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on Ancient Bronzes

edited by Dávid Bartus, Zsolt Mráv and Melinda Szabó

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Budapest 2024



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the XXIst International Congress
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Budapest, 20–24 September 2022

Edited by
Dávid BARTUS – Zsolt MRÁV – Melinda SZABÓ

Budapest, 2024

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New find of Roman military equipment of the period of the Roman–Bosporan war of 45–49 AD from the Eastern Crimea

Mikhail Yu. TREISTER 

Independent researcher, Bonn, Germany
mikhailtreister@yahoo.de

Nikolay I. VINOKUROV 

Moscow State Pedagogical University, Moscow, Russia
vinokurovn@list.ru

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Abstract: The Artezian fortified settlement in the Azov Sea coast of Eastern Crimea perished in a strong fire at the beginning of the Roman–Bosporan war in 46/47 AD. In the homogeneous fire layer, along with numerous items of jewellery, silver, bronze and glass vessels, a heavily burned out round bronze plaque, 7.7–7.8 cm in diameter with a hole in the centre was found. The plaque is decorated along the edge with a figural frieze, depicting two pairs of animals opposing each other: ‘dog–bull’, ‘dog–wild boar’. Besides two animals are running after each other: a lion and a roe deer.

The decoration of the plaque from Artezian finds parallels among plaques from the military camps along the *limes* of Lower and Upper Rhine and Danube. Objects similar in shape depicting animals in circular friezes are also known in Dacia and in the South-Western Crimea. The parallels to the images of the plaque and options of interpreting the function of the piece are discussed. The combination of pairs of opposing animals and animals running after each other finds parallels only on the belt plaques from Asciburgium and Magdalensberg. Thus, there are reasons to consider the disc from Artezian as an element of Roman military equipment of the first half of the 1st century AD.

Keywords: Roman military equipment, bronze disks with running and opposing animals, Roman provinces, North Pontic area, Bosporan Kingdom, Artezian fortified site, Roman–Bosporan war of 44/45–49 AD

Introduction

The Artezian fortified settlement in the Azov Sea coast of Eastern Crimea perished in a strong fire at the beginning of the Roman–Bosporan war of 44/45–49 AD.¹ Due to the numismatic materials the burnt layer may be dated precisely to 46/47 AD.² In the homogeneous fire layer, which preserved in the pits of the room 4 at the section III (Fig. 1.1), along with numerous items of jewellery, silver,

1 The introduction is written by N.I. Vinokurov, who is conducting the excavations of the Artezian fortified site. The rest of the article is written by M. Treister.

2 [ABRAMZON – VINOKUROV 2015](#), 151–156, Figs 3–4; [ABRAMZON – VINOKUROV 2016](#), 712–743; [ABRAMZON – VINOKUROV 2017](#), 1–41.

bronze and glass vessels and their fragments, a heavily burned out round bronze plaque, 7.7–7.8 cm in diameter with a hole in the centre was found (Fig. 1.2–3).³

Description

A decorative plaque in the form of a disc with a central part shaped like an umbo with a through hole in the centre. Along the edge in high relief scenes with three groups of animals are embossed from the rear. This frieze is separated from the umbo-shaped part by a ridge. Dotted ornament runs along the edge. A strip with a frieze in the form of a ‘running wave’ passes between it and the figural frieze (Fig. 2).

- Group 1 is located next to the loss along the edge (a bull and a dog). On the right—a bull jumping to the left (the horns are clearly visible; the elaboration of the skin is guessed on the body) with a tail twisted in a ring (the loss under the belly of the bull); front legs with well-emphasized hooves are thrown forward. The animal depicted in profile to the right, standing in front of the bull is most probably a dog with the front legs are thrown forward at ground level, and the hind legs set back. This image suffered more than others (most of the head and neck are lost) (Fig. 2, Fig. 3.1).
- Group 2 is located on the left, i.e. clockwise: on the right—most likely a dog, i.e. the animal is very similar in posture and size to the left animal from the previous group. On the left there is represented a wild boar. Thus, the scene shows the dog attacking the boar (Fig. 2, Fig. 3.2).
- Group 3 shows two animals running after each other: in front is a lion jumping to the left, behind it is a roe deer (?), with its head turned back (Fig. 2, Fig. 3.3).

State of preservation slightly bent; part of the edge and part of the frieze with animals are lost; corrosion. Bronze; sheet hammering, embossing, piercing of the hole. Diameter 7.70–7.77 cm. Max. height 1.02 cm. Diameter of the hole 0.68 cm. Thickness at the edge 0.22 cm. Section III. Room 4. Burnt layer, pits 495, 497–498. 2013. Field inventory no. 1892. Kerch, East Crimean historical and cultural museum-reserve, acc. No. 185521; KM-8565. Collection inventory no. 105.

Parallels

The figural frieze of the plaque represents two pairs of animals opposing each other: ‘dog–bull’ (Fig. 3.1), ‘dog–wild boar’ (Fig. 3.2). Besides two animals are running after each other: a lion and a roe deer (Fig. 3.3). The decoration of the plaque from Artesian finds parallels among the objects from the sites of the Lower Germanic, Upper Germanic–Rhaetian Limes and Norican Limes, as well as from Britain.

A disk from Asciburgium with a diameter of 6.2 cm is attributed as a belt plaque. It has an umbo-shaped central part rendered as a rosette (without a hole). On the flat part of the disk there is a frieze depicting five animals, three of which run one after the other on one half of the disk: a wild boar, followed by a dog, followed by a hare. On the other half there are shown opposite each other a stag and a dog. The outer frieze is decorated with dotted wave pattern.⁴

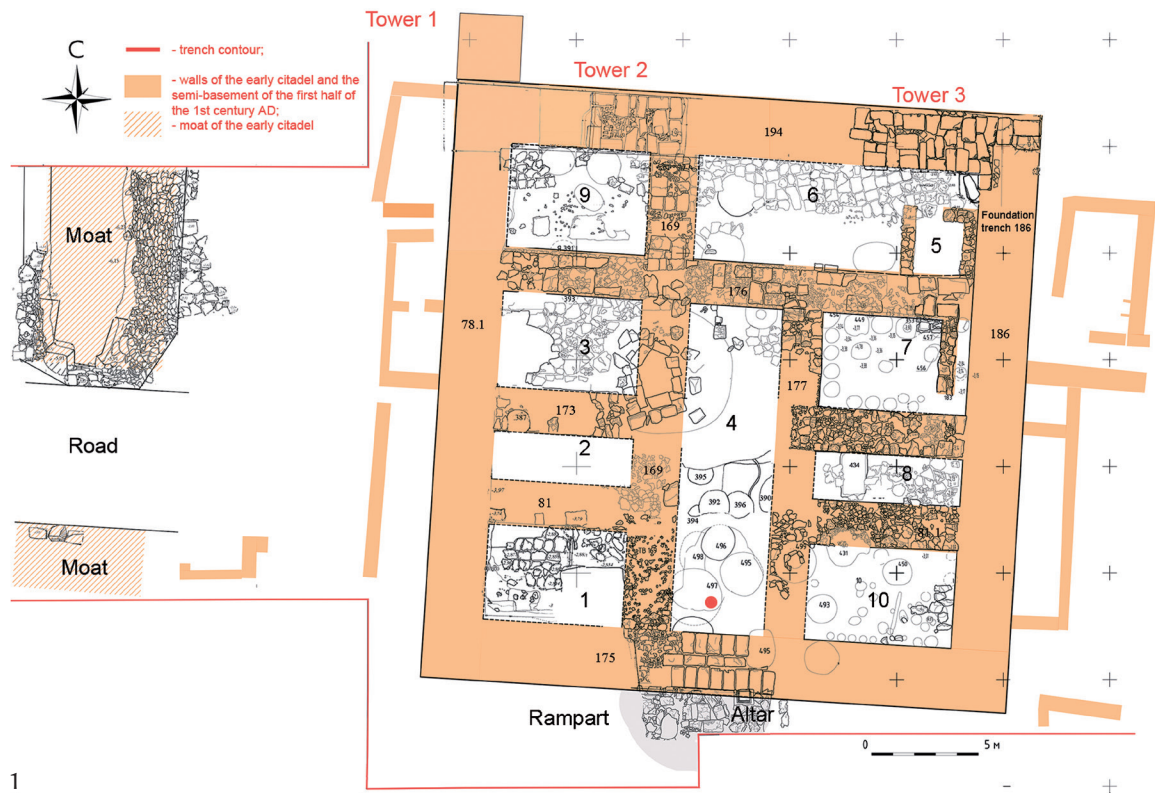
A slightly smaller disk (diameter 5.1 cm) with a similar composition of five animals (one pair opposing each other, and three—running one after the other) comes from Magdalensberg.⁵ A similar composition is represented on a bronze rectangular belt plaque from Magdalensberg.⁶ In both cases,

3 VINOKUROV 2015, 271–294; on the find of the plaque with its short description, see: p. 286.

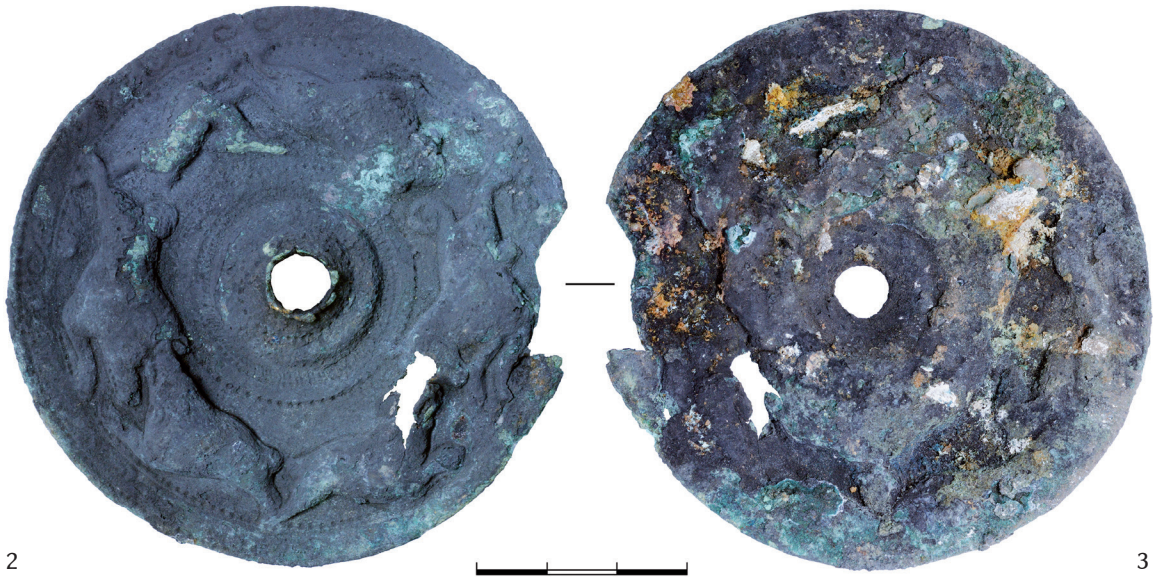
4 HACHMANN 1990, 709–710, Abb. 33; DESCHLER-ERB 2012, 55–58, Abb. 22–23; 113, Nr. C16, Taf. 7.

5 DEIMEL 1987, 295–296, Taf. 77.14; KÜNZL 1996, 410, Abb. 13.6; 462, C18.

6 DEIMEL 1987, 295, Taf. 77.13; KÜNZL 1996, 410, Abb. 13.5; 461, C17.



1



2

3

Fig. 1. Bronze plaque from the fire layer of the citadel of Artezian fortified site. 1 – plan of the citadel with the findspot of the plaque (red circle in pit 497), 2–3 – front and rear sides of the plaque before the restoration (2 – front side, 3 – rear side). (1 – plan by N. Vinokurov 2022, 2–3 – photographs by M. Treister, 2014).

there are no holes in the centre, and the central part of the plaque from Magdalensberg is designed in almost the same way as that of the plaque from Asciburgium.

On a fragmented plaque from Vindonissa (diameter ca. 6.0 cm) around the central umbo-shaped part, designed in the form of a rosette, there was also a composition with animals, from which one pair of opposing dogs and deer (?) remained.⁷

7 DESCHLER-ERB 1996, 19, Abb. 8.6; 21, Nr. 6; KÜNZL 1996, 463, C41; Taf. 43.5; Taf. 49.8; BISHOP – COULSTON 2006, 245, Fig. 149.2.

A bronze stamp used to decorate rectangular plaques with animal scenes has been found at Colchester, however, here is an image of six animals standing on their hind legs and placing their front legs on the back of the animal in front of him.⁸

On a fragmented plaque from Oberstimm in Bavaria, in view of the fact that only its central part has been preserved,⁹ it is difficult to get an idea of the composition of a figural frieze. On a rectangular plaque from Chichester, the central part is decorated with a circular frieze depicting six animals running clockwise one after another, among which a wild boar and dogs are recognizable.¹⁰

On one of the sides (B) of the octagonal bronze matrix found in 2013 in Sarmizegetusa Regia, once a capital of Dacia, the lion head in the centre of the matrix rendered from a frontal perspective is enclosed by a circular frieze with four pairs of fighting animals, which are antipodal displayed withing the register: lion–bear, goat–griffin; leopard–bull; tiger–boar.¹¹

Objects similar in shape with images of animals in circular friezes come also from the North Pontic region. The bronze disk with four animals (the central part is protruding, with a hole) comes from the excavations of the sanctuary at the Gurzuf Pass in the Crimea and was published by N. G. Novichenkova as a detail of a Roman military costume dating to the turn of the eras or to the first half of the 1st century AD.¹² It is difficult to say whether the hole was original or the result of a damage—only a drawing of the disk was published without a detailed description. On the drawing, one can more or less definitely attribute one pair of opposing animals as: a boar (on the right) and a dog.

A bronze matrix from crypt no. 520 of the Ust'-Alma necropolis in Western Crimea, 6.8 cm in diameter, is decorated with a similar relief composition of four animals (they are depicted running clockwise one after another: a dog (or wolf), an eagle-headed griffin and a dog (wolf); another eagle-headed griffin depicted to the left, thus forming at the same time, an opposing pair with a dog (wolf). This frieze is located around an umbo-shaped central part with a lion's head *en face* (thus, the composition of the matrix is very close to the composition of side B of the abovementioned matrix from Sarmizegetusa). The matrix from Ust'-Alma was used originally for embossing plaques,¹³ before it was turned into an overlay by its last owner in the second half of the 1st or early 2nd centuries AD.¹⁴

Compositions of pairs of opposing animals in Greek and Roman art

The composition and poses of the animals on the abovementioned Colchester stamp are very reminiscent of the image on the upper frieze of a gold plaque in the form of a fish from the hoard of the

8 NIBLETT 1985, 122, no. 61; 167, Pl. 14; DESCHLER-ERB 1996, 27, Abb. 15; KÜNZL 1996, 410, Abb. 13.8; C48; BISHOP – COULSTON 2006, 245, Fig. 149.1.

9 BÖHME-SCHÖNBERGER 1978, Nr. B 144, Taf. 21; KÜNZL 1996, 410, Abb. 13.4; 462, C22.

10 GREW – GRIFFITHS 1991, 54, 67, no. 66, Fig. 10; KÜNZL 1996, 460, C8; MAGEE 2010, 64, Fig. 30.

11 FLOREA 2015, 62–63, 74, Fig. 31; 76–77, Figs 33–34; 79, Fig. 36; 152–153.

12 NOVICHENKOVA 1998, 63, Fig. 13.4 (diameter 6.4 cm, after the drawing with scale); NOVICHENKOVA 2002, 67, Fig. 30.4; 70; NOVICHENKOVA 2015, 60, Fig. 99.4; 120, Fig. 219.4; MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 180–181, Fig. 6.4; ZAYTSEV – MORDVINTSEVA 2004, 264; NOVICHENKOVA 2017, 87, Fig. 46.9.

13 MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 174–181, Figs 2–3; ZAYTSEV – MORDVINCEVA 2004, 260–270, Figs 2–3; PUZDROVSKIJ 2007, colour plate 9.1; LVR – LANDESMUSEUM BONN 2013, 302, Nr. 7.1.

14 MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 174; ZAYTSEV – MORDVINTSEVA 2004, 262–263. It is worth noting that at the same time, another bronze positive matrix fell into another crypt of the Ust'-Alma necropolis—with the image of Jupiter sitting in the aedicula (PUZDROVSKIY – TRUFANOV 2010, 204, Fig. 7.1–2; 204–205, Nr. 12), of the type that became widespread in Thrace and also after a find from Chersonesus Taurica (TREISTER 2001b, 355–361, Fig. 120).

6th–early 5th centuries BC. in Vetersfelde.¹⁵ The early prototypes of the compositions under consideration are also evidenced by the fact that on another plaque (phalera) composed of four disks from Vetersfelde, there are images of paired animals in circular friezes, and on three of the four disks these are pairs of opposing animals, whereas on one—running after each other.¹⁶

Pairs of opposing animals in circular friezes were also shown on the items of the North Pontic and Thracian toreutics of the Hellenistic period, in particular on the silver-gilt phalerae from Starobelsk (lion–boar, panther–bull) and Tvarditsa (lion–panther, winged panther–deer).¹⁷ The fact that the motif of pairs of opposing animals was popular in the North Pontic region also in the 1st century AD is evidenced by additional images on silver *phialai* from a Sarmatian burial in Novoaleksandrovka in the Lower Don area.¹⁸

Scenes depicting animal fights were common in Roman art. On Early Imperial belt plaques with the image of a Capitoline she-wolf, a pair of a boar and a bear opposing each other were depicted in the upper part.¹⁹ On a decorative plaque of a gladius scabbard from Velsen in Holland, a scene of an attack by two dogs on a wild boar is shown.²⁰

On one of the goblets from the Hildesheim Treasure, which are attributed as products of the Gallic workshop of the first decades of the 1st century AD, a frieze depicting three pairs of animals is presented: two pairs are shown in a fight with each other: a lion and a bull, a dog and a boar, while the third pair (a boar and a dog stand opposite each other) are representing preparing for a fight.²¹

A similar rendering of a running roe deer with its head turned back is presented by a frieze with animals running one after another on a Late Antique glass vessel from the collection of the Corning Museum of Glass.²² A jumping lion²³ and a dog, attacking and tormenting a wild boar,²⁴ were depicted on the shields of the lamps of the first half of the 1st century AD. A frieze depicting running animals is shown on a glass goblet from Sopron, dated to the second half of the 1st century AD. One of the scenes of the frieze represent a dog and a boar standing opposite each other.²⁵ Goblets made in the same mould come from Switzerland, in particular from Augst and Vindonissa.²⁶

15 FURTWÄNGLER 1883, 5–8, Nr. 1, Taf. 1.1; GREIFENHAGEN 1970, 61–62, Taf. 39–40, Abb. 35; PLATZ-HORSTER 2001, 43–44, Nr. 25; NAWROTH 2007, 322–323, Abb. 2; NEBELSICK 2014, 25, Nr. 1, Fig. 2.7,2; 42–46, Fig. 2.17,1 bottom; NEBELSICK 2015, 123, no. 1; 124, Fig. 1.1; TOPAL 2020, 470, Fig. 1.11; TOPAL 2022, 174, Fig. 1.11.

16 FURTWÄNGLER 1883, 8, Nr. 2, Taf. 2.1; GREIFENHAGEN 1970, 62, Taf. 41; MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 178, Fig. 4; 180; NAWROTH 2007, 322–323, Abb. 3; NEBELSICK 2014, 25, no. 1, Fig. 2.7,1; 44, Fig. 2.17,1, top; 53, Fig. 2.23; NEBELSICK 2015, 123, no. 2; 124, Fig. 1.2; TOPAL 2020, 470, Fig. 1.10; 472, Fig. 2; 474–475; TOPAL 2022, 174, Fig. 1.10; 180, Fig. 6; 181–183.

17 MORDVINCEVA 2001, 80–81, Nr. 79, Taf. 43; MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 180–181, Fig. 6.2.

18 IWATAYA 1991, 118, nos 144–145; SCHILTZ 2001, 192–193, nos 211–212; MORDVINTSEVA – TREISTER 2007, vol. 2, 50, no. 151.1–2, Pl. 32, Fig. 15; TREISTER 2007, 36; MORDVINTSEVA – ZAYTSEV 2002, 180–181, Fig. 6.3; ZASETSKAYA 2008, 132, Nr. 46; SEIPEL 2009, 254, Nr. 107; BESPALYY – LUK'YASHKO 2018, 36, Fig. 19.8; photo 2; TREISTER 2021, 86, 88, 92, Fig. 12; 96–98, Figs 15–17.

19 KÜNZN 1996, 410, Abb. 13.1–2.

20 KÜNZN 1996, 418, Abb. 17.3; 459, M46.

21 PERNICE – WINTER 1901, 66–69, Taf. 38–40; WILLERS 1901, 173–175, Abb. 63; Taf. 10.3; DREXEL 1909, 225–227; KÜTHMANN 1958, 134–135, Taf. 14; BOETZKES – STEIN 1997, 80–81, Nr. 66; STEFANELLI 1991, 184, Fig. 178; 273, no. 99, Figs 279–280; BARATTE – PAINTER 1989, 74–75, no. 15.

22 HARDEN 1988, 207, Nr. 115; WHITEHAUS 2001, 268–270, no. 457; 376 (ill.).

23 LEIBUNDGUT 1977, 237, Nr. 230; DESCHLER-ERB – WYPRÄCHTIGER 2010, 50, Nr. 17, 74, Taf. 2.

24 LEIBUNDGUT 1977, 213, Nr. 83; DESCHLER-ERB – WYPRÄCHTIGER 2010, 50, Nr. 18, 74, Taf. 2.

25 HARDEN 1988, 167, Nr. 88; WHITEHAUS 2001, 62–64, no. 534; 325 (ill.).

26 WHITEHAUS 2001, 64, with bibliography.

In the 2nd–3rd centuries AD friezes depicting pairs of opposing animals or several animals running one after another adorn Gallo–Roman silver utensils and Hemoor-type bronze buckets.²⁷ Perhaps even more popular are the scenes of persecution and animal fights in the art of the 3rd–4th centuries AD, in particular on mosaics,²⁸ and glass vessels.²⁹ A leopard chasing a deer is engraved on the lid of a bronze basin with a spout from Trier.³⁰ A circular frieze with animals running one after another is shown on one of the Germanic phalerae found in the Thorsberg peat bog in Jutland, made by a local artisan familiar with Roman techniques.³¹

If we consider the chronologically close items of toreutics with the images of animals mentioned above, then the ‘dog–bull’ pair on the disk from Artesian does not find parallels, while the ‘dog–boar’ pair is represented on the frieze of the goblet from Hildesheim. The combination of pairs of opposing animals and animals running after each other in the composition of the frieze finds parallels only on plaques from Asciburgium and Magdalenberg.



Fig. 2. Bronze plaque from the fire layer of the citadel of Artesian fortified site. Front side and view from the side. Kerch, East-Crimean Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve, acc. no. 185521, inv.-no. KM-8565. Collection inv.-no. 105. (1 – photograph, Museum; after the restoration, 2 – photograph by M. Treister, 2014).

The function of the plaque

The absence of any holes along the edge testifies against the interpretation of the disk from the excavations of the Artesian site (Fig. 2) as a belt plaque. This fact, as well as the absence of loops on the back (Fig. 1.3), does not allow us to consider it as a phalera of armour or horse harness. Another argument against the last variant of interpretation is that of the motif, which is considered by E. Deshler-Erb when attributing the find from Asciburgium.³² Phalerae of Roman military armour, known both after the real archaeological finds and after the images on reliefs and tomb steles, as a rule, were decorated with portrait busts, gorgoneia, heads of deities and mythological persons, but not with scenes of animal fights.³³

27 WILLERS 1901, 144–175, Taf. 5–9, 10.1–2; DREXEL 1909, 218–228.

28 See, for instance, the mosaic from Westerhofen: WAMSER 2000, 273, Abb. 232; 431, Nr. 238.

29 From Thessaloniki: ADAM-VELENI 2010, 285–286, no. 238. From the collection of the Corning Museum of Glass: see above note 22.

30 BIENERT 2007, 119–120, Nr. 127.

31 VON CARNAP-BORNHEIM 1997, 72, Abb. 2A; 74, Abb. 3; WAMSER 2000, 376–377, Nr. 135a.1–2; 378 (Abb.); MATEŠIĆ 2008, 101; PRZBYŁA 2010, 99–100, Anm. 6 with bibliography.

32 DESCHLER-ERB 2012, 58.

33 BÜTTNER 1957, 132–133, 145–152; MAXFIELD 1981, 91–92, Pl. 2.a–b; GARBSCH 1983, 108–109; JENKINS 1985, 141–164; BISHOP 1988, 94–95, 124–126, 135–141, Figs 34, 39–42; WAMSER 2000, 324–326, Nr. 31.a–f; TREISTER 2001b, 339; BISHOP – COULSTON 2006, 96, Fig. 52.3; 121–122; MATEŠIĆ 2008, 101; KÜNZL 2008, 26–30; 61–64.

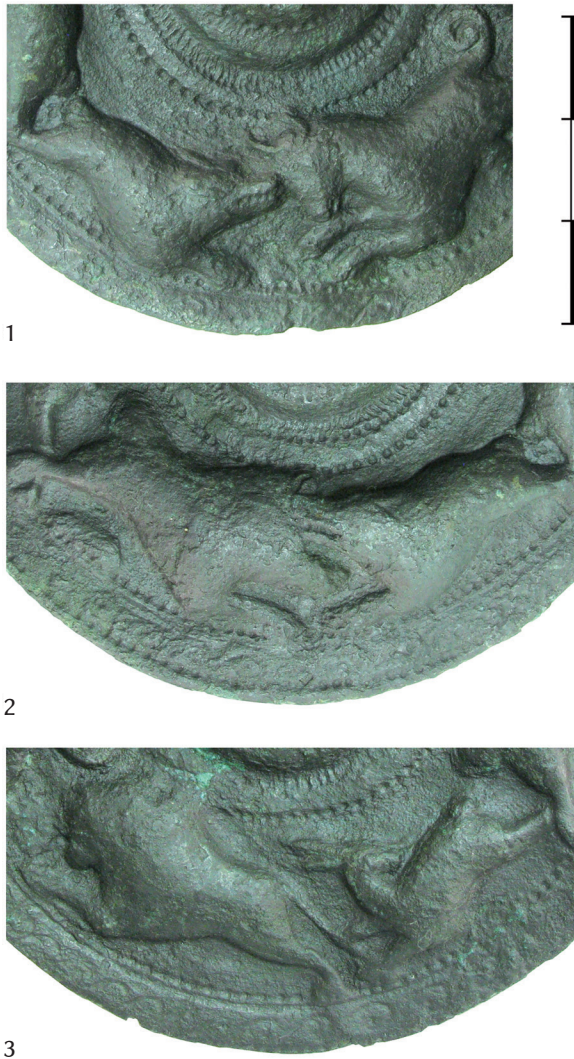


Fig. 3. Bronze plaque from the fire layer of the citadel of Artesian fortified site. Details of circular frieze. Kerch, East-Crimean Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve, acc. no. 185521, inv.-no. KM-8565. Collection inv.-no. 105. Photograph, Museum.

The absence of any fastening elements on the disk and the presence in its centre of a round hole with a diameter of almost 0.7 cm suggests that the disk could rather be attached to the base with a pin passing through the hole. Thus, it could serve as a decorative plaque decorating the cross-guard of the gladius, similar to the bronze round plaque originating from the Comacchio shipwreck in Northern Italy, which is attributed as the decoration of the Mainz type *gladius*. The plaque from Comacchio is only slightly smaller than the find from the excavations of the Artesian site (its diameter is 7.2 cm, in the centre there is not a round, but a rectangular hole, around which two pairs of animals opposing each other are depicted in a low relief: a lion and a bear.³⁴

This is, in my opinion, a theoretically possible explanation for the design of the central part of the plaque from Artesian and the hole in it, although the cross-guards of swords, as shown, for example, by the finds from the excavations of the sanctuary on the Gurzuf Pass,³⁵ or Tenginskaya in the Kuban region,³⁶ are more often oval in shape, and the cut-outs in their central parts are rectangular, like the abovementioned plaque from Comacchio shows. Alternatively, the plaque from Artesian could be used, for example, to decorate a shield. One way or another, it is difficult for me to offer an unambiguous interpretation of the functional purpose of the plaque.

Conclusion

Thus, in my opinion, there is every reason to consider the disk from Artesian as an element of Roman military equipment of the first half of the 1st century AD, regardless of its functional purpose, which is not completely clear. The find under discussion complements the series of items of Roman military equipment found during the excavations of the citadel of the Artesian fortified settlement,³⁷ among which there is also a *gladius* of the Mainz type,³⁸ and in general such finds from

34 BERTI 1990, 258, no. 227; 260 (ill.); KÜNZL 1996, 418, Abb. 17.1; 459, M45; FEUGÈRE 2002, 208, Fig. 276; MIKS 2007, 157, 161, 561, Nr. 115, Taf. 157, Stichblatt; Vortafel E, 22.

35 NOVICHENKOVA 1998, 52, Fig. 1.7; NOVICHENKOVA 2015, 69, Fig. 117, 7; 74, Fig. 133; NOVICHENKOVA 2017, 53–54, Fig. 11.1–4.

36 BEGLOVA – ERLICH 1998, 173–176; BEGLOVA – ERLICH 2018, 150–151, Fig. 180.11.

37 ABRAMZON et al. 2014, 11, Fig. 1.3–4; VINOKUROV – TRAISTER 2018, 45–50.

38 ABRAMZON et al. 2012, 97–98, Fig. 4.

various sites of the North Pontic region: Tyras,³⁹ Olbia,⁴⁰ Chersonesus,⁴¹ South-Western Crimea,⁴² sanctuaries of the mountain Crimea,⁴³ Bosphoran Kingdom,⁴⁴ and the Kuban area.⁴⁵

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- 39 CHERNENKO et al. 1989, 250–252; SON – NAZAROV 1993, 120–121, Figs 1–2; TREISTER 2001a, 110.
- 40 VINOGRADOV – NAZAROV 1994, 101–109; SON – NAZAROV 1993, 121–122, Figs 3–4.
- 41 ZUBAR – ANTONOVA 2001, 122–125; TREISTER 2001a, 111–116, Fig. 1.1,3–10; ZHURAVLEV 2003, 87–116; KOSTROMICHEV 2006, 43–128; KOSTROMICHEV 2008, 39–60; KOSTROMICHEV 2011, 15–164; DOROSHKO et al. 2020, 95–100.
- 42 MASYAKIN 2010, 261–286; ZHURAVLEV – KAMELINA 2012, 63–69; KOSTROMICHEV – MASYAKIN 2013, 184–207.
- 43 NOVICHENKOVA 1998, 51–67; LYSENKO 2013, 279; NOVICHENKOVA 2013, 268, Nr. IV.6–8; 270, Nr. IV.16–17; NOVICHENKOVA 2013, 29–30; NOVICHENKOVA 2015, 68–77; NOVICHENKOVA – KONTNY 2015, 303–324; NOVICHENKOVA 2016, 219–222; NOVICHENKOVA 2020a 160–165; NOVICHENKOVA 2020b, 115–121.
- 44 TREISTER 1993, 56–57; TREISTER 1994, 91, Pl. 1. top; TREISTER 1995, 162–165, Fig. 1.3–4.
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