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Relationships between the Roman Empire, Caucasian Albania and Sarmatians

Abstract: *Classical written sources describe the trade relations between Caucasian Albania and other regions of the South Caucasus with Black Sea region, as well as Latin epigraphic monument found in Gobustan (Azerbaijan), pointing to the military campaigns of the Roman Empire in this region. Some researchers believe that the legion was sent here to campaign against the Sarmatians. Greek epigraphy devoted to a man named Eunon on a stone slab dated to the 2nd century AD was found in Sheki, Azerbaijan. Below it there are depiction of three Sarmatian tamgas, which have parallels in the Lower Don River region. During the same time there is some archaeological evidence of the Roman type findings in the region of Albania – fibulae, phials, silver denarius of Emperor Augustus. Some of these items are found in the graves with items of the Sarmatian type – paste beads, iron swords and daggers with ring-shaped pommels, tanged tri-lobate arrowheads and knifes. During this period there was an active infiltration of the Sarmatian tribes into the South Caucasus from the North, recorded in the Classical written sources and registered by archaeological findings of Azerbaijan. Archaeological evidence points to the existence of some connections between the Sarmatian and Roman type findings in the region. Sarmatians could have played an important role of mediation between South Caucasus and Roman provinces of the Near East and Black Sea Region. Another route of contacts between these regions could be through the water channels which connected the the Black Sea region with Central Asia. According to some researchers there was a water road starting from Amu Darya River through Uzboy to the Caspian Sea, then to the Kura River and from there to the Roman provinces of the Black Sea region.*

Keywords: *Sarmatians; Caucasian Albania; Mingachevir archaeology; Water Silk Road; Legion XII Fulminata; Sarmatian tamga; Uzboy River.*

Written sources originating from the territory of Caucasian Albania[1] and belonging to the Hellenistic period and Early Middle Ages are

[1] The term Caucasian Albania is used as a geographical and state definition. As can be judged from the classical written sources (Strabo), Albania was a multi-ethnic state. As will be shown below, the diversity of funeral rites also testifies in favor of the multi-ethnicity of the Albanians

a comparative rarity. Archaeological data, as well as classical written sources found outside of Albania continue to be our main source for the period under study.

In this paper, we will study two inscriptions in ancient Greek and Latin languages found in Azerbaijan. They will be compared with the well-known ancient Greek written sources and archaeological sites of Mingachevir containing local ceramics, Sarmatian weapons and finds from the area of the Roman Empire. Information of Strabo about the existence of a water route from Central Asia to Albania and further to the Black Sea will be examined. The mentioned archaeological sites of Mingachevir located on this waterway will be considered in the context of the interaction of cultures. It is the comparative research of written sources and their comparison with archaeological data that shed light on the problem of interaction between different cultures in the South Caucasus during the period under study.

Greek votive inscription from the village of Boyuk-Dehne, Sheki.

In the village of Boyuk-Dehne, Sheki region, an ancient building was discovered in 1902, which, according to researchers, was a bath-house. Inside this building, a Greek votive inscription to Ailius Jason was found. According to K. V. Trever, the inscription was discovered by E. A. Resler (Trever 1959: 340). The hard limestone stone was hewn on both sides – from the front and the right side, which gave Latyshev reason to come to the conclusion that it was a corner stone in the wall. The dimensions of the stone – 142 cm high, 53 cm wide and 26 cm thick. The weight of the stone is more than 160 kg. Based on the large size and weight of the stone, Latyshev comes to the conclusion that it was made locally (Latyshev 1904: 103-105). K. V. Trever agrees with this opinion (Trever 1959: 340-341).

The stone bears the following Greek inscription:

Αἴλιος Ἰάσων
Εὐνώνηι τῷ ε⟨ο⟩ὐερ-
γέτηι μνήμης χάριν.

"Elius Jason to Evnon, his Benefactor, for the sake of memory" (Fig. 1: 2).

By the nature of the inscription V.V. Latyshev dated it to the 2nd century. AD He draws attention to the fact that the name Eunon (Εὐνώνης) belonged the king of the Sarmatian tribe of Aorsi, who lived in the middle of the 1st century AD in the Sea of Azov region and mentioned in the work of Tacitus (Tac. Ann. XII: 15, 18-20) (Latyshev 1904: 104).

Latyshev notes that "under the inscription and on the lateral side, several more mysterious signs are carved. They are also found on the Panticapaeum and Tanaid lapidary monuments" (Latyshev 1904: 104). K. V. Trever also writes about the signs depicted on this stone, but does not interpret their origin correctly (Trever 1959: 341).

S. A. Yatsenko quite rightly came to the conclusion that these signs are *tamgas* – "three tamgas are neatly and symmetrically depicted in a row under the inscription" (Yatsenko 2001: 76, fig. 26a). He notes that they have the following analogies in the Sarmatian world. The *tamga* depicted on the left is known in the Lower Don and "as a royal *tamga* – on the coins of Khorezm" (Yatsenko 2001: 76; Wainberg 1977: tabl. XI). The largest *tamga*, depicted in the middle, has an exact analogy on a series of gold plaques of a costume originating from the Lower Don and belonging to the period from the middle of the 1st to the middle of the 2nd century. AD (Yatsenko 2001: 76, fig. 5: 41). The *tamga* depicted on the right has an exact analogy on a clay amulet belonging to the period between 1st and 11th centuries AD from the Syrskoye settlement on the Upper Don, as well as on the bricks of Tok-kala in Khorezm (Yatsenko 2001: 76, fig. 24: 1\/; Gudkova: 1964, fig. 8). In the final conclusion on this issue, Yatsenko notes that this stone slab from Boyuk-Dehne is evidence of the presence of the Sarmatians in Albania, from where they often were raiding the territory of Parthia (Yatsenko 2001: 76).

Latin inscription by the Beyuk-dash mountain.

In 1948 I. M. Jafarzade discovered a Latin inscription in Gobustan, Azerbaijan (Jafarzade 1948). The inscription was carved on a small flat rock located in a plain area at the foot of Mount Boyuk-dash, at a distance of about 4 km west of the coastline of the Caspian Sea. The inscription was carved on the lowest inclined surface of the rock facing south (Yampolsky 1950, 178). The inscription was first published in 1948 by Jafarzadeh (Jafarzadeh 1948). After this publication, I. M. Jafarzade, E. A. Pakhomov and Z. I. Yampolsky once again examined the inscription and Yampolsky published the exact extampage

and translation of the inscription in the second publication. They are given below.

IMP DOMITIANO
CAESARE AVG
GERMANIC
L. IVLIVS
MAXIMVS >
LEG XII FVL

Imp(eratore) Domitiano
Caesare Aug(usto)
Germanic(o)
L(ucius) Julius
Maximus centurio
leg(ionis) XII Ful(minatae) (Yampolsky 1950: 177-178).

"The time of Emperor Domitian Caesar Augustus Germanicus. Lucius Julius Maximus, centurion of the XII Lightning Legion" (see: Fig. 1:1).

Legion XII Fulminata since the 70-th of the 1st century AD had a permanent base in Militene in Cappadocia (Yelnitsky 1950: 193; Trever 1959: 344). During the period when this inscription was found, it attracted the interest of researchers from all over the world, primarily because it was the most eastern of all known Roman inscriptions (Yampolsky 1950: 179). The studied inscription is dated on the basis of the chronology of the years of the reign of Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 AD. Researchers dating the inscription noted that Domitian received the title of Germanicus between 83 and 84 AD (Yampolsky 1950: 181; Trever 1959: 344). A more precise date for the acquisition of this title by the emperor was later proposed. Miriam Griffin notes: "The date currently favored? on numismatic evidence, for Domitian's assumption of the title Germanicus is autumn 83" (Griffin Miriam 2000: 38, note 144). Based on this information the inscription can be dated between the autumn of 83 and 96 AD.

From the reports of Suetonius we know that Albania and Atropatena were in the zone of political interests of Domitian during the period when he was not yet the Emperor. Suetonius writes the following: “when Vologesus, king of the Parthians, desired succours against the

Alani, with one of Vespasian's sons to command them, he labored hard to procure for himself that appointment. But the scheme proving abortive, he endeavoured by presents and promises to engage other kings of the East to make a similar request." (Suet. VIII, Dom. 2). In this passage the line "one of Vespasian's sons" refers to Domitian (Yampolsky 1950: 181). Information about this invasion is also given by Josephus Flavius, who reports on the unexpected and destructive campaign of the Alani in Media. During this period, the name Media definitely refers to Atropatena. Based on the additional information of Josephus that the king of Hyrcania allowed the Alani to pass to Media, it can be concluded that the campaign took place from north to south – from the territory of Albania to Atropatena (Josephus Flavius J. Vit. VII, 7, 4). Regarding the period of this invasion of the Alans, it can be noted that the researchers attribute it to the very time when the king of the Parthians Vologesus asked the emperor Vespian for help (Griffin Miriam 2000: 40). These written sources make it possible to clarify the reasons for the emergence of the Roman presence in Albania during the reign of Domitian.

As for the size of the military detachment from the XII Legion, there are different opinions on this matter. For example, from the point of view of L. A. Elnitsky, the purpose of the expedition of the XII legion Fulminata, located at a permanent base in Cappadocia, was most likely punitive and was directed against the Albanians or Sarmato-Alani (Yelnitsky 1950: 193). N. V. Efremov also believes that it was a punitive expedition against the Sarmatians (Efremov 2012: 11-12). In connection with the mention of the name of the centurion in the Latin inscription under research Z. I. Yampolsky asks the question – was the entire XII Legion here? (Yampolsky 1950: 178) K. V. Trever draws attention to the fact that the inscription has no frame, the word order in the title has been changed, and the title of Caesar is missing from Domitian's name. She adds that the inscription was not written in the name of Domitian. Based on these data, she comes to the conclusion that units of the XII Legion Fulminata carried out some local tasks in Albania, possibly related not to conquest, but to exploration purposes (Trever 1959: 344-345).

Taking into account the various opinions available, the question should be asked – how many Roman soldiers were required in order to carry out a "punitive operation" in Albania? As noted above, the author of the studied inscription is a centurion. The sign > used to reproduce the title of centurion in the inscription corresponds to its period. Mi-

chael Speidel notes that: "the conventional abbreviation for both centurio and centuria was a sign resembling a 7 or a >; in the early Empire, a reverse C was used" (Speidel 2014, 330). Roman centuria in different periods had different numbers. On average, the centuria (centuria) had a number equal to 80 solgers. It was headed by a centurion (Speidel 2014: 330). Could one centuria carry out a punitive operation in Albania? During the period of Pompey's campaign in the South Caucasus, the size of his army was in the boundaries of 50 thousand to 60 thousand Roman soldiers (see: Jafarov 1985: 102). In other words, about 10 Roman legions participated in Pompey's campaign. At the same time, according to Plutarch, Pompey was never able to reach the shores of the Caspian Sea and was forced to turn back three days from it (Plut. Vit. Pomp., XXXVI, 1). According to Cassius Dio, the Albanian army consisted of more than 40 thousand soldiers when they unexpectedly attacked the Romans during their wintering near the Kura River during the Roman holiday of Saturnalia (Cass. Dio. XXXVI, 54, 1-4). This was the first battle between the Albanians and the Romans. Plutarch suggests that Amazons from the river Thermodon may also have fought in the Albanian army during this first battle (Plut. Vit. Pomp., XXXV, 3). Appian, on the other hand, confidently asserts that the Amazons did indeed participate in this battle. He also writes that the combined army of Albanians and Iberians in this first battle against the Romans was 70,000 warriors (Appian, Mithr., 103).

According to Strabo, the Albanians marched against Pompey with an army of 60,000 infantry and 22,000 horsemen (Str., XI, 4, 5). Apparently, in this passage Strabo writes about the second battle of the Albanians with the Romans.[2] Based on the scale of the above mentioned battles and armies involved in the war of Pompey against Albania, we can conclude that we do not have enough data to conclude that a sufficiently significant Roman military contingent, capable of resisting the Albanian army, was present in Albania in the time of Emperor Domitian.

One should also pay attention to the nature of the inscription under research itself. I. M. Jafarzade drew attention to the fact that in the inscription the size of the letters was not the same, and "the cross-section of the deepening of the letters represents the form of an acute angle with a rounded apex" (Jafarzade 1948: 308).

[2] On the problem of Pompey's campaign in the South Caucasus, see: Trever 1959: 6, 345; Manandyan 1939; Javadov 1960; Jafarov 1985; Dreer, 1994

We visited the site at the foot of Mount Boyuk-dash together with Professor Michael Speidel, who drew my attention to the fact that the nature of the inscription does not correspond to the canons of the official inscriptions of the Roman Empire. In particular – the size of the letters of the inscription differs, the inscription does not have clear boundaries, and the recesses of the letters are a type of an acute angle with a rounded top. Apparently the inscription was created by the centurion himself or his assistants (see: Braund 2003; Smyshliaev 2018).

While researching the site, I noticed that the inscription was not carved in the most convenient place for its long-term preservation. It is carved at the very bottom of the rock, on slightly inclined surface. The likelihood that it can be destroyed over time is very high. You can easily step on the inscription, drop a heavy object on it, etc. All this could lead to its destruction over time. If the goal of the centurion Lucius Julius Maximus was to preserve the inscription for many centuries, then he would have to create it on a higher spot. The inscription was carved on the inclined, lowest, most clearly visible part of the rock. The inscription is placed in such a place on the rock that it could be clearly seen by those passing by. Over time, the inscription was somewhat erased, but during the period of its creation, the letters were certainly located much deeper[3] and the inscription should have been seen much more clearly from a distance.

Based on the data presented, it can be assumed that the inscription was created in order to perform the function of a guide. If so, there must be other inscriptions mentioning this legion. In confirmation, one can cite information from Z. I. Yampolsky that Professor V. A. Petrov told him that in 1934 "he saw in the village of Karyagino [Fizuli] of the Azerbaijan SSR a stone with a Latin text, which also mentions the XII Legion. The stone was found on the banks of the Arax (Araz) River" (Yampolsky 1950: 182). The same information is given by K. V. Trever (Trever 1959: 345). There is no additional data about this second Latin inscription to date. Here one should pay attention to the fact that both Roman inscriptions are located on waterways – the Arax (Araz) River and the Caspian Sea. Perhaps the purpose of the Roman detachments was to prepare for the invasion, and they collected information along the route of the alleged offensive zones of the Roman troops. Suetonius' information about Domitian's political interests in this region can be

[3] At the time of discovery of the inscription, the depth of the incised letters in most cases reached 1 cm. Jafarzadeh 1948, p. 308.

used as confirmation of this notion (Suet., VIII, Dom. 2). Plutarch's report that Pompey went to the coast of the Caspian Sea, but could not reach it and was forced to turn back, while three days away from it (Plut. Vit. Pomp., XXXVI, 1), testifies to the strategic importance of controlling the coast of the Caspian Sea for the Romans.

It is also necessary to answer the question why the centurion detachment stopped in Gobustan. If you look at modern maps, you can immediately notice that Gobustan is located in the very center of a natural bay. Recently, the Port of Baku was moved from the Baku Bay to the Alat Bay (Baku International Sea Trade Port), which is the next bay in the southern direction after the one in which Gobustan is located. It cannot be ruled out that the natural and strategic characteristics of this region, which contributed to the location of the modern Baku International Sea Trade Port there, were also known in ancient times.

"Water Silk Road" of the Classical Antiquity Sources.

Based on the information of written sources, researchers cite the presence of three different branches of trade routes passing through Caucasian Albania in the ancient period. One of them passed along the western coast of the Caspian Sea. The second one was heading west to Iberia. The third route was a waterway – from the Amu Darya to the Caspian Sea and further along the Kura River to the Black Sea. The existence of these trade routes is confirmed not only by written sources (Str., XI, 2, 17; XI, 5, 8; XI, 7, 3), but also by numerous imported items found during archaeological excavations (Babaev 2009: 24-25).

For our study, the most interesting is the water trade route, information about which is given in the work of Strabo, who writes the following. The rivers Ochus and Oxus (Amu-Darya) flow into the Hyrcanian (Caspian) Sea. Many Indian goods are transported along the Oxus River to the Caspian Sea and from there they are transported to Albania. Further from Albania, along the Kura River, these goods are transported to the Black Sea (Str., XI, 7, 3). In another passage, Strabo writes that the large river Phasis (Rioni) flows through Colchis, from which it is a 4-day journey by land to the Kura River (Str., XI, 2, 17). The Phasis River flows into the Black Sea. The information that goods are delivered along the Oxus River to the Caspian Sea and then from there along the rivers to the Black Sea is repeated in another passage of Strabo (Str., II, 1, 15) (see: Fig. 2).

Pliny the Elder also provides information about the water trade route under research: "under the direction of Pompey, it was ascertained

that it is seven days' journey from India to the river Icarus, in the country of the Bactri, which discharges itself into the Oxus, and that the merchandize of India being conveyed from it through the Caspian Sea into the Cyrus, may be brought by land to Phasis in Pontus, in five days at most" (Plin. NH, V, 17).

As for the reliability of Strabo's information, he notes that his sources on the geography of the Oxus River and its connections with the Caspian Sea are the works of Aristobulus and Eratosthenes, who in turn borrowed this information from Patroclus (Str., XI, 7, 3). Patrocles (a Macedonian general and geographer) is a fairly reliable source, as Strabo himself writes about it (Str., II, 1, 2). Patrocles led the fleet of Seleucus I and at that time explored trade routes along the Caspian Sea and adjacent rivers (Tarn 1901: p. 13). Herodotus (Herodotus, I, 202-203) was the first ancient author to provide accurate information about the Caspian Sea, including the duration of navigation on it in various directions.

There are different opinions about the reality of the existence of the studied water road. W. W. Tarn questioned the information of Patroclus based on where the modern mouth of the Oxus (Amu Darya) is located. He believed that Patroclus had confused the Aral Sea with the Caspian Sea (Tarn 1901: 18-22). K. V. Trever believes that in the works of ancient authors we are dealing with the echoes of the discussion of the possibility of such transportation of goods from India to the ports of the Black Sea, and not with the real fact of such transportation (Trever 1959: 44). Arguments for and against the existence of this road can be explored by dividing this road into two segments. The first is from the Amu Darya to the Caspian and the second is from the mouth of the Kura to the Black Sea.

One of the first researchers substantiating the reality of the existence of the waterway along the Kura, based on the archaeological data of Albania, was Z. I. Yampolsky (Yampolsky 1956). The same opinion was shared by K. G. Gozalishvili, indicating the absence of any facts against the existence of this trade route (Gozalishvili 1956). In subsequent years, a significant number of researchers joined this opinion (see: Aliyev 1962: 15; Rasulova 2008: 68; Babaev 2009: 24-25). Goshgar Goshgarly cites the following archaeological data from Mingachevir as the main argument in favor of the existence of the investigated water trade route: 1) the presence of large quantities and a wide range of imported goods in the graves of ordinary people; 2) the simultaneous existence of the ancient city on two opposite banks of the Kura River in

the ancient period; 3) the presence of all the main types of burials of the Caucasus here at the turn of the two eras, which have no analogues in the archeology of the Caucasus yet (Goshgarly 2009). Goshgarly believes that Mingachevir could be one of the key points that ensured the functioning of the water trade route along the Kura River and it played the role of a regional center of trade (Goshgarly 2009: p. 39). Maya Rasulova cites the numismatic materials of Albania as evidence of the existence of this water trade route. Among them the presence of tetradrachms of Greco-Bactrian kings and the fact of the diversity of the numismatic material of the ancient period (Rasulova 2009: 124).

N. V. Efremov believes that in studying the possibility of the existence of this water road, instead of analyzing written sources, researchers are only bringing forward archeological data that increase year by year (Efremov 2012: 4). At the same time, Efremov's research itself contains too many suggestions about what the written sources might or might not have implied.

Regarding the trade route along the Amu Darya River, R. R. Mukasheva and M. Rasulova cite information from the work of the Chinese historian Sima Qian, who, referring to Chinese travelers, writes about the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya (Kui-shui) River, on which many merchants dwell delivering goods over long distances (Mukasheva 1972; Rasulova 2008: 87; Sima Qian. Historical notes, Shih Tzu, ch. 123). Thus, not only ancient Greek, but also Chinese sources confirm the existence of trade along the Amu Darya River.

As for the problem of connecting the Amu Darya with the Caspian Sea, there are a sufficient number of studies indicating that it really existed. Disagreements are only about the millennium in which this waterway ceased to exist. Researchers for a long time opposed the full flow of Uzboy River in the 1st millennium BC (see: Tolstov 1960; Mukasheva 1972). Later B. I. Wainberg, who has been conducting archaeological excavations in the Uzboy region for a long time, came to the following conclusions. At the end of the 8th – beginning of the 7th centuries BC abundant watering and filling of the Sarykamysh depression begins. As a result, a population of pastoralists of the Kuyusay culture, who left settlements and burial mounds, appeared here. Further, starting from the 6th century BC watering of the Uzboy begins, however, there was no permanent population on its banks at that time. At the turn of the 5th-4th centuries BC Uzboy is constantly functioning as a river. This continues until the 4th century AD (see: Fig. 2). Stone

crypts (fish bones were found in several of them) and religious buildings, dating back to this time, were discovered on its banks. These crypts were used for multiple burials, which indicates the constancy of the settlement of the inhabitants. (Wainberg 1999: 19, 36-45). Wainberg points out that a series of burial grounds formed from several crypts stretches at a distance from several meters to ten or fifteen kilometers along the right bank of the Uzboy River (Wainberg 1999: 40). In the area of the Igdy-kala fortress, located in the area of the Uzboy, a burnt layer up to half a meter with burnt reed stalks was found, which, from the point of view of Weinberg, indicates that the Uzboy terrace was overgrown with reeds, which indicates the presence of water in it. Radiocarbon dating of this layer showed the date of the 1st c. AD (Wainberg 1999: 42-43).

Regarding the geographical status of the Uzboy, Dilorom Alimova, Edvard Rtveladze and Ulfat Abdurasulov note that it should be considered a river, since its channel was filled with water, at different periods, as a result of the overflow of the Sarykamysh basin. Accordingly, Uzboy was not a continuation of the Amu Darya (Alimova, Rtveladze, Abdurasulov 2009: 10).

The only argument against the existence of this water trade road in Central Asia can be Polybius' evidence that there are quite large waterfalls on the Oxus River (Polyb., X, 48). Waterfalls can indeed be an obstacle to the continuous passage along the river on navigable vehicles. An argument against the existence of the studied waterway in the South Caucasus may be Strabo's information that the river sediments of the Kura River clog its mouth. Further, he describes a similar situation with the Arax (Araz) River, which carries its sediments to the mouth, making its channel navigable (Str., XI. 4, 2). From Strabo's information, it can be concluded that the mouths of the Kura and Arax were blocked, while their channels were navigable. It should be especially noted here that not the entire path from the Amu Darya to the Black Sea passed through the water. Part of this path undoubtedly passed by land. Strabo reports that from river Kura to river Phasis one should go by land within four days. Based on the above information of Strabo, it can be concluded that the ships also did not enter the mouth of the Kura immediately from the Caspian Sea. Most likely, they unloaded in the port and then followed by land to that part of the Kura, where it was navigable. The same processes could take place along the Oxus River.

Cassius Dio provides information that Pompey, choosing the route of the campaign against Mithridates to the Bosporus through the

territory of Colchians, found out that: “the voyage by sea was still more difficult on account of the lack of harbours in the country…” (Cass. Dio. XXXVII, 3, 1-3). From this passage we get information that on the territory of Colchis there were either no harbors, or there was a lack of them. Hippocrates' information presents a slightly different picture.

Hippocrates writes that in the Phasis region, people “sail about, up and down, in canoes constructed out of single trees, for there are many canals there” (Hippoc. Aer. 15).

Small local harbors acceptable for boats carved from a single tree may not have been suitable for ships of the Roman army. This is what explains Cassius Dio's information. The Phasis River is the shortest section of the investigated water trade road. It is possible that ships of different types and sizes were used on different sections of this route. The goods were unloaded and reloaded onto new vessels several times. At first they were reloaded on the Oxus River. Then, at the mouth of the Uzboy, they could be reloaded onto larger ships to enter the Caspian Sea. After that, the goods were unloaded on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, transferred to the navigable channel of the Kura and loaded onto smaller ships. The last reload took place on small boats after a four-day hiking trip from Kura to Phasis. The same route was used in the opposite direction of this route (see: Fig. 2).

The trade route from the Amu Darya to the Black Sea was a combined route using water and land means, but the main part of this route, contributing to its safety and speed of movement, certainly passed through the water.

B. I. Wainberg notes that archaeological materials from Khorezm of the 4th-2nd centuries. BC demonstrate close cultural contacts with the regions of Transcaucasia and Media. All these data, along with information from written sources, lead her to the conclusion that there is a real existence of a water trade route from the Amu Darya to the Black Sea (Wainberg 2005: 14). Thus, on all the way from Uzboy to Mingachevir, we trace the penetration of imports, along this trade route, in both directions – from Asia to Europe and back.

It is important to note that during the modern times the idea of this classical water route was repeated in the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa oil pipeline. The reason for the similar transportation structures repeating throughout the history are the favorable landscape elevations alowing the easiest passage and the existence of the certain communication infrastructure created through centuries.

Burials with finds of Sarmatian and Roman origin.

During the period under study, there was an active infiltration of the Sarmatian tribes into the region of the South Caucasus. Burials with finds of the Sarmatian type were discovered in various regions of Azerbaijan, but in this case we are interested in the burials located on the above-described water trade road. As noted above, according to researchers, the central point of this road was Mingachevir (Goshgarly 2009: 39).

As a result of excavations in 1946-1953. in Mingachevir, 4 jar burials with Sarmatian-type weapons were found. These burials differed from all other jar burials of Mingachevir by the richness and variety of inventory, the peculiarity of the burial architecture, as well as the presence of a large number of weapons. All four burials were located at a great depth – 3-4 m from the level of the modern ground surface. Usually the jar burials of Mingachevir are located at a depth of 0.5-2.5 m (Ione 1955: 54).

Three burials with Sarmatian weapons (No. 17, 26 and 29-31) were located on the grave field, on the right bank of the Kura River. The grave structure consisted of a polygonal underground crypt built of mud brick and covered with wooden beams. The fourth burial (No. 14-L), excavated on the left bank, was built in a soil pit in which there was a burial jar additionally covered with shards of a large broken vessel and lined on all sides with slab-like blocks of fine-grained sandstone (Ione 1955: 54). All four burials were approximately the same size – 3 x 5 m, while usually the jar burials of Mingachevir do not exceed 2 x 3 m (Ione 1955: 54). The skeleton of a horse was found in burial No. 17 (Qazıyev 1960: tabl. III) (Fig. 3). Jar burials with an accompanying horse skeleton are a great rarity for the archeology of Azerbaijan. According to Goshgar Goshgarli, burial No. 17 from Mingachevir is the only known burial of this type (Goshgarli 2012a: 38-39). Iron bits, a set of rings and buckles from horse equipment, as well as spurs were found in two of the investigated burials (Ione 1955: 61). Weapons (in large numbers) were found in all of the four burials. This detail is also very rare, since weapons were found only in 10% of the jar burials of Mingachevir, and usually in small quantities (Ione 1955: 54).

According to all other indications of the funeral ritual, these burials do not differ from the rest of the jar burials of Mingachevir. 1) the horizontal position of the burial jar; 2) head orientation to the northwest; 3) the position of the skeleton inside the vessel. In each of the four burials studied, a jar was found with one crouched human skeleton oriented

with its head to the neck of the vessel and placed on the right or left side (Ione 1955: 55). In the jar graves of Mingachevir, burials on the left side and sometimes on the right side are more common (Kaziev 1949: 32).

Clay vessels of various shapes and sizes (large jars, spouted jar, trefoiled jugs, tripod bowl and zoomorphic rhyton with deer protome), Roman and Parthian coins, rings, bracelets, beads, a glass vessel, brooches, and especially many weapons were found in the burials.

Coins were found in two burials. Among them are a Roman silver denarius of Emperor Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD) and an Arsacid coin bearing the name of Phraates IV (38 BC - 3 BC).

According to Pakhomov's description, on the silver denarius minted by Emperor Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD), on the front side there is a depictionof Augustus in a laurel wreath, and on the reverse side of his two adopted sons – Gaius and Lucius, dressed in togas. This denarius was minted around 4 BC. Pakhomov gives the following description: "[they] stand straight, each placing his hand on one of the two large round shields placed between them on the ground; the ends of the spears rise from behind the shields, and a priestly spoon and a staff are placed between the latter. The entire image rests on a horizontal line. The inscriptions are read from the edges of the coin: under the horizontal line, – G L CAESARES; above the line, in a semicircle above the entire image – AVGVSTI F COS DESIG PRINC IVVENT". Denarius diameter 19.0-19.5; thickness up to 1.5; weight 2.83 (Pakhomov 1951: 147).

In the Numismatic Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan there are three denarii, with the above-described image of Emperor Augustus and his sons. All of them come from Mingachevir. On the first two, both the images and the Latin text (Fig. 1: 3-4) correspond exactly to Pakhomov's description. On the third denarius (Fig. 1: 4), as a result of a manufacturing defect, part of the Latin text is missing (both on the front and on the back).

Pakhomov notes that in some parts of the South Caucasus (for example, in Georgia), these denarii were so widespread that, when they were scarce, their imitations were minted with a distorted pattern and inscriptions (Pakhomov 1951: 147). These imitations date back to the 1st-3rd centuries. AD (see: Rajabli 2016: fig. 311). Judging by the description of Pakhomov, the denarius of Emperor Augustus, originating from a jar burial with Sarmatian weapons, is an original, not an imitation.

Ione, referring to Pakhomov, dates the studied jar burials to the 2nd-1st centuries BC and 1st-2nd centuries AD (Ione 1955: 55-56). Based on the finds of coins, Pakhomov himself dates these same burials to the second half of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD (Pakhomov 1951: 163). According to Pakhomov, the Arshakid coin of Phraates IV (38 – 3 BC) comes from a jar burial on the left bank of the Kura. He gives the following description – a silver drachma with a diameter of 19.0-20.0, a thickness of up to 2.0 and a weight of 3.18 (Pakhomov 1951: 146). We know from the work of Ione that only one burial with Sarmatian weapons was excavated on the left bank of the Kura. This allows us to somewhat narrow the time frame of this burial and date it to the period after 38 BC. We have no information about which of the three remaining burials the silver denarius of Emperor Augustus comes from.

The ceramics presented from the studied burials (Fig. 4: 4-14) generally corresponds to samples originating from other Albanian burials of the period under study. An exception is the find of a zoomorphic rhyton depicting a deer protome. Exact analogies of this find in the archeology of Azerbaijan are not yet known. In the archaeological fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, we managed to find some of the vessels originating from these burials (Fig. 4: 2-3; 5: 1-3), including a zoomorphic rhyton (Deer shaped vessel: AF 1887) (Fig. 4: 1).

Among the studied vessels, attention is drawn to two large jugs with rounded shape, narrow necks and small loop-shaped vertical handles on the sides. Images of both vessels are given in Ione's article. On one of them, shown in the form of a drawing, a tamga in the form of a trident is clearly visible (Ione 1955: fig. 20) (Fig. 4: 12). On the second jug, presented in the form of a photo, the ornament is not observable (Ione 1955: fig. 21) (Fig. 4: 11). We found this vessel in the archaeological fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. Its examination showed an ornament in the form of a tamga (Yellow clay jug with rounded shape: AF 15763) (Fig. 4: 2-3). According to Yatsenko, these tamgas (signs) are specific to the Aral Sea region. He notes that these signs were used on the pottery of Central Asia (Yatsenko 2001: fig. 27) (Fig. 6). In terms of its forms, this pottery corresponds to the pottery common in Albania during this period. The only distinctive feature is the presence of tamga-like signs on both vessels.

In accordance with the information given in Ione's article, all the weapons presented in these burials were made of iron. Tri-lobate and

trihedral tanged arrowheads of the Sarmatian type, socketed spearheads, small socketed darts, knives of various shapes and sizes, pitchforks, straight swords with one-sided and two-sided sharpening come from these burials. In addition to this, large three-legged iron candelabra (thymiaterion – incense burner) were found in the burials (Fig. 7). Horse harness and riding equipment were found in two burials. Among them are iron bits, rings, buckles and more. Parts of metal armor were found in one burial (Ione 1955: 59-61).

In the archaeological fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, we managed to find tri-lobate tanged arrowheads (trilobate arrow heads: AF 2286) (Fig. 7: 18) and a sword with a ring-shaped pommel (Sword of Sarmatian type: AF 1814) (Fig. 7: 17) originating from the jar burials of Mingachevir. The numbers of the burials from which they originate are not indicated, but these examples of Sarmatian-type weapons correspond to those depicted in the drawings in Ione's article.

The two fibulas depicted in Ione's article (Fig. 8: 6-7) correspond to the early Roman hinged arc fibulas of the "AVCISSA" type originating from the Roman provinces in Italy. They date from the first half of the 1st century BC. In accordance with A. K. Ambroz in the archeology of the Soviet Union, these items were probably imported. These fibulas were found in the North Caucasus, in the upper reaches of the Dnieper River and one in Siberia. Ambroz notes that two examples of these brooches were found in the jar burials of Mingachevir in Azerbaijan, containing coins of Augustus and Phraates IV. He dates these burials to the 1st century BC – 1st century AD (Ambroz 1966: 26).

The three-legged candelabras (thymiaterion) found in these burials have parallels in the Mediterranean [Bronze thymiaterion with Marsyas]. They were used there in Roman times and earlier as an incense burner in religious rituals (Fig. 7: 19).

We managed to find the balsamarium depicted in the figure in the article by Ione (Fig. 8: 9, 11) in the archaeological fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. This Roman Balsamari made of green glass, with a long neck, a narrow mouth and conical body. Balsamari were used for perfumes and perhaps medicinals.

Among the beads depicted in the article, Ione's attention is attracted by eye beads ("eye beads") and pendants in the form of a fig. O. N. Mosheeva notes that eye beads are widespread in the burials of the Sarmatians of the Lower Volga region of the 4th century BC – 3rd century AD. Further, she gives statistical data, according to which, in the

late Sarmatian culture, eye beads are more often found in female and children's burials. At the same time she points out that rare finds of eye beads in the Sarmatian male burials (about 11%), could be pendants-amulets for weapons (Mosheeva 2008: 26).

Ione's article depicts three paste beads depicting a human face (Fig. 8: 1). We were not able to find them in the fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan.

Ione's article depicts two Roman figs made from pasta (Fig. 8: 3-4). One of these figs is stored in the archaeological fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (Fig. 8: 10). Fig gesture – "a hand clenched with thumb protruding between the index and second finger". In Latin this hand configuration was called *figere*. Very often often *figere* amulets were combined with phallus (Potts 1982: 7-8). According to Albert M. Potts these amulets were universally used against the Evil Eye in Roman Empire. He points out that the Evil Eye is universal concept. Accordingly the use of amulets and talismans against it is universal to human nature as well (Potts 1982: 7).

The finds of individual Roman figs in the Mingachevir jar burials are certainly quite interesting, but even more interesting is the combination of these finds with other artifacts used to protect from the evil eye. Potts gives an image of a bead amulet against the Evil Eye originating from the Cimmerian Bosphorus. This amulet contains eye beads, figs, and anthropomorphic images, including images of a human face (Potts 1982: fig. 47) (Fig. 8: 12). That is, the same combination as on the finds beads from the jar burials of Mingachevir under research. Of particular interest on the amulet from the Cimmerian Bosporus is the image of a man in a pointed cap. The connection of this combination of finds on the amulet from the Evil Eye with the Sarmatians is beyond doubt.

Conclusions.

The study of written sources allows us to establish the existence of close ties between the Roman Empire, Albania and the Sarmatians. The inscription from Boyuk Dehne is evidence of the presence of the Sarmatians in Albania, from where they often raided the territory of Parthia. The reports of Josephus indicate that the Alani, who were of Sarmatian origin, advanced into Parthia from the north. King of the Parthians Vologesus was asking Roman Emperor Vespasian to help him in his war against the Alani. As we can conclude from Suetonius' report, the future emperor of Rome, Domitian, had certain political interests in

Albania and Atropatene, but he was unable to realize them under the rule of his father Vespasian. After Domitian becomes emperor, he begins to collect information about Albania and Atropatene in order to determine the routes of advance of the Roman troops. Evidence of this may be a Latin inscription in Gobustan near the Caspian Sea and possibly a second Latin inscription in Fizuli, near the Arax River.

Finding Latin inscriptions next to the waterways of South Caucasus is not accidental, since they played an important role in Albania's trade relations. The water trade route, information about which is given in the work of Strabo, played an important role in relations between Central Asia, Albania and the Black Sea provinces of the Roman Empire. A comparative study of written sources and archaeological data allows us to confirm the existence of this path. As evidence, a whole series of archaeological evidence from Central Asia and the South Caucasus is cited. It is very important that from Central Asia to Albania, we trace the penetration of imports, along this trade route, in both directions – from East to West and back. All this testifies to the importance of cultural exchange. This route can be called "Water Silk Road" between Central Asia and the Black Sea.

In addition to the "Water Silk Road", which moved horizontally from east to west and back, there was also a land trade route moving vertically along the western coast of the Caspian Sea. It connected north and south and played an important role in the infiltration of the Sarmatians and Alans into Albania and Atropatene. The combination of these two paths – horizontal and vertical – allows us to trace the interaction of the cultures of the Roman Empire, Albania and Sarmatia.

Special mention should be made of the burial rite in a structure made of mud bricks covered with wooden beams. This rite was recorded in the studied burials of Mingachevir No. 17, 26 and 29-31. An interesting fact is that these burials were located on the right bank of the Kura River. The above-described jar burial No. 14-L, lined with slab-like blocks of fine-grained sandstone, was located on the left bank of the river. Perhaps the above-mentioned facts may indicate the penetration here of the burial rite in mud-brick tombs covered with wooden beams from the territory of Central Asia through Atropatene – i.e. from southeast to north. The ritual of burning their dead in catacombs practiced by the Sarmatians could have entered Azerbaijan from the North Caucasus. But this does not mean that the Sarmatians advanced to the South Caucasus exclusively from the north. The discovery by Japanese archaeologists of catacomb burials with Sarmatian-type mirrors and

weapons, as well as a Saka-type girth buckle in the Dailaman vicinity of the Gilan province of Northern Iran (Egami Namio et al. 1966: 4-12) demonstrates that the steppe tribes could move to the western coast of the Caspian Sea from the south as well. However, the main penetration of the catacomb burial rite to this region, apparently, should be associated with the northern regions.

In the archeology of Azerbaijan, the Sarmatian burial ritual is usually identified with catacomb burials (Goshgarly 2012: 119). However, based on the data presented here, we can speak about several burial rites in graves with Sarmatian-type artifacts on the territory of Azerbaijan: 1) burials in the catacombs; 2) jar burials in mud brick crypts covered with wooden beams; 3) jar burials in earth pit graves where the burial vessel was lined with slab-like blocks of fine-grained sandstone.

The burial rite in jars placed in a mud brick crypts covered with wooden beams is apparently a combination of two different rituals. Azerbaijani researchers believe that the burial ritual of burying their dead in large jars during the Classical Antiquity time penetrated into the northern parts of our country from Atropatene (Asadov 2010: 93; Goshgarly 2012b: 42-43). As for the rite of burial in mud brick crypts covered with wooden beams, this rite is known from the burials of the Northern Black Sea region of the Scythian time. As an example, we can cite the burial mounds of the Nymphey necropolis, as well as the Semibratnie kurgans. Researchers attribute these burials to the Sindo-Maeotians (Ilyinskaya, Terenozhkin 1983: 81, 209-214). Goshgarli notes that the rite of burial in mud-brick crypts was brought to Albania by migrants, whom he associates with the Hellenic population (Goshgarli, 2012b: 42-43). Based on the richness of the findings, Ione comes to the conclusion that the studied jar burials of Mingachevir belonged to tribal leaders or the military elite (Ione 1955: 61).

The finds of Sarmatian-type weapons in the investigated jug burials of Mingachevir, coupled with horse burials and the burial rite in mud brick crypts covered with wooden beams, originating in the Northern Black Sea region, testify in favor of the origin of the warriors buried here from the territory of Sarmatia. The discovery of parts of an amulet consisting of “eye beads”, figs, and anthropomorphic images in the studied burials of Mingachevir allows us to once again confirm this conclusion and draw a parallel with a similar amulet from the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

The glass bottle, eye beads, thymiaterion and the Roman fig found in these graves are certainly Roman imports. Archaeological evidence

points to the existence of some connections between the Sarmatian and Roman type findings in the region. Sarmatians could have played an important role of mediation between South Caucasus and Roman provinces of the Near East and Black Sea Region. Further archaeological research of necropolises of the Classical Antiquity period located in Azerbaijan is important in order to fully understand these relations.

Captions for Figures

Figure 1. 1 – Latin inscription from Gobustan, Azerbaijan; 2 – Greek votive inscription from Boyuk-Dehne, Sheki, Azerbaijan; 3-5 – silver denarii of Emperor Augustus (1 – photo by Zaur Hasanov; 2 – after Trever 1959, fig. 46; 3-5 – after the Numismatic Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan: NF 875, 4005, 4489).

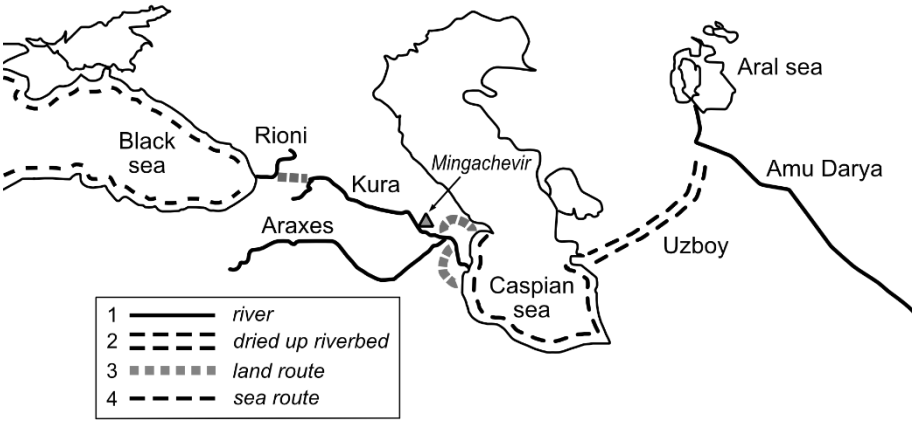

Figure 2. Water trade route (map by Zaur Hasanov).

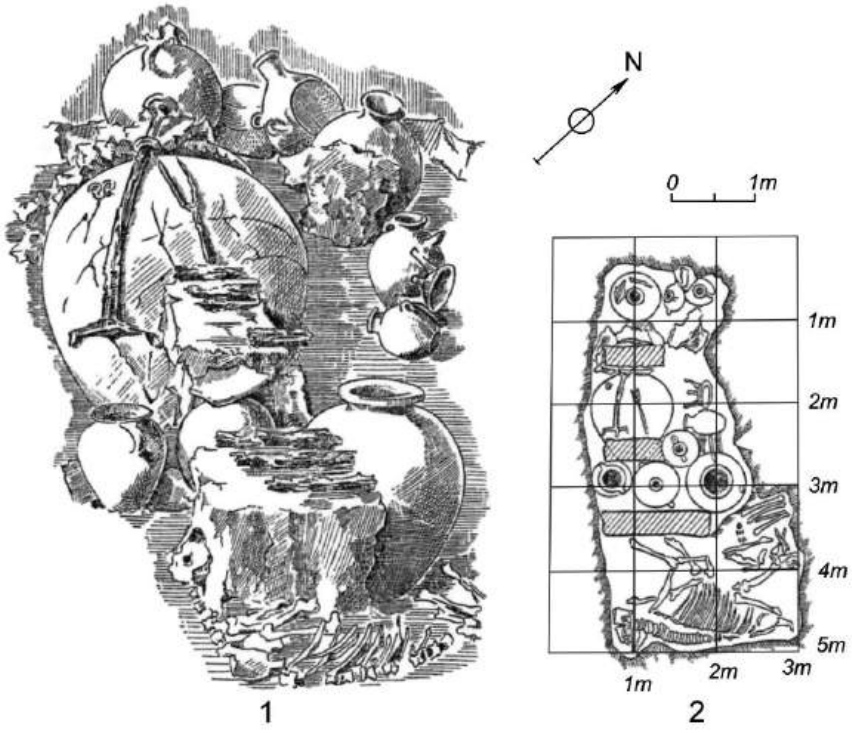

Figure 3. 1-2 – Jur burial No. 17, Mingachevir, Azerbaijan (1-2 – after Ione 1955: fig. 19).

Figure 4. 1-14 – Ceramics from the jur burials No. 17, 26, 29-31 and 14-L with Sarmatian type weapons, Mingachevir (1-3 – after the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan; 1 – AF no. 1887; 2-3 – 1434; 4-14 – after Ione 1955: fig. 20-21).

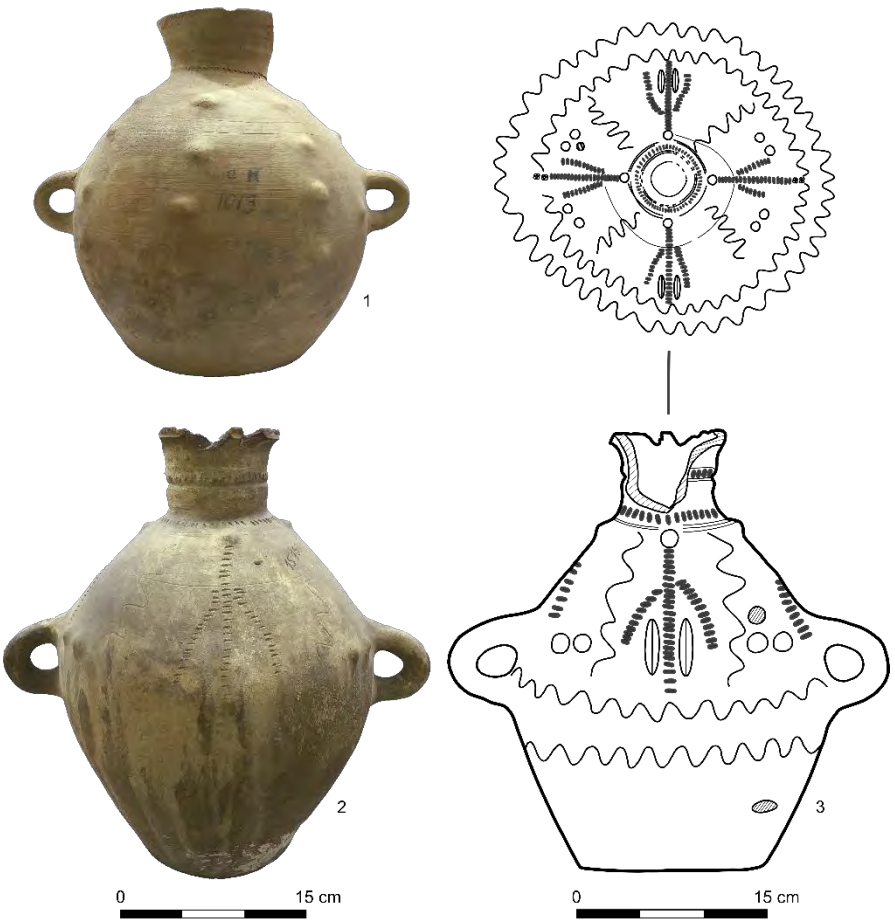

Figure 5. 1-3 – Ceramics from the jur burials No. 17, 26, 29-31 and 14-L with Sarmatian type weapons, Mingachevir, Azerbaijan (1-2 – after the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan; 1 – AF no. 1013; 2 – AF no. 15763; 3 – drawing after Nermin Bayramova).

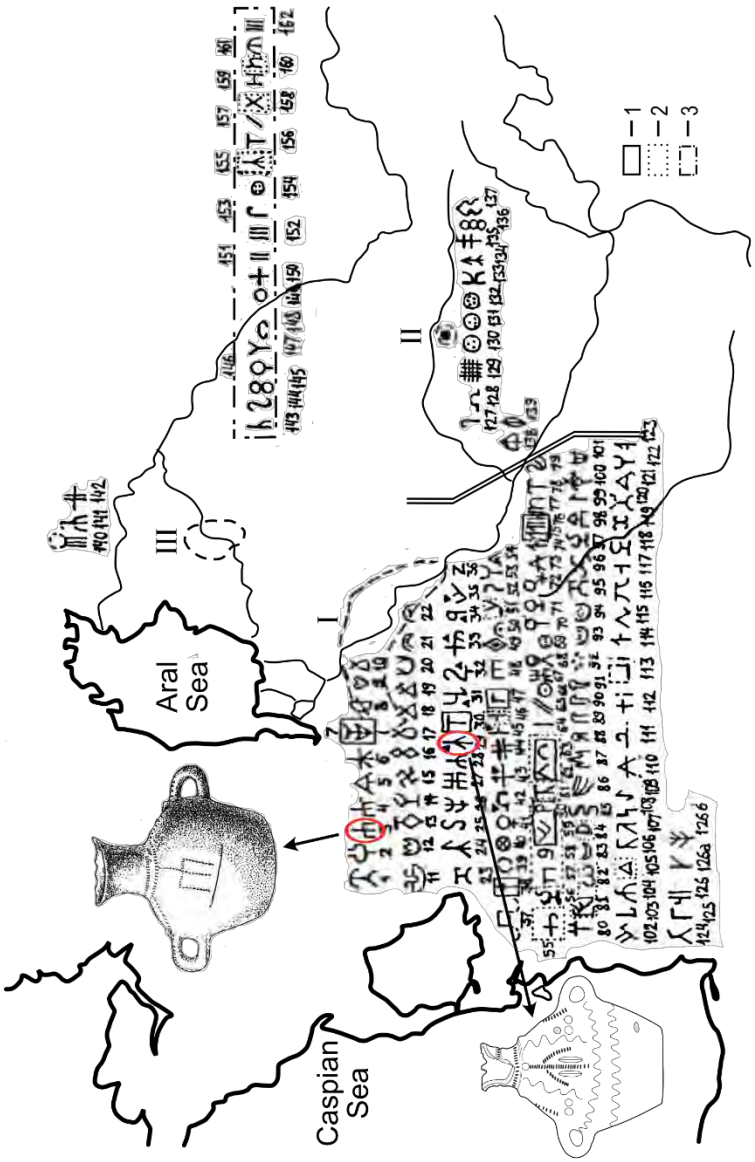

Figure 6. Tamgas (signs) from the Aral Sea region (after Yatsenko 2001: fig. 27).

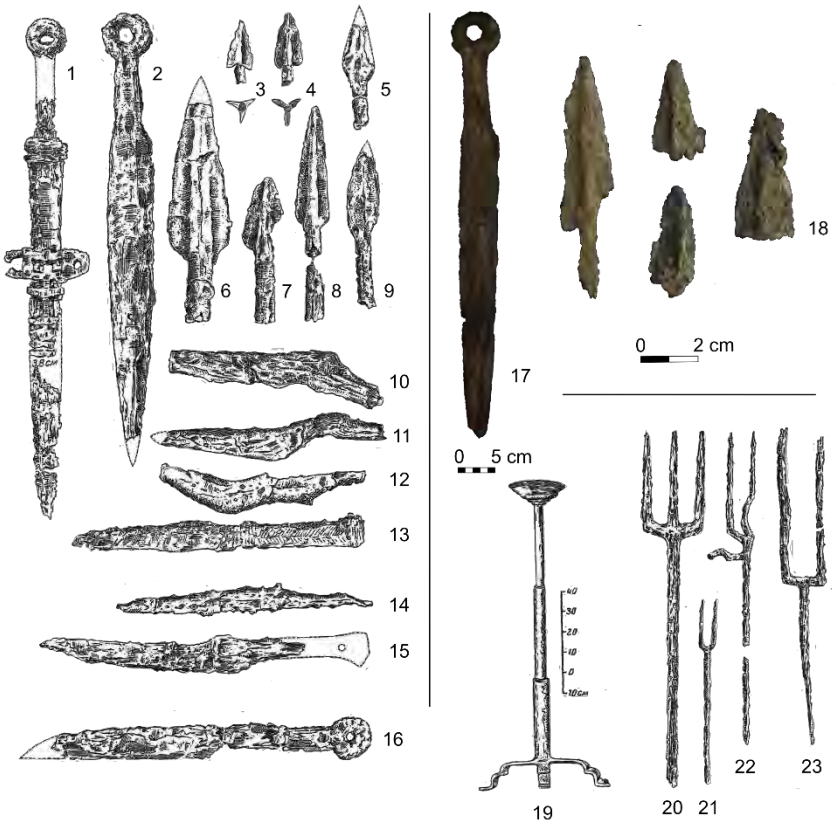

Figure 7. Jur burials No. 17, 26, 29-31 and 14-L with Sarmatian type weapons, Mingachevir, Azerbaijan. 1-18, 20-23 – iron weapons; 19 – iron thymiaterion (1-16, 19-23 – after Ione 1955: fig. 23-24; 17-18 – after the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan; 17 – AF no. 1814; 18 – AF no. 2286).

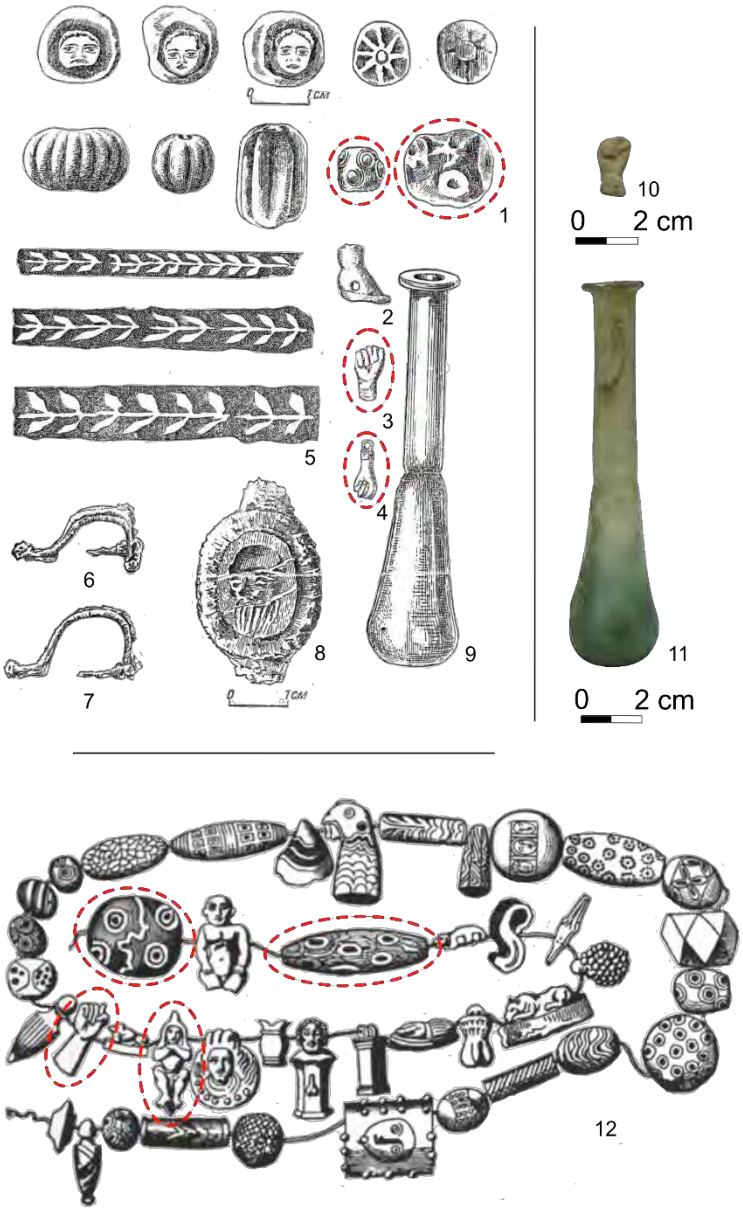

Figure 8. Jur burials No. 17, 26, 29-31 and 14-L with Sarmatian type weapons, Mingachevir, Azerbaijan. 1 – beads; 5 – ornaments on the beads; 2, 3, 4, 10 – amulets; 6-7 – fibulas; 8 – ring; 9, 11 – balsamarium; 12 – amulet against the Evil Eye, Cimmerian Bosphorus (1-9 – after Ione 1955: fig. 22; 10-11 after the Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan; 10 – AF no. 1589; 11 – AF no. 24195; 12 – after Potts 1982, fig. 47).

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