

## **Maeotian Plastic Arts: Nomadic Influence Or Nomadic Order?**

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The mechanism and dynamics of relationship between nomadic and sedentary population of the Barbarian periphery of the Classical world were not subject of a special research. For ancient authors, any events in Barbaricum that were not directly tied with the Classical world laid outside of their interests. However, the interaction between the sedentary and nomadic tribes beyond the frontier of the Classical world becomes apparent from the objects produced by the sedentary population, found in the nomadic graves.

As a rule, the archaeologists recognise the existence of “exchange” between the sedentary and nomadic people by grave-goods. Pottery made on numerous settlements is frequent (ANFIMOV 1985. 82ff.), while manufacture of beads, glass or metal costume decorations and metal vessels on settlements is unknown; the latter objects were imported to the inhabitants of the steppe from the cities of the North Pontic or were received through the direct contacts of the nomads with the Classical world.

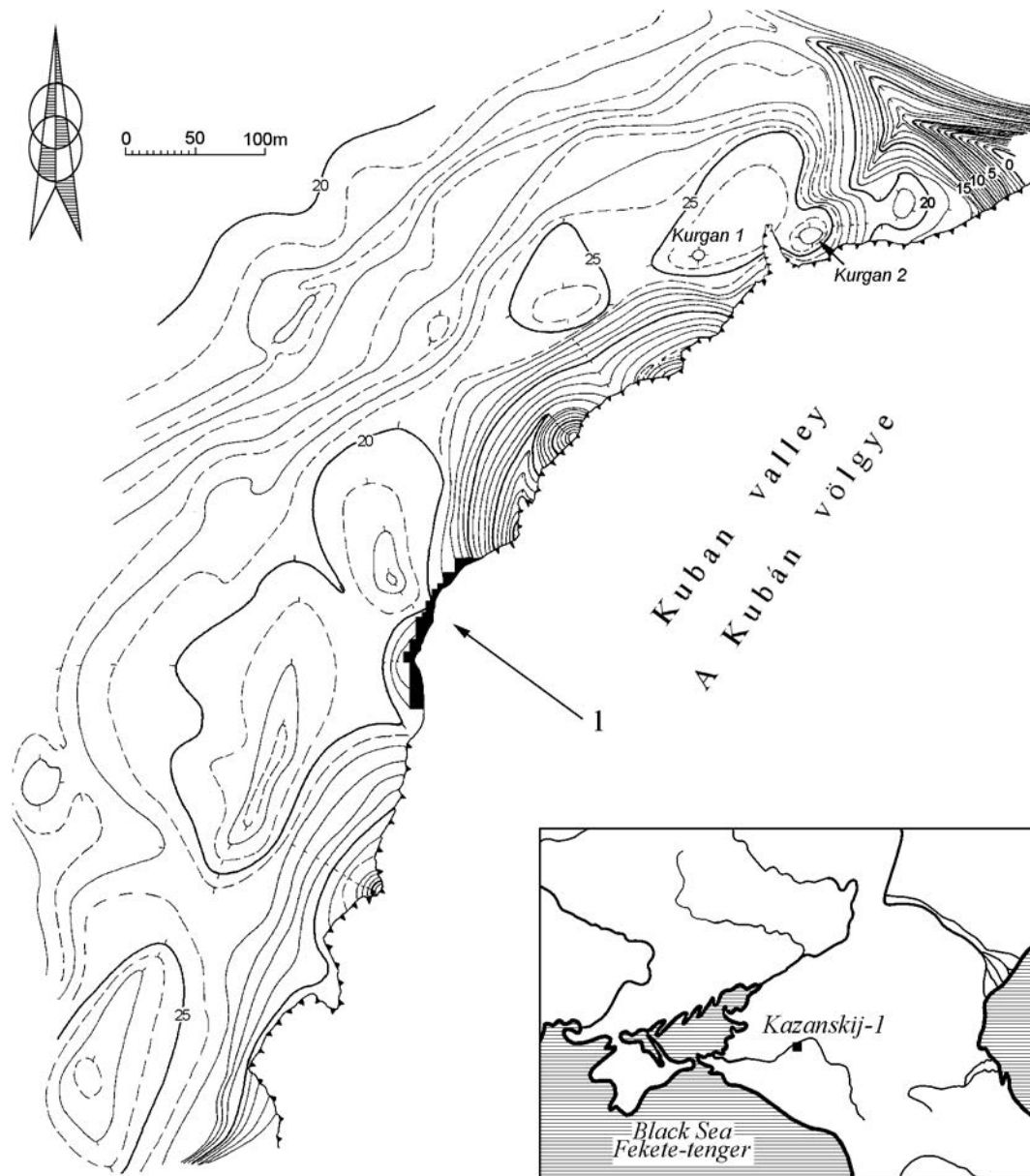
The Kuban River region is the most suitable area for the creation of the theoretical model of the relationship between nomadic and sedentary populations, and for the defining these relationship in archaeological context. For eight centuries, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD farming population co-existed in the region with different nomadic tribes. The former had left numerous settlements along the banks of the large rivers – Kuban, Laba, Urup, Kirpili etc. (KAMENECKIJ 2000A., KAMENECKIJ 2000B. 74ff.), the latter had left numerous kurgans in the steppe built within immediate proximity to the settlements of the Maeotae. In the Middle Kuban and Lower Laba regions, ancient Maeotian settlements were located extremely closely; the distance between their “citadels” do not exceed several hundred meters. With reference to the top terraces of the right banks of these two rivers, it is possible to speak about the “habitation belt” that stretches for several tens of kilometres. Moreover, considerable part of kurgans was erected not only next to the ancient settlements, but sometimes directly in their cemeteries. In the steppe, there is a slightly larger number of kurgans which are located nearby the rivers, but the concentration of the kurgans around the Maeotian settlements is significantly higher.

In archaeological literature, a group of kurgans located on the right bank of the Kuban received the name of “Golden Cemetery” (GUSHCHINA-ZASECKAJA 1994.). The study of the excavated kurgans at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries revealed, that the majority of the mounds were erected over the graves dated from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the firsts centuries AD, i.e. they are contemporary with the settlements.

The kurgan graves, as well as the graves in the cemeteries of the ancient settlements, have similar sets of grave-goods. They include locally manufactured pottery, weapons, horse harness and

prestige goods seized by the nomads during their Transcaucasian forays, such as jewellery, metal and glass vessels. Large number of the warrior graves in the cemeteries of the sedentary population contradicts the opinion about exclusively agricultural and peaceful nature of the local Maeotae. It is more likely that the graves reflect the symbiosis between the arrived nomads and local population which got involved into the military enterprises of the nomads.

The basic source for the reconstruction of the interconnections between the nomads and settled farmers in the region is archaeological evidence. For several years, the Kazanskij-1 settlement in the Middle Kuban region has been excavated by the archaeological expedition of the Rostov



**Fig. 1**  
Location of the Kazanskij-1 settlement

**1. kép**  
A Kazanszkij-1 telep helyzete

University. The settlement is among the largest ones in this region. It stretches 700 meters along the river bank and is ca. 300 meters wide. Kuban has washed away about 1/10 part of the settlement including parts of two “citadels” separated by deep and wide ditches (Fig. 1).

Ancient narrow and deep ditches that were filled in the process of the expansion of the settlement’s area were explored and ca. 1000 sq.m of the settlement were excavated. The section with cultural remains demonstrated uniform strata sequence for the whole territory of the site.

The thickness of this layer consisting of ash mixed with pieces of plaster riches 2.5–4.8 m. There were found two pottery kilns (RAEV 2012. 209–212) and about 200 storage pits. However, there was no possibility to trace the remains of constructions because the houses were built mainly of clay, the constructions supported by wooden poles.

During seven years of work at the settlement, over 10,000 pieces of profiled shards have been collected. Grey wheel-made, burnished bowls, jugs and pots constitute the larger part of the vessels. Sinopa amphorae (SHELOV 1978. 18ff.) date the ancient settlement from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Kazanskij-1 settlement existed for a short interval lasting less than 150 years, and finds from the settlement’s layers can be used for the dating of the graves of the steppe kurgans.

The pottery from the Kazanskij-1 settlement includes though not large but an extremely significant group that attests to close connections of the settlement’s inhabitants with nomads from the neighbouring area. These are clay vessels decorated with zoomorphic motifs. Typically, the vertical handles of jugs are shaped as animals. For the first time, zoomorphic motifs on clay ware appeared in the steppe zone of the North Pontic region in the last centuries BC (ABRAMOVA 1984.). In this region, such vessels became typical finds in Sarmatian graves of the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (KAPUSTINA 2010. 86).

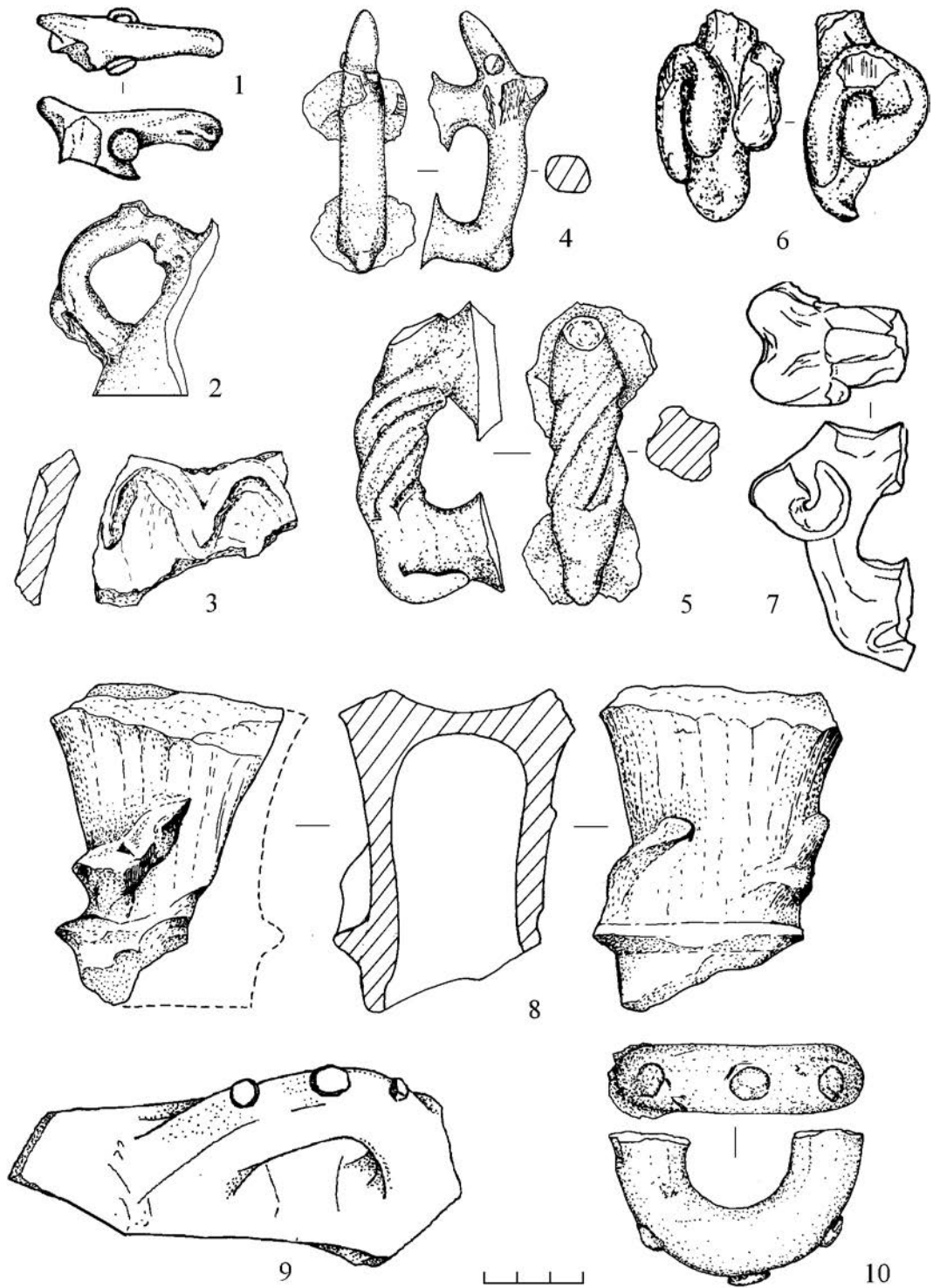
The group of ceramic vessels of the first centuries AD with zoomorphic details has been attributed to the influence of the Sarmatians (KASTANAJAN 1951.). An alternative view on the Transcaucasian origin of the zoomorphic motifs was not sufficiently corroborated (ABRAMOVA 1984.). The former opinion is generally accepted and well-supported (KASTANAJAN 1951., MARCHENKO 1996., KAPUSTINA 2010.)

In my opinion, we can explain the appearance of vessels with zoomorphic decoration in Eastern Europe by the arrival of nomadic peoples from Central Asia to the region. Similar decoration is known on the pottery from the settlements and graves of the Dzhetyasar Culture in the northern part of the ancient delta of the Syr-Darya river, east of the Aral Sea (LEVINA 1992. 69, Pl. 25).

Scholars underline the difficulties in identifying specific kinds of animals based on zoomorphic images (KOSJANENKO 2008. 79). On the Kazanskij-1 settlement, the top parts of vertical handles of small vessels are made in the shape of ram’s (Fig. 2: 6, 7), dog’s (?) (Fig. 2: 4) and elk’s (Fig. 2: 1) head. Sometimes, there is a relief décor on the vessel’s body; for example, in our case it is a ram’s head (Fig. 2: 3). There is also a foot fragment of a bowl with burnished vertical strips surrounded by stylised figures of four birds (Fig. 2: 8).

The bottom part of a vase in the shape of a wild boar can be truly regarded as work of art (Fig. 3). It is made in an extremely realistic manner; its surface is polished so that it has got a black metallic shine; images of a deer and a horse are chiselled on the wild boar’s sides.

Clay vessels with handles and some details imitating metal vessels appear in the Kuban and Lower Don region in the first centuries AD. S.I. KAPOSHINA (1963.) separated this type of handles and the details from the zoomorphic group. Similar knobs were considered as stylised parts of animals that, after a certain time, lost their initial meaning, shifted to the body or neck of jugs (SKALON 1941.). Recently, E.P. KAPUSTINA (2010. 87ff.) suggested that various knobs, rolls and other decorative

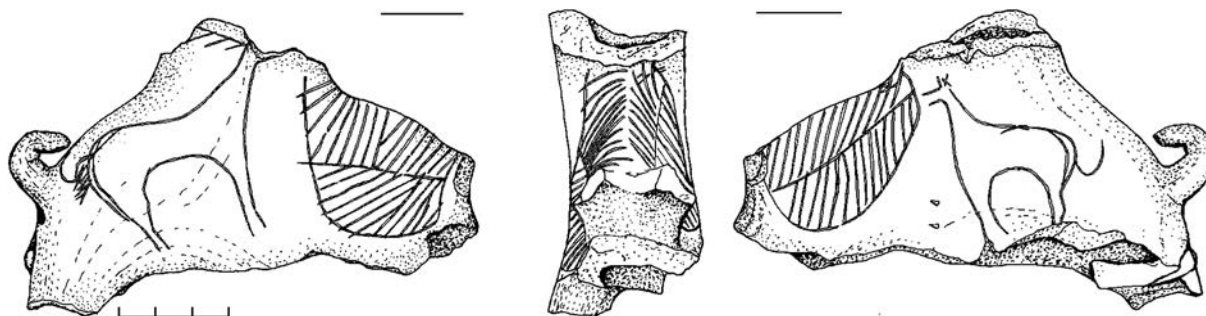


**Fig. 2**

Grey burnished ware from the Kazanskij-1 settlement 1–8: zoomorphic motifs, 9–10: handles imitating cast decoration on the bronze Sarmatian cauldrons

**2. kép**

Szürke, korongolt, simított kerámia a Kazanszkij-1 telepről 1–8: zoomorf díszítések, 9–10: szarmata üstökön található öntött díszeket utánozó edényfülek



**Fig. 3**

The bottom part of a grey burnished vase

**3. kép**

Szürke, korongolt, besimított edény alsó része

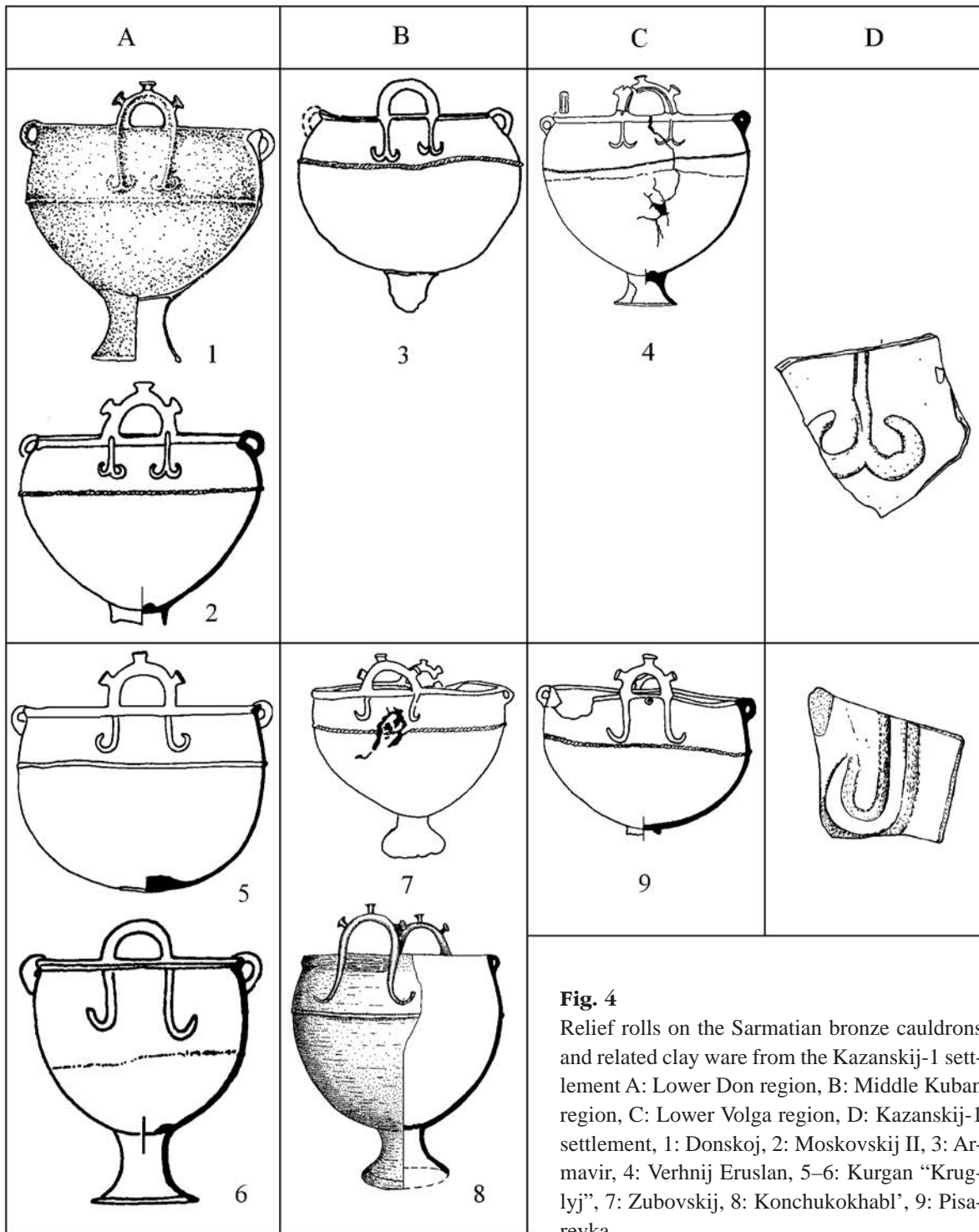
elements on bodies and necks of jugs are the result of stylisation of the details of metal vessels but not animal images.

Studying the grey burnished jars from the kurgan graves of the nomadic nobility in the Lower Don region, I concluded that some jugs feature zoomorphic handles and handles imitating the metal ones at the same time (RAEV 1986. 45, 48ff.). Sometimes, the décor of a handle bears zoomorphic elements that combine details typical for the imported metal ware and ornamentation of the cast bronze cauldrons of local production.

The best evidence on the relationship between the Maeotian sedentary tribes and the nomadic population surrounding them is represented by a kind of décor, which is a feature of typical nomadic vessels. The knobs on the horizontal handles of the grey burnished bowls (Fig. 2: 9, 10) have their prototype in the vertical handles decorated with three knobs known on bronze cauldrons, which represent a widely spread nomadic ware. Despite the fact that the position of the handle was changed, the prototype is obviously clear (DEMIDENKO 2008., cf. handles of Type VI).

The shards of the jugs with attached relief rolls belong to the same group. They repeat the relief decoration imitating tamga signs, which run down from the lower edge of the handle on the body of the Sarmatian bronze cauldrons. Two fragments were found: one fragment with a sign in the shape of an anchor, and the second one is the lower part of one of two tendrils (Fig. 4).

The most representative fragments are the ones of the grey burnished jugs found in 2007. Decorations of their handles depict typical Sarmatian tamga signs. The tamgas are executed as relief rolls running from the bottom part of the handle to the vessel's shoulders (Fig. 5: 1–4). Similar signs are known from the archaeological sites of the first centuries AD in the city-states Panticapaeum (DRACHUK 1975. Pl. III: 139–145), Olbia (DRACHUK 1975. Pl. XLVI: 139, 141–144), and in the layers of the Crimean settlements (Scythian Neapolis: DRACHUK 1975, Pl. VII: 500, 501). These tamgas constitute the contacts of nomadic tribes with ancient states of the North Pontic. Participation of the Sarmatians in the political and military events in the Black Sea region during the first centuries AD is well-known from the ancient written sources. It is interesting to note that the tamga signs from the jugs of the first centuries AD continued to exist in the culture of the native population of the North Caucasus up to the Middle Ages. Some images of the patrimonial tamgas similar to the one found at the Kazanskij-1 settlement were recorded by the ethnographers in the 19<sup>th</sup>, and even in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (JAHTANIGOV 1993. *Abadzekhian*: 13, 52, 53, 81; *Abazinean*: 534, 537, 607; *Abkhazian*: 1, 3, 13; *Balkarian*: 6, 37, 38, 62, 63; *Beslaneev*: 23, 41; *Ingushetian*: 9–12; *Kabardian*: 123, 124, 193, 201, 204, 236, 986, 989, 1100; *Ossetian*: 9, 55, 67, 68).

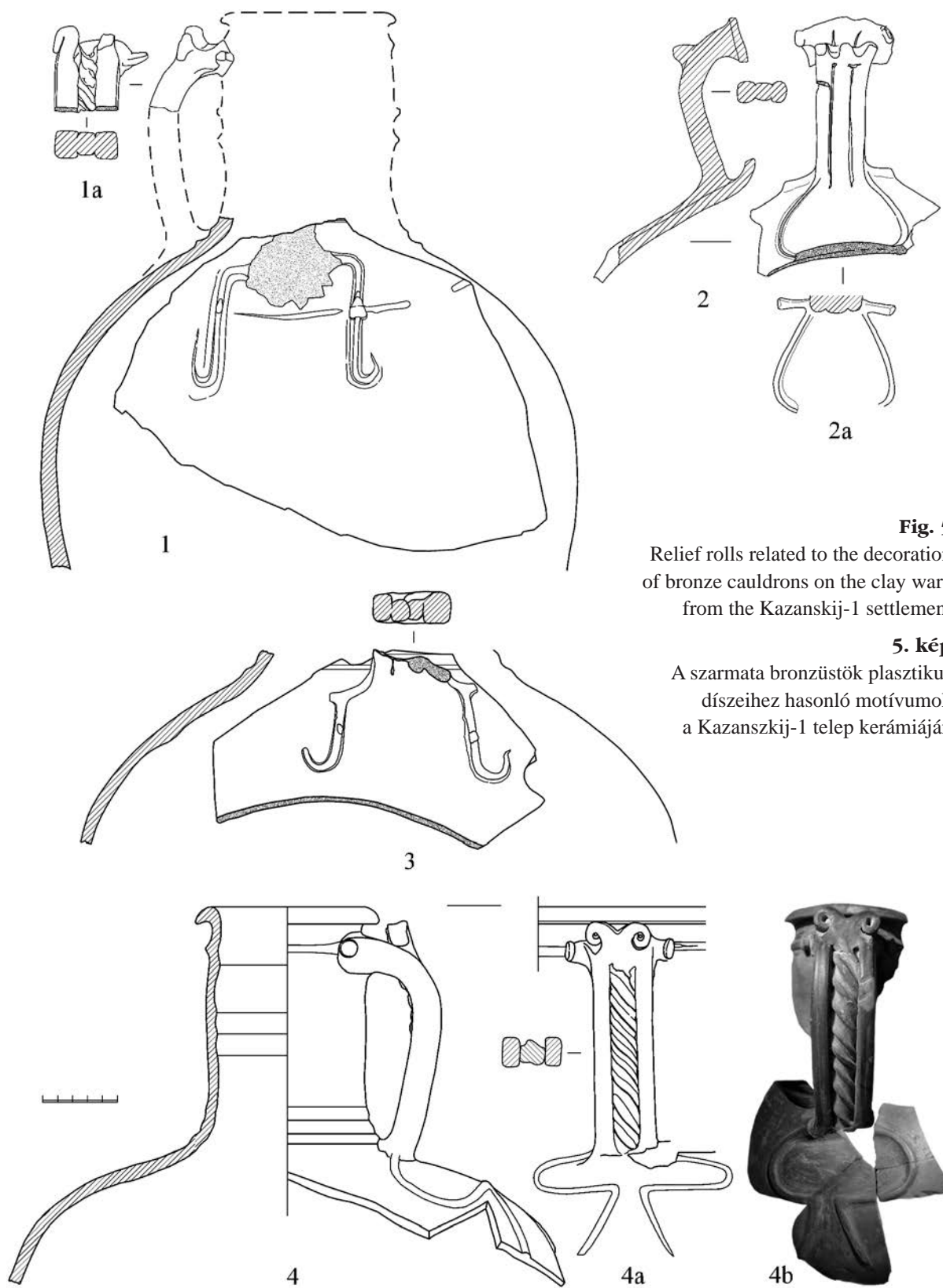


**Fig. 4**

Relief rolls on the Sarmatian bronze cauldrons and related clay ware from the Kazanskij-1 settlement A: Lower Don region, B: Middle Kuban region, C: Lower Volga region, D: Kazanskij-1 settlement, 1: Donskoj, 2: Moskovskij II, 3: Armavir, 4: Verhnij Eruslan, 5–6: Kurgan “Kruglij”, 7: Zubovskij, 8: Konchukokhabl’, 9: Pisarevka

**4. kép**

Szarmata bronzüstök és a Kazanszkij-1 telep agyagedényeinek hasonló plasztikus díszítései A: Alsó-Don-vidék, B: Középső-Kubán-vidék, C: Alsó-Volga-vidék, D: Kazanszkij-1 telep, 1: Donszkoj, 2: Moszkovszkij II, 3: Armavir, 4: Verhnyij Jeruszlan, 5–6: Kurgan “Kruglij”, 7: Zubovszkij, 8: Koncsukohabl’, 9: Piszarevka



**Fig. 5**

Relief rolls related to the decoration of bronze cauldrons on the clay ware from the Kazanskij-1 settlement

**5. kép**

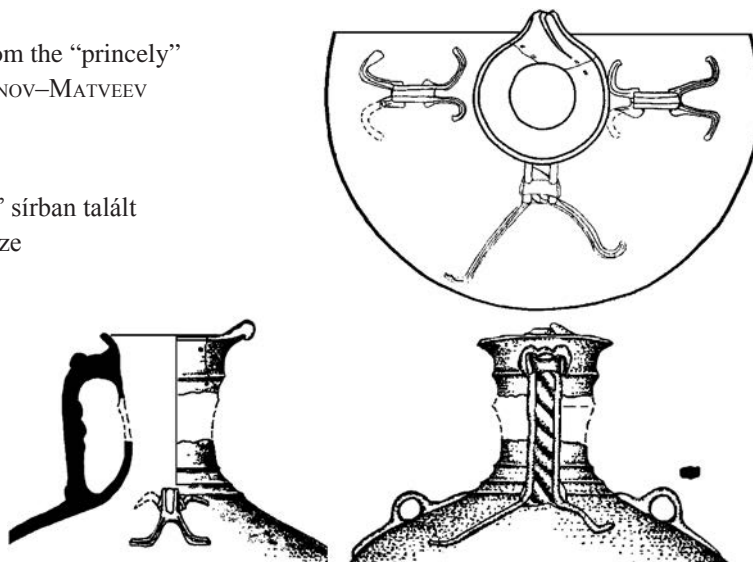
A szarmata bronzüstök plasztikus díszjeihez hasonló motívumok a Kazanszkij-1 telep kerámiáján

**Fig 6**

The upper part of a grey burnished jug from the “princely” grave near Lipeck (after MEDVEDEV–SAFONOV–MATVEEV 2008. Fig. 80: 1).

**6. kép**

A Lipeck környékén előkerült “fejedelmi” sírban talált szürke, korongolt, simított korsó felső része



Jugs with attached rolls in the shapes of tamgas had spread far beyond the steppe zone. In 2006, a rich Sarmatian kurgan was excavated in the Lipeck district located 350 km south of Moscow, in the European forest zone. A grey burnished jug with attached décor similar to those that can be seen on the jugs of the Kazanskij-1 settlement was found in a rich woman’s grave (MEDVEDEV–SAFONOV–MATVEEV 2008. 117, Fig. 80: 1). (Fig. 6)

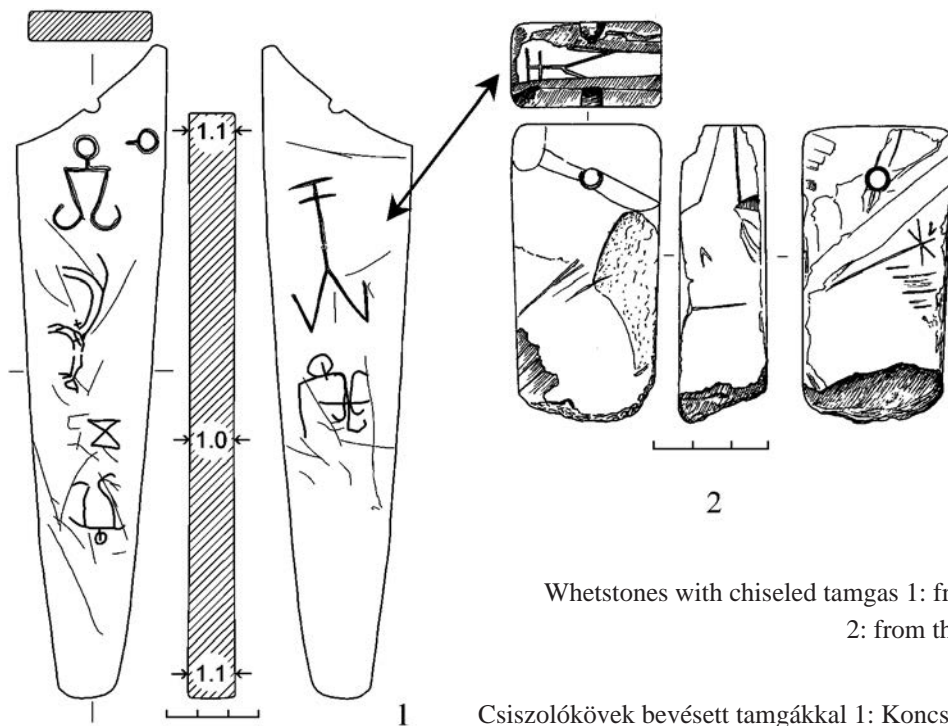
This type of pottery had not been used widely by the inhabitants of the Kazanskij-1 settlement; its ratio does not exceed 0.1–0.2 percent of the whole collection. So far, it is impossible to say, whether this pottery was made for nomads by order, or its presence at the settlement points to other types of contacts.

The second source for the reconstruction of the connections between the nomads and the sedentary tribes, are the data of the related sciences, ethnology in the first place. Due to the depressed nomadic economy, the ethnographic parallels and historical sources can be used for the examination of the relationship between the nomads and the “external world” (HAZANOV 2000.).

It seems that the nomads of the Kuban region (Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans) used the tribute model of interaction (KRADIN 2007A. 156, KRADIN 2007B. 177) with the farming Maeotian population. It is confirmed by topography of the rich kurgans erected by the nomads near the Maeotian “settlement belt,” and also by the fill of the layers on the settlements. There are no traces of fire and destructions in these layers that could be connected with the military activities of the nomads. This type of dependency is characteristic for the settled population without state structure (HAZANOV 2000. 356ff.). We can speak, perhaps, about another model: the long-distance exploitation of the surrounding Classical world carried out together with the military groups of the Maeotian tribes.

The aforescribed grey burnished ware decorated with the attached rolls in the shapes of the tamgas provides evidence for dynastic marriages that is an essential attribute of the relations of the first model. A unique representation of a tamga had been chiselled on whetstones, one found in a rich nomadic burial from the early-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Konchukohabl’; Fig. 7: 1), another one in a layer of the Kazanskij-1 settlement (Fig. 7: 2).

The history of the Maeotian tribes in the Kuban region was full of events, which are hard to explain and which had not been mentioned in ancient sources but can be traced in archaeological materials. We mean the synchronous emergence of similar settlements on the banks of the Lower Don and in the Don Delta. The earliest settlements, Podazovskij and Krepostnoj, appeared at



**Fig. 7**

Whetstones with chiseled tamgas 1: from the Konchukokhabl',  
2: from the Kazanskij-1 settlement

**7. kép**

Csiszolókövek bevéssett tamgákkal 1: Koncsukohabl, 2: Kazanszkij-1

the very end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC on the left bank of the Don, while the rest on the right bank of the Don are dated to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD (SHELOV 1972, 174ff., KAMENECKIJ 1993. 151, Pl. 38). Archaeologists noted identical material culture at the settlements of the Kuban and Don regions; the latter ones were founded by the natives of the Kuban region (KAMENECKIJ 1993. 6). Recently, I.S. KAMENECKIJ (2000c. 229ff.) has republished his unworthily forgotten article where he identified the migrants with the Yazamathes, and connected the migration process itself with the increased political activity of the Bosporan Kingdom.

It seems that, taking into account the above-mentioned features of the nomadic society, this phenomenon can have another explanation, especially, if we turn to the distant, but extremely informative Chinese written sources. Due to the character and duration of the contacts between China and nomads of Inner and Central Asia, Chinese sources reflected many aspects of the relationship between the agricultural states and the surrounding nomadic world. It is well known that slavery in its classical form was not instrumental in the nomadic societies. However, we have evidence according to which prisoners of war were engaged in workshops supplying nomadic population with necessary products. On the settlements specially built for the migrants by the nomads, the new settlers recreated their original social organisation and workshops (KRADIN 2007c. 135, KRADIN 2007b. 189). There is a recently formulated hypothesis that Sarmatians re-settled the craftsmen of the post-Zarubincy Culture further eastward, closer to the regions where the Sarmatians lived (SHCHUKIN 1994. 236ff., VORONJATOV–JEREMENKO 2006. 91).

The emergence of the two earliest settlements on the Lower Don region coincides with the arrival of the first “Alanic wave” to the Northeast Black Sea region. This wave is associated with the burials of the “Zubovskij-Vozdvizhenskaja” type (RAEV–JACENKO 1993., RAEV 2008.). These burials were made on the left bank of the Don, close to the settlements. The nomadic burials of the “Zubovskij-Vozdvizhenskaja” type are related not only to the Lower Laba region but also to the eastern Azov Sea area; only two graves were excavated in the steppe region of the Lower Don.

Burials were never primary ones under the barrow or located in the centre that is in agreement with the period of the “settling on the land” by the nomads.

The emergence of the settlements on the right bank of the Don in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD is connected with a migration “wave” of nomadic tribes who made the kurgans on the right bank of the Kuban, a group of burials now united under the name of the “Gold Cemetery”.

A great number of migrants consisted of the inhabitants from the Kuban settlements who moved to the Don region together with the main part of the nomads. Ecologically, the high terrace of the right bank of the Don resembled the landscape in the Kuban region left by the migrants. The close proximity of ancient Tanais provided additional convenience for the mutual trade and co-operation under nomadic patronage. The construction of pottery kilns excavated on the Maeotian settlements of the right bank of the Lower Don, repeats in details the construction of kilns on the settlements in the Kuban region. Probably, not only farmers, but also craftsmen who supplied the nomads with the products of their workshops migrated to the new places.

Unfortunately, we do not have enough materials from excavations, either in the Kuban or the Lower Don regions, for the detailed study of the offered scheme. With the scarcity of written sources, only accumulation of archaeological material from the multi-layered settlements will allow us to prove this working hypothesis.

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## Meót plasztikus művészet – nomád hatás vagy megrendelés?

A Kubán-vidék letelepedett lakosságához köthető települések és az azokat körbevevő nomád elit sírjainak topográfiája arra utal, hogy ezek a csoportok intenzív kapcsolatban álltak egymással a Kr. u. első századokban. A cikk néhány kerámicsoportot elemez, amelyek a földvárak (gorogyicsék) rétegeiben fordulnak elő. Ezek közé tartoznak a zoomorf ábrázolásokkal díszített edények, valamint olyan kerámiák, amelyek nomád nemzetségjeleket (tamgák) viselnek magukon.

Az első csoport eredete a közép-ázsiai nomádokhoz köthető, elsősorban a Dzsetiaszar kultúrához, amely az Aral-vidék keleti részén terjedt el az ezredforduló idején. A Kelet-Európa déli részén megjelenő hagyomány közép-ázsiai nomád lakosság Pontus-vidéki bevándorlásával függ össze.

A második csoport tárgyait olyan típusú tamgákkal díszítették, amelyekhez hasonlóak öntött bronzüstökről ismertek, egyúttal megtaláljuk őket a görög városok kőfalaira és más tárgyakra vésve. A helyi gyártású kerámián fellelhető tamgák a nomád és a letelepedett lakosság szoros, talán dinasztikus házassági kapcsolatairól tanúskodnak.

A nomád és letelepedett lakosság szoros, szimbiotikus kapcsolata abban is tükröződik, hogy az Alsó-Don vidékén a Kr. e. I. század végén hirtelen megjelennek a meót földvárak. Az ott lakók magukkal hozták korábbi fazekashagyományait új településeikre. Letelepedett kézművesek nomádok általi átköltöztetése általános gyakorlat volt, amire kínai forrásokkal rendelkezünk. Ezek a kézművesek szolgálták ki a nomádok szükségleteit.

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