Interpretation of a Group of Archaeological Sites in the Vicinity of Tauric Chersonesos

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The study of the characteristics of the initial period of Greek settlement on the Herakleian peninsula represents one of the principal aims concerned directly with some peculiarities in the earliest history of the Chersonesean polis. These studies were commenced by S.F. Strželeckij,¹ with whom A.N. Ščeglov has been working for many years. It was Ščeglov who initiated the further and more detailed study of various sites of the pre-Greek settlement on the Herakleian peninsula, and formulated and successfully solved an entire complex of problems related to this subject. From his pen have come a number of fundamental works devoted to the character of the Graeco-barbarian contacts, and the analysis of these provided the basis for building a model of the stage-by-stage Greek occupation of agricultural lands in the neighbourhood of Chersonesos. A chronology of this process was proposed, and well-founded conclusions were drawn as to the specific features of the relations between Doric Greeks and the bearers of the Kizil-Koba archaeological culture – who were the Taurians of the written sources – during the period of the foundation and the earliest stages of the existence of Chersonesos.² It may be said without exaggeration that the results achieved by A.N. Ščeglov in this field represent a massive contribution to our science in the second half of the 20th century, and he may now state, with full justification: feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.

However, archaeological science is never static. The conclusions, which seem to have been already well-established, are actually in constant need of correction or refinement on the basis of a more thorough examination of the various sources, first and foremost, the archaeological evidence, which is of principal value in studies of Graeco-barbarian contacts in western Taurica. The treatment of this evidence is somewhat complicated and involves certain difficulties. Its interpretation sometimes entails a degree of ambiguity. Moreover, archaeological evidence, unfortunately, has its limits, which are highly undesirable to overstep when reconstructing historical events. Therefore, a scrupulous analysis of the archaeological materials is the first and perhaps the most important stage of a historical and archaeological investigation. This fact has been brilliantly demonstrated in the works of Ščeglov and his followers.³

Moreover, the archaeological evidence used as a basis for scientific hypotheses and historical reconstructions does not always answer to the present-day methodological requirements. Occasionally rather careless and superficial archaeological investigations and subsequent analysis have led to various unfortunate mistakes. That is why the most concentrated attention must be paid to such facts, and such conclusions must be corrected as early as possible. It is time to look around, to examine what has been done and how, and to lay down a plan for future work, in the course of which, we are certain, A.N. Ščeglov will achieve many new results and discoveries.

The collection of papers of the 1st All-Union Symposium on the Ancient History of the Black Sea Region in Tskhaltubo in 1977 devoted to different problems of the Greek colonisation on the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea contains *inter alia* O.Ja. Savelja's article about Greco-barbarian relations in south-western Crimea in the 6th-4th century BC. With reference to the results of his excavations in the neighbourhood of Chersonesos, Savelja wrote:

"It is of note also that the settlements [i.e. those of the barbarian population – V.Z & E.K] of the 4th and 3rd century BC were not situated nearer than 1-1.5 km from the boundary of that part of the Herakleian peninsula which was regularly divided into farm plots. In other words, the topographical belt of the settlements is distinctly linked to the system of farm plots, the arrangement of the settlements suggesting a obligatory element in the selection of their location, though also certain ecological principles in the location of these settlements are consistent with those peculiar to Kizil-Koba and late Scythian sites in southwestern Crimea. It seems that the settlements of the 4th-3rd century BC around the Herakleian peninsula were part of the structure of the agrarian territory of Chersonesos in south-western Crimea, along with the territory divided into plots and various categories of the unsettled lands of the city's community which lay between the system of plots and the belt of settlements. The composition of the evidence obtained from excavations and archaeological surveys suggests that ethnically the population of these settlements was fairly heterogeneous. Most probably this population may be considered as dependent and halfdependent. A similar model of the inclusion of the indigenous population into the economical and social structures of a polis was peculiar particularly to the mother country of Chersonesos, Herakleia Pontike".4

This undoubtedly interesting conclusion was immediately accepted by the overwhelming majority of scholars and was included as an incontestable fact in many general and more specialized works on the archaeology and history of the Classical period in the northern Black Sea area.⁵ Based on this thesis and following D. Pippidi, one of the present authors has assumed that a form of dependence, similar to that of the helot system, existed in Chersonesos in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.⁶

However, after the publication of Savelja's article, the fact remained overlooked that to confirm this obviously very important statement he neglected to refer to any detailed examination of the archaeological evidence or to its full-scale publications; rather he proceeds from his own suppositions and some preliminary communication on the excavations in which the chain of the Kizil-Koba sites near the Sapun-Gora mountain received only a brief mention.⁷ This fact has induced us to examine the reports about the excavations mentioned above, which are now kept in the archives of the National Preserve "Tauric Chersonesos" and in the Institute of Archaeology, the National Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, in a belated attempt to verify what was actually the basis for the conclusion which unfortunately with only rare exceptions⁸ has been considered an axiom for many years.

The gathering of artefacts and the undertaking of archaeological excavations in the locality near Sapun-Gora were initiated by L.N. Solov'ev as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. The evidence obtained, however, was published by S.F. Strželeckij much later.9 Half a century further on, it became possible for the Preserve of Chersonesos to resume regular archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Sapun-Gora directed by O.Ja. Savelja. During the period 1973-1974, the gathering of surface materials and preliminary trenching were undertaken. This made it possible to map about 30 sites in this region with finds of artefacts, trace several ancient rural houses on the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora, and to conjecture the existence of a number of settlements near the village of Oktjabr'skoe and in the uročišče (isolated wood) of Kavkaz.¹⁰ Since the territory adjoining the Sapun-Gora was devastated during World War II, no investigations of the stratigraphy of its cultural layers were conducted, and thus the dating of the archaeological materials from them was of a very general nature. Nevertheless, this fact has not prevented Savelja from presuming the existence of about 19 settlements and two cemeteries within the confines of this relatively small area. Fourteen of those sites were interpreted as belonging to the Kizil-Koba culture and were dated on the basis of the surface finds to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.¹¹ In addition "clearing of the walls and bottom of one isolated bomb-crater of the war period has been carried out in order to obtain some materials for dating the site and preliminary information on its stratigraphy".¹² During the excavations of 1974, a number of fairly small areas at the settlements situated near the village of Oktjabr'skoe and in the uročišče of Kavkaz were investigated.¹³ The reports of 1973-1974 contain neither any description of the technique in which the excavations were conducted nor their sequence, and the illustrative material appended to them is very scanty.



Fig. 1. Map of archaeological sites in the eastern reaches of the Herakleian peninsula according to A.N Ščeglov (1981, 215).

In 1978 and 1979, the excavations in the region of Sapun-Gora were resumed at a settlement of the Kizil-Koba culture near the village of Oktjabr'skoe. Discovered in the course of the excavation were a wine-pressing platform cut in the rock with a *tarapan* (pressing stone), as well as several stone socles of different periods and two later burials. In addition, a few household pits were cleared, and a fragment of a wall was excavated in the southern part of the settlement. Outside the settlement, a cremation burial was discovered.¹⁴

In 1986 the excavations near Oktjabr'skoe were continued. This season saw the unearthing of the remains of a winery,¹⁵ several rooms which belonged to the settlement of the barbarian population, and a Greek stone structure.¹⁶ In 1987, investigations were conducted in the *uročišče* of Taš-Kulle on Sapun-Gora.¹⁷ During these surveys and excavations no signs of any barbarian settlement were found, but the remains of various Greek structures – towers and buildings – were discovered. In 1989, archaeological studies of the region of Sapun-Gora were conducted on the territory of the "Energetik" gardening co-operative society. No structural remains were discovered during this excavation. The clearing of a few household pits of different periods, however, enabled the excavators to posit the existence of a settlement, which was given the name "Energetik".¹⁸

Thus, on the basis of the evidence from O.Ja. Savelja's reports, it seems reasonable to discuss only the following settlements and burials of the Kizil-Koba culture recorded and investigated in the region of Sapun-Gora:



Fig. 2. Map of archaeological sites in the eastern reaches of the Herakleian peninsula.

- 1. Oktjabr'skoe
- 2. Kavkaz
- 3. "Energetik"

Oktjabr'skoe

A settlement of the Kizil-Koba culture near the village of Oktjabr'skoe, on the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora (the settlement of Oktjabr'skoe) (Fig. 2, no. 1).

The surface materials include handmade black-burnished pottery with incised decoration, isolated finds of unburnished pottery decorated with separated cylinder-made indentations, and abundant Greek pottery of the Hellenistic period. Scattered along the slope, the remains of ancient fortifications, a winery, a presumed farmhouse and the remains of a wall dated to the late antique period were traced. Also uncovered were the remains of a trapezoid stone building containing in its fill various artefacts including handmade pottery, which suggested that this structure might have belonged to the Kizil-Koba settlement.¹⁹ Predominant in the fill were fragments of Greek pottery of the 4th and 3rd century BC, which supplied a date for the building. Fragments of pottery bearing combed decoration also were encountered in these layers. Related to the barbarian settlement were, in addition, three semi-dugout dwellings, the fill of which contained ashes, fragments of burnished and comb-decorated unburnished handmade vessels as well as Greek pottery. In these houses of the dug-out type, the remains of fireplaces were uncovered; the clayey plaster of the aboveground parts of these structures showed the effects of extreme heat, which, along with other archaeological evidence, suggested that the settlement was destroyed by fire. At a distance of 200 m south of the site, a test trench was dug in which a cremation burial in an amphora and other artefacts including fragments of kantharoi, a Chersonesean amphora, a handmade burnished bowl and a vessel with combed ornamentation were discovered. Within the limits of the settlement, two burials – one of an adult and another of an adolescent – were discovered dug into the ancient layers. The skeletons were found lying on their backs with slightly flexed legs and oriented with their heads to the south-east. Near the head of the adolescent was a handmade salt-cellar.²⁰ From O.Ja. Savelja's reports it follows that the burials mentioned above were excavated twice: first in 1978, and again in 1986.²¹

Kavkaz

Several areas of the accumulation of surface materials – the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora and a settlement in the *uročišče* of Kavkaz (Fig. 2, no. 2).

Among the surface materials found in the area framed by Sapun-Gora and in the east by the heights of Fedjuchiny Vysoty, were fragments of handmade vessels of the Kizil-Koba type including several black-burnished examples, as well as flint artefacts and fragmentary amphorae of the early Hellenistic period (4th-3rd century BC), but the particular types of the latter are not specified in the report. On the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora, the structural remains of a number of Greek rural houses were recorded.²²

The results of test trenching in the *uročišče* of Kavkaz led to conjecture about the existence of two buildings of the 4th or 3rd century BC. However, no detailed description of their remains was presented. In the report, a cemetery of the 4th-3rd century BC is also mentioned, but again without any detailed information. In addition, a number of household pits of different periods were uncovered on the site. The aggregate of the finds mentioned above suggested the possibility of a settlement here (the settlement of Kavkaz). In the fill of the household pits, fragments of Greek pottery of the 4th century BC were encountered. Generally, the finds from the *uročišče* of Kavkaz are similar in terms of their types to the surface materials collected near the House-building Factory on the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora.²³

In the *uročišče* of Taš-Kulle, on the south-eastern slope of Sapun-Gora, at the boundary between the Herakleian peninsula and the Balaklava Valley, the remains of a tower and some structure related to it were traced on the flat spur of a terrace. A few fragments of late Scythian and Saltovo pottery were also found. The peculiarities of the masonry of the tower and the adjoining structure, as well as the ceramic evidence from their fills, supply a date of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. In Savelja's report it is noted that these structures were destroyed in a fire.²⁴

Energetik

A settlement of the Kizil-Koba culture on the ridge of Sapun-Gora, on the territory of the gardening co-operative society "Energetik" (Fig. 2, no. 3). Recorded here were several household pits, the infills of which contained

Greek pottery dated to the Classical and Hellenistic periods, fragments of handmade pottery both slightly burnished and unburnished and decorated with combed ornamentation in the form of three parallel lines, and examples of handmade pottery of the so-called Scythian type with finger indentations round the rim dated on the basis of the accompanying Greek wheel-made pottery to the 4th century BC. In addition, there were found fragments of flint, bones of dogs and a bronze finger-ring in the form of a coiled snake, along with several scorched stones from some fireplace structure. The report also mentions the remains of two rooms dated to the 4th-3rd century BC and found by test trenching on the eastern slope of Sapun-Gora. However, no further description is presented. O.Ja. Savelja considers the sites of Kavkaz and Energetik as a single settlement with a total area of 10-12 hectares dated to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.²⁵

On the basis of the available evidence we can posit the existence of only three barbarian settlements on Mt. Sapun-Gora and its environs, the finds from which undoubtedly need further analysis to date these sites more exactly. The surveys described above have not enabled us to form any idea about the archaeological situation in this locality, since the finds they yielded were only of an isolated character, dated to differing periods and recorded in no definite stratigraphical contexts, thus indicating only the presence of some barbarian population in the vicinity of Sapun-Gora without fixing any narrow chronological frames. Also the cemeteries recorded by Savelja are represented only by isolated burials.

The situation, as suggested by closer examination of the reports and field documentation, seems to be as follows. On the ridge and eastern slope of Sapun-Gora, only three settlements were situated, rather than an entire chain of them. These three settlements appeared not earlier than the 4th century BC and were deserted not later than the middle of the 4th century BC. Typologically, the pottery from these sites constitutes a single assemblage, which indicates their synchronous occupation and shows their similarity to other similar sites of the Kizil-Koba culture which have been recorded to the east of the Herakleian peninsula.²⁶ Apparently, Oktjabr'skoe was the only settlement which continued to exist in the middle of the 4th century BC. Its lowest layers containing Greek structures are datable to the last quarter of the 4th century BC, and cannot be linked to the Kizil-Koba population.²⁷

It needs to be stressed that practically all of the excavated settlements on the eastern border of the Herakleian peninsula were destroyed in fires, the traces of which²⁸ were covered later by the structural remains of Greek farmhouses, wineries and other complexes in the Hellenistic period. However, there is no reason to connect these fires with any barbarian population. The surface materials which gave the basis to the conjecture about the existence of a chain of settlements located along the ridge, on the eastern slope and around the Sapun-Gora, mostly derive from re-deposited layers formed due to soil erosion and acts of war in the 19th and 20th centuries. This material may not indicate much more than the presence of some temporary Kizil-Koba settlements.

The cemeteries O.Ja. Savelja described in his publications and reports,²⁹ actually never existed. On the basis of the evidence available to us, we can only identify isolated burials dug into the earlier layers, for example the cremation in a Herakleian amphora of the 4th century BC ³⁰, and a few inhumations with the skeletons lying on their backs with slightly flexed legs.³¹ The latter burials are, however, on the basis of the data available impossible to attribute to the Kizil-Koba population in the vicinity of Chersonesos. On the contrary, the pits of these graves were sunk into Hellenistic layers, and thus suggest a later appearance.

Thus the conclusions about the presence of numerous barbarian settlements on the borders of the Chersonesean chora on the Herakleian peninsula in the 4th and 3rd century BC are unfounded. Furthermore there is no evidence to suggest that their inhabitants were bound as dependants to cultivate the agricultural lots of the Chersoneseans. On the contrary, the sources described above show quite clearly that by the middle of the 4th century BC, when the total division of the most of the Herakleian peninsula had been completed,³² the Kizil-Koba, or Taurian, population had been driven out (probably by force) beyond the limits of the peninsula, of which fact inter alia the fires mentioned above are an indication. This theory is perfectly consistent with the increase in the number of settlements east of the Herakleian peninsula, beyond the Chernaya River. The finds from these settlements present numerous examples of the handmade black-burnished pottery decorated with incised triangles and combed ornamentation, typical of the Kizil-Koba culture, as well as handmade unburnished ware decorated with an appliquéd flange. On the basis of the Greek imports usually accompanying these types of pottery, they are dated to the 5th to 4th century BC and 4th to 3rd century BC respectively.³³ The defensive wall and towers were probably built not later than the turn of the 4th and 3rd century BC, on the site of the previously existing settlements of the Kizil-Koba culture on the ridge of Sapun-Gora.³⁴ The remains of these could still be seen by travellers who visited this area at the end of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries.³⁵ The possibility cannot be ruled out that these defensive systems were raised by Agasikles who was in charge of the defence of the possessions of the Chersoneseans on the Herakleian peninsula which was constantly threatened by the barbarian population inhabiting the area to the east of the territory divided into land plots (IOSPE I², 343; Strab. 7.4.7).³⁶

Notes

- 1. Strželeckij 1954; 1959, 66-67.
- Ščeglov 1976, 76; 1978, 119, 124; 1981, 172-173; 1986, 162-163; 1988, 8-25; Vinogradov & Ščeglov 1990, 312-314, 320 etc.
- 3. See, e.g., Hannestad, Stolba & Ščeglov (eds.) 2002.
- 4. Savelja 1979c, 173.
- See, e.g., Ščeglov 1981, 172-173; 1984, 54; 1986, 162; Vinogradov & Ščeglov 1990, 312, with a map; Saprykin 1986, 66; Nikolaenko 1999, 72; Zubar', Lin'ova & Son 1999, 113; Pal'ceva 1999, 204, n. 293; Nikolaenko 2001.
- 6. Zubar' 1993, 70.
- 7. Savelja 1974, 338; 1975, 101-102; cf. Nikolaenko & Savelja 1975, 331-332.
- 8. Rogov 1999, 121; cf. Pal'ceva 1999, 202.
- 9. Strželeckij 1954, 82-85.
- 10. Savelja 1977, 4-11.
- 11. Savelja 1974, 337-338; 1977, 4-13.
- 12. Savelja 1977, 11.
- 13. Savelja 1977, 14-21.
- 14. Savelja 1979a, 398; 1979b, 23-25.
- 15. Savelja 1986, 9.
- 16. Savelja 1986, 12-13, 19.
- 17. Savelja 1987, 5.
- 18. Savelja 1990, 13.
- 19. Savelja 1986, 19.
- 20. Savelja 1974, 337-338; 1977; 1979a, 398; 1979b, 42; 1986, 9-19.
- 21. Savelja 1979a, 398; 1979b, 24; 1986, 10.
- 22. Savelja 1977, pl. 2.
- 23. Savelja 1977, 17-25.
- 24. Strželeckij 1954, 82-85; Savelja 1977, nos. 12-14, 22; 1987, 5-8; Nikolaenko 1999, 23.
- 25. Savelja 1974, nos. 19-20, 22; 1990, 13; Nikolaenko 1999, 23.
- 26. Savelja 1977, nos. 1-5, 8; Senatorov 1998, 12.
- 27. Savelja 1986, 19.
- 28. Savelja 1986, 9-19; 1987, 5-8.
- 29. Savelja 1974, 338; 1979a, 398; 1979b, 24; 1986, 10.
- 30. Savelja 1974, 338.
- 31. Savelja 1979a, 398; 1979b, 24; 1986, 10.
- 32. Nikolaenko 1999, 41.
- 33. The results of the analysis of the archaeological evidence are now under preparation and will soon be published.
- 34. Nikolaenko 1985, 282; Zubar' 1993, 18; 2002, 205-206; Marčenko 1996, 193-194; cf. Nikolaenko 1999, 72-73.
- 35. For further details, see Danilenko 1993, 237.
- 36. The activities of Agasikles, son of Ktesias, who was in charge of strengthening the defences of the Chersonesean *chora* on the Herakleian peninsula, will be discussed in a special paper currently being prepared for publication.

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Abbreviations

AO	Archeologičeskie otkrytija, Moskva.
ChSbor	Chersonesskij sbornik, Sevastopol'.
MAIET	Materialy po archeologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii, Simferopol'.