

TRADE CONTACTS THE VOLGA AND THE KAMA REGION IN THE LATE BC – EARLY AD CENTURIES (WRITTEN RECORDS, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NUMISMATIC SOURCES)

Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis and reconstruction of the nature and forms of relations between the peripheral regions of Eastern Europe and ancient centers in the II century B.C. – the first centuries A.D. Within the framework of the stated problem, the issues related to the relationship of the Roman Empire with the nomadic tribes of the steppe belt of Eurasia remain the least studied. One of the most important issues is the understanding of how and how imported Roman and Byzantine goods produced in Italy came outside, into areas that were not directly linked to ancient centres, such as the Don's and Kuban areas. The set of import items presented in the article is very diverse and includes both imported mass-produced products and luxury goods. The study confirms the hypothesis that the peak of the inflow of imported goods and coins of Roman production falls on the I-II cc. A.D., the period of the most active contacts between the barbarians and the Roman Empire, largely due to the stabilization of the political situation in the steppe zone. Thus, it can be stated that in the development of Roman-barbaric relations up to the middle of the III c. A.D. contacts show a tendency of slow but continuous growth.

Key words: international trade, Volga-Kamye, nomads, luxury goods, imported items, coins, ancient centers, Byzantium, Rome.

It is an important and challenging issue to perform an analysis of trade and economic relationships of the Volga and Kama Rivers Region, the peripheral areas of the Eastern Europe, with the Roman Empire and Byzantine Empire, relying mainly on the study of objects of Roman and Byzantine origin found on the territory covered by our article.

The essence and trends of the early trade relations are evidently among the most sophisticated and topical aspects in the ancient history of the peripheral area of the Eastern Europe, on the whole, and the Volga and Kama Rivers Region, in particular, considering scanty written testimonies. The trade relations could be determined by various aspects of the society life, such as trade exchange of raw materials, livestock and goods; cultural interchange and so on.

The history of the population in the steppe and forest-steppe zones of the Eastern Europe in the late BC – early AD centuries comprises a number of important and sophisticated issues which have been poorly analyzed so far and undeservedly neglected.

The issues that are least examined by the researchers relate to the study of mutual relations between nomads and the Roman Empire. One of these specific aspects is the way the products manufactured in Greece, western Rome and the Byzantine Empire as well as Italic goods were spread beyond Italy, in the areas that were not linked with the ancient central regions, with the exception of the Dnieper, the Don and the Kuban regions which have now been studied over one hundred years.

The geographical and chronological frames of the study cover a certain cultural and historical region and period and have been determined by the location of the foreign items. The geographical names 'the Ural Region', 'the Volga Region' and 'the Kama Region' are mostly used for convenience of the reader. These names define, respectively, the territories of the Cisurals, the Middle and Southern Ural river region, Trans-Urals, the Kama river region, the Lower and Middle Volga river region.

According to the traditional ancient writings, the eastern neighbors of the Scythians were nomadic tribes with the way of living similar to that of the Scythians. These tribes were known to the Greeks as "Sauromatians" and later "Sarmatians" which were already mentioned in Herodotus'

History. The reference to Herodotus is not occasional, since all the ancient successor historiographers, Greek and Roman authors in certain ways refer to Herodotus' information about the tribes and peoples populating the steppes and forests of Eastern Europe from the Dnieper to the Urals.

The political history of the Sarmatian tribes and the nature of their relationships with Rome are generally presented in the writings by Roman authors. As the Sarmatian tribes were approaching the Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea region and the borders of the Roman Empire, the Greek authors became much more informed about them. However, these data remain quite controversial and less informative when covering the areas further east of Rome.

It was a special epoch for the Iranian-speaking nomads of the Eurasian steppes, but it left virtually no traces in written records where it is incredibly difficult to find either an overview of the nations inhabiting the steppes or a clear story about commercial or cultural contacts. F.Bozi explains this incompleteness by "loss of the major part of the historical and geographical literature" and also by the idea that "the new intellectual environment of the Hellenistic period had to give less attention to the nations known since the ancient times, such as the Scythians and the Sarmatians" [20, p. 34].

Important information about the commercial ties of the Eastern European nomads in the Hellenistic period is contained in Polybius' *The Histories* [Polyb., IV, 38]. Not going into details, it is difficult to speak with certainty about some specific areas of the Pontus, but most probably, this indication by Polybius can be related to the entire Bosphorus which is famous, in particular, for the significant scope of the fishing industry and for the large slave market in Tanais.

Later in his description of the trade between Tanais and the neighboring Meoto-Sarmatian tribes Strabo gives interesting information about the nature of these relations [Strabo, XI, II, 3].

Special attention should be paid to Strabo's indication about the trade of the "upper Aorsi" which were mentioned only in Strabo's writings and, probably, occupied the areas of the western Caspian Sea region [Strabo, XI, V, 8]. The researchers were not able to find a common understanding with regard to this episode. Traditionally, it is assumed that the Aorsi carried out an independent intermediary trade [13, p. 164]. It sounds more convincing that the Aorsi did not practice intermediary trade because such interpretation contradicts to Strabo who wrote about the nomads' primitive natural barter [5, p. 129].

Ptolemy's "Geographia" for the first time ever shows the Volga, Ural and Kama rivers on the geographic maps although earlier the Volga (then unnamed) was included into the Greeks' geographical horizon [18, c. 80]. This part of Ptolemy's map is especially interesting in relation to the trade route because the map gives a detailed and, most important, accurate description of the Northern Caspian Sea region, Trans-Caspian countries, the flow of the Volga and the Ural.

Thus, the presented data from the ancient writings evidence that there existed steady river ways and land trade roads which tied the regions of the Ural, the Volga and the Kama with the ancient cities and states during various chronological periods starting from the 6th c. BC till the Early Middle Ages.

The earliest known finds in this category of imported objects were discovered in Astrakhan region (Krivaya Luka, Chernoyarskiy district) in a rich woman's burial of the 3rd c. BC, where there were found a black varnish vessel and an amphora of Greek origin with a Heraclea hallmark, both vessels dated to the 1st half of the above century [8, p. 5].

In 1999, an Early Hellenistic Heracleian amphora was discovered in the burial No. 1 of the barrow 3 in the Novomusinokurgan necropolis (Meleuzovsky District of Bashkiria, the Southern Urals), being today the easternmost find of Greek amphorae on the territory of Eurasia, in the opinion of Monakhov, it analogizes with the first two issues (II-A-1 and II-A-2), which allows us to strongly date it within the last years of the 4th century BC to the first two decades of the 3rd century BC," and the burial is dated to the first decades of the 3rd century BC [14, p. 92].

No ceramic utensils of proper Italic production were unearthed. Quite possibly, this can be explained by the fact that in Bosphorus itself the Italic ceramics were found in much smaller quantities than, for instance, in Olbia or Chersonesos, although most of the imported ceramics reached the

Sarmatians of the Volga region and Cisurals via Bosphorus and Tanais.

The products from Bosporan, Don, Kuban and various Middle Asian centers prevail among the imported ceramics found in the region under review. Such products seem to have been brought there (along with ancient imported ceramics) in the Prokhorovka period (4th c. BC) until the middle of the 3rd c. AD (the conventional upper border of this chronological period is obviously the defeat of Tanais by the Goths in the middle of the third century), thereafter the inflow of imported pottery basically ceases.

Probably, this category of imported articles represents products, which arrived occasionally together with the ceramic ware that was supposed to be bartered, or those could be objects of the merchants' personal use, which were found in the Volga and the Kama Rivers region due to various reasons, not necessarily linked with commercial interests of their owners (left items, gifts etc.).

The peak inflow of imported ceramic ware was seen in the 1st-2nd c. AD – the period of the most active barter trade between the ancient cities and states, on the one hand, and the nations inhabiting the Ural, the Volga and the Kama regions, on the other hand, when the Roman empire and, therefore, the international trade were flourishing, and relative stability was observed in the steppes.

Bronze vessels of diverse shapes, types and functional applications represent a significant share among various categories of imported products found in rich burials. These items were produced in the artisan workshops of Italy and also in other regions of the empire – in Gaul, the Rhine region, Frakia and Pannonia [3, p. 57-58].

The earliest finds of imported bronze vessels occurred in the rich burials of the Lower and Middle Volga region and the Kama region. During the excavations led by V.P. Shilov in 1954 in the famous burial 55/8 of Kalinovsky burial site a bronze vessel was found which turned out to be a product of Italic, namely, Campanian craftsmen and has numerous analogies among vessels which originate from South Italy [17, p. 45].

Among the recent finds we believe it is worth mentioning the bronze ladles from the burial dated to the late 2nd c. – the first third of the 3rd c. AD discovered in the summer of 2010 in Agapovka district, Chelyabinsk region, in kurgan 21 of Magnitny burial site where “the largest part of the grave goods consisted of metallic items which could be considered as the Roman “wine set”: jug, ladle, strainer, scoop, cup [7, p. 269].

Presence of imported glass, silver and bronze articles of Italic or Northern Black Sea region production is typical for rich burials of Sarmatian nobles in the 1st c. BC – 1st c. AD. To a certain extent, probably, it can be associated with the overall process of movement of the Sarmatian tribes to the west and intensification of their activities in the Northern Black Sea region and at the Danubian borders of the Roman Empire.

The insufficient quantity of archeological materials does not allow us to give a clear answer to this question. It may be also that some imported items, in particular, the inexpensive bronze utensils arrived to the Sarmatians of Cisurals and the Volga region by the Northern Branch of the Great Silk Road which stretched through the South Cisurals and Lower Volga region. On the return route in the Roman Syria it was possible to purchase glassware, silver articles and Italic bronze ware. In this case the Sarmatians received a major part of imported bronze articles as payment for caravan crossing their territory and for escorting along the route.

Silver ware is represented by a significant quantity of imported objects found during archeological research work or by occasion.

The proper Roman products are represented by individual finds in rich Sarmatian burials in the Volga region and the Ural region. In 1953 during the dig led by V.P. Shilov at Verkhnee Pogromnoe village (Bykovsky district, Volgograd region) in a Sarmatian burial (kurgan 1) there were found two silver semi-spherical bowls of Syrian production dated to the 1st c. BC and a silver jug discovered in grave 8 of kurgan 55 [11, p. 89].

Thus, silver articles of Roman production penetrated in Trans-Volga and in the Ural region as a result of normal barter trade contacts via an intermediation of the Bosporan cities and through an intertribal exchange with the related Sarmatian tribes of the Don region and the Kuban region.

A large group of Byzantine silver vessels found in the Kama region and in Cisurals contains a great number of items of various types, shapes and themes of images. We mentioned a few times that imported objects of Byzantine origin were present in these regions, but we do not have concrete data about direct ties of the Kama region and Cisurals with Byzantium or about direct exports from Constantinople workshops or other Byzantine crafts centers to those regions, nor about manufacturing of such goods for the purpose of exports to Cisurals and the Kama region.

Thus, the majority of Byzantine silver vessels penetrated to the territory of the Kama region and Cisurals from the Middle Asia together with other Middle Asian coins and artistic goods from various centers. The route from the Middle Asia obviously ran via the Ustyurt plateau to the Caspian Lowland and the Lower Volga region and then downstream the Volga, the Kama and the Chusovaya rivers to the north of the Kama region or to the south – to the Sylva river basin [6, p. 262].

The statement that the most probable communication routes ran on the Volga and the Kama rivers is supported by the places where the majority of the Byzantine vessels were found: in the basins of the Kama, Vyatka, Cheptsa, Belaya and Ural rivers, i.e. in the Middle, Upper and Lower Kama region and in South Cisurals. Only a small part, for example, two Byzantine vessels of the Bartym complex, could arrive via the Volga route from Transcaucasia or from the Northern Black Sea region, from the Byzantine Chersonesos.

The coins from Olbia and other cities of the Black Sea region were the earliest finds of ancient coins in the territory of the Ural, the Volga and the Kama rivers region.

In South Cisurals ancient coins were discovered during archeological studies. In the excavations of a kurgan cemetery near Ishtuganovo (Meleuzovsky district, Bashkortostan) coins were found in a nomad's grave [1, p. 46–54].

Thus, the composition of the coin finds, on the whole, shows the occasional and irregular nature of their bringing to the Volga region and to Cisurals.

The earliest finds of Roman copper, bronze and silver coins are dated to the second half – late 2nd c. BC – 1st c. AD when the Roman republican denarius was in active circulation and widely used in the international trade. Such a long-time functioning is explained by the fact that silver denarii were used not only as a payment means, but symbolized a definite social status of the owner of such coins.

Only single Roman golden coins were found in the Volga region and in Cisurals. In Astrakhan region on the right bank of the Volga river at Zamyany village (Enotaevsky district) there was found a golden coin of Eudocia (408-414), wife of Theodosius II (408-450), and a well-preserved golden coin of Theodosius I (379-395) provenes from a burial discovered in Ufa [9, p. 48].

These coins do not represent a valuable historical evidence of the economic relations between the ancient cities and the barbarians because golden coins could not play a serious role in the international commerce and money circulation in the adjacent territories, and certainly, not in the peripheral lands. A major part of such coins usually has lugs for appending or holes, i.e., they were basically used as decorations. Moreover, the mass inflow of Roman silver coins during a relatively long chronological period did not result in creation of a local monetary-weighting system.

Finds of Byzantine copper, silver and golden coins with prevalence of silver hexagrams of Heraclius of the 7th c. discovered on the outskirts of the barbarian world evidence the ambiguity of socioeconomic and political processes which took place on the outskirts of the ancient world in the late ancient period and in the early medieval years.

Byzantine golden solidi of the 7th c. were present in the finds from the territory of the Lower Volga region and the South Cisurals [10, p. 26]. As for the ways of penetration of golden coins to the Volga region and South Cisurals, we cannot give preference to any single route. It is quite possible that the coin found near Orsk was brought by the steppe road from the Middle Asia which was used to transport almost all artistic imported goods from Khorezm and basically the entire Orient, including Byzantium. This hypothesis is backed by the fact that in the Middle Asia there are known finds of mainly golden solidi, but no Byzantine silver coins [19, p. 32–34].

In the Kama region we know about three hoards of Byzantine silver coins.

In Perm region at Bartym village (Berezovsky district) in 1950 a Sassanidian silver vessel with two hundred sixty Byzantine silver coins was found; in an exploratory shaft nearby there were found twelve more Heraclius' hexagrams of the same type which were minted in Constantinople in 615–629 [2, p. 19].

Thus, penetration of Byzantine coins on the territory of the regions under review, as we can see, was generally insignificant and irregular, did not lead to creation of a local monetary-weight system or establishment of money circulation among the nations of Cisurals, the Kama and the Volga regions.

Therefore, the majority of Byzantine golden and silver coins reached the Volga region, the Kama region and Cisurals via the trade route from Transcaucasia along the Volga and the Kama rivers during a relatively short time span (second half of the 5th – middle of the 7th c.).

For the conclusion we would like to highlight a few fundamental factors relating to the routes and ways of the ancient imports distribution in the peripheral lands, barter trade formats and main trends in the quantitative and qualitative composition of the imported products.

The nomadic people were in constant contact with the settled tribes (in the south – nomadic tribes and settled agricultural nations of the Middle Asia, in the north – Ananino tribes, in the west – settlements of the Scythians, the Meotes, the Greek cities of the Northern Black Sea region), and the particularities of their economy provide for continuous barter trade between them and for search of the most optimum and convenient format of barter.

The peak inflow of imported goods of Roman origin was seen in the 1st-2nd c. AD – the period of the most active barter trade between the ancient cities and states, on the one hand, and the nations inhabiting the Ural, the Volga and the Kama regions, on the other hand, when the Roman empire and, therefore, the international trade were flourishing, and relative stability was observed in the steppes.

We can confidently state that the main trend in development of the Greek-Roman-Barbarian ties until the middle of the 3rd c. AD had a slow, but continuous growth. Possibly, direct relations were interrupted from time to time due to military conflicts, migrations of tribes and the general unstable political situation in the steppes, but as soon as the situation got stable, the trade routes resumed their functioning immediately, because, first of all, it was in the interests of the tribal elite.

The overall reduction of the imported goods inflow from the West is clearly registered immediately after the Gothic invasion in the 30-40-s of the 3rd c. AD and the destruction of Tanais when the city lost its dominant position in the trade with the barbarians, and since then other routes for purchasing of imported goods were in use, bypassing the Northern Black Sea region. The destruction of the ancient centers of the Northern Black Sea region and consequent pirate raids on the entire Black Sea coast led to a significant reduction of the international trade volume, although it did not cease completely, but switched to exchange in kind in a greater extent than in the 1st-2nd c. AD. Once of secondary importance, the trade roads from Gaul, Dacia and Pannonia started to play a more important role.

Thus, the overall unstable situation in the steppes could not further contribute to development of the trade contacts. In a large extent, it can be explained by the fact that the Sarmatians as the stabilizing military and political power in the steppes of the Northern Black Sea region have lost their dominating position, except the strong Alanian tribal union, and the epoch of dominance of the Iranian-speaking nomads came to an end. That period saw the rise of the numerous Turkic peoples and tribes on the historical scene.

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ТОРГОВЫЕ СВЯЗИ ВОЛГО-КАМЬЯ В ПОСЛЕДНИЕ ВЕКА ДО Н.Э. - ПЕРВЫЕ ВЕКА Н.Э. (ПО ДАННЫМ ПИСЬМЕННЫХ, АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ И НУМИЗМАТИЧЕСКИХ ИСТОЧНИКОВ)

Аннотация Статья посвящена анализу и реконструкции характера и форм взаимоотношений периферийных районов Восточной Европы с античными центрами во II в. до н. э. – первые века н. э. на примере районов Урало-Поволжья и Прикамья. В рамках заявленной темы наименее изученными остаются вопросы, связанные с взаимоотношениями Римской империи с кочевыми племенами степного пояса Евразии. Одной из самых важных проблем является понимание того, каким образом и каким путями импортные предметы римского и византийского производств попадали за пределы Италии, в районы, которые не были связаны непосредственно с античными центрами, как например, районы Подонья и Прикубанья.

Состав импортных товаров, о которых идет речь в статье, весьма разнообразен и включает в себя как изделия массового производства, так и предметы роскоши. В ходе исследования подтверждается гипотеза, согласно которой пик притока импортных товаров и монет римского производства приходится на I-II вв. н. э., период наиболее активных контактов между варварами и Римской империей, во многом обусловленный стабилизацией политической ситуации в степной зоне. Автор уверен, что в развитии римско-варварских связей вплоть до середины III в. н. э. контакты демонстрируют тенденцию медленного, но непрерывного возрастания.

Ключевые слова: международная торговля, Волго-Камье, кочевники, предметы роскоши, импортные предметы, монеты, античные центры, Византия, Рим.

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