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Introduction to studies on late Sasanian protective armour. The Yarysh-Mardy¹ helmet

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In 1968, in a mountainous village of Yarysh-Mardy, situated on the river Argun in the north-eastern part of the Caucasus, presently within the borders of the Chechen Republic, a find in the form of a warrior burial place was made by a local, D. Ahmatov, who then handed it over to the national Museum of the Chechen-Ingush Republic.² The find contained a helmet and a spearhead. The



Fig. 1. The Yarysh-Mardy iron *spangenhelme* type helmet, a frontal view. An aperture in the central forehead part of the bottom band is well visible. The National *Museum* of the Chechen Republic, photograph courtesy of H. Mamaev.

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¹ The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Hamid Mamaev for granting permission to use his photographs of the find, which acted as an inspiration for writing this article.

² MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982) 250.



Fig. 2. The Yarysh-Mardy iron *spangenhelme* type helmet. Left: a side view, right: inside view. The *National Museum* of the Chechen Republic, photograph courtesy of H. Mamaev.

helmet which is the main topic of the present study, is currently in the collection of the *National Museum* of the Chechen Republic in Grozny. The find was first reported in 1982 by H. Mamaev and D. Chahkiev in a yearly journal, *Sovetskaya Archeologia*.

The helmet, or, as E. Naroznyj³ rightly remarked, more precisely its upper part, is in the form of a hemispherical, multi-segmental dome. It is 13 cm high and 20,7 cm wide⁴ and consists of 6 segments conjoined together by decorative ridges. The whole construction is fastened together with rivets of exceptionally spiky form, each ridge possessing a double row of 6 such rivets at each side. There is a band attached to the bowl of the helmet by means of rivets of the same form as those used in the upper part of the helmet. Both the top of the bowl and the bottom part of the band have disappeared due to corrosion, which makes it difficult to estimate the precise height of the helmet. However, H. Mamaev and D. Chahkiev's view that there might have been a round topping or a rosette holding the whole construction of the bowl at the top⁵ seems quite likely. In the front part of the bottom band, more precisely in the central part of the forehead, an aperture can be clearly observed. A thin metal plate, most probably made of bronze, which is sticking out of the ridge in the central forehead part of the helmet⁶ constitutes a rather peculiar form of decoration.

The burial of Yarysh-Mardy has often constituted the subject matter of works on protective armour,⁷ It has been associated with the Golden Horde (post-Mongolian) period. Yet, the helmet does not bear close resemblance to other helmets of that time.⁸ By virtue of its moderate height, H. Mamaev and D. Chahkiev compare the find to a type of protective headwear called „misiurka” (from Polish)⁹ used in the Caucasus which was later also popularized in Russia and other Slavic countries.¹⁰ However, as E. Naroznyj¹¹ rightly remarks, the height of the bowl could have been considerably diminished due to corrosion of the bottom part of the rim. It is noteworthy that the rim band of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet is damaged along the whole length of its perimeter and hence the estimation of its width seems impossible.

³ NAROZNYJ (2003) 113.

⁴ MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982) 250.

⁵ NAROZNYJ (2003) 113.

⁶ MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982) 250.

⁷ MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982); CHAHKIEV (1988); NAROZNYJ (1998); NAROZNYJ (2003); GORELIK (2002) and others.

⁸ MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982) 252-253.

⁹ GRADOWSKI, ŻYGULSKI (2010) 123, 130.

¹⁰ MAMAEV, CHAHKIEV (1982) 253.

¹¹ NAROZNYJ (2003) 113.

Due to the height of its upper part, E. Naroznyj attempted to find parallels between the Yarysh-Mardy helmet and a similar find from Beloi Kalitva.¹² Nonetheless, apart from the size, there is not much in common; the two helmets have completely different types of bowl construction. Both the construction and the decorative form of ridges of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet constitute the main arguments on which E. Naroznyj rests his analysis.¹³ The Yarysh-Mardy helmet is, in fact, a six-ridged helmet, i.e. the so called *spangenhelme* type with semispherical topping. However, as already mentioned, the helmet must have been longer at the bottom and therefore it must have had a shape of an elongated semi-oval slightly flattened at its sides. In contrast, the Beloi Kalitvy helmet is of cylinder-conical form with the upper part of the bowl consisting of one riveted sheet of metal. Therefore, it represents a completely different type of helmets, namely those which were particularly popular in Ruthenia in 15th-17th c. AD.¹⁴

M. V. Gorelik, on the other hand, juxtaposes the helmet from Yarysh-Mardy with helmet found near Ozernoe (presently held in Sterlitamak Museum, Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia) as well as the helmet from the Perm Museum, suggesting that all of them could be classified as types of Mongolian helmets from 13th-14th c. AD. However, M. Tsurtsumia is rather skeptical about drawing too hasty conclusions concerning dating of helmets based solely on their seemingly Mongolian appearance. He states that “*many details of 13th-14th c. AD helmets, that were considered to be Mongolian, after a thorough study can no longer be thought as such*”.¹⁵ Such a common a priori assumption that Mongols were responsible for popularization of new armour solutions has often led to certain automatization in dating of objects considered as atypical. This excessive willingness to identify certain finds as those of Mongolian origin is instantiated by M. V. Gorelik’s statement that Mongols were the carriers of heavy armour solutions on the basis of which European armour developed.¹⁶ However, many scholars, for instance Yu. A. Kuleshov,¹⁷ questioned the above view popularized by M. V. Gorelik.

As far as the comparison of the three aforesaid finds is concerned, it must be stressed that the mentioned decorative shape of ridges had become a commonplace feature of helmets in Central Asia by 6th c. AD.¹⁸ A. von Le Coq refers to this type of helmets, perhaps not thoroughly adequately, as Sasanian ridge helmets.¹⁹ Additionally, it is noteworthy that the practice of making such decorative ridges on helmets has survived in the south-eastern Asia virtually until the present time.²⁰ Therefore, helmets’ highly ornamental form cannot constitute unambiguous evidence for classification of finds. Other elements of construction should be analyzed in order to consider possibilities of mutual parallels among the mentioned finds.

The aforementioned helmet found in the vicinity of Ozernoe, a village on the geographical border between Europe and Asia, was published by V. V. Ovsjannikov in 1990.²¹ It comprises four elements conjoined together by means of four decorative ridges. The bottom of the bowl consists of a two-part band. A suit of lamellar armour made up mainly of elongated rectangular plates with 13 holes was also found in the same grave. Apart from the armour and the helmet, nothing else was found which could facilitate dating of the burial. Focusing on popularization of plate lamellar armour of a similar type in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 13th-15th c. AD, V. V. Ovsjannikov suggests Mongolian origin of the find. Additionally, he recognizes the burial ritual as typical of the Mongolian tradition.²²

¹² NAROZNYJ (1998) 13; NAROZNYJ (2003) 113.

¹³ GORELIK (2002) 75; NAROZNYJ (2003) 113.

¹⁴ ZUKOV (2005) 216-235.

¹⁵ TSURTSUMIA (2011) 84.

¹⁶ GORELIK (2002) 31; GORELIK (2011) 121-137.

¹⁷ KULESHOV (2010) 73.

¹⁸ BOBROV, HUDJAKOV (2005) 180.

¹⁹ LE COQ (1925) 57 fig. 60-61.

²⁰ LARocca (2006) 68-91.

²¹ OVSJANNIKOV (1990) 141-149.

²² OVSJANNIKOV (1990) 141-149.

There are, however, two fundamental problems with V. V. Ovsjannikov's thesis. Firstly, the dubious principle of dating finds on the basis of a burial ritual, which is widely discussed in a monumental volume on nomadic burials in 10th-14th c. AD by G. A. Fedorov-Davidov.²³ It is in order to mention here his observation that there are types of burial rituals that cannot be confined to a narrow time window.²⁴ The main thesis of G. A. Fedorov-Davidov comes down to a rather obvious necessity of carrying out comparative analyses and grouping certain elements found in burial places despite the difficulties of dating them.²⁵ Secondly V. V. Ovsjannikov does not provide a proper analysis of the armour plates discovered simultaneously with the helmet. As already mentioned, the find from Ozernoe also included armour plates of 4 various kinds. The prevailing number of plates are in an elongated rectangular shape with rounded top edge and 13 holes. The size of these plates varies between 1,2-2,8 cm in width and 6,8-8,5 cm in length. The plates in the first three types correspond in shape, size and in the form of binding to type II, VI, 12, b) according to V. V. Gorbunov's classification (7,9-10,0 cm x 2,7-3,7 cm). In other words, they resemble the plates found in the burial



Fig. 3. From top: left: painting from General Lou Rui's tomb dated to ca 577 AD, the author's drawing, iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from Verden, 6th-7th c. AD, bottom: iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from Ozernoe, Central Asia, 7th-10th c. AD; drawings by D. Wierzbowski.

²³ FEDOROV-DAVIDOV (1966) 5-9.

²⁴ FEDOROV-DAVIDOV (1966) 9.

²⁵ FEDOROV-DAVIDOV (1966).

of Kydyrge, og. XIII (possibly dated to 5th -6th c. AD).²⁶ Plates of a similar form, both with regard to the size and shape as well as the pattern of 13 holes, are also known from several other burials dated between 7th -10th c. AD,²⁷ for example: the Balyk Sook-I burial (possibly dated to 8th -10th c. AD)²⁸ or from the armour found in a garrison in Birka (dated to 900-950 AD) which may be considered as a Far East influence.²⁹ The upper part of the Ozernoe helmet consists of semi-spherical four-segmental dome with four teeth-like ridges. Each of these ridges possesses a clearly visible axis in the middle. On top of the helmet there is a round cap, whose uppermost element comes in the form of a little pin with a horizontal aperture in which a ring for fastening helmet decorations was placed. Similar solutions are known to have appeared in China towards the end of 6th c. AD. They are evidenced, for instance, by a painting from General Lou Rui's tomb dated to ca 577 AD³⁰ or by a helmet found in Verden (Aller) in Saxony published by W. A. J. Wilbrand. Although the latter find is typically associated with the Carolingian period,³¹ it appears quite probable that it may represent an element of Asian armour brought to Europe by Avars, a scenario which does not seem so unlikely in 6th-7th c. AD.³² The Ozernoe helmet differs from the mentioned helmets in that it has a bottom band holding the bowl construction. The band itself consists of two parts, front and rear. As L. A. Bobrov rightly observes, the construction of a four-segmental *spangenhelm* with decorative shape of ridges and a two-piece rim is directly associated with the helmets of the Liao dynasty, which were popular between 10th -11th c. AD within the territory of present-day China.³³ However, he also highlights a number of features that distinguish the helmet under discussion from those coming from the times of the Liao dynasty. Namely, L. A. Bobrov points to the lack of decorative diadem on the forehead and to the same width of the band at its front and rear. Additionally, the Ozernoe helmet displays two peculiar characteristics that refer it to Iranian culture. One of them is the presence of decorative rivets with big heavy semi-spherical heads. Such a tradition of decorative riveting on ridge helmets goes back to the pre-Sasanid



Fig. 4. A fragment of the bottom part of a relief from *Ṭāq-e Bostān* III (western Iran) depicting hemi-spherical *spangenhelme* type helmet of a heavy armoured warrior. Despite the damage the eyebrows above the eye cuts are well visible. From left: frontal view, photograph courtesy of P. Bargassa; side view, photograph courtesy of M. Vandae.

²⁶ GORBUNOV (2003) 10.

²⁷ KUBAREV, KUBAREV (2003) 72-73.

²⁸ HUDJAKOV (1986) 156; KUBAREV (1997) 629-645.

²⁹ STJERNA (2004) 32.

³⁰ BOBROV, HUDJAKOV (2005) 180, ris. 15/14.

³¹ WILBRAND (1914) 48-50.

³² ŚWIĘTOSŁAWSKI (2001) 75-85.

³³ BOBROV (2013) 77.

period and thus this feature may be considered as one of the arguments in favour of the helmet's Iranian provenance.³⁴ The other typically Iranian feature is decorative eyebrows above the eye holes.³⁵ As far as semi-spherical ridge helmets are concerned, such a form of embellishment is also present in the case of the helmet found in Voivode in north-eastern Bulgaria dated to 5th-6th c. AD³⁶ and in the case of the helmet depicted on the Larger Iwan from *Tāq-e Bostān*,³⁷ which is dated to the end of 6th or the beginning of 7th c. AD.³⁸ However, the eyebrows on the Ozernoe helmet differ slightly from the finds mentioned above. Both the eyehole cut and the (just embossed) decorative eyebrows on the Ozernoe helmet have an almond-like shape with an elongated upward line in the outer part. Similar forms of eyebrows on Iranian helmets appeared at the turn of 7th and 8th c. AD.³⁹ Taking the above into account, one may venture a statement that the Ozernoe helmet may be representative of helmets which could arise due to the mutual Chino-Iranian influence (Central Asia) between the end of 7th and the beginning of 10th c. AD.

The other helmet with which the one from Yarysh-Mardy is often compared is yet another find from the area marking the European-Asian border in the Ural mountains. It is currently held in the Perm Museum in Russia. Not much is known about the helmet, however, as until the present time it has not been properly studied. The Perm helmet constitutes a four segmental construction with



Fig. 5. Turko-Iranian (Central Asian) helmets from 6th-8th c. AD with a characteristic depression of the upper part of the bowl. From left: iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from the Perm Museum, drawings by D. Wierzbowski, iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from Niniveh BM. 22495, British Museum, Trustees of the British Museum©.

³⁴ AHMAD (2015) 145-146.

³⁵ STUDER (1990) 98.

³⁶ VAGALINSKI (1998) 103-105.

³⁷ NICOLLE (1982) 330A, 330E; NICOLLE (1996) 30; FUKAI, HORIUCHI (1971) pl. XXXVI-XXXVIII; OVERLAET (1982) 192.

³⁸ HERZFELD (1920) 82-103; HERZFELD (1928) 139; HERZFELD (1938) 158; ERDMANN (1937) 79-97; ERDMANN (1943) 20-24; GHIRSHMAN (1963) 293; GALL (1967) 298; KELLENS (1973) 133-138; FUKAI (1974) 84; LUSCHEY (1968) 129-147, (1975) 128; VANDEN BERGHE (1984) 85, 205; TANABE (1982) 90-92; TANABE (1983) 111-112; TANABE (2003) 583, and others.

³⁹ See for example: AZARPAY (1981) pl. 17, Amazon Cycle, Panjikent XXI:1.

decorative ridges. A band placed on the inside of the bowl holds the bottom part of the helmet. The helmet possesses rivets with big decorative heads and it displays a very interesting shape of the bowl with a characteristic depression in the upper part of its construction. Such a bowl shape is known mainly from helmets of lamellar construction, for instance from the Niederstotzingen helmet⁴⁰ or a helmet from grave number 3 from Kalkni,⁴¹ i.e. from helmets belonging to Group V, type 12 according to E. V. Lur's classification.⁴² Constructions of *spangenhelme* type with a similar depression became widespread in 6th-8th c. AD, which may be evidenced by paintings from Qyzil dated to 5th-8th c. AD, Tumshuq terracotta figurines dated to 6th-7th c. AD,⁴³ or a helmet from Nineveh dated to 6th-7th c. AD. The Nineveh helmet⁴⁴ appears to be the closest analogy to the helmet from the Perm Museum. Apart from the above, the author of the present paper suggests another analogy to both the Nineveh and the Perm Museum helmets, namely a helmet from the Nasser D. Khalili collection most probably dated to the same period.⁴⁵ What is interesting, beside the shape and the type of construction of the upper part of the bowl as well as decoratively cut narrow ridges, the two helmets share yet another peculiar feature, i.e. decorative rivets. While in Sasanid helmets the rivets are placed in evenly dispersed single rows, in this type of helmets they appear in groups of several rivets with intervening breaks of flat surface. A similar layout of rivets may be observed on several types of Roman helmets, for example a helmet shown by Ch. Miks.⁴⁶ These examples indicate that such a pattern of rivets may have evolved as a characteristic aesthetic feature of "Greater Iranian" helmets in the Sasanid period.

A direct link with Iran of both helmets mentioned in M. V. Gorelik's theory inevitably entails the necessity of analyzing the Yarysh-Mardy helmet from the perspective of its possible Iranian provenance.

As already mentioned, the Yarysh-Mardy helmet has a six-ridge construction of *spangenhelme* type. In the Sasanian period it is a widely used form of helmet, though to the best of author's knowledge such helmets have not been found in Iran. It may be placed in group IV according to E. V. Lurie's classification, that is among oval six-ridge helmets of Deir-el Medineh type.⁴⁷ The Deir-el Medineh helmet itself, currently housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, bears a number of features that strongly suggest its link to Iranian armour.⁴⁸ Both the Deir-el Medineh and the Yarysh-Mardy helmet possess exactly the same number of rivets (i.e. 6 along each side of a ridge) joining particular ridges with the segments of the bowl. Additionally, in all of the discussed helmets, there are 2 rivets connecting the bottom band with a particular segment of the bowl (with the exception of the frontal decoration in the Yarysh-Mardy helmet where there appear two additional rivets to stabilize it). Interestingly, both mentioned finds have a similar form of binding of the top of the helmet with the main part of the bowl, which in the case of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet was most probably in the form of a round plate (in some of the ridges there have been preserved apertures). The number of rivets used to fasten the cap is the same as the number of ridges, the rivets being placed in the central upper part of each of the spangen. It must be emphasized here that the Deir-el Medineh helmet has often been regarded as a Roman one.⁴⁹ Moreover, it is noteworthy that the helmet from Deir-el Medineh has been properly grouped with two other helmets of similar construction. One of them is an undated helmet discovered in Egypt on the head of a mummy,⁵⁰ which is now held in the National Museum of

⁴⁰ PAULSEN (1967) 133-137.

⁴¹ SALICHOV (1985) Fig. V.

⁴² LUR'E (2013) 274.

⁴³ LECOQ (1925) Fig. 32-33, 53, 62-63.

⁴⁴ GUIDE (1922) 169; JAMES (1986) 118-119 and others.

⁴⁵ ALEXANDER (1992) 26-27, SKUPNIEWICZ (2007) Fig. 1.7.

⁴⁶ MIKS (2009) abb. 5.

⁴⁷ VOGT (2006) 274-277.

⁴⁸ As the discussion of the Deir-el Medineh helmet is the subject matter of the author's another study in preparation, the issue will not be pursued in detail here.

⁴⁹ DITTMAN (1940) taf. 15-16; JAMES (1986) fig. 6; MECKENSEN (2007) Abb. 7.

⁵⁰ EBERT (1909) 163-170.



Fig. 6. From the left: Iron Strap Helmet (*spangenhelme*) of the *baldenheim* type, 578-628 AD, Sinj, Museum of the Cetinska Krajina Region – Sinj, Inventory number MCK-AZ-118, Iron *spangenhelme* type helmet, 618-628 AD, Egypt, National Museum of Antiques, Leiden.

Antiques in Leiden. The piece is quite exceptional in its construction. I. Stephenson states that this item could be of Roman origin. More interestingly, he argues that this helmet could have arrived in Egypt from the Uighur Turkish state in Central Asia because such constructions are found on wall paintings of Kumtura.⁵¹ However, this mistaken statement suggesting such late dating can be attributed to his lack of knowledge of East Asian arms and armours, as clearly similar constructions were present in East Asia much earlier (as evidenced by, for example, Chinese art from the 4th -6th Centuries AD).⁵² The other helmet, which is now held in the Museum of the Cetinska Krajina Region in Croatia, comes from Sinj in Dalmatia. The form of this helmet is slightly similar to the helmet from the Leiden museum.⁵³ However, the embossed axis on each of the spangen is far more conspicuous, which gives this item a strong Asiatic look. The presence of such a feature, which is known to appear on some Sasanian helmets⁵⁴ and is ubiquitous among Tibetan helmets⁵⁵ necessitates comparing this helmet with other Asian helmets. Although these two types of finds are usually described as 5th century helmets, due to certain similarities with helmets shown on the Arch of Galerius, H. R. Robinson proposes to date them to a much earlier period, i.e. 3rd c. AD.⁵⁶ Also S. James argues for their earlier dating, stating that such forms are present on Trajan's Column (2nd c. AD). In the opinion of S. James, such helmets of Roman-Egyptian form entered Europe from the east, most probably from Parthian or Sasanian Iran,

⁵¹ STEPHENSON, DIXON (2003, 29).

⁵² BOBROV, HUDJAKOV (2005) Ris. 8.11.

⁵³ NEGIN (2007) 347.

⁵⁴ see for example AHMAD (2015) 142.

⁵⁵ LAROCCA (2006) 68-91.

⁵⁶ ROBINSON (1970) 73.



Fig. 7. From top: left: Iron *cross-bandhelme* type helmet of “Greater Iranian” or Central Asiatic origin, frontal and right side view, possibly 4th-6th c. AD, top right: closer view on the fragments of possibly gold-plated decoration of the helmet, middle: closer view on the fragments of a decorated brass strip going along the lower rim of the helmet’s bowl, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz, photos by: R. Müller, bottom: left: *cross-bandhelme* type helmets (possibly of Greater Iranian or Central Asiatic origin) shown on Chinese figurines 5th-6th c. AD, drawings by D. Wierzbowski after BOBROV, HUDJAKOV (2005) 175, 178, ris. 10.8,13.9.



Fig. 8. From top: left: Iron multisegmental Korean *Vertical-plate* type helmet (kor. *Jongjangpanju* type), front, right side and back view, 4th c. AD, found in tomb no.44, Bokcheon-ding, Dong-nae, Busan, Pusan National University Museum, bottom right: Korean multisegmental helmet shown on Japanese 6th c. AD Haniwa, Iizuka-cho, Ota-shi, Gunma, Kofun period terracotta figurine, helmet most likely under influence of new *spanghelme* forms known from Chinese 5th-6th c. AD art reduced to 4-part bowl and front spang, Tokyo National Museum, the author's Drawing.

and became popular as their simple design was suited to the urgent need for mass production in the 3rd c. AD Rome.⁵⁷ Additionally, this view is also shared by A. Negin who groups these “early” spangen helmets under the heading of “Romano-Egyptian helmets”.⁵⁸

Yet another helmet has been recently discovered that can be placed within this group. On 8th of July in 1978, an almost fully intact helmet was found on the floor near the entrance to corridor 16025, which leads from stepped street 16989 into the building in Area XVI near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The construction of this item clearly corresponds to the helmets from the Leiden Museum and the helmet from Sinj. The building inside which it was discovered went out of use at the time of the Persian (614 AD) or Muslim (638 AD) occupation. G. D. Stiebel associates this item with the defenders as there was a buckle in the Byzantine fashion⁵⁹ found nearby. In the light of this discovery, two further statements may be put forward. Firstly, the theory regarding the development of the early forms of the so called Romano-Egyptian group proposed by S. James and inseminated by A. Negin appears to be wrong.⁶⁰ Most probably there were two lines of development in the evolution of spangen helmets that met in the early 7th c. AD The first line which derives from the late Parthian Empire (as shown on Kushan iconography) was introduced to Romans after Trajan’s victories⁶¹ and later developed into forms known from western Europe.⁶² The second line, stemming from the same core, evolved into the eastern *spangenhelme* forms shown in this paper, which later developed into

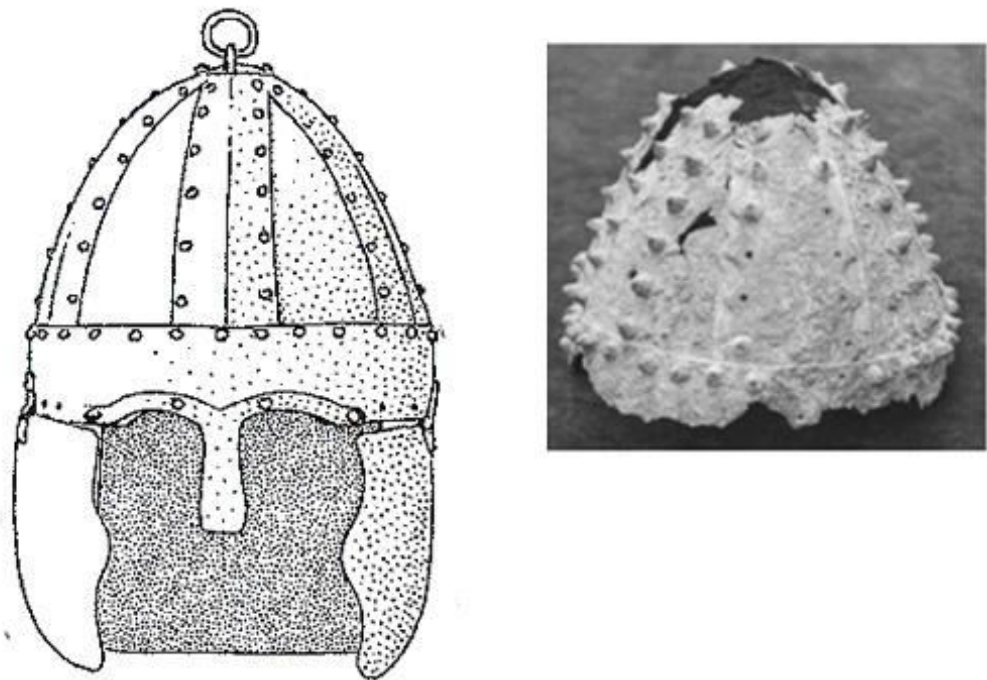


Fig. 9. from left: Iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from Deir-el Medineh, 618-628, Egypt, Coptic Museum Cairo, the author’s drawing; upper part of the bowl of the Iron *spangenhelme* type helmet from Yarysh-Mardy, the *National Museum* of the Chechen Republic, photograph courtesy of H. Mamaev.

⁵⁷ JAMES (1986) 131-133.

⁵⁸ NEGIN (2007) 348.

⁵⁹ STIEBEL (2007) 43.

⁶⁰ NEGIN (2007) ris. 12.

⁶¹ Most probably the metopes from Trajan’s column depict trophies from all of the emperor’s campaigns. This would explain why both helmets with straight ridges as well as those known from Sarmatian burials (identified by A. Negin (2007) ris. 11.) are shown.

⁶² For European Spangen helmets see for example BÖHNER (1994) 471-520.

the Central Asian spangen helmets, examples of which are depictions on the wall paintings of Kumtura or certain Chinese helmets. Secondly, providing that these four helmets, i.e. the Deir-el Medineh, the Leiden Museum, the Sinj and the Jerusalem ones, are possibly dated to the same period (which can be easily estimated on the basis of the Jerusalem find) and thus belong to the same group, they must be placed in the early 7th c. AD. It is in order here to consider the question of why such helmets appear at the same time, i.e. in the early 7th c. AD, solely in the territories of the Eastern Roman Empire while they are absent in western Europe despite the fact that other helmet forms known from the late Roman and early Byzantine period were found there. Several historical occurrences between 572 AD and 628 AD may shed some light on this issue. Most probably helmet from Sinj could have come as a trophy from Flavius Mauricius Tiberius Augustus's military operations against Sasanian Empire (578-589). This possibility may be used as an explanation of later popularity of spangen helmets with straight rims in the Balkan region (Balkan helmets will be discussed below). However, the helmet could have also been a trophy from Heraclius's military operation (622-628 AD) made after the success of Iranian expedition. Such a hypothesis would explain its slightly Asiatic look and close connection to the Leiden Museum example. It is known that during this military operation the Roman army plundered Lorestan, and therefore it seems quite likely that the army of Heraclius could have brought such trophies after the victories over Xusrō's II armies. Thus, the helmet may have found its way from an Iranian head into Roman hands, and then it could have travelled from Anatolia to the Balkans, where it was eventually found. The military expeditions waged against Rome by Xusrō II (590–628 AD) may account for southern examples of helmets in this type. During one of such campaigns, two Sasanian armies were active in the Roman territory: the northern one, which conquered Caesarea in Cappadocia and then retreated to Armenia and the southern one. "The Romans tried to hold off the Iranian army but were defeated in the battle of Emesa (611 AD). Without much resistance on the side of Rome, Xusrō II took over the main towns in the East: Antioch, Apamea (611 AD), Tarsus, Damascus (613 AD), Jerusalem, Ephesus and Chalcedon (614 AD). The campaign ended with the Iranians entering Egypt (618 AD), which marked the beginning of the Sasanian occupation of Egypt".⁶³ The southern army expedition may explain the appearance of this form of helmets both in Jerusalem (which, as stated above, can be unambiguously dated to the Persian occupation of Jerusalem) and in Egypt. Moreover, this speculation explains the proximity of the Leiden and the Sinj helmets to Chinese ones. Most probably, these helmets came from north-eastern provinces of Greater Iran and were re-absorbed after re-conquest of the eastern provinces of Iran under the rule of Xusrō I Anōšīrvān in the second half of the 6th c. AD.

It is noteworthy to remark here that much more interesting objects of this type have been discovered in the Balkans. Several multisegmental helmets were found within the territory of the former Yugoslavia, i.e. in Split, Bitolii, Caričin Grad, Batajnici⁶⁴ and St. Vid.⁶⁵ Three helmets of such a type were also found in Bulgaria, namely in the fortress in Asen,⁶⁶ in Novakovo near Varna and in Šabla.⁶⁷ Interestingly, all these items could be dated to the 6th -7th c. AD.⁶⁸ An even more interesting discovery was made by a Polish expedition exploring the Roman and early Byzantine city of Novae. During their archaeological works around 30 helmets (among them examples with long straight rims) were discovered⁶⁹ and dated by A. Biernacki to the second half of the 6th c. AD.⁷⁰ Most likely the introduction of *spangenhelme* with straight spangs starts under the rule of Xusrō I Anōšīrvān in Iran and the main peak of its popularity could be connected (as stated above) with Emperor Flavius Mauricius Tiberius Augustus and his post-Sasanian wars in the Balkan region. In fact, it is probable that there were several absorptions of the Iranian arms and armor into the Roman Empire, coinciding

⁶³ MAKSYMIOUK (2015) 86.

⁶⁴ VINSKI (1982) 19.

⁶⁵ VOGT (2006) Abb. 104.

⁶⁶ MOVRODINOV (1948) 167.

⁶⁷ PAROUSHEV (2004) 192.

⁶⁸ BIERNACKI (2012) 99-100.

⁶⁹ BIERNACKI (2012) 95.

⁷⁰ BIERNACKI (2012) 101.

with the appearance of new types of helmets in Sasanian Iran. This could explain both the reappearance of the forms known from much earlier periods and similarities of this type of 6th-7th c. AD Roman helmets to far Asiatic forms known from 5th c. AD. It is in order to remark here that such helmets are unknown from Avar graves and therefore the northern path of absorption leading from

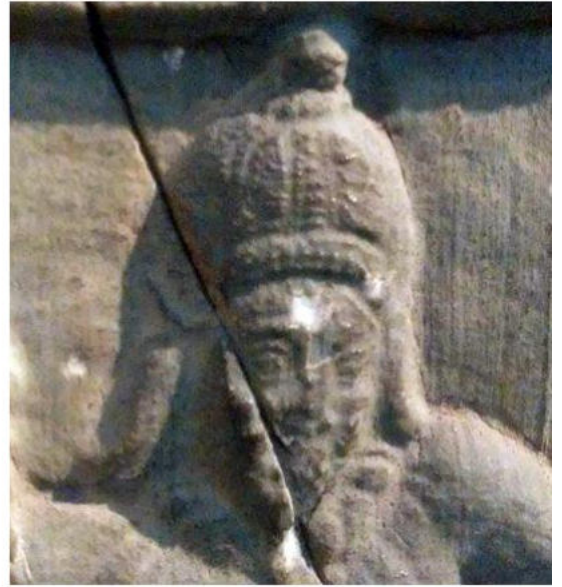


Fig. 10. from left: Mandupa pillar showing dwarf Yaksha and Scythian figures, 3rd c. AD, the National Museum of Delhi, India, photograph courtesy of A. Kumar; medallion of the Great Kushan monarch Huvishka, 2nd c. AD, the author's drawing.

China or Turkestan seems very unlikely. Furthermore, the proposed theory concerning the appearance of new forms of *spangengenhelme* in post Xusrō I Anōšīrvān Iran and their introduction to Rome during military operations suggests that, in fact, among new Byzantine copies there could be also trophies from Sasanian campaigns. Additionally, apart from providing an explanation for the

reappearance of helmet forms known from much earlier periods, the proposed hypothesis entails taking into account the following two issues. Firstly, the fact that there must have existed earlier helmets of *spangen* type with straight ridges in the East which were introduced to the Roman Empire in the late Partian period (this will be shown below). Secondly, the necessity of demonstrating that foreign elements were known and adopted in the military of the late Sasanian Empire. The latter statement may be easily proved by two artistic works from *Ṭāq-e Bostān*. The first of them is a capital showing an eastern form of a helmet made with ‘Turkic’ B-shaped lamellar – such helmets are also seen in Xinjiang, Ushrushana and far China.⁷¹ The second piece of artwork is a statue of a horse rider from the Large Iwan which displays the East Asian or Central Asian influences in the form of the hourglass quiver.

Helmets of spangen types, including both real *spangenhelme*,⁷² in which separate ridges approach radially one another towards the top of the bowl, as well as the most numerous type of Sasanid finds, namely *cross-bandhelme*,⁷³ often erroneously described as *spangenhelme*,⁷⁴ were not generally depicted in the Sasanian period. It is worthy of note that there is also lack of visualizations of other forms of armour.⁷⁵ In the author’s opinion, it is connected with a very strong ‘canonization’⁷⁶ of copying of arms and armour reality⁷⁷ in early Sasanid art.

As already mentioned, the Iranian tradition of *spangenhelme* with decorative rivets goes back to the pre-Sasanid era, as evidenced by a helmet depicted on the Mandupa pillar in the National Museum of Delhi.⁷⁸ The pillar shows three scenes with a Yaksha dwarf. The pillar itself has a two-fold construction, the top part shows the dwarf, the bottom one shows smaller reliefs. At its right side the pillar contains a figure of a warrior bearing non-Indian, but apparently Central Asian, features. The warrior is wearing a four-segmental spangen helmet with conspicuous rows of bulging rivets both along the ridges and the upper part of the bottom band. Such a helmet construction with a spherical cap on its top is reminiscent of a helmet depicted on the bronze medallion of Great Kushan monarch Huvishka, which is dated to 2nd c. AD.⁷⁹ In both instances one can notice a spherical cap (in the case of the medallion it may have been a circular loop), which in the Sasanid period was enhanced by the addition of a decorative *korymbos*. With regard to the medallion, the cap is embellished with a ribbon fluttering in the wind at the back of Huvishka’s head while in the instance of the Mandupa pillar the ends of a ribbon go along the two sides of the warrior’s head and fall on his shoulders. Apart from these depictions, Iranian helmets with long straight ridges finished off with a little round disc on the top of the helmet also appear on Trajan’s Column.⁸⁰

As far as the feature of parallel evenly dispersed ribs on Sasanid helmets is concerned, such a form is also attested in the case of certain cross-band helmets, for instance the one from Cheragh Ali-Tepe held in the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels or the one from Amlash housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁸¹ A similar ridge solution is depicted on a 4th c. AD terracotta statuette from Tepe Yaya.⁸² This form was in use in Iran until the post-Sasanid times and was still depicted on early Islamic coins.⁸³ Furthermore, a similar type of helmet appears with one figure of the so called ‘feasting artists’ on a painting from Sector XXIV in Penjikent, which is now in

⁷¹ SKUPNIEWICZ (2007) fig. 10.

⁷² MIKS (2009) abb. 4

⁷³ AHMAD (2015) 137-141, for *Cross-bandhelme* construction see: MIKS (2009), abb. 4.

⁷⁴ see for example: OVERLAET (1982) 192-193.

⁷⁵ KUBIK (2014) 156; KUBIK, AHMAD (2015) 159.

⁷⁶ Specifying certain strict canons in early Sasanid art.

⁷⁷ For a different view on the Iranian art see, for instance GOLDMAN (1973) 53-78; WÓJCIKOWSKI (2014) 23-27.

⁷⁸ See also: ROSENFELD (1967) fig. 157.

⁷⁹ ZAVIALOV (1979) 150-151, ris. 8; NIKONOROV (1997) 14, 69 fig. 37/f.

⁸⁰ MIKS (2009) Abb. 10.

⁸¹ MIKS (2009) Abb. 6.

⁸² LAMBERG-KARLOVSKY, LAMBERG-KARLOVSKY (1971) 109-110; AHMAD (2014) fig. 12.

⁸³ AHMAD (2014) fig. 15.



Fig. 11. Wall painting of the so called feasting artists: a close-up of the helmet (though one cannot exclude a possibility that it is only a cap). First half of the 8th c. AD, Penjikent, XXIV, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia, photograph courtesy of S. Miszanin.

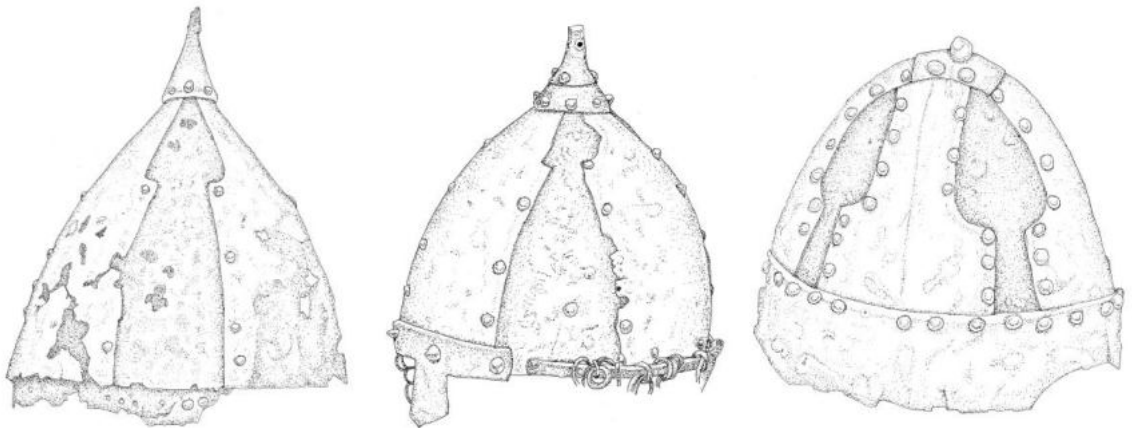


Fig. 12. Iron helmets with characteristic cuttings of the so called ‘keyhole’ type. From left: Helmet from Lagerevki, helmet from Kazazovo, helmet from Nineveh, drawings by D. Wierzbowski.

the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg in Russia. Interestingly, the bottom band of it is considerably wide, a feature which makes it reminiscent of the helmets from Niniveh⁸⁴ held in the British Museum in London.

However, the Yarysh-Mardy helmet stands out from the rest of the discussed items mainly due to its decorative elements. The first decorative element that merits attention is ornamental cutting of ridges. The teeth-shaped edges of ridges constitute an evident eastern borrowing, which did not appear before 6th c. AD.⁸⁵ That such decorative cuttings of ridges appeared in Iran may be evidenced by, for instance, a helmet from a capital of *Tāq-e Bostān*, which is thoroughly discussed by P. N. Skupniewicz.⁸⁶ However, the cuttings of ridges on the Yarysh-Mardy helmet bear a very specific

⁸⁴ GUIDE (1922) 169; SIMPSON (1996) 97-98.

⁸⁵ BOBROV, HUDJAKOV (2005) 180.

⁸⁶ SKUPNIEWICZ (2007) 9-28.

characteristic, namely they appear in the form of teeth-like edges in segments which do not possess an elongated axis in their central part. This feature allows us to refer the find to helmets of type II according to A. N. Kirpichnikov's⁸⁷ classification, i.e. helmets also known as Polish helmets⁸⁸ or Greater Poland helmets.⁸⁹ Two aspects regarding the decorative element merit consideration here. Firstly, even Kirpichnikov⁹⁰ himself pointed to the possibility of Asiatic provenance of helmets of this type. Secondly in the case of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet the decorative element corresponds to helmets of an entirely different construction, i.e. four-segmental constructions which appear with a similar decoration in items from 10th until 12th c. AD.⁹¹ Moreover, it is vital here to call attention to the presence of a sheet of copper metal under the element with the teeth-like cuttings in the helmets mentioned above. In the Yarysh-Mardy helmet such a decorative sheet of metal is well visible under the frontal ridge. Although in helmets of Kirpichnikov's type II the metal sheet was cut out in exactly the same shape as the decorative element placed directly on top of it, undoubtedly the very presence of such a metal sheet is a feature that these both types of helmets share. This puzzling similitude may be explained by a fragment of one of the five helmets from 8th-9th c. AD⁹² found in Diurso near Novorosyjsk on the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea, the drawing of which was published in 2002 by M. V. Gorelik.⁹³ The find is important due to the fact that it may be categorized together with eight-segmental helmets from the Khazar Khaganate period, which in fact constitute a further stage in the evolution of *spangenhelme* observed in Sogdian iconography. As shown in Figure 12 below, they display many features characteristic of armour of late-Sasanid Iran such as specific cuttings in the upper part of widened ridges in the so called keyhole form,⁹⁴ which appear, for instance, on the helmet from Lagerevki (7th -9th c.)⁹⁵ or the one from Kazazovo (8th -9th c.).⁹⁶ The similarity of the solutions used in the case of the Nineveh helmet allows to formulate a thesis of a strong impact of certain late-Sasanid armour solutions, including decorative ones, on armour in the sub-Caucasian region in the Khazar Khaganate period. Specifically, it may be hypothesized that the sheet of decorative metal visible under the frontal ridge of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet is, in fact, a prototype of similar decorative solutions. It seems very likely that in the course of time the piece of metal may have been adjusted so that it eventually was of the same size and shape as the decorative ridge. Later such a solution must have spread through the Caucasus and Khazar Khaganate to Ruthenia, and then to the western Slavic lands. Such a hypothesis seems to be in line with A. N. Kirpichnikov's thesis stating that indeed the direction in which helmets of group II in his classification spread was from the east to the west, as may be evidenced by dating of the burials of particular finds.⁹⁷ The author of the present article would like to emphasize here that such westward propagation of specific helmets' features concerns in particular their decorative aspects,⁹⁸ with simultaneous evolution of constructions which seem to have been unknown in Sasanid Iran. The observation is interesting in so far as it leads to a thesis of universality of certain decorative forms which could have spread independently from some types of helmets to others. Furthermore, as rightly observed by B. Overlaet,⁹⁹ a similar spread of the decorative element

⁸⁷ KIRPICHNIKOV (1971) 22.

⁸⁸ BOCHEŃSKI (1930) 1-21.

⁸⁹ NADOLSKI (1960) 117.

⁹⁰ KIRPICHNIKOV (1971) 26.

⁹¹ KIRPICHNIKOV (1958) 49-52.

⁹² Dating of finds from Diurso, see: ARMARCHUK (2003) 207-227, Tab. 89.

⁹³ GORELIK (2002b) tab. XI-5, 5.

⁹⁴ AHMAD (2014) fig. 9-10.

⁹⁵ MAZITOV (1981) ris. 42; IVANOV (1987) 6-26.

⁹⁶ TARABANOV (1983) 148-155.

⁹⁷ KIRPICHNIKOV (1958) 49; KIRPICHNIKOV (2009) 19-21.

⁹⁸ KIRPICHNIKOV (2009) 25.

⁹⁹ OVERLAET (1982) 189-206; OVERLAET (1998) 267-297; MASIA (2000) 185-289; AHMAD (2014) 145.

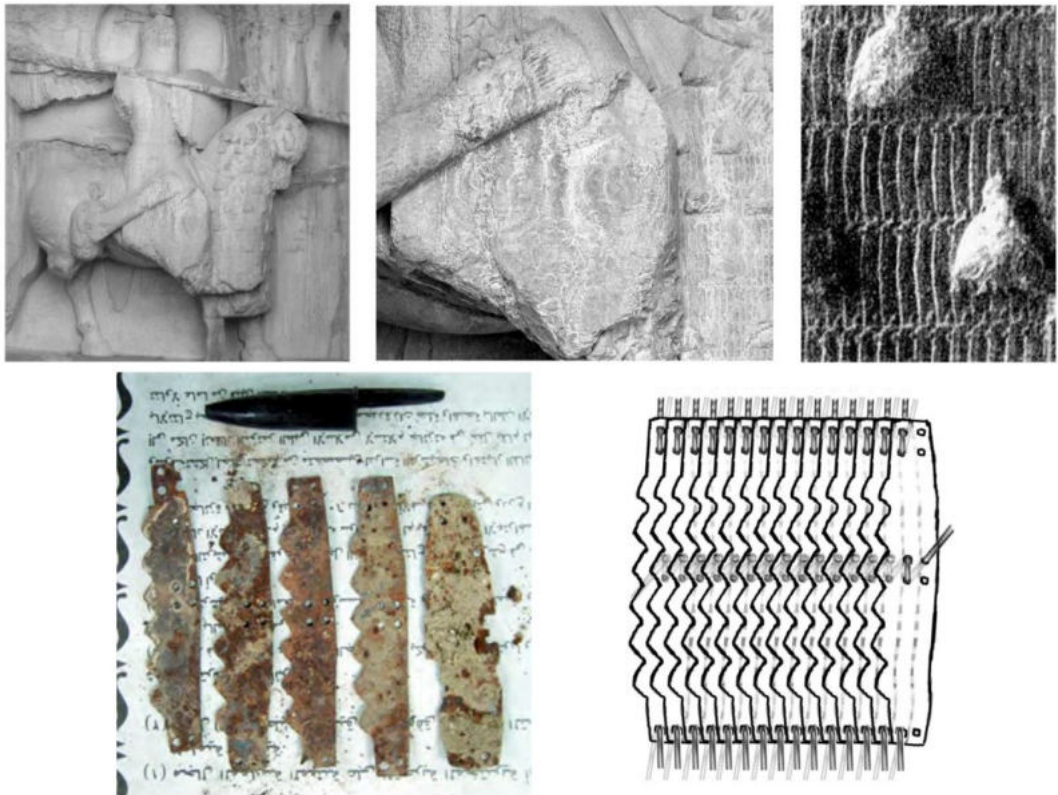


Fig. 13. from left: top: depiction of a heavy armoured horse rider on the Larger Iwan from *Ṭāq-e Bostān*, photograph courtesy of E. Shavarebi. A close-up of armour showing the binding of plates, photograph courtesy of M. Vandae, bottom: Plates from Damascus (horse armour?) found in a sealed stairwell of Tower 4 of the Citadel of Damascus, 7th-early 8th c. AD, National Museum Conservation Department, inv.2001-120-prov.B, Damascus. photograph courtesy of D. Nicolle. A drawing demonstrating the details of binding and a possible layout of plates replicated on the basis of the plate from *Ṭāq-e Bostān*. It is clearly visible that owing to retraction of the middle row of holes, the central binding point is hidden. A fragment of thong noticeable on the *Ṭāq-e Bostān* relief indicates that individual rows of plates in horse armour were not fastened rigidly but certain amount of flexibility and displacement between the rows was possible.

may also be observed, for instance, in the case of Sasanid ornamental rivets being transferred from protective armour to Sasanid swords. Yet another example of such a transfer can be observed in the case of teeth-like cuttings.

In 2001 the Conservation Department of the National Museum in Damascus received five armour plates of a very peculiar shape. The find was later published by D. Nicolle in 2014, who dated it to the period between 12th and 14th c. AD.¹⁰⁰ The contour of the plates is reminiscent of corncobs. Four of them are slightly bulging on one side while on the other side they end with six triangular teeth-like prongs. The shape of a single teeth is that of an equilateral triangle, and thus they correspond in style to the regular pyramidal shape of rivets from the Yarysh-Mardy helmet. The fifth plate is bulging on both sides and is most similar in its form to a corncob. Despite the poor state of preservation, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the original layout of apertures with 100 percent certainty, it appears probable that the plates possessed ten such holes. All apertures were placed along the axis of symmetry perpendicular to the longer sides of the plates, though four of the holes were slightly shifted away from

¹⁰⁰ NICOLLE (2014) fig. 41.

the side finished with the decorative ‘teeth’. Similar symmetrical solutions are known to the author to have been used solely in north-eastern parts of China and Japan.¹⁰¹ However, it is not possible to find direct correspondences between these Chinese and Japanese plates and the find from Damascus. The plates from Damascus display holes that form three separate groupings, which implies the existence of three points of binding. For the sake of fuller comprehension of the carried out analysis of the Damascus armour plates, it is in order here to make a short excursus into the development of a certain form of armour in Iran.

One of the fundamental problems in studies on lamellar armour is the provenance of various methods of binding of particular elements, which is obviously inherently connected with typologization of finds. In reference to the Sasanid period, the basic problem comes down to the separation of indigenous solutions connected with local traditions from those arising under the influence from Central Asia or the Altai region. Additional difficulty lies in the fact that finds of lamellar armour from the Sasanid period constitute a rarity. However, among several types of plates known to the author that could possibly be of Iranian provenance one deserves our special attention. Namely, long rectangular plates with two points of binding placed on two opposite sides. A similar form of armour appeared in the Near East as early as in the Neo-Assyrian period¹⁰² and together with other forms of armour was absorbed by various Mediterranean cultures.¹⁰³ Although it may seem surprising, such a form of armour was also known in the Parthian period. A fragment of lamellar armour consisting of long rectangular plates with only one aperture on both sides of a plate was found in Old Nisa. The fragment is interesting inasmuch as it comprises of two rows of such archaic plates bound with one another.¹⁰⁴ Yet another similar form of armour corresponds to a find from Togolok-Tepe. As with the Old Nisa case, the Togolok-Tepe item shows a fragment of two rows of rectangular plates with only a single aperture in the top and bottom part of the plate respectively. This sort of aperture layout enabled rigid fastening of particular rows of plates.¹⁰⁵ Due to the layer of soil in which it was buried, the Togolok-Tepe find is dated to 6th-7th c. AD.¹⁰⁶ The find is of great significance. It demonstrates that such an archaic type of armour could survive throughout centuries in a practically unchanged form, for in this instance one cannot contemplate a possibility of borrowing this form of armour from the Far East.

Some modification of the plates with binding holes placed on their opposite sides is a type with an additional fixing point in the center of the plate. It is difficult to state when such a modification took place but a specimen of a long plate, date to 3rd c. AD, with four holes in the middle was found in Dura Europos and then described by S. James in his monumental work in 2004.¹⁰⁷ The existence of long rectangular plates with three points of binding, i.e. top, bottom and central, is also evidenced by “famous clibanarius” graffiti from Dura Europos. Two rows of such plates can be seen on the belt of a heavy armoured horse rider. The upper line of the plates depicts two rows of binding holes whereas the bottom one has three. Such a layout may be accounted for by partial overlap of plates and the binding of the third line of holes in the upper row underneath the bottom row of plates.¹⁰⁸ This solution seems quite rational and it has its analogies in some finds of similar type of armour. Moreover, although suits of armour with long rectangular plates seem to also have been quite popular in Syria at the turn of the Parthian period,¹⁰⁹ it is, however, difficult to unequivocally conclude which form of construction is the case here. The aforementioned type of plate with four holes in the middle is instantiated by a find of

¹⁰¹ see for example: KAJIWARA (2009) 57.

¹⁰² see for example: KING (1915) pl. XXI; HALL (1928) pl. XIV, XXVI; BARNETT (1962) 108; WINTER (2010) 271, the same form of plates was found in Nimrud, see: MALLOWAN (1966) no. 336 a-e.

¹⁰³ DAWSON (2013) 68.

¹⁰⁴ PILIPKO (2001) ris. 225.6; PILIPKO (2006) fig. 13.6.

¹⁰⁵ VDOVII, NIKONOROV (1991) ris. 1.1.

¹⁰⁶ VDOVII, NIKONOROV (1991) 77.

¹⁰⁷ JAMES (2004) pl. 82.508, 83.508.

¹⁰⁸ KUBIK (2016) forthcoming.

¹⁰⁹ TEIXIDOR (1979) pl. 8.

Sasanid armour from Qasr-i Abu Nasr,¹¹⁰ which currently belongs to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The find is interesting inasmuch as it may be directly related to a number of other finds from the early Byzantine period commonly discovered in the Mediterranean region from the Balkans¹¹¹ to Spain.¹¹² Both in the case of the Qasr-i Abu Nasr armour as well as numerous lamellar armour specimens from the early Byzantine period one can observe a decorative shape of plates. Interestingly, decorative cutout of plates appears in the similar period of time in Central Asia, Eastern Turkistan and southern China.¹¹³ According to M. V. Gorelik, the introduction of ornamental shapes of plates should be dated not earlier than 5th -6th c. AD.¹¹⁴ Therefore, it seems legitimate to speak of existence of a general trend in decorative elements of armour. The Damascus plates constitute an important argument for negating the theory proposed by W. Arendt¹¹⁵ and inseminated by M. V. Gorelik.¹¹⁶ Both of these scholars attempted to explain the ornamental cutouts in plates as a means of reducing the overall weight of armour. However, in the case of the Damascus plates the decorative spikes protrude considerably beyond the possible construction of the plate. Since the lack of spikes would undoubtedly contribute to the reduction of armour's weight, it may be firmly stated that the spikes on the Damascus plates have purely ornamental character. Interestingly enough, such spiky decorative forms seem to have been unpopular in far eastern Asia, in particular in the late-Sasanid period. Yet, they occasionally appear on individual finds, which are to be discussed below. It needs to be noticed that the symmetry of the upper and lower binding points fixing together particular rows of Damascus plates in armour is achieved by means of a two-fold copy of the system applied in the case of the plates from Qasr-i Abu Nasr. Thus, the system of binding itself did not change, only the fastening of the ends of plates was two-fold. Even more interestingly, such a system and the shape of plates make it possible to reconstruct the already mentioned armour¹¹⁷ depicted on the Bigger Iwan from *Ṭāq-e Bostān*. T. Dawson reconstructed the plates from *Ṭāq-e Bostān* as a D-like form with bigger plates, used for central binding, in the shape of corncobs. However, T. Dawson's reconstruction refers to the non-existent model of a plate. The *Ṭāq-e Bostān* armour may indeed show plates in the shape of corncobs whose one side is hidden by the next element, which would point to the symmetrical layout of holes. The fragments of the Damascus armour are closest in form to the depiction from *Ṭāq-e Bostān* and it is likely that they may have come from horse armour. As stated by D. Nicolle, apart from the fragment of armour nothing else was found which could help to date the find. Moreover, D. Nicolle suggests that on the basis of what is known about Damascus, one cannot rule out the possibility that the find may have come from an earlier period. According to the author of the present study, the similarity of both the form of decoration and the construction of the armour itself allow to put forward a thesis that the Damascus plates provide evidence for the conquest of Syria by Xusrō II during his campaign in the years of 603-622 AD, in particular the presence of the Sasanid army in Damascus in 613 AD.¹¹⁸ Obviously, one cannot exclude the possibility that the plates constitute an instance of Sasanid borrowing of a decorative element from the early Umayyad period. Yet, certainly the find should be re-dated to 7th -8th c. AD. Furthermore, to the best of the author's knowledge, the same type of spikes as those from the Damascus plates appear on at several other objects from 6th -8th c. AD, for

¹¹⁰ Excavated in 1935 by J.M. Upton, W. Hauser and C.K. Wilkinson on behalf of The Persian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; acquired by the Museum in 1936. Available online: <http://metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/323474>.

¹¹¹ see for example: CSALLÁNY (1972) fig. 4.7-10; POPOVIC (1987) fig. 23.

¹¹² SÁNCHEZ (2008) pl. 4-5.

¹¹³ KUBAREV (2006) abb. 10-12, (2007) ris. 10-12; KUBAREV, ZURAVLEV (2012) 142.

¹¹⁴ GORELIK (1993) 170.

¹¹⁵ ARENDT (1932) 50.

¹¹⁶ GORELIK (1993) 172.

¹¹⁷ SKUPNIEWICZ (2014) 49.

¹¹⁸ MAKSYMIOUK (2015) 86.

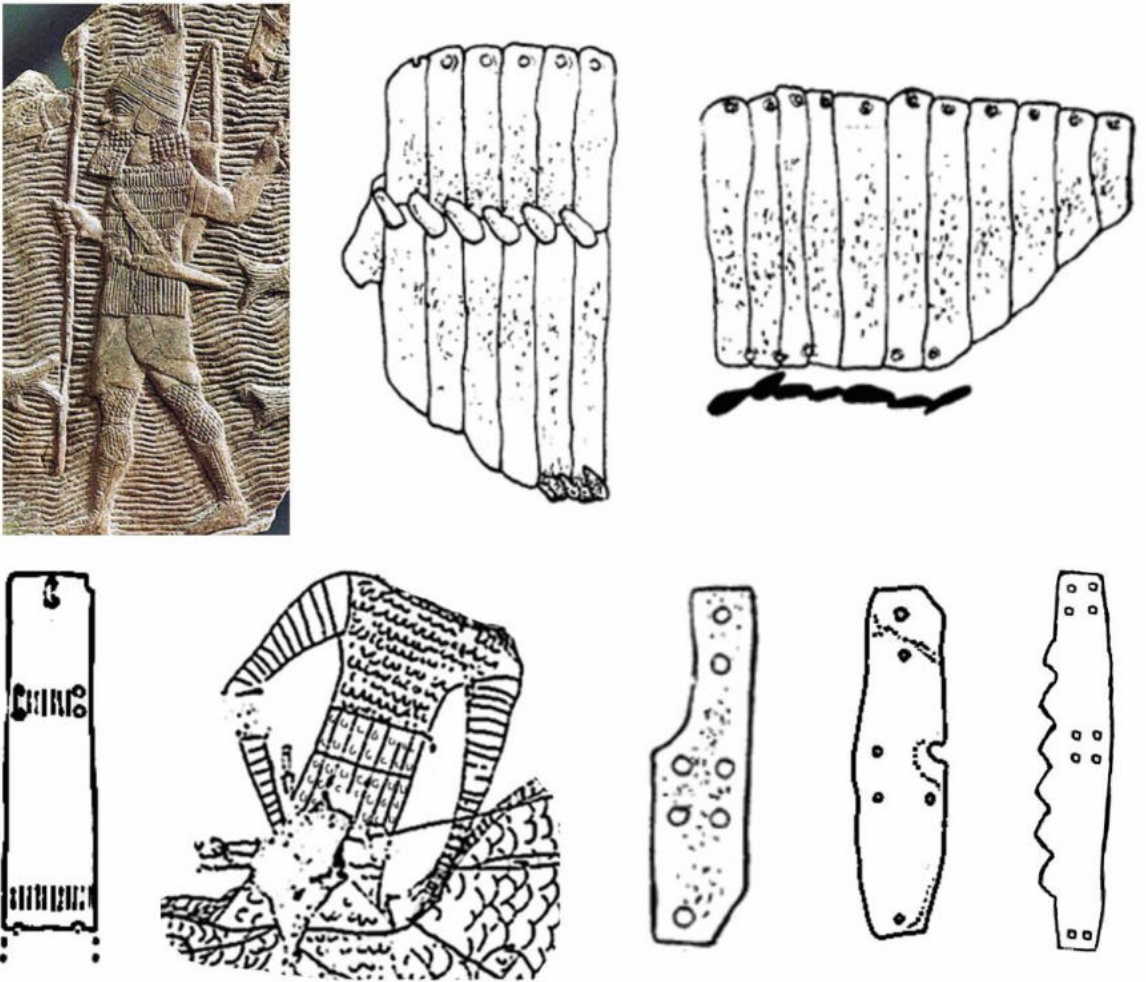


Fig. 14. From the upper left: proto form of Iranian lamellar armor, Neo-Assyrian relief depicting a cavalryman leading his horse, Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932, date 704-681 BC, Mesopotamia, Nineveh, acc. nr 32.143.18, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Fragment of lamellar armour in archaic Iranian form, Big Squared House, Old Nisa, Parthian period, after: VDOVII, NIKONOROV (1991) ris. 2. Fragment of lamellar armor in archaic Iranian form, Togolok-Tepe, late Sasanian period, 6th -7th c. AD, after: VDOVII, NIKONOROV (1991) ris. 1. Down left: steel plate from Dura Europos, end of the Parthian/ early Sasanian period, 3rd c. AD, author's drawing after: JAMES (2004) fig. 82.508. "Famous *clibanarius*" graffiti from Dura Europos, 3rd c. AD author's drawing. Qasr-i Abu Nasr 5th-7th c. AD, after: VDOVII, NIKONOROV (1991) ris. 3, steel plate from Carthago Spartaria, Spain, author's drawing after: SÁNCHEZ (2008) Fig. 5B, steel plate from Damascus 7th-early 8th c. AD, author's drawing.

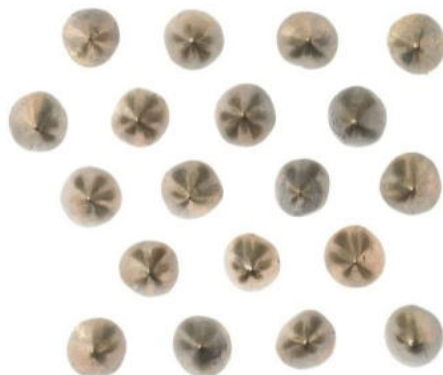
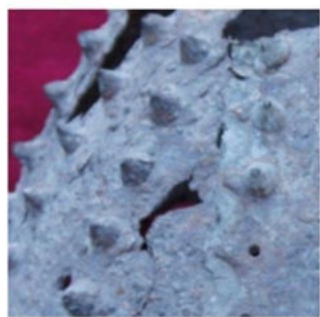


Fig. 15. Left column: rivets in the form of spikes, i.e. cones with smooth edges; From top: 1) rivets on the Yarysh-Mardy helmet, *National Museum* of the Chechen Republic, photograph courtesy of H. Mamaev; 2) rivets from the Amlash glove (top view), *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum*, Mainz, photograph courtesy of M. Bunker (Wulfheodenas), the *Musee d'Art Classiqe de Mougins*; 3) Sasanian helmet, detail of the top plate, photograph courtesy of the *Musee d'Art Classiqe de Mougins*. Right column: the armoured glove from Amlash after renovation; photograph courtesy of the *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum*, Mainz, photography by R. Müller.

example: armour plates from Svetinja in Bulgaria dated to the early Byzantine period (one prong)¹¹⁹, plates from the fragment of armour found in Armenia dated to 5th -7th c. AD (one prong)¹²⁰ and plates from the Mug Mountain (multiple prongs)¹²¹ dated to 7th -8th c. AD. Interestingly, the layout of the apertures in plates from these pieces of armour is evocative of what may be observed in the case of Avar armour.¹²² However, the location where the finds were discovered, i.e. the Balkans, Armenia and “Greater Iran”, may point to the possibility of mutual permeability of some Central Asian and Sasanid aesthetic trends.

Another crucial element of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet deserving closer examination is a characteristic shape of its rivets. They appear in the form of sharp spikes, i.e. cones with smooth edges. To the author’s knowledge, there are at least several finds which are of direct relevance to the discussion of this type of rivets. One of them is a helmet published by S. N. Ahmad in 2014, which is presently held in The Musée d’Art Classique de Mougins in France. The helmet constitutes an example of *bandhelme* and possess several features which refer it to Sasanid Iran.¹²³ Among the decorative rivets used to join together particular components of the helmet, the author would like to draw attention to the four rivets on the top of this helmet by means of which a little rectangular plate is fixed. These rivets are exactly in the same form of a spiky cone with smooth edges as the rivets on the Yarysh-Mardy helmet. Another piece of armour which has similar rivets is an armoured glove from Amlash in the collection of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentral Museum in Mainz in Germany. The glove is in the form of a wide plate protecting the metacarpus with segmental plates for finger protection. The wrist part contains a soft collar-like extension with spike-like rivets. In 2002 in Lesnoe near Sochi in Russia a glove of segmental construction was found, which bears close resemblance to the one from Amlash (though the former does not have decorative rivets). The Lesnoe glove was presented by A. Varyshev in 2012 at a weaponry conference held in Tula, Russia and it is due to be published soon. The find is important in the context of our discussion of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet inasmuch as, apart from the glove, there was also found a characteristic buckle. The buckle enables the dating of the objects to the late Sasanid period, i.e. 6th -7th c. AD.¹²⁴ The similarity of the Lesnoe glove to that from Amlash may be regarded as evidence corroborating the fact of spreading Sasanid armour to the Sub-Caucasus and the Black Sea region. Apart from the finds from the Sasanid period mentioned above, a similar form of rivets appears on the helmet from Kazazovo, which is undoubtedly another Iranian borrowing made by nomads of the Khazar Khaganate period.

Beside the riveted headwear discussed above, the author is aware of the existence of other types of spiky helmets, which, however, do not bear direct correspondence to the rivets found on the Yarysh-Mardy helmet. One of them is an archeological find from Groningen, a helmet published in 1954 by A. E. van Griffen.¹²⁵ The find is devoid of an archeological context¹²⁶ but due to its distinctive character – it is a hemispherical *cross-bandhelme* type helmet– the item may be classified as belonging to the late-Roman period. Its construction is held together by rows of spiky rivets, which are yet of different shape than those on the Yarysh-Mardy helmet. Namely, they possess a square base and bevelled sides. The helmet is presently in the collection of the Groningen Museum in the Netherlands. Another object of a similar type is a helmet accidentally found during the dredging works of Carl Schünemann company in Bremen. The helmet was then published in 1925 by Von. A. Lonke¹²⁷ and is currently held in the Focke-Museum, Bremen, Germany. The find is of particular interest as it displays

¹¹⁹ BUGARSKI (2005) fig. 8a.

¹²⁰ GORELIK (1993) ris. 12.10.

¹²¹ RASPOPOVA (1980) ris. 53.4.

¹²² MAJOR (2014) 120-130.

¹²³ AHMAD (2014) 135-156.

¹²⁴ VARYSHEV (2012).

¹²⁵ VAN GRIFFEN (1954) 234-243.

¹²⁶ VAN GRIFFEN (1954) 234.

¹²⁷ LONKE (1925) 196-197, and also GROHNE (1929) 73-75.



Fig. 16. Spiky helmets. From left: iron cross-band type helmet from Groningen, photograph courtesy of the Groninger Museum (7th - 8th c. AD?), photography by M. de Leeuw; iron cross-band type helmet (*Amlash* type) from Bremen (7th - 8th c. AD?): side view and close-up of the band with teeth-like cuttings (directly below), photograph courtesy of the Focke-Museum. Bottom: Umayyad fresco at Qasr Amra turn of 7th and 8th c. AD, Jordan, photograph courtesy of D. Nicolle.

a wide array of features corresponding to both the armour of Sasanid Iran and to the Yarysh-Mardy helmet. One of such facets are undoubtedly spiky rivets, which in this case appear in an elongated form with a square base and beveled edges. It seems that the shape of the Bremen rivets constitutes an intermediary link between the elongated rectangular rivets found on the helmet from The Musée d'Art Classique de Mougins and the conical rivets from the Yarysh-Mardy helmet or certain other Sasanid items. The helmet itself appears in the form of an elongated cross-band helmet with arched Sasanid ridges known as the *Amlash* type.¹²⁸ What strikes the attention is the fact that, as in the case of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet, the decorative band running around the bottom of the bowl on the Bremen helmet possesses bi-lateral teeth-like ridge cuttings. Thus, as far as the aesthetic aspect is concerned, due to the form of these ornamental cutouts the Bremen helmet seems to constitute the closest parallel to the one from Yarysh-Mardy. Similar cuttings may be observed in the case of a 9th -10th c. AD helmet from group II according to the already mentioned typology by A. N. Kirpichnikov, which was found in a nomadic burial site in Manvelovka.¹²⁹ Again, it appears very likely that it is yet another instance of replication of certain trends in armour decorations that had evolved in Sasanid Iran. Due to the fact that since the 4th c. AD there existed in Rome a very strong tendency to copy eastern armour patterns, it is virtually impossible to unequivocally state whether the finds from Groningen and Bremen are of Iranian origin or merely constitute European replicas of Sasanid armour. As far as the helmet from Bremen is concerned, however, many of its features indicate that its Iranian provenance is very likely. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that both of the helmets mentioned above were found in the vicinity of the sea, which may suggest that they could have been imported via merchant shipping routes from eastern coast of Mediterranean sea. Finally, one more example of a spiky helmet relevant to the discussion is a depiction coming from the Umayyad fresco at Qasr Amra¹³⁰ in Jordan, dated to the turn of 7th and 8th c. AD. Namely, one of the characters shown on the fresco seems to be wearing a helmet with spiky rivets, which demonstrates the fact that late Sasanid riveted helmets, as well as a good deal of other Sasanid armour, was still in use until around the beginning of 8th c. AD.

Dating of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet

Late 6th c. AD may be assumed as a possible bottom time frame in the dating of the Yarysh-Mardy helmet since before 6th c. AD there were no helmets with decorative ridges, which has been thoroughly discussed in the above text. Judging by the scarcity of known art pieces as well as relevant archeological finds, it may be concluded that six-ridge spanglen helmets must have quickly fallen into disuse in the Islamic period. However, due to the possibility of the existence of helmets with spiky rivets in the Umayyad period (which may be evidenced by a helmet depicted on the Qasr Amra fresco), the bottom time frame should correspond to the beginning of 8th c. AD as early Islamic armour did not come into existence overnight but evolved under the influence of the conquered cultures.¹³¹

Of course, a question arises of whether there were any other specific factors, apart from the already investigated ones, which additionally might have contributed to the appearance of Sasanid armour in the Caucasus in the period under discussion. Besides a rather obvious influence of merchant routes and the existence of Derbent stronghold in the Caucasus, military campaigns waged during the Byzantine-Sasanid wars in the region, must have undoubtedly played a significant role. In particular, the wars breaking out in the wake of Guaram's I attack on Albania (588 AD),¹³² due to which the Iranian army operated in Suania (crossed Caucasus), as well as Heraclius's military operations in the Caucasus in 627 AD¹³³ must be taken into account.

¹²⁸ VOGT (2006) 85-86; MIKS (2009) Abb. 7, Abb. 8.

¹²⁹ CHURILOVA (1986) ris. 2.

¹³⁰ NICOLLE (1991) d. 11a.

¹³¹ NICOLLE (1976) 9.

¹³² MAKSYMIUK (2015) Map I. 15a.

¹³³ MAKSYMIUK (2015) Map. I. 17a.

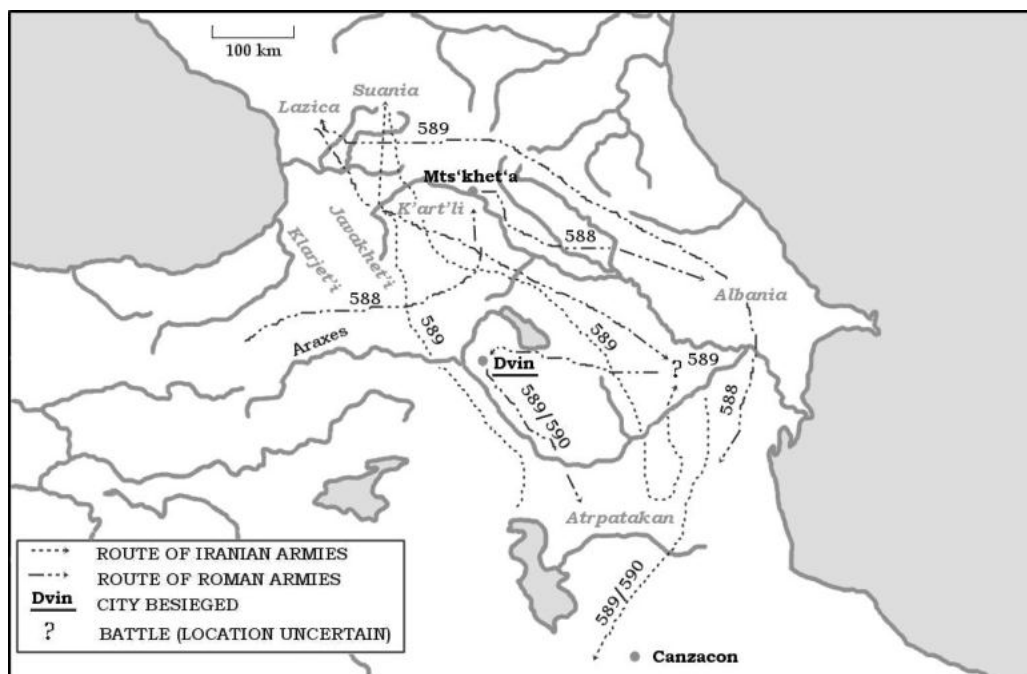


Fig. 17. Military operations in the Caucasian region in 588-589, drawing by K. Maksymiuk.

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Summary:

The article discusses a helmet found in 1968 in a mountainous village of Yarysh-Mardy situated on the river Argun in the north-eastern Caucasus. The helmet was often associated with the Golden Horde period, which according to the author seems highly unlikely. On the basis of a detailed comparative analysis, the author puts forward a thesis of dating the object to either the late-Sasanid or early-Islamic period, i.e. to late 6th - beginning of 8th c. AD. Specifically, it is suggested that the appearance of the helmet in the Caucasus may be attributed to the time of Byzantine-Sasanid conflicts taking place at the turn of 6th and 7th c. AD.

Additionally, the article argues that in the late Sasanid period a new sub-type of helmets came into existence, namely the ones with straight spangs and ones with spiky rivets. Furthermore, it is proposed that the Yarysh-Mardy helmet bears certain correspondences to similar finds from Groningen and Bremen.

Keywords: Helmets, Armour, Sasanian Iran, Caucasia, Central Asia, Nomads