THREE RELIEF-PLAQUES FROM OLBIA
(SOUTH RUSSIA)

BY

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In figure I I have given an illustration, in actual size, of three tiny relief-plaques from Olbia (South Russia), and now in the Leyden Museum 1). The plaques are made of a very thin sheet of gold, which was hammered onto a die or puncheon, so as to receive the imprint of the relief decoration. The latter shows, in all three plaques, virtually the same frontal bust of a woman. The woman's hair is parted in the middle, and has a torus-like portion in top. The garment shows a pointed décolleté, and is falling down in V-shaped folds over the breast. Small bosses appear just above the shoulders of the woman. At the contours of the relief-plaques, the rim has been folded over from behind, so as to provide a bordering frame all-around. All three plaques betray a certain amount of damage at the upper-left corners, and also some secondary deterioration elsewhere, yet it is certain that all essential traits can still be adequately measured from what remains. One might have some doubts, however, whether all the perforations, which are meant for attaching the plaques to a string or cord, are really ancient; there is a good reason for raising this question, since the perforations have been made within the expanse of the actual state of preservation, rather than when the plaques were complete. So one could argue that at least some of the perforations must be modern.

Traces found on the reverse of our gold plaques (not illustrated) prove the latter to have been impressed from a die or puncheon, presumably the same puncheon for all three of them. Now such a kind of puncheon has actually come to light during the 1936 campaign of the Russian excavations at Tyritake, an ancient fish-

1) Collective acc. no. I 1907/12. 11. Bought in December 1907, from a dealer, whose sources were at Odessa. I want to express my thanks to Dr. W. D. van Wijngaarden, Director of the Leyden Museum, for his granting me permission to publish the plaques here.
producing site a little south-west of Kertch (ancient Panticapaeum) ¹). We are referring to a bronze puncheon, here reproduced as our figure 2, 1-3, with a frontal woman's bust in relief at the lower end, which has recently been disclosed in literature ²). The Tyritake puncheon presents the woman's bust in a slightly battered state, but enough remains to establish beyond doubt that it was employed for making quite similar relief-impressions in foil of gold or silver, as in the case of our three plaques in Leyden: frontal view, the same torus-like portion of hair in top, the same indication of little bosses just above the shoulders. The Tyritake puncheon reveals a slightly different portion of the body, with no traces of drapery at all. The different arrangement of the bust's contours in Tyritake can be fully accounted for by the fact that the bronze puncheon was used for making medallions, i.e. plaques of circular shape, in lieu of rectangular plaques.

According to the excavator, W. F. Gajdukewic, the Tyritake puncheon dates from the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. If that is correct, we should confidently assign our Leyden plaques from Olbia to the same period. Anyhow, the Tyritake find of a puncheon is of revealing importance, as it provides solid proof for there having been metal-working shops in the Panticapaean area in Hellenistic times.

The products of the Hellenistic metal-working centres around Kertch were, of course, distributed to other Greek colonies along the northern shores of the Black Sea. As a matter of fact, quite a large series of oval gold plaques, and a gold ring, all with a frontal woman's bust in relief, were found already in 1908 by Weselowski, together with other precious sets of jewelry in an urn (number 3) at Tanais (near Rostow on-the-Don), dating from the 3rd-2nd

¹) For a map of the whole Pontic region, with the Panticapaeum and the Tyritake sites indicated on it, see Fasti Archaeologici IV, 1949, [1951], p. 284.

²) T. N. Knipowic, *Tanais*, Moscow-Leningrad 1949, [Russian], p. 62 with previous literature, and fig. 21a on p. 63; W. F. Gajdukewic in *Materialy i Issledovaniia po Archeologii S S S R* 25, Moscow-Leningrad 1952, [Russian], pp. 44-46, with fig. 43 on p. 44, and figs. 44-45 on p. 45. The puncheon has received the excavation—no. L/36—321, and has been sent for cleaning and analysis to Moscow.