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“THE BOSPORAN ARMY” AND “THE ARMY ON THE BOSPORUS”
IN THE TIME OF MITHRADATES VI EUPATOR, KING OF PONTUS

Abstract: During the reign of Mithradates VI Eupator, king of Pontus, the Cimmerian Bosporus was incorporated to the kingdom of Pontus. Detachments of the Mithradatic army were located on the Bosporus. The military forces of which the Bosporans disposed of also stayed on the Bosporus. The organization of the military forces as well as soldiers’ arms and armour are discussed. Special attention is devoted to the epigraphic material which is evidently the most important piece of evidence relating to the military history of the Bosporus of Mithradatic times.

Keywords: Bosporus, Mithradates VI Eupator, army, arms and armour

About 107 BCE Bosporan Kingdom (map 1) lost its independence1. The Bosporus had come under the rule of Mithradates VI Eupator, king of Pontus2 (Fig. 1). Units of Mithradates’3 army were located in the Bosporan centers4, as had been done in other north Pontic cities5 incorporated into Mithradates’ sphere of interest at the end of the second century BCE. Appian’s passage about the “rebellion” of the Bosporans6, which took place during the first Mithradatic war against Rome and just after, indicates that after subjugation to Mithradates, significant military forces stayed in disposition of the Bosporans7. Appian wrote that a strong fleet and numerous Pontic forces were ordered against Bosporus8. On the other hand Appian’s account is very interesting, as the economic9 situation of the Bosporus was far from being prosperous before its incorporation to Mithradates VI’s possessions.

The military history of the Cimmerian Bosporus in the late second and the first century BCE as presented in the literature on the subject is mostly based on the fragmentary literary sources, epigraphic material (supplemented by recent finds), and sporadic archaeological finds (also enreached in recent years), among which important iconographic material exists. In effect the topic has not received the effort it deserves10, despite significant works devoted to Bosporan military architecture published in recent years11. During Mithradates VI’s reign fortified settlements were developed in the Bosporus, as in other parts of Mithradates VI’s

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1 Strab. 7.4.4. See Shelov 1983, 40; McGing 1986, 46ff; Vinogradov 1987, 67-69; Saprykin 1996, 140. Also in these works is found discussion on the date of the events. The change is explained as result of Diophantos’ victory over the Scythians under Saumakos (from the rich literature on the subject see especially: Rubinshten 1980; Gavrilov 1992, 53-73; Molev 1994, 120-131; Vinogradov 2009, 130-131), as well as the subjugation of Theodosia and Panticapaeum (IOSPE I 352 v. 40-41: παρέλαβεν οἱ[ε]ς ἄνθρωπον Ὀπτικανταὶ καὶ Παντικαπαίτων). Traces of destruction visible at Panticapaeum, Phanagoria and Cephi are associated with the war between Saumakos and Diophantos, and the wars of Mithradates VI. Saprykin and Maslennikov 1995, 266-267.
3 IOSPE I 352. 6000 hoplites Diophantos sent against the Roxolani – Strab. 7.3.17.
4 App. Mithr. 108.
6 App. Mithr. 64. See McGing 1993, 496-522.
7 It cannot be ruled out that among the Bosporan units “in rebellion” was a “remnant” of the Spartocids army. For an opposite opinion: Molev 2009, 325-326.
8 App. Mithr. 64.
9 Strab. 7.4.4 and scanty archaeological evidence – Kruglikova 1975, 101-103; Saprykin 1997, 196.
kingdom, especially in the case of the χώρα βασίλικη$^{12}$. These were settled by soldiers$^{13}$.

An almost complete inscription$^{14}$, found accidentally near ancient Phanagoria in the Asiatic part of the Bosporan kingdom in 1986, seems still to be the most important piece of evidence relating to the military history of the Bosporus during Mithradatic times$^{15}$. Yu.G. Vinogradov, the first editor of the monument, regarded the inscription as an excerpt of a more detailed document$^{16}$.

Phanagoria defended the Bosporan kingdom from the East$^{17}$. Especially against the local tribes, which role is attested by Strabo’s information on Neoptolemos’ victories over Barbarians$^{18}$ (we leave to one side the view that the Bosporans were the enemies of Neoptolemos$^{19}$). The members of the king’s family were accommodated in Phanagoria$^{20}$. Phanagoria was also one of the first cities to rise up against Mithradates, when he fell from power$^{21}$. In 63 BCE the city was besieged by Mithradates’ army, while the Phanagorians set fire to the town’s fortress in which king’s children were staying$^{22}$. Pompey left Phanagoria with its own “freedom and independence” while he recognized Pharnakes as a friend of Rome and ruler of Bosporus. On the other hand Phanagoria, and Nymphaeum$^{23}$, were Bosporan cities in which Mithradates was “called” “king of kings”$^{24}$. In Phanagoria the use of this title by Mithradates is attested by an inscription from Taman, dated to the time of Dynamic$^{25}$ -- in this period a local renaissance of the legend of Mithradates VI is evident$^{26}$.

The Phanagorian inscription of 1986 informs us that during Mithradates VI Eupator’s reign, in the year 210 of the Bosporan era, i.e. 88/87 BCE, the boule and demos of Phanagoria proclaimed citizenship and other honors to a group of mercenaries. The mercenaries had received a grant of citizenship in return for their loyal service to Mithradates. As Yu.G. Vinogradov$^{27}$ has announced, the words used in the inscription to describe the soldiers, i.e. τούς από ξένης στρατιώτας, may be taken as an indication that the soldiers mentioned in the inscription do not came from Phanagoria. Is even very probable that the inscription deals with mercenaries recruited outside of the Bosporus. The term ξένοι, στρατιώται was used instead of ξένοι, popular from the

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17 See Strab. 7.4.5. Kuznetsov 2010.
21 App. Mithr. 108; Oros. 6.5.1.
22 App. Mithr. 108.
24 See Strab. 7.4.3. as κατέστη κύριος. See comments: Molev 2009, 322.
25 CIRB 979. See Karyshkovskii 1985, 572-573.
fourth century BCE, or the most popular term μιστοφόροι which might be expected from other inscriptions and some other documents relating to Bosporan history. Soldiers of Pontic garrison in Olbia came from Little Armenia. In relation to Bosporus, according to Appian, we must consider also another possibility that Mithradates’ forces stationed in Bosporus might also have included Celtic mercenaries. Appian mentions units of Celts under the command of Bitoites present in the Bosporus in 63 BCE.

The text of the Phanagorian inscription informs us that the mercenary soldiers had συνστρατεύσασθαι with the Phanagorians. This phrase could confirm that the Phanagorians too had been in service into the army of Mithradates VI. At this point it is interesting to add that when Pharnaces subdued Phanagoria, he is mentioned by Appian as having been defeated in the battle by Phanagorians. The text of the inscription can be also used as information on the relations between the king’s units stationed on the Bosporus and local Bosporan troops, if we suppose that the Phanagorians mentioned in the inscription to be a “home guard”. A “home guard” is attested in Olbia and Chesonesus, too. In the opinion of E.A. Molev, “home guard” units were “restored” on Bosporus by Mithradates VI.

According to Appian the garrison of Phanagoria (most probably not the troops mentioned in the inscription under discussion), was commanded by a Phanagorian named Castor. It is possible to conclude from the words of Appian that Castor held a position of some importance in the court of Mithradates VI.

As is made clear in the inscription from Phanagoria, the units were paid by the city. J.M. Højte suggests that so called “municipal” coinage of Mithradates VI’s period could be connected with necessity to pay mercenaries stationed in the city. F. de Callataÿ study of the monetary policy of Mithradates VI has proved that the production of Mithradates VI’s silver coins is strongly related to wars.

Late in the reign of Pairisades V, the last king of Sartocid dynasty, silver drachms and hemidrachms, together with bronze coins of the same type as the silver pieces, were produced in Panticapeum. In Mithradatic times, probably at the end of the second or early first century BCE new silver drachms of greater weight than the previous emission, and bronze coins of two denominations were struck in Panticapeum, Phanagoria and Gorgippia. It was suggested that the head of Apollo on the obverse of some coin types, has received the facial features of Mithradates. In the case of the bronze currency the production of a higher denomination, described as a tetrachalcus, was more intensive in Phanagoria than in Panticapeum. Phanagorean pieces circulated mainly in the Asiatic part of Bosporus. In place of the small Bosporan bronzes, bigger pieces were introduced. Also a new type of silver coin was introduced (bearing the head of Dionysus, with whom Mithradates associated himself; a motive was adopted on the Bosporus under Pontic influence). Drachms were struck in Panticapeum...

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28 See Gauthier 1971, 44-79.
29 IOSPE I 1. 35. Probably some hundred people. Krapivina and Diatroptov 2005, 71. See also Strab. 12.3.1, 12.3.28 and Molev 1979, 186-190. Little Armenia supported Mithradates by 10,000 horsemen. In the time of Pharnaces Little Armenia and Pontus were still in a military alliance (Polyb. 25.2).
30 App. Mithr. 111. Treister 1993; Mielczarek 1999a, 72.
31 On the other hand this document can be treated as special evidence to position of cities in Mithradatic kingdom – see Højte 2009, 98-99.
32 Molev 2009, 323.
33 Lomouri 1979, 147; Yu.G. Vinogradov 1989, 262; Molev 2009, 323.
35 Panov 2005; Zavoikina 2013, 304.
36 Højte 2009, 100.
37 Callataÿ de 1987, 57-63; Callataÿ de 1997; Callataÿ de 2000, 337-364. See also Callataÿ de 2007.
38 See Anokhin 1986, 72.
39 Golenko and Shelov 1963, 7-8.
40 For the interpretation of the meaning of the iconography: Price 1968, 4-5. See also the discussion on the portrait sculpture identified as Mithradates portrayed as Dionysius – Savostina 2012, 189-200.
41 Frolova and Ireland 2002, 1.
and Gorgippia – Bosporan pieces were often overstruck on drachms of Amisus. In the 90s and 80s BCE a new series of coins were introduced – three denominations of silver and two denominations of bronze. Coins were struck in Panticapaean, Phanagoria and Gorgippia. These coinages, in fact, could really be used for the payment of mercenaries.

In light of the archaeological evidence from Phanagoria, after its subjugation to Mithradates VI, coins from Panticapaean and Phanagoria, as well as those struck in several cities of Pontic kingdom, were in circulation; both silver, including Mithridatic tetradrachms, as well as those struck in bronze. Bosporus was full of bronze coins of Pontic type (the influx of some earlier Pontic coins into Bosporus was not connected with the subjugation of Bosporus to Mithradates), and coins produced in other Pontic centers (mainly Amisus, Sinope, Comana Pontica) during the years 111-70S BCE. This situation suggests that these pieces were in everyday use, as well as the unification of the monetary system of Mithradates VI’s state developed over time.

From early first century BCE didrachms, drachms, hemi-drachms and bronze tetrachalkoi were struck in Phanagoria. Bronze coins dominate in hoards. The same situation is observed in other cities of the northern Black Sea coast. Coins from the last period of Mithradates’ reign are present in both cities.

It is possible that the fact that the three important Bosporan cities of this time were engaged in striking coins is serious support for the idea, that municipal coinage was produced for military purposes. Phanagoria produced full- and half-silver pieces. So it cannot realistically be excluded, that the coins were produced for paying mercenaries, and not only to support the autonomy of the cities.

Worthy of attention is one of two hoards of bronze coins from the settlement at Polyanka. The settlement was established at the time of Mithradates VI. In the opinion of S.Yu. Saprykin and A.A. Maslennikov the settlement can be treated as an example of a military-agricultural settlement. The hoard consists of 1100 coins of the type “Apollo-eagle on lighting”, anonymous Bosporan pieces and coins of Pontic cities of Mithradates VI’s reign, which are the earliest pieces in the hoard (the last coins belong to Asander’s emissions of 45-42 BCE). The hoard is treated as payment for the military settlers.

The service of Scythians and Sarmatians under the command of Mithradates VI is the next problem. According to Appian’s account they were persuaded to join into an alliance with Mithradates.

In Justinus, opinion Mithradates subjugated the Scythians, above all these living on the Pontus and Lake Meotis. They were described as “friends of Mithradates” in Appian’s account, and the king commanded the Scythian army to support his army drawn up against Rome. The Scythians Olkabas and Sobadakos rebelled against Mithradates while serving in Mithradates army.

Maybe the warrior burial discovered near the village Chisten’koe, some kilometers south of Sympheropol’, should be considered as a late Scythian. Here, in a Bronze Age barrow, a later catacomb grave dated to the second half of the second or first century BCE was discovered. A horse was buried in the first chamber, the warrior burial was located in the second. The body was placed in a wooden coffin. The warrior was equipped with one spear and two javelins (the javelin heads barbed, which is typical for the Meotis), a Sarmatian sword with a triangular-section blade, and what is probably a ring pommel (the pommel is partly damaged), and arrows. In the opinion of A.V. Simonenko, the warrior buried in Chisten’koe could belong to the Scythian or Sarmatian units serving in the army of Mithradates VI Eupator.

As regards the Sarmatians, they are mentioned as being “federated” with Mithradates several times by Appian. This can be confirmed by Strabo’s information about the military forces of the Siraces and the Aorsoi, with reference to the times of Pharnakes. They were united with the Bosporan ruler during his preparations for the war with Rome.
Is not easy to discuss arms and armour of Bosporan warriors from the times of Mithradates VI. Bosporan finds of military equipment dating to the Mithradatic period are sporadic. These were found in the settlement of Chorkasskii mys (first century BCE)⁶⁶.

It has been suggested that a series of Etrusco-Italic helmets found in Sarmatian burials dating to the first century BCE may have been taken from the Romans by the Sarmatians participating in the campaigns of Mithradates VI in 80s and 70s BCE⁶⁷.

Archaeological evidence found on the Bosporus demonstrates that the Beotian helmet also came into use at this time. A late variant of a bronze helmet of this type has been found in a Sarmatian grave from Orekhovka in the Stavropol’skii krai (north-west from the border of Asiatic part of the Bosporan state), dating to the second century or the first century BCE⁶⁸. Finds of other helmets of a similar date have been reported from the campsite near Akhtanizovka, near the ancient city Tyrambe, in the Asiatic part of the Bosporan kingdom. The Beotian helmet may have been borrowed from the repertoire of contemporary Hellenistic or Roman military equipment⁶⁹.

⁶⁶ Maslennikov 1996, 69.
⁶⁸ Pavlovich 1995, 200-205.
⁶⁹ Waurick 1988, 159-163.

The most probable representation of a Bosporan soldier from the time of Mithradatic rule over the Bosporos is a figure of a warrior carved on a stele 101 cm high, now in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, which was found also on the shore of Akhtanizovskii liman⁷⁰. The stele (Fig. 2) was carved by a local Bosporan sculptor, which is demonstrated by the imbalance in the proportion and in the modeling of the sculpture⁷¹. Many parallels of the hair style and beard can be found in Bosporan sculptures, particularly in those coming from the Asiatic part of the Bosporus.

The stele shows a foot soldier in full length. He wears a garment which could be a short-sleeved kaftan, but which equally well could be a coat of scale armour – it seems probable that the details of the armour could originally have been painted onto the stele⁷². On the other hand, it is difficult to say whether scale armour (very popular later on) had become common on the Bosporus as early as the Mithradatic period. The warrior holds a spear and a large oval shield, which takes up the greater part of the picture. We can say nothing about the real length of the spear as it may have been shortened to fit into the size of the stele. The shield with its long vertical rib resembles a Celtic shield in appearance.

⁷⁰ Tolstikov 1976, 80-90; Mielczarek 1999a,74-75.
⁷¹ Tolstikov 1976, 80-81.
⁷² Tolstikov 1976, 84.
Shields of this shape had become popular on the Bosporus in the second half of the third century BCE\(^73\). A series of terracotta figurines becomes common on the Cimmerian Bosporus at the turn of the second and first centuries BCE and remains popular through the first few centuries AD. Terracottas of this type are found on the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom\(^74\). The terracotta found in Iluraton (Fig. 3) shows a young man wearing a torque round his neck, which could be interpreted as another Celtic feature represented on terracottas. They show a young man in distinctive dress, which was once taken to be Sarmatian (but this view cannot be treated as certain). The man’s hand is leaning on a large oval shield with long vertical rib resembling the shield of the warrior from the Akhtanizovka stele.

The iconography of Bosporan stelai of the first century BCE also attest to the growing role of cavalry. To judge by the grave stelai Bosporan cavalry were equipped with both spear and bow, as on the stele of Pharmakion son of Pharmakes (Fig. 4), dated to the first century BCE\(^75\).

Worthy of attention is the passage in Tacitus relating the struggle for the Bosporan throne between Cotys I (45/6-67/8) and Mithradates III (39/40-44/45)\(^76\). He mentions “Bosporans equipped in our (i.e. Roman) manner”\(^77\). Appian and Plutarch mention 12,000 warriors of Mithradates VI equipped in the Roman style\(^79\). Whether they included the Bosporans we cannot be certain, but this seems possible\(^79\).

After the fall of Mithradates VI and his successors, rule on the Bosporus was seized by kings of Sarmatian origin. The character of the Bosporus changed\(^80\). From the first century AD the role of the Sarmatian elements in the Bosporus army began to rise.

Fig. 4. Stele of Pharmakion son of Pharmakes. State Hermitage Museum, Sankt Petersburg. After the photo. Courtesy of State Hermitage. Drawing by E. Górska.

Abbreviations:
- CIRB – Korpus Bosporskikh nadpisey – Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani, Moskva – Leningrad 1965
- SEG – Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum, Lugduni Batavorum 1923 –.

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\(^{73}\) Mielczarek 1999a, 75

\(^{74}\) Pruglo 1966, 205-213.

\(^{75}\) Bosporskie … 1990, no. 43.


\(^{77}\) Tacit. Ann. 12.16.

\(^{78}\) Plut. Lucull. 7; App. Mithr. 69.

\(^{79}\) On the acceptance of Roman military equipment see, for instance: Mielczarek 1999b, 5-9; Novichenkova 2011 and also Ivanchik 2013.

\(^{80}\) On the military questions Mielczarek 1999a, 79-100; Goroncharovskii 2003; Goroncharovskii 2009.


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**THE BOSPORAN ARMY** AND **THE ARMY ON THE BOSPORUS** IN THE TIME OF MITHRADATES VI EUPATOR


**Streszczenie**

„Wojsko bosporańskie” i „wojsko na Bosporze” w czasach Mitrydatesa VI Eupatora, króla Pontu

Podporządkowanie państwa bosporańskiego Mitrydatesowi VI Eupatorowi, królowi Pontu, wyznaczyło nowy okres w militarnej historii Bosporu. W miastach bosporańskich rozlokowano jednostki Mitrydatesa. Pozostawiono jednak również oddziały będące w dyspozycji „Boporańczyków”.

Studia nad wojskowością bosporańską tego okresu są prowadzone od dawna na podstawie źródeł narracyjnych, danych epigraficznych oraz materiałów archeologicznych i ikonograficznych. W ostatnim czasie podstawa studiów została rozszerzona o nowe inskrypcje i ostatnie znaleziska archeologiczne. Nadal jednak główną podstawą analiz jest inskrypcja z Phanagorii informująca o najemnikach służących w tym mieście.

Po raz kolejny rozważono treść wspomnianej inskrypcji, zwracając jednak uwagę przede wszystkim na kwestię żołdu najemników w świetle oceny produkcji monetarnej w Poncie i na Bosporze. Podkreślono fakt emitowania monet z przeznaczeniem na żołd dla najemników. Odniesiono się też do problemu zaciągu do oddziałów związanych z miastem („home guard”).

Opierając się na dyskutowanym już materiale ikonograficznym, krótko charakteryzowano broń wojowników bosporańskich. Wskazano nowe znaleziska (przede wszystkim pochówki odkryty w Chisten’koe, koło Symferopola), mogące odnosić się do doby Mitrydatesa VI Eupatora.