

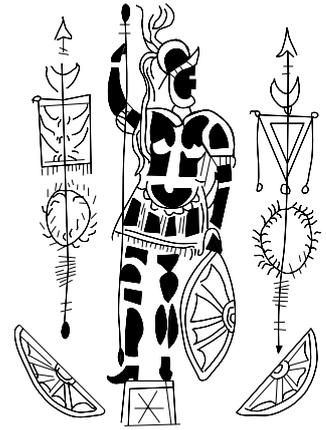
# Arma

## Newsletter of the Roman Military Equipment Conference

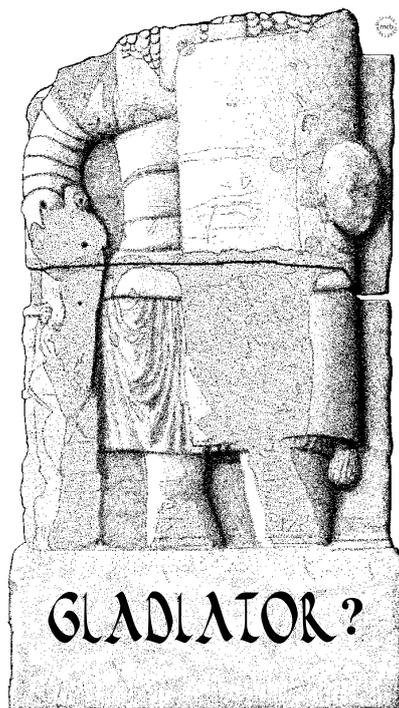
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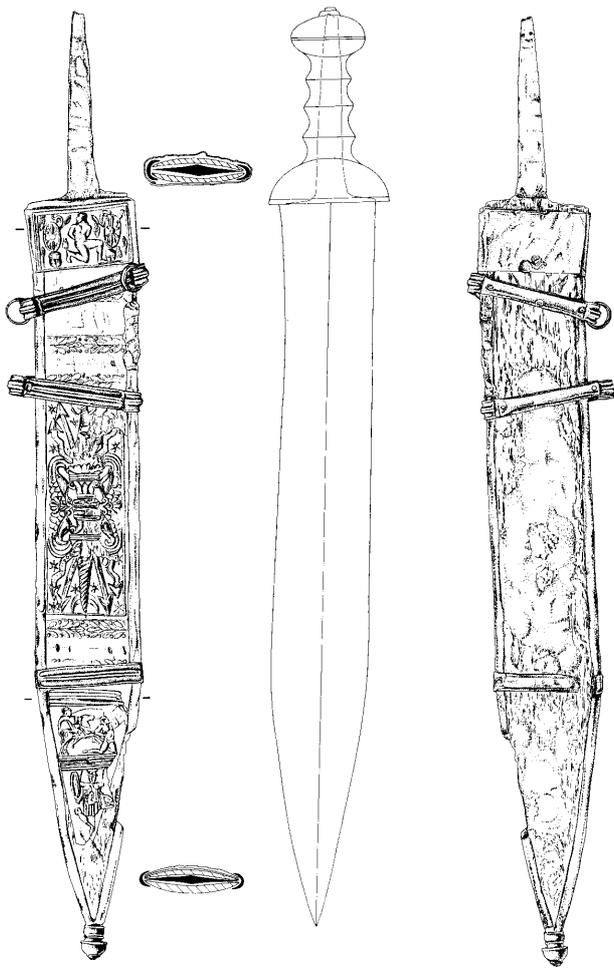


### CVSTOS ARMORVM

First, this issue is free to individual *Arma* subscribers. Why? Oh, call it whimsy on my part, if you like, perhaps the need to make amends for the increasingly tardy arrival of this newsletter. *Arma* is like one of those all-too-frequent episodes of a certain science fiction series, where the starship *Whatever* slips into a particularly sticky piece of the time-space continuum and watches time pass by at a different speed to itself. So it is that *Arma's* numbering and titular date (the one you are *supposed* to put in a reference, as opposed to the year in which it actually appears) have slipped serenely backwards. Hence this issue – which, as we have already established, is free to subscribers – covers two volumes and years (11/12 for 1999/2000) and thus warps itself through publication hyperspace into the immediate past. The first part of volume 13 (2001) will appear shortly after this... but then you have probably heard that one before.

There is a theme to this volume (apart from a degree of temporal uncertainty): antiquities. You will find a number of unprovenanced items of military equipment within the covers, some certain, some less so, but all lacking the context that archaeology could have given them. However, the absence of a provenance is not just a matter of an artefact being rendered stateless; it also loses credibility. This means that when something unusual comes along, you cannot be sure it is genuine until a similar piece has been excavated somewhere. For however convincing an antiquity may appear, there will always be a faker somewhere who can fool the specialist. So it is that we bring you one of a family of what are almost certainly fake pieces of military equipment ('almost certainly' because it is very difficult to *prove* satisfactorily that a good fake is just that, particularly when the craftsman takes the trouble to use ancient alloys).

We also have an up-to-date list of Roman military re-enactment groups (as up-to-date as such lists ever can be: which is not very...), should you feel the need to go and squeeze your body into a '*lorica segmentata*' (I fail to see the attraction), and some Roman military equipment from Russia. What more could you ask? Apart from promptitude, of course...



### The Wrong Way Round

Observant readers will have noticed that the illustration of the gladius and sheath from Vindonissa published in the last issue had something wrong with it. You have had a while to stare at it now, so it can be revealed that the back face of the scabbard has been reversed in publication, so that the corrected illustration should look more like the image above.

### Gladiator Or Not?

Shamelessly cashing in on the dregs of gladiator-fever, it is worth pointing out to readers who may not have seen it Jon Coulston's consideration of the sculpted armoured figure from Alba Iulia (Romania) in *Arma* 7 (1995). In that short article, the question of the status of the figure – was he a legionary or a gladiator? – was raised and it now looks as if a definitive answer can be supplied. The figure (see front cover) is depicted with a curved rectangular body shield, segmental body armour and an armguard. He is also shown to be wearing a sword scabbard on his left-hand hip: a sure sign that the sculpture dates to the 2nd or 3rd century and that the figure is not intended to be a gladiator, as gladiators are not depicted wearing sword scabbards. Or are they? Can any reader supply details of a *plausible* depiction of a gladiator with such a scabbard?

### Developments at JRMES

Increasing delays in the appearance of the *Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies* (nearly nine months in the case of volume 8) have led the editorial board to change publishers for volume 9 and subsequent volumes. The journal will continue to be distributed by Oxbow Books. Volume 9 (a miscellaneous one) was published on December 22nd 2000. Volume 10 (the Mainz ROMEC, concentrating on the equipment of the Later Empire) will be available from the beginning of August, and then volume 11 (the South Shields ROMEC on reconstruction, re-enactment, and experimental archaeology) will follow before the end of 2001.

Meanwhile, the *JRMES* website can now be reached at [www.jrmes.org](http://www.jrmes.org) and the consolidated index that can be found there continues to grow (by the end of July, it should include volume 10) and is downloadable as a PDF.

Oxbow Books can be contacted at Park End Place, Oxford OX1 1HN, UK (Tel: +44 (0)1865 241249, Fax: 01865 794449, Email [oxbow@oxbowbooks.com](mailto:oxbow@oxbowbooks.com)) with a website at [www.oxbowbooks.com](http://www.oxbowbooks.com) or in the USA as The David Brown Book Company, PO Box 511, Oakville, CT 06779, USA (Tel: +1 860-945-9329, Fax: +1 860-945-9468, Email: [david.brown.bk.co@snet.net](mailto:david.brown.bk.co@snet.net)).

### New Books

A new volume of the catalogue of the Guttman collection has been published, much of which – in keeping with the theme of this issue – has been acquired on the antiquities market and lacks anything except the vaguest of provenances. It has to be said that some of the helmets will, at the very least, cause the reader to cock an eyebrow.

Junkelmann, M. 2000: *Römische Helme*. Band VIII Sammlung Axel Guttman, Mainz

More straightforward, and less controversial, is this welcome new catalogue of decorated dagger scabbards.

Obmann, J. 2000: *Studien zu römischen Dolchscheiden des 1. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. Archäologische Zeugnisse und bildliche Überlieferung*. Kölner Studien zur Archäologie der Römischen Provinzen 4, Rahden

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## Just Another Cheekpiece?

M.C. Bishop

This short note concerns itself with a copper alloy helmet cheekpiece (Fig.1), said to have been recovered from the Thames near Battersea and kindly brought to the attention of the writer by Mr M. Hardy.

The object retains a brassy patination with blackish areas, similar to other more familiar finds from the Thames.

No corrosion products are present on the item. The object measures 169mm high, 109mm wide, and is c.1.5mm thick in the centre and c.2mm at the edges, where it has been doubled over. The doubling or rolling (which averages about 3mm in width) is present all the way round the cheekpiece (except for the top hinge area) and had been carefully flattened (probably by hammering), the marks of this process being visible on the front of the object. There is a single hole near the centre of the frontal jaw lobe, in the customary place for a chin fastening ring and rivet. The splaying of the metal caused by the piercing of this hole has been carefully hammered flat on the inside (thus it appears to have been pierced from the outside). The cheekpiece retains a gentle curvature between the ear/cheekbone line and the base of the jaw, whilst there is a slight out-turned flange up to 8mm wide along the lower

edge. The cheekbone lobe is higher than the highest point of the rear jaw flange. No traces of tinning or silvering are evident. There are two folds near the top of the object which appear to have been flattened out, perhaps since discovery. Tears in the metal, together with abrasion marks on the inside of the plate, may have been caused during this process. Another recent modification may be the hinge tube at the top of the cheekpiece, which appears to have been opened out and then re-rolled to a much smaller diameter (perhaps in imitation of the doubled over edges of the rest of the plate). There are diagonal scratches on the inner face in the vicinity of the fastening hole and these too may be modern (perhaps the result of abrasive cleaning). Occasional dimpling over the whole area of the cheekpiece (exclusively from the inside towards the exterior) might be the result of over-enthusiastic finishing by the object's manufacturer, but it is not inconceivable that these too have a recent origin.

The technique of rolling the edges of the cheekpiece is not often found, but can be paralleled. Three recently-published examples from Xanten exhibit exactly the same method of edging.<sup>1</sup> The rolling of the edges of plate can of course be seen on '*lorica segmentata*', where the neck opening and the topmost girthplate beneath the arm were customarily rolled.<sup>2</sup>

It was most common to edge a cheekpiece (whether iron or copper alloy) with copper alloy piping. Although it may appear to be for decorative purposes, it had an entirely practical function: to hide the crude nature of the edges of many cheekpieces. Helmets like the Ossario example from the Dominican Republic (copper alloy)<sup>3</sup> show just how rough the edges of such pieces could be.

In form, the cheekpiece under consideration here most closely resembles an example from Buderich and one attached to a helmet from the Rhine at Mainz, both defined by Robinson as belonging to his Auxiliary Infantry group.<sup>4</sup> The Buderich piece has a larger cheekbone lobe than the Battersea cheekpiece, but otherwise shows a number of points of similarity in its simplicity and the slight out-turned flange along the jawline. However, in outline the Battersea piece most closely resembles one of Robinson's Imperial-Italic group of cheekpieces, also from the Rhine at Mainz.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. SCHALLES & SCHREITER, 1993, Taf.26,Mil.10–11; 27,Mil.13.
2. ROBINSON, 1975, 177.
3. BENNETT, 1989.
4. ROBINSON, 1975, 85, Pls.229–30, 235–6.
5. ROBINSON, 1975, 68–70, Pls.232.

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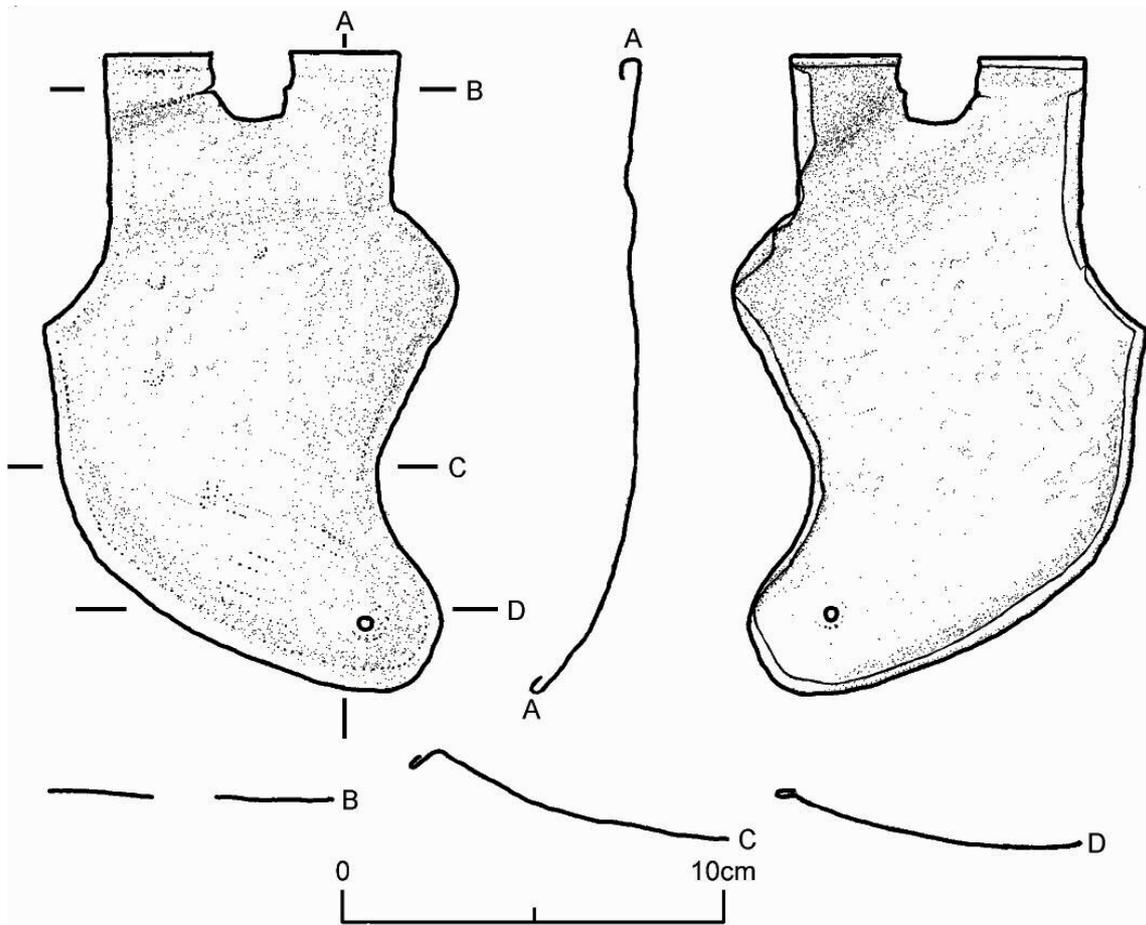


Fig 1: Cheekpiece reported to have been found at Battersea, London (scale 1:2)

ROBINSON 1975: Robinson, H.R., *The Armour of Imperial Rome*, London

SCHALLES & SCHREITER 1993: Schalles, H.-J. and Schreiter, C., *Geschichte aus dem Kies. Neue Funde aus dem Alten Rhein bei Xanten*, Xantener Berichte 3, Köln

### **A New 3rd-Century Dagger Scabbard, or a Good Fake?**

*M.C. Bishop*

The discovery of a new dagger scabbard from Britain would be worthy of comment in itself, if for no other reason than that they are rare objects in this country. It would be even more significant if it were of a 3rd-century type and most surprising if it were of such a unique and unprecedented form. Unfortunately, the object in question does not come from a sound archaeological context, but from the antiquities market, which, if genuine, would inevitably diminish its worth. The provenance was reported to the purchaser as being in the region of Hadrian's Wall and that the object was discovered in the 1950s, but in the absence of proof such information is usually next-to-useless. Throughout the following consideration of the artefact, emphasis will be laid upon testing its authenticity.

### **Description**

The sheath is made of copper alloy with a dark (although in parts still brassy) patina. There is scarcely any corrosion visible, although the object has apparently been cleaned in recent times. It has been formed from two sheets of metal, the rear being fastened to the front by means of overlapping its edges to form, effectively, an imitation of guttering. The object is elliptical in cross-section with the edges meeting at an extremely acute angle. The tip of the scabbard is missing and shows signs of having been removed by cutting.

The rear face of the object is unadorned, but retains faint dimpling reminiscent of that noted on the Battersea cheekpiece.<sup>1</sup> This is not a commonly-observed characteristic of Roman worked sheet copper alloy in this writer's experience, so may be due to similar depositional circumstances, or may perhaps be a sign of production by the same hand (unlikely in the case of the object being genuine), or of the use of a similar, but rare, technique of finishing the metal.

The front face is decorated with two cutouts. The uppermost, slightly off-centre and just below the top pair of suspension rings is cruciform, with rounded lobes forming the four arms of the cross. The whole upper aperture is surrounded by simple punctum beading, punched through from the rear of the face. The lower opening reflects the triangular openings of other dagger scabbards, but each of



Fig.1: The 'new' copper alloy dagger scabbard (scale 1:2)

its corners is filled with a lobe. Each of these lobes was further adorned by the addition of a concave riveted roundel, two of which survive. The location of the missing roundel shows how the metal was raised into a hollow ring, upon which the roundel would sit. Two more such roundels are to be found at either side of the mouth of the scabbard, similarly seated and riveted. Damage has been sustained by the front plate at the point (where it terminates some 10mm above the lowest point of the rear plate), in one corner of the lower aperture (near the missing moulded terminal), and at one edge of the top opening.

The scabbard was suspended by means of four suspension rings. Each copper-alloy ring is a simple oval loop, sub-circular in section, and 3mm thick. It is not clear how the rings were formed: if they were made of wire, no obvious joints are visible, and it is not inconceivable that they were formed by stamping, in a similar way to that observed in mail rings.<sup>2</sup> The rings are fastened to the scabbard by a simple rectangular plate, held to the doubled-over edge of the rear plate, by a pair of small dome-headed rivets. All of the rings are still articulated and only one of the rivets is missing, on that upper suspension

ring closest to the damage already noted to the upper aperture of the front face.

L: 244mm; Max. W of body: 87mm; W at mouth: 83mm; Max. Th: 15mm; Th. of front face: 0.5mm; Th of rear face: 0.5mm; D. Roundels: 17-19mm; D. rivet heads: 3mm; H suspension rings: 15-16mm; W suspension rings: 12-13mm.

## Discussion

Examples of this type of dagger scabbard are best-known from the hoard from Künzing, although these were exclusively made of iron.<sup>3</sup> Further examples have come from Speyer and Tuchyna, whilst Britain has produced the exceptional object from Cophthall Court in London.<sup>4</sup> The pieces from Künzing, Tuchyna, and London are all decorated in a similar way, with beading parallel with the edge of the scabbard, on those sections between the cutouts. The Cophthall Court, Speyer, and Künzing examples also feature a single rivet attaching the suspension ring supports. Likewise, they are characterised by the front plate wrapping around the back and being rounded at the edges.

There are thus a number of points of divergence between the known dagger scabbards and the object under consideration here. These can usefully be summarised as follows:

- Most known examples are of iron (not copper alloy)
- Beaded decoration runs mainly parallel with the edges of the sheath (not around one of the cutouts)
- The front face of the sheath wraps around the rear (not the rear around the front in imitation of binding)
- The edge of the scabbard is rounded (not meeting at an acute angle).

Our scabbard would thus appear to be outside the tradition of later dagger sheaths otherwise known. This inevitably leads on to considerations of authenticity: is the object an example of a previously unencountered type (which is not, of itself, implausible), or is it a fake?

## Conclusions

There is no doubt that this is an extremely interesting object. If genuine – and there are many indications (quality of workmanship and materials used, lack of 'telepathy' with existing artefacts) that it could be – then it is an important addition to the dagger scabbards already known. If not, then it is an extremely clever fake which would be worthy of being considered as a work of art in its own right.

The quality of workmanship demonstrates the usual Roman absence of symmetry and imperfection of finish, most notably the rough edges of the cutouts. One feature of modern replicas of Roman military equipment is that most craftsmen find it extremely difficult to make artefacts as badly as the Romans did: the temptation to do one's best is obviously overwhelming. The sheet metal used in the construction of the dagger scabbard is of a thickness and irregularity that are highly reminiscent of Roman workmanship. One of the strongest arguments in favour of the authenticity of the weapon might be the failure of its manufacturer to ape features of known genuine scabbards.

However, until such time as part or all of a similar object was excavated from a soundly dated archaeological context (or recognised in a museum collection as coming from such a provenance), an element of caution in accepting the authenticity of the object would be essential.

Some time after this object was brought to the attention of the writer, he was shown a photograph of a helmet, decorated in a similar style, but constructed with a separate bowl and neckguard, riveted together. This, together with a Pompeii-type scabbard constructed in a similar fashion to the dagger sheath, and more cheekpieces with folded-over edges, gave an indication that something was wrong. One unique, unparalleled item (the dagger scabbard) would be interesting, a second (the scabbard) unlikely, but a third (the helmet) simply suspicious. These items are undoubtedly evidence of an extremely talented craftsman at work, but he (or she) is modern and not Roman.

## Notes

1. BISHOP 1999/2000.
2. SIM 1997, 371.
3. SCHÖNBERGER & HERMANN 1967-68, 57, 60-1, Figs.18, 21-3; HERRMANN 1969, 133, Fig.3.
4. Speyer: AuhV III.V.Taf.V,2; Tuchyna: KREKOVIC 1994, Fig.7,13; Copthall Court: MERRIFIELD 1965, Pl.99.

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## Roman Military Re-Enactment Groups 2001

There has never been so many legions on the face of the planet. Admittedly, some only have a few members, but they all need more – and if you want to join one, here are the details organized geographically (not much point in joining one in Russia – yes, there is a legion there – if you live in California, is there?). The information here is derived from a variety of sources (but using the website of *legio XX* in the USA – <http://www.larp.com/legioxx/> –

as a starting-point), all of which ultimately derive it from others. This has been compiled prior to updating the Information section (amongst many others) of *Armamentarium* (<http://museums.ncl.ac.uk/archive/arma/>).

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## *On the problems of Roman-type Swords in the Territory of the Former Soviet Union and Modern Russia*

*Andrei Negin*

Finds of Roman equipment from the territory of the former Soviet Union and modern Russia are very rare. Specimens of Roman swords were mostly found in the territory of the so-called “Chernyakhovskaya Culture” (named after the village of Chernyakhov where the first monument was found). The area of Chernyakhov’s culture extends up to the Pripiat River in the north, to the Seversky Donets river in the east, to the Danube river in the south, and to the mountain ranges of the Southern Carpathians in the central part of modern Romania in the west. As a rule, monuments of this Culture are found not far from the ancient cities of the Northern Black Sea area. In the 20s of the 20th century Chernyakhov’s culture was defined as one with Roman influences. The presence of Roman weapons and panoply in this territory can be explained by the settlement of retired soldiers and beneficiaries that served earlier on the Danube Limes.<sup>1</sup> Phracians and first of all Odrises, recruited from the frontier regions, carried the imperial relics with them while returning back to the native land and handed them down.

On the left bank territory of the Dnieper river only one specimen of the sword of that time (1st–4th centuries AD) was known up to our days (burial No.86 of the Kompanievsky burial that was situated at the confluence of the Psla and Vorskla rivers).

One more sword was found accidentally after a field was ploughed up at the northwestern outskirts of Kolomak settlement in Kharkov region in 1980. Earlier the typical Chernyakhov’s ceramics were gathered in this place and two coins attributed to the Emperor Maximian. A scale from the fire can be noticed on this sword and its blade was curved twice originally. The fact testified that the sword was most probably found in the

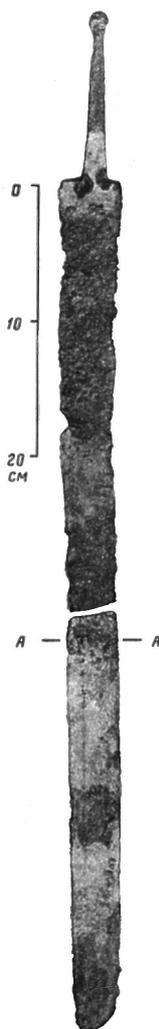


Fig. 1: The Kolomak sword.

place of the destroyed burial with the ritual of corpse burning. Unfortunately, the schoolboy who found it did not remember the exact place of this find, besides which he tried to straighten the sword and, as a result, the sword was broken into two parts.

The sword (Fig. 1) is double-edged, its total length is 720 mm, the sword's blade is 610 mm and it has some asymmetry with respect to the handle. Sizes of the ledges separating the handle from the blade are not equal: one ledge is 15 mm and the other is 8 mm. The width of the blade at the foot of the handle is 43 mm. The handle's length is 120 mm. It is made in the pivot form, rectangular in the section and narrowing to its end with a typical top as a small ball at the end.

Similar finds can be seen in Poland among the swords of the 3rd–4th centuries AD, well-known there in monuments of the Przeworska Culture.<sup>2</sup> The similar swords of the late Roman period are often encountered in the territory of Germany.<sup>3</sup>

The Roman sword of the second half of the 4th century AD is particularly close to our one from a burial in Suwalkovsky district of Poland.<sup>4</sup> The same type of sword was also revealed in the military burial from Lyon, dated by *denarii* of Septimius Severus to the year AD 197. The length of this blade is about 65 cm.<sup>5</sup>

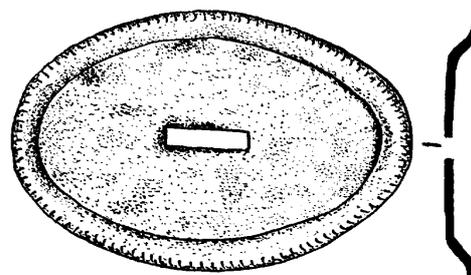


Fig. 2: Bronze plate from Tenginskaya (scale 2:3).

A sample was taken from the cross-section of the Kolomak blade close to the break for metallographic analysis. The maximum thickness of the blade, where the test was taken, is 3.5 mm. The minimum thickness is 1.8 mm (it is taken at the foot of the bow-shaped hollow, which is not deep. The hollow's width is 20 mm).

The metallographic test revealed that the sword is made out of a well-forged strip of metal. The microstructure of the sword consists of ferrite: here and there traces of perlite. The iron's microhardness is not high and it oscillates within the range of 116–170 kg/mm<sup>2</sup>. Slag was not revealed.

From the provincial Roman swords of the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD, three swords have been found in the territory of the Western Ukraine. There are also separate fragments of swords. So, in Summer 1995 an oval bronze plate was discovered when a burial ground (3rd century BC to the 1st century AD) was investigated. The burial No. 57 was situated in the western outskirts of Tenginskaya stanitsa (Cossack village) in Ust'-Labinsk district of Krasnodar region. Originally the function of this plate was not clear enough. The burial this plate was found in belonged to a child of 4–8 years of age. The grave pit was not observed.

The edge of the plate (Fig. 2) was bent back, decorated with incisions. In the center of the plate there is a narrow rectangular hole with the marks of wear. The length of the plate is 83 mm, the width is 54 mm, the sizes of the hole are 20 × 5 mm.

The search for analogies led to the conviction that the plate is none other than part of a Roman sword (Figs. 3–4). As is known, the Roman swords of the first centuries AD often had a wooden handguard and handgrip. Sometimes, this wooden construction was hafted onto the iron handle of a sword. Similar plates were found at the Saalburg, Germany, dated to the end of the 2nd century AD.<sup>6</sup> A bronze dagger handguard from Zugmantel has a similar form and date. The sword from Lyon, mentioned above, had the same type of copper oval plate with a turned-up edge, having the maximum length of 7.5 cm.<sup>7</sup> And finally, the handguard on the "Sword of Tiberius" in the British Museum can be considered as the nearest analogy to the Tenginskaya plate (although the plate of the "Sword of Tiberius" has no engraved decoration).

Besides swords from the territory of the former U.S.S.R., there were also finds of other components of Roman equipment. Not far from the Cossack village of Tenginskaya, mentioned above, 10 km to the east, in the

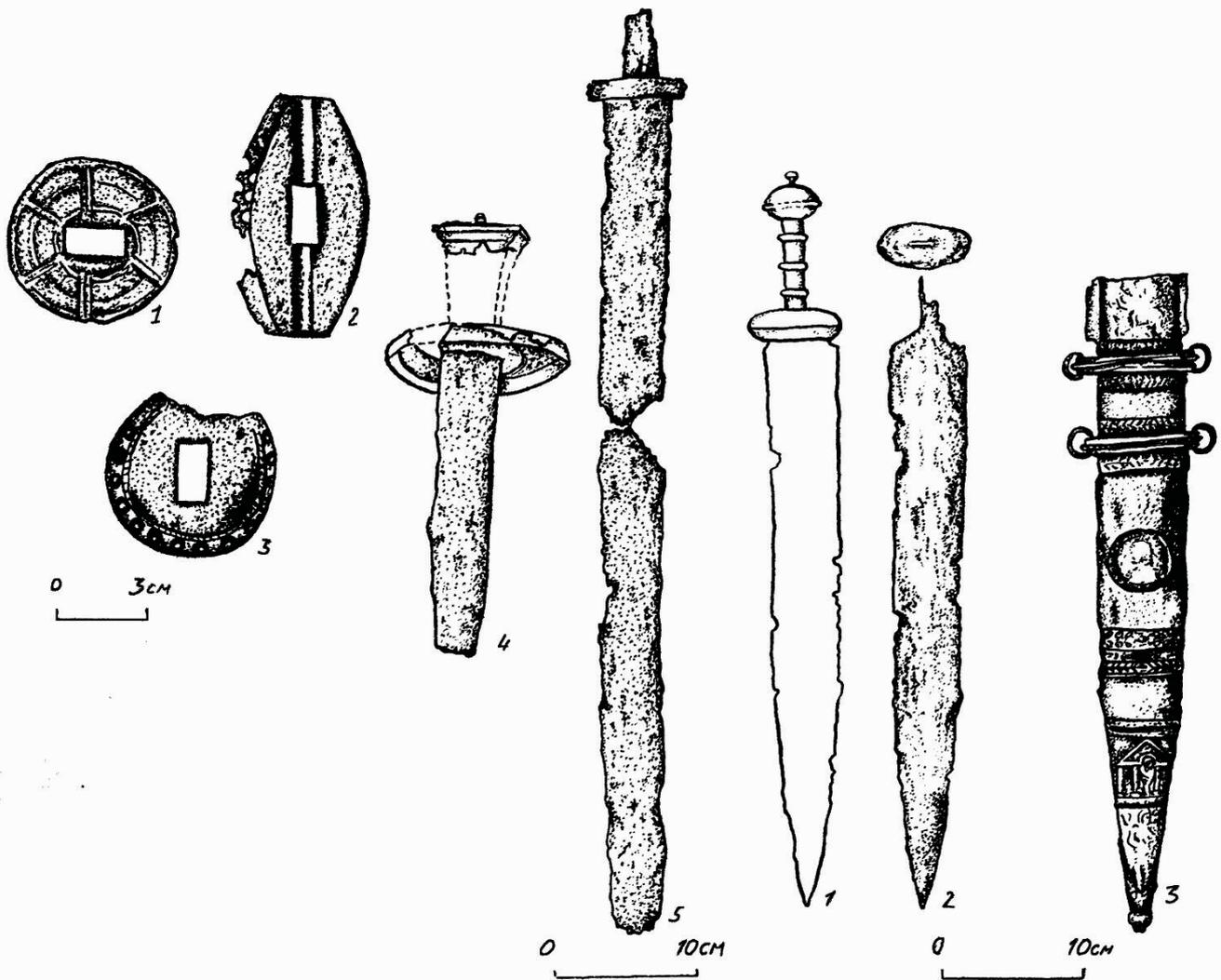


Fig.3: Details of the handguards of Roman swords and daggers. 1: National Museum Copenhagen; 2: Saalburg; 3: Denmark; 4: Zugmantel; 5: Lyon.

Fig.4: 1 – Reconstruction of the gladius from the ‘Sword of Tiberius’ (after Connolly); 2–3 – the ‘Sword of Tiberius’ in the British Museum.

Vozdvizhenskaya stanitsa, there was found a Roman *pilum* (1st century BC–1st century AD) – the top of a Roman standard from burial mound No. 15 (burial mounds of the so-called “Gold Cemetery” near the Tiflisskaya stanitsa on the right bank of the Kuban river).<sup>8</sup> Also, two Italian helmets of Montefortino type have been found recently over the Kuban in burials near the Vladimirskaia and Sereginskaya settlements. They are dated from the end of the 1st century BC to the very beginning of 1st century AD.<sup>9</sup> An Imperial-Gallic type helmet dated to the middle and the second half of the 1st century AD, was found near the town of Sochi.<sup>10</sup>

Roman soldiers have never been to all the places of finds mentioned above. It means that the components of the Roman panoply could get there only as a result of the widespread Roman import.

Summing up, we can confidently say that the finds potential is not exhausted yet, because even the distribution places of the Roman garrisons have not been investigated completely yet – for instance, in Khersonesus (now

Sevastopol: *vexillatio* of *legio XI Claudia* in the mid-2nd to mid-3rd centuries AD). There are some places where a lot of finds can be expected in legionary’s fortress and *canabae* of the Dioskurius (Sebastopolis – now Sukhumi, Olbia), Pitiunt (Pitsunda), and Olvia (Borisfen).

#### NOTES

1. NEGIN n.d., 97.
2. KOSTRZEWSKI et al 1965, 273, fig. 95; p. 8, fig. 29.
3. JAHN, 1916, 127, fig.145.
4. WIELOWIEJSKI, 1976, fig.30, 31.
5. WUILLEUMIER, 1950, 146, fig.1.
6. OLDENSTEIN, 1977, 88, Katalog Taf.9,1.
7. WUILLEUMIER, 1950, 146, 147, fig.1.
8. KROPOTKIN, 1970, 124; GUSHCHINA & ZASETSKAYA, 1994, 58 No.269, table 29.
9. BERLIZOV et al, 1995, 122,127. table 45, 51; RAEV et al, 1990, 132 No.12, fig.37, 2.
10. SUDAREV, 1991, 143–5, fig.1.

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