NEW DATA ON DETAILS OF ROMAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AND HORSE’S HARNESS FROM CHERSONESOS AND ITS ENVIRONS

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Finds of Roman military equipment and horse’s harness are extremely rare in the North Pontic region. They constitute an important addition to already available evidence relating to the Roman presence in the region. The study of these objects from the North Pontic region only began relatively recently.1 Apart from Olbia, Tyras and Chersonesos, where Roman military units were stationed at various times, parts of weapons or harness have also been found in Panticapaeum and in a shrine near the mountain pass known as the “Gurzuf Saddle” (Gurzufskoe sedlo). It is interesting to note that no similar objects have so far been found either in Balaclava or in Charax, where Roman troops were also stationed.2 I do not yet have any explanations to offer for this.

Meanwhile, parts of Roman military accoutrements and horse’s harness from various parts of the North Pontic region are stored in the collections of many museums in Russia and the Ukraine, objects about which specialists know nothing or, at best, very little. This article, which does not claim to offer far-reaching historical conclusions on the subject, is devoted to some objects of this kind from one of the largest Russian archaeological collections – that of the State Historical Museum in Moscow (SHM).3

Among the collections of articles from Chersonesos in the above museum there are parts of a Roman belt-set (Fig. 1), which was found in “earthen tomb” No. 492 excavated by K.K. Kostyushko-Valyuzhinich in 18944 (SHM

2 Sarnovski, Savelja 2000; Blavatskii 1951, 250-291. At the present time research staff at the State Historical Museum are preparing to publish some of the materials from the excavations at Charax undertaken by V.D. Blavatskii in 1932 and 1935, which are kept in the Museum’s collection.
4 Report of the Archaeological Commission (OAK) for 1894, 68, figs. 94-99. These figures have recently been reproduced by V.M. Zubar and N.A. Son, admittedly, virtually without commentary: Zubar, Son 1999, fig. 3.
Inv. No. 33081, Op. B.1/118, No. 40; Inv. No. 33426, Op. B.1/121, No. 109; Report of the Archaeological Commission dated 29:12:1895, No. 2101). In this burial complex “a large bronze fibula, a damaged bronze belt buckle, 24 bronze buttons-cum-cufflinks of various shapes and sizes, evidently originally used for decorating a belt” were found. An article was recently published by M.Yu. Treister in the journal Rossiiskaya arkheologiya (“Russian Archaeology”) on the subject of Roman military accoutrements and horse’s harness, part of which was also devoted to the belt-set discussed here. Unfortunately the author of the article had not known where the belt-set was currently stored and reproduced depictions of the objects concerned from an old publication of the Imperial Archaeological Commission (IAK), where there were only illustrations of some and not all of the objects. While in agreement with M.Yu. Treister regarding the attribution of the objects and the main conclusions he drew, I should like to offer readers a complete publication of this belt-set, as this particular find from the North Pontic region is a unique one.

There are 25 plaques in the SHM collection altogether. I am unable to explain why this number does not match the one indicated in the description of the finds in the Report of the Archaeological Commission: either a mistake was made in the original report or another similar buckle was found later, when the objects were transferred to the SHM. Unfortunately it is impossible to establish what the complete belt-set consisted of or to identify the fibula from that particular burial, as the objects were made over to the Museum as a ‘job-lot’ with others from excavations of several different years. Moreover the Imperial Archaeological Commission is well-known for its habit of handing over to several different museums materials from one and the same complex (for example, the State Historical Museum – known then still as the Emperor Alexander II Russian Historical Museum – and the Hermitage Museum). Today it is possible to establish reliably that the following objects were part of the belt-set under discussion.

A pelta-shaped (einfache Peltenbeschläge) plaque (Fig. 1, 2), parallels for which are known over a wide area in the late 2nd and 3rd century AD within

5 OAK for 1894, 68.
7 For information on the finds of parts of Roman military equipment in the Bosporus, see: Treister 1993; idem 1994, 91-99; idem 1996; idem 2001, 109-122.