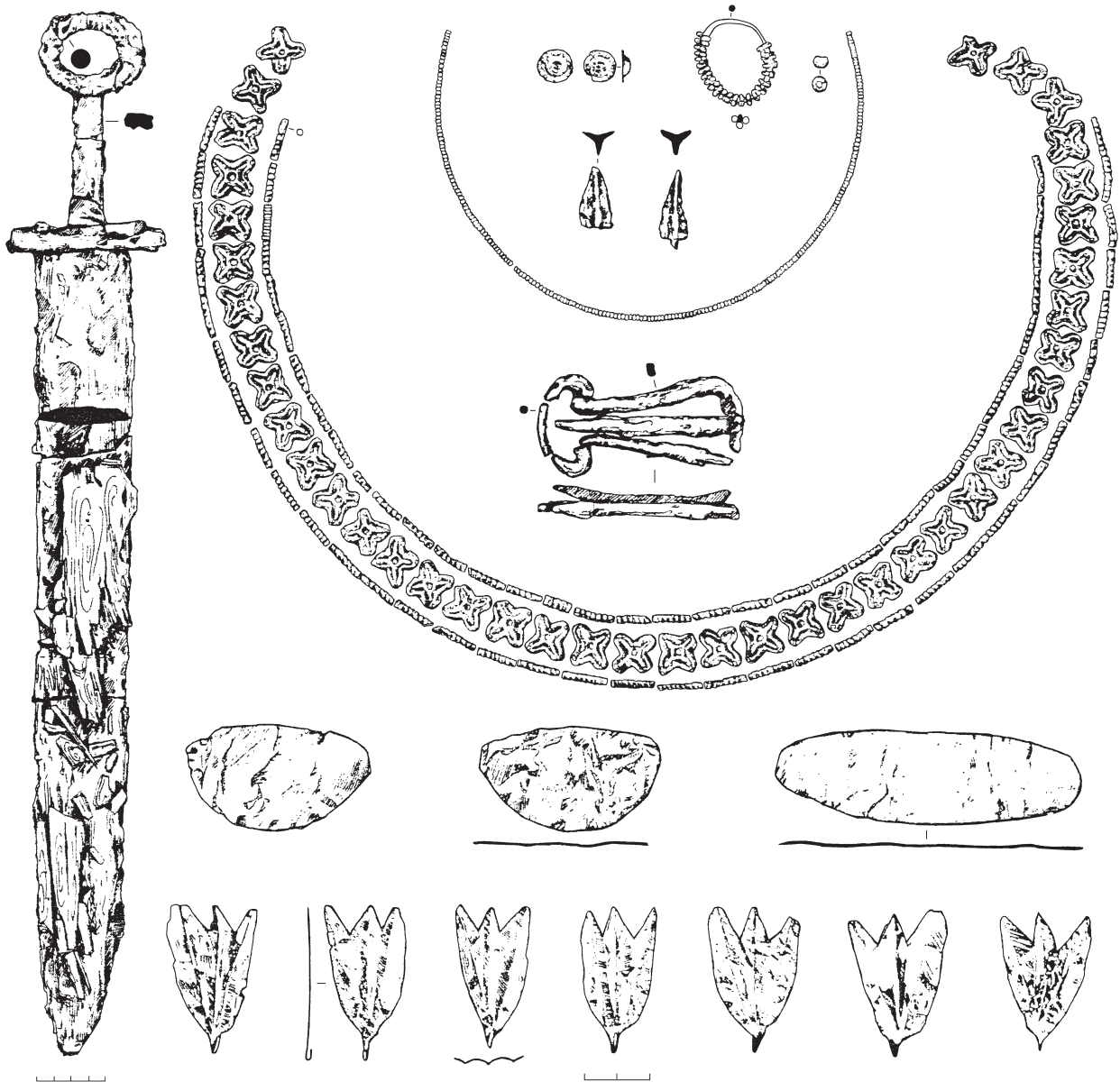


Fig. 86 Catacomb 612 at Ust'-Alma, dating from the 1st century AD. – (After Loboda/Puzdrovskij/Zajcev 2002, figs 8-9).

tians living in Asian Bosphorus)³⁵⁵, known for their anti-Roman sentiments, probably supported Mithridates and thus found themselves facing the Aorsi³⁵⁶.

Aside from the Alans and the Siraci, the Roxolani were also a source of regular nuisance to the Roman Empire. Their restlessness along the Lower Danubian frontier is reported, e. g. in 69 AD, when four emperors succeeded each other within a year during the turmoil following Nero's death.

³⁵⁵ As mentioned above, Aspurgos appointed a Sarmatian to rule over them.

³⁵⁶ Puzdrovskij 2001a, 214-215. It is striking that the burials of the elite in Scythian Crimea from the 1st century AD share numerous similarities with the graves of the Sarmatian aristocracy. The burials of the recently excavated and only partially pub-

lished Late Scythian cemetery at Ust'-Alma (fig. 86) can, on the strength of the analogous finds, be assigned to the same horizon as Sokolova Mogila, Porogi, Cvetna and Ves'njanoe in the Ukraine, Hohlač, Migulinskaja, Vysočino, Kobjakovo and Kosika in the Don-Volga interfluvium, and the Golden Cemetery in the northern Caucasus.

Men's minds were so intent on the civil war, that foreign affairs were disregarded. This emboldened the Roxolani, a Sarmatian tribe, who had destroyed two cohorts in the previous winter, to invade Mœsia with great hopes of success. They had 9,000 cavalry, flushed with victory and intent on plunder rather than on fighting. They were dispersed and off their guard, when the third legion together with some auxiliaries attacked them³⁵⁷.



Fig. 87 The *aureus* bearing the legend VICTORIA OTHONIS issued by Otho probably commemorate the victory of the *Legio III Gallica* over the Sarmatians (RIC I.15; BMC 23). – (After http://davy.potdevin.free.fr/2%20Roman%20coins%20I%20Augustus%20to%20Vitellius/9-otho/ric15_50000chf.jpg [5.4.2012]).

Intent on gaining booty, the Roxolani wreaked havoc:

[...] those Scythians who are called Sarmatians, being a very numerous people, transported themselves over the Danube into Mysia, without being perceived; after which, by their violence, and entirely unexpected assault, they slew a great many of the Romans that guarded the frontiers; and as the consular legate Fonteius Agrippa came to meet them, and fought courageously against them, he was slain by them. They then overran all the region that had been subject to him, tearing and rending every thing that fell in their way. But when Vespasian was informed of what had happened, and how Mysia was laid waste, he sent away Rubrius Gallus to punish these Sarmatians; by whose means many of them perished in the battles he fought against them, and that part which escaped fled with fear to their own country. So when this general had put an end to the war, he provided for the future security of the country also; for he placed more and more numerous garrisons in the place, till he made it altogether impossible for the barbarians to pass over the river any more. And thus had this war in Mysia a sudden conclusion³⁵⁸.

The *Legio III Gallica* defeated the Roxolani and drove the 9,000 strong heavy cavalry across the Danube³⁵⁹. The *aurei* and *denarii* bearing the legend VICTORIA ORTHONIS issued by Otho can probably be linked to this Roman victory (fig. 87)³⁶⁰. Tettius Julianus, the hero of the campaign against the Dacians in 88, was awarded the *Ornamenta consularia*³⁶¹. The presence of the Roxolani and mainly the renewed Dacian threat – Diurpaneus, Decebal's predecessor, had united the Dacians in a new state and had founded Sarmizegetusa as its centre, not far from the Danube – forced the Romans to erect a massive defence system. The borders of Moesia were reinforced. The construction of camps along the Danube began under the reign of Vespasian, then supervised by the governor Rubrius Gallus, and was continued by later Roman emperors³⁶². This line of defence was further strengthened with another one, a parallel chain of forts slightly to the east. Three legions and numerous auxiliary troops were stationed in the south along the Danube, from the Olt to the delta. The most important crossing points were guarded by counter-forts (fig. 88)³⁶³. A passage in Jordanes' *Getica* would suggest that the boundary between the Roxolani and

³⁵⁷ Tacit. *Hist.* I.79.

³⁵⁸ Jos.Flav. *Bell.Iud.* VII.4.3.

³⁵⁹ Alföldi 1939a, 534.

³⁶⁰ López Sánchez 2007, 89 fig. 1; in print.

³⁶¹ Strobel 1989, 70.

³⁶² Mócsy 1974, 80.

³⁶³ Alföldi 1940a, 43.



Fig. 88 The Lower Danubian *limes* under Vespasian, around 80 AD, with the location of the legions. – (After http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_umhSWWEgx2c/TSRaS_aDj3I/AAAAAAAAAHQ4/83Sr7lqm8QE/s1600/legioni_dislocazione.gif [5.6.2012]; map M. Ober, RGZM).

the lazyges lay in the Olt Valley at this time, assuming of course that the lazyges had already arrived in the Carpathian Basin by this time³⁶⁴.

Finds From the Second Half of the Middle Sarmatian Age (Mid-1st Century to Mid-2nd Century AD)

Alongside the survival of the earlier artefact types and assemblages, a set of new articles made their appearance on the northern Pontic coast during this period. While the earlier find types and burial rites dominated the region's greater part, ring-pommel swords, early Roman brooches, polychrome jewellery and northern Caucasian wheel-thrown grey wares, etc. appear (fig. 89). An important change was the appearance of double censers and bells. In striking contrast to the earlier practice of digging the graves

³⁶⁴ Alföldi 1940a, 45. – Jordan XII.74. See the next chapter »Sarmatians in the Carpathian Basin« for more on the migration of the lazyges.

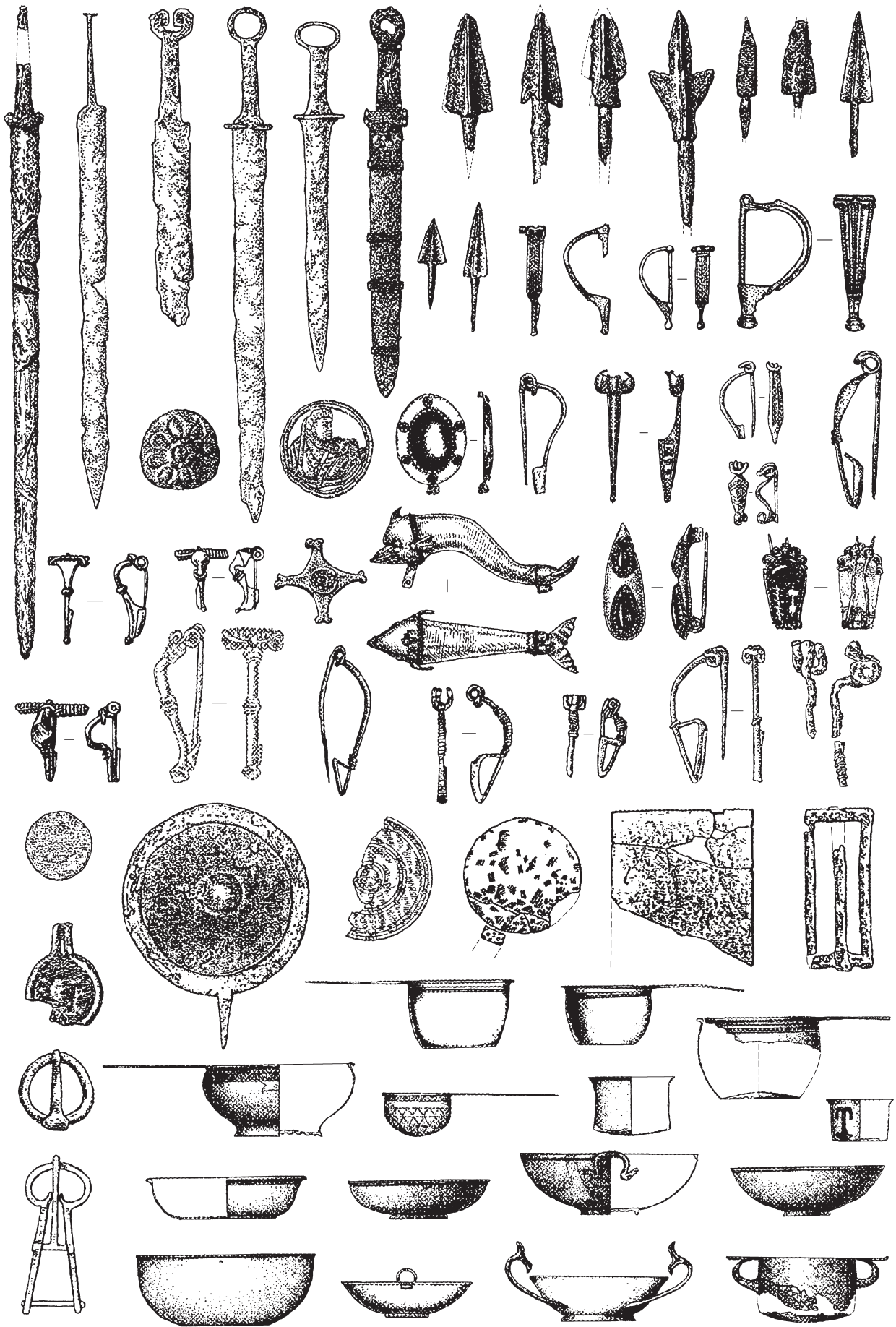


Fig. 89 Finds of the Middle Sarmatian Age (1st-mid-2nd centuries AD) from the northern Pontic. – (After Simonenko 2004, fig. 7).



Fig. 90 Bronze cauldron with handles modelled in the shape of animal figures from the 1st-2nd century AD displayed in the permanent archaeological exhibition of the Hermitage. – (Photo E. Istvánovits/V. Kulcsár).

into earlier burial mounds, the region's inhabitants started to erect kurgans. The new artefactual »culture« predominated on the left bank of the Dnieper, in the Orel-Samara interfluvium, i.e. the easterly part of the Roxolanian territory, where the greatest concentration of new types from the east can be noted. These include cauldrons (**fig. 90**) and gold-turquoise artefacts decorated in the animal style (**fig. 91**), which are all types that occur only sporadically in the west. Diagonal burials become widespread and the deceased were laid to rest with a south to north orientation, resembling the custom in the Don-Volga interfluvium (**fig. 75**) and the Sarmatian lands to its east. This evidence shows that the Roxolani (to whom the earlier assemblages can be linked) apparently moved westward under pressure from the Aorsi and the Alans by the mid-1st century to early 2nd century AD³⁶⁵.

The late phase of the Middle Sarmatian culture is characterised by princely and royal graves (**fig. 92**)

containing the burials of high-ranking individuals. These are concentrated in the Lower Don region, such as the ones found at Hohlač (Novočerkassk) (**fig. 93**), Sadovjy (**fig. 94**) and Kobjakovo (Rostov area) (**fig. 95**), Vysočino (**fig. 96**) and Dači (**figs 97-100**) (Azov area) and other sites³⁶⁶. Comparable burials are also known from the southern Ukraine (Sokolova Mogila – **fig. 101**; Porogi – **figs 81, 102**; Nogajči – **figs 103-105**) and from the Upper Don (Lipect-Lenino – **fig. 106**).

The »royal« burials are characterised by square or wide rectangular grave pits over 3m long, 1-3m high burial mounds, the unusual arrangement of the subsoil dug out during the creation of the grave pit around the pit, the deposition of various prestige articles and various precious articles of eastern origin. Bronze cauldrons, imported metal vessels, amphorae, ritual artefacts (**fig. 107**), gold decorated weapons and harness sets, and insignia of rank are all counted among prestige articles. Articles of eastern provenance include Chinese mirrors of the Han period (**fig. 108**), typical Bactrian ornaments in the gold-turquoise style and Parthian bone-carvings, etc. Several dozen assemblages of this type are known from the Sarmatian burials of the Don delta. The source of these artefacts is uncertain. They have been regarded as both booty from the Bactrian palaces and treasuries looted by the nomads, and as pieces made by Bactrian craftsmen for their nomadic patrons, much in the same way as the Greek goldsmiths of the Pontic catered to the needs of the Scythian elite³⁶⁷.

A distinctive brooch (**fig. 109**) was found in one of the Porogi burials. It bears a resemblance to finds from the Dacian *davas* (hillforts) from the period preceding Trajan's conquest. Brooches of this type are now believed to have been made in Dacian workshops or produced by Bosphoran craftsmen and here demonstrates contact with the west³⁶⁸.

³⁶⁵ Simonenko 1993a, 112-115; 1994, 16-17.

³⁶⁶ Moškova 1989a, 177-180. – Glebov/Parusimov 2000, 70-71.

³⁶⁷ Guguev 1992, 126-129.

³⁶⁸ Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 53 figs 14, 2; 20, 3. – Opreanu/Cociş 2002, 229. – Puzdrovskij 2007, 188 fig. 203. This type of brooch also appears in the material of the Hungarian Plain (Örvény, Szeged-Felsőpusztaszer).



Fig. 91 *Phalera* from Peter the Great's Siberian collection in the Hermitage. Artefacts decorated in the so-called turquoise and gold animal style were popular in the 1st century BC-2nd century AD. – (After L'Or 1995, 51 no. 58).



Fig. 92 Elite burials from the 1st century AD. The sites of the Zubovskij-Vozdviženskaja group are marked with green, the sites of the Zolotoe kladbišče («Golden Cemetery») group with yellow. – (Map M. Ober, RGZM).



Fig. 93 Gold torc from the Hohlač burial. – (After L'Or 1995, 60 no. 83).



Fig. 94 Imported bowls of precious metal from the Sadovjy kurgan. – (After L'Or 2001, 195).



Fig. 95 Gold torc from the Kobjakovo burial. – (After Steppengold 2004, 146 no. 110).



Fig. 96 Vysočino, Kurgan VII.28. – (After Sokrovišča 2008b, fig. 9).

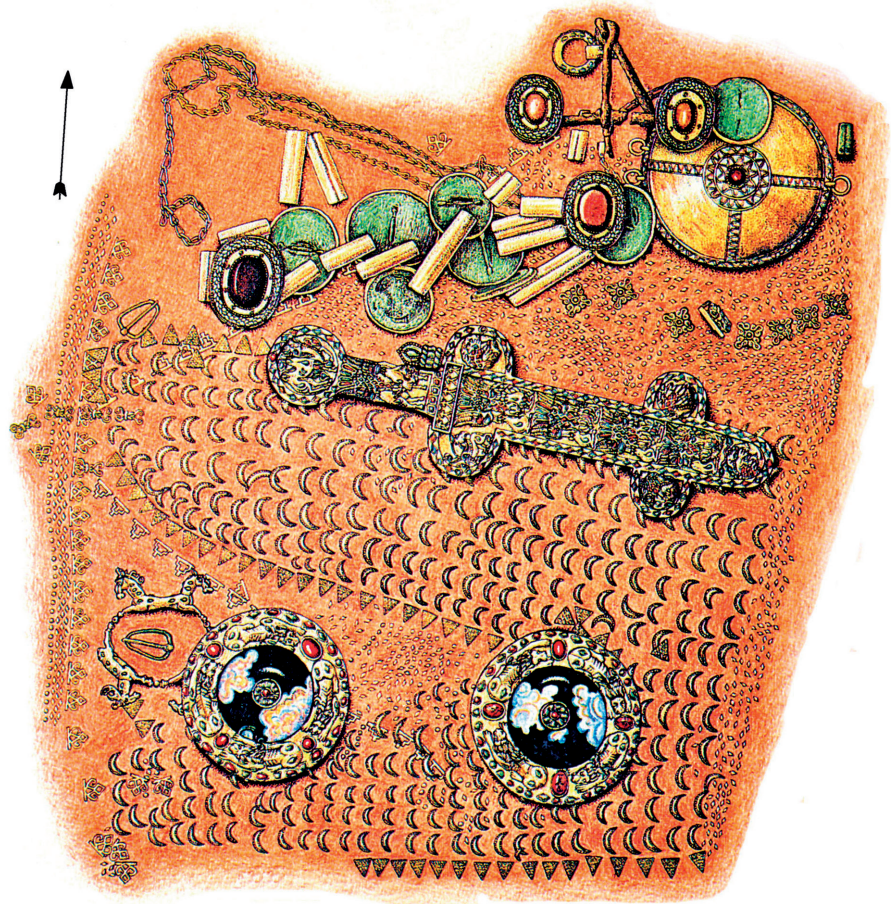


Fig. 97 Gold mounts, perhaps the adornments of a horse blanket, horse harness and a ceremonial dagger from the *tajnik* 1 (secret chamber) of Kurgan 1 at Dači. – (After L’Or 2001, 203).

The assemblages described above bear witness to the rebirth of the Sarmatian animal style. One hallmark of the gold-turquoise and polychrome ornamental style was the use of turquoise to accentuate certain details of the creatures portrayed (fig. 91)³⁶⁹. In addition to the Siberian-Altai and Central Asian animals, the repertoire also included human figures and fantastic, half-animal, half-human creatures, such as the ones appearing on the torc from Kobjakovo (fig. 95). Accepting the possibility that these ornaments had been made in Bactrian workshops would provide an explanation for the relative uniformity of the style. Cultural influences and imports from the east were not restricted to ornamental prestige items. Kurgan 51 at Susly by the Volga and the royal burial at Porogi by the Dniester yielded typical Hiung-nu arrowheads and bone stiffening-plaques for bows, probably of eastern origin, were also brought to light. Long swords with a lozenge-sectioned bronze cross-guard also made an appearance in the 1st century AD. The best analogies for these swords can be quoted from Central Asia and Taxila in northern Pakistan (fig. 110)³⁷⁰. Short swords kept in ornate sheaths decorated with gold and semi-precious stones and fitted with wide suspension loops

³⁶⁹ Zaseckaja, the renowned expert on the Sarmatian animal style, pointed out that the label »turquoise« is imprecise because very few articles are actually inset with this stone, most being decorated with turquoise-coloured glass paste. We would here like to thank her for her kind oral communication.

³⁷⁰ We are indebted to Savin and Semënov for their permission to publish the drawing.



Fig. 98 Horse harness from Kurgan 1 at Dači. – (After L'Or 1995, 69 no. 98).

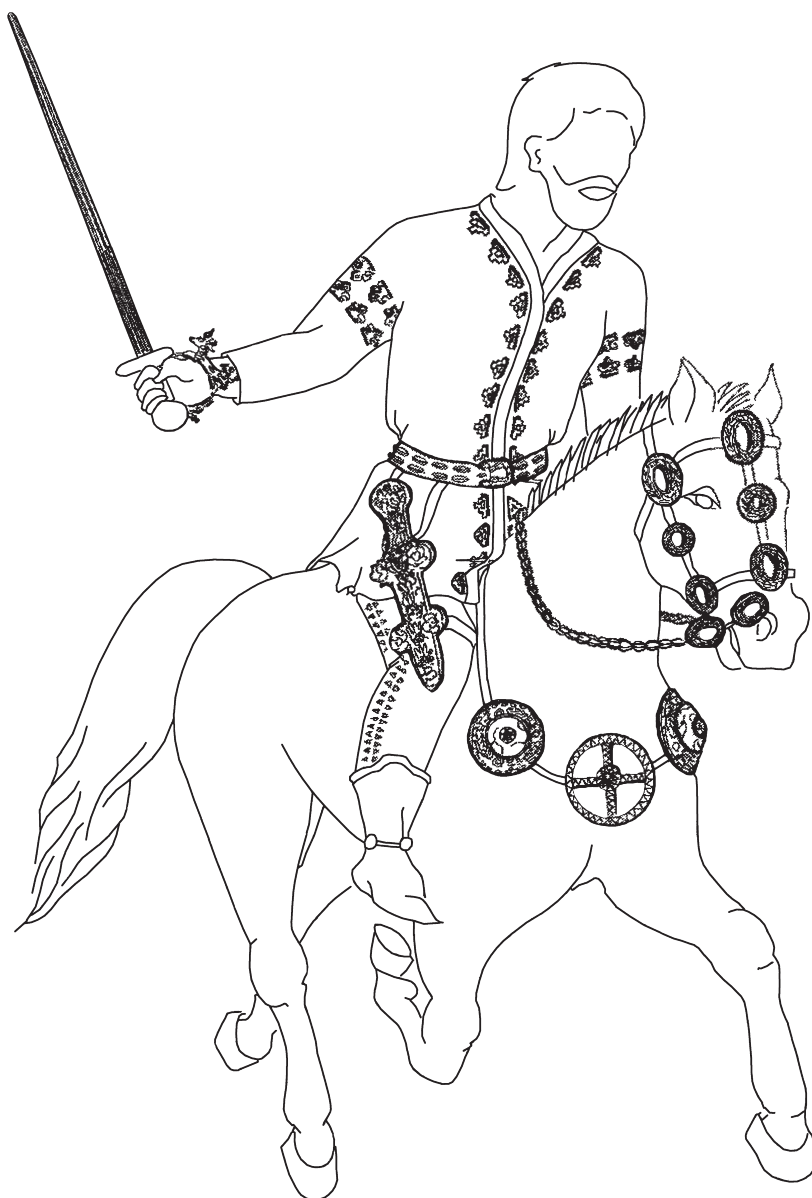


Fig. 99 The warrior of the royal burial at Dači. – (After L’Or 1995, 71 no. 103, 2).

(**fig. 100**) were another innovation from the east. Good examples can be quoted from Kosika (Lower Volga region), Dači (Lower Don region) and Porogi (Dniester region), whose counterparts are known from the royal burials at Tillia Tepe in northern Afghanistan (**fig. 111**). The use of tamgas (**figs 73. 79. 81**) became widely fashionable. Their distribution can be traced from Mongolia through Central Asia to the northern Pontic (and the Carpathian Basin)³⁷¹.

There is an ongoing debate among Russian and Ukrainian scholars as to whether the »royal« horizon should be associated with the Alans or the Aorsi. The Aorsi seem to be the more likely candidates in the light of the report by Strabo (quoted above) that this people controlled the east-west caravan trade – the Silk Road (**fig. 5**) – on which they probably levied heavy tolls. The eastern artefacts could have been acquired from

³⁷¹ Skripkin 1997, 23-24, with further literature.



Fig. 100 Short sword in a gold scabbard encrusted with semi-precious stones from Dači. – (After L'Or 1995, 75 no. 104).



Fig. 101 Reconstruction of the costume worn by the woman buried at Sokolova Mogila and detail of the embroidered hemline of her dress. – (After Kovpanenko 1986, figs 133. 124).



Fig. 102 The warrior of the royal burial at Porogi. – (After Kočyniki 1996, 73).

this traffic. Alternatively, the assemblages from the Lower Don region have been interpreted as reflecting a new Alan centre.

At roughly the same time as the »princely« burials of the Lower Don region there appeared the Zolotoe Kladbišče (Golden Cemetery)³⁷², a chain of kurgans extending over 110km on the right bank of the Kuban

³⁷² So named by Veselovskij after the countless gold finds brought to light during the excavations in the early 20th century.



Fig. 103 Torc from the Nogajči kurgan, the single »royal« burial of the Crimea dating from the 1st-2nd century AD. – (After Gold 1991, 406 no. 145).



Fig. 104 Brooch from the Nogajči kurgan. – (After Gold 1991, 405 no. 146).

– although a few graves occur south of the river, too (fig. 92). The burial mounds form clusters, with each cluster featuring a few outstanding burials³⁷³. The Golden Cemetery was used from the 1st to the 3rd century AD, although most intensively during the second half of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The deceased were laid to rest in catacombs, wearing a costume embroidered with gold plaques. Deposited with them were their weapons, harness sets, and lavish Italian and provincial imports (figs 112-114). Most graves contained male burials, principally of heavily armoured warriors (*cataphractarii*), who occupied a prominent position in the social hierarchy. The catacomb rite and the graves of the Golden Cemetery are often linked to the Alans; the debate over the attribution of the burials continues. In view of the high number of south Italian imports, Guščina and Zaseckaja, who published the material of the cemetery, suggested that the Sarmatian warriors of the Kuban region had perhaps acted as Rome's advance guard in the Caucasian foreland³⁷⁴. In contrast, Marčenko argued that the newly formed Alanic-Siracian alliance entrusted the defence of the southern border to the group that had buried its dead scattered throughout the river valley³⁷⁵.

The burials of the Golden Cemetery are partly pre-dated by and partly contemporaneous with the so-called Zubovskij-Vozdviženskaja group distributed on the left bank of the Kuban, dated to the 1st century BC - 1st century AD (fig. 92). The catacomb rite was not practised in this region: the grave pits are wide and west to east orientated. The grave assemblages, comprising weapons, mails, harness sets, numerous imports and golden dress ornaments, again indicate that the graves contained the burials of the military elite. The group was initially associated with the Siracian elite³⁷⁶; later, an attribution to the earliest Alans was also proposed³⁷⁷, based on the occurrence of Inner Asian artefacts that were supposed to reflect Hiung-nu, Yueh-chi and Saka traditions. Citing the controversial references in the classical texts discussed in the above, the advocates of this hypothesis suggested that the Alans had participated in the war between Pompey and Mithridates Eupator in 65 BC. However, in our opinion, there is no conclusive evidence to support this.

One point that emerges clearly is that the warriors laid to rest in these two rich burial grounds – the Golden Cemetery and the Zubovskij-Vozdviženskaja group – were buried according to different rites (reflected by the use of catacombs in the former and their lack in the latter), suggesting two different ethnic groups. At the same time, the composition of the grave goods and their richness imply that the deceased occupied a roughly similar position in the social hierarchy.



Fig. 105 Finger-ring from the Nogajči kurgan. – (After Gold 1991, 405 no. 147).

³⁷³ A somewhat similar pattern was noted in the burial ground at Hortobágy-Poroshát on the Hungarian Plain. The 220 kurgans formed eleven clusters over an extensive area. Each cluster included more richly furnished kurgans of the elite. Another similar feature was the high number of weapons (Zoltai 1941).

³⁷⁴ Guščina/Zaseckaja 1994, 5-8. 36-40. This would in part support the above mentioned hypothesis that Nero had seriously

considered plans for assuming control over the northern Caucasus. However, if the burials of the Golden Cemetery are associated with the Alans, then Nero could hardly have planned a campaign for subduing the Alans.

³⁷⁵ Marčenko 1995, 309-311.

³⁷⁶ Guščina/Zaseckaja 1989, with further literature.

³⁷⁷ Raev/Jacenko 1993.

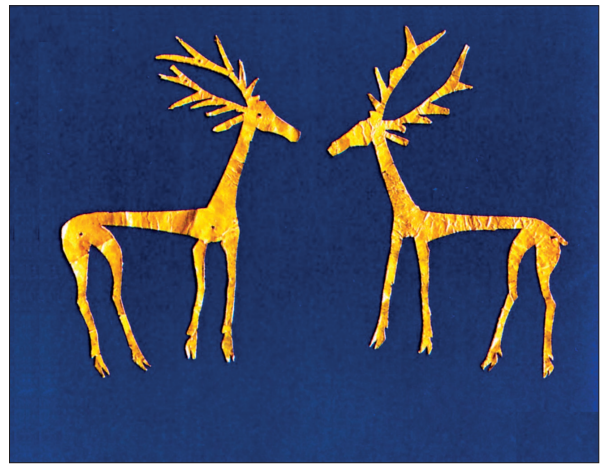
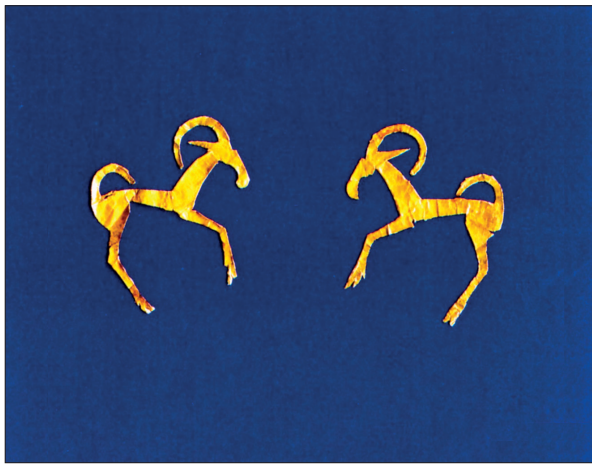


Fig. 106 Gold adornment of a canopy from the Lipeck-Lenino burial. – (After Medvedev/Safonov/Matveev 2008, colour supplement 4).

Mention must be made of the fact that Sarmatian finds have also been discovered in regions where they were previously unknown. Their distribution suggests that the nomads penetrated the forested steppe zone of the Don region during this period³⁷⁸.

In sum, the ever-growing territory of the European Sarmatians, extending from the Ural to the Lower Danube and, later, to the middle reaches of the Danube following the arrival of the lazyges in the Carpathian Basin, came under substantial cultural influence from the east – from Inner and Central Asia – during the

³⁷⁸ Medvedev 2008. Nearly 200 Sarmatian burials were uncovered in this region during the past decades. These graves can

perhaps be associated with Ptolemy's *Hippophagoi* («horse-eating») Sarmatians (Ptolem V.8).



Fig. 107 Sceptre or poletop in the form of the Tree of Life, a symbol of power or a ritual device from Pesčanyj in the Kuban region. – (After L'Or 2001, 175 no. 193).



Fig. 108 Chinese mirror of the Han period in the Taganrog museum. – (After L'Or 2001, 231 no. 248).

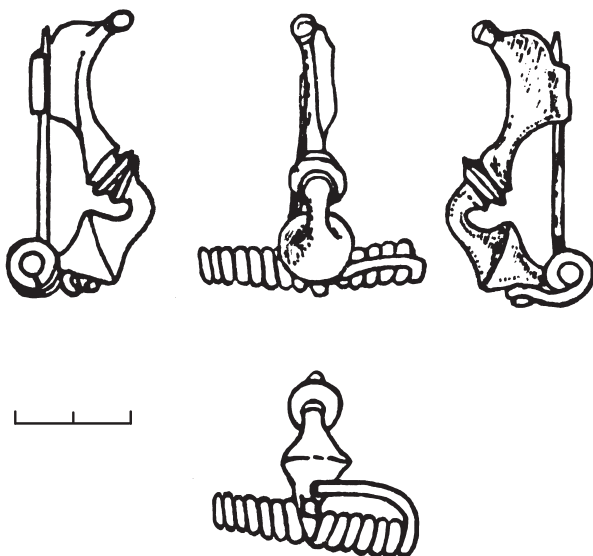


Fig. 109 Brooch reflecting contacts with the west from Grave 1 at Porogi. – (After Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, fig. 14, 2).

1st century AD, a phenomenon which was also noted earlier³⁷⁹. The information contained in the written sources increases, and many events can be precisely dated to the year. Even so, it is impossible to establish unequivocally whether the eastern influence should be interpreted as the expansion of a new population from Central Asia, and if so, whether this population can be identified with the Alans. The possible answers to this question will be covered in the next chapters.

³⁷⁹ Skripkin 2000, has shown that Chinese influences can be demonstrated in the Sarmatian material from the late horizon of the Prohorovka burials, i.e. from the 2nd century BC. This is principally reflected by ring-pommel swords and swords with lozenge-sectioned cross-guards, whose prototypes are known from the Late Bronze Age in China. Chinese elements can be distinguished in the openwork buckles with animal depictions and various other artefacts.



Fig. 110 Long swords with lozenge shaped cross-guard depicted at a bone plaque from Orlat near Samarkand (detail). – (Courtesy of A. M. Savin / A. S. Semënov; drawing A. M. Savin).

THE ALANS: THE MIGRATION OF A NEW EASTERN POPULATION

Origins of the Alans

As we have seen, a new population appeared in the northern Pontic in the 1st century AD: the Alans. Let us state, by way of introduction, that the identity and history of the Alans are two of the most oft-discussed topics in research into this period. However, one is easily lost in the bewildering maze of varying and controversial interpretations, and thus, ironically, the Alans are one of the least-known people as far as their early history is concerned. At the same time, they are the single Scythian-Sarmatian people whose descendants, the Ossets, are still extant in North Ossetia (in the northern Caucasus, Russia) and in South Ossetia (in Southern Caucasus). One group of this population, the Jász (Jassones), settled in the Jászság region (Jazygia) of Hungary during the Middle Ages.

The ethnonym »Alan« was derived initially from the Manchurian and Mongolian word for »mountain«. Other etymologies postulated an origin from various Indo-European roots, such as »foreign, distant« and »deer«.



Fig. 111 Short sword in a golden scabbard and wide suspension loops encrusted with semi-precious stones from Tillia Tepe. – (After Sokrovišča 2008a, fig. 12).

Today, most linguists agree that the name can be derived from Old Iranian **arya-* meaning »Aryan«³⁸⁰.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the people known as the Alans lived in the foreground of the Caucasus from 72 AD at the latest, or perhaps even earlier, from the first third of the century. Accepting the identification of the people buried under the »royal« kurgans with the Alans and that the burial uncovered at Porogi (fig. 102) was the grave of Inismeios, King of the Alans, the implication is that the Alans had advanced as far as the Dniester Valley within a few decades, arriving there by the second part of the 1st century AD. In this case, Lucan's report (confirmed by Ammianus' passage quoted above) that Pompey had clashed with the Alans in the foreground of the Caucasus in 65 BC is not as unbelievable nor as ridiculous as some scholars would have us think.

Although the Alans appear more often in the works of the authors of Antiquity from the 1st century AD than in the epigraphic material, there are few securely datable references to this people.

The etymology of the ethnonym raises the first problem. The name of the Roxolani is inseparable from that of the Alans, seeing that they were designated as the »white Alans«. The adjective »white« recalls the distinction between »white« and »black« Ugrians, and brings to mind the »white« Huns (the Hephtalites). Regardless of whether the adjectives »white« and »black« denoted a difference in status or in the cardinal directions, most scholars agree that the adjectives refer to two groups of the same population³⁸¹. The usage of the ethnonym is even more complicated in the case of the Alans. Neither should we forget about the Aorsi in this respect, whose name means also »white«. The Alans, the Roxolani and the Aorsi were related tribes in view of their name. It is not mere chance that Ptolemy mentions the Alanorsi (Αλανορσοί) twice³⁸², perhaps indicating a mixed population of Alans and Aorsi.

³⁸⁰ For a good overview of the earlier literature on etymology, see Alemany 2000, 1-6 – a pioneering work in Alan research, containing the most systematic compilation of the sources pertaining to the history of the Alans.

³⁸¹ Alemany 2000, 8-9 n. 40.

³⁸² Ptolem VI.14.

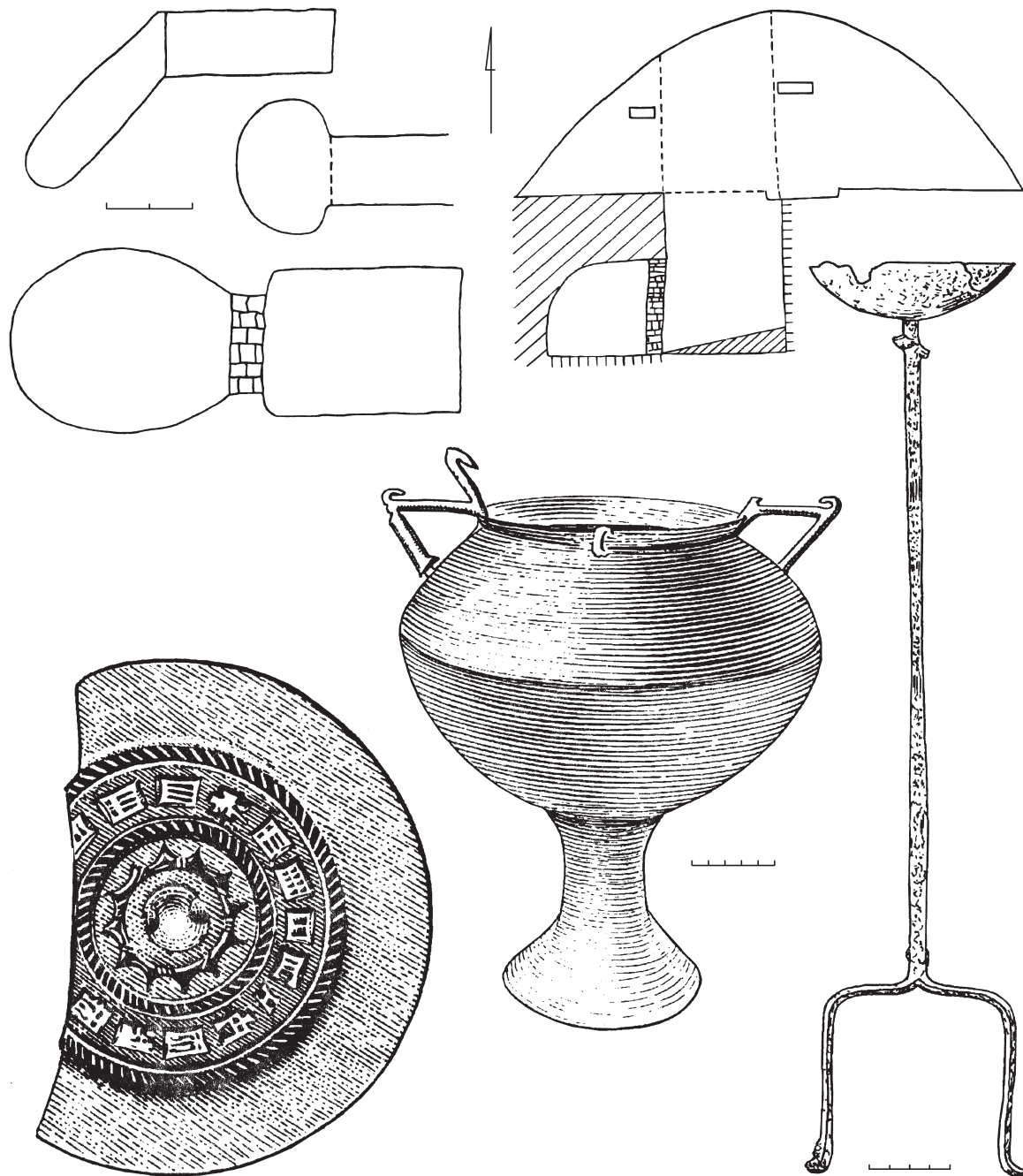


Fig. 112 Catacomb types and typical finds from the Zolotoe kladbišče (Golden Cemetery). – (After Guščina/Zaseckaja 1994, fig. 2 pls 4, 34, 40; 12, 117).

Interestingly enough, a possible equation between the Alans and the Roxolani has been neglected to some extent in Sarmatian research³⁸³, while the possible identity of the Alans with the Aorsi has been proposed repeatedly. This issue takes us far, in both space and time, to the 2nd century BC and the Chinese border; and it is strongly intertwined with the question of Alan ethnogenesis³⁸⁴.

³⁸³ One exception being Gaglojti 1995, 50, 56, according to whom the ethnonym of the Roxolani and the lazyges are a variant of Alan.

³⁸⁴ For a good overview, see Alemany 2000, 396-412, with ample literature and an objective, sensible approach and assessment.

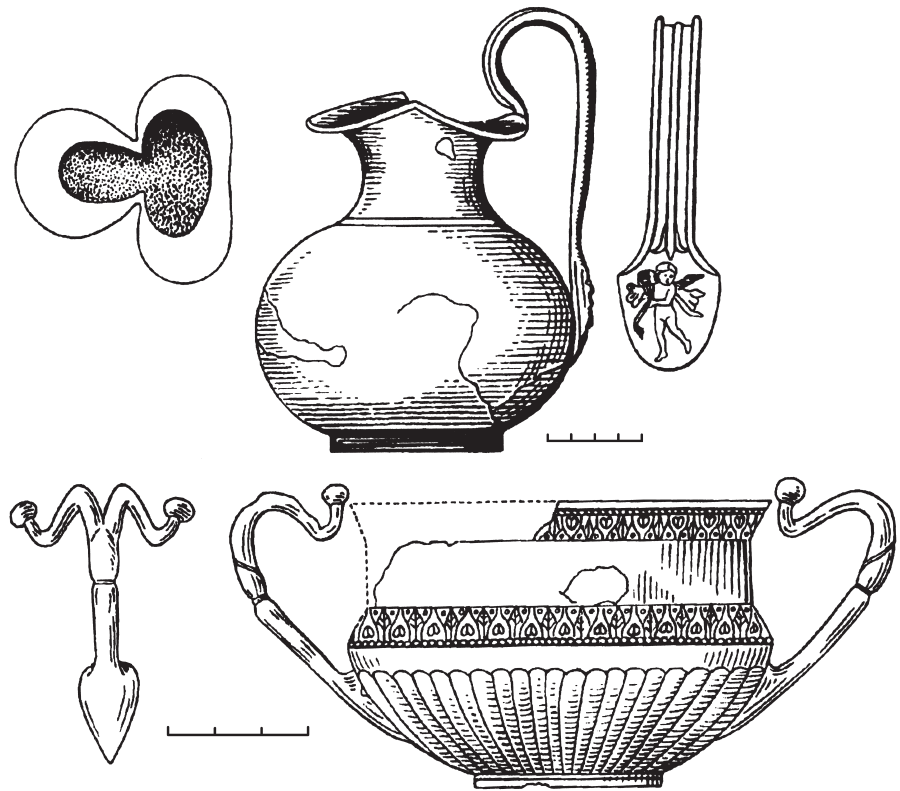


Fig. 114 Typical finds from the Zolotoe kladbišče (Golden Cemetery). – (After Guščina/Zaseckaja 1994, pl. 28, 270, 272).

Countless elaborate and complicated hypotheses have been proposed for the origins of the Alans. Two main theories must be considered: according to one, the Alans emerged as a people in Central or Inner Asia, whence they started their westward migration; while according to the other, the Alans represented a continuation of the earlier Sarmatian culture. The debate between the proponents of these two theories is far from over and therefore both shall be discussed here.

Earlier, most archaeologists believed that the finds of the Middle Sarmatian Age – of the Susly culture as it was at first called – had developed organically without a break from the preceding period and without any influence from other regions. The Alans were thus regarded as having separated from the Aorsian tribal alliance. More recently, however, Russian and Ukrainian researchers have proposed a new explanation, perhaps due to a growing awareness of the long-standing assertions made by classical philologists, linguists and historians. Most archaeologists now subscribe to the migrationist theory according to which the Alans had arrived in Europe from a distant, Inner Asian region and that their migration was triggered by the events on the Chinese border. Parallels from Central Asia are often quoted in explanation for the radical transformation of the artefactual material and the burial rite³⁸⁵.

Proponents of an Asian origin for the Alans hinge their theory on one of Strabo's passages:

[...] the best known of the nomads are those who took away Bactriana from the Greeks, I mean the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari, and Sacarauili, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Iaxartes River that adjoins that of the Sacae and the Sogdiani and was occupied by the Sacae³⁸⁶.

³⁸⁵ Skripkin 1997, 99; 2001, with an overview of recent arguments.

³⁸⁶ Strabo XI.8.2.

This event, the toppling of the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom, can be dated to 130 BC³⁸⁷. Pompeius Trogus made a short reference to the attack of nomads from the north: »Scythian affairs are added on: the Asiani kings of the Tochari and the destruction of the Saraucae«³⁸⁸. Some scholars believe that the Asii/Asiani appearing in the quoted passages can be identified with the Aorsi.

The Chinese sources also described the same event, reporting that the so-called Great Yüeh-chih conquered Bactria (fig. 61), probably referring to the toppling of the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom³⁸⁹. We are fortunate that two separate sources, obviously independent of each other (Strabo and the Chinese yearbooks), recount the same event, according to their own knowledge. Like Strabo, the Chinese sources also mention four names: Wusun, Kangju, Yancai and Yüeh-chih. There have been repeated attempts to reconcile the western and eastern record and to somehow identify and correlate the Asii, the Pasiani, the Tochari and the Sacarauli with Wusun, Kangju, Yancai and Yüeh-chih.

What concerns us here is the identification of the Asii and the Tochari. The former are generally equated with the Yancai and by some researchers with the Wusun. The latter are identified with the Yüeh-chih. Let us take a closer look at these identifications.

Deriving the name of the Asii given in the classical sources from the *ās- root and considering that the same designation (as) crops up as the name of one tribe of the Caucasian Alans, the Yancai of the Chinese sources are often identified with the Alans³⁹⁰. The name of the As and Ias people, appearing in medieval Russian sources, who are known to have been Alans or their descendants, are derived from the same root. The same holds true for the Ovs mentioned in Georgian chronicles.

We know that the Kushan Empire was founded by the Yüeh-chih and it is therefore generally accepted that they spoke an Indo-European and, more specifically, an Iranian or Tocharian tongue. Accordingly, they would be identical with the Tocharians of Strabo and Pompeius Trogus³⁹¹. The Chinese sources contain a wealth of information on the history of the Yüeh-chih, whose early history can be traced from the 2nd century BC onward. During the Han period, China was constantly warring with the neighbouring nomads, the Hsiung-nu (Xiongnu). In 177 BC, the Hsiung-nu finally drove their neighbours, the Yüeh-chih from Gansu and seized control over the greater part of the Tarim Basin. The Chinese sought an alliance with the expelled Yüeh-chih and sent an envoy to them, as a result of which a great deal of information reached the imperial court concerning the westerly territories. Obviously, the number and, also, the credibility of the reports on regions lying far from the great civilisations are limited, and there is often no way of checking them.

The other people mentioned by the Chinese sources who figure prominently in the origins of the Alans are the Wusun, who reportedly lived 800km north-east of Fergana, in the valley of the River Ili, i.e. south of Lake Balkhaš. They were also nomads. They lived together with the Yüeh-chih in the mountains, but were eventually also driven away by the Hsiung-nu. They managed to shake off the yoke of subjugation at roughly the same time as the Yüeh-chih migrated northward. The Wusun proved to be strong this time: they subdued both the Saii (Saka) and the Yüeh-chih. The similarity between the name of the Wusun and that of the Asii/Asiani mentioned by Strabo and Pompeius Trogus has led to the identification of the Wusun, rather than the Yancai, with the Alans. The 7th century Chinese documents mentioned that the Wusun were a blue-eyed, light-bearded people, a description that was treated as evidence for the identification³⁹².

387 For the antecedents, see the earlier section »An Overview of the Steppe«.

388 Iustinus *Prolog.* 42. Quoted after ALEMANY 2000, 17.

389 It has been suggested that by the time the Yüeh-chih had arrived, the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom had already fallen and been carved up. This would contradict the identification of the Yüeh-chih with the Tocharians (ENOKI/KOSHELENKO/Haidary 1996, 173).

390 Harmatta 1986. – Zadneprovskiy 1996, 465-468.

391 Without going into the details of this linguistic problem, suffice it here to note that, judging from the known texts, Tocharian is quite distant from the Scythian-Sarmatian language and that its origins are still debated (Makkay 1998a, 407-408).

392 Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus' remark (XXXI.2) that the Alans had blond hair.

However, these correlations are based on rather flimsy evidence: the similarity between the names and the description of the Wusun as blond and blue-eyed.

The single acceptable point of these identifications was widely discussed. According to the Chinese sources, the Yancai resided some 800km north-west of Sogdiana, on the shores of an immense lake, which was identified, either with the northern coast of the Caspian Sea, or that of the Aral Sea³⁹³. The yearbooks of the older Han Dynasty recorded that the Yancai took up the name, variously, Alan, Alanliao or Alanna, between 25 and 55 AD³⁹⁴. According to a Chinese passage referring to events in 225-239 AD, the Yancai neighbored on the Roman Empire in the west. To their south-east lay the Kangju³⁹⁵, who had earlier subjugated the Yancai. The Kangju territory was also inhabited by the nomadic stockbreeding Asi, who are also prime candidates for identification with the Alans and the Aorsi³⁹⁶. The Yancai territory is sometimes equated with the Aorsian lands, which Strabo located beside the Caspian Sea. The essential point of these theories is that the Aorsi and the Alans are identical, and that they represent a population that had migrated to the Caspian region and thence farther west from Inner Asia.

Regarding these theories, we may wholly agree with Alemany's sensible opinion that it would be a gross mistake to correlate the ethnonyms from different periods surviving in the language of the most diverse cultures merely because they sound similar³⁹⁷. Still, this is what most theories are actually based on. The pronunciation of Archaic and Old Chinese is in itself a matter of controversy. The meaning of the different ethnonyms is unclear, both in the Chinese and in the Greek and Roman sources. Most identifications are based on genuine (or assumed) similarities of pronunciation. The single exception is the report that the name Yancai was changed to Alanja, which should be considered more seriously. In this case, however, we should bear in mind that this event took place, either by the Caspian Sea, or the Aral Sea. Ethnonyms do not denote closed tribal societies among the nomads. The rise of a particular tribe, the emergence or collapse of an extensive »empire« occurred rapidly on the steppe. Frequently, the appearance or, conversely, the disappearance of a charismatic leader from the stage of history was all that led to an event of this type. Viewed from this perspective, it would be hardly surprising if the Alans, who had already set off on their Trans-Caucasian expedition around 35 AD (and had reached the shores of the Caspian Sea), had subjugated the Yancai and all its peoples. The role of the Alans in this coalition or, better said, the actual participation of the Alans as an ethnic group in this coalition remains controversial. When the sources mention Alans or when they are referred to in connection with various historical events, we must be aware that we can never be quite certain whether the term Alan is an umbrella term for the peoples in the Alan

³⁹³ Similar to the identification of all the other places mentioned in the text, this one is also debated. For an overview of the different opinions, see Skripkin 2001, 29.

³⁹⁴ Vičurin 1950, 229: «Владение Яньцай переименовалось Аланья; состоит в зависимости от Кангюя [...] Обыкновения и одяние народа сходны с кангюйскими.» («The land of Yancai has changed its name to A-lan-ja, and is a dependency of Kangju. [...] Their ways of life and dress are the same as those of Kangju.») (Translated from the Russian: Istvanovits/Kulcsár/Seleanu).

³⁹⁵ The name Kangju appears in the *Avesta* and also in Ptolemy's work (around 100 AD). There have been attempts to identify Kangju with Chozm. Kangju can most likely be located in the area between the Karatau Mountains and the Ču and Talas Rivers (Tolstov 1948b, 244). The name Kangju is sometimes derived from the Khotanese-Saka language, with the meaning »leather clad men« or »men clad in leather armour«. The linguistic and archaeological evidence would suggest that early Kangju (the Kaunči I archaeological culture) can be identified

with the middle reaches of the Syr Darya and that the late Saka were the main ethnic component of its population. At the time of its greatest expansion, Kangju extended to the Aral region and the interfluvium of Syr Darya and Amu Darya. Although late Kangju (the Kaunči II archaeological culture) had lost ground politically, it preserved its ethnic composition and culture (Litvinskij 1968, 22-23).

³⁹⁶ Alemany 2000, 398-399. It has been suggested that the Asi, appearing as As by the Caspian Sea, were part of the Aorsian tribal alliance from the 3rd century BC to 30 AD. The Alans rose to become the leading tribe after the disintegration of the Aorsian tribal alliance. Larger groups of the Asi had perhaps moved from Kangju westward at this time, where they mixed with the Alans, their western brethren (Vásáry 2003, 41). Other theories assume that Asi and Alans are two names given to the same population and that the people described as the inhabitants of Kangju are not identical with Asi appearing in the later sources from the 7th century (Fejős 2001).

³⁹⁷ Alemany 2000, 401-412.

tribal alliance or whether it denotes the »genuine« Alans after whom the coalition was named. (The same holds true for every nomadic people, such as the Scythians, the Saka, the Massagetae, the Sarmatians, the Huns, the Turks, etc.)

The Origins of the Alans in the Light of the Archaeological Sources

In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising that Sarmatian studies focused on Bactria and the Altaj as the possible homeland of the new archaeological material appearing in the Middle Sarmatian Age which, in view of the parallels, could be associated with the Alans.

In order to illustrate the confusion in this field of research, suffice it here to mention that Jacenko listed seven different hypotheses on the origins of the Alans: 1) the Scythian version; 2) the Aorsian version; 3) the Massagetae version; 4) the Altaj version; 5) the Yüeh-chih-Tocharian version; 6) the Wusun version; and 7) the nomadic warrior elite version (i. e. an elite transcending ethnic groups). He proposed an eighth version, a combination of the above. In his view, three phases can be distinguished in the Alan ethnogenesis and suggested a Wusun-proto-Alanic-Kangju sequence³⁹⁸.

The finds from the renowned Pazyryk kurgans in the Altaj (**fig. 115**) dated to the 5th-3rd centuries BC were identified as the archaeological heritage of the Yüeh-chih³⁹⁹. Certain elements of the burial rite are regularly quoted as parallels to the funerary practices of the Middle Sarmatian Age. Another major find assemblage has also been associated with both Pazyryk and the Middle Sarmatian Age: the assemblage from Tillia Tepe in Bactria (**figs 116-117**), dating from the turn of the millennium or slightly later⁴⁰⁰. In fact, the similarities are largely superficial and can only be noted in the most widespread elements of the burial rite. Although »Sarmatoid« elements can be distinguished in the finds of the Bactrian burials, these are insufficient for a reliable ethnic attribution⁴⁰¹.

Returning to the Greek and Latin sources, their most striking trait is the uncertainty concerning the origins of the Alans:

[...] along the entire coast of Maeotis are the lazyges and the Rhoxolani; more toward the interior from these are the Amaxobi and the Scythian Alani⁴⁰².

Irrespective of how Ptolemy's report is dated, the important point is that he described the Alans as Scythians. Much later, Ammianus Marcellinus compared them to the Massagetae: »[...] Alani, who were formerly called the Massagetae«⁴⁰³. It would appear that it is not mere chance that the writers of Antiquity associated the Alans with the Scythians and the Massagetae. Considering the linguistic evidence, according to which a direct genealogical link can be established between the Scythians, the Sauromatae, the Sarmatians, the Alans and the Ossets, we must again recall the scenario outlined in the previous chapters that the similarities or the kinship between these languages reflect a common ancestry and the different temporal forms of a northern Iranian cultural unit.

It has been shown in the above that an Alan presence can be assumed in the northern Pontic from the 1st century AD. It is possible that alongside the Siraci and the Aorsi, the Alans had also participated in the war between the Romans and the Parthians for the throne of Armenia. Their appearance in Europe can be

³⁹⁸ Jacenko 1993a.

³⁹⁹ Rudenko 1960, 176.

⁴⁰⁰ See **fig. 61** for the location of Tillia Tepe.

⁴⁰¹ Glebov/Parusimov 2000, 71-73.

⁴⁰² Ptolem III.5.

⁴⁰³ Ammian XXXI.2.12.



Fig. 115 Detail of the felt carpet from Kurgan 5 at Pazyryk. – (After Zolotyev 2001, fig. 20).

linked to their Caucasian presence. The richly furnished kurgans of the Golden Cemetery and the Zubovskij-Vozdviženskaja group (fig. 92) indicate that they had gained control of the Kuban region (or at least a part of it), perhaps when the Aorsi and the Siraci were preoccupied with their fight against each other in the war waged by Mithridates VIII.

We have seen that, according to the most widely accepted views⁴⁰⁴, the Alans' central territory lay in the Lower Don region, which was an area having cultural contacts with the Carpathian Basin during the 2nd century⁴⁰⁵. The lavish burials mentioned above were uncovered in this region. The best parallels to the new finds can be quoted from Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. Skripkin, the expert on the Sarmatians of the Volga region and a renowned scholar of contemporary Sarmatian studies, attempted the identification of the archaeological heritage of the Alan commoners⁴⁰⁶. Like other archaeologists, he believed that the Middle Sarmatian culture could be linked to the Alans (or the tribal alliance led by the Alans). From

⁴⁰⁴ First proposed by Raev 1986, 58-70.

⁴⁰⁶ Skripkin 1990.

⁴⁰⁵ Kulcsár 2000.

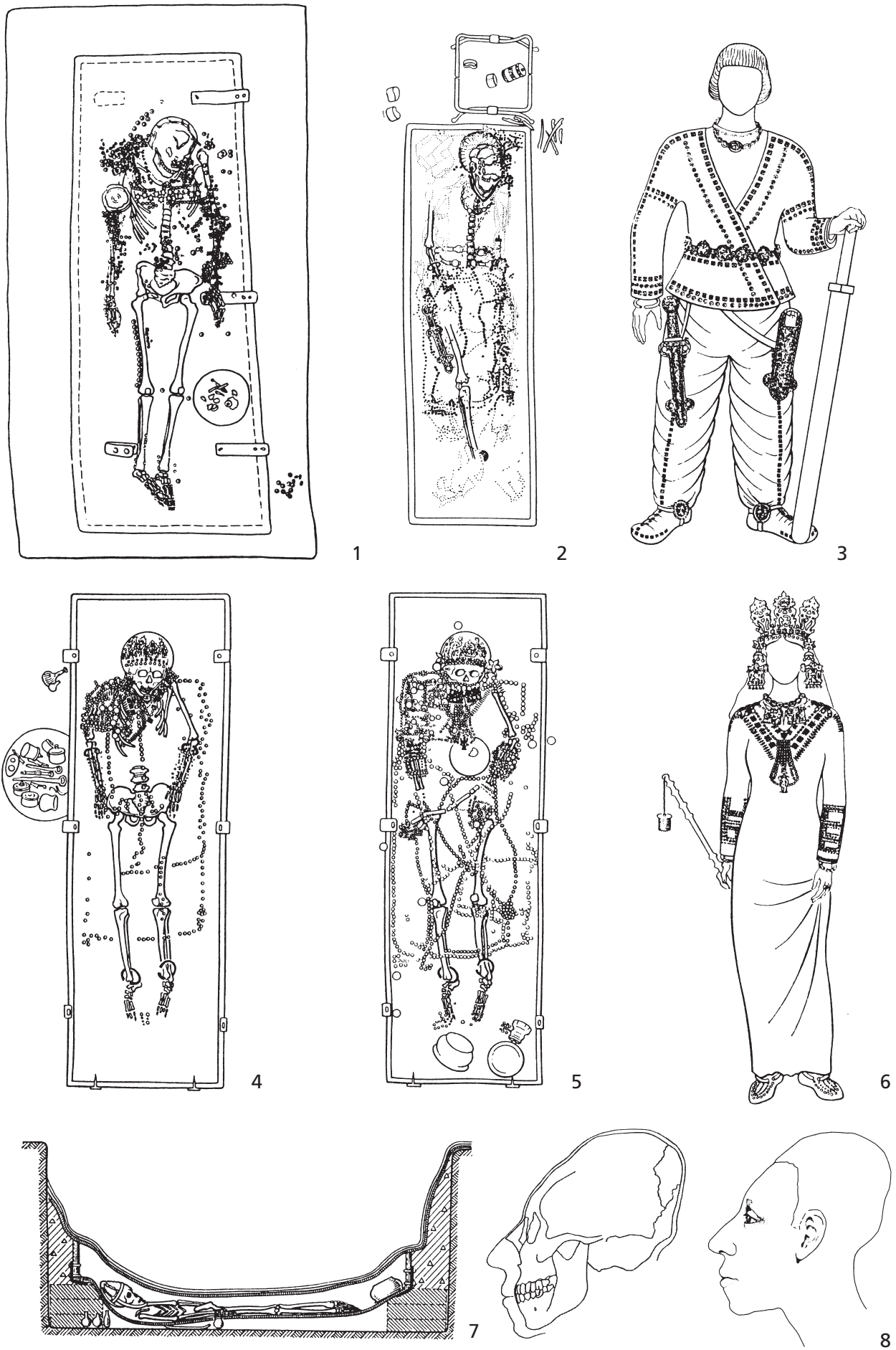


Fig. 116 Tilia Tepe. – 1 Grave 1. – 2-3 Grave 4. – 4-8 Grave 6. – (After Sarianidi 1989, figs 13. 30. 32. 40-41. 46).



Fig. 117 Gold finds from Tilia Tepe. – (After Afghanistan 2006, figs 61. 108. 115. 140).

his examination of the Sarmatian finds east of the Don dating from between the 3rd century BC and the 2nd century AD, he concluded that the major changes in the artefactual material and the burial rite marking the emergence of the Middle Sarmatian culture occurred around the turn of the millennium. Seeing that the Alans gained a foothold on the European steppe roughly simultaneously with the spread of Middle Sarmatian culture, a connection can be assumed between the two⁴⁰⁷.

One cornerstone of this theory is the resemblance between the Middle Sarmatian elite graves and the royal burials uncovered at Pazyryk (**fig. 115**)⁴⁰⁸. However, as mentioned above, the burial rites differ and only have a few elements in common, and even these elements are distributed widely, meaning that no particular significance can be attached to them. While the grave assemblages from Tillia Tepe, dating from the turn of the millennium and the early 1st century AD, share several similarities with both the Pazyryk burials and the graves of the Middle Sarmatian period, the ethnic attribution of the finds runs into several difficulties. There is a remarkable resemblance between the Tillia Tepe burials and the funerary rites of the sedentary Hsiung-nu. The deceased were laid to rest in wooden coffins draped with textiles and placed in rectangular grave pits without a kurgan erected over them. The burials are usually north to south orientated, with a few aligned east to west. The grave finds reflect the wide currency of the animal style. Several traits of the Tillia Tepe burials have their counterparts in the Deristuj group of the Hsiung-nu of the 2nd-1st centuries BC living beyond Lake Bajkal (Ivolga, Deristuj). The secretly conducted funeral characterising the Tillia Tepe burials was alien to the Scythian-Sarmatian world. At the same time, the royal burials of northern Afghanistan cannot be linked to the Hsiung-nu because the deceased buried in the former were Europids, even if the Transbaikalian Hsiung-nu elements were stronger than the Central Asian nomadic features. What must be noted is that Tillia Tepe and its finds were alien to the region's cultural milieu (**figs 116-117**). In this connection mainly the luxury items and the polychrome animal style must be mentioned: these were not characteristic of Bactria during the Kushan period.

Following the fall of the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom (140-130 BC, and the appearance of the nomads on its borders in 145 BC), kurgan cemeteries with several hundred burials appear in certain regions of Central Asia. Many of these burials have well-expressed nomadic, among them »Sarmatoid«, features, such as niche graves, catacombs, the meridional orientation of the deceased, while the grave goods comprise Early Sarmatian weapon types, a few mirrors, buckles and the like⁴⁰⁹. This material has nothing in common with the Pazyryk burials or the Middle Sarmatian culture. It would appear that the nomads overrunning the Graeco-Bactrian Kingdom formed a colourful conglomerate, which included both the eastern Saka and the Yüeh-chih (mixed with the Hsiung-nu), and northern nomads of Sarmatian type⁴¹⁰. It is hardly surprising, then, that Skripkin assumed a dynamic Sarmatian thrust both westward and eastward. He pointed out that the number of Sarmatian burials in the South Ural region and north-western Kazakhstan declined perceptibly, while assemblages exhibiting strong ties with the Sarmatian finds of the Volga-Ural steppe appear in the east, up to the Bukhara area (e. g. the Kuyu Mazar and the Ljavandak cemeteries)⁴¹¹.

Dealing with the later half of the Middle Sarmatian Age, we have already pointed out that the most distinctive element of the burial rite, the diagonal deposition of the body in the grave (**fig. 75**), was already practised by the Sauromatians in the Prohorovka period, meaning that the population of the European steppe in the 1st-2nd centuries AD did not bring this custom from the Altaj (Pazyryk) or Central Asia, as has been repeatedly suggested. Most burials of this type are concentrated in the South Ural region in the 5th-3rd cen-

407 Skripkin 2001, 19.

408 Raev 1989.

409 The Orlat cemetery near Samarkand, whose finds indicate a cultural tradition arriving with the nomadic waves of the 2nd century, can also be assigned here. The intriguing bone

plaques bearing various battle scenes will also be referred to in the following chapters (Pugačenkova 1989, 122-154).

410 Skripkin 2000. – Glebov/Parusimov 2000, 72.

411 Skripkin 1997, 21-22.

turies BC, whence this practice spread to neighbouring territories. It is unclear whether the widespread distribution of the rite should be attributed to migration or to shared elements of the beliefs current in western Siberia, the Aral region and the Lower Don region. We know that a major Sarmatian expansion, that of the Early Sarmatians, proceeded from the South Ural region. The archaeological record would suggest that a similar phenomenon can be assumed in the case of the Alans.

Interestingly enough, several traits of Middle Sarmatian culture can be traced to Sauromatian culture, rather than the Early Sarmatian one. The »resurfacing« elements include diagonal burials, the *dromos* (passage) leading to the burial chamber, the sacrificial objects deposited by the edge of the grave, intact mirrors instead of broken ones and the appearance of archaic artefacts, such as cauldrons, sometimes deposited in pairs (fig. 90). Among these phenomena, »gynecocracy« (rich female burials) and the rebirth of the animal style (fig. 91), etc., are to be noted. These elements could still be documented at the onset of the Early Sarmatian Age, but gradually disappeared and then re-appeared again during the Middle Sarmatian Age. One possible explanation is that a group living on the eastern fringes of the Sauromatian-Early Sarmatian cultural region preserved these ancient traditions and then disseminated them at the turn of the millennium. At the same time, the suggestion that this group occupied the most favourable location for migrating eastward and had expanded toward Bactria, where they had easy access to various commodities (be it Chinese mirrors or new weapon types) is no more than speculation.

It is uncertain whether the Alans ultimately migrated from Central Asia or whether they evolved locally. Raev noted that there was no genetic connection between the 1st and 2nd century royal burials of the Lower Don region and the earlier Early Sarmatians⁴¹², while the same cannot be said of the commoners' graves of the Middle Sarmatian Age, suggesting that the population of the preceding period had not moved away and had become part of the new Alan tribal alliance (Alanorsi).

Several examples can be cited from medieval nomadic history that after a family group or tribe had been subdued by another, the vanquished »vassal« tribe nomadised with the new lords. Its members performed various tasks, they raised troops and were incorporated into the kindred/tribal organisation of their conquerors. A new ethnic group generally emerged after the assimilation, one good example being the Golden Horde⁴¹³. A similar process is assumed in the Middle Sarmatian Age, namely that the newly-arrived tribe (or tribal alliance) overpowered the region's local population.

In this connection it is suffice to also mention Nagler's and Čipirova's hypothesis, according to which the Alans should not be considered as an identifiable ethnic group and ethnonym, but as a supra-tribal social layer characteristic for nomads: a mounted military elite. If we accept this theory, it would explain the lack of clear distinction between Sarmatians and Alans in the literary sources⁴¹⁴. This idea would explain a lot of unanswered questions and would be able to determine the direction of further research.

The sources record the destabilisation of the Sarmatian world in the early 1st century AD. The South Ural and Volga region, the Lower Don region and a part of the northern Pontic came under Middle Sarmatian (Alan) rule. We know from Strabo's description quoted above that the Early Sarmatians moved westward: the lazyges settled by the Danube; the Roxolani, the Aorsi and some Alan groups migrated to the Danube-Dnieper interfluvium. At the same time, the Siraci appeared on the left bank of the Lower Dnieper, if Pliny's information is reliable. In the Kuban region, the Sarmatians disappeared from the steppe extending along the right bank in the mid-1st century AD and began to bury their dead in the Golden Cemetery (figs 112-114) by the river's middle reaches. No matter which tribe the burials in the cemetery are associated with, the grave goods display strong affinities with Central Asia. These events, occurring more or less simultaneously,

412 Raev 1985, 128-129.

414 Nagler/Čipirova 1985.

413 See, e.g. Mongol.

reflect a chain of events brought in motion by the dynamic power shifts among the nomads of the regions east of the Volga up to the Chinese border⁴¹⁵.

In sum, there was considerable restlessness among the Sarmatians of the Middle Sarmatian Age. Power relations changed and the Alans gradually assumed control over the tribal alliance. It seems quite certain that they appeared in the regions east of the Caspian Sea. The very fact that the earlier Yancai began to be called after the Alans suggests that a powerful new group, the Alans, appeared in the region, extending up to northern Afghanistan. The foreignness of Tilia Tepe in its milieu can perhaps be explained by the rise of intrusive rulers with whom the Alans possibly had some contact. The lack of Mongoloid elements also suggests that the Alans did not arrive in the Sarmatian lands from the east, but had rather gradually assumed a leading role within the Sarmatian tribal alliance. An origin in Central Asia can hardly be reconciled with the designation of the Roxolani as »white Alans«, reflecting their strong ties with the Alans⁴¹⁶. It seems to be more probable that the westward and eastward expansion began at roughly the same time, and probably issued from the South Ural region.

The Lords of the Steppe: The Alans in the 2nd-4th Centuries AD

Assuming that the Alans seized the leadership of the Sarmatian tribal alliance during the 1st century AD, we find that the nomadic empire extended its power to the immense territory between the Volga and the Danube, up to the South Bug and the Lower Danube, and perhaps even as far as the Hungarian Plain⁴¹⁷. The Alans' sway extended to the region between the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya, the border of Kangju territory in the east. The geographers of Antiquity told a similar story. Ptolemy recorded that the Alans lived in both Asia and Europe, that is, on both sides of the Don. He designated them as Scythian Alans in both territories. Dionysius Periegetes, a rough contemporary of Ptolemy, located the Alans' land from the Danube to the Pontic, somewhere west of the Dnieper (fig. 118)⁴¹⁸. At the same time, several other peoples were also mentioned in these regions, and the lists of these peoples suggests that there was a larger zone in the territory called Asiatic Sarmatia (between the Volga and the Don) where there were no Alans, only a people called Asaei (Ἀσαίοι) of controversial origin⁴¹⁹.

The distribution of royal burials would imply a polycentric power (fig. 92) whose main centre lay in the Don delta (Hohlač: fig. 93; Sadovjy: fig. 94; Kobjakovo Kurgan 10: fig. 95; Vysočino Kurgan VII.28: fig. 96; Dači: figs 97-100), with local (ethnic?) centres in the Lower Volga region (Žutovo Kurgan 28.1, Kosika) and the southern Ukraine (Sokolova Mogila, Zaporožskij Kurgan, Porogi: figs 81. 102; Nogajči: figs 103-105, the latter the single representative of this burial type in the Crimea)⁴²⁰.

The Alans played an important role in the history of the Caucasus from the moment of their arrival. From the first uncertain reference dating from 65 BC, there is an almost constant stream of information about this people in the historical texts of the Trans-Caucasian lands, namely Georgia (Iberia, called Hyrcania in some sources) and Armenia. The passages describing the Alan incursion in the 1st century AD

415 Glebov/Parusimov 2000, 70-78, with further literature.

416 The role of the Aorsi seems even more unlikely because they were major political actors by the 1st century BC and thus their identification with the Alans raises serious problems.

417 The aspect of the Carpathian Basin shall be discussed at greater length in the section »The First Sarmatians on the Great Hungarian Plain« focusing on the earliest finds from the Great Hungarian Plain and the golden plaque bearing a tamga sign from Dunaharaszti (fig. 190).

418 Alemany 2000, 86-87. The map presented in fig. 118 has the Alans on the left bank of the Dnieper. Periegetes' text suggests that he was told that the Alans lived on the right bank. A systematic re-assessment of the data contained in the works of ancient geographers is long overdue.

419 Ptolem V. 8. – Bachrach 1973, 10-12. – Alemany 2000, 97-101.

420 Glebov/Parusimov 2000, 77.

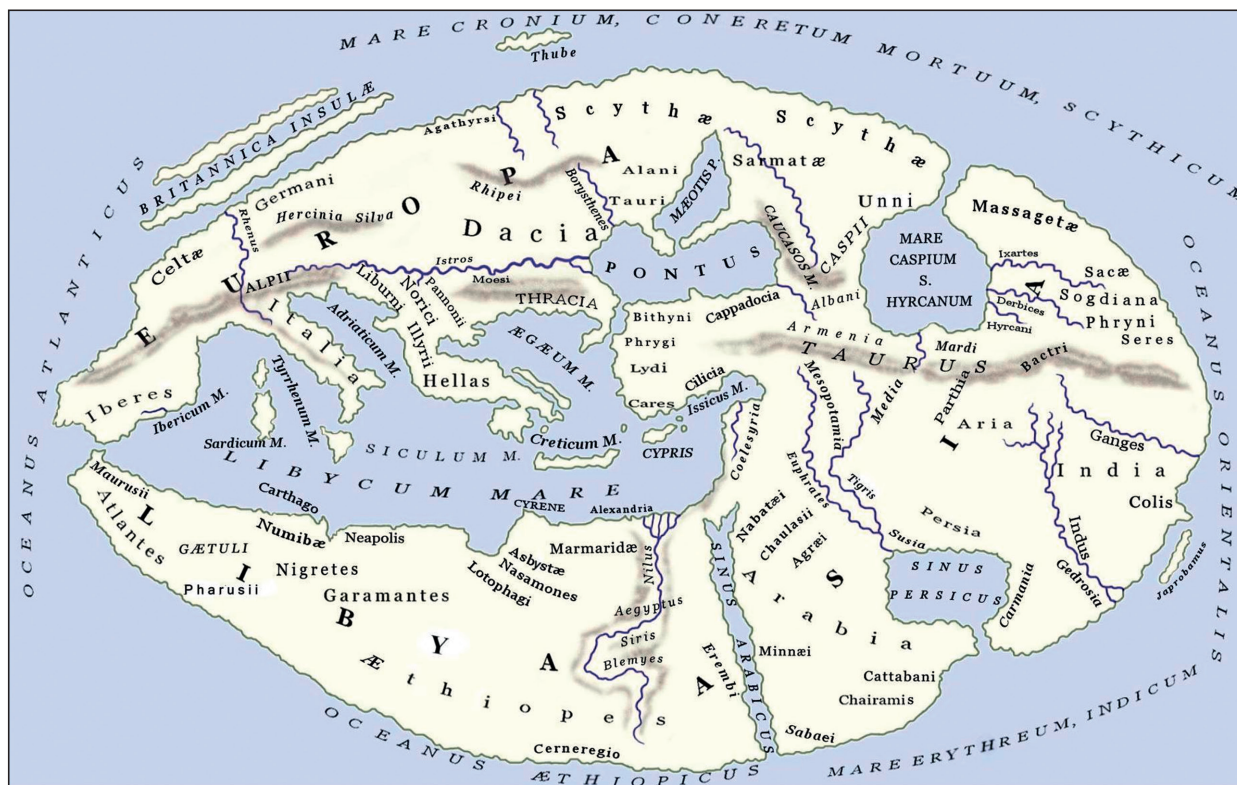


Fig. 118 Reconstruction of Dionysius Periegetes' map. – (After [www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/Ancient Web Pages/117.html](http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/Ancient%20Web%20Pages/117.html) [5.4.2012]).

have already been quoted in the preceding chapter. At the time when Trajan succeeded in strengthening the Caucasian border, the Alans («Sauromatians») are mentioned, together with the Iberians and Albans, among the subjugated peoples⁴²¹. Following their traces, we must evoke the events of 135 AD when, during the conflict apparently provoked by the Iberian king Pharasmenes II, they threatened Armenia and Cappadocia after having overrun Albania and Media⁴²². The attack was probably conducted on two fronts. On the southern front, the Parthian(?) king Vologaesus ameliorated the Alans' aggression by offering them gifts; while on the northern front, the Alans found themselves facing Arrian's army (perhaps on the Erzurum Plain)⁴²³. In his *Ectaxis* («Order of Battle Against the Alans»), the propraetor Arrian recommended sending two legions, four alae and at least twelve cohorts against them, as well as the deployment of artillery and allied troops and catapults. We do not know whether the Alans and Arrian's army ever met in battle: it is possible that the whole affair was no more than the Romans' show of strength on the Empire's borders⁴²⁴.

The Alans meant trouble and not only on the Roman's eastern front. The sources from after the 1st century AD indicate that this tribe was frequently one of the belligerents in the clashes between the Romans and the barbarian peoples in the European wars as well.

Antoninus Pius (138-161) was said to have «many a time sharply checked the Alani in their raiding»⁴²⁵. This report either referred to a military event west of the Dnieper, or an Iberian victory between 140 and 145

421 Bosworth 1977, with the relevant sources.

422 Dio LXIX.15.1-2.

423 Mitford 1980, 1202.

424 Alemany 2000, 79-85. For a discussion of the historical background and a critical review of the sources, see Bosworth 1977.

425 SHA Ant. V.5.

(Caucasian Iberia was at this time under the protectorate of Rome)⁴²⁶. The Alans also crop up among the peoples participating in the Marcomannic Wars⁴²⁷.

One curious aspect of Roman-Alan relations is that Emperor Maximinus (235-238) was of Alanic stock on his mother's side:

He was born in a village in Thrace bordering on the barbarians, indeed of a barbarian father and mother, the one, men say, being of the Goths, the other of the Alani. At any rate, they say that his father's name was Micca, his mother's Ababa. And in his early days Maximinus himself freely disclosed these names [...] ⁴²⁸.

Around 217-218, after his discharge from the Roman army but well before he ascended the imperial throne, Maximinus purchased land in Thracia and traded with the Goths. In Thracia, »the Alani, or at least those of them who came to the river-bank [of the Danube] continually exchanged gifts with him and hailed him as friend« ⁴²⁹.

In 242, Emperor Gordian III »had been beaten by the Alani in a disorderly battle on the plains of Philippi [in Macedonia] and forced to retreat« ⁴³⁰. We know that Emperor Aurelian also fought against the Alans because he paraded Alan captives as part of his triumph⁴³¹.

Leonti Mroveli, the Georgian chronicler, recounts a roughly contemporaneous event. King Amazasp II (Arsacids dynasty) of Georgia, a contemporary of the Sassanid ruler Shapur I (242-272), had clashed with an immense Ovs (Alan) army, which had set out to destroy Mcheta, the capital of Georgia. The Georgian king defeated the enemy and even killed the Alan king. The next year he allied himself with the Armenians and overran the lands of the Ovs (Alans). Moses of Chorene records that Askhen, the wife of King Trdat III the Great (c. 293), was the daughter of Askhadar, King of the Alans⁴³².

The Armenian chronicler, Pavstos Buzand (also known as Faustus of Byzantium) recounted that during the reign of King Khosrov Kotak II (330-338), the king of the Mazkuts (who can probably be identified with the Massagetae and thus the Alans) attacked Armenia with a large army assembled from many peoples and plundered the kingdom for a whole year. The Armenian general, who had been in Greece, finally returned with his companions and »defeated and annihilated the armies of the Alans, the Mazk'owt'k, the Huns and other peoples« ⁴³³.

Another chapter of the chronicle recounts the war between Arsaces II and the Sassanid ruler Shapur II (359-367/8). At one point in the war, which ended with the conquest of Armenia by the Persians, the Armenian general »called the Huns and the Alans to his assistance and arrived in aid of the King of Armenia against the Persians« ⁴³⁴. The Georgian chronicle also related this event, describing how the attack of the Caucasian peoples was organised by the Georgians (King Aspagur), who were experienced in these affairs. However,

⁴²⁶ Alemany 2000, 20, with further literature.

⁴²⁷ SHA Marc.Ant. XXII.1. A vague passage of Cassius Dio (LXXII.2) complements this information by reporting that Commodus granted peace to the peoples he had defeated in battle, to the Buri and others (ἄλλων), received hostages from them and compelled them to take an oath that they would not approach the borders of Dacia for a strip of five miles. It has been suggested that the expression »others« (ἄλλων) is a slip of the pen and should be substituted with »Alan« (Ἀλανών). So this information cannot be considered to be absolutely authentic (Balla 1965, 144; Mócsy 1974, 102; Alemany 2000, 86).

⁴²⁸ Alemany 2000, 20-21, who can be credited with assembling the most complete collection of texts pertaining to the Alans,

has many reservations concerning the authors of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. He considers several references to be dubious, such as the Alans' participation in the Marcomannic Wars, Maximinus' Alan ancestry, the defeat of Gordian by the Alans and the list of captive peoples in Aurelian's triumphal procession.

⁴²⁹ SHA Maxim. I.5-6, IV.4.

⁴³⁰ SHA Gord. XXXIV.3-4.

⁴³¹ SHA Aur. XXXIII.4.

⁴³² Mroveli 1979, 35-36. 72-73. The same event is dated some sixty years earlier by Alemany 2000, 7.5, 362.

⁴³³ Alemany 2000, 292.

⁴³⁴ Alemany 2000, 293.

the Persians defeated them once the Georgians and Armenians were left without allies. The Georgians were compelled to send an embassy to the Ovs to ask for their help, but the envoys were unsuccessful⁴³⁵.

In the light of these events, it is hardly surprising that some scholars believe that the prototypes of cloisonné jewellery were disseminated by the Sarmatians, at first among the goldsmiths of the Bosphorus and, later, among the jewellers of the Huns. The origins of this technique can be sought in Persia or nearby Iberia (fig. 119), i. e. in the Trans-Caucasia, a possibility also confirmed by the fact that the earliest known pieces were discovered in the graves of Iberian nobles⁴³⁶.

In the 4th century, several sources mentioned the Alans, especially in geographic descriptions. However, these passages add little to our earlier knowledge of this people⁴³⁷.

The most informative source for the Alans is Ammianus Marcellinus, who shall be quoted at greater length, because he recorded, not only various events in the history of the Alans, but also made a wealth of ethnographic observations:

The Danube, which is greatly increased by other rivers falling into it, passes through the territory of the Sauromatae, which extends as far as the river Don, the boundary between Asia and Europe⁴³⁸. On the other side of this river the Alani inhabit the enormous deserts of Scythia, deriving their own name from the mountains around; and they, like the Persians, having gradually subdued all the bordering nations by repeated victories, have united them to themselves, and comprehended them under their own name. [...] And in this way the whole of that region to the north-east, till you come to the Chinese, is uninhabited. On the other side the Alani again extend to the east, near the territories of the Amazons, and are scattered among many populous and wealthy nations, stretching to the parts of Asia which, as I am told, extend up to the Ganges, a river which passes through the country of the Indians, and falls into the Southern Ocean.

Then the Alani, being thus divided among the two quarters of the globe (the various tribes which make up the whole nation it is not worth while to enumerate), although widely separated, wander, like the Nomades, over enormous districts. But in the progress of time all these tribes came to be united under one generic appellation, and are called Alani. They have no cottages, and never use the plough, but live solely on meat and plenty of milk, mounted on their waggons, which they cover with a curved awning made of the bark of trees, and then drive

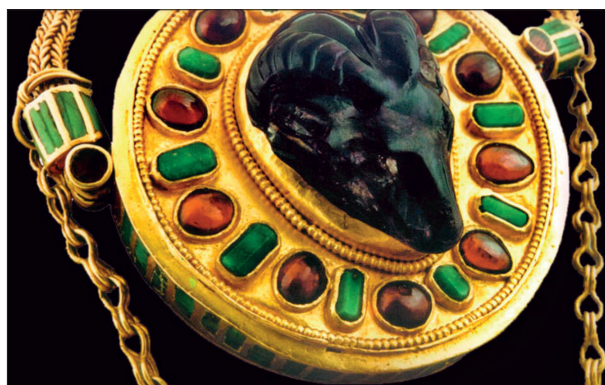


Fig. 119 Detail of a gold necklace set with amethyst, garnet and glass paste from Armaziskhevi in Georgia from the 2nd-3rd century AD. – (After Treasures 2009, 44 fig. 1).

⁴³⁵ Mroveli 1979, 37. 73-74.

⁴³⁶ Ščukin/Bažan 1994. At the same time we have to keep in mind that this theory is debated, and Hellenistic traditions are emphasised (Treister 2004, 192-195. 208).

⁴³⁷ Pseudo-Callysthenes, Julius Valerius, Hegesippus, Festus Rufus Avienus and the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. For an overview, see Bachrach 1973, 16-17.

⁴³⁸ The Alans are located in distant regions in other passages, probably because Ammianus drew his information from many different sources, such as the works of Herodotus, Ptolemy and Pompeius Trogus. He described the Alans as appearing over an extensive area, from the northern Pontic steppe to the region north-west of the Caspian Sea (Alemany 2000, 34-35).



Fig. 120 »Carrying [...] their cities with them in their wagons« (Ammian XXXI.2.18). Clay wagon model from Kerč from the 1st-2nd century AD in the Hermitage. – (After Sokrovišča 2008b, no. 76).

them through their boundless deserts. And when they come to any pasture-land, they pitch their waggons in a circle, and live like a herd of beasts, eating up all the forage carrying, as it were, their cities with them in their wagons. In them the husbands sleep with their wives, in them their children are born and brought up; these waggons, in short, are their perpetual habitation, and wherever they fix them, that place they look upon as their home [fig. 120]. They drive before them their flocks and herds to their pasturage; and, above all other cattle, they are especially careful of their horses. The fields in that country are always green, and are interspersed with patches of fruit trees, so that, wherever they go, there is no dearth either of food for themselves or fodder for their cattle. And this is caused by the moisture of the soil, and the number of the rivers which flow through these districts. All their old people, and especially all the weaker sex, keep close to the waggons, and occupy themselves in the lighter employments. But the young men, who from their earliest childhood are trained to the use of horses, think it beneath them to walk. They are also all trained by careful discipline of various sorts to



Fig. 121 »They boast with more pride of having killed a man; they esteem the scalps which they have torn from the heads of those whom they have slain, which they put as trappings and ornaments on their war horses« (Ammian XXXI.2.22). Detail of one of the bone plaques from Orlat near Samarkand. – (Courtesy of A. M. Savin / A. S. Semënov; drawing A. M. Savin).

become skilful warriors. And this is the reason why the Persians, who are originally of Scythian extraction, are very skilful in war.

Nearly all the Alani are men of great stature and beauty; their hair is somewhat yellow, their eyes are terribly fierce; the lightness of their armour renders them rapid in their movements; and they are in every respect equal to the Huns, only more civilized in their food and their manner of life. They plunder and hunt as far as the Sea of Azov and the Cimmerian Bosphorus, ravaging also Armenia and Media.

And as ease is a delightful thing to men of a quiet and placid disposition, so danger and war are a pleasure to the Alani, and among them that man is called happy who has lost his life in battle. For those who grow old, or who go out of the world from accidental sicknesses, they pursue with bitter reproaches as degenerate and cowardly. Nor is there anything of which they boast with more pride than of having killed a man: and the most glorious spoils they esteem the scalps which they have torn from the heads of those whom they have slain, which they put as trappings and ornaments on their war-horses [fig. 121]. Nor is there any temple or shrine seen in their country, nor even any cabin thatched with straw, their only idea of religion being to plunge a naked sword into the ground with barbaric ceremonies, and then they worship that with great respect, as Mars, the presiding deity of the regions over which they wander.

They presage the future in a most remarkable manner; for they collect a number of straight twigs of osier, then with certain secret incantations they separate them from one another on particular days; and from them they learn clearly what is about to happen. They have no idea of slavery, inasmuch as they themselves are all born of noble families; and those whom even now they appoint to be judges are always men of proved experience and skill in war⁴³⁹.

Ammianus is also our most reliable source on how the Huns defeated the Alans and made them their allies, opening a new chapter in their history⁴⁴⁰.

The Alans thus maintained a continuous presence in the written sources from their appearance, first in the east (in the Caucasus), and then, from the 2nd century onward, in the west (in the northern Pontic and the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire), either as mercenaries or the members of a barbarian coalition. There are many references to their infiltration into the population of various states and provinces through marriage or by other means – suffice it here to recall the Georgian-Ovs kinship, the Princess Sat'inik, Aspagur, the ruler of Georgia with an Iranian name, and Emperor Maximinus of half-Alanic stock. Their presence is amply illustrated by a Bosporan inscription from around 208 mentioning the main Alan interpreter⁴⁴¹.

THE LATE SARMATIAN AGE ON THE STEPPE (2ND-4TH CENTURIES)

Archaeology of the Late Sarmatian Age

In the preceding chapter we surveyed the impact of the Alans on the known historical events up to the onset of the Hun period as narrated in the written sources. Let us now see what we know about the period's archaeology on the steppe. Although Sarmatian culture underwent an immense transformation across its entire distribution, regional differences persisted despite the changes. The bulk of the population was still concentrated in the Don and Volga Valleys, while the find assemblages had already become scarcer in the South Ural region during the preceding period, probably in consequence of large-scale population outflows. The number of finds did not increase in the Late Sarmatian Age, either⁴⁴². The Sarmatian population of the Pontic appears to have declined during this period⁴⁴³. These changes did not affect all regions to the same extent. A sudden change occurred in the Ural region characterised by a relatively small population in the mid-2nd century in both the burial rites and the material culture, accompanied by the disappearance of earlier traditions. In the more westerly regions this was not so: old and new co-existed for a longer time⁴⁴⁴. Elements of the Late Sarmatian culture appeared in the Don-Volga interfluvium later than east of the Volga. The survival of regional differences is indicated by the fact that in the east, in the Lower Volga and the South Ural region, primary burials with their own kurgan account for 95 per cent of the burials, but for only 50 per cent in the Don-Volga interfluvium, while an exactly opposite tendency can be noted in the Pontic, reflected by the dominance of secondary burials dug into already existing kurgans and the visible decline of graves with a freshly-raised burial mound⁴⁴⁵.

439 Ammian XXXI.2.13-25.

440 The history of the Alans during the Hun period is discussed in the next chapter.

441 Minns 1913, 614 n. 2.

442 Pšeničnjuk 1983, 131.

443 Moškova 1989b, 191.

444 Moškova 1994, 22.

445 Moškova 1989b, 191. For an excellent overview, see Krivošeev/Skripkin 2006.

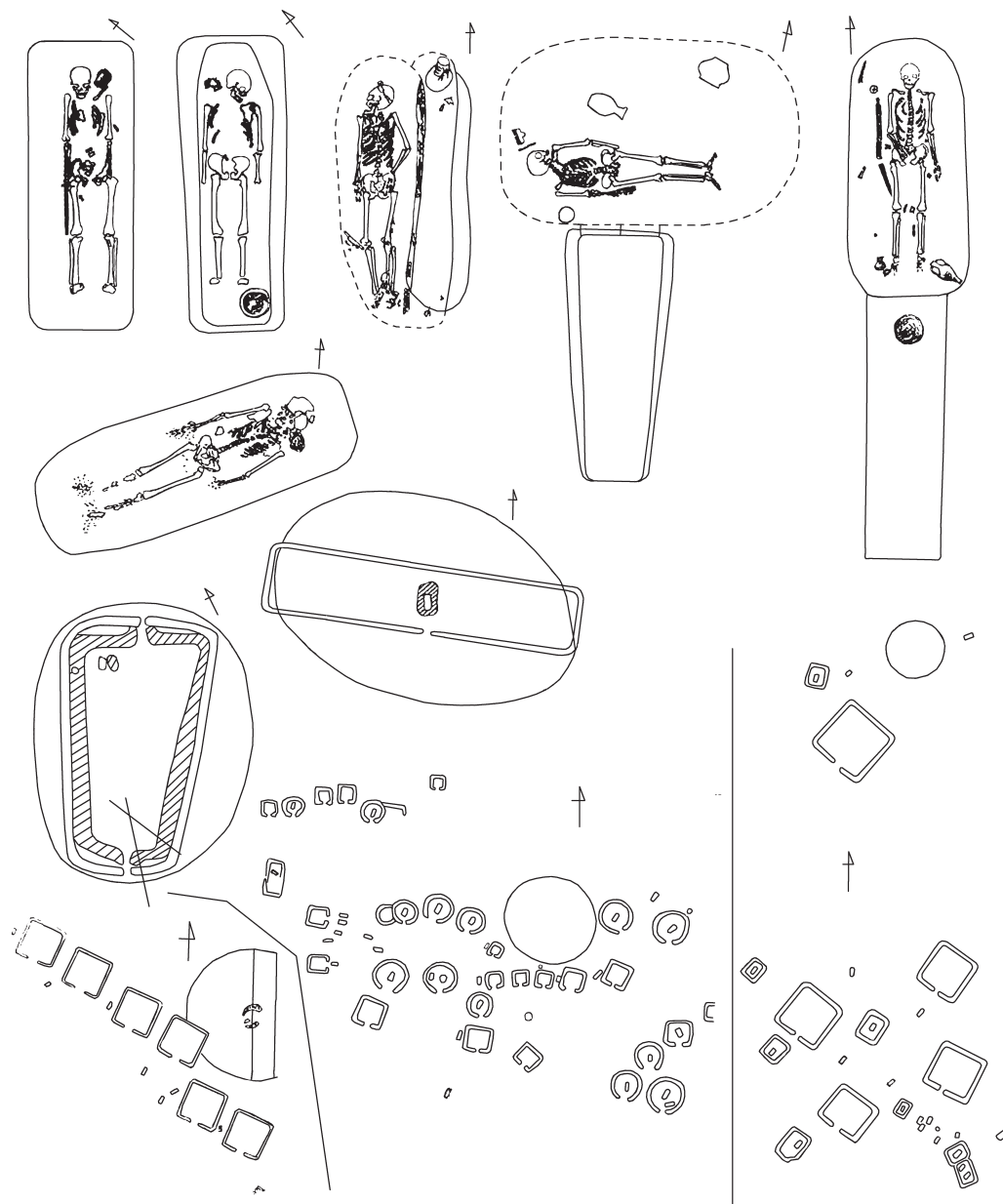


Fig. 122 Typical burials of the Late Sarmatian Age in the Ukraine. – (After Simonenko 2004, fig. 9).

Several smaller regional units have been distinguished within a larger region; thus, for example, four smaller groups in the Don-Volga interfluvium. Obviously, the earlier population of certain smaller regions did not mix with the newcomers to the same extent⁴⁴⁶.

Appearing in the mid-2nd century, the new culture in the Don region established itself by the close of the century. It was characterised by the north to south orientation of the deceased, who were laid to rest in narrow, rectangular niche graves. The niche graves of the Early and Middle Sarmatian Age differ markedly: in contrast to the wide shafts of the former, the latter had cramped, narrow entrance pits, reflecting a break in continuity in this respect too. The practice of skull deformation was widespread. Graves enclosed by ditches⁴⁴⁷, one of the hallmarks of the Sarmatians' burial rite in the Carpathian Basin, made their appearance in the 3rd-4th centuries.

⁴⁴⁶ Krivošeev/Skripkin 2006.

⁴⁴⁷ Bezuglov/Zaharov 1988.



Fig. 123 Sites of the period between the second half of the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century in the northern Pontic. – (After Simonenko 1999, fig. 37; map M. Ober, RGZM).

The appearance of Late Sarmatian culture west of the Don can be similarly noted from the mid-2nd century onward, with its spread falling into the century's later half. Cemeteries without kurgans appeared along the north-western Pontic coast at roughly the same time⁴⁴⁸. Narrow rectangular and oval grave pits predominated on the left bank of the Dnieper and in the region between the Dniester and the Danube. Catacombs and niche graves became the norm from the second half of the 3rd century until the mid-4th century. The custom of ringing the grave with a ditch, which in this region was restricted to the Prut-Dniester interfluvium, is also known from two cemeteries dated to the second half of the 1st century and first half of the 2nd century, although it only became widespread from the second half of the 2nd century. This practice can be documented up to the 4th century. Several cemeteries also contained rectangular ditches without a grave, whose single analogy can be quoted from the Middle Don region (fig. 122)⁴⁴⁹.

One striking phenomenon is that the Late Sarmatian burials are concentrated in two well-definable regions in the Ukraine: along the Danube and the Dniester in the west; and on the left bank of the Dnieper and in the Azov region in the east (fig. 123). The finds from the western region share many similarities with the assemblages from Hungary, while the material from the east is related to the finds from the Don and Volga region. This duality had become more pronounced by the end of the Late Sarmatian Age, from the second

⁴⁴⁸ This is generally explained by the Sarmatians' gradual abandonment of their nomadic lifestyle and their adoption of a sedentary one. Simonenko 1999, rejects this explanation, claiming that the burials in question were ploughed-up kurgan burials poorly observed in the field, indicated by the soil marks of differing colour above the grave.

⁴⁴⁹ Simonenko 1999, with further literature. Recently, we have also obtained data for the same phenomenon from the Hungarian Plain (Nyíregyháza-Felsőszima, excavation of Istvánovits, unpublished).



Fig. 124 Sites of the period between the second half of the 3rd century and the 4th century in the northern Pontic. – (After Simonenko 1999, fig. 38; map M. Ober, RGZM).

half of the 3rd century to the mid-4th century (**fig. 124**), when the central regions of the Ukraine were virtually depopulated⁴⁵⁰, an event usually linked to the Gothic Wars, despite the fact that the tendency can be noted from an earlier period⁴⁵¹ and cannot thus be solely ascribed to the Goths.

Several eastern elements can be distinguished in the material culture: these include stone (mainly semi-precious, e. g. chalcedony) pommels on the hilt of longswords (**fig. 125, 4. 9. 11. 17. 20-21**) and nephrite scabbard slides (**figs 125, 24; 126**)⁴⁵². The military leaders buried with these weapons, and with a distinctive harness set in addition, often had deformed skulls. Their graves are remarkably uniform and their burials form clearly definable regional clusters, one of which could be identified in the South Ural region, the other by the Lower Don⁴⁵³. Surprisingly enough, the westernmost occurrence of these burials has been reported from the Carpathian Basin (Vizedpuszta/Vizejdia, Hévizgyörk – **fig. 127**)⁴⁵⁴. Bezuglov, who first identified the Late Sarmatian aristocratic group, noted that in contrast to earlier the elite of the Don region who were buried with heavy gold jewellery and an elaborate costume trimmed with gold, the leaders of the period between the mid-2nd and the mid-3rd century apparently had an entirely different set of values, being less concerned with personal luxury and more with their horse harness and the craftsmanship (and reliability) of their weapons, as shown, for example, by the finds from the cemetery of Valovj 1, Kurgan 25, Grave 1

⁴⁵⁰ Simonenko 1994, 16-17.

⁴⁵¹ Simonenko 1999, figs 11. 37-38. The maps showing the distribution of Middle Sarmatian finds between the Dniester and the Dnieper reflect a dense occupation (**fig. 84**), while the distribution map for the second half of the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century has very few Sarmatian sites in the

same territory (**fig. 123**). Sarmatian sites are lacking from the second half of the 3rd century (**fig. 124**).

⁴⁵² The prototypes of the swords were identified in Bactria, in the Kushan lands and in Sogdia (Bezuglov 2000, 178-180).

⁴⁵³ Bezuglov 1997; 2000, 179.

⁴⁵⁴ Kulcsár 2000.



Fig. 126 Sword suspension loop of nephrite from Grave 1 of Kurgan 19 at Sladkovskij Cemetery dating from the 2nd-3rd century AD. – (After L'Or 2001, 246 no. 282).

(**fig. 128**). The uniformity of the weaponry reflects a sophisticated military hierarchy. A strict organisation of this type is perhaps an indication that they warred with a formidable adversary, such as the Roman Empire at the time of the Marcomannic Wars⁴⁵⁵. The appearance of new warriors affected the town of Tanais, too, as shown by the presence of north to south orientated graves containing the burials of individuals with deformed skull and the widespread appearance of a class of previously unencountered names of Iranian origin in the onomastic material⁴⁵⁶. The burials of the group disappear in the mid-3rd century and the nomadic graves in the Don region share many resemblances with the middle and north-eastern areas of the Caucasian foreland⁴⁵⁷. The 4th century find assemblages from the Lower Don region may have been affiliated with the Tanaitae Alans, a possibility suggested by Ammianus' remark that the Huns raided »the territories of the Alani, and especially of that tribe of them who border on the Gruthungi, and who are called Tanaitae«⁴⁵⁸ because (a) the burials are located by the Tanais, (b) they neighbour on the territory of the Černjahov culture, associated with the Goths, and (c) they can be dated to the 4th century. Members of the group were buried with cloisonné and polychrome pressed goldwork in catacombs (**fig. 129**). Various Černjahov-type artefacts, which were infrequent in the 3rd century, can be found in the 4th century more often among the grave goods of the Tanaitae (**fig. 130**)⁴⁵⁹.

The other novel finds of the Late Sarmatian Age include bone stiffening-plaques for large bows and arrowheads of eastern origin (**fig. 131**). Daggers and the structure of the harness ornaments (**fig. 128**) have their best counterparts in Central Asia, Iran and Gandhara (northern India, in the Kushan Empire)⁴⁶⁰. Their antecedents crop up earlier, already during the Middle Sarmatian Age. A few pottery wares of Central Asian

⁴⁵⁵ Bezuglov 1997, 138.

⁴⁵⁶ Krivošeev/Skripkin 2006, 132.

⁴⁵⁷ Bezuglov 1997, 138.

⁴⁵⁸ Ammian XXXI.3.1.

⁴⁵⁹ Bezuglov 1990; 2003. In connection with the Gothic-Alanic border, Harmatta 1975, 257, using the written sources (Am-

mian XXXI.3.1. and Jordan 126), also came to the conclusion that the Huns, alongside different Turkic tribes, found Alans between the Don and Dnieper – the Goths did not spread their power into this territory.

⁴⁶⁰ Bezuglov 2000, 180-181.

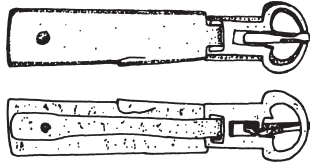
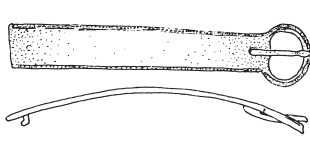
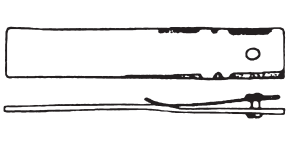
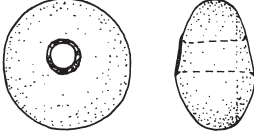
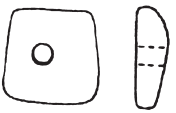
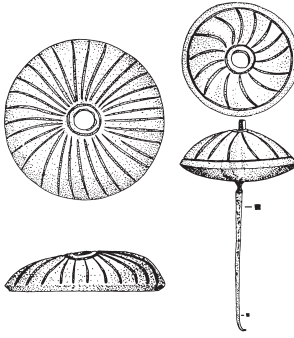
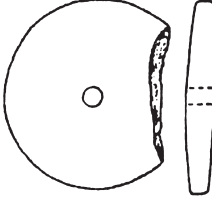
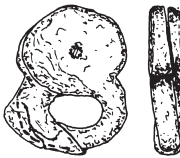
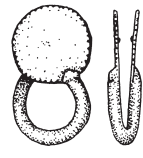
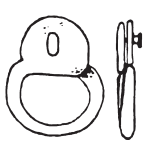
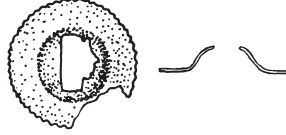
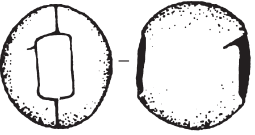
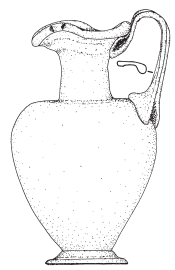
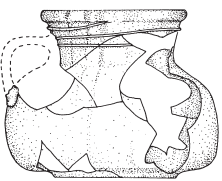
| | <i>Hévízgyörk</i> | <i>Vizesdpusztá</i> | <i>Azov</i> |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| |  |  |  |
| <i>"magic" sword pendant</i> |  | |  |
| <i>sword handle decoration</i> | |  |  |
| <i>sword</i> | <i>length: 87,2 cm</i> | | <i>length: 89 cm</i> |
| <i>harness buckle without spike</i> |  |  |  |
| <i>beads decorating harness</i> | |  |  |
| <i>glass vessel</i> |  |  | |

Fig. 127 Several artefact types associated with the Late Sarmatian warrior elite in the Lower Don region can be found in the Sarmatian assemblages from the Hungarian Plain. – (Hévízgyörk: after Dinnyés 1991, figs 3, 15; 13, 3-4. 10; 14, 18; Vizesdpusztá: after Vaday 1986, figs 1, 12. 15; 2, 9; 3, 1-3; Azov: after Bezuglov 1997, fig. 2).



Fig. 128 Lavishly decorated horse harness of the 2nd-3rd century AD from Grave 1 of Kurgan 25 of Valovj 1 Cemetery. – (After Sokrovišča 2008b, 146-151 nos 66-71).



Fig. 129 The polychrome horse harness from Kurgan 2 at Azov-Aerodrom I, attributed to the Tanaitae Alans by S. Bezuglov. – (After Sokrovišča 2008b, 156 no. 79).

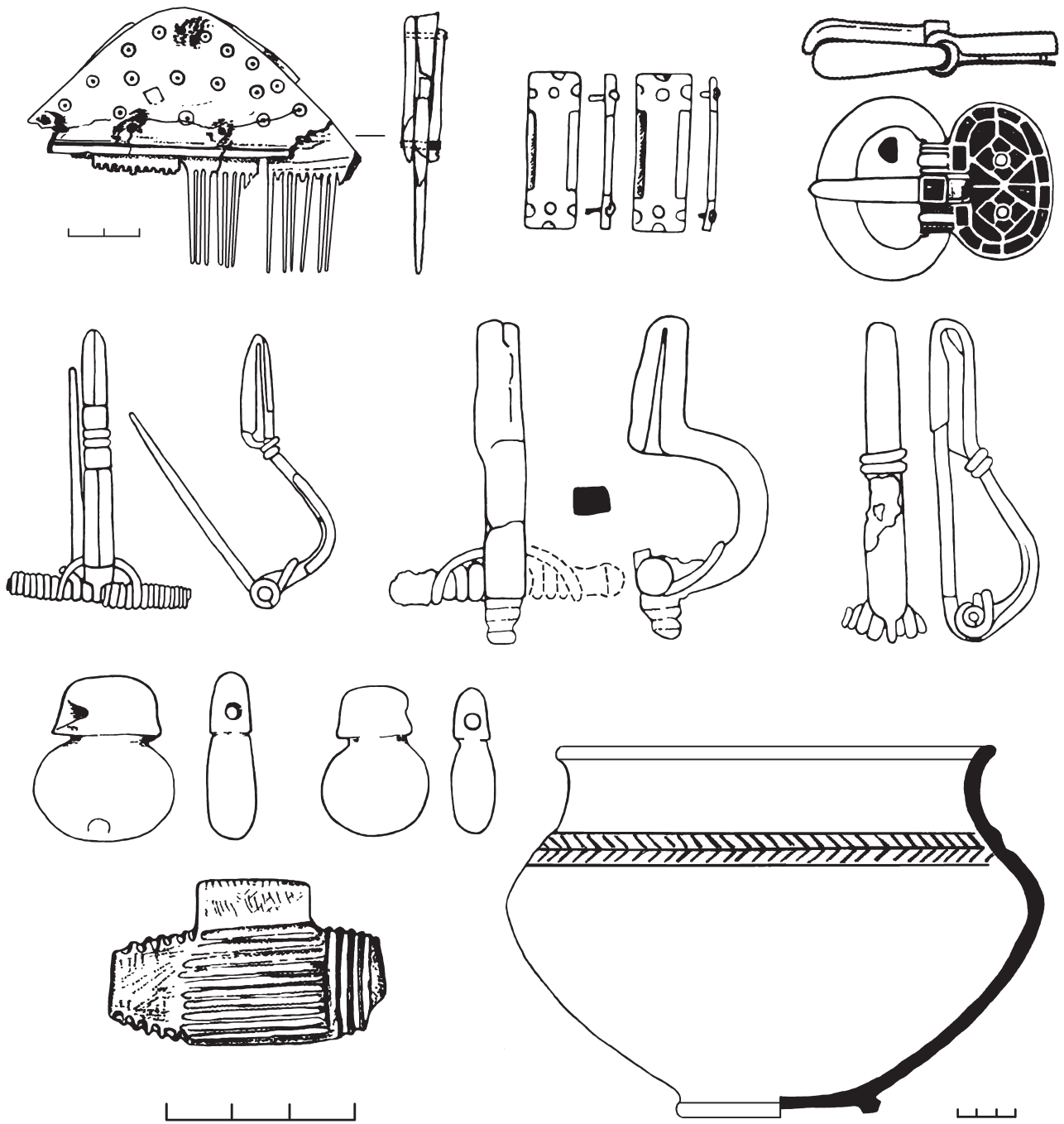


Fig. 130 Western artefacts from the Tanitae Alanic burials of the Don region. – (After Bezuglov 2003, fig. 6).

origin also appear in the Late Sarmatian Age. The custom of skull deformation can likewise be traced to Central Asia (fig. 132) and the increase of Mongoloid elements in the anthropological material can most certainly be associated with a population arriving from the east⁴⁶¹. The appearance of many new eastern elements is hardly unusual in the history of Sarmatian cultures, seeing that a similar phenomenon can be noted at the onset of almost every new period.

⁴⁶¹ Skripkin 1990, 220-222.

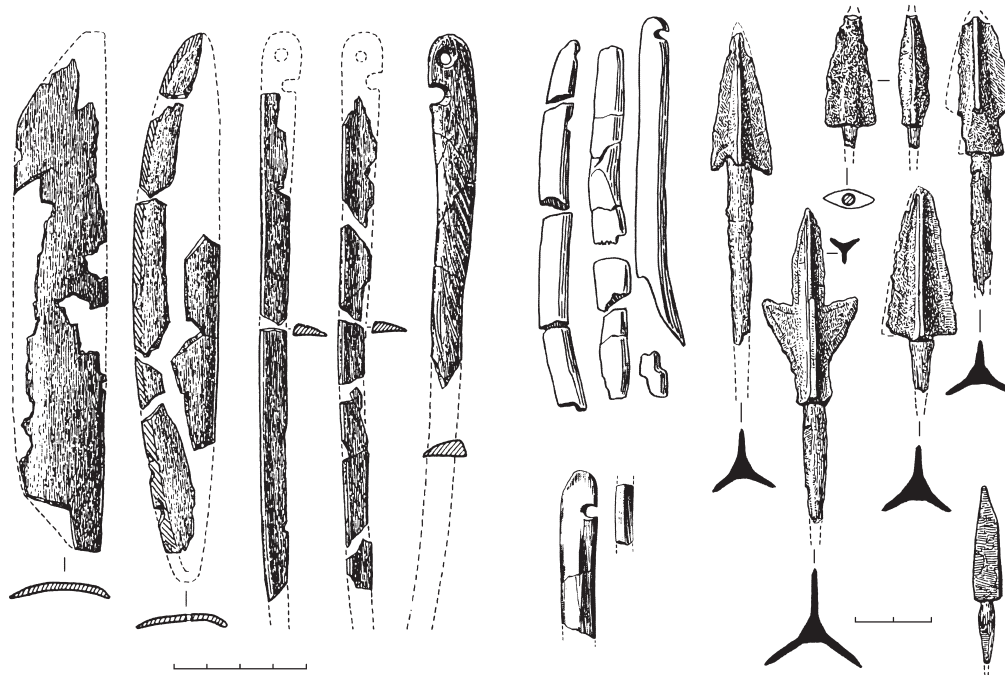


Fig. 131 Bone stiffening plaques of bows of the so-called Hunnic type (Porogi, Ust'-Labinskaja, Grave 1, Kurgan 29 and Susly, Kurgan 51) and the associated arrowheads (Porogi) appear already during the Middle Sarmatian Age, but only became truly widespread during the Late Sarmatian Age. – (After Simonenko 2010, figs 65-66, 68).



Fig. 132 Originating from Central Asia, the practice of skull deformation became widely fashionable on the steppe during the Late Sarmatian Age. Coin of Kushan king Vima Kadphises (165-232) with deformed skull. – (After Weihrauch 1996, fig. 115).

Most scholars associate the Late Sarmatian Age and its culture with the Alans, even though the archaeological traits differ significantly from those observed in the cemeteries of the 1st century AD, having wide grave pits in which the deceased were laid to rest diagonally. While the literary texts undoubtedly support this attribution, the significant changes in the burial rite and the material culture call for an explanation. It must again be emphasised that we are dealing with the Alanic tribal alliance and, as with earlier periods, the most diverse groups with differing burial rites and material culture can be distinguished within the archaeological finds. However, it is impossible to attach an ethnic identity to these groups based on the archaeological finds.

Population Movements on the Steppe in the 3rd-4th Centuries AD

The entire expanse of the Eurasian Steppe, Central Asia and the Iranian Basin became the setting of a series of remarkable events in the 3rd century. The Far East also had its share of singular events. Let us, therefore, start our overview in the East.

The Hsiung-nu gradually faded from the sight of the Chinese and, simultaneously, the European peoples began to have frequent dealings with the Huns⁴⁶². The first mention of a Hunnic group can be found in

⁴⁶² We shall refrain from a discussion of the intricacies of the Hsiung-nu-Hun identification and the voluminous literature on this issue. See, e.g. Maenchen-Helfen 1973, 367-375. – Thompson 2002, 1. 26.

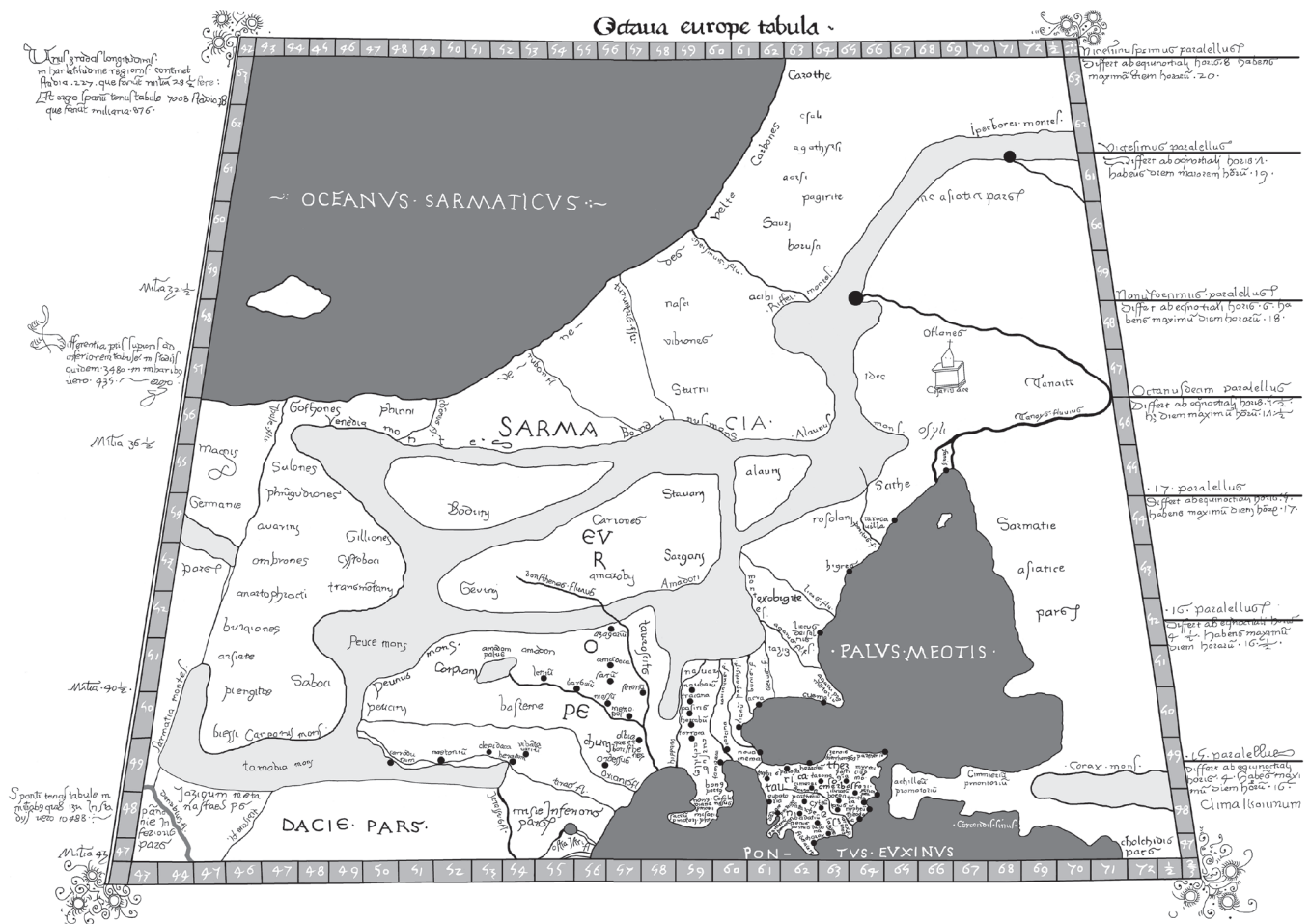


Fig. 133 Ptolemy's eighth map page of Europe. – (After Ptolem. *Octava europe tabula*).

Ptolemy's writings in the 2nd century. In his description of European Sarmatia, he noted that »between the Basternae and the Roxolani are the Chuni« (fig. 133)⁴⁶³. In the late 3rd century, the Greek geographer Dionysios Periegetes mentioned a people called Unni on the plain north of the Caspian Sea (fig. 118). An Armenian source reported that in the 330s the Huns were the allies of the Massagetae and of the Alans in an Armenian war⁴⁶⁴, suggesting that the Hun territory could not have lain very far from the southern slopes of the Caucasus. Quoting these passages, Zaseckaja suggested that, as already mentioned, the obviously non-local weapons (fig. 134) from Kurgan 51 of Susly in the Lower Volga region can perhaps be taken as an indication that the young man buried in the grave was of Hunnic stock and that this would be the earliest archaeological evidence for the appearance of the Huns on the European steppe, dating from before the early 2nd century. This is not the single imprint of early relations between the Huns, the Alans and the Sarmatians from the late 1st and early 2nd centuries. A Hunnic origin has been also suggested for the arrowheads from Ust'-Labinskaja in the Kuban region, Bitak near Simferopol in the Crimea and Porogi on the left bank of the Dniester (fig. 131)⁴⁶⁵.

Despite the more and more intensive westward migration of the Huns, the Late Sarmatian finds only disappear from the Don-Volga interfluvium at the close of the 4th century.

463 Ptolem III. 5.

464 Alemany 2000, 292-294. See also the preceding chapter.

465 Zaseckaja 1982, 63-64. – Puzdrovskij 2001b, 133 fig. 7, 5v. – Simonenko/Lobaj 1991, 44-46. The belt worn by the Porogi

man (fig. 81) also reflects his Far Eastern contacts. Obviously, it is open to debate whether the articles are indeed markers of the presence of an ethnic group or merely signs of contact between the Sarmatians/Alans and the Huns.

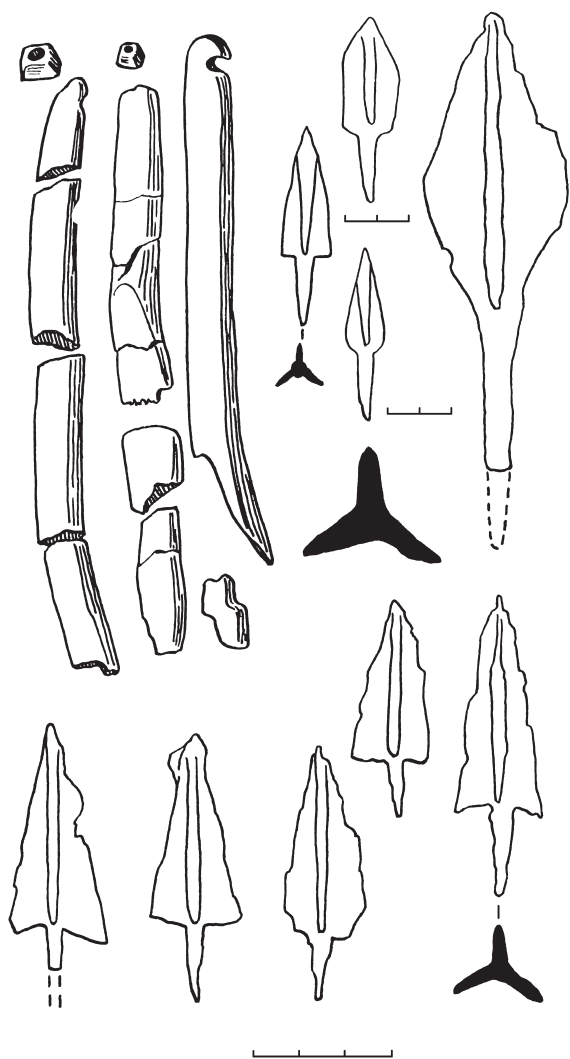


Fig. 134 The non-local weapons deposited in the grave of the young man buried under Kurgan 51 at Susly are an indication of his Hunnic origin. – (After Hazanov 1971, pls XVII, 7; XXI, 17. 19. 22-28).

Another large-scale migration, that of the Germanic peoples, took place at roughly the same time. The eastern Germanic tribes advancing from the Baltic area in the early 3rd century reached the northern Pontic by the 230s. Their pressure precipitated the repeated attacks by the Carpi, a population related to the Dacians, against the province of Dacia and against the Roxolani of the Lower Danube from their lands on the eastern fringes of the Carpathians⁴⁶⁶. The chain of events that took place in European and Asian Sarmatia are still unclear for the greater part. Sarmatian finds virtually disappeared from the Dnieper-Dniester interfluvium from the late 2nd century, while the Sarmatian assemblages and the finds indicating Sarmatian influence ceased in the Upper Don region from the mid-3rd century. The question is whether these changes can be linked to the Gothic advance (equated with the expansion of the Černjahov culture), the explanation favoured by most scholars⁴⁶⁷.

Viewed from an alternative perspective, the Goths may have advanced into the region exactly because it had become depopulated at this time, at least judging from the available evidence. If this supposition is borne out by future research, we must by all means consider the possibility that there was a direct correlation between the depopulation of the Dnieper-Dniester interfluvium after the Marcomannic-Sarmatian War and the Sarmatian population boom on the Hungarian Plain. It seems inconceivable that the events on the steppe were triggered solely by the Gothic migration because the Germanic peoples

who set off on their migration from the forest zone were unmounted warriors and it seems most unlikely that they would have vanquished the Sarmatians, the lords of the steppe, boasting a sophisticated mounted nomadic tradition in their own homeland. It was not by mere chance that Wolfram seriously considered the importance of Iranian elements in the formation of the new Germanic steppe power and its ethnic composition⁴⁶⁸.

The profound changes in the cemeteries of the Sarmatian lands east of the Volga in the mid-3rd century can hardly be explained by the appearance of the Goths. Several arguments have been put forward that the new population wave bringing formerly unencountered artefact types and customs had arrived from the north-eastern Caucasus. The anthropological record supports these claims. At the same time, the new-

⁴⁶⁶ Alföldi 1940a, 48.

⁴⁶⁸ Wolfram 2001, 19-20.

⁴⁶⁷ The data are quoted from Simonenko's unpublished DSc thesis (Simonenko 1999). See also Medvedev 2004, 92.

comers from the northern Caucasus, who can perhaps be identified with the Alans, apparently cut off the region from its former contacts: trade with the Lower Don region ceased, as did the inflow of Bosphoran imports⁴⁶⁹.

It has already been noted that in the same period a strong cultural influence from the northern Caucasus can be felt among the Sarmatians of the Lower Don region. In the following, we shall see that the Late Scythian population of the Crimea was supplanted by Alans from the northern Caucasus. A striking correspondence can be noted between these events. It would appear that the possibly Alan migration from the northern Caucasus was very extensive, flowed in several directions and strongly affected the Sarmatians east of the Don.

As we have seen, there is some scant evidence for a Hunnic influence or perhaps even a Hunnic presence among the Sarmatians. The obvious question arises whether the Huns' advance can be assumed to have taken place behind the visible shifts in power (and ethnic) relations. At present, this is no more than speculation. A fresh look at the Marosszentanna-Černjahov culture, which occupies a key position in the archaeology of the Carpathian Basin, would be essential in order to better understand this period⁴⁷⁰. The events of the 3rd century in Central Asia and the Iranian Basin must be considered in any review of the situation because the region's political map changed considerably. The Parthian Kingdom was supplanted by Sassanian rule, a change that affected the entire region, including perhaps the Caucasus, which is especially important from our point of view.

In András Alföldi's words, a crisis swept through the entire »known world« of the 3rd century, affecting the Roman Empire at least as much as the barbarian lands, including Persia⁴⁷¹. The global crisis (*Weltkrise*) of the 3rd century coincided with the Hunnic, Gothic and Sassanian expansion. Each of these somehow affected the lives of the peoples discussed here. The clarification of whether these events were related and if so, to what extent, remains a task for future research. What must be noted is that the early 3rd century was a relatively peaceful time for Rome, although, as it later turned out, this was a deceptive calm in the eye of the storm. The events described above tied down the Empire's enemies, after which they stormed the frontiers with a vengeance both in the east and in the Danube region.

The Gothic Migration: The Marosszentanna / Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov Culture

The formation and spread of the Marosszentanna/Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov culture⁴⁷² has an exceptional bearing on Sarmatian history. A detailed analysis would take us far and we shall therefore only offer a brief overview here.

There has been an ongoing debate for the past one hundred years over which people should be equated with the extremely heterogeneous Černjahov culture, which has been variously interpreted as Slavic, Germanic or multi-ethnic, depending on the political fashion of the day. Currently, the most widely accepted

⁴⁶⁹ Krivošeev 2004, 121-123, with further literature.

⁴⁷⁰ The basic problem, as we see it, is that most scholars lump together groups with widely differing burial rites and material cultures, and tend to emphasise the similar traits between them, rather than the dissimilarities. This approach to the study of the material can also be felt in Ukrainian archaeology of the past decades.

⁴⁷¹ Alföldi 1967.

⁴⁷² The culture was named after a cemetery in Transylvania, which was excavated by István Kovács in the early 20th cen-

tury, and a site in the former Kiev Governorate investigated by Hvojka more or less simultaneously. The two names reflect the two regional variants of this heterogeneous culture in Transylvania and the Dnieper Valley. For an excellent overview of the culture's research history and its archaeology, see Magomedov 2001. For the freshly published recent finds of the Transylvanian branch of the culture, see Körösfői 2011. For the history of the Goths, see e.g. Wolfram 2001, with further literature.

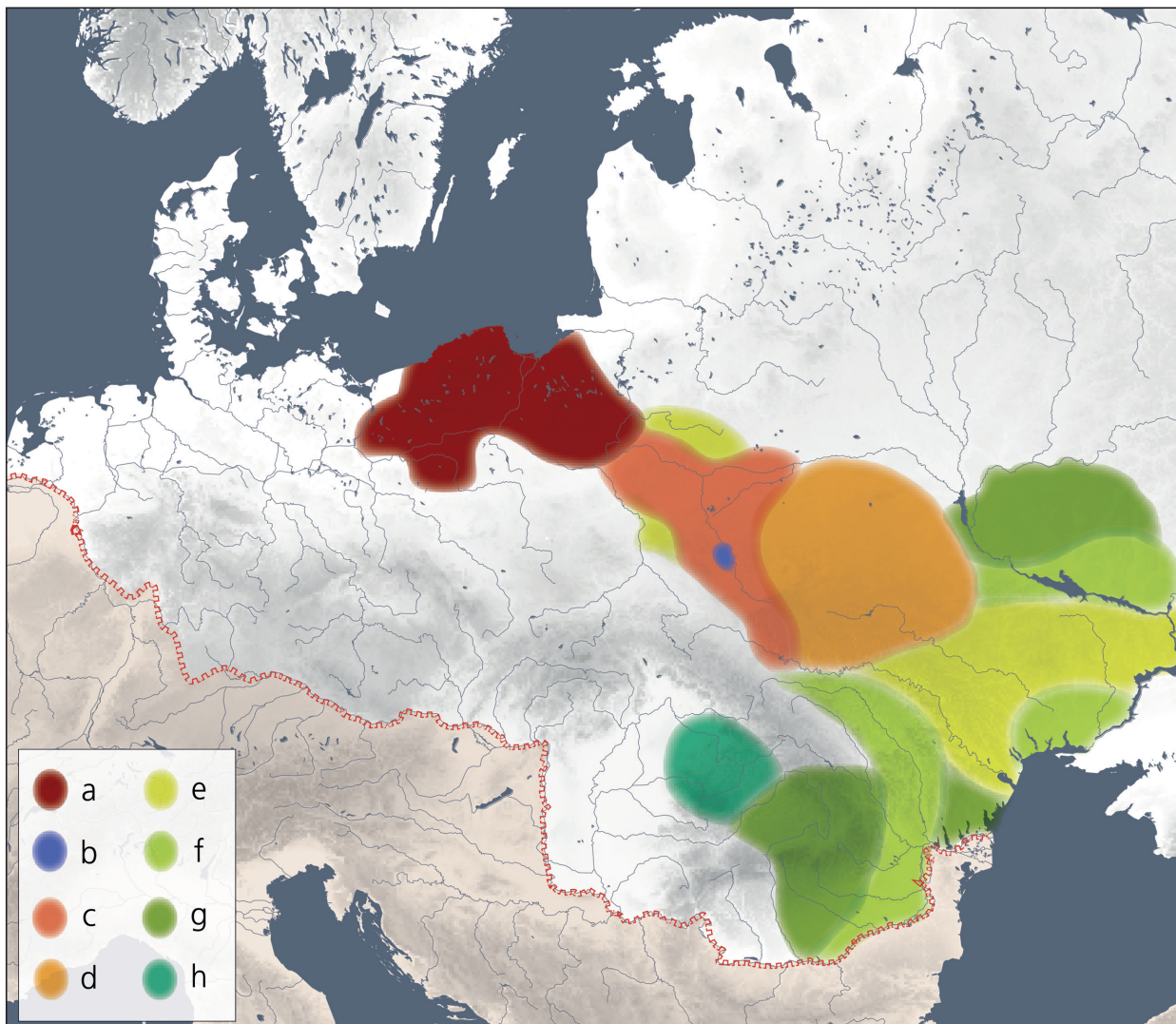


Fig. 135 The route of the Gothic migration: **a** Gothic territory, before the Marcomannic Wars to 180, stage B2. – **b** extension of the migration until 200, stage B2/C1. – **c** extension of the migration until 230, stage C1a. – **d** extension of the migration until 255, stage C1b. – **e** extension of the migration until 280, stage C2a. – **f** Gothic territory until the end of the 3rd century, stage C2b. – **g** extension of the migration until the mid-4th century, stage C3/D1. – **h** territory occupied before the Hunnic invasion in 375, stage D1. – (After Kokowski 1999, fig. 59; map M. Ober, RGZM).

view sees the culture as essentially Gothic, reflecting strong Greek and Roman influences, and having several smaller groups, each with its own distinct traits.

The archaeological record indicates that in eastern Poland and Volhynia (western Ukraine), the Przeworsk culture was succeeded by the Wielbark culture at the close of the 2nd century AD⁴⁷³. The formation of the Černjahov culture can be put at the time of the so-called Scythian⁴⁷⁴ (or Gothic) Wars, between 238 and 270 AD. The archaeological data harmonises neatly with the Gothic migrating starting around the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, described in detail by Jordanes in the 6th century, who based his account on

⁴⁷³ These two archaeological cultures are generally associated with the Vandals and the Goths/Gepids. Both were formed in Poland.

⁴⁷⁴ The Greek and Roman writers turned to the traditional name of the steppe peoples when describing the Goths, the newcomers in the northern Pontic, hence the name of the wars.

earlier sources and sagas (**fig. 135**). Led by King Filimer, the Goths »in search of suitable homes and pleasant places [...] came to the land of Scythia, called Oium in that tongue.« Moving farther, they entered into battle with a people called Spalus and »won the victory. Thence the victors hastened to the farthest part of Scythia, which is near the sea of Pontus«⁴⁷⁵. The Gothic campaigns in the Lower Danube region, the northern Pontic and Asia Minor devastated former strongholds of Antique culture such as Athens, Miletus and Corinth. The wars had grave consequences for the Roman provinces and the population of the Barbaricum, and are discussed at great length by both Roman sources and Jordanes alike. Allied with the Goths were several other Germanic tribes (Vandals and Taifals) and Dacian tribes (Carpi), as well as Roman deserters, if some accounts are to be believed. One outcome of the »Scythian« Wars was the evacuation of the province of Dacia in the 270s. The Romans eventually gained the upper hand, if only temporarily. Earning the *cognomen* Goticus, Claudius boasted that:

We have destroyed three hundred and twenty thousand Goths, we have sunk two thousand ships. The rivers are covered over with their shields, all the banks are buried under their swords and their spears. The fields are hidden beneath their bones, no road is clear, their mighty waggon-train has been abandoned [...]⁴⁷⁶.

The archaeological evidence indeed reflects widespread destruction during this period. The opulent trading city of Tanais in the Don Delta was ravaged during the wars in 251-254. Earlier research ascribed this to the Borani and the Heruls (and probably the Goths)⁴⁷⁷. It has more recently been suggested that the destruction of this flourishing town was brought about by the Iranian (Alanic?) expansion from the northern Caucasus described in the above⁴⁷⁸. Pantikapaion was consumed by fire. Olbia and Tyras were perhaps occupied by the Goths, who dealt a grave blow to the Bosporan Kingdom, and devastated several towns and villages of the Kerč and Taman' Peninsula. From this time onward, the Goths launched their naval attacks against various areas of the Pontic from the coast. Groups of Goths, Borani and Heruls settled by the Maeotis (**fig. 136**)⁴⁷⁹.

A peculiar situation evolved in Crimean Scythia. The so-called Late Scythian archaeological culture gradually disappeared from the peninsula⁴⁸⁰. The situation in the steppe areas of the Crimea was already unstable in the 1st-2nd centuries AD. It would seem that the Sarmatians made regular appearances in this area, even if in small numbers, and that the fortified Scythian settlements and Bosporan towns were the main attractions. We do not know when the Scythian state ceased to exist. The last reference to it is contained in an inscription from 193 AD, in which Rhescuporis III, King of Bosporus, is titled »ruler of entire Bosporus and the Tauroscythians«. Be that as it may, the Scythian settlements in the mountains survived into the mid-3rd century, after which both their settlements and cemeteries ceased. The period's newly-opened cemeteries had nothing in common with the earlier Scythian burial grounds. Perhaps the Scythian population of the Crimea – at least partly – fell victim to the Germanic expansion. However, none of the literary sources claim that the Goths and their allies settled in the Crimea. At the same time, a few cemeteries of the Wielbark and Przeworsk type containing cremation graves – a rite alien to the Scythians – indicate a Germanic presence (**fig. 137**). Various new elements appearing among the grave goods of the Late Sarmatian/Alanic burials, such as combs, shield bosses, mushroom-shaped amber beads and Cypraea strung on wire hoops,

475 Jordan IV.27-28.

476 SHA Claud. VIII.4-6.

477 Magomedov 2001, 133-139.

478 Krivošeev/Skripkin 2006, 132, with further literature.

479 Magomedov 2001, 133-139. For an overview of the finds indicating a strong Germanic influence in the Don Delta, see Bezuglov 2003.

480 For the final period of Crimean Scythian culture, see Hrapunov 1995, 71-72.

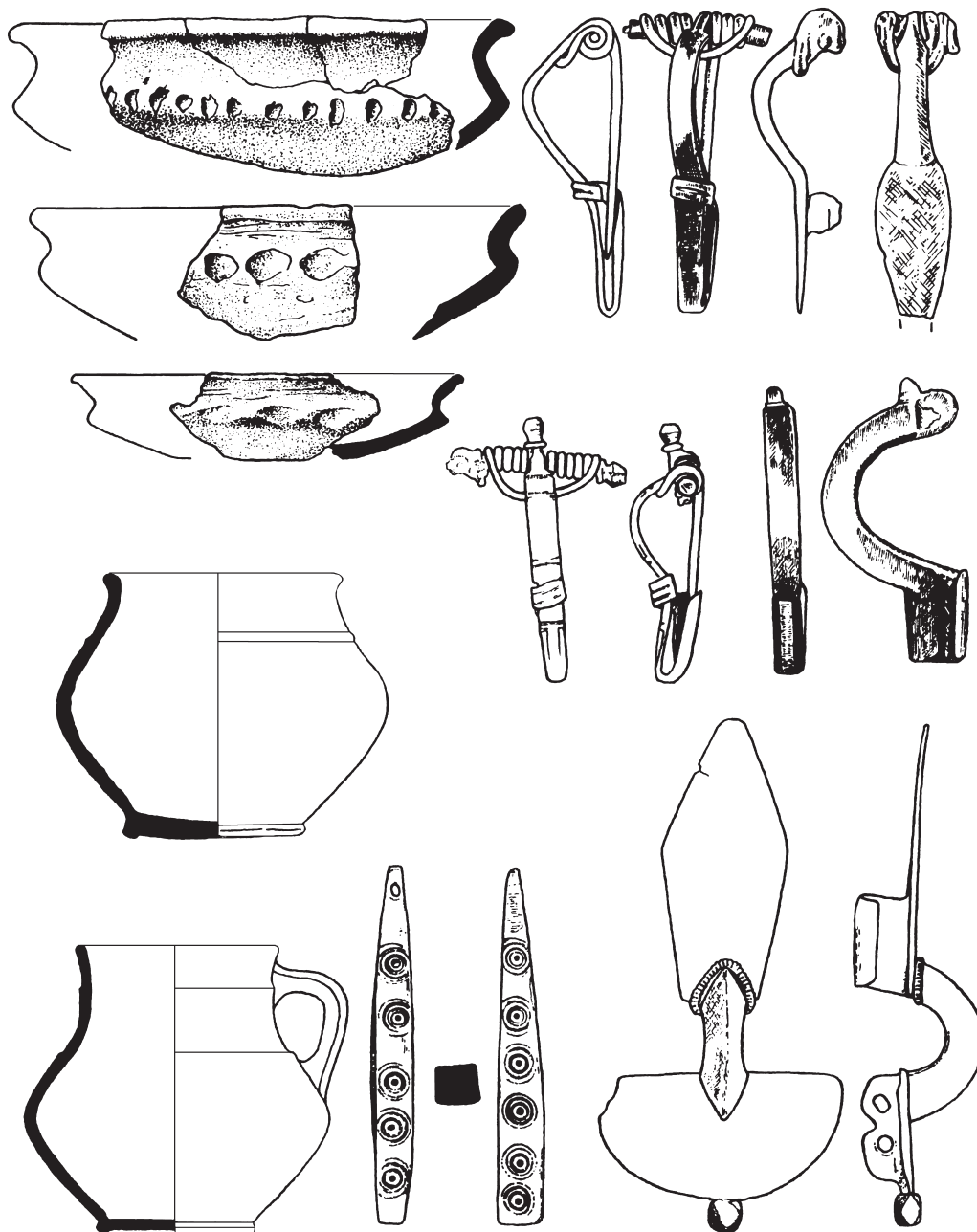


Fig. 136 Černjahov type finds from Tanais. – (After Bezuglov 2003, fig. 3).

can best be associated with Germanic culture. Later sources explicitly mention a Crimean Gothia⁴⁸¹. The Alans arrived in the peninsula at roughly the same time as the Germanic groups. Their typical graves were burial chambers or vaults (*sklep*) containing several burials (fig. 138). A short corridor (*dromos*) led to the rectangular or trapezoidal chamber from the deep entrance shaft. Similar graves are known from the northern Caucasus, from the area occupied by the Alans in the Middle Ages, this being the primary reason that these graves are linked to the Alans. The grave pottery with a distinctly northern Caucasian flavour found in the Crimean burials also confirms this association. The other elements of the burial rite exhibit general

⁴⁸¹ For a good overview of the relevant sources and archaeological finds, see Ajbabin 2003. – Khrapunov 2005.

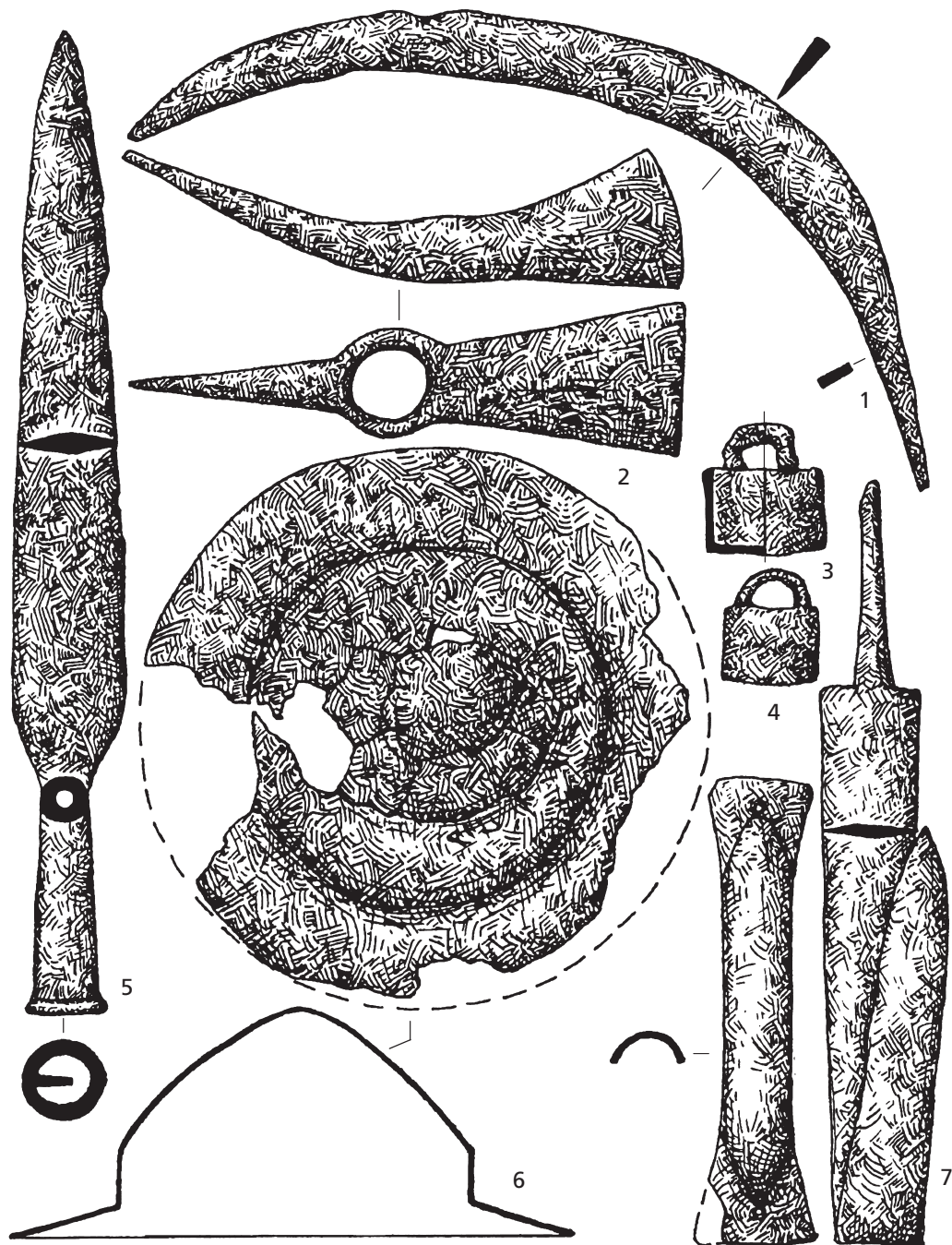


Fig. 137 Grave goods from Germanic cremation burials uncovered at Čatyr-Dag and Charax in the Crimea. – (After Ajbabin 2003, fig. 5).

Sarmatian traits: niche graves, horse burials and harness sets, etc. Part of the finds reflect contact with the Germanic and the Graeco-Roman world (fig. 139). Hrapunov, excavator of several 3rd-4th century Sarmatian cemeteries in the Crimea and author of major studies on the period, suggests that the Alans poured into the Crimea more or less in the same time as the Goths through the Straits of Kerč. The Goths invaded the southern coast of the peninsula, while the Alans advanced westward along the northern foothills, and it seems likely that they can be also held responsible for the destruction of the Late Scythian settlements⁴⁸².

⁴⁸² Hrapunov 1995, 71-76.

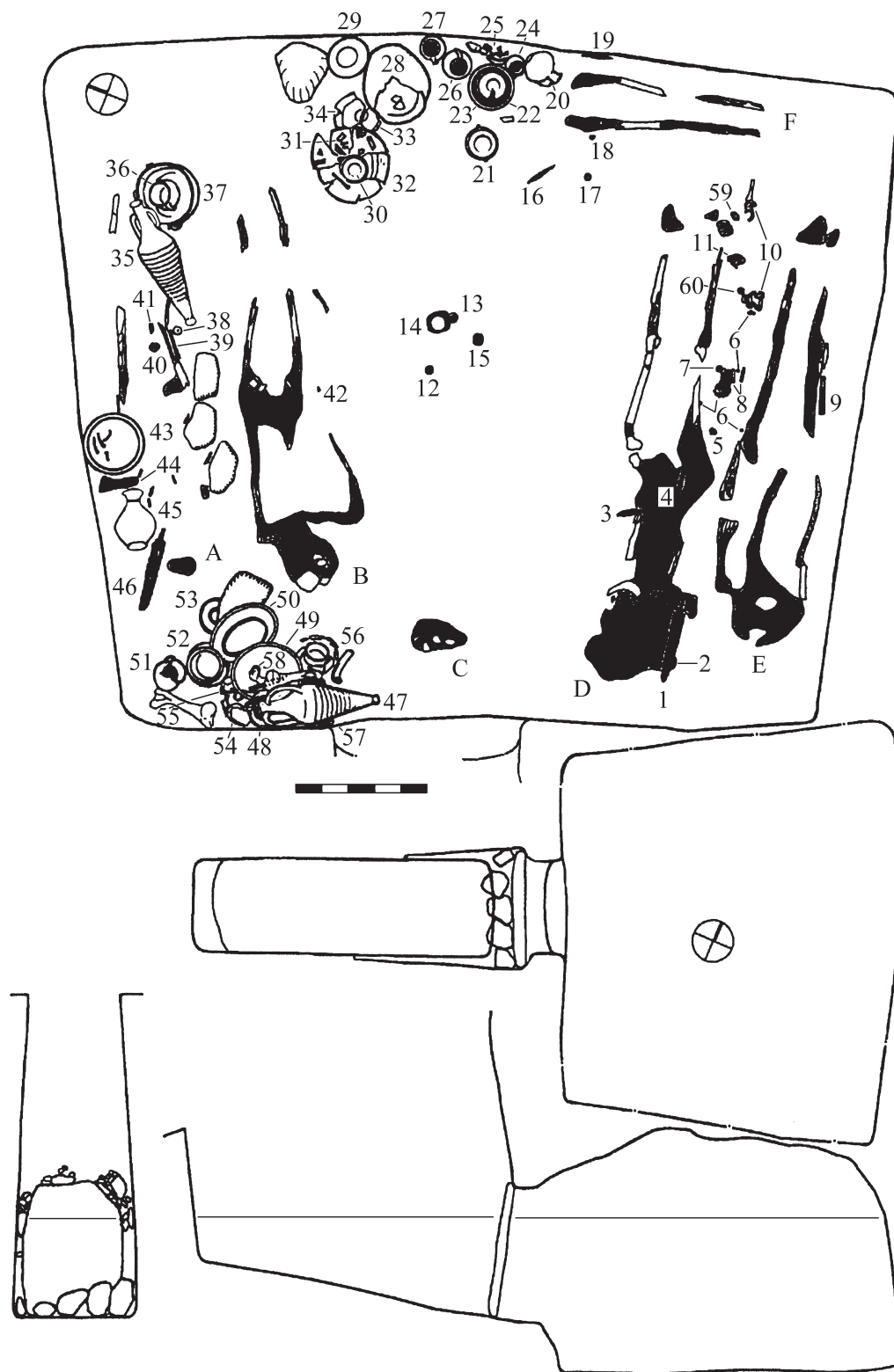


Fig. 138 Grave 3 of Družnoje in the Crimea: a burial chamber (*sklep*) containing a group of Sarmatian/Alanic burials, perhaps of a family. – (After Hrapunov 2002, fig. 4).



Fig. 139 Finds from Sarmatian/Alanic burials at Družnoje and Nejatz in the Crimea reflecting contacts with the Caucasus, the Germanic peoples and the Graeco-Roman world. – (After *Unbekannte Krim* 1999, 116. 118 figs 114-115; *Mer Noire* 1997, 60; photo of the vessel by E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár).

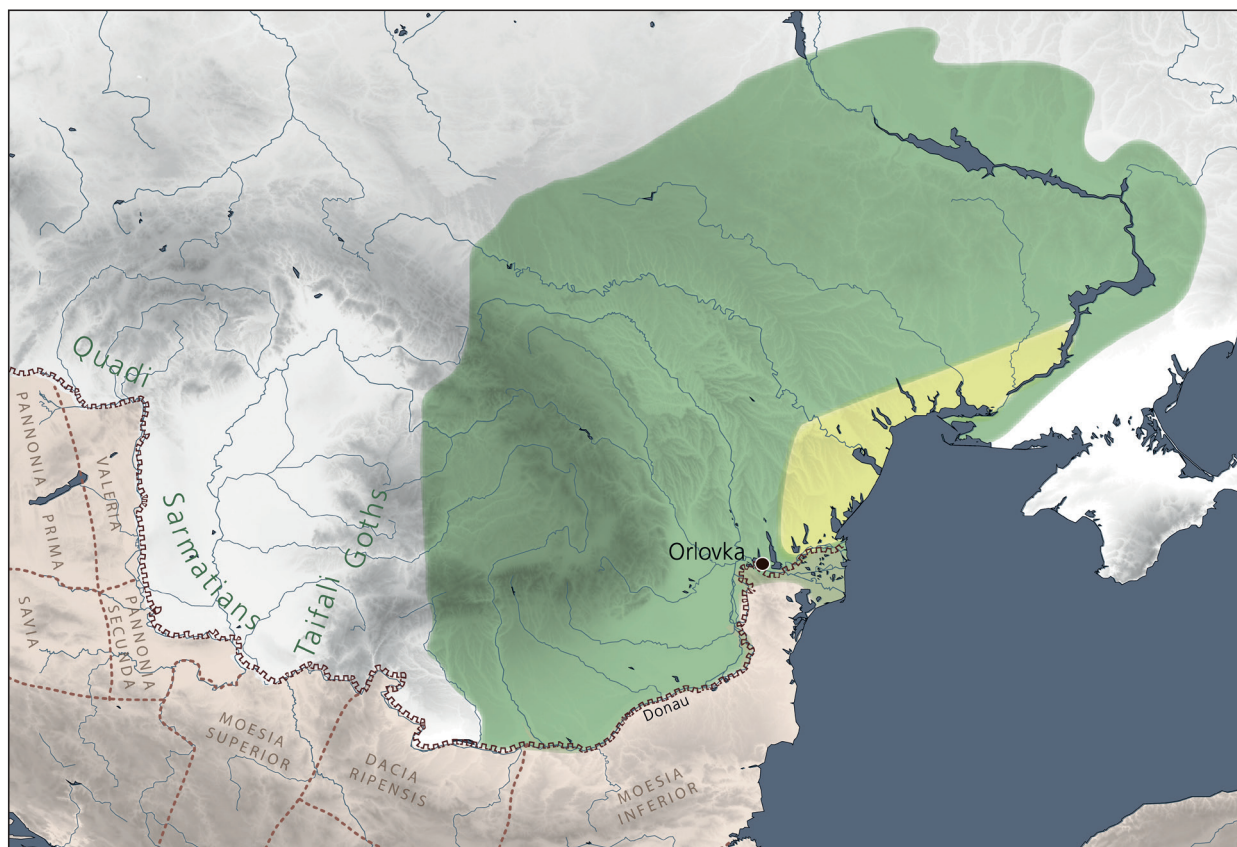


Fig. 140 Distribution of the Marosszentanna/Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov culture (green); the northern Pontic group (yellow), in part identified with the Alans by B. Magomedov (2001, fig. 1); location of Orlovka, the ancient fording place over the Danube. – (Map M. Ober, RGZM).

One linguistic confirmation that the lands of the Alans and the Goths lay adjacent to each other comes from the »p« to »f« change in the Scythian-Sarmatian-Alan-Ossetic tongue. The epigraphic record indicates that this change was most notable in the Don region and by the Sea of Azov⁴⁸³.

Initially distributed in western and central Ukraine and Moldavia, and later in Transylvania, the Černjahov culture did not extend to the Crimea. Judging from Ammianus Marcellinus' remark that the boundary between the tribes was marked by the Dniester⁴⁸⁴, the Tervingi (Visigoths) settled in Moldavia and Transylvania, while the Greuthungi (Ostrogoths) in western Ukraine and by the South Bug. The Černjahov population later expanded southward along the Dnieper, also gaining a foothold on the Pontic coast (fig. 140). The culture flourished in the mid-4th century, during the reign of the Ostrogothic king Hermanarich. A longer period of peace ensued after the war in 332 (see below) when the Goths were no longer enemies, but allies (*foederati*) of the Roman Empire, reflected also by the mass of Roman imports flooding Černjahov settlements. At this time, a new religion, the Arian branch of Christianity, was born and began to spread.

The Hunnic advance brought an end to this period of prosperity and the Marosszentanna-Černjahov culture in general. In 375, new conquerors appeared in south-east Europe:

⁴⁸³ Abaev 1965, 33-34. According to Vernadsky 1951, 376, possible Germanic-Alanic relations are reflected by the name of Ardarich, the Gepidic king, one of Attila's most trusted men, with *rich* meaning »king« and *Arda*, a frequent element in Iranian names (Ardagdakos, Ardarakos, Ardariskos, Ardaros) corresponding to Ossetian *ard*, »oath«. The meaning of the

name would thus be »loyal through an oath« and would in fact denote an office. In the opinion of Harmatta 1975, 257, the Gothic word *gawi* »region, land« can be originated from the Alan **gavi* »settlement, region«.

⁴⁸⁴ Ammian XXXI.3.5.

[...] after having traversed the territories of the Alani, and especially of that tribe of them who border on the Gruthungi, and who are called Tanaitae, and having slain many of them and acquired much plunder, they made a treaty of friendship and alliance with those who remained. And when they had united them to themselves, with increased boldness they made a sudden incursion into the extensive and fertile districts of Ermenrichus, a very warlike prince, and one whom his numerous gallant actions of every kind had rendered formidable to all the neighbouring nations⁴⁸⁵.

The Ostrogothic king died, his kingdom disintegrated into three parts and a part of the tribe moved away. The Visigoths, similarly defeated by the Huns, sought refuge in the Roman Empire⁴⁸⁶. Gothic rule gradually collapsed and the Černjahov culture associated with this people disappeared from the archaeological canvas of the eastern European steppe during the 5th century. The time lag between the collapse of Gothic power and the disappearance of the

Černjahov culture can be explained by the nature of the Hunnic conquest, which did not mean the extermination of the vanquished population. The same can be noted later on the Hungarian Plain.

The Černjahov culture was not a uniform archaeological complex. As already pointed out, several attempts have been made to distinguish ethnic and regional groups. Magomedov, for example, identified three major groups, each with significantly differing traits:

- (1) The Kosanovo group: a population principally made up of Goths and other Germanic tribes (Vandals, Heruls, Taifals, etc.) sporadically mixing with local groups (Late Scythians, Sarmatians, Slavs, Thracians).
- (2) The Upper Dniester group: early Slavs (Venedi), ancestors of the later Prague culture, with slight Thracian traits, characterised by settlements made up of semi-subterranean houses and buildings completely sunken into the earth, and hand-built pottery. Wheel-turned wares were either imported or manufactured by potters settled in the area from other regions. The funerary rite probably involved the scattering of the ashes over the ground, a conclusion suggested by the fact that no burials of this group are known.
- (3) The Northern Pontic group: a strongly Hellenised mixed-population, living in stone houses and using fine, grey, smoothed, wheel-turned pottery. The inhumation burials were often placed in catacombs or in a side niche⁴⁸⁷. The population of this group is in part identified with the Goths, although the dominant ethnic element was made up of Scythians and Alans. The different components sometimes blended into mixed communities, but separate Alan cemeteries have also been found⁴⁸⁸.



Fig. 141 Late Sarmatian (Alanic) finds from the Lower Danube region. Artefacts in the so-called carnelian style of the first half of the 4th century AD from Čauš. – (After Skarby 2006, 138-141 no. 30).

⁴⁸⁵ Ammian XXXI.3.1.

⁴⁸⁶ These events shall be discussed at greater length in the following chapter »The Dawn of a New Age: The Hunnic Invasion«, under the section »Wars in the Last Third of the 4th century AD«.

⁴⁸⁷ Magomedov 2001, 40. 58. 151.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.



Fig. 142 Late Sarmatian (Alanic) finds from the Lower Danube region. Horse harness of the late 4th century AD with cloisonné decoration from Cazaclia. – (After Bunjatjan et al. 1998, fig. 68; photos: courtesy of A. V. Simonenko).

The latter group, equated partly with the Alans, only comprises a few sites. No more than thirty-eight burials are known, which are concentrated in a relatively small area, namely the Budžak steppe and specifically in the Lower Danube region (the broader Odessa area: Gradeška, Kurči, Kubej/Červonoarmejskoe, Frikacej/Limanskoe, Čauš, Vladičen' and Cazaclia, the latter lying in Moldavia) (fig. 140, 1). Opened in the mid-3rd century and perhaps used up to the last quarter of the 4th century, the cemeteries usually contain catacomb graves, while the grave goods comprise jewellery in the cloisonné style and a few Černjahov artefacts, such as shields and combs. The harnesses and jewellery often include pieces in the so-called carnelian

style (figs 141-142). The late use of some cemeteries is indicated by typical objects of the Hun period⁴⁸⁹. This and the fact that a major concentration of these burials lies by the modern village of Orlovka, the single good ford along this section of the Danube Delta, suggests that the location of the sites was motivated by strategic considerations. Several scholars have linked these assemblages to the Tanaitae Alans of the Lower Don region. The clarification of how an independent Sarmatian/Alan warrior group could have thrived in Hermanarich's Gothic kingdom remains a task for future research. Their expansion was fairly rapid. Following the expansion of Hunnic power, the Alan lands shifted from the Barbaricum to the former Roman provinces.

Occurring at the same time as the gradual disappearance of the Germanic peoples in the wake of the Hunnic storm, all traces of an Iranian presence also begin to fade. Part of the eastern Sarmatian population beyond the Volga was probably swept along with the Huns. There is little information on the Iranian peoples of the steppe in this period. However, in the light of what we know of the later Saltovo culture of the early Middle Ages and of the groups arriving in the Carpathian Basin through successive population waves – Huns, Avars and ancient Hungarians – it seems unlikely that the disappearance of the Iranian element was a rapid process. What seems certain is that the Turks eventually established themselves on the steppe, while the Slavs gained dominance over the forested steppe. A part of the Alans migrated westward, another part remained in the northern Caucasus and lived to see the Khazar dominion and, later, the conquests of the Golden Horde. The present-day Ossetians are their direct descendants (a subject discussed in later chapters).

⁴⁸⁹ Bezuglov 1990. – Simonenko 2001. – Bezuglov 2003. – Dzigovskij 2003, 176-199.