HOOFDARTIKELEN

EGYPT ON THE STEPPE: A GAZETTEER OF SIXTH CENTURY *AEGYPTIACA* FROM THE NORTH BLACK SEA

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ABSTRACT

This note compiles a list of nearly 100 Egyptianizing faience scarabs, pendants, figurines, and vessels excavated from the northern Black Sea coast dating between the late seventh and mid-sixth centuries B.C.E. I argue that the geographical distribution of so-called aegyptiaca offers a useful index testifying to the mobility of region's early Greek migrants between their Ionian homelands, budding centers such as Istria and Olbia, and short-lived settlements in the countryside. In their circulation of Egyptianizing objects, Greek settlers introduced a taste among their indigenous trade partners for faience 'trinkets' as grave goods that flourished long after similar material fell out of favor in Greece. While sixth century imports represent only a tiny fraction of the over 9,000 faience scarabs, beads, and amulets known from the region between the Archaic period and late antiquity, they were an important channel that propagated Egyptianizing devotional practices in the far north.

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Between the middle of the seventh and the end of the sixth century B.C.E., worshippers and mourners dedicated thousands of Egyptianizing scarabs, amulets, and vessels across Greece (fig. 1).[1]) Whether deposited one-by-one in graves or *en masse* at sanctuaries, the use and display of 'Egyptian' ritual objects allowed dedicators to claim real or fictive associations with Egypt's ruling Saite dynasty. People in Greek cities curated assemblages of individual types of objects, emphasizing their special knowledge of Egyptian culture and even creating local traditions of 'reading' the hieroglyphic texts inscribed on many of them.[2]) Despite these pretensions to authenticity, the vast majority of *aegyptiaca* found in the Aegean were imitations, manufactured at workshops that specialized in supplying Greek sanctuaries.[3]) The material of choice was faience—a vitreous substance made from a partial fusion of silica powder, metal colorants, and natron alkali ($NaCO_3 \cdot 10H_2O$)—which represents well over 90% of Egyptian or Egyptianizing offerings at the 11 sanctuaries with the largest published assemblages. The century-long popularity of 'Egyptian' faience was a cultural response to—and archaeologically visible manifestation of—a significant export trade in natron between Egypt and the Aegean.[4])

Egyptomania was a relatively subdued phenomenon around the Archaic Black Sea. Only about 100 faience objects dating to the Archaic Period have been published after nearly two centuries of excavation. These represent the earliest of the over 9,000 beads, scarabs, pendants, and figurines catalogued from the region by E. Alekseeva dating between the sixth century B.C.E. and the fourth century C.E.[5])

The corpus of Egyptianizing faience from around the Archaic Black Sea offers much less diversity and was product of a shorter chronology than the assemblage in Greece. With a few exceptions, scarabs—which make up over half objects listed here—circulate the familiar repertoire of rightward-facing animals and hieroglyphic inscriptions found on examples produced at Naukratis and Rhodes. The remainder consists of spherical or figured aryballoi made at the same sites.[6]) Most Black Sea *aegyptiaca* come from domestic contexts or individual burials, unlike in the Aegean where the majority are found in sanctuary votive deposits. Scholars from the former Soviet space are unanimous in attributing the movement of faience to Milesian colonists.[7]) Indeed, all but nine objects in the gazetteer come from Milesian colonies or their environs. Faience 'trinkets' were important cult objects at Miletos itself; the partially-published votive deposit from Miletos' extraurban Aphrodite sanctuary at Zeytintepe contained at least 250 scarabs. But using *aegyptiaca* as grave goods is uncommon in the central Aegean after c. 700 B.C.E. The practice of burying children with Egyptianizing amulets, well-known in Geometric Greece, is mostly restricted to Rhodes during the seventh and sixth centuries. The number of scarabs placed in children's graves at Berezan could indicate the presence of Rhodians there.

[1]) This article could not have been written without the assistance of my supervisor Barbara Kowalzig, Tyler Jo Smith, Anne Duray, Samuel Holzman, Philip Katz, and Antonia Noori Farzan. I owe special gratitude to Sergey L. Solovyev and Svetlana Adaxina of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, for help in obtaining inventory numbers and for image permissions. Finally, my thanks are due to Maria Lampraki and the staff of New York University's Global Research Institute in Athens and for the continued support of the Department of Classics in New York. All errors are of course my own.

[2]) The most comprehensive survey of *aegyptiaca* in Greece remains Nancy Skon-Jedele's 1994 dissertation. For overviews of this material elsewhere, see Hölbl 1979 (Italy) and Pardo i Parcerisa 1980-95 (Mediterranean Spain). The earliest catalogs of *aegyptiaca* from around the Black Sea are Touraïeff 1911 and Matthieu 1926; their data was incorporated into studies by Webb 1978 and Gorton 1996. Important overviews of Black Sea material are Piotrovsky 1958, Alekseeva 1972 and 1975, Domăneanţu 1988, Bolshakov and Ilyna 1988, Boriskovskaya 1989, and Dan 2011.

[3]) See Webb (1978, 2-3) and Gorton (1996, 91-131). Webb (2015, 2019) and Masson-Berghoff's (2018) contributions to the British Museum's *Naukratis: Greeks in Egypt* project (Villing et al. 2013-ongoing), bring renewed attention to the cultural and economic processes underlaying Egyptomania in the Archaic Mediterranean.

[4]) The term faience encompasses various low-fired vitreous substances; for overviews, see Webb (1978, 5 and 2016, 1-4), Peltenberg (1987, 11-15), Nicholson (2012, 13), and Masson-Berghoff (2018, 13-15). My sample includes Perachora (95%), the Argive Heraion (99%), the Sounion sanctuaries (100%), the Aegina sanctuaries (99%), the Parian Delion (95%), the Chian sanctuaries (95%), the Samian Heraion (86%), Lindos (96%), Kameiros (96%), and Ialysos (98%); this data is gathered from Skon-Jedele 1994. On the Greco-Egyptian natron trade, see Yardeni 1994 and Briant and Descat 1998.

[5]) Alekseeva 1972 and 1975. Sixth century faience corresponds to her types 41, 50a, and 61-62.

[6]) The most commonly encountered hieroglyphs on scarabs in the Greek world are Gardiner A40/B1 (seated deity); F35 (*nfr*); I12 (uraeus); M17 (*i*); N5 (*r*ʿ); N35 (*n*); S34 (ʿ*nḫ*); V30 (*nb*); X1 (*t*); and D58 (*b*); for discussion, see Hölbl (1979, 1, 210-13) and Skon-Jedele (1994, 299-303). Petrie's assertion (1888, 36) that the many "meaningless" inscriptions on scarabs from Naukratis were proof that they were manufactured by "men more familiar with Greek vase-painting than with hieroglyphics" was once widely accepted. Masson-Berghoff (2018, 26-31), building off work by Bolshakov and Ilyna (1988, 59-61) and Dan (2011, 32-33), has convincingly demonstrated that many of these are cryptograms for the name Amun Re.

[7]) Piotrovsky (1958, 23), Alekseeva (1975, 25), Domăneanţu (1988, 25), Bolshakov and Ilyna (1988, 62), and Boriskovskaya (1989, 117).



Fig. 1: Clockwise: (A) Spherical aryballos from Berezan (Hermitage Б-135); (B) head scaraboid from Berezan (Hermitage Б-79.179; (C) scarab from Berezan (Hermitage Б-73.439). © The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photographs by Vladimir Terebenin. Used with permission.

However, with a corpus amassed over two hundred years of excavation, too little Black Sea *aegyptiaca* comes from primary archaeological contexts to identify the transfer of region-specific practices.[8])

Despite the rather limited reach of Egyptomania along Black Sea coast, the geographical distribution of faience *aegyptiaca* offers an interesting perspective on the early history of the region's colonization by Greeks (fig. 2). Finds of faience *aegyptiaca* can be divided into five clusters: the nine objects found at Istria and its environs near the mouth of the Danube; an uncertain number of objects from the Akkerman fortress on the Dniester Liman; some 67 objects from Berezan and Olbia around the Bug/Dnieper Liman; and ten objects from Pantikapaion and the network of early settlements around the Kerch Strait. A fifth cluster of nine objects was found at necropolises at Zigli and Chegem in the north Caucasus by V.F. Miller in 1888.

Alla Bujskikh, Udo Schlotzhauer, and others have hypothesized that the earliest Greek settlers of the coast founded clusters of small settlements rather than single urban foundations. The earliest settlements, including Orgame at the mouths of the Danube, Berezan on the Bug/Dnieper Liman, and Golubitskaya-2 in the Kuban, failed to grow into major centers. Nearly all of them predated the foundation of a major city nearby, such as Istria, Olbia, and Pantikapaion. Survey on the Taman peninsula in the lead-up to the Kerch Strait bridge project has uncovered a dense network of early settlement built on a fast-changing alluvial landscape. Early settlements such as Golubitskaya-2 on the Taman peninsula or the site now offshore from Taganrog on the Sea of Azov might only have lasted a generation.[9])

The heyday of *aegyptiaca* in the first half of the sixth century corresponds to the early era of settlement in the north Black Sea. Given their rarity, it is surprising to see single faience objects come from Golubitskaya-2 and Volna-1 in the environs of Pantikapaion, Beikush near Olbia, and Orgame, Tariverde, and Vișina near Istria. Their presence might allow us to situate individuals who patronized Egyptianizing cults at Zeytintepe, Rhodes, and elsewhere as members of early communities in the region.

The fifth group of faience *aegyptiaca* is the most challenging. Nine scarabs, argued by B.B. Piotrovsky to be of Naukratis manufacture, come from a necropolis high in an alpine valley near modern Zigli and Chegem in the modern Kabardino-Balkar Republic, adjacent to the Russian-Georgian border. These are the only sixth century faience objects thought to exist so far from a Greek settlement. While Piotrovsky

[8]) On Aphrodite at Zeytintepe, see Hölbl (1999 and 2014, 184-85) and Greaves (2004). For an overview of scarabs in sixth century burials, see Webb (2019, 331-35); on the association between amulets and children, see Arrington (2016). For the archaeological context of the Berezan scarabs, see Bolshakov and Ilyna (1988, 62-63) and note 31 below.

[9]) A. Bujskikh 2013, Schlotzhauer and Zhuravlev 2014, Giaime et al. 2016, and Bîrzescu 2018. On the Taganrog settlement, see Kopylov and Adrianova 2011.

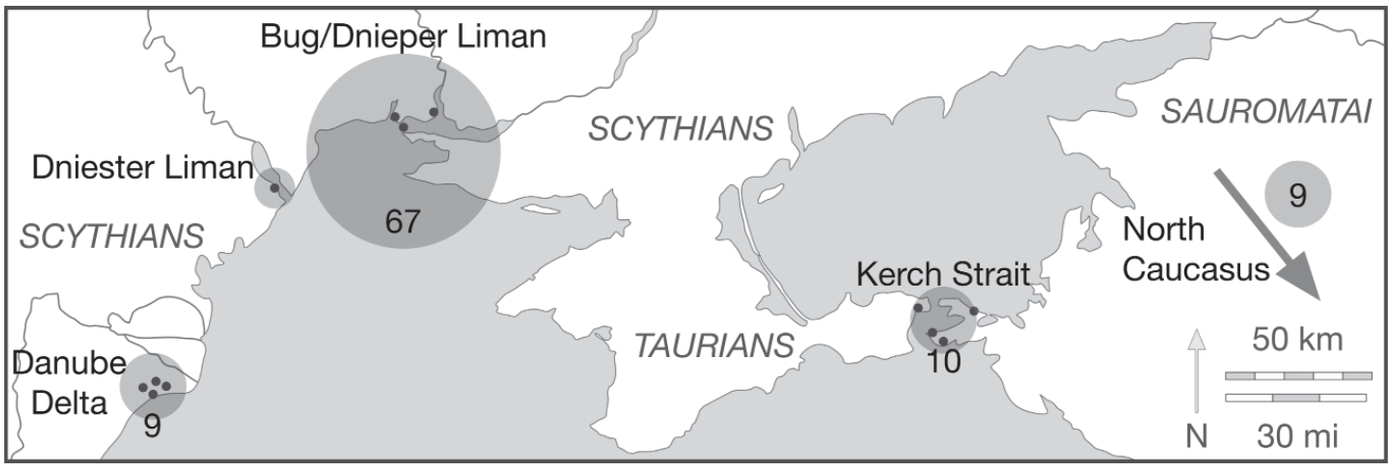


Fig. 2: Map with locations of excavated sixth century faience. Adapted from https://d-maps.com/m/mediterranean/mernoire/mernoire03.pdf.

notes that a rivulet of *aegyptiaca* trickled overland from Urartu and Assyria into the Caucasus during the first half of the first millennium B.C.E., he attributes the conveyance of the Zigli and Chegem scarabs to seafaring Milesians.[10]) Their distance from any other objects of their kind raises difficult questions. It is possible that this handful of Naukratis scarabs arrived at their destination as what Alain Bresson has called "free riders" with more important trade goods; a similar approach has been used to explain the phenomenon of faience at Archaic Black Sea sites in general.[11]) The other mechanism could have been the complicated sociology of gift-giving between coastal Greeks and peoples of the interior that has been invoked to explain the discovery of seventh-century Ionian pottery hundreds of kilometers inland.[12])

Egyptomania's impact lingered along the north Black Sea coast for centuries after the collapse of the Saite state—and with it, Egyptianizing cults at Greek sanctuaries—in 525 B.C.E. Excavations at Panskoye-1 in Crimea show a continued association between brightly-colored beads and pendants with children's burials in a fifth century B.C.E. indigenous context.[13]) Alekseeva argues that Egyptian craftsmen could have migrated to the region at some point during the Classical period to support the demand for 'trinkets;' she even plausibly suggests that Egyptian natron was shipped to the region in quantity.[14]) The volume of faience trinkets in Egyptianizing shapes found along the coast spikes during the second century B.C.E.; a large number are found in the Eurasian interior starting in the Roman period, and these see continued popularity through the fourth century C.E. Makers of later *aegyptiaca* appear to have responded to different demands than their sixth century predecessors. The obscure hieroglyphic inscriptions so common on scarabs in Archaic Greece are rarely found in later periods, although the obverses of some Hellenistic and Roman examples do feature perfunctory attempts at 'Egyptian' writing. The small number of sixth century objects that remained in circulation ensured that models for reproducing 'hieroglyphs' continued to exist.[15]) The migration of shapes associated with faience—most popularly scarabs or the dwarf god Bes—to new materials including bone and ceramic suggests that Scythians and other people of the steppe did not value their 'imitations' based on their supposed magical inscriptions or even their exotic provenance. Rather, it was the shape or color that were important.[16])

Egyptomania was a minor but intriguing phenomenon of the sixth century Black Sea. Nevertheless, the very narrow distribution of *aegyptiaca* offers a useful illustration of how settlers transited between Ionia and the region's earliest Greek communities—an insight particularly valuable where those settlements failed to take root. As few as they were, these objects introduced a taste in Egyptianizing devotional trinkets to Caucasus and the steppe that would last for nearly a millennium.[17]) From that perspective, the regional spread of *aegyptiaca* pinpoint the beginnings of a much more significant and long-lasting encounter between the cultures of Africa and Eurasia, mediated through East Greece. This exchange might ultimately have been the backdrop invoked by Herodotus' famous 'mirror'-like contrast between the cultures of Scythia and Egypt.[18])

[10]) See Miller (1888, pl. 126 nos. 81-89) and Piotrovsky (1958, 23).

[11]) Bresson 2016, 368.

[12]) See the debate between Vachtina 2007 and Tsetskhladze 2012 over seventh-century B.C.E. vessels from Nemirovo in Ukraine; for similar debates surrounding Greek pottery in Iron Age Gaul, see Dietler 2010.

[13]) Skon-Jedele (1994, xxi) notes the absence of *aegyptiaca* in the Aegean between c. 525 B.C.E. and the Hellenistic Period. But this is not the case if we include in the rubric of *aegyptiaca* the core-formed glass beads and pendants popular through the Classical period that were manufactured using the same imported Egyptian commodities. On beads and trinkets at Panskoye-1, see Stolba (2009). Faience scarabs, amulets, vessels, and figurines had already begun to disappear in Greece even before the Saite collapse; see Webb (2015, 31; 2019, 312) and Masson-Berghoff (2018, 82-86).

[14]) Alekseeva 1975, 27; but see Boriskovskaya (1989, 115) with apprehensions. Archeoscientific testing finds that glassmakers across Roman Europe used North African natron; see Devulder and Degryse 2015.

[15]) See Touraïeff 1911, 22 (Archaic faience in disturbed context at Akkerman); Piotrovsky 1958, 24 (sixth century scarab found in fourth-century tomb on Taman peninsula); Dan 2011, 12-13 (sixth century scarabs in fourth-century domestic context at Orgame).

[16]) Alekseeva (1975, pls. 9-10) shows Hellenistic scarabs with perfunctory inscriptions. For Scythian imitation scarabs, see Simonovich 1976; for imitation of other objects, see Piotrovsky 1958.27 and Stolba 2009.

[17]) On Egypt and the spread of devotional 'trinkets' in the Mediterranean, see Hölbl (1981), Arrington (2016), Kousoulis (2017), and Webb (2019).

[18]) See Hartog 1988 [1980] and Ivantchik 2011.

Gazetteer

This gazetteer updates the 1988 checklist compiled by Catrinel Domăneanţu. Information provided is summarized from published descriptions and does not intend to be comprehensive.

Table 1

Danube delta	
Location	*Object types*
Istria	1 scarab[19]) 4 spherical aryballoi[20])
Orgame	2 scarabs[21])
Tariverde	1 spherical aryballos[22])
Vişina	1 hedgehog aryballos[23])

Table 2

Dniester liman	
Location	*Object types*
Akkerman/Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi	Uncertain number in disturbed context.[24])

Table 3

Bug/Dnieper liman	
Location	*Object types*
Berezan	1 falcon figurine[25]) 1 ram aryballos[26]) 1 grasshopper aryballos[27]) 1 hedgehog aryballos[28]) 1 tilapia aryballos[29])
	9+ spherical aryballoi[30]) 13 scarabs[31])
Olbia	1 warrior head aryballos[32]) 1 Achelous head aryballos[33]) 2 amulets[34]) 3 hedgehog aryballoi[35]) 7 spherical aryballoi[36]) 25 scarabs[37])
Beikush	1 scarab[38])

Table 4

Kerch strait	
Location	*Object types*
Pantikapaion?[39])	1 scarab[40]) 1 musician figurine[41]) 2 monkey aryballoi[42]) 4 spherical aryballoi[43])

[19]) Domăneanţu (1988, 21) and Dan (2011, 36 n. 96). Discovered at the Aphrodite temple in Istria's *Zone Sacrée;* now lost.

[20]) Two fragmentary examples (inv. nos. B2577 and 2578) were discovered in the *Zone Sacrée* with a terracotta Bes figurine and a scarab; see Domăneanţu (1988, 21-22). A third was found in mixed Archaic fill behind a rampart wall while a fourth was a surface find on the city's western plateau; both fragmentary.

[21]) Both scarabs (inv. nos. ICEM 46773 and ICEM 46774) were discovered in a late fourth-century domestic context although are certainly Archaic; see Dan 2011, 12-13.

[22]) Domăneanţu 1988, 23; from unknown context.

[23]) Domăneanţu 1988, 23, fig. 1/6. Fragmentary example found in sixth century domestic layer with both imported East Greek and local handmade pottery. Tulcea Museum.

[24]) Touraïeff 1911, 22, fig. 3. An unclear number of scarabs and amulets were found eroding down the bank with a late Ptolemaic coin. Most of these were probably Hellenistic as well, but Piotrovsky (1958, 24) notes some appear to be much older.

[25]) Webb (1978, 95 no. 507), Domăneanţu (1988, 24), and Solovyev (1998, 57 fig. 41, 2005, no. 205, and 2007, no. 1). Hermitage Б.87-313. Sixth century context.

[26]) Domăneanţu (1988, 24) and Solovyev (2005, no. 196). Hermitage Б.123.

[27]) Webb (1978, 135 no. 953) and Domăneanţu (1988, 24). Hermitage Б.13-267.

[28]) Webb (1978, 134 no. 932) and Domăneanţu (1988, 24). National Museum, Warsaw 148502.

[29]) Solovyev (1998, 87 fig. 77 and 2007, no. 9) and Dan (2011, 26). Hermitage Б.82-315.

[30]) Both whole and fragmentary; see Domăneanţu (1988, 24) and Solovyev (2005, no. 199). The number and individual condition of these is uncertain; one is Hermitage Б.135.

[31]) Bolshakov and Ilyna (1988, 50-59 nos. 1-13) publish (in order) Hermitage Б.131, Б.83-272, Б.69-365, Б.67-406, Б.73-439, Б.79-179, Б.128, Б.127, Б.67-285, Б.126, Б.129, Б.130, and one now lost. Nos. 1, 4, 7-8, and 10-13 come from children's burials. Two burials include multiple scarabs; nos. 7, 8, and 11 come from Berezan necropolis grave 31, found with rock crystal beads; both nos. 10 and 12 come from grave 87. Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9 were found in fill of pit houses. Bolshakov and Ilyna 1988 no. 6 (Hermitage Б.79-179) is an unusual head-shaped scaraboid (see note 37 below). See also Solovyev (2005, nos. 203-204).

[32]) Domăneanţu 1988, 24. Hermitage.

[33]) See Webb (1978, 128 no. 855) and Domăneanţu (1988, 24); National Museum, Warsaw 148501.

[34]) See Touraïeff (1911, 23), Matthieu (1926, 68) and Alekseeva (1975, 44) types 61-62 (tb 11.17-18); from single sixth century burial also containing five scarabs (see note 37 below). Couchant lion amulet is Hermitage Ол.89-1.

[35]) Domăneanţu 1988, 24. These include Hermitage Ол.1909-62 (Skudnova 1988, 45 from grave 17) and Ол.1909-106 (Skudnova 1988, 48 from grave 37).

[36]) Domăneanţu 1988, 24. Hermitage. These include Hermitage Ол.1912-69 (Skudnova 1988, 108 from grave 16), Ол.1912-256 (Skudnova 1988, 118 from grave 63), and Ол.1913-134 (Skudnova 1988, 135 from grave 52).

[37]) There is no complete publication of these. Matthieu 1926 publishes 12 Olbia scarabs and one ram's head scaraboid. Alekseeva (1975, 42, tbs. 9.11a-д, 12a-д, 17, 20, and 21), publishes 13 Olbia scarabs as type 50a, giving partial inventory numbers (Hermitage Ол.67-1, Ол.89-1, Ол.131-1, Ол.89-4, Ол.67-2). All are from sixth century burials. Alekseeva type 41 (1975, 40, tb. 9.1, Hermitage Ол.1908-2726) is an unusual head shaped-scaraboid that comes from an unknown context. This and Hermitage Б.79-179 from Berezan (see note 31 above) are the only examples of their kind known from around the Black Sea.

[38]) See S. Bujskikh 2006, 143, pl. 40.25. Found in sixth century votive deposit.

[39]) I list vessels purchased in Kerch under the heading Pantikapaion; some of these objects probably come from the surrounding region, such as the aryballos listed by Domăneanţu (1988, 24; note 42 below) said to come from Taman peninsula. Other objects published in the early twentieth century with provenance from Kerch and other Black Sea ports, such as the unprovenanced *ushabtis* published by Snguireff (1929), are so rare outside Egypt that they must have been brought from Egypt as souvenirs by eighteenth- or nineteenth-century travelers; see Webb (2016, 63-64).

[40]) Touraïeff (1911, 26, fig. 12) and Piotrovsky (1958, 24, fig. 2). Hermitage.

[41]) Touraïeff (1911, 29-30, fig. 22) and Webb (1978, 90, no. 411). Hermitage.

[42]) Domăneanţu 1988, 24. Hermitage.

[43]) Domăneanţu 1988, 24; all in Hermitage. One of these, Webb 1978, 119 no. 773, features illegible pharaonic cartouche. Webb (1978, 121 no. 811) publishes two under one number.

Hermonassa	1 scarab[44])
Golubitskaya-2	1 spherical aryballos[45])
Volna-1	1 scarab[46])

Table 5

North Caucasus	
Location	*Object types*
Zigli and Chegem	9 scarabs[47])

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44) Referred to by Piotrovsky (1958, 24); discussed by Gaidukevich (1959, 166 no. 50), and Mimokhod, Sudarev, and Uspenskiy (2018, 223). From sixth century burial 3/1938.

45) Schlotzhauer and Zhuralev 2014, 211. State Historical Museum, Moscow, Б.2105/243. Found with mid-sixth century pottery in zone 2 of excavation, possible domestic context.

46) Mimokhod, Sudarev, and Uspenskiy 2018, 223, fig. 10.4. From sixth century burial 4202.

47) Miller (1888, pl. 126, nos. 81-89) and Piotrovsky (1958, 22). Miller reports that objects were both excavated from necropolis or obtained by locals without specifying. Piotrovsky believes that Miller's illustrations are consistent with sixth century date.

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