

Amphora Finds of the 4th Century BC from the Settlements of the Lower Dnieper Region

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Introduction

The 4th to early 3rd centuries BC was a time of definite prosperity for the ancient Greek colonies and temporary settlements of nomadic tribes, which existed in and around the northern Black Sea Littoral. The Dnieper Valley occupies a central part of this wide territory and played, because of this, an important role in the economics and trade of the different tribes that dwelt there in this period.

The territory under consideration in this paper stretches along the valley of the Dnieper River for a distance of more than 320 kilometers from the modern city of Zaporozh'e in the north to modern Cherson and the estuary of the Dnieper in the south (Fig. 1). The northern edge of this territory is bounded by the Dnieper Rapids, which in Antiquity were impassable to any type of ship and remain so today. Unfortunately, the waters of the Kachovskoe artificial lake now cover much of this rich and fruitful area, and a great number of potentially important and intriguing archaeological remains are now inaccessible because of this. A number of ancient sites and settlements, however, do remain in the upper reaches of the riverside terraces of the Dnieper River valley. Moreover, the steppe zone of the northern Black Sea, spreading to the east and to the west of the Dnieper Valley, has been populated by Nomadic tribes from the Prehistoric period until the late Middle Ages, and remains of these cultures can still be found in this region.

History of research

The first descriptions of archaeological objects from the territory of the Lower Dnieper were published in the 16th–19th centuries in connection with travelers' accounts of their activities. Goškevič published a summary and detailed report of these descriptions at the beginning of the 20th century. At this time also, Skadovskij, Goškevič and Ebert organized the first modern excavations of the ancient settlements of this area.¹

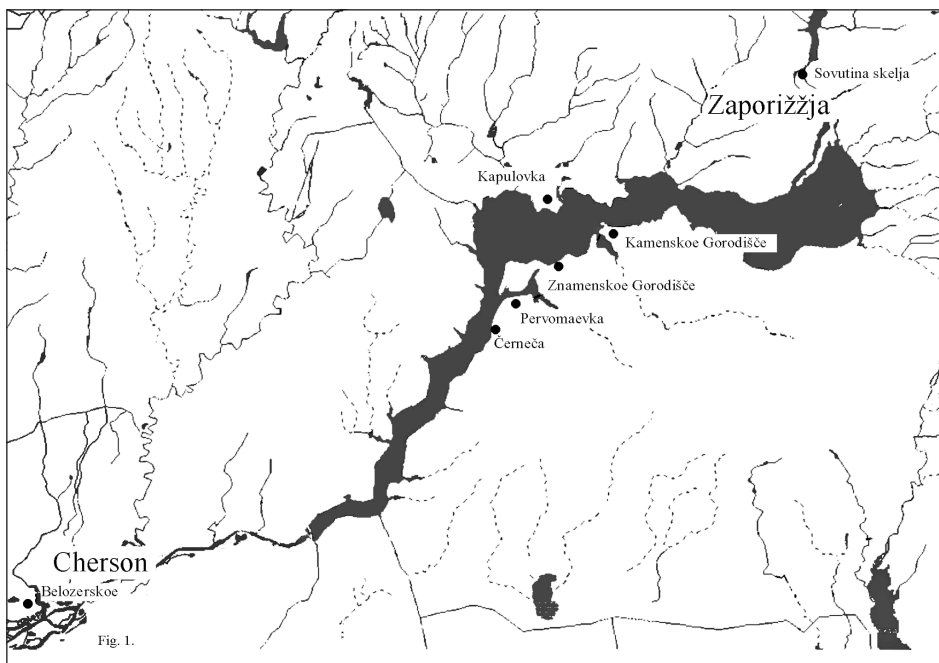


Fig. 1. Location of the biggest settlements of the 4th century BC in the Lower Dnieper.

After the Russian Revolution, in the 1920s, regular investigations of a sizeable part of the territory of the Lower Dnieper began. They were concentrated especially on the area between Kachovka and the Dnieper Estuary. The archaeologists A.V. Dobrovol'skij, I.V. Fabricius, G. Krysin and M.M. Dmitrenko played a major role in carrying out this work.²

In 1938, B.N. Grakov conducted long-term excavations of the territory belonging to the Kamenskoe fortified settlement.³ Shortly thereafter, two significant events took place, first, the construction of the Kachovskaja hydro-system and second, the preparation of almost all of the territory of the Lower Dnieper for the resulting flooding. In this connection, a number of separate expeditions were carried out in order to explore as fully as possible the considerable quantity of archaeological sites and objects to be found in this area, before they were lost to the waters of the new hydro-system. The excavations of Zolotaja Balka (by Dobrovol'skij and M.I. Vjaz'mitina), Kamenskoe (by Grakov and P.D. Liberov),⁴ Znamenskoe (by Grakov, N.N. Pogrebova & Elagina) and other settlements all took place during the course of a few years, and materials from these excavations formed the basis for the first serious publication, by N.A. Onajko, of ancient Greek imports found in the territory of the Dnieper and Bug basins.⁵

In the 1970s, excavations were extended within a framework of research planned by the Institute of Archaeology at the National Academy of Sciences of the Ukraine, but the major excavations were carried out in the 1980s and

1990s. Long-term excavations of various settlements at this time led to the exploration of considerable areas and brought to light much new material. The largest expeditions, organized by N.A. Gavriljuk, V.P. Bylkova, and S.N. Kravčenko, focused on the Kamenskoe fortified settlement, and the settlements of Lysaja Gora, Pervomaevka, Černeča, and Belozerskoe, all from the 4th century BC.⁶

Finally, during the last 10 years, regular excavations of the northernmost fortified settlement – Sovutina Skelja in the territory of the modern town of Zaporož'e – have taken place.

Review of the amphora finds

The collection of materials from these sites includes finds from over one hundred settlements of the 4th century BC, both large and small. The sites examined vary from different types of fortified settlements with considerably thick archaeological strata to settlements and sites where cultural layers are almost entirely absent. Among these, the best known and best explored are Kamenskoe Gorodišče, Lysaja Gora, Kapulovskoe, Sovutina Skelja, Pervomaevka, Černeča and, the most southern of them all, the Belozerskoe settlement. The region of the Kamenskoe and Kapulovskoe fortified settlements is especially notable, located as it is at the crossroads of important land routes and the riverbed of Dnieper, which was the most important means of transport in the region.

The inhabitants of the territory of the Lower Dnieper basin first became acquainted with Greek culture and Greek imports in the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Archaeological remains from this period consist mainly of the occasional finds of amphora fragments in the territory of several settlements, such as the Kamenskoe fortified settlement and the settlement of Lysaja Gora. Very rarely, such fragments are also found in burial mounds. There are, however, no archaeological remains or cultural layers from the settlements, which can be dated to the earlier centuries of Scythian history.⁷ Thus, these finds can only serve as evidence of the first penetration of Greek goods into the barbarian territory, and tell us little or nothing about earlier periods of the area's history.

It seems likely that it was only after the start of the 4th century BC that a substantial import of different goods to the nomadic tribes of the steppes of the northern Pontic area began. This supposition is based on the finds from over 100 different fortified and unfortified settlements of the 4th century BC.⁸

The emergence of these settlements was associated with the use of the Dnieper as a significant river trade route. Traditionally, the majority of the settlements on the Lower Dnieper have been associated with the Scythian culture, as exemplified by the archaeological remains of the material culture of these settlements.

Amphorae fragments are the most widespread finds among the remains of

imported pottery from the settlements of the Lower Dnieper basin. The number of these fragments found in the materials of separate sites and settlements varies greatly, ranging from 13.64 % (the Kapulovka fortified settlement and the Sulicke settlement) to 87.88 % (Pervomaevka I). The most striking feature of the ceramic evidence from the different Scythian settlements is the almost entire absence of fragments of thin-walled black-glazed vessels.⁹ The ceramic material from the settlements of the Lower Dnieper consisted of amphora fragments and fragments of hand made vessels.

The amphora material in question is represented mainly by numerous fragments deriving from all parts of the jar. Only two intact vessels have been found, which is too few to provide us with a general picture of the material from particular sites. The first of these was found off the Chortica Island in the most northern part of the Lower Dnieper region, whereas the second comes from one of the cisterns at the site of Belozerskoe.

The most numerous group of amphora fragments was produced in the workshops of the northern Aegean. They occur in great quantities not only throughout the territory of the Lower Dnieper basin but also throughout the whole territory of the north-western coast of the Black Sea. This has been shown by N.A. Lejpunskaja, writing on the materials of the Greek *poleis* of the latter region.¹⁰ We must note too that the provenance of a considerable number of these fragments has been determined through the general features of their exterior shape and the characteristic composition of the clay used in amphorae made in workshops of the northern Aegean. The amphora fragments from the northern Aegean are clearly distinct from the materials of the Kamenskoe fortified settlement and the settlements in its neighbourhood. Grakov was the first to notice their prevalence in the materials from the excavations of the 1940s and 1950s.¹¹

Fragments of Thasian amphorae and from vessels produced in Mende and Peparethos (so-called Solocha-2 type) are the most numerous, but amphorae from Akanthos also seem to have been present – judging by various amphora stamps. Of the fragments from northern Aegean amphorae, those from Thasian vessels occur most frequently (Fig. 2.1-2). Their characteristic feature is a considerable variety in the exterior shape of their toes and rims but they are nonetheless easily separated from the general mass of amphora fragments. To their general number may be added the fragments of amphorae from the Thasian circle, which are easily determined by the colour and structure of their clay. They average about 30-35 % of all types of amphorae found. Most of the Thasian amphorae are of the bi-conical type with a tall foot and expansive bottom and stem from the 4th century BC.¹² Almost all of them seem to have had a little conical hollow in the centre of their bottoms. A few specimens have a deep hollow of up to 5-6 cm in depth.

Although Thasian amphora rims are normally easy to determine because they are flat on top and their smooth surface, but many of them have atypical shapes. Their handles all have a typical oval section as well.

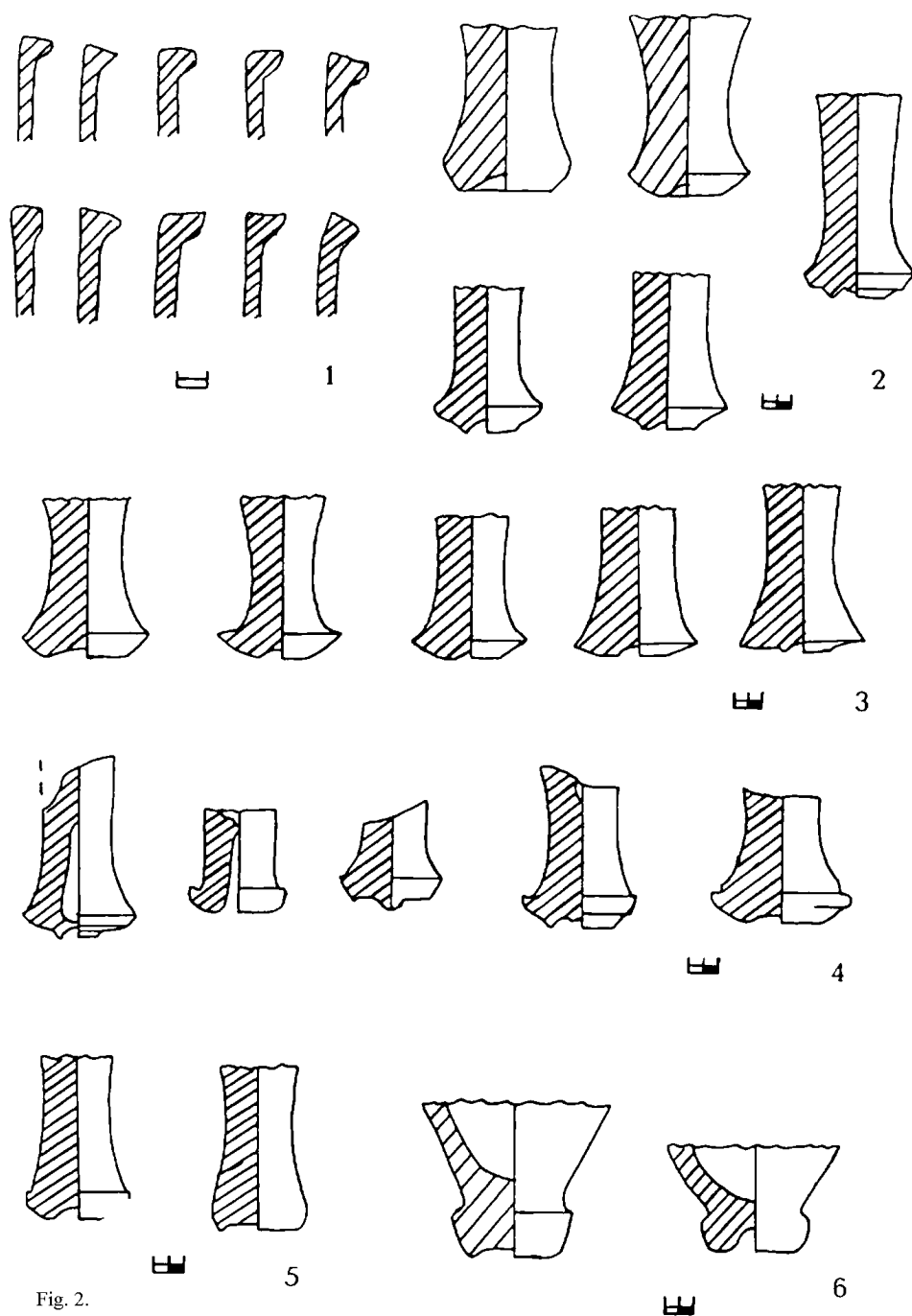


Fig. 2.1) Rims of Thasian amphorae (scale 1:2); 2) Bases of Thasian amphorae; 3) Bases of Mendean amphorae; 4) Unusual shapes of amphorae bases; 5) Bases of Solocha-II amphorae; 6) Bases of Solocha-I amphorae (scale 1:4).

It is hard to explain the cause of a few unusual specimens of Thasian amphora toes, which we can determine by the structure of the clay and the general proportions of their shape.

The Thasian amphora fragments stand out clearly from the materials of the Kamenskoe fortified settlement. Grakov was the first to notice their prevalence among the materials from the excavations of the 1940s and 1950s.¹³ Stamped Thasian amphora fragments were also found in strata of the same period in the settlements of Velikaja Znamenka,¹⁴ Majačka and Vyšetarasovka.¹⁵ Thasian amphorae also occur frequently among the materials from burials and barrows near Kapulovka,¹⁶ Tovsta Mogyla,¹⁷ and Nosaki.¹⁸

The second most prolific group of fragments is made up of amphorae from Mende (Fig. 2.3) in the northern Aegean.¹⁹ The specimens that have been excavated are typical of the amphorae from this centre and at the same time have a few features in common with amphorae of the Thasian circle. In Russian and Ukrainian literature, they are often described as amphorae from the Melitopol' Barrow. They constitute about 15-20 % of all amphora fragments. Their bottoms are wider and flatter than other amphorae, while their toes are tall, vary in shape and have more distinctive profile of their bodies. Their rims are less precise than the Thasian.

Onajko was the first to note the widespread occurrence of this type of amphorae.²⁰ It must be emphasized that they are less frequent than Thasian amphorae, but finds of Mendean amphorae are well known from the excavations of burial sites of both the Scythian aristocracy and probably also Scythian kings. For example, as S.V. Polin has determined, they account for the majority of amphorae in the barrows of kings at Certomlyk,²¹ while 7 examples were found in the burials of the well-known Tovsta Mogyla²² and 11 in the barrow at Melitopol'.²³ By contrast, remains of Mendean amphorae are rare in ordinary Scythian barrows and occur in these locations mainly as part of the remains from the funeral feast.

The third most frequent category consists of amphorae of the Solocha-II type (Fig. 2.5) from the first half of the 4th century BC.²⁴ They amount to about 15 % of all amphora fragments from the settlements of the Lower Dnieper. Probably they originated in the area of the northern Aegean just as the Thasian and Mendean amphorae did; they were at any rate produced on the island of Peparethos.²⁵

Admittedly, some few fragments of the 4th century BC Solocha-I amphorae can be attributed to the same centre.²⁶ They amount to about 2-5 % of the total. The type is clearly distinguished by the characteristic shape of its sharply out-turned rim (Fig. 3.10). The bodies of these amphorae are oviform in shape with vertical handles; their surfaces are smooth and made of a high quality clay (Fig. 2.6). Many of them were found at Velyka Znam'janska Pristan.²⁷ The best collection of this type of amphora originates from the Solocha Barrow²⁸ and the Pervyj Mordvinovskij Kurgan.

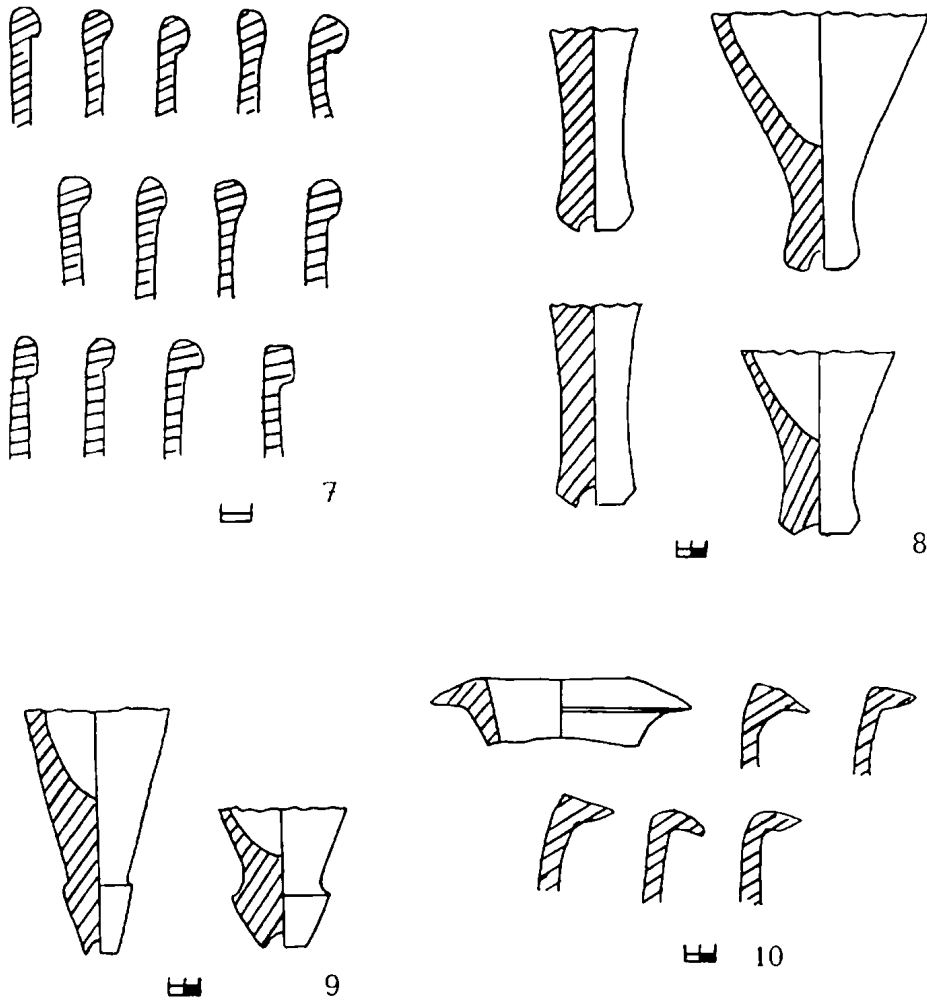


Fig. 3.

Fig. 3.7) Rims of Herakleian amphorae (scale 1:2); 8) Bases of Herakleian amphorae; 9) Bases of amphorae from Chios; 10) Rims of Solocha-I amphorae (scale 1:4).

Fragments from amphorae produced in Herakleia call for separate treatment (Fig. 3.7, 8). They amount to about 10-15 % of all amphora fragments. The exterior shape of these vessels shares a number of common features with the Thasian amphorae. They too generally have a conical body with vertical handles and a tall but not massive cylindrical toe. The most characteristic feature of these amphorae is the presence of noticeable stone inclusions in the structure of their clay. The majority of them belong to types 1 and 2 of Zeest's classification.²⁹

Fragments of Herakleian amphorae can often be found among the materials from the settlements of the Lower Dnieper, but a considerable number of them were also found during the excavations of Lysaja Gora and a few of its neighboring settlements. Moreover, many Herakleian amphorae were found in ordinary Scythian burial grounds, such as Širokoe (barrow 5), Širokoe 2 (barrow 26), Ševčenko 3 (barrow 2) and Kutjanskij Mogil'nik (barrows 18 and 25).

Vessels from Herakleia are well known from the excavations of numerous Greek colonies and burial mounds.³⁰ A considerable number of them were imported to the territory of the northeastern Black Sea and the Bosporan Kingdom. This probably occurred as the result of the existence of a direct route from the southern coast of the Black Sea to the southern coast of the Crimea in the 4th century BC.

We have observed a relatively few amphora fragments from Sinope or Chersonesos, the presence of which is known from the use of amphora stamps.³¹

Surprising as well is the infrequent appearance of fragments from amphorae produced in Chios (Fig. 3.9), which are otherwise known as one of the most common types of amphorae found in the Greek colonies of the northern Black Sea in the 4th century BC.

A certain irregularity in the territorial distribution of amphora fragments by their number and centres of manufacturing can also be noted. The greatest number was found in the territory of the Kamenka and Kapulovka fortified settlement and this sample seems typical for a great number of other settlements in the Dnieper Valley.

The majority of the amphorae fragments found there were manufactured in the production centres of the northern part of the Aegean, of which the most important were Thasos, Mende and Peparethos. The quantity of fragments of amphorae from these centres varies, but together they make up the majority of the finds. One exception to this is the materials found at the Lysaja Gora settlement, located to the north of the Kamenka region. Materials from this settlement provide evidence of closer trade relations with centres in the southern Black Sea region and especially with Herakleia.³²

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can affirm that the majority of settlements of the Lower Dnieper mainly imported productions of lower quality amphorae made in the northern Aegean.³³ The prevalence of finds of fragments from Herakleian wares can be observed only among the materials from the settlement of Lysaja Gora and its neighbours. More expensive wine was imported in amphorae from Mende and Peparetos, which are more often found in the burials of the wealthy Scythian aristocracy. More widespread was the import of ordinary amphorae from Thasos and Herakleia. Finally, for the Scythian settlements of

the 4th century BC in the Lower Dnieper region it is characteristic that there is a lack of imports from Chios, although such wares can often be found among the materials from the Greek colonies of the northern Black Sea.

Notes

- 1 Skadovskij 1897, 81-85; Goškevič 1913, 118-133.
- 2 Fabrycius 1929, 17; 1930, 113-119; Krysin 1929, 10-21; Dmytrenko 1946, 1-7; Dobrovol'skij 1954, 25
- 3 Grakov 1954.
- 4 Grakov 1954.
- 5 Onajko 1966; Onajko 1970.
- 6 Gavriljuk, Bylkova & Kravčenko 1992; Karjaka 1997.
- 7 Onajko 1966, 17.
- 8 Gavriljuk & Olenkovskij 1992, 5, 35.
- 9 Gavriljuk 1999, 250, tab. 5.11.
- 10 Lejpunskaja 1973, 29, tab. 2.3; 1981, 60.
- 11 Grakov 1954.
- 12 Zeest 1960, 82-85.
- 13 Grakov 1954, 56.
- 14 Pogrebova 1958, 142-146.
- 15 Gavriljuk & Olenkovskij 1992, 10, figs. 3.16.15; 6.7.
- 16 Terenožkin, Il'inskaja, Černenko & Mozolevskij 1973, 122.
- 17 Mozolevs'kyj 1979, 25, figs. 7.1.2; 8.4-6.
- 18 Bidzilja, Boltrik, Mozolevskij & Savovskij 1977, 117, 107.
- 19 Brašinskij 1976; Brašinskij 1984, 38.
- 20 Onajko 1970, 11.
- 21 Polin 1991, 365.
- 22 Mozolevs'kyj 1979, 23-25.
- 23 Terenožkin & Mozolevskij 1988, 69-76.
- 24 Brašinskij 1984, 240.
- 25 Garlan 1992; Empereur & Garlan 1992b.
- 26 Lejpunskaja 1981, 32.
- 27 Gavriljuk & Olenkovskij 1992, 15-16, fig. 6.5.
- 28 Mancevič 1987, 51.
- 29 Zeest 1960, 100-101.
- 30 Lejpunskaja 1975, 126-138.
- 31 Grakov 1954, 90-92; Plešivenko 1992, 162.
- 32 Karjaka 1999, 29-33.
- 33 Karjaka 1996, 126-129.