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## DECORATED SWORDS AS EMBLEMS OF POWER ON THE STEPPES OF THE NORTHERN BLACK SEA REGION (3<sup>RD</sup> C. BC - MID-3<sup>RD</sup> C. AD)

**Keywords:** decorated sword, burials of elite, centers of political power, Iranians, Bosphoran kingdom, nomadic empire

*After this they met, and Syennesis gave Cyrus large sums in aid of his army; while Cyrus presented him with the customary royal gifts to wit, a horse with a gold bit, a necklace of gold, a gold bracelet, and a gold scimitar, a Persian dress. Xenophon, Anabasis, 2.27.*

*Pompey ... was amazed at the size and splendour of the arms and raiment which Mithridates used to wear; although the sword-belt, which cost four hundred talents, was stolen by Publius and sold to Ariarathes. Plutarch, Life of Pompey, 42.1.*

### Introduction

A sword, a weapon with a long metal blade with a sharp point for thrusting and edges for cutting, was for thousands of years the primary weapon of war by numerous cultures that placed great symbolic value on it. The weapon was often considered to have magical properties, and even possessed its own character. According to tradition, the relationship between a sword and its owner evolved independently of one another. A sword could betray its master, but could also provide him with unusual strength. Death by a sword was an honor that in some cultures is reflected *inter alia* in the hierarchy of methods of execution (as, for example, in the case of Anne Boleyn). In some societies, a bejeweled sword served as an individual's *insignia*, or even as an emblem and symbol of royalty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kovachev 2006, 256–258.

Often a richly decorated sword or dagger accompanied the corpse of a deceased monarch or chief as was the case with the burial of the Frankish king Childeric I.

The practice of using a sword in a funerary context as an item that accompanied the deceased into the afterlife varied considerably. In sedentary societies the mere presence of a sword as part of the funerary assemblage was the exception rather than the rule, which allows one to conclude that this object had a high social value, even if it was not decorated. On the other hand, in nomadic societies weapons were regularly part of the burial inventory. Moreover, ornamental swords are often found in nomadic burials, signifying that the deceased had been of a particularly high social status. Thus, the appearance of ornate swords in a funeral context might indicate the societies that had similar lifestyles and values.

The North Pontic region in the “Sarmatian epoch”<sup>2</sup> is one such territory where decorated swords of barbarian elites have been recovered. The region also consisted of different kinds of societies – Greek poleis, the Greco-barbarian Bosporan Kingdom, and nomadic and sedentary societies that depended to varying degrees on state structures. It is with these considerations in mind that we will focus on the practice of using decorated swords in the burial tradition of this region.

### **Burials with decorated swords**

Excavations on the territory of the North Pontic region were first conducted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but then intensively in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when in addition to the central academic research institutions in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev they were attended by regional archaeological centers of Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Rostov on-Don, Azov, Volgograd, Krasnodar, Simferopol and other cities. As a result, thousands of burial complexes were investigated. Most of the burials have appeared in national and regional publications, with varying degrees of completeness and quality. To the “Sarmatian epoch” belong 28 burials, which contained ornamented swords (fig. 1, see the Catalogue). Taking into account the amount of field research that has occurred in the North Pontic region compared with other steppe regions of Eurasia, the geographical and chronological distribution of these burial complexes may reflect an accurate picture of how these kinds of swords formed part of the funerary rites of a given population at a particular period of time.

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<sup>2</sup> Under the “Sarmatian epoch” in the North Pontic region we mean the period from the time of the demise of the classical Scythian culture in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC to the time before the appearance of a new ancient people, independent from the state structures (Goths) in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

The **first chronological group** consists of fifteen burials dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Nine were found in the Lower Volga region, six were located to the north of the Volga-Don interfluvium (Baranovka-I, Belokamenka, Politotdel'skoe, Verhnee Pogromnoe, Koroli, Pisarevka), and three were discovered south of the Volga-Don interfluvium (Zhutovo, Krivaia Luka, Īashkul'). Another group of six burial complexes was recovered in the Krasnodar region: one in the foothills of the North Caucasus (Mezmaĭ), and five in the steppes on the right bank of the Kuban river (Malai, Karstovyĭ, Oleniĭ, Dinskaĭa, Razdolnaĭa). Most of these elite funerary complexes are situated together with the "standard" burials in the same necropoleis. The distance between the elite burials is an average of ca. 100–200 km, while three burial mounds on the right bank of the Kuban river (Malai, Karstovyĭ, Oleniĭ) are less than 50 km from each other, which suggests their probable attachment to the same polity. The rest of the complexes might indicate centers of power related to independent social groups.

The earliest of the graves was discovered at the flat necropolis<sup>3</sup> of Mezmaĭ, where a variety of objects were found, including imported items such as a black-glazed cantharos, a bronze jug, and two glass vessels (a cup and a skythos). Most of the material from this grave is dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>4</sup> However, the authors of the publication are quick to note that the glass skythos belongs to type I.1 according to the classification of I. Zaset'skaĭa and I. Marchenko, which they place at the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> to early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>5</sup>

Other complexes rarely contain items that allow for such a narrow time frame. In grave 4 of barrow 27 of the Zhutovo necropolis a fusi-form unguentarium<sup>6</sup> was found, suggestive of a date for the burial of the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The barrow of Baranovka (Volgograd region) contained fragments of an iron fibula, which was determined to be an early variant of a bow-shaped brooch<sup>7</sup> and is thus dated to the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>8</sup> This date, however, does not correspond to the chronologies worked out for other, similar complexes. Thus these kinds of brooches are typically dated quite broadly as they seem to have begun to be manufactured in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.<sup>9</sup> A bronze fibula of the same type was found in the barrow of Pisarevka with a similar set of grave goods. Other graves are likewise dated broadly between the second and first century BC (see the Catalogue).

<sup>3</sup> Under "flat necropoleis" we mean cemeteries without burial mounds.

<sup>4</sup> Mordvintseva, Shevchenko, Zaitsev 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Zaset'skaya, Marchenko 1995, 96; Limberis, Marchenko 2003, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Sergatskov 2000, 162.

<sup>8</sup> Sergatskov 2000, 166.

<sup>9</sup> Zaitsev, Mordvintseva 2003.

This early group of elite burials with decorated swords can be divided into four groups based on the kinds of grave goods – markers of social status contained in them (tab. 1).

**Table 1. Content of grave goods – markers of social status found in elite burials, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.**

Burial complex	Bladed weapons	Quiver/ arrows	“Ritual baton”	Decorated belt plates	Phalerae	Gold plaques/tubules	Bronze cauldron	Imported vessels	Gold arm-ring	Gold brooch	Drinking cup	Neck-ring	Gold ear-ring	Throwing weapons	Helmet	Armour	Horse harness	Iron candelabrum
Baranovka-I	1	x	?															
Belokamenka	2	x		x		x			x									
Plitotdel’skoe	1	x		x														
Verkhnee Pogromnoe	2	x		x												x		
Koroli	1	x	x					x										
Pidarevka	1	x	x	x														
Zhutovo	2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x							
Krivaia Luka	1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x							
Īashkul’	2	x			x	x	x										x	
Mezmaĭ	4							x	x	x	x		x	12	2	x	x	x
Malai	1	x				x					x							
Karstovyĭ	4	x				x		x		x	x	2						
Olenĭ	2	x				x					x							
Dinskaia	1	x				x				x								
Razdol’naia	1	x	x			x		x	x	x								

The burial mounds of the barbarian elites from the northern part of the Volga-Don region are characterized by the presence of such insignia as a quiver decorated in gold, a “ritual baton” (a wooden plate with carved zoomorphic images covered in gold foil), belt buckles (often depicting a camel lying at rest or a camel fighting a beast of prey).

The burial mounds of the barbarian elites from the southern part of this same area are in many respects similar to the northern group, save that they also contain fabrics embroidered with gold thread, plaques and tubules as well as silver phalerae presumably from horse harness and a large bronze cauldron.

Another group of elite burials is situated in the steppe north of the Kuban. These burial complexes differ from the Volga groups by their lack of belt buckles, and the presence of drinking cups made of precious materials (silver, glass etc.), and gold polychrome brooches. In one grave two gold neck-rings were found.

A special assemblage of *insignia* was unearthed in the grave of the Mezmaĭ flat necropolis in the foothills of the North Caucasus consisting of four swords, two of which are decorated with gold plaques, an iron axe, a chain-mail, two helmets, and many spear- and javelin-heads. This excessive amount of weapons may be characterized as “over-equipment” (Überausstattung<sup>10</sup>). A similar characterization can be said of the animal sacrifices (three horses and one cow). This complex also consists of several gold brooches, gold details of a garment, and several drinking cups to name but just a few. The extreme abundance of funerary offerings and the special location of the grave<sup>11</sup> places it in a special class characterized as “ostentatious burials”.<sup>12</sup>

Seven graves dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD belong to the **second chronological group** (table 2). One burial was found in the southern part of the Lower Volga region (Kosika), two burial mounds were excavated between the rivers Sal and Manych in the Lower Don area (Arbuzov, Novyĭ), another in the Don delta (Dachi), one grave was unearthed in the middle reaches of the Kuban (Zubovskĭĭ), one barrow was excavated in the steppes north of the Kuban (Vodnyĭ), and one burial was found in catacomb 620 of the Ust’Al’ma flat necropolis in southwestern Crimea. The distance between the burial complexes is great, as only two graves in the Lower Don region (Arbuzov, Novyĭ) are situated less than 50 km from each other, making it highly probable that they reflect one political group.

Due to the large number of imported items, the burials of the second chronological group are more accurately dated, despite the partial destruction and robbery of some of them. The earliest grave dates to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Kosika).<sup>13</sup> Contemporaneous or slightly later are the mounds at Arbuzov and Novyĭ, as well as the barrow of Zubovskĭĭ containing a bronze hydria<sup>14</sup>. The burial mound near the village of Dachi is dated based on the finds of light-clay amphorae to the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The Roman bronze vessels found in the burial at the Ust’-Al’ma necropolis and in the Vodnyĭ barrow yield the same date as their counterpart near Dachi.

<sup>10</sup> Hansen 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The necropolis is not totally researched, but N. Shevchenko, who excavates this site, informs that other graves also contain *insignia*.

<sup>12</sup> Kossack 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Treister 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Shchukin 1992, 108.

**Table 2. Content of grave goods – markers of social status found in elite burials, late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC – 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.**

Burial complex	Bladed weapons	Quiver / arrow-heads	Belt buckles	Phalerae	Gold plaques / tubules	Bronze cauldron	Imported vessels	Arm-ring	Drinking cup	Horse harness	Neck-ring	Gold funeral wreath	Throwing weapons	Armour	Iron candelabrum	Gold ear-ring	Amphora
Kosika	2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				
Arbuzov	2		x														
Novyĭ	1		x			x											
Dachi	1			x	x			x	x	x							
Zubov	1		x	x	x		x	2	x	x				x	x		
Vodnyĭ	2		x		x	x	x		x				x				
Ust'-Al'ma	1		x		x		x	x							x	x	x

The burial inserted into a natural hill near village of Kosika (Lower Volga region) contains a large number of precious grave goods including a variety of *insignia*: weapons, a horse harness, a fabric embroidered with gold, gold jewelry (*inter alia* several neck rings and a bracelet), bejeweled belt buckles, bronze cauldrons, and silver tableware (tab. 2). In addition, gold leaves from a funeral wreath were found, marking this find as an exceptional case in which this Greco-Roman funeral artifact appears in what is otherwise a purely barbarian burial. This grave most certainly conforms to an ostentatious burial, especially as it was hidden outside ordinary kurgan necropoleis.

Two barrows from the Lower Don group (Arbuzov and Novyĭ) are located in necropoleis where ordinary burial mounds are also represented. The burial complexes include decorated swords, belts with gold buckles, and a bronze cauldron. The barrow near the village of Dachi is situated not far from the Greco-barbarian trading post of Tanais, outside the ordinary burial mounds. Despite the fact that the grave had been plundered, the finds in a hidden pit inside the mound of the barrow indicate an extraordinary amount of wealth that had made up this complex. On this basis, it allows us to attribute it as an ostentatious burial. In the grave there were found fragments of a glass drinking cup and the remains of a cloth embroidered with gold thread. The hidden pit contained a horse harness richly ornamented with gold and colorful inlays of precious stones, a sword, an arm-ring, and a fabric with plaques sewn onto it.

Two graves make up the Kuban group. One barrow (Vodnyĭ) is situated in the same area as the elite burials of the first chronological group. But the set of

prestige items is different. There is no gold polychrome brooch, which is so characteristic of the earlier period, but there are a belt buckle and an imported bronze jug of Roman provenance. Another barrow appears in the new district of the Kuban region on the left bank of the river in the piedmont. The burial complex was excavated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, partly by an amateur, and is thus not well-documented. Many precious objects were recovered, including richly decorated belt plaques, a sword, phalerae of a horse harness, cloth sewn with gold plaques, a drinking cup, a bronze jar of Roman provenance, an antique silver phiala inscribed to the sanctuary of Thasos (dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC), a bronze cauldron, and an iron candelabrum among many other items.

Burial 2 in catacomb 620 of the Ust'-Al'ma necropolis in the Crimea is close to other burial complexes in which decorated swords of this period have been found, but differs from other elite male burials that are concentrated in this burial ground. The status symbols associated with elite burials of southwestern Crimea are gold funeral wreaths and gold face-coverings for eyes and mouth. Although they are absent in burial 620–2 at Ust'-Al'ma. On the other hand, the decorated swords and ornamented belts are not recorded anywhere else in the Crimea at this time, except for the Ust'-Al'ma. It is possible that it is due to the special identity of the warrior interred there.

The **third chronological group** of elite burials with decorated swords consists of six burial complexes and is dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (table 3). It includes one burial in the south part of the Lower Volga region (Baranovka, Astrakhan' region), two barrows in the Don delta (Valovyĭ, Vysochino), two burial mounds in the middle reaches of the Kuban (Ust'-Labinskaĭa, Tiflisskaĭa), and one burial in the necropolis of the Greek city of Gorgippia, modern Anapa. The burial complex of Baranovka is located in a group of burial mounds that contain ordinary graves. The barrows from Valovyĭ and Vysochino belong to the elite kurgan necropoleis. The burials from Ust'-Labinskaĭa and Tiflisskaĭa belong to a long chain of kurgans on the right bank of the middle Kuban, which is termed "Zolotoe Kladbishche" (the Gold Cemetery) in scientific literature. The ordinary graves are concentrated in the same area as flat necropoleis. The crypt at Gorgippia occupies a special place in the Greek necropolis.

The burial of Baranovka (Astrakhan' region) is difficult to date due to the small number of grave goods. Nonetheless, the authors of excavation attribute this burial complex to the Late Sarmatian culture based on parallels associated with hand-made pottery and on the unusual shape of the pommel of the sword.<sup>15</sup> The burials from Ust'-Labinskaĭa and Tiflisskaĭa are dated according to the form

<sup>15</sup> Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1989, 18–19.

of the swords' pommels ornamented with polychrome inlays.<sup>16</sup> The elite complexes at Valovyī and Vysochino are dated based on finds of imported vessels and belt fittings to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The crypt at Gorgippia is dated near the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 3. Content of grave goods – markers of social status found in elite burials, 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.**

Burial complex	Bladed weapons	Belt fittings	Phalerae	Horse harness	Imported vessels	Drinking cup	Gold plaques / tubules	Decorated lamp	Arm-ring	Neck-ring	Face coverings	Gold funeral wreath	Finger-ring	Strigil	Incense-burner	Stylus
Baranovka (Astrakhan')	1															
Valovyī	3	x	x	x	x	x										
Vysochino	3					x										
Ust'-Labinskaya	1	x														
Tiflisskaya	1															
Gorgippia	2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Burials from the Lower Volga (Baranovka), Lower Don (Vysochino), and Kuban region (Ust'-Labinskaya, Tiflisskaya) contain only decorated swords as *insignia*. The Valovyī barrow and the crypt at Gorgippia may be regarded as ostentatious burials. In Valovyī a set of imported bronze tableware, a richly decorated belt and horse harness, and three swords (one long and two short) were found. Especially interesting is the burial in a crypt from the necropolis at Gorgippia. It was a burial of a Bosporan noble, judging by its placement in a stone sarcophagus on the territory of the Bosporan necropolis and majority of grave goods displaying someone of high social status (for example, a gold funeral wreath, gold facial coverings, finger-rings with intaglio, strigili, stylus, etc.).<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the presence of a gold neck-ring, bracelet, belt-fittings, horse harness and a jeweled sword seem to indicate the respect and close relationship that the Bosporan elite had with the barbarian nobility, since these objects formed part of an intimate inventory that accompanied the deceased. In this connection it is necessary to mention the appearance on Bosporan tombstones at this

<sup>16</sup> Khazanov 1971, 16, 17, 21 tab. XIII: 5, tab. XIV: 4, 5, 6, 7, 9; Gushchina, Zasetkaia 1994, 57, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Treister 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Mordvinceva, Treister 2005.



time of warriors, dressed as barbarians, replete with belted sword with ringedommel.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the analysis of funeral complexes containing decorated swords reveals chronological differences in composition and location.

Most of the burial complexes with decorated swords dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC are situated in the steppes of the Lower Volga and Kuban regions that were inhabited by nomadic peoples. Male burials in these territories normally contain weapons, especially swords. The aforementioned regional groups of elite warrior graves, however, contain a special set of status objects. The complexes of the Volga group are characterized by a “ritual baton” with carved Animal Style images as a local *insignia*, the Kuban graves contain gold polychrome brooches. Elite burials of both groups are situated in the same necropoleis as ordinary graves. The implication is that these local elites were probably part of the same social unite, whose political power was not delegated to some supra-tribal structure.

The grave in the Mezmaï necropolis show different features and is defined as an ostentatious burial. As a rule, the appearance of such burial complexes reflects a certain stage in the social formation, namely a complex society with a central power.<sup>20</sup> It is believed that such richly equipped graves appear in times of instability and / or cultural change,<sup>21</sup> often in a contact zone that borders a technically and organizationally superior civilization. This proximity resulted in a process whereby the less complex society ultimately concentrated its authority.<sup>22</sup> The location of this ostentatious burial at the Mezmaï necropolis in the mountain zone, prior to passing from the North Caucasus to the South Caucasus countries and Iran, indicates the direction of contact by the political elite who ruled the foothills of the North Caucasus.

In the following chronological period from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, there were significant changes in the composition and location of burial complexes of warrior elites. On the one hand, the content of status objects changed. Some *insignia* including a quiver decorated in gold, and local status symbols, such as a “ritual baton” and a gold polychrome fibula, no longer form part of the grave inventory. Now nearly all male elite burials contain a belt with gold or silver elements and imported bronze and silver tableware (mostly of Roman provenance). On the other hand, the number and location of elite burials are markedly reduced. In the northern part of the Volga region, for example, there are no burials with decorated swords. In fact, a similar situation is observed in

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<sup>19</sup> Kreuz 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Egg 2009, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Kossack 1998, Schier 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Kossack 1998, 31; Egg 2009, 46.

the steppes north of the Kuban. Indeed, only one burial complex with a decorated sword was found. But elite warrior graves appeared in the Lower Don region, on the left bank of the Kuban and in southwestern Crimea. Most are situated in the same necropoleis as ordinary graves. Ostentatious burials were found in the southern part of the Volga (Kosika, mid–1st century BC), near the left bank of the middle Kuban (Zubovskiĭ, late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC), and in the Don delta (Dachi, the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD). This could reflect an increase in the complexity of the political structure and the strengthening of the political power of the elites of the Volga, Kuban, and Don areas. By the end of the second period, barbarian political centers were situated on the borders of the Greek states of the North Pontic.

The next chronological period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the mid–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD shows a similar pattern of elite burials with decorated swords. In this case, the status objects have not significantly changed. Ostentatious burials are noticed in the Lower Don region as well as on the territory of the Bosporan kingdom (i.e., the necropolis of Gorgippia).

In order to reconstruct the historical circumstances that caused these changes, it is necessary to consider the construction and decorative features of the swords.

### **The construction and decorative features of the swords**

The majority of the decorated swords of the first chronological group have short blades with the total length including the handle from 36 cm (Īashkul') to 54.4 cm (Razdol'naĭa), mostly within 46–48 cm. In two cases, together with a short sword was a longer decorated sword of 102 cm (Īashkul') and 91 cm (Mezmaĭ). Among the short swords there are two basic types: 1) a triangularly shaped blade, a direct guard, and a crescent-shaped pommel with a thickening at the ends; and 2) a blade that tapers near the point, a direct guard, and a curve-shaped pommel.

All of the swords of the northern Volga-Don group, one from Īashkul', and most from the right bank of the Kuban region belong to the former type. The latter is represented by swords from Zhutovo (the southern Volga-Don group) and Razdol'naĭa (on the right bank of the Kuban). In several cases, short decorated swords are found with long undecorated swords consisted of an arcuate-shaped pommel (Mezmaĭ, Olenĭĭ), a ring-shaped pommel (Belokamenka, Verkhnee Pogromnoe), or lacking a metal pommel altogether (Īashkul', Zhutovo).

The majority of the swords associated with the first chronological group are decorated in similar fashion. Their grip and scabbard are overlaid with gold leaf.

In six cases the scabbard is decorated with gold filigree stripes at the top and bottom of the sheath. These stripes probably mark where the sword was attached to the sword belt. In two cases (Belokamenka and Verhnee Pogromnoe) a personal inspection revealed that the foil at the top of the sheath goes further to the guard of the sword, making it non-functional.<sup>23</sup> According to the metallographic analysis of Dr. Valentina Porokh, some swords and daggers from the Sarmatian burials of the Volga and Ural regions are made of ball iron, thereby rendering them unusable in combat.<sup>24</sup>

Swords from Mezmaī contain a special kind of decoration. Gold filigree plaques with inlay of striped agate and glass were fixed to the sheath. This method of decoration is noticed for the first time. Possibly, we are dealing with a local tradition.

All the decorated swords of the second chronological period from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD are short in length, measuring from 42 to 48 cm. The burial of Kosika included the remains of two decorated swords, but neither their length nor the features of the design of their pommels are known because of their fragmentary state. The pommels of the swords from the Zubovskī barrow and the barrow near the village of Dachi resemble a disk. The pommel of the sword from Arbuzov is “segment”-shaped. The pommel of the sword from Novyī is not preserved.<sup>25</sup> The sword from Vodnyī had no pommel. The sword from Ust’-Al’ma has a ring-shaped pommel. Thus, none of the decorated swords of this period had an arcuate or crescent-shaped pommel, which indicates a change in the type of the decorated short sword in the North Pontic region.

Likewise, changes in the decorative features of swords and their scabbards have also been detected. For example, the sheath consisting of four lateral projections first appeared in this period. Such a sheath is recorded in the burial complexes of Kosika, Zubovskī and Dachi. These swords are particularly richly decorated. The sheath from Kosika is heavily damaged and cannot be attributed to a particular school of decoration. The specimens from Zubovskī and Dachi are ornamented with scenes in the Animal Style bejeweled with semi-precious stone and glass inlays, and may be called “ostentatious swords”. The decorative elements of these swords and scabbards suggest their production in Iran and Bactria.<sup>26</sup> A sheath similar in form and design is represented on reliefs of Parthian kings (fig. 12). The decor of sheaths from other burial complexes resembles those of the first chronological group: they are decorated with overlays of gold or bronze foil.

<sup>23</sup> Mordvintseva, Shinkar’ 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Porokh 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Ил’юков, Vlaskin 1992, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Mordvintseva 2010, 194.

In the third chronological period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD long and short decorated swords are known. Short decorated swords (from 34 to 56 cm in length) in sheaths with four lateral projections are found on the territory of the Bosporan kingdom near Tanais (Valovyī, Vysochino) and in Gorgippia. The sheaths from Valovyī and Vysochino are quite simple in décor. Their lateral projections are ornamented with gold or silver flat discs. The scabbard and the pommel of the sword from Gorgippia are bejeweled with glass and stone inlays. In contrast to the sheaths from Dachi and Zubovskii this ostentatious sword was probably made by Bosporan craftsmen, because it is technically and ornamentally close to other Bosporan toreutics. On the Bosporan workshops points also a several times repeated image of a bird of prey pecking a hare.

Along with decorated swords in sheaths with four lateral projections there are swords of different type and decoration found. They have a long grip ending with a round in plan pommel ornamented with colorful inlays and granulation. Two of the swords come from the burials of Tiflisskaia and Ust'-Labinskaia (Kuban), while the third was found in the Valovyī burial mound. This type of sword is probably represented on the graffito at Pābag at Persepolis.<sup>27</sup> The polychrome decoration is, however, typical for the jewelry style, which was widespread at that time in the Bosporan kingdom and the North Pontic region suggesting that it might have been of local manufacture. This type of decorated swords was found in a barrow located in the southern part of the Volga-Don interfluvium (Baranovka, Astrakhan' region). It is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>28</sup> Its volute-shaped pommel is made of bronze. The sheath is covered with gold foil, similar to the examples of the first chronological group.

Thus, the first chronological period comprises swords of a similar type that were fashioned locally in the Lower Volga and Kuban. They clearly indicate the close contact that must have existed among the elites of these regions. The swords from Mezmaī differ from them both in type and décor, perhaps hinting that the local elite in this region lived in a relative isolation. Taking into consideration the area in which the cemetery is situated, the main activity of the local peoples, apparently, was to control the passes connecting the North Caucasus with the territory of the Transcaucasia. Moreover, the swords might well represent a society in which the elite did not depend on the economic and cultural network of the North Pontic steppe.

The decorated swords of the second and the third chronological periods differ in type and design. Apart from the pieces of local production, there are others whose type and décor resemble those associated with Iranian royals. It is conceivable that some of these ostentatious swords could be made in Bactria or Iran.

<sup>27</sup> Daryae 2010, 244.

<sup>28</sup> Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1989, 18–19, 41–44.

## Conclusion

The majority of burial complexes with decorated swords are located in the Asian part of the North Pontic region, adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Bosporan kingdom. At the same time in other parts of the North Pontic region (the Crimea and the steppes between the Dniester and the Don) the burial complexes of barbarian elites are well represented. However, they do not contain decorated swords. Apparently, the cultures of the western and eastern portions of the North Pontic region differ in this respect, perhaps due to their cultural diversity. The use of short swords in gold scabbards in the Lower Volga, Lower Don and Kuban are to be found among the elites of Iran.

A short sword (akinakes) in a gold sheath as a crucial component of *insignia* and even *regalia* is made in reference to rulers of ancient Iran (Herod. Hist. 7.54; 9.80; Plut. Pomp.42.1; Xenoph. Anab. 2.27; 8.28). Short swords were particularly important in the Parthian period, at least beginning in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC when they were used as royal emblems of power. In Kushan Bactria, however, short swords were replaced by long swords as symbols of power.

A special role of the ostentatious swords in Iranian culture is confirmed by numerous images, the most famous of which are rock reliefs and statues that transmit their form and decoration.<sup>29</sup> The burial rite using a richly decorated sword was apparently characteristic of the Iranian cultural tradition. Moreover, swords and daggers with gold sheaths have been found in the graves of the Scythians and Sarmatians whose origins are considered Iranian.<sup>30</sup>

The emergence and dissemination of short swords with crescent / arcuate pommels in a gold sheath as part of the funerary ritual coincides with the activities of Mithridates VI Eupator, who in his attempts to expand his kingdom came into contact with a number of "Scythian" chiefs. The areas that are marked by the burial complexes with decorated swords were, apparently, the centers of political power. In this sense, it is interesting to recall the excerpt from Strabo about the numerous Upper Aorsi, comprising exiled Aorsi and Siraki, who were involved in a dynastic struggle for control of the Bosporan kingdom (Strabo, Geogr. 11.5.8). These peoples conducted a camel caravan network of imported Indian and Babylonian goods from the Armenians and the Medes. The Aorsi lived along the river Tanais (modern Don), the Upper Aorsi dwelled probably on the Lower Volga, and the Siraki inhabited a territory near the river Achardeos (evidently, the Kuban), which flows from the Caucasus Mountains into Lake Maiotis (Sea of Azov). Both the Siraki and Aorsi provided the rivals in the Bosporan war with a great number of mounted warriors. Probably, the Lower Volga and the

<sup>29</sup> Ghirshman 1962, 66 pl. 79, 67 pl. 80; Brentjes 1993, fig. 39, fig. 41.

<sup>30</sup> Abaev 1971.

Kuban, two areas in which different status symbols were found in the graves of the elite correspond to the warlike peoples mentioned by Strabo.<sup>31</sup> The situation created by Mithridates VI Eupator in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC evidently led to the increase of social complexity and centralization of the peoples inhabiting these areas manifested in the ostentatious burial at Kosika. It might also animate cultural ties between the Bosporan and Iranian elites since Mithridates VI had brought his court – nobles, servants, and craftsmen from the kingdom of Pontus to the Bosporan kingdom. In this regard, the emergence of the sheathed sword of Parthian type found in the burial at Kosika is hardly coincidental. This period marks the emergence of ostentatious swords of this type periodically appearing in the burial repertoire of barbarian and even Bosporan elites. The burial complexes of elite warriors concentrated close to the borders of the Bosporan kingdom, as well as the Bosporan kingdom itself becomes a complex social organism that includes neighboring barbarian polities that increasingly resembles a small nomadic empire.

## Catalogue of the graves with decorated swords<sup>32</sup>

### *The Lower Volga region*

#### 1.

**Name of the burial complex.** Verkhnee Pogromnoe, barrow 7, grave 6.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Verkhnee Pogromnoe village, Leninsk district, Volgograd region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Leningrad Department of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Valentin Shilov, 1957.

**Burial construction.** A niche-grave dug in a Bronze Age burial mound.

**Buried person(s).** A male.

**Finds.** A long iron sword with a ring pommel in wooden sheath. A short sword with a sheath covered by gold plating, 45.8 cm long (fig. 5: 2). A bronze mirror. 40–45 iron arrow heads. An iron quiver hook. Iron scales from an armour. Bones of an animal. A bronze gilded belt buckle.

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999, 138–139.

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<sup>31</sup> See also Olbrycht 2001, 431ff.

<sup>32</sup> The burial complexes are arranged after the region of their location, and then in a chronological order.

## 2.

**Name of the burial complex.** Belokamenka II, barrow 7, grave 3.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Belokamenka village, Staraya Poltavka district, Volgograd region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Volgograd State University under direction of Alexander Lukashov, 1988.

**Burial construction.** A niche-grave was dug in a barrow mound of earlier times. An entrance pit: 2.48x0.85 m, 2.9 m deep; the chamber: 2.48x0.88 m.

**Buried person(s).** A female of 16 years of age (Burial 1) and 60 year old male (Burial 2). The male was decapitated with the head placed aside the body.

**Finds (Burial 1).** Ram's bones. An iron knife. A loom weight. A bone tubule. An iron ring in fragments. A necklace of coral, glass and jet beads.

**Finds (Burial 2).** A long iron sword with a ring pommel. A short iron sword with a sheath covered by gold plating, 46 cm long (fig. 5: 3). One bronze arrow head, iron arrow heads. A bronze mirror. 2 whet-stones. Gold tubules from a necklace. A gold spiral arm-ring. 2 bronze belt buckles with the representation of a camel lying down.

**Date.** Second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999, 138; Mordvintseva, Khabarova 2006, cat. 25.

## 3.

**Name of the burial complex.** Zhutovo, barrow 27, grave 4.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Zhutovo railway station, Oktiabr'skiĭ district, Volgograd region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Leningrad Department of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Valentin Shilov, 1964.

**Burial construction.** A niche-grave covered with a burial mound. In the burial mound found separately was a ritual deposition of silver phaleræ of a horse harness.

**Buried person(s).** A male.

**Finds.** A long iron sword with a long grip without pommel. A short sword with a sheath covered by gold plating, 46 cm long (fig. 4: 1). A wooden quiver ornamented with gold bands. Iron arrow heads. A bronze mirror. A glass perfume vessel. A bronze forged cauldron. Ceramic jugs. A ceramic fusi-form unguentarium. Gold plating from a wooden vessel. Iron braces. Gold sewn plaques of two types. 2 belt front-buckles made of jet.

**Date.** Second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Shilov 1975, 139–140; Mordvintseva 1994, 99; Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999, 139–140; Mordvintseva, Khabarova 2006, cat. 77.

#### 4.

**Name of the burial complex.** Baranovka I, barrow 10, grave 9.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Baranovka village, Kamyshin district, Volgograd region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Volgograd State University under direction of Igor Sergatskov, 1982.

**Burial construction.** Burial mound 4.21 m high, 34 m in diameter, constructed in the Bronze Age. A niche-grave was dug in the burial mound. The entrance pit: 2.42x0.75 m, 2.6 m deep; the chamber: 2.25x1.15 m.

**Buried person(s).** A male 30–35 years old (Burial 1) and an elderly female (Burial 2).

**Finds (Burial 1).** A ram's leg with a scapula. An iron knife. An iron sword 43.7 cm long (fig. 5: 4) in a sheath with gold plating. A quiver made of birch bark and leather with gold plates ornamented with zoomorphic images. 40 iron arrow heads. A piece of leather near the scull. An iron fibula.

**Finds (Burial 2).** A bronze mirror. A loom weight. A ram's leg and two scapulas. A necklace of glass and stone beads. Gold temple pendants.

**Common burial finds.** Fish scales.

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Sergatskov 2000, 30–32; Mordvintseva, Khabarova 2006, cat. 19–20.

#### 5.

**Name of the burial complex.** Koroli, barrow 4, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Korolevskii steading, Novaïa Anna district, Volgograd region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Volgograd State Pedagogic University under direction of Vladislav Mamontov, 1969.

**Burial construction.** Bronze Age burial mound, 3.44 m high, by 38 m in diameter. A rectangular grave was dug in the burial mound, 2.2 m deep from the summit of the barrow.

**Buried person(s).** A male 40–45 years old.

**Finds.** A ceramic jug. A short iron sword with a sheath decorated with gold plating (fig. 7: 7), 39.5 cm long. An iron knife. A quiver made of birch bark ornamented with gold straps. Iron arrow heads. A wooden plate with zoomorphic images covered with gold foil.

**Date.** V. Mamontov dated the grave to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Mamontov 2001, 120). However, taking into account the type of vessel that was found, the burial should be dated not earlier than the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Mamontov 2001, 111–112.



## 6.

**Name of the burial complex.** Politotdel'skoe, barrow 4, grave 20.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Politotdel'skoe village, Nikolaevsk district, Volgograd region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Konstantin Smirnov, 1952.

**Burial construction.** Bronze Age burial mound, 0.6 m high, 20x30 m in diameter. A rectangular pit with side-shelves dug in the burial mound 2.4x1.1 m, 2.67 m deep from the summit of the barrow.

**Buried person(s).** A male (maturus).

**Finds.** A ram's front leg with a scapula. A hand-made pot. A hand-made ceramic incense burner. An iron knife. An iron quiver hook. A fragment of the blade from a sword or a spear. A short iron sword with a ring pommel, ca. 36 cm long (there is no drawing or photo, or any other kind of representation). An iron sheath with the remains of gold threads. A bronze belt buckle. A fragment of the whet-stone. A bronze plaque of a conical form with a hole in the centre.

**Date.** K. Smirnov dated the grave to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC due to the bronze buckle (Smirnov 1959, 248). However, the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC cannot be excluded.

**Bibliography.** Smirnov 1959, 243–244.

## 7.

**Name of the burial complex.** Krivaia Luka VIII, barrow 5, grave 12.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Krivaia Luka tract, Chernyi Iar, Astrakhan' region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of German Fedorov-Davydov, 1975.

**Burial construction.** A burial mound of the Scythian period, 0.8 m high, 20 m in diameter. A rectangular grave-pit was dug in the burial mound: 3.2x1.4–1.75 m, 3.67 m deep from the summit of the barrow. In the bottom of the grave-pit there was made a deepening 2.25x0.85–0.95 m. It contained a wooden coffin 1.8x0.8 m. Under the coffin a round hiding-place was dug 0.34x0.37 m, 24 deeper than the level of the coffin.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** *Outside the coffin.* A big ceramic jug. Ribs of an animal. *Inside the coffin.* A short iron sword with a crescent-shaped pommel in a sheath with gold details, 52 cm long (fig. 4: 2, 3). A quiver ornamented with gold straps. Iron arrow heads. A gold elongated rectangular plate with rounded end. A gold plate with ornamentation, probably from a ritual baton. Gold sewn plaques. A bronze belt front-buckle decorated with gold foil. A silver buckle. A bone cylindrical hoop. *In the hiding-place.* A big bronze cast cauldron. A wooden cup in fragments. An

iron unidentified item. 2 bronze rings. An iron hook. 2 silver phalerae of a horse harness.

**Date.** Second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Fedorov-Davydov et al. 1975, 60–64.

## 8.

**Name of the burial complex.** Pisarevka II, barrow 6, grave 1–2.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Pisarevka village, Ilovliā district, Volgograd region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Volgograd State Pedagogic University under direction of Vladislav Mamontov, 1999–2001.

**Burial construction.** A rectangular grave-pit was dug in an earlier burial mound: 5.37x0.98 m, 1.23 m deep from the level of ancient ground surface. Burial 1 (in the south part of the grave-pit) was made in a wooden block in shape of a ship, 2.55x0.72 m. Burial 2 (in the north part of the grave-pit) was made in a wooden block in shape of a ship of the same size.

**Buried person(s).** A male 25–30 years old (Burial 1) and a male 25–30 years old (Burial 2).

**Finds (Burial 1).** A short iron sword.

**Finds (Burial 2).** A bronze mirror. A pebble. A whet-stone. A short iron sword in a wooden sheath covered by gold foil, 47.1 cm long (fig. 5: 1). A big bead from the sword knot. A quiver ornamented with gold straps. Iron arrow heads. A wooden rectangular elongated plate with zoomorphic images covered with gold foil (ritual baton). Wooden derrails of a bow. An iron knife. A bronze fibula. A bronze cast belt front-buckle with representation of a struggle between a camel and a beast of prey.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Mamontov 2002, 251–256.

## 9.

**Name of the burial complex.** Īashkul', burial ground 37, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Īashkul' village, an autonomous Republic of Kalmykia. Excavations in the zone of construction of the Volga-Chograī channel, 1988.

**Burial construction.** A rectangular grave with side shelves was dug in a natural hill, which was used as a burial mound in the Bronze Age. A size of the grave was 3x1.55 m, 3.06 m deep from the summit of the hill. In the north-western corner of the grave was dug a hiding semi-circle niche. In the center of the eastern side of the grave there was dug a similar hiding niche.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** *Inside the grave.* A short iron sword with a crescent-shaped pommel in a sheaf decorated with gold foil, 36 cm long (fig. 4: 4). A long iron sword with a long grip without pommel, in a sheath decorated with gold foil, 102 cm long (fig. 4: 5). A leather quiver ornamented with gold threads. Iron arrow heads. An iron knife. Bronze details of a belt. Gold sewn plaques of three types. *Inside the hiding niche 1.* A cast bronze cauldron. Bones of a horse. *Inside the hiding niche 2.* Gold phalerae from horse bridle. Iron bits ornamented with gold foil. 2 gold rings from the horse harness. Bronze details of a belt (spoon-shaped pendants). 2 silver gilded phalerae and silver front-piece.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Otchir-Goriaeva 2002.

## 10.

**Name of the burial complex.** Kosika, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Kosika village, Enotaevka district, Astrakhan' region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of German Fedorov-Davydov and Vladimir Dvornichenko, 1984.

**Burial construction.** A rectangular grave was dug in a natural hill. It was destroyed during construction works.

**Buried person(s).** A male 35 years old.

**Finds.** Gold sewn plaques and gold threads, wooden poles with silver tops from a canopy above the grave. *From the disturbed and displaced content of the grave.* Gold sewn plaques. Pieces of gold foil. Gold leafs from a funerary wreath. Gold threads. Inlays. Gold buttons. *In the grave.* A leather sac. A silver pyxis. 2 gold pendants. 2 spear-heads. Fragments from an iron sword in a sheath with gold plating and turquoise inlays (fig. 8: 1, 2). An iron short sword in a sheath ornamented with gold wire. Iron arrow heads. A set of silver vessels. A forged bronze cauldron with an inscription in Greek. Several bronze vessels. A silver spoon. A silver mirror. Belt equipment. A whet-stone with a gold cap with representation of a head of the beast of pray. An iron knife. An iron razor with gold details. Gold phalerae from bridle and saddler. A gold pectoral. A gold armband. A pair of gold belt front-buckles in the shape of a hedgehog. A gold tip from a torque. 4 stone seals. Amulets.

**Date.** Mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Treister 2005), compare: mid-1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1993, 178).

**Bibliography.** Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1989; Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1993; Treister 2005; Mordvinceva, Treister 2007, complex A114.

## 11.

**Name of the burial complex.** Baranovka, barrow 17, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Baranovka village, Chernyĭ Īar district, Astrakhan' region. Excavation of the archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of German Fedorov-Davydov, 1972 г.

**Burial construction.** A rectangular grave covered with a burial mound 0.5 m high, 20 m in diameter. The size of the grave: 2.3x1.7 m, 1.50 m deep from the level of ancient ground surface.

**Buried person(s).** An adult. The burial was disturbed in antiquity, probably as a result of post-burial rituals.

**Finds.** A hand-made ceramic cup. Fragments of hand-made pot. A small hand-made pot. Ram's bones. Fragments of a whip: a bone grip decorated with gold foil with floral ornamentation and a bronze ring-weighting. An iron short sword with a separately made bronze crescent-shaped pommel and a cross-guard, in a sheath with gold plating (fig. 6: 1).

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1989, 18–19, 41–44 fig. 23–26.

### *The Kuban' region*

## 12.

**Name of the burial complex.** Mezmaĭ, sector I, grave 3.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Mezmaĭ village, Apsheronsk district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Krasnodar State Historic and Archaeological Museum-Reserve under direction of Nikolaĭ Shevchenko, 2005.

**Burial construction.** A stone cist 3.2x1.2 m, 2.6 m deep from the surface.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** *In the filling of the grave, above the stone cist.* A bronze arm-ring. A horse burial 1. Iron bits. A horse burial 2. Iron bits. A big glass bead. A horse burial 3. Iron bits. A cow burial. Fragment of a ceramic bowl. *Inside the stone cist.* 2 bronze helmets. A gold temple-pendant 2 gold brooches. 3 big gold plaques. 3 small gold sewn plaques. 4 gold buttons. A pendant made from a gold coin. A gold bead. A gold arm-ring. 2 long iron swords. A long iron sword ornamented with a gold plaque, 91 cm long (fig. 7: 3). A short iron sword with a sheath ornamented with a gold plaque, 48.5 cm long (fig. 7: 4). 6 spear-heads. 6 javelin-heads. An iron axe. An iron arrow-head. An iron tripod. A bronze mirror. A chalcedony bead with gold cap. A glass cup. A glass cantharos. A black-glazed cantharos. A bronze jug. 2 ceramic bowls. An iron chain-mail. A bronze

basin. Iron pincers. 2 ceramic cantharoi. A big ceramic jug. A hand-made ceramic incense-burner. A bone knife. An item made of horn. A skull of wild boar.

**Date.** Second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 289, 297; Mordvintseva, Shevchenko, Zaitsev 2012.

### 13.

**Name of the burial complex.** Oleniĭ I, barrow 3, grave 4.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Oleniĭ stead-ing, Kaliniskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the North-Caucasian expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Alexander Geĭ, 1987.

**Burial construction.** Burial mound 60x45 m, 1.5 m high. A niche-grave was dug in the burial mound of earlier times. The entrance-pit: 3.05x1.3 m. The chamber: 2.9x1.32 m, 4.31 deep from the summit of the barrow.

**Buried person(s).** A male 20–25 years old.

**Finds.** A ceramic cup. A big ceramic jug. A glass cantharos. A long iron sword with a crescent-shaped pommel. A short iron sword with a crescent-shaped pommel, 49 cm long (fig. 7: 1). An iron arrow head. Bronze sewn plaques. A bronze belt front-buckle. A bronze tip of a belt. Gold threads. Gold sewn plaques.

**Date.** Second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Geĭ 1988.

### 14.

**Name of the burial complex.** Karstovyĭ, barrow 1, grave 2.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Kaliniskaĭa village, Kaliniskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the North-Caucasian expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Alexander Geĭ, 1986.

**Burial construction.** Burial mound 5 m high, 60 m in diameter. A catacomb-grave was dug in the burial mound. The entrance pit: 1.90x1 m, 3.63 m deep from the summit of the barrow. The chamber: 2.5x1.40 m, 3.73 m deep from the summit of the barrow. In the bottom of the chamber, under the coffin with inhumation, was dug a hiding-pit 18x8 cm.

**Buried person(s).** An adolescent 14–19 years old.

**Finds.** *In the chamber.* A blanket embroidered with gold sewn plaques and tubules. A ceramic amphorisk. A pebble. An amulet. A ceramic oinochoia. Bones of a ram. 3 long iron knives. A wooden vessel. Gold and silver bindings. A short iron sword with a crescent pommel in a sheath ornamented with gold foil, 50 cm

long (fig. 6: 3). Iron arrow heads. A quiver ornamented with gold sewn plaques and straps. A gold brooch. *In the hidden pit*. 2 gold torques and a silver phiala.

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Geĭ, Sateev 1987.

### 15.

**Name of the burial complex.** Dinskaĭa, barrow 1, grave 3.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Dinskaĭa village, Dinskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Krasnodar State Historic and Archaeological Museum-Reserve under direction of Nikita Anfimov and Evangelina Īarkova (Khachaturova), 1973.

**Burial construction.** The grave was dug in a Bronze Age burial mound.

**Buried person(s).** A male.

**Finds.** An short iron sword without pommel in a sheath ornamented with gold foil (fig. 6: 5; fig. 8: 6). Iron arrow-heads. Gold brooch. Gold sewn plaques and tubules.

**Date.** Late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Marchenko 1996, complex 385 fig. 96; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 104.

### 16.

**Name of the burial complex.** Malai I, barrow 9, grave 9.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Malai steading, Kalininskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the North-Caucasian expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Alexander Geĭ, 1981.

**Burial construction.** A catacomb-grave was dug in a Bronze Age burial mound, 5 m high.

**Buried person(s).** An adult male.

**Finds.** A red-slip cantharos. A big ceramic jug. 2 fragments of an iron chain. A short iron sword with a crescent-shaped pommel in a sheath covered with gold foil (fig. 6: 4). An iron knife. A fragment of a bronze item. Iron arrow heads. Gold straps from a quiver. Gold sewn plaques of five types.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Geĭ 1986; Marchenko 1996, complex 302; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 280.

### 17.

**Name of the burial complex.** Razdol'naĭa, barrow 7, grave 13.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Razdol'naĭa village, Korenovsk district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the archaeological

expedition of Krasnodar State Historic and Archaeological Museum-Reserve under direction of Alexander Nekhaev, 1978.

**Burial construction.** Burial mound 2.15 m high, 56 m in diameter. A rectangular grave was dug in the burial mound of earlier times. Its size: 1.96x1.45 m, 3.88 m from the summit of the barrow.

**Buried person(s).** A male more than 50 years old.

**Finds.** Fragments of a glass vessel. A ceramic bowl. 2 ceramic jugs. A wooden rectangular elongated plate with zoomorphic images covered with gold foil. Gold straps. A short sword in a sheath ornamented with gold foil, 54.4 cm long (fig. 6: 2; fig. 7: 2). Long iron rods in a wooden box. An iron knife. Gold tubules. A gold brooch. A gold spiral arm-ring.

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Marchenko 1996, 51–52 complex 356.

## 18.

**Name of the burial complex.** Zubovskiĭ, barrow 1–1899.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Zubovskiĭ steading, Tenginskāia village, Tbilisskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of Nikolaĭ Veselovskiĭ, 1899.

**Burial construction.** No information.

**Buried person(s).** No information.

**Finds.** An iron tripod. 7 belt plaques with polychrome inlays. 5 gold plaques from a sword sheath. A short iron sword with gold details (fig. 10: 1, 2). Belt tips. Gold buttons and a ring. Glass and other beads. 2 gold bracelets. A glass cup. A bronze cast cauldron. Details of a casket. A bronze jar of the Hydria type. 2 silver phalerae of horse harness. An iron chain-armor. Fragments of copper items. Iron bits. A whet-stone. A whet-stone with a gold cap. A ceramic jug. Iron arrow heads. A silver phiala.

**Date.** From the middle to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Gushchina, Zsetskaĭa 1989, 87); 40-s of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Shchukin 1992, 108).

**Bibliography.** Minns 1913, 230ff; Gushchina, Zsetskaĭa 1989, 114–118, 127 Cat. 113–134.

## 19.

**Name of the burial complex.** Vodnyĭ, barrow 1, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Vodnyĭ village, Krasnoarmeĭskaĭa village, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Krasnodar State Historic and Archaeological Museum-Reserve under direction of Olga Kulikova, 1978.

**Burial construction.** A grave was dug in the burial mound of the earlier time, 61x79 m, 5.78 m high. The grave was 2.25 m deep from the summit of the barrow.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** Fragments of a bronze cauldron. A bronze ladle. A bronze jug. A ceramic vessel. An iron spear-head. A bronze mirror. A long iron sword, 84 cm long. A short iron sword in a sheath with gold details, 48 cm long (fig. 8: 5). A silver vessel. Gold threads from embroidery. Gold sewn plaques. A silver gilded belt front-buckle with a representation of a goat. Bronze sewn plaques.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Marchenko 1996, complex 293 fig. 78.

## 20.

**Name of the burial complex.** Tiflisskaĭa, barrow 11/1902.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Tbilisskaĭa village, Tbilisskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of Nikolaĭ Veselovskĭĭ, 1902.

**Burial construction.** A catacomb-grave under a burial mound. The entrance-pit: 2.44x1.32 m. The chamber: 3.00x1.47 m, 4.25 m deep. The grave was robbed in antiquity.

**Buried person(s).** No information.

**Finds.** A richly ornamented pommel of a sword (fig. 11: 5–6). A bronze buckle. An astragal of a ram with a round hole.

**Date.** 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Gushchina, Zassetskaĭa 1994, 57 tab. 26 cat. 247.

## 21.

**Name of the burial complex.** Ust'-Labinskaĭa, barrow 45/1902.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Ust'-Labinskaĭa village, Tbilisskaĭa district, Krasnodar region. Excavations of Nikolaĭ Veselovskĭĭ, 1902.

**Burial construction.** A catacomb-grave under a burial mound. The entrance-pit: 2.44 m long. The chamber: 3.36x1.42 m, 3.5 m deep. The grave was robbed in antiquity.

**Buried person(s).** No information.

**Finds.** A short sword with a richly ornamented pommel, 52 cm long (fig. 11: 3–4). Silver tips of a belt. A whet-stone.

**Date.** Second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Gushchina, Zassetskaĭa 1994, 72 tab. 51 cat. 477.



### *Taman peninsula*

#### 22.

**Name of the burial complex.** Gorgippia, crypt II, sarcophagus II.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** City of Anapa, Krasnodar region. Excavations of the expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences USSR under direction of Ekaterina Alekseeva, 1975.

**Burial construction.** A burial in a stone sarcophagus in crypt on the territory of the necropolis of the antique city of Gorgippia.

**Buried person(s).** Bones of the skeleton have not survived.

**Finds.** *Inside the sarcophagus.* A gold mouth-cover. 2 gold eye-covers. A gold plaque inlaid with turquoise. A gold plaque representing a lion mask. A gold neck-ring. 20 gold beads. A gold fibula. A gold funeral wreath. 2 gold finger-rings. A gold belt-buckle. A gold arm-ring. A short iron sword richly ornamented with gold and inlays in a gold sheath, ca. 34 cm long (fig. 9: 1). A long iron sword. Gold ornaments of a wooden casket. Bronze plaques ornamented with gold foil from the horse harness. Fragments of gold threads. 2 astragals made of turquoise. Glass and chalk beads. A small silver vessel. A big glass jug. A bronze amphora. An iron sliding chair. 2 bronze buckles. 2 iron buckles. Bronze belt fittings. *Inside the crypt, between sarcophagi.* A bronze lamp. 2 pairs of iron bits. Bronze temple pendants. A glass horn. A polychrome glass cup. A glass jug. A fragment of glass vessel. 2 silver spoons. An iron tool. An iron knife. A bronze stylos. A bronze enameled incense burner. A bronze enameled pyxis. 3 bronze enameled strigili. A bronze strigil. A bronze overlay.

**Date.** First half – middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Alekseeva 2002, 109, 111 fig. 22; Treister 2003, 57f. fig. 9; Mordvinceva, Treister 2005, 73, 76 tab. 34.

### *The Lower Don region*

#### 23.

**Name of the burial complex.** Novyĭ, barrow 70, grave 5.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Novyĭ township, Bol'shaĭa Martynovka district, Rostov-on-Don region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Rostov State University under direction of Leonid Il'ukov, 1982.

**Burial construction.** Bronze Age burial mound, 0.68 m high, 26 m in diameter. A niche-grave was dug in the burial mound, then covered with an additional mound.

**Buried person(s).** *Burial in the niche 1 (eastern).* A male 18–20 years old. The burial is partly destroyed. *Burial in the niche 1 (western).* A male 18–20 years old.

**Finds (Niche 1).** 2 iron knives. Iron arrow heads. *In the destroyed part of the niche.* Fragments of an iron sword. An iron knife. Fragments of a bronze cauldron. Horse bones. An iron belt front-buckle plated with gold foil. Iron belt fittings.

**Finds (Niche 2).** A short iron sword in wooden sheath with gold elements (fig. 8: 8, 9). Iron arrow heads. Fragments of a bronze cauldron. An iron knife. A belt embroidered with two rows of kauri shells and a gold belt front-buckle in the shape of a hedgehog. A button made of alabaster.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century BC – 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Il'ūkov, Vlaskin 1992, 80–82, fig. 20: 7–19.

## 24.

**Name of the burial complex.** Arbuzovskii, barrow 8, grave 3 (eastern).

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Arbuzov steading, Bol'shaĭa Martynovka district, Rostov-on-Don region. Excavations of the archaeological expedition of Rostov State University under direction of Vladimir Kīashko, 1980.

**Burial construction.** Bronze Age burial mound, 0.6 m high, 24x20 m. A niche-grave was dug in the burial mound.

**Buried person(s).** *Burial 3 (eastern niche).* A male 20–30 years old. *Burial 8 (western niche).* A male 25–30 years old.

**Finds (Burial 3).** A short iron sword ornamented with gold foil in a sheath with bronze applications (fig. 8: 7). An iron knife in a sheath ornamented with gold foil. A flint flake. A small vessel made of alabaster. Iron arrow heads. A ceramic vessel. 2 iron buckles covered with gold foil.

**Finds (Burial 8).** A short iron sword with a ring pommel. A flint flake. A piece of brimstone. An iron buckle. An iron knife. Iron arrow heads. A hand-made ceramic vessel. Bones of a ram's hind-leg and pelvis.

**Date.** 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

**Bibliography.** Il'ūkov, Vlaskin 1992, 145–148.

## 25.

**Name of the burial complex.** Dachi, barrow 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Dachi township, city of Azov, Rostov-on-Don region. Excavations of the Azov-Don expedition under direction of Evgeniĭ Bepalyĭ, 1986.

**Burial construction.** A single grave of square shape was covered with a burial mound. The burial was robbed. In the mound there were found remains of a funerary feast (bones of cattle, fragments of not less than 12 amphorae, fragments of ceramic vessels) and a hiding pit.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** *In the grave.* Bones of a ram. Fragments of amphorae. Fragments of a glass cup. An iron knife. Iron arrow heads. A bronze plaque. Fragments of a bone pyxis. Gold sewn plaques. A gold tubule. Fragments of gold wire and threads. *In the hiding pit.* A covering embroidered with gold sewn plaques. Gold phalerae from bridle and saddler. A gold bracelet. A short iron sword with gold decoration in a richly ornamented gold sheath, 42 cm long (fig. 9: 2).

**Date.** Last quarter of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Bespalyī 1992.

## 26.

**Name of the burial complex.** Vysochino I, barrow 10, grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Vysochino necropolis between rivers Don and Kagal'nik, Rostov-on-Don region. Excavations of the Azov-Don expedition under direction of Sergeī Luk'tashko and Evgenī Bepalov.

**Burial construction.** A grave of an unidentified form in a burial mound 0.55 m high.

**Buried person(s).** An adult.

**Finds.** A long iron sword with a chalcedony pommel. A long iron knife in a sheath covered with gold foil. A short iron sword in a sheath covered with gold foil, 38.8 cm (fig. 10: 7). A small vessel made of alabaster. A silver goblet. Silver bells. Small glass beads.

**Date.** 2<sup>nd</sup> – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

**Bibliography.** Bepalyī, Luk'tashko 2008, 20–23.

## 27.

**Name of the burial complex.** Valovyī I, barrow 25 grave 1.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Kurgan necropolis Valovyī, Mīasnikovskīi district, Rostov-on-Don region. Excavations of the Azov-Don expedition under direction of Evgenī Bepalyī and Igor Parusimov, 1987.

**Burial construction.** A catacomb grave was covered with burial mound 0.3 m high, ca. 20 m in diameter. The entrance pit: 0.85x0.67 m. The chamber: 2.35x0.8 m, 2.55 m deep.

**Buried person(s).** An adult male.

**Finds.** A wooden comb. A flint flake. An iron needle. A wooden goblet. A bronze ring. Fragments of a leather sac. Glass beads. A small wooden box. Iron bits. A short iron sword with a ring pommel in a sheath ornamented with silver plaques, 47.5 cm long (fig. 10: 3, 5). A short iron sword with a ring pommel in a sheath ornamented with silver plaques, 56 cm long (fig. 10: 4, 6). A long iron sword with a pommel ornamented with gold foil, 102 cm long (fig. 11: 1, 2). A big stone bead from the sword knot. A bronze buckle. A silver buckle. An iron buckle. 2 iron knives. Iron hooks and shafts. A bronze ring with three rows of knobles. 2 iron axes. Wooden shafts. A red-slip ceramic goblet. A bronze basin. A bronze fibula. A bronze ladle. A wooden basin. Fragments of gold foil. Iron belt fittings with gold plating. 2 wooden goblets. Fragments of leather straps. Horse harness: bronze phalerae covered with gold foil from the horse harness, wooden fish-shaped plaques covered with gold foil, 2 iron buckles, and 2 iron rings. Iron bits. A wooden box containing a whet-stone and a wooden spoon. Silver ornaments of the shoes. An iron adze. A bronze fibula. Bronze and silver belt fittings.

**Date.** Late 2<sup>nd</sup> – first third of 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Bezuglov, Glebov, Parusimov 2009, 48–63.

### *The Crimean peninsula*

#### 28.

**Name of the burial complex.** Ust'-Al'ma, catacomb 620, burial 2.

**Location and circumstances of discovery of the burial complex.** Pechanoe village, Bakhchisaraï district, Republic of the Crimea. Excavations of Ust'-Al'ma expedition under direction of Alexander Puzdrovskii, 1996.

**Burial construction.** A catacomb 3.2x2.1 m, 2.6 deep. There were two burials in wooden coffins.

**Buried person(s).** Burial 2 belonged to a male 35–45 years old.

**Finds.** A short iron sword in a sheath ornamented with a rectangular gold plate, 35 cm long (fig. 8: 3, 4). Iron arrow heads. An amphora. An iron candelabrum. A hand-made ceramic lamp. A hand-made ceramic incense burner. An iron knife. A piece of sandstone. A bronze patera. A bronze oinochoia. Remains of leather shoes. A fragment of silk cloth. Bronze and silver belt fittings. A gold buckle and a gold tip of the belt. A bronze fibula. Gold tubules and sewn plaques. A gold ear-ring. Gold pendants. A silver arm-ring.

**Date.** Second half of 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

**Bibliography.** Puzdrovskij 2013, 296–297.

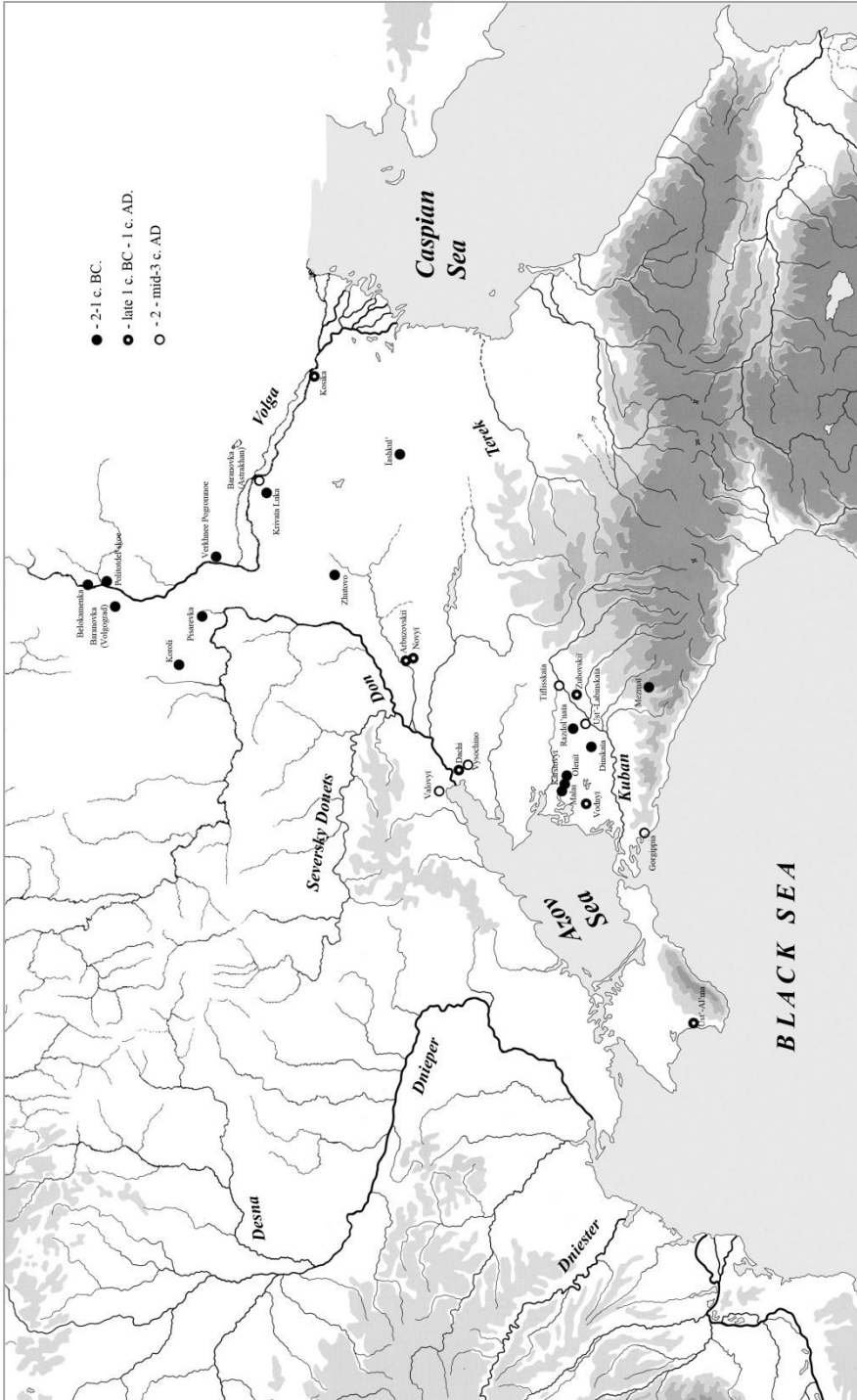


Fig. 1. Map of distribution of the decorated swords.  
1 – 2–1 c. BC, 2 – 1 c. BC – 1 c. AD, 3 – 2–3 c. AD.

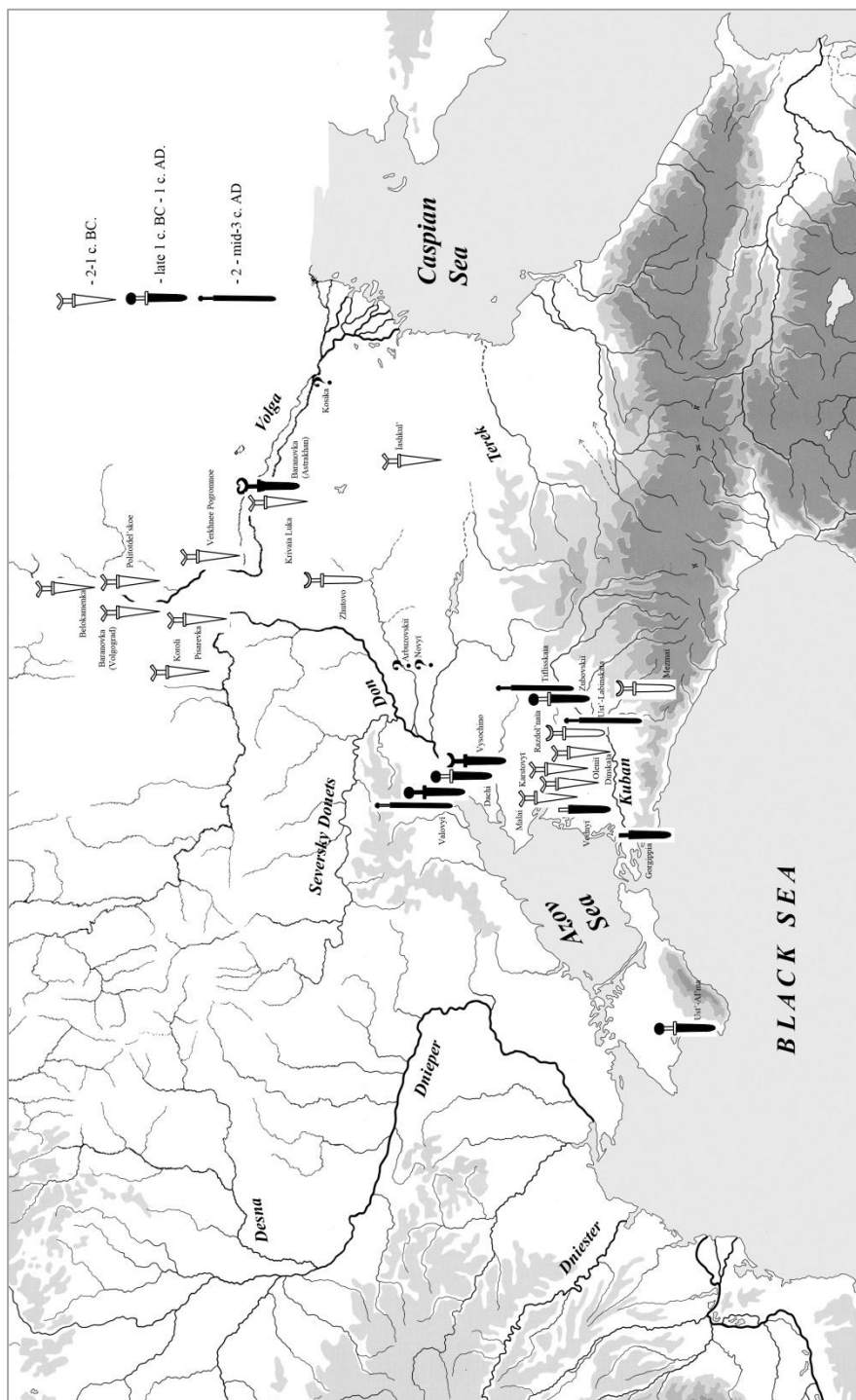


Fig. 2. Map of distribution of the decorated swords of different types.

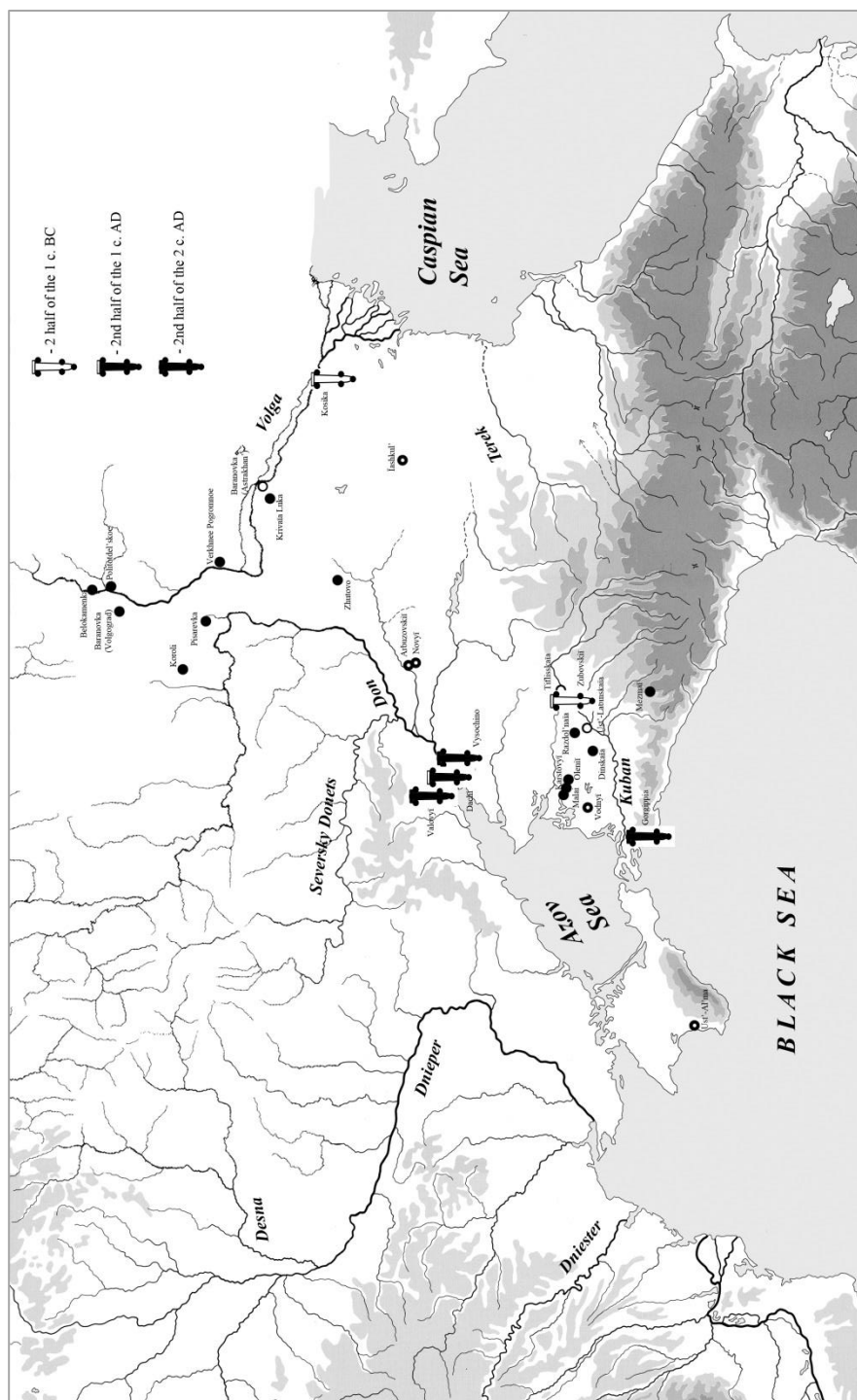


Fig. 3. Map of distribution of the decorated swords in a sheath with four later projections.

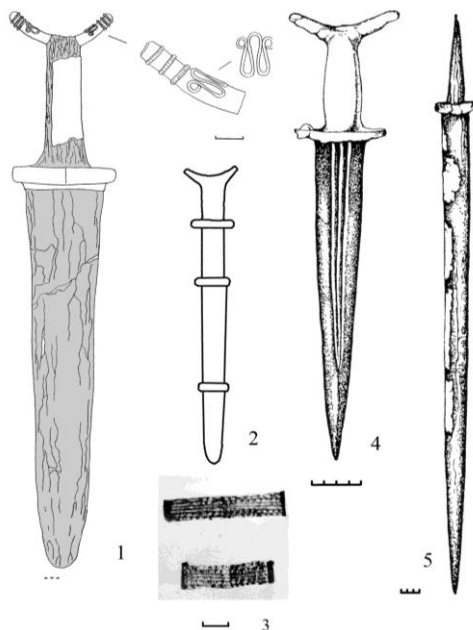


Fig 4. 1 – Zhutovo. 2, 3 – Krivaia Luka. 4, 5 – Īashkul'. 1 – after Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999. 2, 3 – after Fedorov-Davydov et al. 1975. 4, 5 – after Otchir-Gorjaeva 2002.

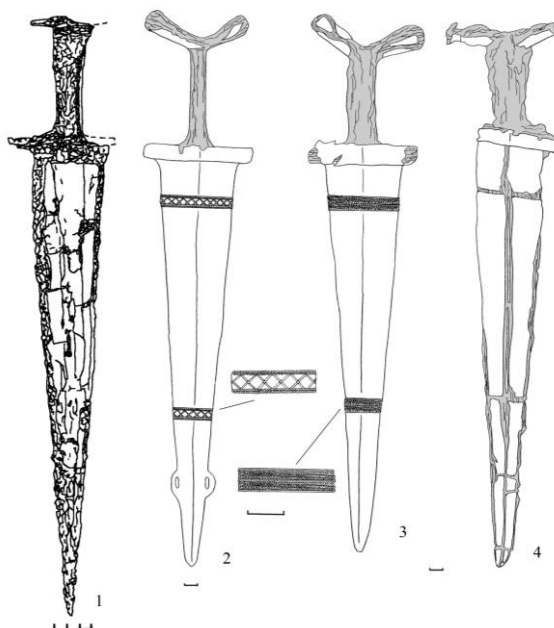


Fig. 5. 1 – Pisarevka. 2 – Verkhnee Pogromnoe. 3 – Belokamenka. 4 – Baranovka (Volgograd region). 1 – after Mamontov 2002. 2–4 – after Mordvintseva, Shinkar' 1999.



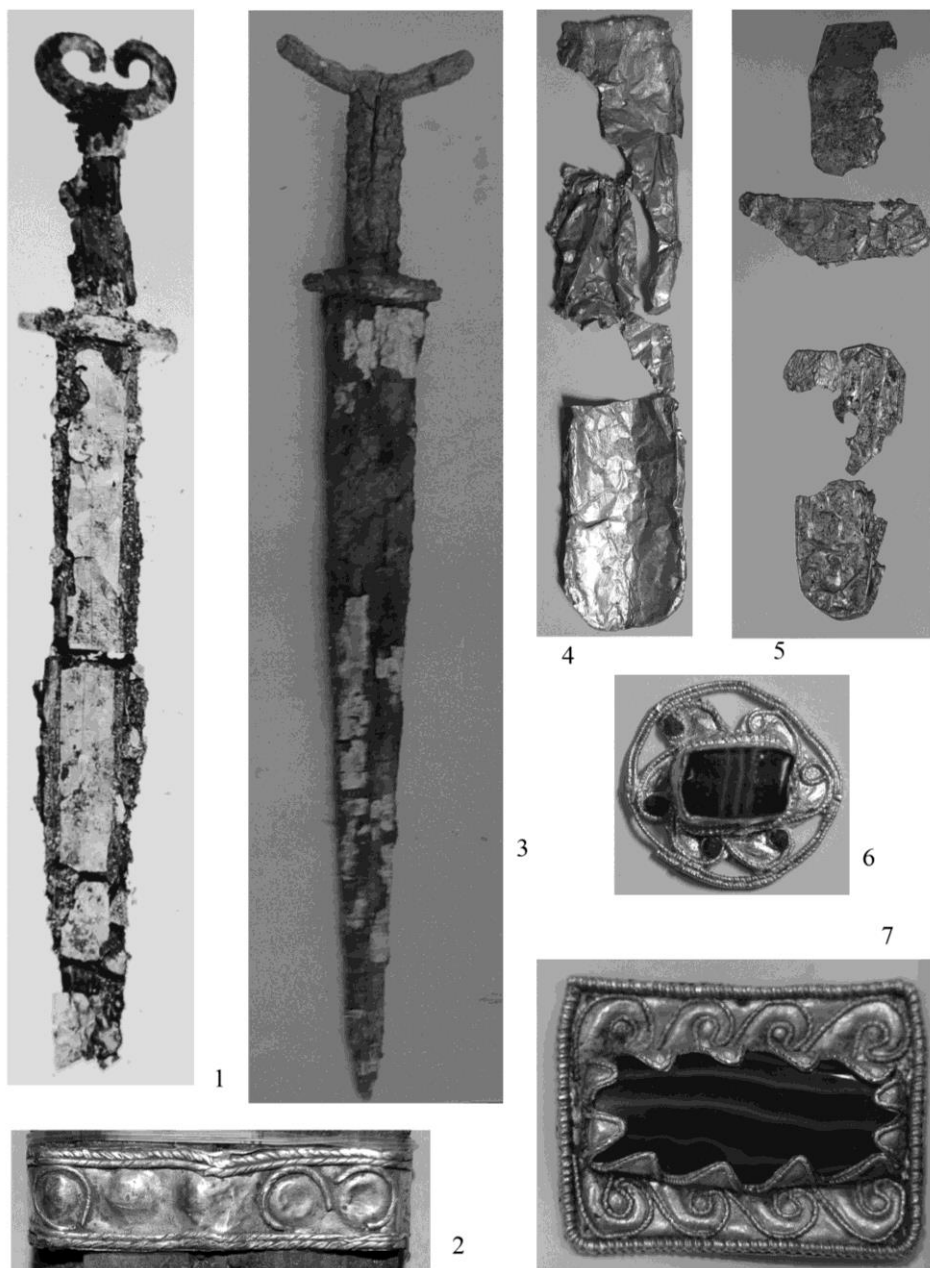


Fig. 6. 1 – Baranovka (Astrakhan' region), 2 – Razdol'naia. 3 – Karstovyĭ. 4 – Malai. 5 – Dinskaia. 6, 7 – Mezmaĭ. 1 – after Dvornichenko, Fedorov-Davydov 1989. 2 – after Marchenko 1996. 3 – Geĭ, Sateev 1987. 4–7 – after Mordvintseva et al. 2010.

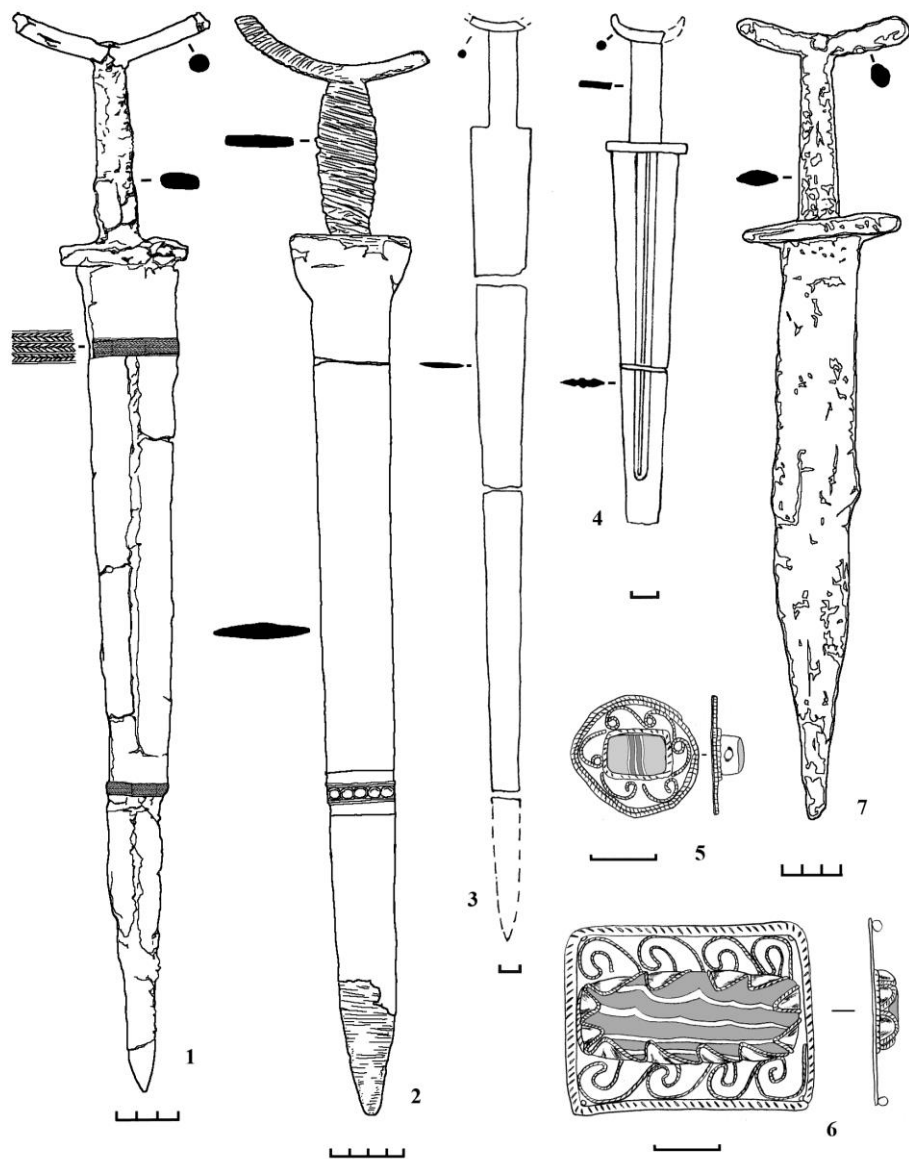


Fig. 7. 1 – Oleni. 2 – Razdol'naia. 3–6 – Mezmaï. 7 – Koroli. 2 – after Mordvintseva et al. 2010. 2 – Geï 1988. 3–6 – after Mordvintseva et al. 2012. 7 – after Mamontov 2001.

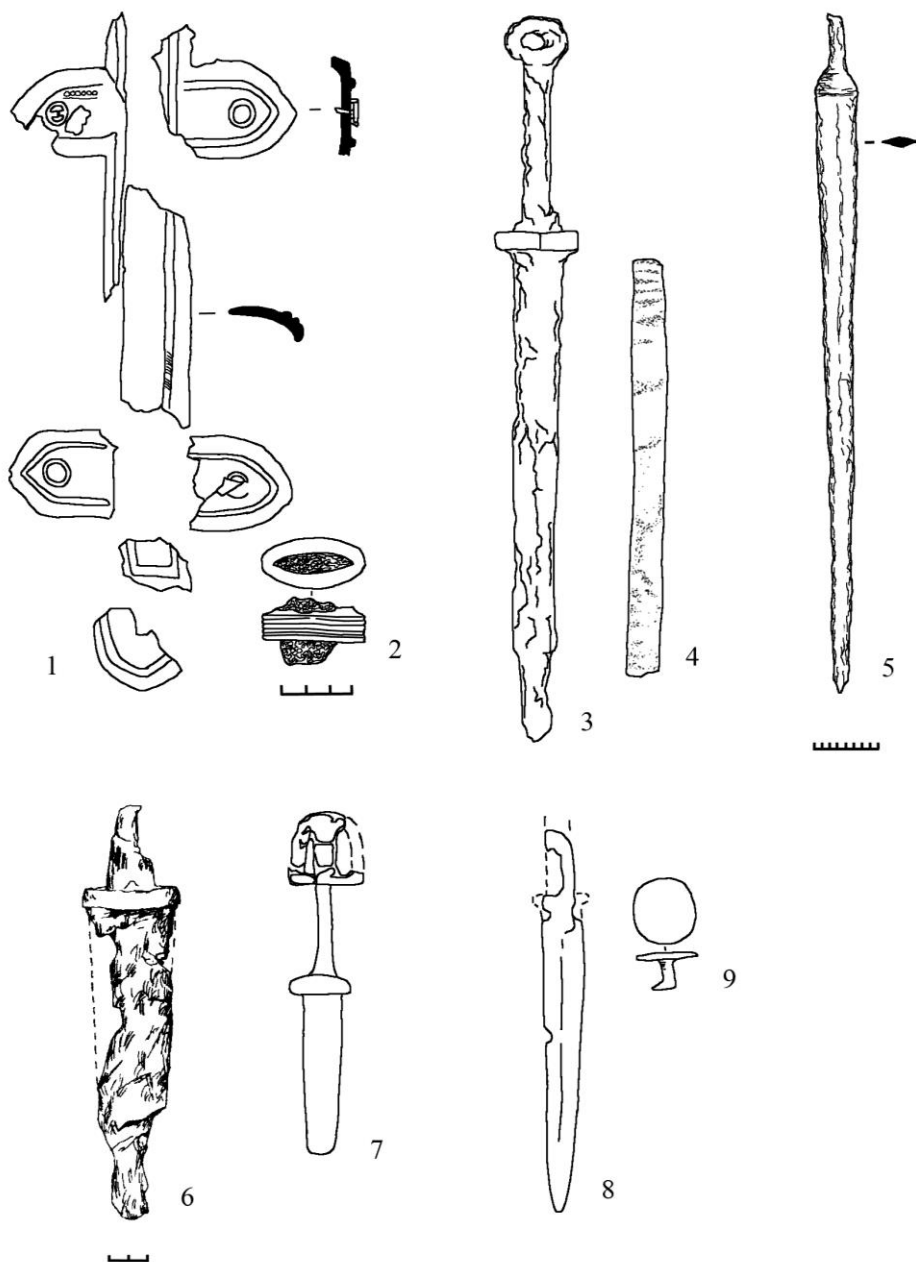


Fig. 8. 1, 2 – Kosika. 3, 4 – Ust'-Al'ma. 5 – Vodnyi. 6 – Dinskaia. 7 – Arbuzovskii. 8, 9 – Novyi. 1 – after Dvornichenko, V.V., Fedorov-Davydov, G.A. 1993. 2 – after Anisimova et al. 2005. 3, 4 – after Puzdrovskij 2013. 5, 6 – after Marchenko 1996.

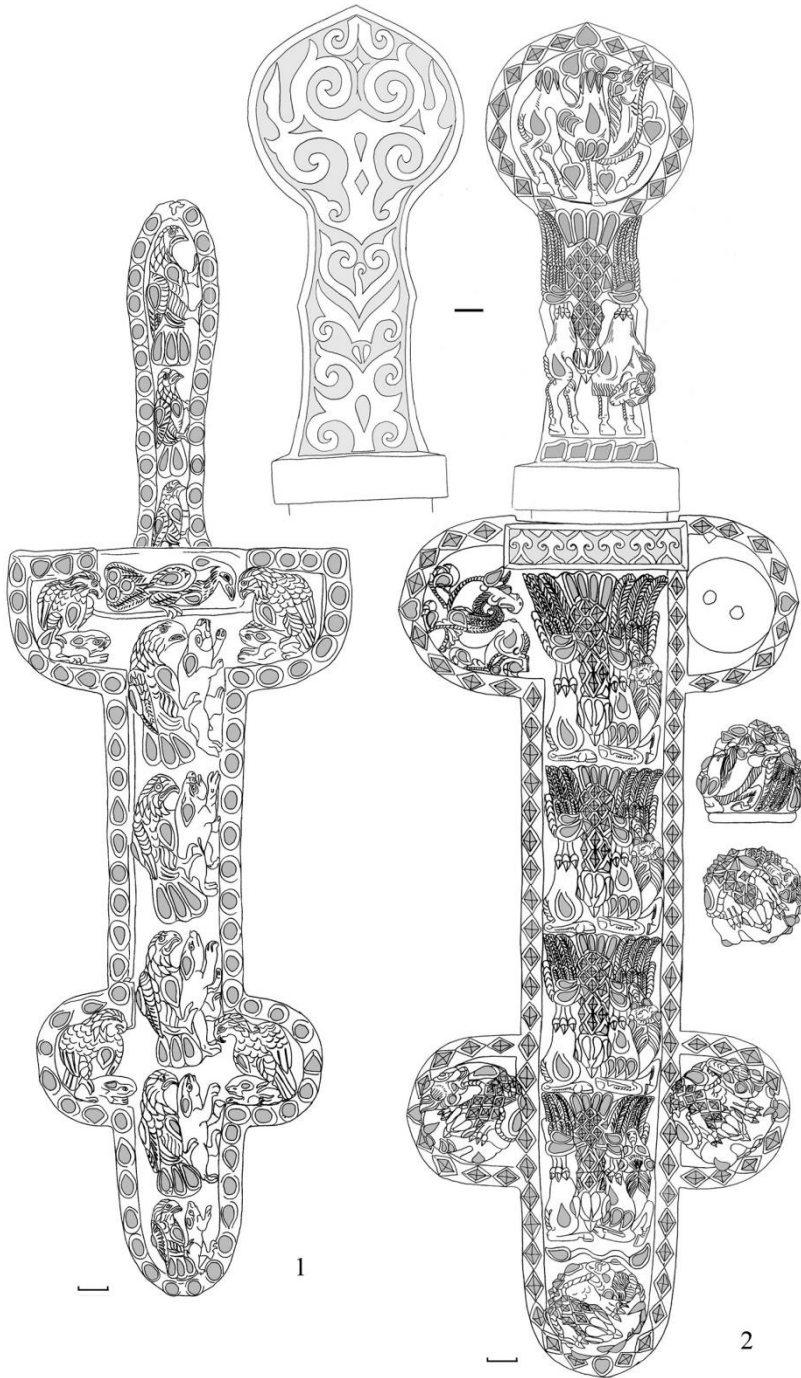


Fig. 9. 1 – Gorgippia. 2 – Dachi. 1 – after Mordvinceva, Treister 2007.

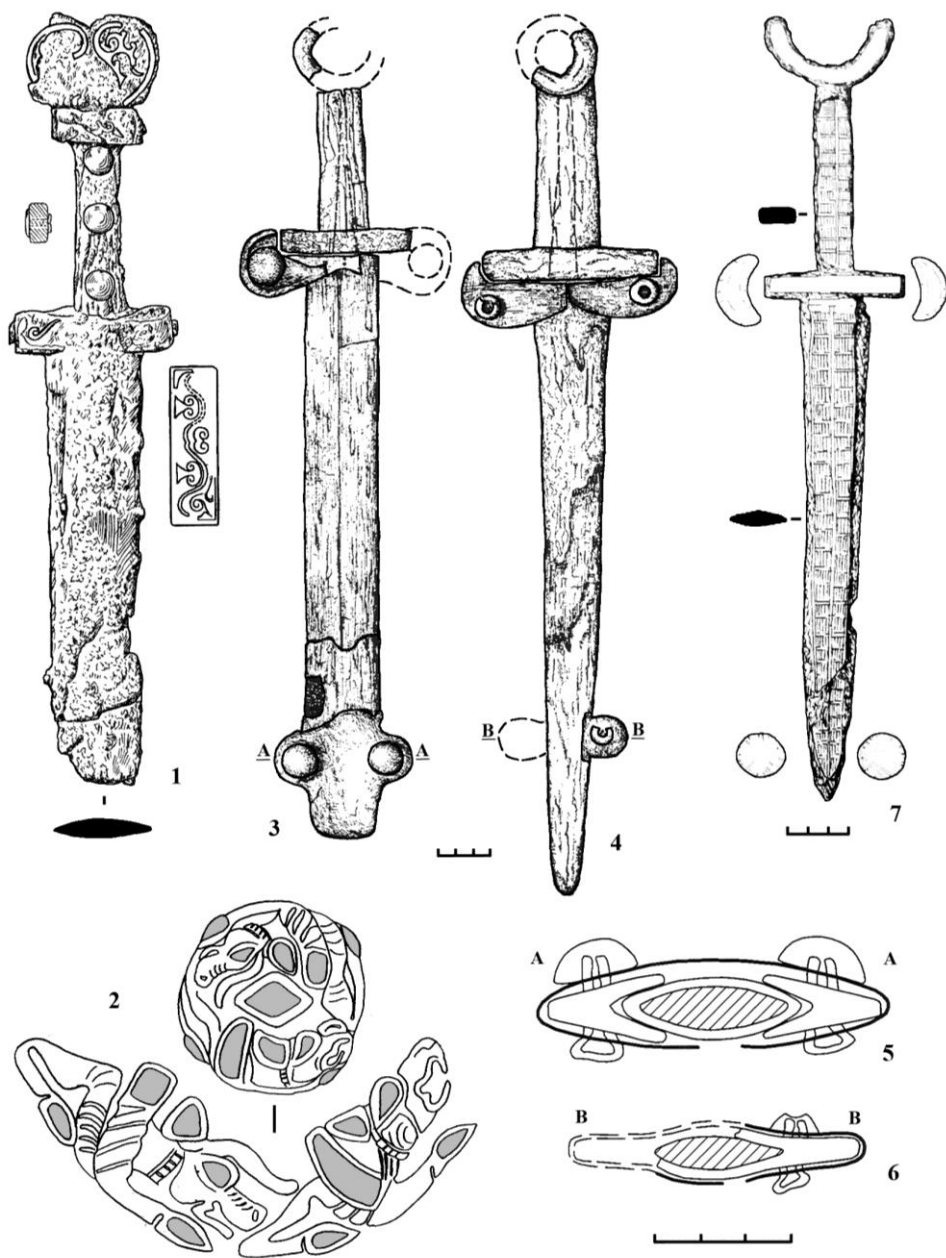


Fig. 10. 1, 2 – Zubovskii. 3–6 – Valovyi. 7 – Vysochino. 1 – after Gushchina, Zasetkaia 1989. 2 – after Mordvinceva, Treister 2007. 3–6 – after Bezuglov et al. 2009. 7 – after Bespal'yi, Luk'tashko 2008.

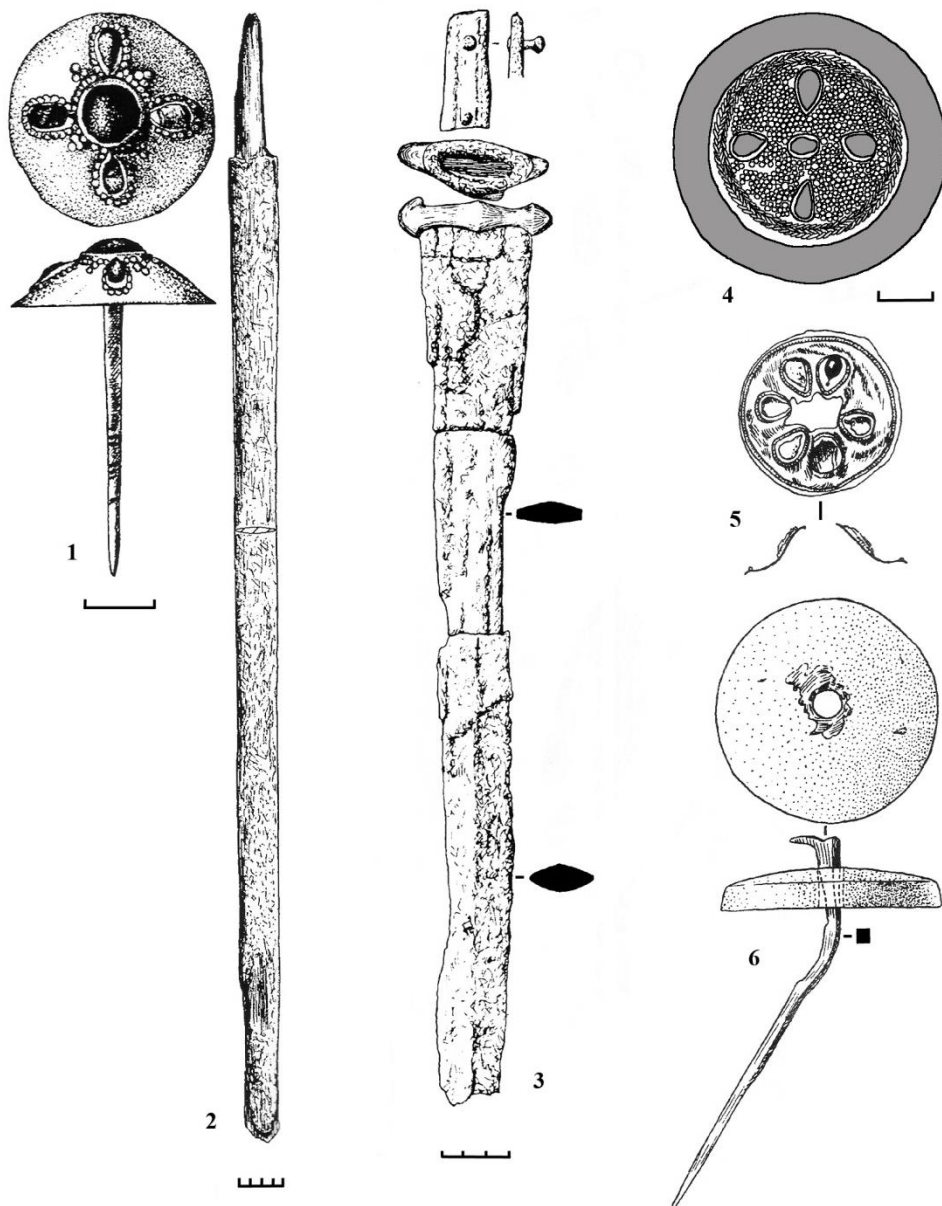


Fig. 11. 1–2 – Valovyī. 3–4 – Ust'-Labinskaia. 5–6 – Tiflisskaia. 1–2 – after Bezuglov et al. 2009. 3–6 – after Gushchina, Zassetskaia 1994.



**Fig. 12. Nimrud Dagh. The relief representing Antiochus and Apollo-Mithras. Detail.  
Photo by M. Olbrycht.**

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## Abstract

The practice of using a sword in a funerary context as one of the items that accompanied the deceased varied considerably in ancient societies. The appearance of ornate swords in a funerary context might indicate that different societies had similar lifestyles and values. The North Pontic region in the "Sarmatian era" is one such territory where decorated swords of barbarian elites have been recovered. The region also consisted of different kinds of societies – Greek poleis, the Greco-barbarian Bosporan Kingdom, and nomadic and sedentary societies that depended to varying degrees on state structures. It is with these considerations in mind that we will focus on the practice of using decorated swords in the burial tradition of this region.