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HOPLITE ARMOUR IN COLCHIS

The various intensive contacts of Colchis with the Greek world began with the time of the foundation of first Greek colonies on the Eastern Black Sea area. Alongside with various items of the Greek manufacture elements of Greek armour penetrate into environment of local elite as well.

It is necessary to note one feature - while in the previous period (8th-7th centuries B.C.) the graves with weapon represented an usual phenomenon, in the time under discussion number of such graves is drastically reduced. As a rule they differ by richness of funerary goods. Structure of stock includes subjects from gold and samples of the Greek import (including armour).

To the earliest samples of the Greek defensive arms found on the territory of Colchis belongs a bronze plate with an image of eagle from the grave at the Krasnij Mayak cemetery in Abkhazia (Pl. I1). Together with this object the spearheads and also two-piece bronze bits and a bronze bell are found in a tomb. This grave is well dated to the 2nd half of the 6th cent. or the very beginning of the 5th cent B.C.

This facing represents a bronze three-layered plate (thickness 0.5-1.0 mm). Eagle is depicted in flight with a head to the left. The wings and tail are spoiled. Shoulders are put forward. One paw rests against the right wing. The wings are connected with a body by means of bronze pivots. Feathers on the neck are represented by scales. The wings are divided into three zones of which the shoulder part is smooth, while the lower two parts are covered by long feathers. Along the edges of wings a row of paired apertures for the attachment of the facing to a wooden or leather basis are pierced. The eagle is 54 cm long, the wing spread reaches 60 cm.

We know only a small number -of archaeological finds of a similar sort. It is worthy to mention a very fragmented image of eagle from the German excavations in Olympia in 1938-1939 (both wings are missing) (Pl. I2). Functionally this eagle is identical to the Colchian one. One more interesting find occurs from the island of Samos, where during the excavations of an archaic sanctuary two bronze disks (shield facings) with engraved representations of Gorgoneion and eagle were found (Pl. I3). These facings are also dated to the 6th cent. B.C.

The function of such representations is well known: they are shield devices or blazons. Different kinds of such representations are well known archaeologically from the excavations of Olympia. In the literary sources the earliest mentions of such devices are known from Homer: the shields of Athena and Agamemnon were decorated with the images of Gorgon, the shield of Achilles, made by Hephaestus was also covered with various compositions.

Black-figured vases of the archaic period provide us with various versions of similar emblems, including the images of eagles. One of the earliest examples is a shield represented on an Eretrian vase of the end of the 8th cent. B.C., though emblems at this time are still very rare. In the subsequent period the images of eagles on shields are more regular, especially in Chalkidian and Corinthian black-figured vase-painting. An eagle and bull-head are represented on the shields of warriors on one Corinthian vase of the early 7th cent. B.C. The various images are placed also on the shields of warriors on the famous

1 Traph M. M. Trudi (Works), vol. II, Sukhumi, 1969, pp. 88-89, fig. 29.
2 OI.Ber. III, pp. 84-85, Pl. 27.
5 II., 5, 739-742.
6 II., 11, 34-37.
7 II., 11, 478-608.
Chigi vase (late Protocorinthian style, 640 B.C.) (Pl. II).10 On Attic lekanes of 575-550 B.C. there are represented warriors. Their shields are decorated with the horse-heads and human-heads, also with a helmet, a goat and an eagle.11 On a Chalcidian vase of 530-525 B.C. Hector holds a shield with an image of an eagle (Pl. II).12 The similar examples are numerous.

All above mentioned examples are united by a common manner of depicting eagles: they are in a position of free flight, shoulders are put forward, the tail is spoiled. In all known cases the wing consists of three parts - i.e. the scheme is completely similar to the image of the eagle from the Krasnij Mayak cemetery. But there is also one difference - feathers of Krasnij Mayak eagle are represented in two rows, whereas on black-figured vases long feathers are depicted only in the lowest row of wings. The sole exception of this rule (alongside with the Samian facing) is the image of an eagle on Olympian stater of 490 B.C. which is very close to our eagle in all aspects.

The representation of feathers in one line is characteristic of the images of various essences in mainland Greece. For example it is possible to name wings of lion-like or eagle-like griffons on the Late Proto-Corinthian vases,13 a figure with wings and snake-body on the Corinthian vase of the Transition style (640-625 B.C.),14 a man's winged figure on a vase of the Middle Corinthian style (600-575 B.C.),15 the goddess Nike and winged figure (Erida?) on red-figured Attic lekythoi (470-450 B.C.).16

A completely different picture is traced on the Ancient Eastern images. First of all, circuit of a wing differs from Greek ones. Secondly, feathers are divided usually into two, three or more parts. The shoulder part is smooth or covered with scales. For example, wings of a sphinx from Carchemish (the early 1st millennium B.C.) consists of four parts and three of them are covered with feathers.17 The wings of all figures represented on the famous pectoral from Ziwyre are similar.18 The same can be said about winged figures from Persepolis.19 At last it is necessary to note the image of an eagle of Achae menid period on the gold phiale from Hamadan (Pl. I).20 which does not find direct analogies in the Ancient Near Eastern Art. This eagle is represented in flight, the wings are spoiled, shoulders are put forward, one paw bases on a wing. Thus, this image completely repeats the Greek scheme. In the same time the shoulder part of a wing, as well as the whole body, is covered with scales, and feathers are arranged in two lines. Thus, we have the combination of the typically Greek scheme with Ancient Eastern motives, i.e. a successful example of syncretism of Greek and Near Eastern motives.

If we consider the eagle from Krasnij Mayak cemetery from these point of view, its affinity with the Hamadan eagle will be obvious (feathers in two lines, scales on the neck, etc.). The eagle from Samos could be ranked to the same group. The combination of Ancient Eastern and Greek motives on an object of the Greek origin (in our case facing of a shield – an emblem) could have been happened in one of the East-Ionian centres. Its origin from workshops of one of the Ionian centres of the Northern Black Sea littoral also can be supposed. The reality of this assumption is supported by a find of a silver bowcase in a burial mound of the second half of the 5th cent. B.C.21 On it an eagle is represented, which is similar to the above considered eagles from Krasnij Mayak and Hamadan in all parameters (scales on a body, feathers in two lines). Thus, it is difficult to tell something definite about a definite place of production of our eagle, though the influence of Eastern-Ionian school is evident.

Another shield of really Greek provenance in Colchis occurs from a destroyed tomb in Akhul-Abba, also in Abkhazia, investigated in 1940.22 In the pit-grave together with other funerary goods there

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11 Greenhalgh P. A., op. cit., p. 112, fig. 56.
12 Greenhalgh P. A., op. cit., fig. 75.
14 Payne H. op. cit., figs. 15, 25.
15 Payne H. op. cit., fig. 21.
19 Godard A. L'art de l'Iran. Paris, 1962, p. 112, fig. 43.
20 Sept mille ans d'art en Iran, Paris, 1962, Cat. = 671, PL XII.
21 Artamonov M. I. Sokrovishcha skifskikh kurganov (The Treasury of Scthyian Tumuli), Leningrad, 1966 (in Russ.), Pl. 113.
were fragments of the bronze facing of a wooden shield, from which noteworthy are plates of edge, decorated with four lines of repoussé cable decoration (so-called guilloch), and a central disk (diameter up to 29 cm) with the holes on edges. Reconstructed diameter of this shield was 80-90 cm (Pl. III.

The context of finds (a bronze phiale, an iron sword, an iron knife, an iron axe, black-lazed vases, etc.) is dated to the late 4th cent. B.C.

Shields similar to the above described, were widely spread in the Greek world. The earliest ones, dated to the Archaic period, are found at Olympia (Pl. III.). Of the same time are the shields found in Isthmia, Delphi, Sparta, Dodona, Lindos, and also in Trebenishte (Bulgaria). It is possible to name two items in Southern Italy - Niokataro, near Tarent and Perudja. Relatively later is a shield from excavations of the Athenian Agora. The latest from them, but at the same time chronologically closest to our example, is the shield from Olynthus (Pl. III.).

Both shields, though they are of different time and of different shape, are unified by one feature - they are hoplite or Argive shields, i.e. a main element of heavy hoplite armour (so-called panoplia).

Appearance of heavily-armed warrior-hoplites and the changes in military tactics connected with it, have rendered huge influence on farther development of arms and military activities during the subsequent three hundreds years. The efficiency of new tactics and armour was especially shown during the Graeco-Persian wars. A standard set of panoplia, besides a shield, included also corselets, helmets and greaves.

We have no traces of corselets in archaeological finds in Colchis, Though other objects are better represented here.

The helmets and greaves are dated to the Early Hellenistic period (4th-3rd cent. B.C.). These finds are concentrated in North-west Colchis (modern Abkhazia) - in vv. Atara, Eshera, in above mentioned Akhul-Abaa and in the vicinities of the mouth of the Kelasuri river (Pl. IV.1). It is worthy to note, that for the not clear reasons helmets, discovered in Colchis, are usually defined as Attic (as well as similar finds in Northern Black Sea area). To my mind, it is a misunderstanding; all helmets of this type should be attributed to the Chalcidian type.

It is noteworthy that both names - "Attic" and "Chalcidian" - are conventional.

Helmet of Attic type is characterised by light, open shape. It doesn't cover forehead, not cheeks, as well as ears. Sometimes it is supplied with a neck-guard and a frontlet; this last covered the upper part of a forehead, ending by volute-shaped terminals near ears. A few finds of helmets are known. Our knowledge on them is largely based on the representations on the Attic black-figured vases. Helmets under discussion are usually worn by Athena, and Amazones as well.

Helmets of Chalcidian type appear for the beginning of the 6th cent. B.C. The name of the type is derived from Chalcidian vase-painting. The best examples of the Chalcidian painted vases have been


26 Carapanos C. Dodone et se ruines. I. Paris, 1878, pp. 92, 234, Pl. 23.


30 Messerschmidt F. Inedita Etruriae. – Studi Etruschi, VI, 1932, Pl. XXV.


found in Chalcidian colonies in Etruria, South Italy and Sicily. The helmets of this type are found in the same region.37

The helmet of this type was also discovered in South-Western Colchis, in the village of Kokhi.38

One more helmet of the Chalcidian type was found in the hinterland of Colchis, in Kutaisi.39

About the cnemides, found in Colchis, it could be said, that all of them are of the standard type, characteristic of the 5th-2nd cent. B.C.40

Noteworthy are thigh guards found in the grave of a noble warrior in Vani, dated to the third quarter of the 4th cent. B.C.41 It must be underlined that in Greece proper this type of armour is extremely rare. Namely, a single find of thigh guard is known in Olympia. There are known the representations of a thigh guards on Attic black-figured pottery, as well as in Corinthian and Spartan art.42

The latest find of defensive armour is connected with the village of Baghl an, situated also in North-west Colchis. A cemetery with cremation burials was discovered there. The cremated remains were buried outside the urns, on a small round ground (50-60 cm in diameter). A thin layer of ash and burnt bones overlaid the grounds. The burial inventory was placed above this layer. The scanty inventory consisted of a standard set of items: a small jug, a couple of iron spearheads, occasionally an iron axe, a modest set of colored paste beads including the so-called eye-beads, bronze bracelets of thin wire with open ends and curved back. All these items are characteristic of the 3rd-2nd cent. B.C. Colchis. The most interesting complex was found in the centre of this cemetery.43

The burial complex consisted of two grounds arranged close to one another. One of them (4 x 4 m) was covered with a thick (15 cm) charred layer. In this layer there were revealed fragments of Colchian and Sinopean amphorae, amphoriskoi of Asia Minor production, handles of a bronze vessel, fragments of an iron weapon including the hilt of a sword, spearheads. Within 0.5 m of that ground there was another one (2.0 x 1.2 m) lying slightly deeper in the soil. A heap of burnt bone remains mixed with pieces of charcoal and ash and covered with a silver plate was found in the centre of the ground. A fairly rich inventory was discovered around it: gold palmette-shaped plaques, a gold earring and two gold conical pendants. In the


western part of the burial an entire horse head covering was discovered. It was made of thin sheet bronze, which was probably attached to a leather base. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to preserve, for it had numerous cracks and despite careful handling, it crumbled into small pieces at the very first attempt of withdrawing it. Thus, we possess only field photos and drawings of the covering. In the grave there were found also two silver plaques of a bridle, a local two-handled pot, a great number of iron items deformed by fire, such as an axe-head, spearheads, knives and up to thirty three-edged arrowheads. Sinopean unguentaria and a black-glazed fish-plate of Asia Minor provenance were also discovered in the eastern part of the grave. The inventory allows us to date the burial to the second half of the 3rd cent. B.C.

Of great interest is the bronze horse covering (Pl. V1). Its peculiarity is that it is not flat (as this part of horse trapping usually does), but volumetric and it fitted closely the upper part of a horse muzzle (see the graphic reconstruction).

Such big face-guards are quite rare both in Greek, and in Ancient Eastern World, where basically were used easy plate head-coverings. Such objects are known from the graves of the 6th-4th cent. B.C. from South Italy and Sicily, and by the images on red-figured Campanian vases.

The closest analogy of our head-covering is the representation of a similar item on the relief frieze from Pergamon (Pl. V2).

The listed samples limit finds of the Greek protective arms on the territory of Colchis. All finds in this territory occur from rich, aristocratic burials.

According to the archaeological data of Colchis, the rich, "aristocratic", burials of this region have a number of common features: the presence— in the inventory, in addition to items of precious metals— of weapons including defensive ones, horses and (or) harness, and imported Greek wares. The presence of defensive weapons points to the high social and proprietor status of the owner.

The concentration of Greek imported items in the burials of the nobility points not only to its social status, but also to its key position in the redistribution system on the territory of Colchis.
