

On the weapons of Sarmatian type in the Bosporan Kingdom in the 1st – 2nd centuries AD

The grave stelae found in the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom, the quantity of which exceed thousand pieces, may be used as a source of extremely valuable information. **2** Among the Bosporan stelae of the first centuries AD numerous are those with the images of the warriors and horsemen, often with rather realistically and detailed shown arms and weapons. Things have reached a point to study carefully the depictions of arms on the Bosporan stelae and to correlate them with archaeological realia, both from the area of the Bosporan Kingdom and from the nomadic cultures of Eurasia and from the Near East. **3** Such an analysis allow us both the better understanding of the genesis of certain types of arms, used in the Bosphorus in the first centuries AD and the social and historical context of the possible adoptions. **4** My analysis is concentrated on three categories: the daggers, which were carried fastened with belts to the right thighs, long swords fastened to the quivers of the so-called Scythian type, as well as quivers of the so-called Hunnic or Central-Asian type.

The catalogue, making the basis of the study, includes seventy six Bosporan grave stelae from the late 1st century BC to the first half of the 2nd century AD which show the arms of the abovementioned types, found or acquired primarily in Kerch and its vicinities.

5 Most of the daggers shown on the stelae have ring-shaped finials and rectangular cross-guards. In some cases, as on the 1st century stele of Chrestion, on the scabbard there are clearly seen two pairs of side projections, from which the straps, encircling the thighs are going.

6 The riders with daggers fastened to the right thighs usually carry the quivers of the Scythian type on their left shoulder or the quivers of the Central-Asian type with tubular sections, hanging on their belts on the right side. **7** The quivers of the Scythian type were

hanged on the straps, forming loops, – such quivers are shown on the frescoes and gravestones of the late 1st – first half of the 2nd century AD from Pantikapaion and Chersonesos. **8** Quite often over the back of the rider, moving to right, close to the quiver of the Scythian type there is seen a hilt of a sword. **9** More usual are complete images of long swords fastened to the quivers on the stelae with the riders to the left. In total, long swords fastened to the quivers are represented on thirty-two gravestones, and on about half of them by the horsemen with the dagger on the right thigh. **10** The quivers with two tubular sections are shown on eleven reliefs with the riders, including seven pieces with the images of „horsemen” daggers, as well on the later 2nd century AD daggers, showing the riders without daggers. In some cases there are shown quivers with three compartments, the left was used to insert the multi-component bow with unbinded string.

11 The arms discussed are shown primarily on the stelae with the images of the horsemen. The distribution of the images of the daggers and long swords, fastened to the quivers, is more or less similar: they occur mostly on the reliefs of two variants **12**: 1) with two riders, one of which is shown completely, the other, following the first, only partly; sometimes the scene is completed with additional images; 2) with the images of the rider to the right and the standing figure of a youth with arms (or without) behind him. **13** The quivers of the Central-Asian type are shown, on the contrary, almost exclusively on the stelae with the two horsemen, one following another.

14 The swords and daggers with rectangular cross-guards and ring-shaped finials first appeared in the North Pontic area in the 2nd century BC, **15** they were wide-spread in the 1st – first half of the 2nd centuries AD; and are represented, primarily by the finds from the Sarmatian burials. Both the swords and daggers of that type and **16** the long swords with cross-guards and with a long hilt have Eastern prototypes. **17** Among the long swords from the Sarmatian burials of the 2nd/1st centuries BC to the 2nd/3rd centuries AD there is singled out a series with the rhomboid in section cross-guards executed of iron, bronze of jade, some of

which had jade slides attached to the scabbards to hang the sword on the sword-belt – these are the swords of Chinese origin or they have Chinese prototypes. **18** In China of the Han-dynasties the scabbard slides, as well as scabbard endings, cross-guards and hilt finials were executed primarily of jade and had elaborate decoration, as, for instance, the elements of the sword, found in the tomb of Zhao Mao, the second king of Nan Ye, dated to 122 BC.

19 The combined finds of long swords with bronze cross-guards and the daggers with rectangular cross-guards and ring-shaped finials are known in some of the Sarmatian burials in the Lower Volga and Don basins, dated already to the 2nd-1st centuries BC, as well as in the 1st century AD burial no. 4 of the Tillya-tepe necropolis in Northern Afghanistan. These finds confirm the eastern roots of such a combination of arms. **20** For the Sarmatian and Late Scythian burials of the first centuries AD in the Crimea such a combination is a rare one and is represented by the set from the burial no. 1 of the tomb no. 777 of the Ust'-Alma cemetery, where a short sword with a ring-shaped finial was found near the right thigh, while to the left of the deceased a long sword of the Han-type was placed.

21 Bosporan tombs yielded finds of short swords and daggers with rectangular cross-guards and ring-shaped finials. **22** The few unprovenanced examples acquired in Kerch, mentioned by Woldemar Ginters and Nikolaj Sokol'skij, may be completed by the find in a mid-1st century AD cremation burial of the Nymphaion necropolis. In almost of a quarter of registered finds of swords in the Bosporan burials from the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD long swords were accompanied with daggers, but in most cases we do not have information, whether daggers with ring-shaped finials occur among them – **23** the only exception is a find of such a dagger and a long sword in the 2nd century AD burial of the necropolis of Kytaiou.

24 In the the first half of the 1st century AD burial of a horsemen in the necropolis close to the fortified estate near Tsem dolina in the vicinities of Novorossijsk – such a short sword was placed near the right thigh of the deceased. However, in general the finds of such daggers and

swords originate from the burials without horses, whereas the burials with horses usually yielded the long swords without finials and cross-guards. It is also worth noting one find of a long sword with a rectangular cross-guard in this cemetery.

25 The volute shape of the finial of the dagger, shown in the image of rider on the stele of Daphn **26** reminds the finial of the dagger with rectangular cross-guard from the barrow no. 1 near Zubov Farm. **27** The cross-guard and the finial of the dagger are inlaid with thin gold strips – the motif and technique of decoration reminds those of the 4th century BC iron swords from Early Sarmatian Filippovka barrows in South Urals. **28** Short swords and daggers with volute-shaped finials and straight cross-guards, going back to the Early Sarmatian finds of the Volga-Ural region, are represented in particular by the finds from the Bactrian cemeteries of the South Tadzhikistan and the Sogdian barrows of the 1st-2nd centuries AD, as well as those from the 2nd - 3rd centuries burials in the Volga area, including the examples in gold-plated scabbards.

29 The shape of most of the daggers, which appear on the Bosphoran stelae under discussion, is comparable, for instance, with a parade dagger from the Sarmatian burial no. 1 in a barrow near the village of Porogi on the left bank of the Dnestr. **30** It was found parallel to the right thigh of the deceased. According to the reconstruction by Alexander Simonenko, the dagger was hanging on the belt and its scabbard was additionally fixed to the hip by two pairs of straps with rectangular slips and endings. If the reconstruction of the mode of fixation of the dagger from Porogi is based only on the finds of buckles and belt endings, **31** than the early 2nd century AD grave no. 700 of the Ust'-Alma cemetery yielded a sword in a preserved wooden scabbard with side blades below the cross-guard and in its bottom part, decorated with gilded bronze plaques with the holes to insert the straps, fixing the scabbard to the hip. **32** Similar finds of daggers with remaining wooden scabbards with side blades with attached semi-spherical plaques with holes or rivets with circular tops occur from some 1st-2nd centuries AD Sarmatian burials in the Don basin. **33** Fragmentary dagger and scabbard

originates from the destroyed mid-1st century BC Sarmatian elite burial in Kosika in the Lower Volga basin. Thus, there are grounds to suggest, that such a manner of carrying of short swords and daggers was characteristic for the Sarmatian horsemen, in the burials of which such daggers with ring-shaped finials are usually found near the right hip-bones. ³⁴ A dagger on the stele of Chrestion, belongs exactly to this type. ³⁵ The finds of such parade daggers of the late 1st to the mid-2nd century AD originate from the cache of in the barrow near Dachi/Azov, ³⁶ from the sarcophagus II of the tomb II/1975 in Gorgippia and from the burial no. 1 in Armaziskhevi in Georgia.

³⁷ The appearance of such daggers in the North Pontic area occurred side by side with their distribution in the Central Asia and Near East in the 1st century BC – 1st century AD. Such a sword in parade scabbard with side projections was unearthed in Tillya-tepe. ³⁸ Comparable daggers in scabbards with side projections, some decorated with lion masks, are shown on the stele with the image of Mithridates I Kallinikos (109-70 BC) and Herakles from Arsameia on Nymphaion and ³⁹ on the stelae of the Western Terrace of Nemrud Dagh, on which the King of Commagene, Antiochus I (69-34 BC) is shown with Herakles, with Zeus and with Apollo. ⁴⁰ It is worth noting, that the daggers shown on the reliefs from Commagene have two types of finials, a ring-shaped, most clearly seen on the relief from Arsameia, and a volute-shaped – on the reliefs from Nemrud Dagh, corresponding to the two types of finials on the “horsemen” daggers shown on the Bosphoran reliefs and two types of finials of the Sarmatian short swords and daggers. ⁴¹ Numerous examples of such daggers in scabbards with side projections are represented in Parthian sculpture, including the famous bronze statue of the so-called Parthian Ruler from Shami, dating most probably to the second half of the 1st century BC or early 1st century AD, on which two such daggers are shown on the both thighs. The scabbards are equipped with two pairs of narrow side blades, each with attached small umbo-shaped plaques with relief whirl-shaped rosettes – ⁴² given the shape and construction of the side blades, with the plaques with holes to insert straps – the daggers

of the Ruler from Shami are very similar to those found in the 1st-2nd centuries AD nomadic burials in the Don area and in the South-Western Crimea. **43** Further on we find the daggers of the type discussed on the Parthian bronze buckles and terracotta plaques with the images of horsemen. On some of the latter the rider is shown with a dagger and with a quiver of the Central-Asian type, whereas the daggers may be seen on both the right and left thighs. **44** Such daggers continued to be represented on the Late Parthian sculpture from Hatra and Palmyra.

45 The prototypes of the daggers in the scabbards with side projections originate from the burials of the Scythian Pazyryk culture of the Mountaineous Altai, dating from the 5th/4th to the 3rd/2nd centuries BC, where such wooden models were found, **46** whereas an actual find of a bronze dagger in a leather-covered wooden scabbard originates from a child burial of the Ak-Alakha-I cemetery, where it was on his right thigh. **47** On the rounded side projections there holes used to insert partly preserved leather strips, fixing the scabbard to the hips. The strip inserted near the finial was attached to the special sword-belt. The manner of carry the daggers could have been invented only by the nomads: being fixed in such a way a dagger in a scabbard is not loose and does not strike the hip of the rider. Such a manner fits only to the daggers and short swords, the ending of which did not reach knee.

48 Long words, fastened to the quivers, belong to two types. **49** Some of them represent swords without cross-guards; in some cases with rounded hilt finials. The swords of the second type have rectangular cross-guards, hilt finials widening in their upper parts with flat upper edge, trapezoidal scabbard endings, as well as narrow vertical slides or wide plates, covering almost all the width of the scabbards, in their upper parts. The scabbards of some of these swords are decorated with parallel longitudinal rims. **50** Similar images of long swords with comparaneous elements are represented also on numerous Bosporan reliefs and on the frescoes, showing footed warriors, leaning against the column. **51** These two types of long swords correlate well with the existence of these two types of them among the finds from the

Sarmatian and Late Scythian burials. On the contrary, Bosporan burials of the late 1st century BC – 2nd century AD does not yielded finds of the swords with cross-guards, trapezoidal scabbard endings and vertical scabbard slides or rectangular plates. The swords with cross-guards seem to be spread in the Bosphorus as late as in the 3rd - 4th centuries AD. Thus, the visual monuments and archaeological sources show us two different patterns, which is especially evident in case of depiction of vertical scabbard slides, shown on some of the Bosporan reliefs, both with the images of riders and footed warriors – the known finds of jade scabbard slides in Kerch originate from the later contexts of the 4th century AD. Thus, the depiction of such slides on the swords with straight cross-guards, dating to the 1st – first half of the 2nd century AD, confirms the use of the long swords of Han type in the Kingdom of Bosphorus at the earlier date.

52 The decoration of the sword scabbards with parallel longitudinal rims, as on some of the Bosporan stelae, finds parallels on the swords, represented on the gravestone of the first archon of Chersonesos, Gazurios, dated to the first quarter of the 2nd century AD, **53** and on the central plate of the gold diadem or torque from the late 1st – early 2nd century AD burial of Sarmatian priestess in Kobyakovo barrow no. 10 in the outskirts of Rostov-on-Don. **54** Also other elements of the latter swords (the finials, cross-guards and scabbard endings), as well as a rectangular plate shown in the upper part of the sword on the ornament from Kobyakovo find parallels on the swords on the Bosporan stelae. **55** The position of the rectangular plate allows to suggest its function associated with the hanging of the sword on the sword-belt, which is proved by the similar plates shown on the sword scabbards on the Late Parthian sculptures from Hatra.

56 The depictions of the quivers of the „Scythian” type with fastened swords are known only on the Bosporan stelae. **57** I agree with Sokol'skiĭ, who suggested this mode of carrying the swords as a „mobile“. Indeed, long swords could be carried fastened only to the quivers of the “Scythian” type, which were hanging on the left shoulder. Whether, this mode

was a Bosphoran innovation, is, to my opinion, an opened question. On one hand, we know, that a long Greek cavalry sword, *machaira*, was carried over the back of the horsemen. ⁵⁸ On the other – we are aware of examples, when the long swords of the Han type with jade scabbard slides and cross-guards were placed in the Sarmatian burials under the back of the deceased, as was the case in the burial of the barrow near Sladkovskij Farmstead in the Lower Don area, it is worth noting the position of the dagger below the right cannon-bone in this burial, suggesting that the dagger was fixed to the outer part of the hip. ⁵⁹ Also the context of the 2nd – 1st century BC Sarmatian burial of the Majerovskij-III cemetery near Volgograd attracts attention – here a long sword was placed to the left from the deceased and close to the quiver. In some cases in the later burials of the necropoleis of Phanagoria and Iluratos, the long swords were also found close to the remains of quivers.

⁶⁰ The finds of the remains of quivers in the burial near Porogi and in one of the Ust'-Alma tombs allow ⁶¹ to reconstruct the quivers used in the first centuries AD by the Sarmatians as cylindrical or truncated conical wooden boxes covered with leather and painted. ⁶² Presumably as a quiver there is interpreted a conical truncated cylindrical object made of the sutureless leather from the neck of the young camel, found in Dura-Europos. On the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD relief from Dura-Europos and a series of such reliefs Palmyra we come across quivers with one tubular compartment for the arrows and adjoining compartment for the bow. ⁶³ We are not aware of finds of quivers with two tubular compartments in the North Pontic area. Viktor Sarianidi mentions the find of the two quivers in the already cited 1st century AD burial from Tillya-tepe, not discussing their shape or construction. However, given the plan of the burial, the four gold lamellar overlays could rather served as lower and upper framings of two tubular compartments of one quiver, whereas one of the compartments was closed with a cylindrical lid with engraved and gilded floral pattern. ⁶⁴ If I am right, this is the only archaeological find of a quiver with two tubular compartments, the shape, which is well known to us, in particular on the Palmyrene relief, dated to 154 AD and on one of the graffiti

from Dura-Europos. **65** The quivers with two compartments for the arrows, allegedly for the arrows of various size and purpose and with a compartment for bow are carried by the horsemen shown on the first centuries AD bone belt plaques from the Orlat cemetery in Sogd and contemporary ivory plates allegedly from a casket, found in the Oxus temple in Takhti-Sangin in South Tadzhikistan. **66** On the relief of the Bosphoran king's chamberlain Daphn we can clearly see that the upper parts of the quiver compartments have either lids or framings, which may be compared with the abovementioned contemporary finds from Tillya-tepe. Perhaps, these details on the stele of Daphn stressed the parade view of the quiver. Thus, the quivers with two tubular compartments, shown on the Bosphoran stelae, have Central-Asian prototypes and could have been adopted via the Sarmatians. Given the dating of the stele of Matian the bows of Central Asian type appeared in the Kingdom Bosphorus not later than in the late 1st century BC.

67 Coming to the concluding remarks, images on the gravestones testify that in the late 1st century BC – first half of the 2nd centuries AD in the Bosphoran Kingdom there were spread short swords or daggers; the shape of which as well as details of scabbards (side blades) and the mode of wear are characteristic to Eurasian nomads and have South-Siberian prototypes. In this connection the combination of the “horsemen” daggers with the bows and quivers with tubular compartments of the Central-Asian type on the Bosphoran stelae is not a chance one. In many cases on the reliefs the daggers represent the secondary arms – they accompany the long swords fastened to the quivers of the Scythian type. The peculiar features of some of these long swords, in particular, the scabbard slides, also testify in favour of their Eastern origin or their Eastern, perhaps, Chinese prototypes. Most probably, as it was the case in the Near East, these arms, for instance the daggers, were known as real battle arms, shown both on the sculpture images (the Ruler from Shami) and known after the finds from the 1st century AD Sarmatian burials in North Pontic area, as well as in parade variants, represented

by the finds from Tillya-tepe in the East to Gorgippia in the West and also represented on the reliefs from Commagene.

Most of the names on the Bosporan gravestone with the depictions of the arms discussed are Greek, which actually does not mean that they could not necessarily have had Sarmatian ancestors, which is indirectly proved by the occurrence of the clear Iranian (Sarmatian?) names on some of these stelae, including those of Matian, Omphalagos, Kamorsadzes and Ksaiorsadzes.

68 The fact that the “horsemen” daggers appear on the grave stelae of high-ranking officials, among them the chamberlain Daphn, the members of *sinodes*, Attas, Achaimenes and others, the chief of *pinakide*, Artemidoros and the writer Stratonikos, testifies the use of the weapons of the Sarmatian type with the characteristic for Sarmatians manner of its carry to the hip, also among the Bosporan elite, whereas the presence of such a dagger could stress social status of the deceased, **69** which is further confirmed by the presence of accompanying figures of mounted or footed warriors on many of such reliefs and the dagger fastened to the right hip of the life-size marble relief from Gorgippia, most probably a grave stela of a noble citizen.

70 The context of find of a short sword with ring-shaped finial in the cremation burial in Nymphaion allows to suggest that it belonged to a wealthy citizen buried after the Greek ritual. Given the fact that a youth, ca. 12-13 years old was cremated there, it may be supposed, that a sword put in his grave may be considered as a status object, stressing his belonging to a certain social group. The fact that the representatives of the Bosporan elite in that time were equipped both with a long sword and a dagger is further confirmed by the finds of them in a male burial found by chance on the slope of the Mithridates Mount in 1894. **71** Given the inscription on a gold plate from the wreath in form of *tabula ansata*, the deceased was called Iulius Kallisphenos, he was *paraphilagatos*, the member of a *thiasos*. He had a gold finger ring with an amethyst gem, showing the portrait of Cladius carved by the famous gem-cutter

Skylax. It was maintained that Iulius Kallisphenos could participate in the military events of 49 AD. **72** Also in the later, 2nd century AD, abovementioned grave of the necropolis of Kytaion a dagger with ring-shaped finial and a long sword were found together with gold foil buckles and belt endings, on which the tamga, usually attributed to the Bosphoran king Eupator, were hammered, and which could have been status symbols.

73 No less attention attracts the find of a parade dagger in the scabbard with side projections in the tomb II/1975 in Gorgippia, probably belonging to the king's deputy Neokles or his father. The hilt and the scabbard overlay of the dagger from Gorgippia are decorated with motifs, characteristic for the Bosphoran art, and were probably manufactured in the Bosphoran workshop. **74** It is worth noting that eastern elements in the costume and weapons of the deceased in the Gorgippean tomb were combined with imports from Italy and western Roman provinces (glass- and metalware, ornaments). Some of the latter may be conventionally discussed as Roman diplomatic gifts. **75** The status character of the daggers in richly decorated scabbards with side blades is further confirmed by the find in the mid-2nd century AD tomb of Asparugos (given the inscription on the portrait gem of his finger ring), the representative of the highest nobility of Iberia, in Armaziskhevi necropolis.

76 The dating of the gravestones and the real find of a sword with a ring-shaped finial in Nymphaion suggest that its establishment as a status object in the Bosphoran Kingdom occurred in frames of the second half of the 1st century BC – mid-1st century AD. Most probably the adoption of the above discussed daggers, long swords and quivers, having Eastern origins and/or prototypes took place in course of the service of warriors of Sarmatian and Maiotian origin, the so called 'Aspurgians', using such arms, who formed the detachments of Bosphoran cavalry, guarding the frontier of the Asian Bosphorus. Most probably the Aspurgians were settled on the royal lands already under the rule of Asandros. **77** Even before Asandros, probably, half-Greek, half-Barbarian was left by Pharnakes as his deputy in Bosphorus during the Asia Minor campaign of Pharnakes, Asandros was *etnarchos* and had

probably some special contacts with barbarian tribes of the Asian Bosphorus. ⁷⁸ Under Asandros the defensive system composed of numerous fortresses was definitely established in the Taman Peninsula, and one of which, as we know from the inscription was a residence of a certain Chrysaliskos, whereas the garrison was formed by the warriors having probably Sarmatian origin. ⁷⁹ Given the gravestone of Matian, the son of Zaidar, dedicated by the Queen Dynamis and showing a horseman with a bow and quiver of the Central Asian type, this system continued its function also under her rule. ⁸⁰ I should also refer to a comparatively high proportion of the burials with arms in the Tsemdolina cemetery (21%) yielding numerous finds of swords and daggers, exceeding the comparative statistic data on the cemeteries of the Central Cis-Caucasus and Kuban basin of the first centuries AD (12-17%). The warriors, buried in the cemeteries of the fortified estates in the area of modern Novorossijsk could have served for the Bosporan kings, ⁸¹ which is probably testified by the rich burial inventory of the abovementioned burial no. 9 of the Tsemdolina necropolis. It is also worth noting the possible Sarmatian origin of Aspurgos, the son of Asandros, whose name goes back to the Iranian *aspa* (horse), *aspabara* (horseman). ⁸² Given the dating of the gravestone of Daphn, on which the deceased is shown with a dagger with volute-shaped finial and the parade quiver of the Central-Asian type, he could served, with high probability as the chamberlain of Aspurgos.

⁸³ P.-□.Kreuz correctly associates the appearance of the daggers discussed on the Bosporan stelae with considerable changes in the self-consciousness of the Bosporans – he sees the new elements s correlated with the status system of values of the nomadic aristocracy. ⁸⁴ To my opinion, not less important reason of the adoption of the arms of Eastern types in the Kingdom of Bosphorus since the late 1st century BC could have been the fact that by that time the dagger in a scabbard with side blades has already become a status symbol in the Late Hellenistic East and just as such a symbol was shown in detail on all the known to us reliefs of the Kings of Commagene, representing them with gods. The

phenomenon discussed seems, therefore, to have two components – one, showing the evident ties with the nomadic Sarmatian world, the second – stressing the relation with the Late Hellenistic monarchies of the Near East, who also adopted the new types of arms from the nomads of Eurasia. **85** It is thus, evident, than even if the materials discussed give grounds to testify the Sarmatian influence on the arms of the Bosporans and the mode of its carry, its adoption there and transformation in the status symbol was not simply the reflection of the so-called sarmatization of the Bosporan Kingdom, but has more widely roots and should be discussed in the context of ideological constructions, similar to those spread in the Near at the end of the Hellenistic period.