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A LATE SARMATIAN BURIAL IN THE CENTRAL DONETSK BASIN

In 1988 near a workers settlement of mine "Mospin-skaia" (close to the town of Mospino, Makeievka district, Donetsk region) a barrow erected above a primary Sarmatian grave, was excavated. It was situated at the basis of a wide watershed in the open steppe. The barrow had round ground plan, its diameter was about 18 m, its height was 1.6 m from the level of the original surface. In the centre of the surface under the barrow, around the shaft of the grave (mainly east of it) a subsoil layer was observed. It was thrown out during the digging of the grave. The diameter of the subsoil layer was about 7 m, the utmost thickness was 0.25–0.20 m. The barrow was built at once, out of blackearth without significant inclusions. In its central part, from the top of the barrow, practically above the shaft a pit was dug. It was 1.75 m deep, its form could not be observed in the black soil. It was covered by three plates of sandstone, the average size of which was 0.8x0.55x0.1 m. At the bottom of the pit skeletons of two foals were found lying in anatomical order at the their left side, oriented to the east (Fig. 1.2). Burial was made in a catacomb. The ground plan of the shaft was rectangular, with rounded angles. Its axis was oriented NW-SE, its sizes were 2.45x0.6 m. Short sides of the pit were widening a bit towards the bottom, the width of the pit at the bottom was 0.75 m. In the whole filling fragments of a gray wheel-made vessel and human bones were spread. The bottom of the shaft at the depth of 3.75 m from the land mark (2.15 m deep from the level of the original surface) was a little deepening towards the entrance of the niche. It was made in the northern wall and had an arch-shaped section. The width of the entrance was 0.7 m, its height was 0.6 m. The entrance was covered by two sandstone plates standing on their long side, the average size of which was 0.6x0.4x0.05 m. The bottom of the shaft transited into the niche with a low (0.17 m) stair. The niche had a rectangular form with rounded angles. Its axis was oriented NW-SE, its size was 2.8x1.1 m, its bottom was 4.81 m deep from the land mark (3.21 m from the level of the original surface). The ceiling partly collapsed, the height of the part that could be observed was 1.15 m.

In the centre of the niche, closer to the eastern wall, a wooden platform stood. It was constructed of boards the sizes of which were 1.85x0.45x0.3 m. The corpse was placed at this platform. The burial was robbed out, only tibia and tarsal bones were found in situ. Judging

from their situation the skeleton had been placed in an extended position on the back, oriented NW with its head. There was a sword (1) lying across the platform with a bronze rivet (2) near to it. At the feet a vessel (3) was placed. At the eastern edge of the platform a fibula (4), near to the western wall a bronze buckle (5) were found. A similar but smaller buckle (6), a marl disc (7) and fragments of iron objects were found in the filling of the niche during the cleaning. In the north-western corner of the niche, in a mole hole some bones of the dead and a jug (9) were found. At the entrance of the niche a bottom of the same vessel (10) the fragments of which were met in the shaft (Fig. 1.1) was found.

Description of the finds

1. *Iron double-edged sword* with a spike-shaped handle. The length of the blade is 88 cm, its width is 7 cm at the basis. The blades are parallel, the cross-section is lentiform. The cross-bar is straight, wide, its ends slightly go out of the basis, its width is about 2.5 cm. The handle is flat, widening towards the basis. It was hammered together with the blade. Its length is 11.5 cm, the width at the basis is 3 cm, at the end it is 2 cm wide (Fig. 2.1, 1a.). At the handle and blade remains of wooden cover and sheath could be observed.
2. *Bronze rivet* consisting of a wire bent in two halves (at the place of the bending a ring was formed) the ends of which were connected by a rounded knob. The size of the latter is 0.7x0.5 cm. The general length is 1 cm (Fig. 2.2).
3. *Hand-made pot* with a slightly bending out rim, short neck, spherical body and wide, flat bottom. The height of the vessel is 10.5 cm, the diameter of the rim is 8 cm, maximal diameter of the body is 9.5 cm, the diameter of the bottom is 7 cm (Fig. 3.2).
4. *Bronze two-piece fibula* with an inverted foot. The cross-section of the bow is triangular, the head has a vertical plate for holding the axis of the spring. The foot is narrowing towards its end. There is a low rib along the body of the fibula. From both sides of the inverted part of the foot there are relief decorations. The spring is long, the cord is in low position. (Fig. 2.3).
5. *Bronze buckle*. Its frame is rounded, with a thickening front and back part. The lower side is flat, cross-section is rounded. The tongue is bending onto the frame, it is mobile, with an outstanding platform at its basis. The sizes of the frame are 2.5x2.6 cm, the length of the tongue is 3 cm (Fig. 2.4).
6. *Bronze buckle* of a similar type, but smaller (frame: 12.7x1.4 cm, tongue: 1.8 cm) (Fig. 2.5).
7. A flat cylindrical *marl object*, the diameter of which is 3.2 cm, thickness is 1 cm. There is a hole in the centre, the diameter of which is 0.06 cm (Fig. 2.6).

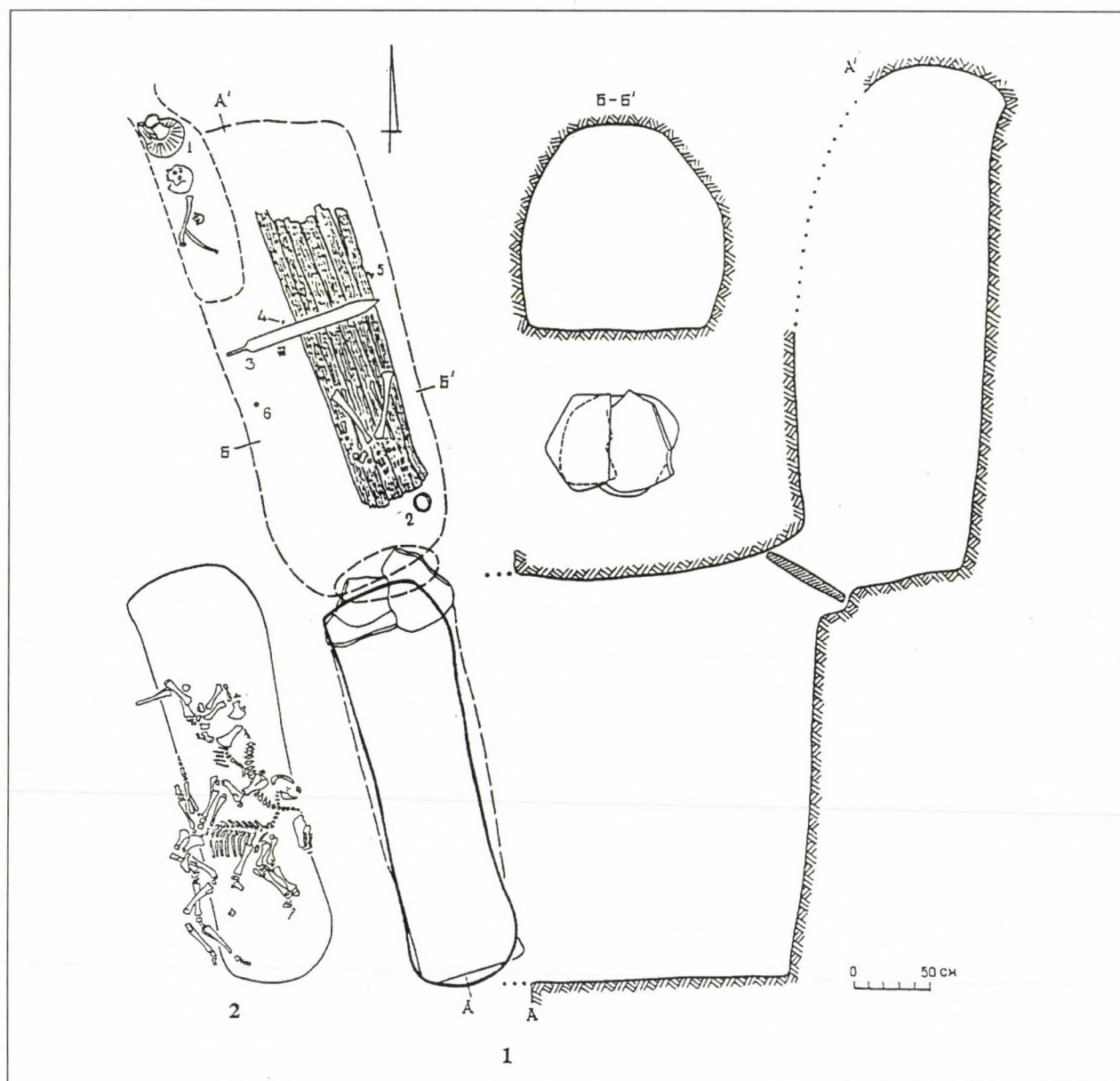


Fig. 1 Burial at mine "Mospinskaia"

1: Ground plan and cross-section of the grave: 1 – jug; 2 – pot; 3 – sword; 4 – rivet; 5 – fibula; 6 – buckle;
2: Horse grave

8. Fragments of *iron rings* - probably remains of bits.

9. Black polished wheel-made *jug*. The rim is flat, bending out, the neck is long, cylindrical, the body is biconical, the bottom is flat, there is a hole in its centre. Lower the basis of the rim there is a low ribbon, and a similar one is placed at the basis of the neck. The upper part of the body is polygonal. The handle is bent in a right angle, it has a rectangular cross/section, there is a low rib at its sides which is the continuation of the ribbon placed under the rim. The outer surface of the handle is decorated with a net motif. The height of the jug is 29.5 cm, the diameter of the rim is 10.5 cm, the diameter of the neck is 9.5 cm, the maximal diameter of the body is 25 cm, the diameter of the bottom is 10.5 cm, the height of the handle is 20 cm (Fig. 3.1).

10. A *bottom part* of a wheel-made gray vessel with rounded body and a flat bottom. It is ornamented with an incised line at the body. The diameter of the bottom is 7 cm (Fig. 3.3).

The ethno-cultural attribution and the chronology of the grave

The catacomb of the burial at mine "Mospinskaia" was constructed so that the shaft and the niche were situated at the same axis. This construction belongs to the most spread type 2 of Sarmatian catacombs according to the classification of K. F. Smirnov (SMIRNOV 1972, 74). Such burial constructions appear at Sarmatians already in the Early Sarmatian time (2nd-1st cen-

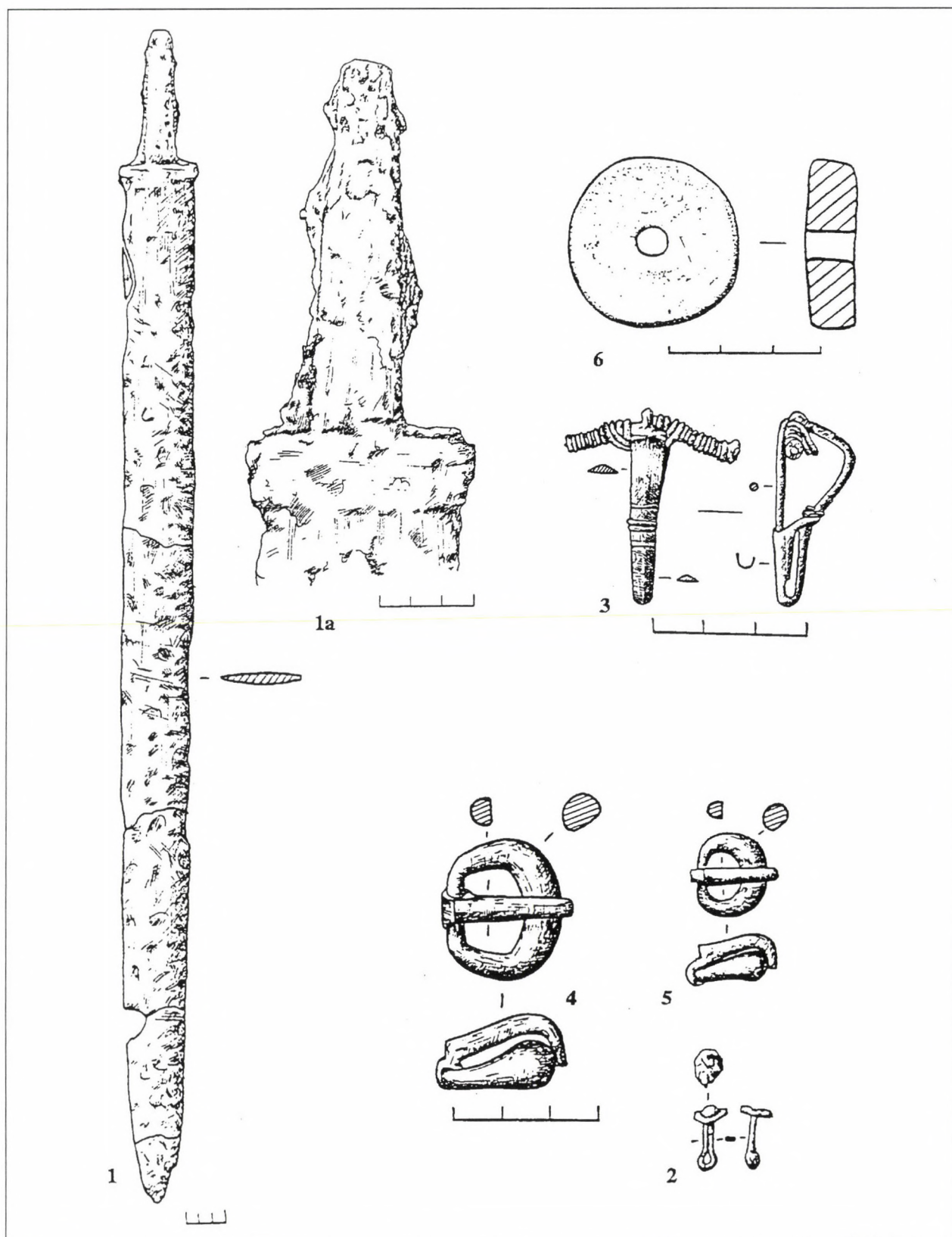


Fig. 2 Grave articles

1, 1a - sword; 2 - rivet; 3 - fibula; 4, 5 - buckles; 6 - object made of marl

turies B. C.) in the lower Don region (BEZUGLOV 1995, 325), Lower Volga region (SKRIPKIN 1990, 183–184) and at the basin of Kuban' (MARCHENKO 1995, 303–324). In the latter territory catacombs of this time were met in a large number, but only sporadically at the rest of Sarmatian territories. We know only one catacomb from the 2nd–1st centuries in the North Pontic region (SIMONENKO 1995, 345). In the Middle Sarmatian period (1st – middle of the 2nd centuries A.D.) practically the same situation can be observed: at Volga, Don and North Pontic region catacombs are relatively rare and scarce, but they are concentrated in the cemeteries of the Zolotoie Kladbische (Golden Cemetery) in the basin of river Kuban' (SIMONENKO 1995, 352). A basically different picture can be observed in the Late Sarmatian culture, especially at its final phase (second half of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D.). At that time catacombs disappear in the Kuban' region, but spread in the Northern Caucasus and by the Don (BEZUGLOV—KOPYLOV 1989, 181) and in the North Pontic region. Their appearance in the latter territory is undoubtedly the result of the move of the representatives of this rite from the Don basin (SIMONENKO 1995, 354).

In the North Pontic region catacombs of the Late Sarmatian period are concentrated basically in two areas: at the border of the steppe and forest-steppe of the left bank of the Dnieper and at the Lower Danube. Grave at mine "Mospinskaia" is close to the former territory (Fig. 4.1). Such topography of catacombs partly can be explained by the fact that in the North Pontic region Late Sarmatian sites of the second half of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D. are concentrated just in these regions, and at the same time the central part of the territory under study makes the impression of a deserted or a least rarely populated one (SIMONENKO 1994, 17). Catacomb graves at the left bank of the Dnieper are heterogeneous from typological point of view: according to the classification of K. F. Smirnov they belong to type 1 (Dmuhailovka, Kolpakovka barrow 2) and 2 ("Mospinskaia", Kantemirovka barrow 1). Some graves (Kolpakovka barrow 8, Verbki) have unique construction and cannot be classified according to the existing typology (SIMONENKO 1995, 352–353). Catacombs of the Lower Danube are more compact both from typological and topographical point of view; practically all of them belong to type 2 (only in the cemetery of Frikatsei graves of type 3 with square niches were represented) and are grouped in the cemeteries Chaush, Vladychen, Gradeshka, Kubei, Frikatsei (SIMONENKO 1995, 348–349).

So, in the North Pontic region in the Late Sarmatian period, catacombs of type 2, most common at Sarmatians, were spread. Burial construction found at mine "Mospinskaia" belongs also to this type. Unlike M. M. Fokeev, who considers the representatives of this rite to be migrants from the Kuban' region (FOKEEV 1991, 61), we agree (SIMONENKO 1995, 354) with the opinion of S. A. Bezuglov, A. V. Zaharov and V. P. Kopy-

lov (BEZUGLOV—ZAHAROV 1988, 20; BEZUGLOV—KOPYLOV 1989, 181) about the Trans-Don-Stavropol origin of Sarmatians who brought this rite to the Lower Don basin and then farther to the west. Another discussed question connected with Sarmatian catacombs is whether they represent ethnic or social features. We do not think that catacomb is only an ethnic feature (as a rule, supporters of this idea consider the catacombs to be Alanic burials)¹. Most of the catacomb burials contained rich grave-goods and judging from this, they must have been left by the representatives of the noble – this fact is obvious enough (MARCHENKO 1995, 314; SIMONENKO—LOBAI 1991, 37). Recently (SIMONENKO 1995, 356–357) this question has been analyzed in details, so here we only remind the conclusions. In the Early and Middle Sarmatian period catacombs served as burial constructions of the noblemen. In the Late Sarmatian period this type of burial construction first was characteristic for some ethnic group (catacombs of the Stavropol region), that took over the political dominance over the Late Sarmatian community of the Lower Don. Migrants who shortly moved to the North Pontic region, took the leadership upon the local tribes and catacomb graves became the special feature of the nomadic aristocracy. In this way, ethnic indicator transformed into a social one.

Solving the question of the ethnic attribution of burial at mine "Mospinskaia" we have to take into consideration the finds typical for the Cherniahov culture: the jug with polygonal body and fibula with inverted foot. Finds of Cherniahov objects (bone combs, ceramics) are known from several Late Sarmatian burials (Dmuhailovka barrow 13, Kubei barrow 15, Kantemirovka barrow 3). From the other hand, there are catacomb constructions met in Cherniahov cemeteries (Koblevo, Furmanovka, Belen'koie) (GUDKOVA 1987, 67). These graves are rightfully considered to be the manifestation of Iranian (Sarmatian or Late Scythian) influence. The question is whether catacombs with Cherniahov objects are Late Sarmatian graves or these are Cherniahov graves with Sarmatian objects? We think that sites in question (among them burial at mine "Mospinskaia") belong to the Late Sarmatian culture. The reason is the following. First, all of them are burials under barrows unlike the plain shaft graves of the Cherniahov culture. A not less important feature is that burial sites of the latter are concentrated in cemeteries, while the graves in question are single ones (the only exclusion is the cemetery of Kubei, but its Late Sarmatian attribution is undoubted). Further, in the Cherniahov catacombs together with the meridian orientation characteristic for Late Sarmatians (Koblevo), longitudinal is also frequently met (Furmanovka, Belen'koie) (GUDKOVA 1987, 67) which is hardly known at the Sarmatians of this time. Beside, Cherniahov objects are single in Sarmatian graves comparing with the rest of typically nomadic graves-goods, while the basic set of grave-goods found in Cherniahov cemeteries belong to this concrete culture².

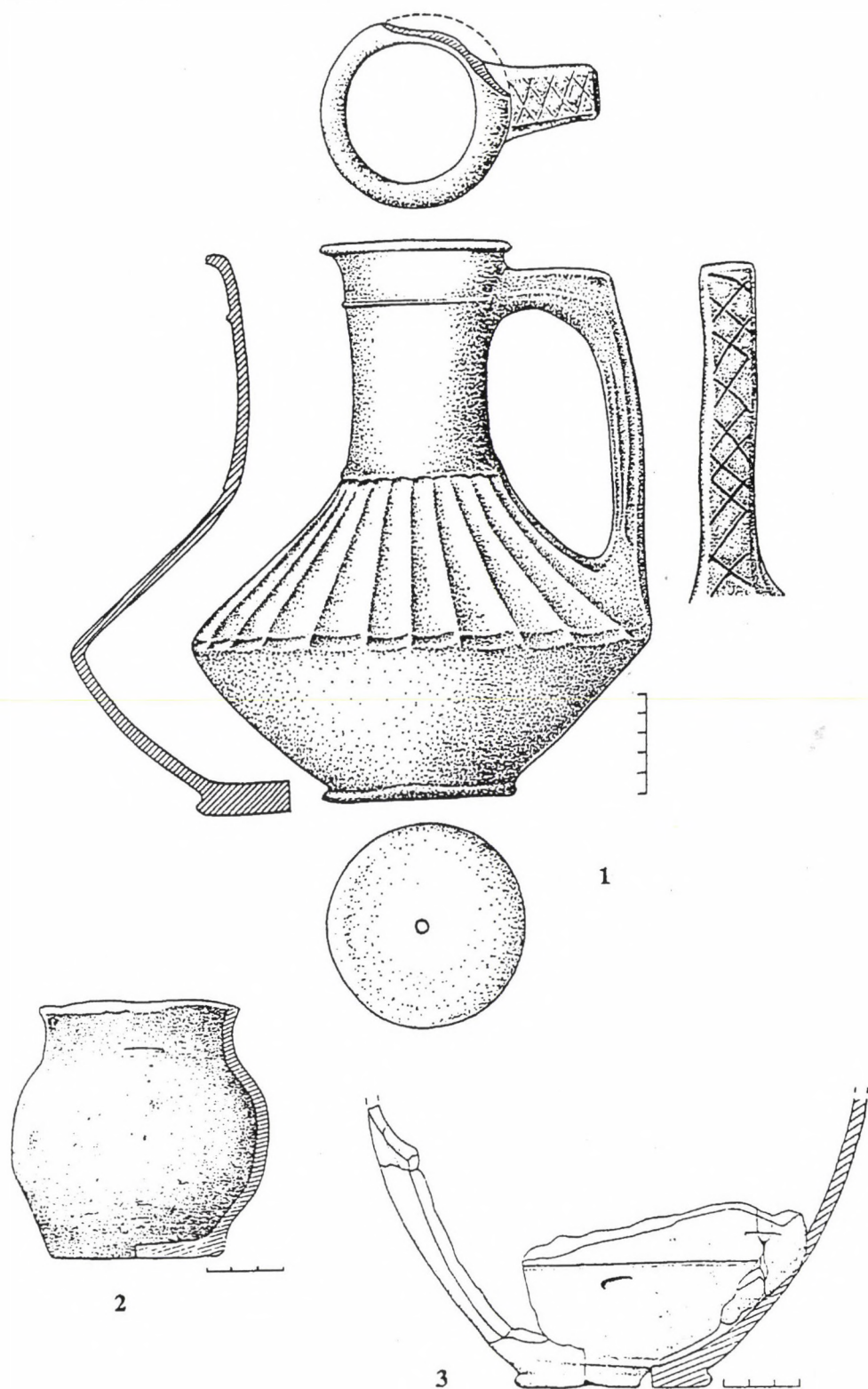


Fig. 3 Ceramics of the burial
1 – jug; 2 – pot; 3 – fragment of a vessel

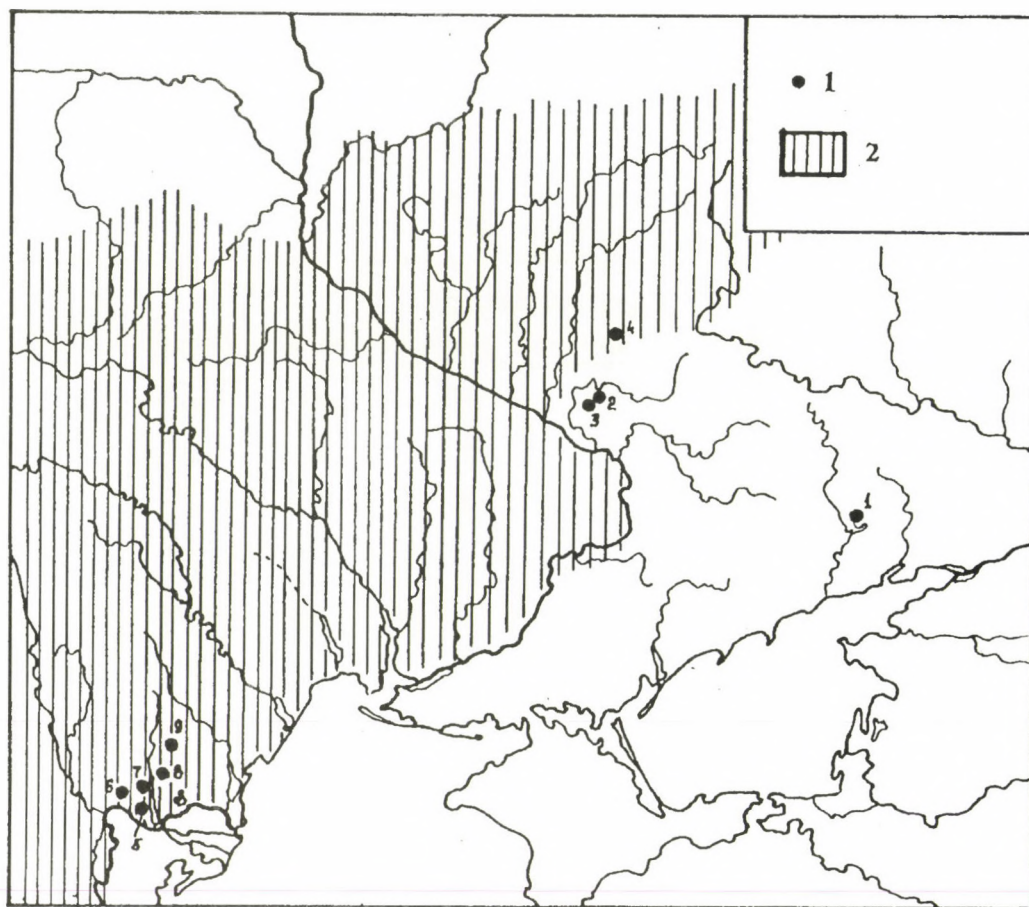


Fig. 4 Ethno-cultural situation in the North Pontic region in the second half of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D.
 1: Sarmatian catacombs: 1 – Mospinskaia; 2 – Dmuhailovka; 3 – Kolpakovka; 4 – Kantemirovka; 5 – Chaush, Gradeshka;
 6 – Frikatsei; 7 – Vladychen'; 8 – Kubei; 9 – Kazaklia
 2: territory of the Cherniakhov culture

We should pay a special attention to the burial of two foals in the barrow. In the profile it could be well observed that the pit was dug from the top of the barrow, so there was no direct connection between the burial and horse skeletons. From the other hand, the placing of corpses of foals into the barrow could took place directly after its construction or after a while (memorial sacrifice?) – unfortunately, archaeology is not able to determine this interval of time. Though the custom of burial of the corpse or parts of a horse was not in use at Sarmatians, in some graves of the second half of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D. (cemeteries Chaush, Vladychen') parts of horse skeletons were found (FOKEEV 1991, 58–59). Position in question has been met for the first time. We are not sure that horse burials and the grave under the barrow can be connected, but do not exclude the possibility of this.

Let us examine the grave goods for the determination of the chronological position and ethnic attribution of the site.

Sword. This arm is the example of the dominant type of swords and daggers of the Late Sarmatian period.

The basic features of such arms are the following: a long (up to 1 m) blade with a lentiform cross-section; spike-shaped handle hammered together with the blade. The spike of the handle is usually wide and flattened, more rarely it is narrow, with round or square cross-section. The handle can be reconstructed according to the form of the spike: with flat wooden covering or a rounded one spitted on the spike (SIMONENKO 1986, 67–68). The handle of such swords transits into the basis of the blade in an obtuse or right angle (this is a strictly technological feature). Most of the swords of this type had not had metal cross-bars the function of which was played by the widening of the lower end of the handle (KHAZANOV 1971, 16). However, there is a range of finds of such arms that make it possible to separate the type: they have iron and, in single cases, bronze or silver cross-bars (SKRIPKIN 1990, 127–132). Beginning from the 2nd century B.C. swords of this type sometimes had a top made out of minerals: alabaster or different kinds of utilitarian and semi-precious stones decorated with gold (the latter are characteristic for the final stage of

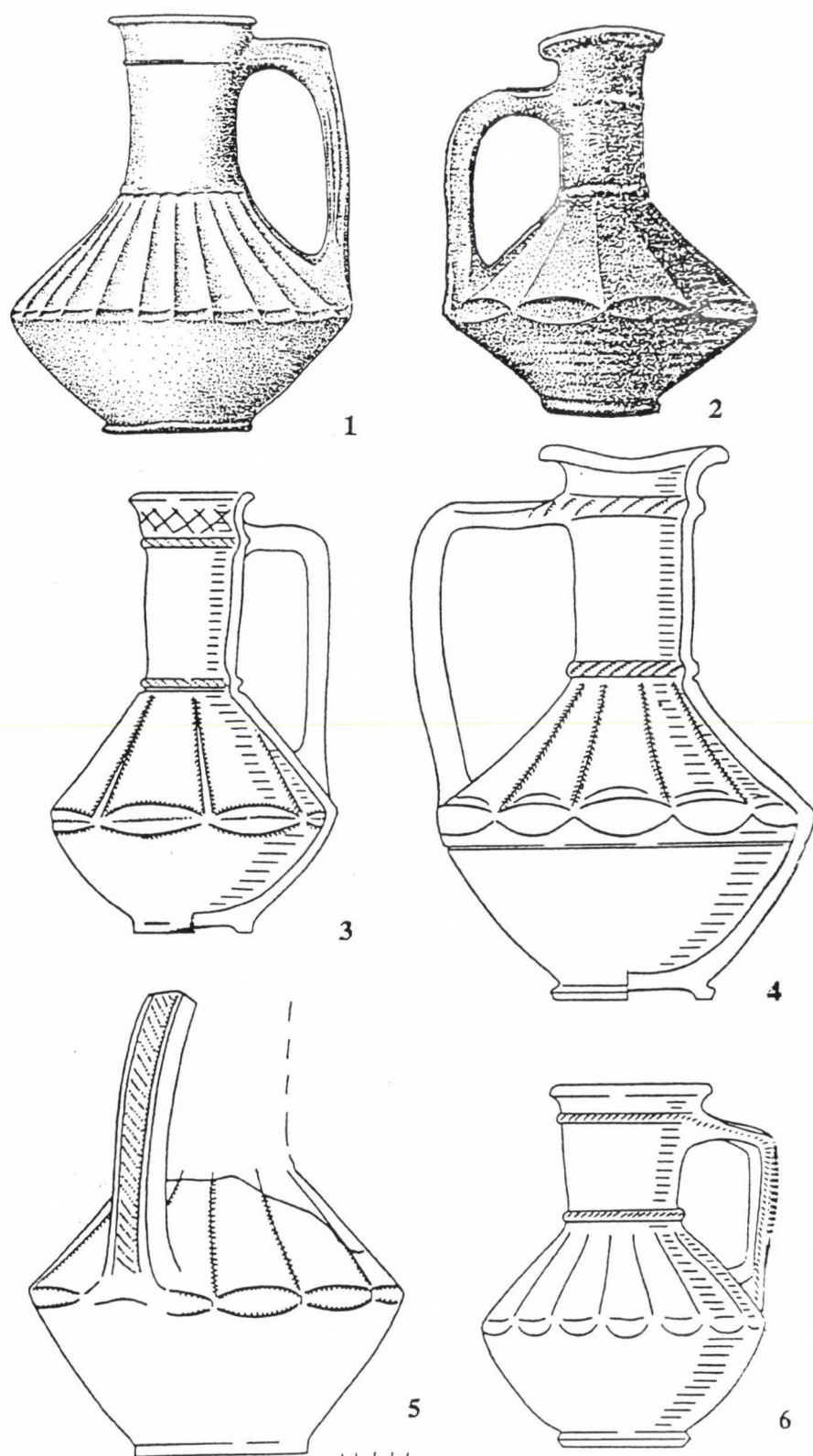


Fig. 5 Cherniahov jugs with polygonal body
1 – Mospinskaia; 2 – Korovincy; 3–6 – Uspenka

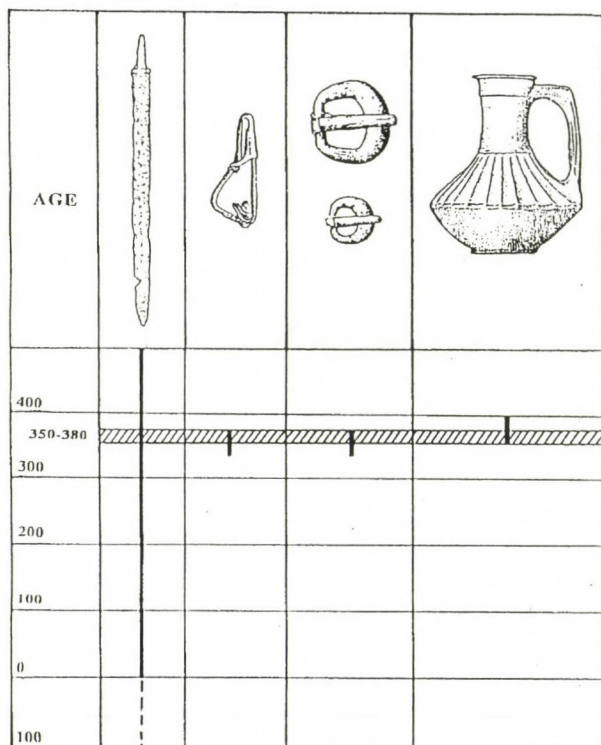


Fig. 6 Chronological position of burial at mine "Mospinskaia"

the Late Sarmatian period). Externally the marl cylinder of our grave reminds such a top which stands very close to the alabaster top of the sword from village Majaki (SIMONENKO 1984, 144). However, we cannot be convinced about its being top of a sword (do not forget that it was not found in situ) because of the flat spike that suits to a wide wooden handle, while handles with such tops are usually rounded and were spitted onto spike with a round or square cross-section. This cylinder could rather be a decoration of the strap of the sword, as it is frequently met on the Sarmatian arms (KHAZANOV 1971, 25). By the way, this fact is an indirect evidence of the Sarmatian attribution of the grave: Cherniahov burials with arms in general, and apparently with sword (especially decorated in Sarmatian way) are very rarely met. The bronze "rivet" found by the sword could be connected with the system of the fixing of the strap.

Chronological frames of the use of side-arms of this type in the North Pontic region in the whole coincide with the common Sarmatian chronology. The earliest examples (Brilevka, hutor Arpachin, Novyi etc.) are dated to the 2nd–1st centuries B.C. (SIMONENKO 1993, 25; GUGUEV–BEZUGLOV 1990, 170). In the Middle Sarmatian period long swords with a spike-shaped handle were the parts of the Sarmatian warriors' armament together with short swords with ring- and antenna-shaped pommel, though they are met in grave more rarely (SIMONENKO 1993, 80–81). Beginning

from the middle of the 2nd century A.D. such arms were practically the only type of sword at Sarmatians, though daggers with the ring-shaped pommel (and in the west, in Moldova and Hungary also the swords with this one) were still in use.

Late Sarmatian swords of this type en masse have 3.5–5 cm wide blades. Wide – up to 6–8 cm – blades are characteristic for the swords of the final phase of the Late Sarmatian culture (second half of the 3rd–4th centuries) both in the east (GUGUEV–BEZUGLOV 1990, 170) and in the North Pontic region (SIMONENKO 1986, 68). It cannot be excluded that this phenomenon is connected with the contacts of Sarmatians with the tribes of the Gothic alliance that appeared at that time in Sarmatia – such wide and heavy swords were in use just at the latter people. So, even having a wide chronology of the arms of the type in question, the sword from the grave at mine "Mospinskaia", according to its morphological features, can be dated to the second half of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D.

Fibula and buckles of the grave are very important from the chronological point of view. Fibula belongs to the most popular type of the 3rd–4th centuries A.D.: a two-part fibula with inverted foot, that sometimes are called "Cherniahov" fibulae because of their wide spread in the sites of this culture. But they are also found in the Sarmatian burials of the Lower Don (BEZUGLOV 1995, 343, fig. 7, 1, 2), Lower Danube (SUBBOTIN–DZIGOVSKI 1990, III, 44, ris. 20,2) and especially in Hungary (VADAY 1989, 308–309, Abb. 16, 17). The amount of the material significantly increased in the last years made it possible to make more accurate the datings of some types of such brooches suggested before (AMBROZ 1966, 60–67). Fibula in question according to the classification of E. L. Gorohovski (1988, 35) belongs to sub-variant b of variant 3, series A of "plain", that is to say not faceted pieces (in the following: A3b). Also according to the same author (GOROHOVSKI 1988, 42) buckles from the burial at mine "Mospinskaia" belong to sub-variant b, variant 2, series V (in the following: V2b). North Pontic assemblages in which fibulae A3b and buckles V2b are met together, belong to the second third – third quarter of the 4th century A.D., that is to say to the time around 330–380 (GOROHOVSKI 1988, 44).

The finding of black polished jug with a polygonal body is very interesting. Such vessels (class A, type 1 "left bank of the Dnieper" by B. V. Magomedov) considered to be typical for Cherniahov sites of the Dnieper left bank Ukraine in the middle – second half of the 4th century A.D. (MAGOMEDOV 1973, 81). True, that all the examples of such jugs (not too many) have been found in the north-eastern part of the Ukraine, that is to say in direct neighbourhood of burial at mine "Mospinskaia". These are vessels from cemeteries Uspenka and Korovincy (Fig. 5) of Sumy region (material is unpublished, excavations of E. V. Mahno), island Starica, Rodnoi Krai, Sokolovo of Kharkov region (PETRENKO 1991, ris. 4.3; 9.12; 13.9). The most similarity to

our jug shows the vessel from Korovincy: almost identical proportions of the body, quantity and situation of ornamental ribbons; only the polygonal parts of the body of our jug are more narrow and placed more frequently.

The second vessel from the burial is badly fragmented, but by techniques and material can be recognized as an example of wheel-made Cherniahov ceramics.³ Handmade pot belongs to the strictly speaking Sarmatian products and by its proportions is close to vessels of type R2 (SIMONENKO 1995a, 153) which are neutral from chronological point of view.

So, the combination of dating objects in the burial at mine "Mospinskaia" refers to 350–380 as the most probable time of the formation of the assemblage (Fig. 6). Special features of the burial rite allows us to suggest that it belonged to the Late Sarmatian culture.

Sarmatian sites of this time are localized in two regions of the modern Ukraine: in the north-east of the left bank region of the Dnieper and in the Lower Danube. Practically the whole territory between Dnieper and Prut and the larger part of the left bank Ukraine was occupied by the area of the Cherniahov culture (Fig. 4.2). It is noteworthy that Sarmatian sites of the left bank are situated, in the whole, out of this area, and the Danubian sites are inside the borders of this territory. In other words, eastern (meaning the eastern part of the North Pontic region) Sarmatians in all probability were not involved into the empire of Hermanarich, if we identify with it Cherniahov culture (SHCHUKIN 1987, 122). The formation of this alliance cut the Sarmatian world of the North Pontic into two parts. Western sites synchronous to the burial at mine "Mospinskaia" (cemeteries Chaush, Frikatsei,

Gradeshka, Kubei) were probably left by those Alans about whom Paulus Orosius later (in the 5th century) wrote that Alania was situated on the left bank of the Lower Danube (KULAKOVSKI 1899, 22–23). The same author called river Prut "Alanus Fluvius" (VERNADSKI 1944, 132). S. I. Bezuglov identifies latest Sarmatian catacombs with Tanaitian Alans of Ammianus Marcellinus (BEZUGLOV 1995, 332) who, according to this author, lived in the neighbourhood of the Greutungi (Amm. Marc. XXXI, 3). Anyhow, it is absolutely evident that the population the representatives of which were buried in the Lower Don and Lower Danube catacomb cemeteries of the second half of the 3rd–4th centuries was close to each other. It would be tempting to identify catacomb cemeteries of the Danube with Tanaitian Alans who moved there, and the Cherniahov sites of the same territories with Greutungi, but such a direct identification would be an exaggerated exploitation of the source. While Late Sarmatian sites of the eastern part of the Ukraine clearly enough show the territorial (and political?) independence of their representatives from the Gothic alliance, it is difficult to convincingly state the same about the sites of the Lower Danube that were surrounded by Cherniahov settlements and cemeteries. Judging from the topography of sites, Sarmatians and Goths lived here in changing strips. We are not able to definitely reconstruct the character of their political relations – the written sources are too poor on this topic. It is much easier to explain the finds of Cherniahov objects in Sarmatian graves (bones combs, fibulae and ceramics in Dmuhailovka, Kubei, "Mospinskaia" and Kantemirovka). Judging from their composition these are objects of commerce or change.

Notes

1 Critics of this hypothesis see: SIMONENKO, LOBAI 1991, 37.

2 From this position ethno-cultural attribution of catacombs found in Dmuhailovka and Kantemirovka con-

sidered Sarmatian (SIMONENKO 1995, 353) may have to be revised.

3 We thank B. V. Magomedov and M. E. Levada for kindly consulting us.

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