

## THE EYE BEADS – AMULETS OF WARRIORS OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup>-1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES BC

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**Summary.** *The large eye beads, found in numbers one to three, were excavated at scarce barbarian sites of the North Pontic region (Tchisten'ke, Glinoe, Găvani). They were usually located near horse or human skeletons. All beads are dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC and similar in their color, design, shape, dimensions, and eye structure.*

The closest parallels to them are the beads from the cemeteries of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC near stanitsas Tenginskaya, Sereginskaya, and Novolabinskaya in the North-West Caucasus. A comparative analysis shows that this kind of beads is connected to a particular horse harness from the sites. The harness' characteristic details include the bronze frontlets and breastplate sheets with pendants, and also the harsh bits with mouthpieces of cruciform shape; most likely, the eye beads were attached to the bridle and served as amulets.

The horse harness of the described type was used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC by the North-West Caucasian barbarians (their tribal identification is problematic). The finds in the North Pontic region probably reflect migration of a group of these barbarians to the West.

Among the objects from the rare barbarian sites in the North Pontic region dated to the Late Hellenistic period one can find items that at first could look ordinary but their analysis led to the unexpected and interesting results. The North Pontic beads of a large variety are found in numbers from one to three near the horse skeleton, on the human skeleton, or nearby. They have been discovered in the kurgan grave near the village of Tchisten'ke in Crimea (Зайцев, Колтухов, 1997, p. 49-59; Колтухов, Тощев, 1998, p. 42-46; Симоненко, 2001, p. 92-106), in the disturbed assemblage near Găvani in Romania (Harțuche, 1966, p. 25-70; Sîrbu, Harțuche, 2000, p. 139-153; Зайцев,

2007, p. 258-268), and in the kurgans nos. 17 and 51 of the cemetery near the village of Glinoe near Tiraspol' (Синика, 2004, p. 238). Dr. Yuri Zaytsev as this category a bead from the stone crypt in mausoleum of Scythian Neapolis (Зайцев, 2007, p. 265) but its association with a bridle but it is questionable<sup>1</sup>.

In the Tchisten'ke grave, a round cylinder bead made of opaque dark blue glass, decorated by the eight convex white-dark blue eyes and white band, was placed to the right of a horse skull; its diameter 32, height 25 mm (Fig. 1:1). Near the right elbow of a human skeleton was found a polychromic, dolioform eye bead made of translucent dark blue glass decorated with five large, relief white-dark blue eyes, ten yellow and ten white eye of lesser size arranged in a chess pattern (Fig. 1:2) its dimensions are 30 x 30 mm. This bead and a small gold ring were placed near a sword handle, and, possibly, decorated the handle (Зайцев, Колтухов, 1997, p. 50, fig. 2.4,17).

Three beads together with details of a bridle were discovered in Găvani, (Sîrbu, Harțuche, 2000, figs. 7.1-3; 8.1-3)<sup>2</sup>. One of them is round and flattened, made of opaque dark blue glass, with a horizontal white strip dividing it in half. Three orange-dark blue-white eyes decorate each half; it has diameter 32 mm, height 23 mm, diameter of channel 14 mm (Fig. 1:3). The second, dolioform, bead is made of iridescent translucent dark-blue glass and decorated with a few rows of the relief eyes: five purple drops surrounding the bores; two rows of yellow drops on the overhead and lower parts, a row of protuberant yellow-dark blue-white eyes and little yellow drops between them in the center. It measures: height 33 mm, diameter 30 mm, diameter of channel 8 mm (Fig. 1:4). The third bead is cylindrical in shape and was made of opaque dark blue glass decorated with three rows of the relief eyes: two belts of blue drops above and below (now there left only two drops), and five conical white-dark blue eye in the center. It measures: height 35 mm, diameter 24 mm, diameter of channel 8 mm, height of conical eye 10mm (Fig. 1:5).

In kurgan no. 17 at the cemetery near Glinoe, a biconical opaque dark blue glass bead was unearthed behind the horse's skull. It is heavily covered in blue, white and orange flat spots; its dimensions are 30 x 30 mm, diameters of the tapering channel are 10 mm and 5 mm (Fig. 1:6). A smaller bead (Fig. 1:7) was found behind the horse skull in the kurgan no. 51. The association of both beads with a bridle is obvious<sup>3</sup>.

The bead from Tchisten'ke found next to the horse skull, judging by its color and the location of the eyes, is close to Alekseeva's type 356 (the latter is

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<sup>1</sup> The absence of the bit and other required details of the bridle show that the horses in the mausoleum were not bridled.

<sup>2</sup> We are very grateful to Dr. Valeriu Sîrbu for the photographs of the beads.

<sup>3</sup> We got the drawing and description of the bead by courtesy of Drs. Igor Tchetverikov and Vitali Sinika.

only smaller) dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (Алексеева, 1978, p. 54). The bead lying near the sword is probably of the Alekseeva's type 386. This type displays a translucent, turquoise glass bead but its color is the only difference between it and the bead from Tchisten'ke<sup>4</sup>. Dr. Ekaterina Alekseeva has noted that the bead of type 386 was found in Panticapeion but did not offer a date. Thus, the bead of type 386 found in Tchisten'ke together with the bead of type 356, which is reliably dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BC, could also be dated to the same period.

One of the beads from Gāvani (Fig. 1:3) belongs to the Alekseeva's type 358, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC; the second one (Fig. 1:5) appears to be the Alekseeva's type 368 of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD (Алексеева, 1978, p. 54-55)<sup>5</sup>. The third bead (Fig. 1:4) is close to the one from the grave no. 140 of Tenginskaya necropolis (Fig. 2:5), which Dr. Elena Beglova dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Беглова, 2002, p. 159-160). The beads from Tenginskaya and Gāvani of Alekseeva's type 368 are not identical but similar in style and use of color: the elongated body, central part of which is decorated by band with conical white-dark blue (Tenginskaya) or yellow-dark blue (Gāvani) eyes between of two rows of white or yellow drops.

The bead from Glinoe is of interest. It belongs to the group of polychrome beads with spotty design. We cannot find a close parallel to it in Corpus compiled by Dr. Alekseeva. The beads of types 13, 18 (this also has a similar shape), and 19 are close in their color range but significantly different in size (the bead from Glinoe on the average is 1,5-2 times larger). Beads of these types, according to Dr. Alekseeva, are generally dated to the first c. AD but the items of type 18 were found in the assemblages of the 3<sup>rd</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Алексеева, 1978, p. 57-58, pl. 12: 74, 94, 95).

The kurgans near Glinoe, according to Dr. Vitali Sinika, were built by the Scythians of the late period and are dated, similarly to the Scythian catacombs of the Tiraspol' group, to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> -beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Четвериков, 2004, p. 282). Dating and cultural attribution of the grave from Tchisten'ke and Gāvani assemblage are disputable. Dr. Sergey Koltuhov and Dr. Gennady Toshchev did not provide a date for the burial from Tchisten'ke (Колтухов, Тощев, 1998, p. 42) in their monograph, and Dr. Yuri Zaytsev and Dr. Sergey Koltuhov dated it in their article to the third quarter-second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Зайцев, Колтухов, 1997, p. 57). The authors of the monograph defined the grave near Tchisten'ke as a Sarmatian one (Koltuhov, Toshchev) or as a grave of a cavalryman with a battle horse, who came from the

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<sup>4</sup> The color perception is a very individual feature, since blue and turquoise colors lie in the same part of spectrum.

<sup>5</sup> Now became clear that chronology of Dr. Alekseeva is far from perfection. Sometimes it is based on the old incorrect dates or simply on the individual opinion of a researcher who provided information to the author.

Kuban' river or other North Caucasian region (Zaytsev, Koltuhov). Later, Dr. Zaytsev interpreted this site as the grave of the "Satarkhian conqueror (of Crimea – authors)" of the Skylarks time (Зайцев, 1999, p. 144). Dr. Oleksandr Symonenko argues the grave from Tchisten'ke is a warrior tomb of the Late Scythian period, with an imported bridle and weapon, and dates it to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (СИМОНЕНКО, 2001, p. 100).

The assemblage from Găvani is explained by Dr. Nicolae Harțuche and Dr. Valeriu Sîrbu as the destroyed grave of a Getic nobleman, dated to the end of 4<sup>th</sup> – the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC (Sîrbu, Harțuche, 2000, p. 153). Dr. Oleksandr Symonenko and Dr. Vitalie Bîrcă do not exclude the possibility that this site belongs to the "hoards" of the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> -beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (СИМОНЕНКО, 2008, p. 260). Dr. Zaytsev dates it to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC, with preference to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and attributes it to the same category of sites (Зайцев, 2007, p. 261-262).

Thus, the assemblages discussed here ought to be dated in rather broader chronological span within the 3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BC. It is worth noting that generally the dates for the similar beads included in the book by Dr. Alekseeva are in this range.

The search for analogies to our beads outlined the very narrow area of their use: the Northwest Caucasian barbarian sites of the Sarmatian-Maeotian milieu. These are the cemeteries near stanitsa Tenginskaya (Беглова, 2002, p. 157-168) and Sereginskaya (unpublished excavations of Dr. Elena Beglova), and the kurgan at the cemetery of the IV Novolabinskoe settlement (Паев, Беспалый, 2006)<sup>6</sup>. At these sites, the large round, cylindrical or dolioform beads similar to ours were discovered near the horses and human skeletons (Fig. 2).

The large round bead from the cemetery of IV Novolabinskoe settlement (Fig. 2:1) belongs to Alekseeva's type 358<sup>7</sup>, which is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.

Two beads were found near the horse no. 1 in the grave 140 of the Tenginskaya cemetery. One of them – round, made of opaque dark blue glass decorated with white-blue-green eyes and a wavy white line (Fig. 2:2) is of Alekseeva's type 400 (this type is undated) (Алексеева, 1978, p. 56-57, pl. 32: 11,12). The other bead is cylindrical, 25 mm long, made of opaque dark blue glass decorated by applied white bands, conical white-blue eyes and rows of the very tightly located white and yellow balls (Fig. 2:3). A similar bead but without conical eyes and with yellow and green balls, 22 mm long (Fig. 2:4), belongs to the horse no. 2 from the same grave. In our opinion, they are very close to the

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<sup>6</sup> We have listed only the known to us sites. According to the courteous information of Dr. Beglova, a lot of the relative sites were discovered recently in this region.

<sup>7</sup> A very large bead of dark blue glass decorated with white band and seven large eyes, where three of them surround one bore and four ones surround the other bore. The eyes are flat and layered; Алексеева, 1978, p. 54, pl. 32:24.

Alekseeva's types 385 of the 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC and 386 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (Алексеева, 1978, p. 56-57, pl. 32:71,72).

In this grave, the large, round beads were made of opaque dark blue glass and green-orange-blue eyes were found under the jaws of horse no. 4. One of the beads has three eyes and belongs to Alekseeva's type 54d of the 3<sup>rd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> c. BC (Fig. 2:5), the other (Fig. 2:6) has four eyes. It is not shown in the Corpus by Dr. Alekseeva but it's almost complete identical to the Alekseeva's 54d type (they are differ only in the number of eyes) suggest that the beads are contemporaneous. At least, we can say that they were used together, since they were found in the same assemblage.

There are no parallels to the beads from the grave 158 in the Dr. Alekseeva's corpus. One of them is made of the opaque dark blue glass and decorated with three large white-blue-yellow eyes and six small grey-blue eyes between them (Fig. 2:7). The other bead made of opaque green glass, has three light-green ring-shaped eyes with three small white rings inside each eye (Fig. 2:8). Judging by the presence of similar beads among the dated items in the grave 140, it would not be a mistake to date the beads being studied to the same time period (3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC).

The horse harness from these sites is very original and has very specific features. The large bronze frontlets with round upper part and axe-shaped lower one (Fig. 3) were its main decoration. The top part was ornamented by embossed or engraved concentric circles. Some frontlets of this type (Fig. 3:4-6) come from the graves and some are from the stray finds in the Kuban' river region (Лимберис, Марченко, 2005, p. 162-166). Three identical objects (Fig. 3:3) were found in the Stavropol' region, in the crypt on the Tatarskoe settlement (Кудрявцев et al., 2000). Eight such frontlets (Fig. 3:2) were discovered in the graves and sacrificial deposits in the kurgan of the IV Novolabinskoe settlement (Раев, Беспальный, 2006, pp. 15, 19, 25, 26, 32, 33, pl. 13:2; 19:2,3; 24:2,3; 28:10; 31:3; 32:5).

The *terminus post quem* for the frontlet from the Kuban' river region, the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, is defined by the amphorae (Лимберис, Марченко, 2005, pp. 163, 166). The assemblages with frontlets from Novolabinskaya dates to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC (Раев, 2007, p. 379-381), the one from the Tatarskoe settlement can be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.

A frontlet of this type was found in a Tchisten'ke grave (Зайцев, Колтухов, 1997, p. 50, fig. 3). It was damaged and repaired in antiquity (Fig. 3:1). Besides that, two other frontlets of this type (Fig. 4) were found in 1902 in a destroyed grave near Nikopol' (Павлуцкий, 1903, p. 37-40; Ханенко, Ханенко, 1907, p. 10-11, pl. III:417, 418; Мурзин, Черненко, 1980, p. 155, fig. 1:1,4). Dr. Vyacheslav Murzin and Dr. Evgen Chernenko, following D.G Schultz, attributed similar frontlets kept in the State Hermitage as being found in the Kelermes kurgans and dated them accordingly, to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC. They

compared the Hermitage frontlets to the objects from Nikopol' placed them at the same time and described as the battle defense for horses in the Early Scythian period. But, as it was shown in works by other scholars, the Hermitage's frontlets were found in stanitsa Tsarskaya (now Novosvobodnaya) in the Kuban' river region (Лимберис, Марченко, 2005, p. 163).

Another characteristic feature of the harness is bronze decoration of the breastplate known in two shapes. The first one is a pair of trapeziform plates with the straight or figured edges. The front side is decorated with parallel rows of repoussé dots and engraved or punched concentric circles. The lunulae, tubes, and "semi-bells" pendants also decorated by punched geometrical ornament were attached to the lower edge of the plates. Such breastplates are found in the horse grave of the kurgan no. 1 at the Vasyurina Gora (Fig. 5:1), in the graves of the Tenginskaya cemetery (Fig. 5:2), and in the kurgan at IV Novolabinskoe settlement (Fig. 5:3,4). In Ukraine, the bronze decoration of similar breastplate (Fig. 5:5) was found near Nikopol', together with the above-described frontlets (Павлуцкий, 1903, p. 37-40; Ханенко, Ханенко, 1907, p. 10-11, pl. III:415, 416; Мурзин, Черненко, 1980, p. 155-167, fig. 1:2,3).

The bronze breastplate decoration of a different type comes only from the two sites: Vasyurina Gora (Fig. 5:6) and a kurgan near the village of Ostry (Зарайская, Привалов, Шепко, 2004, p. 137, fig. 3) in the Donetsk region (Fig. 5:7). They consist of two lapped bronze ribbons decorated in the same manner as the plates of the first shape, e.i. with punched rows of dots and engraved circles. The lunulae, tubes, and "semi-bells" are attached to the lower edge. The stylistic unity of decoration of both types of breastplate, points to their common place of origin and probably, to the same date. The sword with the straight hilt and slightly bent crescent-shaped pommel does not allow us to date the Ostry burial earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC.

Dr. Beglova dates the ritual complex of the Tenginskaya necropolis to the first quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Беглова, 2002, p. 159) and the horse grave in the kurgan no. 1 at Vasyurina Gora – to the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Беглова, 2002, p. 160). The breastplate from Vasyurina Gora and the horse equipment from the Novolabinskaya and Tenginskaya necropolises are items from the same cultural milieu. It seems that such a novel harness appeared in the North-West Caucasus and then in the North Pontic region no earlier than the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC and was in use there in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and, possibly, in the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The harsh bits with cruciform mouth-pieces belonged to this type of harness. Traditionally, they are called "cruciform check-pieces". However, we should admit that the term is incorrect, since the main function of the check-piece is to connect the bit and bridle, and they could not be performed without loops fastening the bridle straps. The check-pieces there are also on some bits with the cruciform mouth-pieces (Fig. 6:1,3) but the objects had a different function: pressed onto the horse lips and *angulus oris*, they increased pain and

helped to control the horse more effectively. For these purposes, the flat sharp teeth, turned to the horse muzzle, were made at the ends of the mouth-pieces (Fig. 6:8).

In the North Pontic region, the bits with cruciform mouth-pieces were found in a "hoards", a few kurgans of the Tiraspol' group, and in the Tchisten'ke grave; a fragment of the harsh bits was found in Găvani (Fig. 6:2). On the other side, this type of bits is well known from the barbarian sites of the Kuban' river region and the North-West Caucasus, (Марченко, 1996, p. 72-75; Лимберис, 1988, p. 35-54; Беглова, 2002, p. 157-168; Раев, Беспалый, 2006). Dr. Konstantin Smirnov once reasonably suggested that the bits with cruciform mouth-pieces (he called them check-pieces) are of Kubanic origin (Смирнов, 1953, p. 37).

However, we should take a closer look at the connection of the finds of harsh bits with the described horse harness. Harsh bits are rare at the Siracian sites located northwards the Kuban' river region but are common at the sites known southwards to it (the Novolabinskaya-Tenginskaya type). They are typically consisting a complex with the frontlets and above-described breastplates.

The harness of this type seems to reflect a local ethnical group. The horse equipment always appear as an ethnical and cultural indicator in the regions where horse breeding and riding are an integral part of everyday life, we can mention the Mongolian, Caucasian or Cossack saddles as examples, Hungarian trappings, the Western type harness found in the USA and Mexico, etc. A bridle, saddle, and harness decoration serve the same function of identification as folk costume.

The large eye beads decorating a bridle and battle equipment were used only by the peoples who inhabited the sites of the Novolabinskaya-Tenginskaya type. Taking into account the locations of the beads at the sites, one can assume their practical use as served for the fixing of the strap knots. It is also doubtful that they were used only as ornaments, as Dr. Sinika interpreted the bead from the Glinoe and called it a tassel (Синика, 2004, p. 238). We think that the style of these beads, the standardized design (largeness, form, color gamma, eyes), rarity, and relation to the warrior goods or horse harness suggest more than their practical or aesthetic role in the lives of their owners.

We cannot exclude the possibility that these beads were the amulets as well. What first support this hypothesis is the color gamma and the presence of eyes. Dark blue and blue eye beads were in use (and continue to be<sup>8</sup>) like amulets for various purposes. Judging by numerous ethnographic data, they are associated with a belief in jinxes, i.e. the destructive force of "evil eye" which

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in today's Central Asia (by courteous information of Dr. Aleksander Naymark).

causes an evil curse (Столба, 2009, p. 111). So, the eye beads should neutralize the evil eye and avert the evil curse.

The archaeological materials from the Greek sites of the North Pontic region show the intention of their inhabitants to protect the families, children, and animals from jinxes and wicked forces with amulets (Столба, 2007, p. 157-162). The amulets were also widespread among the Scythians and Sarmatians. We can list the objects made of rare metals, teeth, and claws of large predatory animals and birds, holed stones, Cyprea and conch shells, the objects of unusual shape or origins (including artifacts of earlier times), and also beads and pendants with definite symbols. The use of the as amulets-protectors, not only as adornment, has been repeatedly emphasized in the archaeological literature. The eye beads were particularly endowed with medical properties, and with the power to resist the evil eye (Ковпаненко, 1986, с. 90). The large eye beads were sewn directly to the felt bag with amulets unearthed in the burial of the Sarmatian "queen-witch" in the Sokolova Mohyla kurgan (Ковпаненко, 1986, с. 87). The large eye bead was found among the amulets in a grave of rich a Sarmatian woman in the kurgan near the village of Chuguno-Krepinka (Simonenko, 2008, Taf. 64.7).

There is no doubt that the North-West Caucasian and North Pontic sites, where the beads discussed in this article were found, are related and belong to the same cultural milieu. We do not rule out the possibility that the finds near Ostry and Nikopol' mark the way of a North-West Caucasian barbarians group to westward (Fig. 7). Judging by the materials from the Tiraspol' kurgans, it ended on the Dniestr river banks in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC. It is very tempting to link this raid with the destruction of the Greek settlements on the territory from the Don river to Dniestr river, from the Elizavetovka trade center in the sixties of this century, collapse of the North Pontic Scythia and the famous account by Diodorus (Виноградов, Марченко, Рогов, 1997, p. 101 ff) but now we should abstain from that – it should be a topic of separate work. If the graves from the Tchisten'ke and Gävani are later then the Tiraspol' kurgans (at least, it looks like it) they demonstrate the further use of the beads-amulets by the barbarians of the North Pontic region. As it often happens, over a period of time, a custom of the new-comers was accepted by the aboriginal population.

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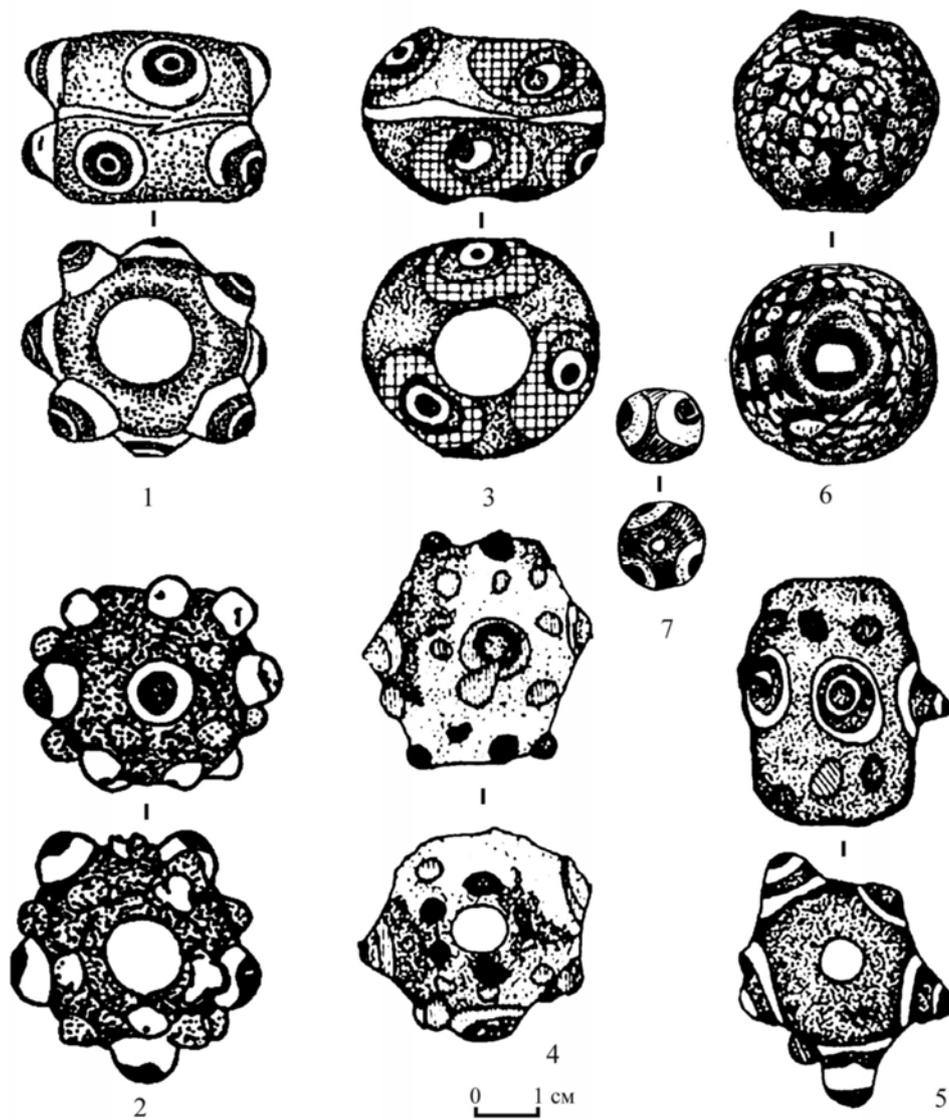


Fig. 1. The beads-amulets.

1,2. Tchisten'ke (after Yu. Zaytsev and S. Koltuhov); 3-5. Găvani (after V. Sîrbu and N. Harțuche); 6. Glinoe, kurgan 17; 7. Glinoe, kurgan 51 (after V. Sinika).

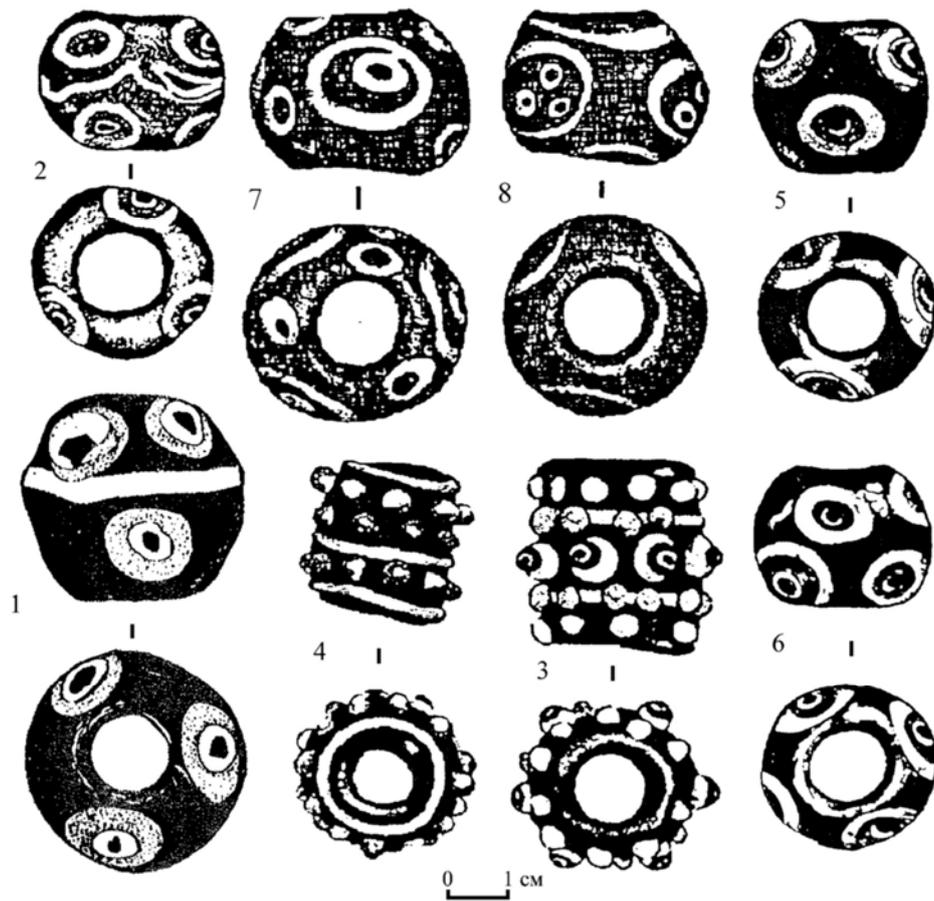


Fig. 2. The beads from Northwest Caucasus.

1. Novolabinskaya (after B. Raev and G. Bepaly); 2-8. Tenginskaya (after E. Beglova).

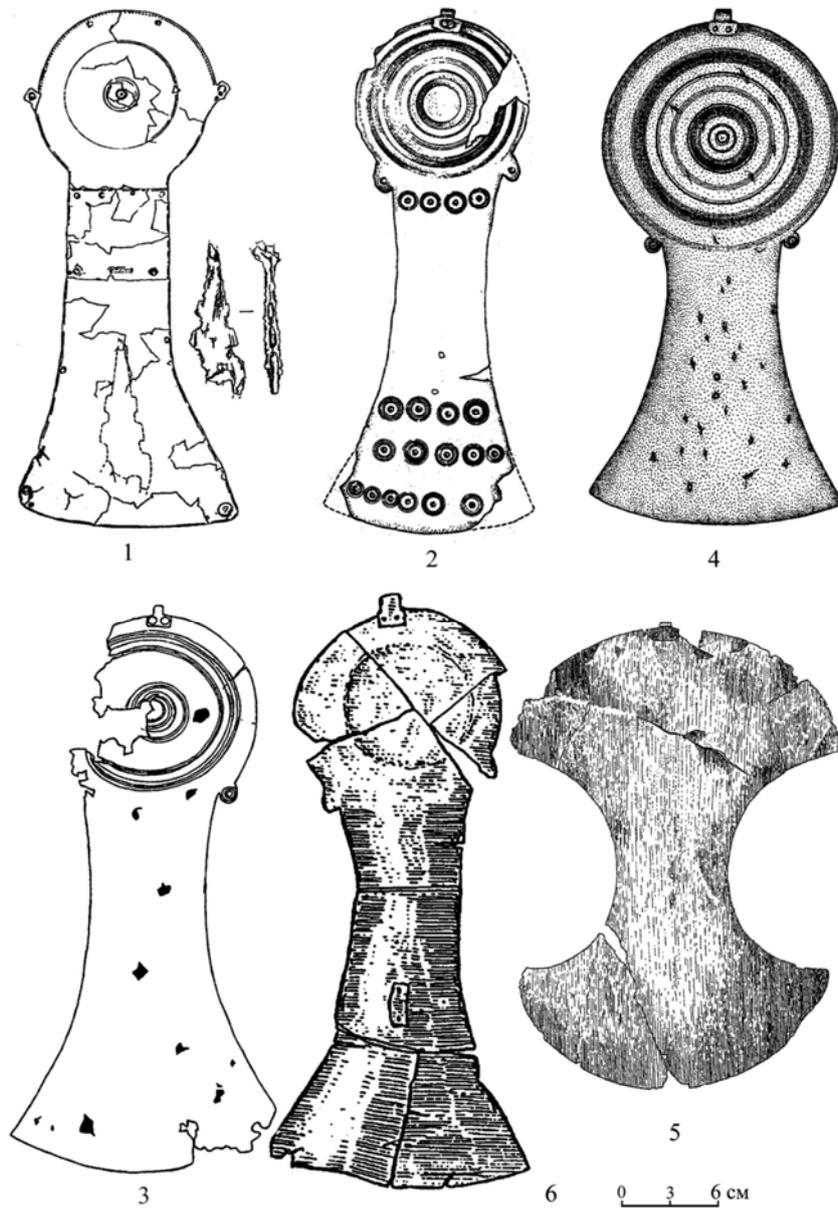


Fig. 3. The bronze frontlets

1. Tchisten'ke (after Yu. Zaytsev and S. Koltuhov); 2. Novolabinskaya (after B. Raev and G. Bepaly); 3. Tatarski (after A. Kudriavtsev et al.); 4-6. Kuban' region (after I. Marchenko and N. Limberis).

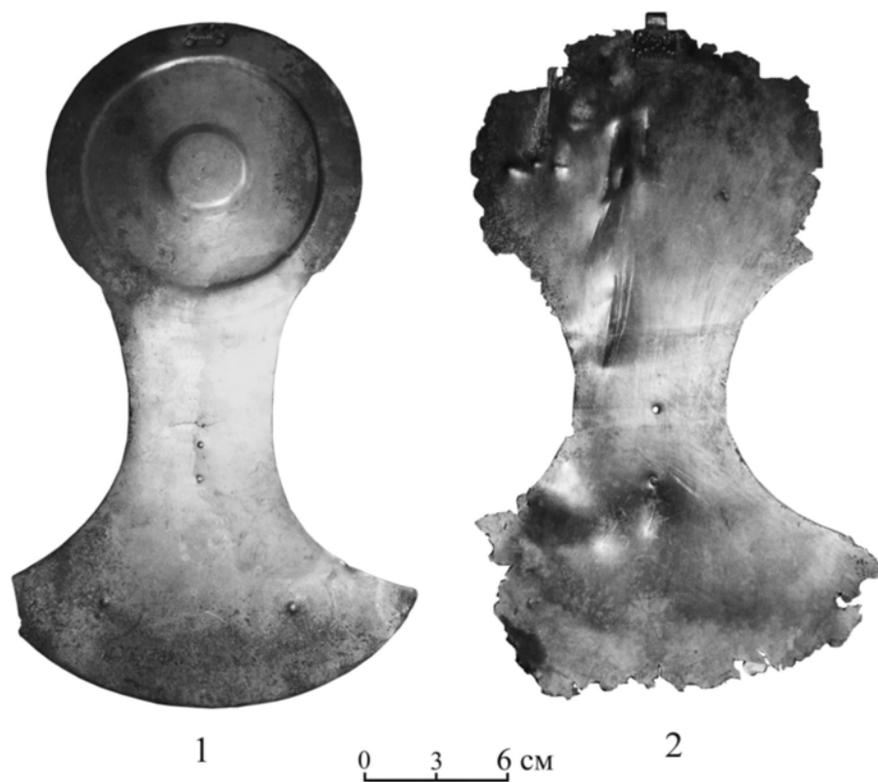


Fig. 4. The frontlets from Nikopol' (photo of O. Symonenko).

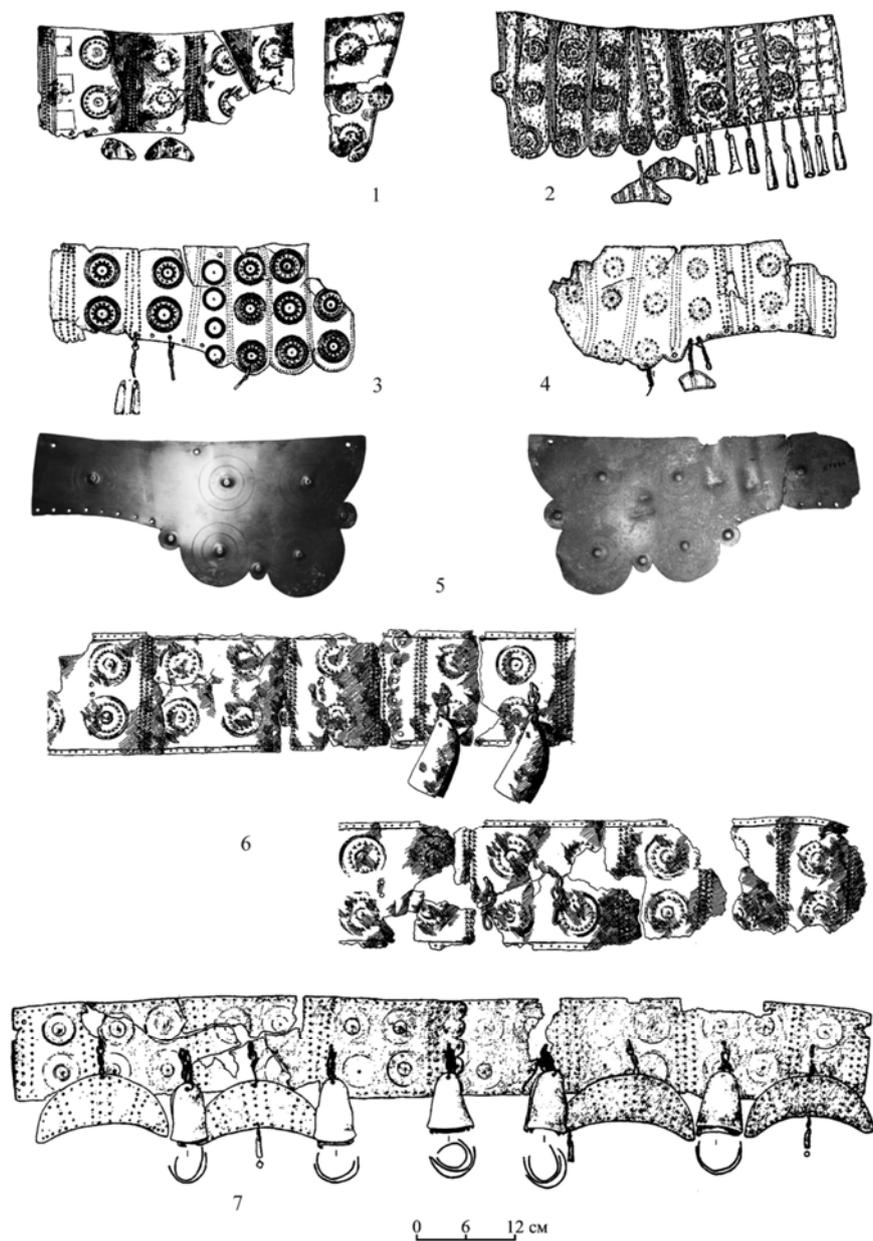


Fig. 5. The bronze breastplate sheets.

1,6. Vasyurina Gora (after M. Rostovtsev); 2. Tenginskaya (after E. Beglova); 3,4. Novolabinskaya (after B. Raev and G. Bepaly); 5. Nikopol' (photo of O. Symonenko); 7. Ostry (after N. Zarayskaya et al.).

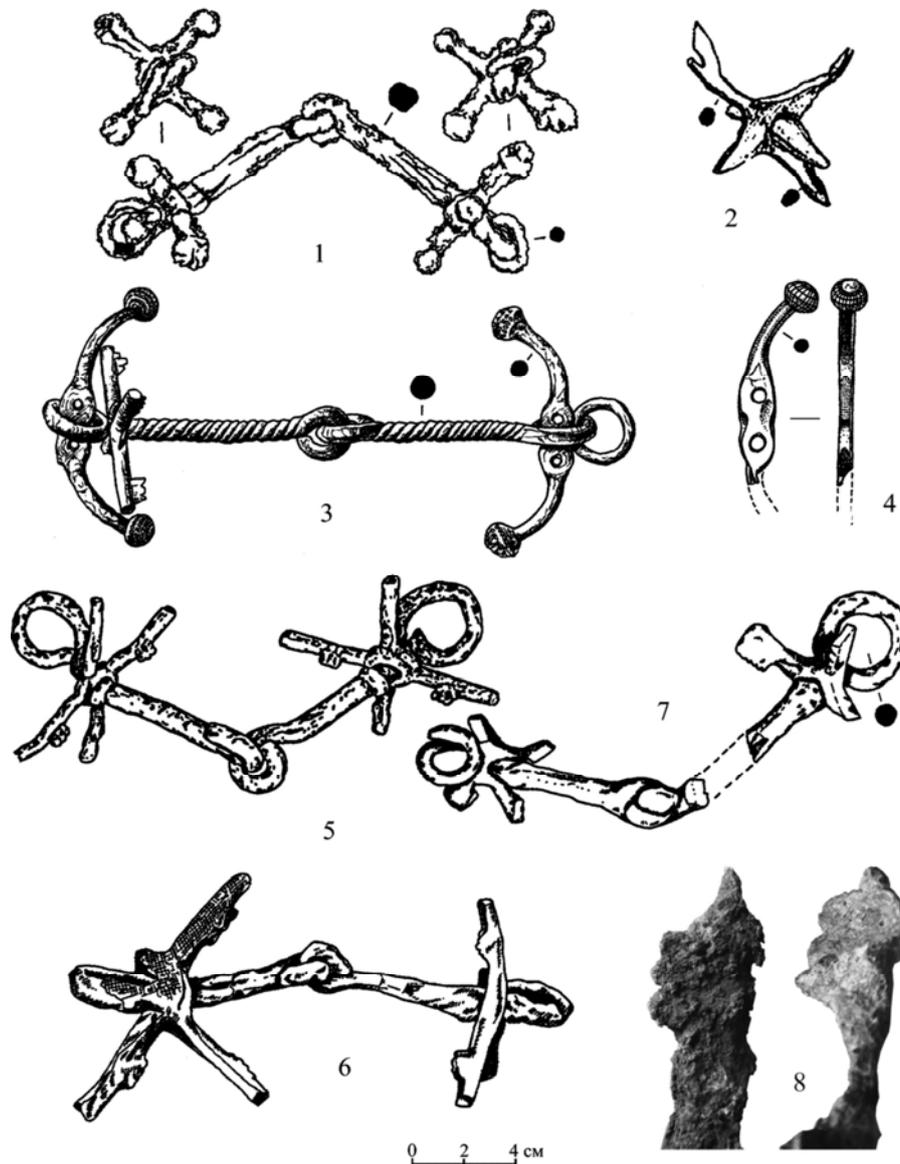


Fig.6. The harsh bits with cruciform mouth-pieces.

1. Tchisten'ke (after Yu. Zaytsev and S. Koltuhov); 2. Gāvani (after V. Sîrbu and N. Harțuche); 3,4. Vesela Dolyna (after E. Redina and O. Symonenko); 5. Tenginskaya (after E. Beglova); 6,7. Novolabinskaya (after B. Raev and G. Bspaly); 8. The teeth on the mouth-pieces (photo of O. Symonenko).

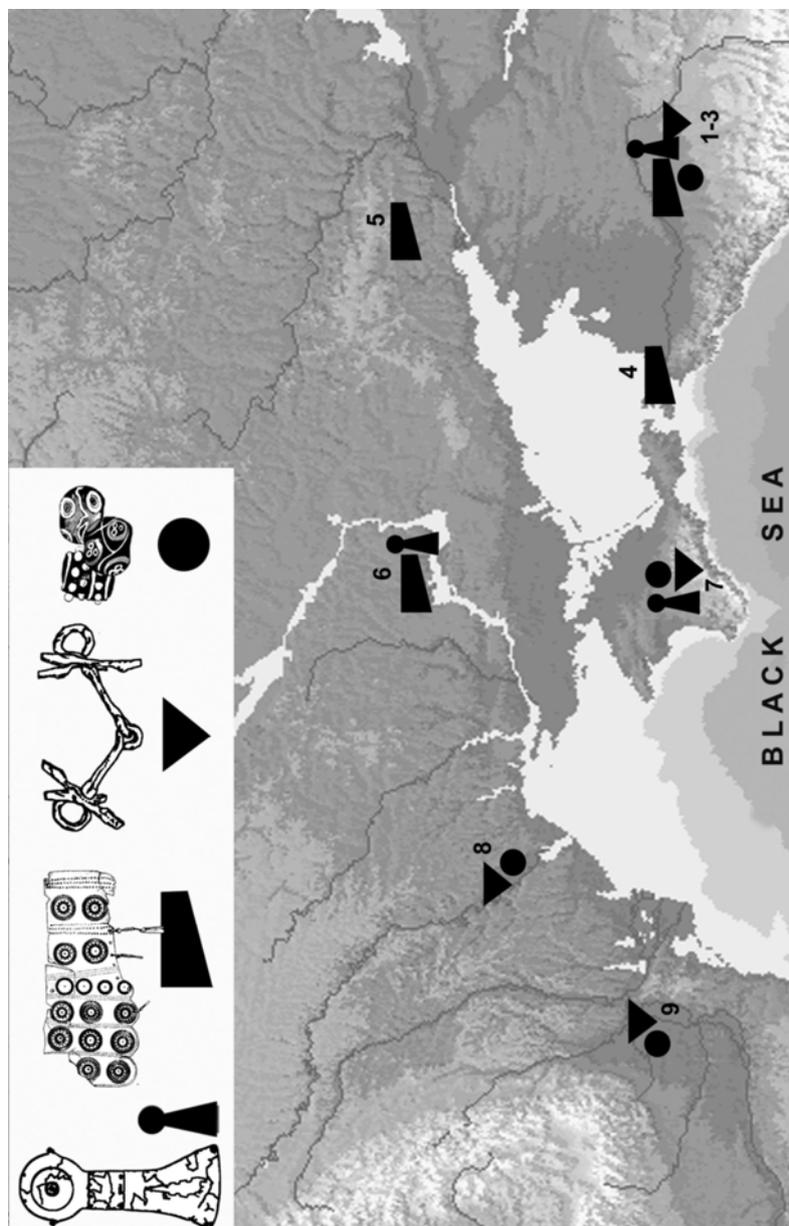


Fig.7. The assemblages with Northwest Caucasian harness of Novolabinskaya-Tenginskaya type.

1-3. Novolabinskaya, Tenginskaya, Sereginskaya; 4. Vasyurina Gora;  
5. Ostry; 6. Nikopol'; 7. Tchisten'ke; 8. Glinoe; 9. Gāvani.