

THE INVASION OF THE BORANS INTO THE BOSPORUS IN THE 3RD CENTURY A.D.

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The article is devoted to the complex topic of the invasion of the barbarians, known as the Borans, into the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom in the 3rd century A.D. However, the circumstances of the appearance of these barbarians in the North-Eastern Black Sea Region continue to arise numerous disputes. The main goal of the research is the ethnic identification of the Borans and determination of the exact route of their movement to the Bosporus, which does not contradict other types of sources.

Methodology: The leading method of research is the method of source analysis. It consisted not only in the selection but also in a thorough study of all the features of the source that are important for deciphering information about the past and identifying historical facts, which are important for the study. When working with found ancient coins, the method of numismatic research was used; it included determining the place and time of issue, as well as the weight and size of a coin.

Main Findings: The main results of the study consist of the identification of the Borans with ethnically mixed insurgent detachments of the Latrones type, which were active in the middle of the 3rd century A.D., including the sea and the border areas of the Roman Empire. A new route was also developed for the movement of the Borans to the Bosporus from the Lower Danube to Tanais at the mouth of the Don aboard small vessels, i.e. exclusively by water.

Applications of this study: The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that it can be used to write summarizing works on the history of the states and peoples of the Northern Black Sea Region of the first centuries A.D., textbooks, as well as for developing special courses for students of higher education institutions on the subject "History of Ancient Rome", in order to study the experience of interaction between the ancient civilization and the barbarian world.

Novelty/Originality: The novelty of the research is determined by the fact that for the first time an explanation is given of the organization of unusual sea crusades of the barbarians against the Roman Empire on the ships of the Bosporan fleet in the second half of the 3rd century A.D. The fact is that at that time the Latrones were the only barbaric force on the Lower Danube that was actively operating, including on ships. It was precisely in such a barbaric environment that the idea of the sea plunder of the Greco-Roman world could have arisen.

Keywords: Roman Empire, Bosporan Kingdom, Tanais, Borans, Celts, Goths, Bosporan Fleet, Latrones Troops, King Pharsanzes.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of ethnical identification of the Borans

The history of the invasion of the Borans into the territory of the Bosporan Kingdom in the 3rd century A.D. has long attracted researchers. Unfortunately, the ethnicity of these representatives of the Barbaricum has not yet been established, since it is impossible to accurately determine the monuments of material culture that can be identified with these barbarians. The basis of all assumptions on this subject is the analysis of the very name of the Borans. Thus, the Borans were usually called a Scythian-Sarmatian-Alanian ([Remennikov, 1954, 90](#)), Slavic (Ptolemy's "Boruskai") ([Udaltsov, 1946, 49](#)), or Germanic tribe ("Varna" of Procopius of Caesarea and Agathias) ([Pioro, 1990, 39](#)), or a Lugi tribe ([Tikhanova, 1953, 322](#)), which came from the territory of the Przeworsk culture.

The problems of the ways of movement of the Borans to the Bosporus

The problem of the movement of the Borans from the Lower Danube to the Bosporus continues to cause many disputes. In contrast to the most common version of the path of the barbarians by land ([Aibabin, 1999, 32](#)), Gaidukevich believed that the Borans invaded the Bosporus on ships captured after the seizure of Tanais ([Gaidukevich, 1949, 443-445](#)). Veimarn assumed that the barbarians initially moved from the Lower Danube towards Crimea along the coast on small coasting vessels ([Veimarn, 1971, 62](#)). Vysotskaya also assumed that the barbarians used the sea route to move towards Crimea ([Vysotskaya, 1972, 187](#)). In this regard, the opinion of Kazanskii is of particular interest, who was convinced that if the barbarians in this situation invaded the territory of Crimea, they did it by sea from Moeotis, with the help of small vessels. The fact is that there was no point for them to invade a dry steppe that was deserted and inhospitable for them without prepared cavalry. According to the scientist, they approached the Azov Sea, most likely, by moving along the coast from the side of the Lower Dnieper ([Kazanskii, 2015, 180-185](#)).

METHODS

In the study, the authors tried, as far as possible, to adhere to the principle of objectivity, relying solely on the facts that were obtained after careful analysis of historical sources. The choice of specific methods is due to the specifics and features of the used sources. The authors' main written source is "The New History" by Zosimus. Among archaeological sources, a special place in the study is occupied by the finds of the Bosphorus coins at the Belinskoye settlement and its necropolis in the territory of the European Bosphorus. The leading method of research is the method of source analysis. It consisted not only in the selection but also in a thorough study of all the features of the source that are important for identifying and deciphering information regarding the past. In the course of work on historical facts, revealed in such a way, the general logical methods of analysis and synthesis were widely used.

RESULTS

The data, obtained after a thorough analysis of the sources, make it possible to identify the Borans with insurgent detachments of the *Latrones* type that were actively operating in the middle of the 3rd century A.D. in the border areas of the Roman Empire. The ethnic composition of such anti-Roman units was quite diverse. It consisted of Roman provincials, mainly of Celtic origin, runaway slaves and *coloni*, and former Roman soldiers. Considering that the *Latrones* also acted against the Romans at sea, this may explain the emergence of the idea in the Borans' minds of using the ships of the Bosphoran fleet to attack the rich coastal centers. In any case, the *Latrones* were the only barbaric force on the Lower Danube, operating also on ships. Moreover, a breakthrough in the defense of the Bosphorus could also have taken place according to the same scheme. The basis of the contract between the Borans and Pharsanzes was the transfer of ships from the Bosphoran fleet to the barbarians for helping him to ascend to the royal throne. At the same time, at the stage of concluding this agreement, the Borans had no plans to organize a piracy base on the border of the Bosphorus. Most likely, the main goal of the barbarians was the final relocation to the eastern parts of the Roman Empire.

On the part of Pharsanzes, there was an understanding of the extreme danger of the presence of the barbaric uncontrollable contingent in the state. Therefore, the new king was not averse to sacrificing part of the Bosphoran fleet, if only after his victory, to send the Borans to the northeast coast of the Black Sea, away from the Bosphoran borders.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the impact of the predatory attacks of the *Latrones* on the organization of the Borans' sea plunders

The authors have previously explained that the confrontation between two candidates for power after King Ininthimeus – Rhescuporis V and Pharsanzes was longer than was previously thought (Yartsev, Zubarev, Butovskii, 2015, 67-74). However, the protracted internecine struggle required the involvement of external allied forces, including from the number of surrounding barbarians. At the same time, the nearest place where it was possible to hire an army of professional mercenaries was the Danube territory, where the Borans actually operated before their appearance in the Northern Black Sea Region. Here, at that time, in addition to the Germanic tribes, the Goths and the Carpi, insurgent detachments of the *Latrones* type were particularly distinguished, which were militarily active at that time in this territory. They consisted mainly of Roman provincials, runaway slaves and *coloni*, and former Roman soldiers (Remennikov, 1954, 16, 48), but definitely included immigrants from certain barbarian tribes. To become such a robber was the easiest way out for those who went bankrupt or were in danger (Myusse, 2006, 204). It was the *Latrones* who were fighting not only on land, but also in the sea, and provided tremendous assistance to the tribes invading from behind the Danube (IGR, III, 481; ILS, 8870). Moreover, it is noted that in the 240s A.D. this movement received the highest scope. The Act of Gordian III dated 243 declared the irresponsibility of those who killed the *Latrones* (Cod. Just., IX, 16, 2). In 265, Emperor Gallienus had to confirm this law (Cod. Just., IX, 16, 3). Cruelty to such criminals by the Roman authorities was fully justified. The rebels did not only stand up against the Romans as armed forces; they tracked down and transmitted to the hostile tribes beyond the Danube all the information about the movement of the Roman troops, showed the barbarians who invaded the imperial territory suitable places for defense or attack, served them as faithful guides, delivered food and fodder to the barbarian armies (Dmitrev, 1956, 109-110). It is unlikely that Pharsanzes, who needed military force in the struggle for the Bosphoran throne, would be able to ignore the potential of these combat units.

The authors propose to regard the Borans, the main allies of Pharsanzes, as such an army of the *Latrones*, consisting mainly of inhabitants of the banks of the Danube, and where in the past mainly Celtic tribes lived. In this regard, it would be more logical to assume that the name "Borans" is based not on the Germanic term "vaeria" connected with the self-defense (Vasilev, 2005, 348-349), but on the Celtic word "var" relating to water and sea (Kuzmin, 2005, 610). It matches numerous data on the persistent preservation of the ancient traditions by the population of the former Celtic and Danube lands (Schukin, 2005, 81, 119-123, 167). The hypothesis, suggesting that the Borans should be considered a large pirate barbarian association that initially operated on the Danube and where the steady traditions of sea plunder have long been preserved (Arr. Anab., I, 3, 6), allows explaining the unusual orientation of these barbarians in the second half of the 3rd century A.D. solely to the organization of sea attacks. In any case, in the 3rd century A.D., the *Latrones* was the only actively operating barbaric force on the Lower Danube, including on ships. Only the barbarians, associated with them, could have the idea of sea plunder of the Greco-Roman world. Thus, the reasons become clearer

why the barbaric fleet from Moetis, going on a predatory campaign, often went into the mouth of the Danube to interact with related barbaric associations ([Budanova, 2001, 114-127](#)). The proposed identification of the Borans can certainly shed light on Pollio's "celtae" (SHA, Claud., 6, 2), one of the most mysterious participants in the attack on the empire in 269.

Analysis of the characteristics of the predatory attacks of the Borans and the choice of the method of breaking through the defense of the Bosporan Kingdom

According to Zosimus, the Borans, among other Danube tribes, plundered the Roman lands even under Trebonianus Gallus (251-253) (Zosim., I, 27), under the usurper Aemilianus (July-October 253) and Valerian (253-260): "... the Borans, the Goths, the Carpi and the Urugunds who lived on Danubia not only plundered all parts of Italy or Illyricum but continuously kept on devastating them without any resistance. The Borans even tried to get across to Asia and easily arranged it with the help of the Bosphorians, who rather out of fear than out of sympathy gave them their ships and showed the way when crossing" (Zosim., I, 31). Considering that all Pharsanzes coins date back to 550 B.E. ([Frolova, 1980, 63-65](#)) (October 253 – October 254), the most likely time of his accession to the throne can be considered the autumn of 253. The existence of the agreement of Pharsanzes with the Borans, as even Kruglikova believed ([Kruglikova, 1965, 8](#)), is undoubted, since it is clearly visible in the context of the dramatic events of the second half of the 3rd century A.D. Obviously, the basis of such a treaty was the transfer of ships from the composition of the Bosporan fleet to the barbarians for their help to Pharsanzes to ascend to the royal throne. Moreover, realizing the amount of danger of the presence of such an uncontrollable contingent next to his possessions, the new king, apparently, ultimately planned to send the barbarians across to the northeast coast of the Black Sea, away from the Bosporan borders.

At the same time, it is unknown whether there were any military actions during this civil strife or the power was transferred to Pharsanzes without any serious crashes. Kruglikova also assumed that the seizure of power by Pharsanzes was not accompanied by the destruction of cities and settlements ([Kruglikova, 1965, 8](#)). However, it is unlikely that the barbaric army from the Danube region could pass overland without a single battle through the echeloned defense system of the western borders of the Bosphorus unless some of the border fortresses voluntarily went over to the side of Pharsanzes. The material of the upper layers, some of the affected settlements in European Bosphorus in the second half of the 3rd century A.D. ([Zubarev, 2002, 122](#)), persuade the authors to assume that the destruction was not in the middle, but in the last quarter of the 3rd century A.D.

In this regard, the numismatic material from the Belinskoye settlement and its necropolis from the authors' own excavations is considered to be particularly significant. The fortress city was, in fact, the western gateway to the Bosphorus and the barbarians who moved from the west simply could not pass it. However, the coins of Rhescuporis V, discovered by the authors, testify that life in the settlement continued after 267. Thus, one of them (16 mm in diameter and weight of 5 g) comes from the crypt No. 19 and belongs to the third group of copper minting (up to 267); the other is found in the settlement. Its weight (3.5 g) corresponds to the fourth group of copper minting (after 267) ([Frolova, 1997, 67](#)). In this case, the last coin was found at the base of the foundation masonry, where it appeared, obviously, during the construction.

Another picture is seen in the Asian Bosphorus. In particular, a treasure from Patrei (1970) is of huge interest. Its dating is directly connected with the destruction of the city ([Desyatchikov, Dolgorukov, 1984, 86](#)). The most recent bullion staters of the treasure belong to the year 251, which at one time gave Golenko the grounds to date this burial exactly to the tenth year of the rule of Rhescuporis V (242-276) ([Golenko, 1978, 27](#)). Usually, copper coins of this king are also taken into account, which appeared in the treasure when such a coin had not yet depreciated so much that it was neglected when hoarding the treasure ([Golenko, 1978, 24](#)). However, according to Abramzon and Frolova, this treasure was buried a little later than in 251 (in the period of 251-257), i.e. during the time to which the copper double denarius No. 9 belongs ([Abramzon, Frolova, 2007-2008, 358-359](#)).

Perhaps the situation in the region in the middle of the 3rd century A.D. will be clarified by the treasure from Hermonassa (1970) because it seems to come from a layer of fire and destruction ([Korovina, 2002, 78](#)). Based on the latest staters of 549 B.E., Golenko rightly dated it the same year (October 252 – October 253). However, the scientist suggested that it should have been hidden in the first half of the year ([Golenko, 1972, 239-249](#)). Here the point of view of Abramzon and Frolova seems to be more correct. The scientists linked the date of hoarding of the staters of this treasure with the events of the difficult state of the economy of the Bosphorus, caused by the threat of the invasion of barbarians ([Abramzon, Frolova, 2007-2008, 366-367](#)).

All these facts may indicate that the barbarians of Pharsanzes proceeded to the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom through the lands of the Northern Azov region, where they might have burnt Tanais, left by the population ([Anisimov, 1989, 128-130](#)) and further went through the settlements and cities of the Asian Bosphorus. It is possible that the seizure of ships during this raid, which created the threat of barbarians attacking the capital, forced Rhescuporis V to go into coregency with Pharsanzes.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the idea of sea crusades was based on the conscious use by barbarians of the most vulnerable place in the defense of the Northern Black Sea buffer zone of the Roman Empire – sea communications.

Consequently, the disclosure of the defense of the Bosphorus should have happened in exactly the same way. Instead of breaking through to the capital through an echeloned system of land fortifications, using sea vessels, barbarians could immediately create a real threat of total annihilation for the main city of the Bosphorus state. However, if the Borans actually moved to the Bosphorus on small vessels, then it would be more logical to assume that almost all their way to Tanais was laid by water: first along the sea coast, then up the Dnieper and one of its tributaries to the Seversky Donets basin which eventually led the barbarians to this city at the mouth of the Don.

At the same time, the upstream area of the Seversky Donets became the deep rear for the barbarians in this struggle. According to scientists, the Goths retreated here after the defeat, and it was from this territory that they entered the Bosphorus (Beidin, 2015, 146; Kazanskii, 2015, 185, note 5). This conclusion confirms the strange concentration of coins in the Seversky Donets basin, belonging to both Pharsanzes and the northern provinces of Asia Minor. Moreover, 31% of the coins from the provinces, for some reason, belong to the Trebizond coinage. It seems that part of the barbarians who participated in the attack of the "Scythians" on this city lived in this territory, many of which were certainly Goths (given the localization of monuments here with Wielbark traditions) (Oblomskii, 2002, 209, Fig. 60; Beidin, 2012, 149-153; Beidin, 2015, 138-149). Perhaps the reason for this was the fact that other groups of barbarians continued to advance towards the Moeotis through the indicated areas, following the Borans. It is not by chance that the Goths are already mentioned along with the Borans in the events of the second sea crusade.

CONCLUSION

On the shores of the Moeotis at the mouth of the Don in the middle of the 3rd century A.D., a pirate base of barbarians arose oriented to the sea plunder of the rich coastal centers of the Greco-Roman world. The emergence of this Azov pirate enclave resulted from the unification of the main pirate forces operating in the Black Sea: local Tauroscythae, numerous natives of the Gothic-Germanic environment and the Borans coming from the Danube, in whom it is necessary to see the Roman seaLatrones. This group of the Borans consisted mainly of Roman provincials and fugitive soldiers. A special tribal union of the Alans-Tanaites was also in alliance with these barbarians.

Bosporan King Pharsanzes, like Ininthimeus, belonged to a special Sarmatian-Iranian dynastic line, which was directly related to the grouping of the Lower Don Sarmatians and the Tanaites. Having suffered a defeat at first, this contender for the highest power in the state invited an army of the Borans from the Lower Danube, specializing in, among other things, sea plunder. At the same time, the Pharsanzes treaty with the barbarians meant, as payment, the subsequent transfer, if successful, of ships from the Bosporan fleet to them.

However, if the idea of the sea crusades was based on the deliberate use by barbarians of the most vulnerable places in the defense of the Northern Black Sea buffer zone of the Roman Empire – sea communications, then the disclosure of the defense of Bosphorus should have taken place in exactly the same pattern. Instead of breaking through to the capital through an echeloned system of land fortifications using ships, the barbarians could immediately create a real threat of complete annihilation for the main city of Bosphorus. Consequently, the Borans moved to the Bosphorus on small ships and exclusively by water: first along the seacoast, then up the Dnieper and one of its tributaries to the Seversky Donets basin, which eventually led the barbarians to Tanais and the Moeotis.

In accordance with the treaty, Pharsanzes, who, with the help of the barbarians, was still able to become the Bosporan king for a short time, hastened to provide his new allies with the Bosporan fleet for the predatory raid. By such actions, he apparently wanted to get rid of quite dangerous neighbors. However, having lost his power support in the absence of the main forces of the allies, Pharsanzes was rather quickly defeated by Rhescuporis V and most likely died. However, the winner, who started the fight against the barbarians who had returned from the campaign, could not beat the latter and be forced to reprovide them with ships for the next campaign. It was from this moment that the neighborhood with these restless and dangerous barbarians became one of the main factors in the historical development of the Bosporan Kingdom in the late antique period.

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