



Alexander Butyagin

## Barrows of the Bosporan Kingdom during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC as a Greek-barbarian Phenomenon

Russian and foreign scientists have been paying great attention to Greek settlements on the coast of Kerch Strait (fig. 1) for more than 170 years. There are many studies on archaeological objects and ancient life of the Bosporan Kingdom. One of the main subjects is the exploration of the barrows in which many outstanding jewellery pieces were found during the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These jeweleries still take pride of place in albums and museums' collections. Remarkably, most of the materials from these significant sites are not published until today. The topographical and chronological situation of these sites is very difficult. Relative and absolute chronology can hardly be defined. Nowadays the Kerch Archaeological Museum and the State Hermitage Museum conduct several studies in order to publish the materials of the Bosporan barrows. Therefore it can be expected that the situation will hopefully change<sup>1</sup>.

However, this is not the only problem.

The reasons of the construction of barrows near the big Bosporan towns are so far not perspicuous. Moreover, their connection with the political and social history of the Bosporan Kingdom and their significance within the Bosporan culture are not clear yet. These difficulties are related to several problems of date and typology of the barrows. Even until today, there is no clear theory about their origin. M. I. Rostovcev was the first who wrote about them in his famous monograph «Scythia and Bosporus».



Fig. 1 – The Bosporan Kingdom (State Hermitage Museum St. Petersburg).

<sup>1</sup> First of all, the materials of the Ak-Burun barrows, the Kul-Oba barrow and the Yuth-Oba barrow group will be published.

Unfortunately the second volume of his book, in which the author wanted to describe all the details of his study has never been published<sup>2</sup>. Rostovcev paid attention to the fact that some of the barrows were located near Greek towns, others near the borders of the Greek centres and some far away in the steppe (to this important aspect we will return below). In his chapter with the description of the barrows of the Bosporan Kingdom the author suggests a Greek origin for the barrows. However, in his description of the barrow in the land of mizra Kekuvatski (the so called Kekuvatski barrow) he writes that «there was a tomb of a Greek embraced Barbarian style or, that is more evidently, of a Hellenised Barbarian». Evidently, the author did not answer the question of the origin of the necropolis. He also drew our attention to the fact that this example was the westernmost barrow in the Yuz-Oba group, at the edge of the steppe. Because Rostovcev's studies are highly respected in Russian archaeology there is a duality in the approach of studying the Bosporan barrows. One result is that nowadays every barrow is studied individually, asking if it was a Greek or a Barbarian burial. Another scholar, V. F. Gaydukevich, paid great attention to the barrows in his book «The Bosporus kingdom». He remarked the cross-cultural interaction of the Greek and the Barbarian aristocracy, and he offered to consider the Bosporan Kingdom to be the true expression of a real Greco-Scythian state. But Gaydukevich did not deal with the chronology of the interaction between the two aristocracies, nor did he set it in the frame of problems of the barrows' appearance. Thus the situation remains unchanged. Even later, no detailed study on the Bosporan barrows was made. However, the archaeological material of the excavations was either used to illustrate the Scythian culture (e.g. they were only mentioned in the literature about arts and ideology of the Scythes). the Greek influence in art (a good example might be the international exhibition "Greek Gold"). Thus, the dual approach in the study of the barrows is still visible.

However, the study of the Bosporan Kingdom as a Greco-Scythian state presents certain limits. First, a better definition should be that of "Greco-Barbarian" because not only Scythes but also Maeotae and Sinds took part in the foundation of this particular culture. Archaeological excavations of the Greek colonies on both coasts of the Cimmerian Bosporus are being conducted for more than 100 years. Important material demonstrates that the Barbarians did not exert any influence on the citizens' culture at least until the period of Mithridatos VI Eupatoros. In fact, it was represented only by hand-made pottery (which was mainly produced in an early period), arrow heads and Scythes swords (which were found in early necropolises and very seldom in the settlements). Apart from that, some bronze and bone bases of horse bridles were excavated. The horse bridles might be attributed to the native population which used only local horses bought together with the bridle. It is important to point out that the Barbarian artefacts came to the sites by direct contact and not as a cultural loan.

Otherwise no Barbarian decoration was found on the pottery and on the metal objects. Also burials carved into the ground had no local features, except the mention of the ethnos of the buried person as well as the non-Greek names on Greek steles. Regarding these materials, we might suggest that the Bosporan Kingdom was free of any local influence and should have been a Greek foundation (In some Russian and Ukrainian archaeology this opinion is still advanced).

The difference between the culture of the Greek colonies and the local culture becomes evident by studying the barrows. It is clear that the culture they represent was deeply connected with the Barbarian civilization: objects with pictures of Barbarians and scenes of Barbarian life, objects of nomads with Greek subjects as well as horse graves and several other items of non-Greek culture. The assumption that the barrows belonged to a Barbarian aristocracy is very problematic. Primarily, it is important to recognize that the nomads' kings had a high influence on the Bosporan Kingdom. Consistently, they built their grave-mounds not only near the settlements but also at strategically important places, like for instance at Cape Ak-Burun where many barrows are preserved. The cape connected the Bosporan Kingdom with one of two fords, which were of great importance for the control of the region. This raises the question about the location of the graves of the Bosporan kings because it is not possible that the kings' part of the necropolis has not been found by archaeologists yet. That means that the vast barrows close to the Bosporan

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<sup>2</sup> Two smaller parts of the second volume were published in 1989 (see ROSTOVCEV 1989a and 1989b), but his complete study was never published.

settlements were built as burials of the Bosporan kings and their families as well as of the Bosporan aristocracy.

At this point we should follow up the development of the Bosporan barrows trying to verify this theory. The first barrows on the territory of Kerch- and Taman peninsulas date back to the Bronze Age. Some of them were used as tombs in Antiquity as well as in Mediaeval Times, or even later (e.g. on some barrows cemeteries and burials of soldiers of World War II have been installed). A few barrows were built shortly before the colonization of the Bosporan Kingdom, e.g. the barrow Temir-gora and the grave-mound near the Cukur estuary. That means that the new Greek inhabitants got acquainted with the tradition of building barrows right from the beginning. More and more an increasing number of free standing barrows and groups of these monuments appeared during Antiquity, in particular during Classical and Hellenistic times. Anyway, the barrow groups were not very numerous. The first accumulation of barrows can be observed in the middle or third quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in the so called older groups of the Nymphaion and the Semibratnie ("seven brothers") barrows. The Nymphaion barrows were built near the town of Nymphaion, while the Semibratnie barrows were situated near Labritos or Labris, a town of Greek origin in the vicinity of Kuban River. These groups are notable for numerous horse graves, clay- and soil-graves and the equipment of Barbarian toreutics. Inside the graves many Greek objects were found, among them objects of Greek workshops, e.g. the series of silver calices from the second and the fourth Semibratnie barrows. The objects, which can be considered as made in Greek style of Barbarian origin, were only gold plates and a base with the picture of an eagle tormenting a fawn. The purpose of this base is not clear; it might originate either from a brigandine or from a gorit. Anyway, no Greco-Scythian industry can be detected at those times.

Completely different is the situation in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Only few barrows date back to the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The most famous ones are the so called "stone graves" with a woman buried in a wooden tomb-chest and a "wooden grave" in a very important barrow near the Karatinskoe highway, both found in 1854, in which gold objects and painted vases have been found. According to these findings, these tombs seem to be of Greek style. This means that already in the first part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the Bosporan aristocracy adopted the concept of the barrows. At the same time, the necropolis near the Karatinskoe highway of the northern coast of Kerch Bay started to develop. It remained in until the end of the Bosporan Kingdom. During that period no new barrow-groups developed, except for the Semibratnie and Nymphaion barrows continued to develop. They might have been in use until the unification of Sindike and Nymphaion with the Bosporan Kingdom.

According to preliminary data, the first barrows of the Bosporan Kingdom, which can be associated with the Bosporan kings and the aristocracy, were built in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, one century later than the Barbarian groups of barrows. The famous Kul-Oba barrow can be considered as one of the earliest barrows. Its location is very remarkable on the westernmost hill at the end of the chain stretching out from Mount Mitridat where Panticapaeum, the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom, is situated. This setting constitutes a link with the observations of Rostovcev about the Kekuvatsky barrow on the extreme Western part of the Yuz-Oba chain which might be very important in this respect. He detected that it was the closest to the steppe. The outmost barrows seemed to mark the borders of the necropolis without any relation to the steppe. Inside the Kul-Oba barrow was found a four-cornered crypt built in stone, in which a man, a woman and a servant were buried. The man was buried in a wooden sarcophagus, the woman laid on the bed and the servant beside them close to the wall of the room. The crypt was one of the first graves belonging to the stepped type found on Bosporus. Among the objects bronze boilers, a helmet, chausses, a sword, and a hryvna on the neck of the deceased were found. A vessel showing some pictures of Scythes was placed between the knees of the dead woman (fig. 2). It is worth mentioning that under the floor of the room an additional burial was found. It was robbed in modern times- and unfortunately we have few information about it. The Kekuvatsky barrow might be considered to be of the same period because it is also the outmost in the group. Inside the stepped crypt was buried a man. He had a flock of arrows in his arms and wore a golden chaplet on his head. Apart from that, were found a very beautiful helmet as well as chausses and a sword.

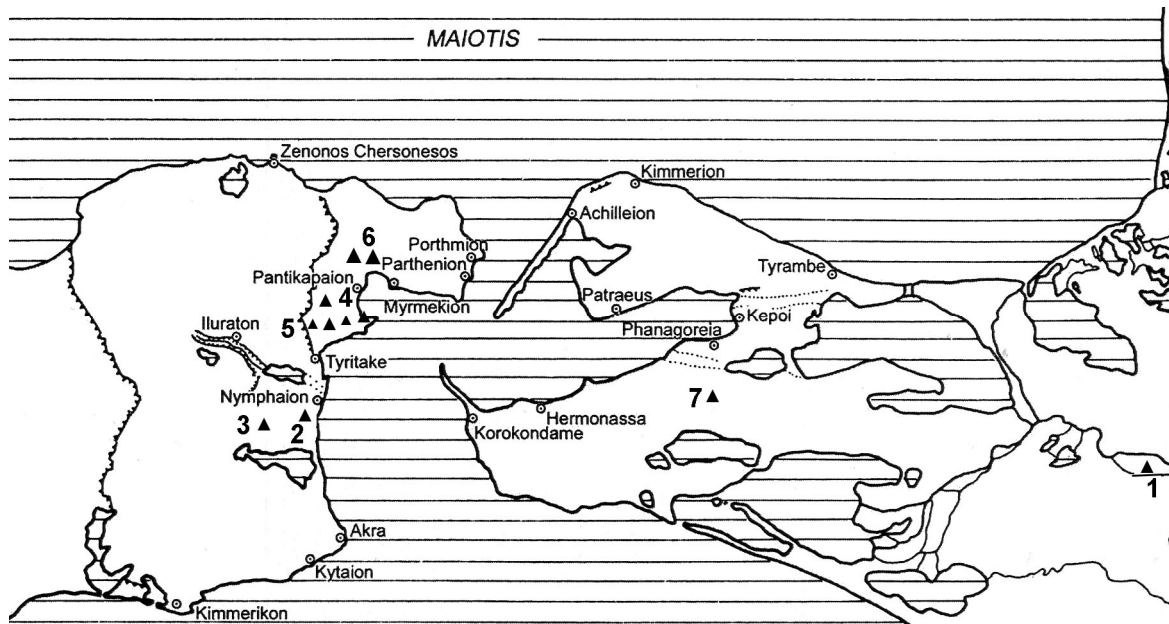


Fig. 2 – Golden vessel from the Kul-Oba barrow (State Hermitage Museum St. Petersburg).

Probably these tombs were the oldest in this group. According to the shape of the crypt, Y.A. Vinogradov suggested that early grave-mounds had four-cornered chambers like in Kul-Oba, Melek-Chesme and the Kekuvatsky barrows; later they had a round chamber like the one in the so called Golden barrow.<sup>3</sup> The crypt of the King's barrow, which is situated in the north of Panticapaeum, had a transitional kind of shape. Unfortunately it was robbed and for this reason it is difficult to date. The location of the King's barrow is remarkable, because it doesn't belong to one of the barrow groups.

The Pavlovsky barrow can be referred to the latest period. It was situated near Cape Ak-Burun and closed the chain of Yuz-Oba in the east. Three burials were found inside. The most interesting is the women's burial in a stone crypt, again of the four-cornered type. The deceased woman laid in a rich wooden sarcophagus together with golden bracelets, painted pelikes, many alabasters and other objects. The burial inside the Ak-Burun barrow refers to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the chamber made of tiles was buried a man. Some weapons were found: a sword, a spear, darts, arrows, a golden chaplet and a unique golden tiara. In the Trechbratnim barrow was discovered the burial of two women who might have been priestesses. Their chamber was built as a stepped crypt and the barrow was decorated with a big stone arrow. Some rich golden jewellery was also found.

In the last third of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC some wonderful barrows on the Taman Peninsula were built. One of them is the Zelenskoy barrow not far from Hermonassa, where a burial with the part of a golden chaplet and also one in a ground tomb with traces of fire, parts of weapons and golden objects was found. The most remarkable tombs have been excavated in the barrow Bolshaya Bliznica near Phanagoria. Inside the large grave-mound three women's and one man's burials were brought to light. The main woman's burial was placed inside the square stepped crypt. It has a very rich equipment with some head-jewelleries, e.g. a wonderful kalathos with pictures of battles of griffons and arimaspos, rings, a huge pendent with Nereids on hippocampus and many golden plates. In the second burial inside the barrow a lot of golden plates, a strigilis and many terracottas were among the grave gifts. The third woman's burial was positioned in a wooden sarcophagus; among the equipment was a golden chaplet. The man's burial was placed inside the four-cornered stepped crypt. Some objects of armour were found, like a golden helmet and golden plates. The

<sup>3</sup> For this information I would like to thank Yury Vinogradov.



remains of the wooden sarcophagus with bone decorations are very remarkable. There was also a stone crypt with paintings and a place for cremation.

On the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom are situated some more barrows which may refer to the same series, e.g. the Snake barrow in the chain of Yuz-Oba, the barrow Baksy, where cremation were placed in a huge crater, as well as the Golden barrow, which is the last of the series of the Bosporan kings' tombs of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. Unfortunately all these sites were robbed and it is difficult to analyse the archaeological material.

To sum up, it becomes obvious that almost all large Bosporan barrows date back to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; they were situated not far from the Greek settlements or on the territory of the inner parts of the kingdom. Inhumations as well as cremations were carried out. For the cremation large Greek vases were employed as urns. In both cases, in men's as well as in women's tombs, were found well-done gold chaplets. The men got pieces of armour as funeral gifts and very often helmets together with Scythian scaly brigandines. Inside untouched tombs, were often found objects of Scythian origin made by antique workers as well as antique objects with Barbarian features. The most interesting one is the tomb in the barrow Bolshaya Bliznica, called "the priestess of Demetra". It is very similar to the burial in the barrow Trehbratny (Three Brothers). According to the specific amount of equipment-pieces, it can be suggested that in this barrow were buried priestesses from only one family. It is worth mentioning that the man's tomb in the barrow looked like other men's tombs in large Bosporan barrows. It seems unlikely that inside the barrow of the Greek priestesses was buried also a Barbarian chief. It is remarkable that many rich women were buried on both sides of the river. In my opinion it is undoubtedly a specific cultural layer with a combination of Greek and Barbarian elements. Its origin is very clear. The Bosporan aristocracy seems thus the result of the aristocracy of the Greek towns and the addition of some Barbarian elements. The barrows of the Bosporan Kingdom differ from the large barrows of the Dnieper river coast, which have no stepped crypts and a different burial equipment. A kind of interim option can be observed in the necropolises of Ak-Kaya and Besh-Oba not far from Belogorsk. The barrows of these groups have not been excavated yet. But modern destruction of the Ak-Kaysky barrow brought to light a stepped crypt. This could be interpreted as an interim option of construction. The settlement of Ak-Kaya, which could claim to be the capital of the Crimean Scythes in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, had an advanced fortification. I was glad to take part in this excavation during summer 2008. This work will enlarge our knowledge about Bosporus and Scythia very soon.

According to the most probable tradition, Spartokos I, the founder of the king's dynasty, descended from the Thracian royal family line. Maybe the custom of using stepped stone crypts was borrowed from Thrace where very similar constructions are known. But in the Bosporan Kingdom this custom was enriched and changed according to the local tradition. The construction of the barrows was initiated after the Bosporan aristocracy had developed its specific cultural tradition. This might have happened under king Leukonos I. There is no doubt that this king drove out the Scythes. The tradition of Polyaeus<sup>4</sup>, which deals with the Scythes who were stopped after the line of Goplitlj to shoot to their backs. This episode shows the high degree of trust of the king to form an alliance with the Barbarians. At the end of his time there was no doubt in the presence of a Bosporan aristocracy. Also a new funeral tradition was introduced: groups of barrows and free standing barrows.

Only few data describing this process can be detected in literary and epigraphic sources. First of all, the title of the Bosporan kings is recorded after Leukonos I. It changed according to the situation, but in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC it has a binary structure: On one hand the king of the Bosporan Kingdom was an archon of Bosporus and Feodosia, his Greek subjects, and on the other hand the king of the Barbarian tribes or territories (Sindike, Toretoy, Dendarioy, Psessoy, all the Maeotae and so on). Even if the word *archontos* is a participle meaning "ruling", a difference between Greek and Barbarian subjects can be observed. The king of Bosporus and his aristocracy should organise the conjunction of these two parts of the kingdom. At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century a battle was fought at the Fat River between the sons of Perisados I – Satiros and Eumelos

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<sup>4</sup> Polyaeus VIII, 55.

– in which many Barbarians participated. It is worth mentioning that king Satiros II was fighting right in the middle of the Scythian formation. According to the Barbarian tradition, he was surrounded by the best warriors. And the fight of this group gained the victory of Satiros. These best warriors, who formed the centre of this formation, can be identified with the aristocratic horsemen whose armour was found inside the barrows. The last stage of the aristocracy at the time of the Spartokids can be seen in the decree of Mithridatos VI Eupatoros Diaphantos, found in Hersonesos in which it is stated that Saumakos, who later excited a rebellion against the Bosporan king Perisados and killed him, was brought up at the king's residence. Probably the inhabitants and the aristocracy of the Bosporan Kingdom were thinking about a palace revolution without any ethnic and social overtone especially in the situation of annexation of the Kingdom by Mithridatos VI. Saumakos had Barbarian relatives.

Summarising I would like to present the idea, that the Bosporan barrows were the tombs of the aristocratic families of the Spartokidian Kingdom. Probably the aristocracy of the Bosporan Kingdom became the cultural mediators, providing the better perception of Greek culture by the Barbarians in the Black Sea region. Exactly from this moment on, the kings of the Scythes and the Maeotae got many luxury items and copied details of funeral complexes and other elements of the Greek culture. The objects with Barbarian traits should not be interpreted as a reflection of Scythe's beliefs, but should be treated as syncretistic pieces of arts.

A major increase in the elements of local (in other words "normal Barbarian") art in the Bosporus and in other parts of the Northern Black Sea-coast region can be observed only at the turn of the Era, when in the Bosporan Kingdom the power definitely shifted to a Sarmatian dynasty. These tendencies were especially pronounced on Sarmatian territory where a considerable number of representatives of the local tribes had settled as well as in the sites and in the settlements of Bosporus. The influence of local tribes was pronounced in all spheres of life and in all social-cultural classes. An example is given by the terracotta objects found in Bosporan sites, in necropolises and in rural settlements. They demonstrate the appearance of a large amount of figures with rough features and hypertrophied separate body parts and an iconographic relation exclusively linked to the nomadic lifestyle. A similar situation can be observed in the funerary sculpture. The schematism and coarseness of the Bosporan funerary sculptures from the Roman period have often been remarked by scholars<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, this quality intensified through the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D.

The main differences between the two periods of the Bosporan Kingdom's history become now very clear: In the first period a partial barbarisation of the strong aristocratic class of the kingdom's society can be observed. In the second period the Barbarisation penetrated all social groups.

**Alexander Butyagin**

Senior research scientist and Head of the Northern Black Sea Sector  
Department of Art and Antiquity  
State Hermitage Museum  
St. Petersburg  
Russia  
E-mail: butyagin@yandex.ru

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<sup>5</sup> SOKOLOV 1999, 379–89, MAXIMOVA, NALIVKINA 1955, 308–21.