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A New Source on the Problem of the Early Medieval Jewish Diaspora in Crimea

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These days, many researchers pay more attention to the ancient and mediaeval history of Jewish communities in Crimea. In this paper I will analyze already known information about the Hebrews in early medieval Crimea mainly from the fifth to the seventh centuries (the problems of the Hebrew *diaspora* in the Khazarian period I have studied in a separate article¹) and enlarge the scholarship with a new source, which seems to widen contemporary account on the given problem.

The cities of Chersonesos (fig. 1.1) and Bosporos (fig. 1.7) are traditionally considered to be the most important centers of the Jewish *diaspora* in the Crimean Peninsula. The site of a synagogue, which had existed at the place where 1935 Basilica was erected later, is considered to be the most relevant argument for the Hebrews lived in Chersonesos in the Late Ancient and Early Medieval periods. In spite of the contemporary discussion on the chronology and the interpretation of the main building periods of this construction,² one can draw the conclusion that

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¹ Yu. M. Mogarichev, "On the Problem of the "Khazarian Heritage" (Khazarian Jews and the Problem of the Origin of the Karaites and Krymchaks)," *PIFK X*(Moscow ó Magnitogorsk 2001) (in Russian).

² E. Overman, R. Maclennan, and M. Zolotarev, "To the Studies in the Jewish Antiquities of Tauric Chersonesos," *Archeologiya* 1(Kiev 1997) (in Russian); D. Korobkov, "On the Buildings of the Jewish Synagogue in Tauric Chersonesos," in: *Materialy Vos'moy Ezegodnoiy Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii po iudaike* (=Materials of the Eighth International interdisciplinary conference in Jewish studies), 2 (Moscow 2001) (in Russian); M. Zolotarev, "Judaic Diaspora in the North Coast of the Black Sea in the Initial Centuries A.D.," in: *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem 2000); I. A. Zavadskaya, "Problems of the Stratigraphy and Chronology of the Architectural Complex of the ðBasilica of 1935ö in Chersonesos," *MAIET*

the synagogue existed during a certain period within the fourth century and ceased to exist in the end of the fourth century or at least no later than in the second half of the fifth century.

Apart from the site of the synagogue, two stone slabs with *menorah* pictures have been excavated in Chersonesos. One of these slabs was undoubtedly connected with the above-mentioned synagogue³ and thus dates to the time when the synagogue existed. The second slab was later used for a purpose another than the cult, and it was founded during the investigation of the southern part of the city necropolis.⁴ For the time being, it is impossible to date this slab for sure.

The *Lives of Holy Bishops of Cherson*⁵ describe the earliest stage of this city's Christianization. This important written source fixes the presence of the Hebrews in Chersonesos. After the publication of C. Zuckerman's article about "The bishops and the garrison of Cherson in the fourth century"⁶, one could hardly doubt that the described events of the *Lives* took place from the second quarter to the end of the fourth century.

Although the Hebrews are mentioned in all versions of the *Lives*, the author of the source might exaggerate their special role of the enemies of the Christians. V. V. Latyshev was the first who put this idea.⁷ The Jews amidst the enemies of the new religion was a traditional episode of the Greek hagiography especially from the end of the fourth century when the new genre of polemics with the Jews became the most popular in the Byzantine literature. The climax of this genre fell on the

5(Simferopol 1996) (in Russian); A. Aibabin, *Ethnic History of the Early Byzantine Crimea* (Simferopol 1999), 88 (in Russian).

³ E. I. Solomonic, "On the Problem of the Population of Tauric Chersonesos," *ADSV* (Sverdlovsk 1999), 121-122 (in Russian).

⁴ Solomonic, *The Population of Tauric Chersonesos*, 121; Idem, "The Earliest Hebrew Settlements and Communities in Crimea," in: *Evrei v Krimu* (= Hebrews in Crimea), (Simferopol- Jerusalem 1997), 14-15 (in Russian).

⁵ V.V. Latyshev, "The Lives of Holy Bishops of Cherson. Studies and Texts," *ZAN VIII* (St. Petersburg 1906), No. 3 (in Russian).

⁶ C. Zuckerman, "The Bishops and the Garrison of Chersonesos in the Fourth Century," *MAIET* 4 (Simferopol 1994) (in Russian).

⁷ V. V. Latyshev, "The Suffering of the Holy St. Martyrs of Cherson Vasiliy, Kapiton and Others with Them," *IAK* 23 (1907), 111 (in Russian).

iconoclastic period. The fact that different versions of the *Lives* mentioned the Hebrews in different episodes is an indirect argument for the above-mentioned hypothesis. If all versions of the source call the Greeks the main enemies of the first bishops, than it seems that the authors of different versions of the *Lives* introduced the Jews in the text accidentally for the most part as a tribute to the genre. Archaeology supplies with another piece of evidence. The presence of only one synagogue, two slabs, and other not numerous items could hardly be an argument for the numerous Jewish population lived together with the Chersonians. Thus the relevant data fix the Hebrew community of Chersonesos (medieval Cherson) only from the fourth and fifth centuries onwards.

More evidences of the Judaic presence have been discovered on the territory of Bosporos (fig. 1.7). The relevant sources of this site, however, also date only to the Late Ancient and Early Medieval periods, from the first to the fifth centuries. This group of sources includes, in the first turn, manumissions, the earliest of which date to the first century.⁸ Besides that, there is a group of tombstones with Jewish symbols, some of them even with inscriptions.⁹ All these monuments or at least the majority of them originated from the second ó fourth centuries necropolises excavated in the territory of modern city of Kerch.¹⁰ Some of these tombstones, first of all those with the inscriptions, obviously date from the second to the fourth centuries. It is difficult to date other monuments because the chronology of Jewish tombstones without inscriptions from Bosporos has not yet been developed. The graffiti from the above-mentioned Chersonesos synagogue supplies another evidence about the

⁸ *Korpus bosporskikh nadpisey* (=Corpus of Bosporan inscriptions), (Leningrad 1965). 70-73 (in Russian); Solomonik, *The Most Ancient Hebrew Settlements and Communities in Crimea*, 17-19; D. I. Dan'shin, "Judaic Community of Phanagoryia," *VDI* 1(1993), 63-64 (in Russian).

⁹ *Corpus of Bosporan inscriptions*, 724, 735-736, 743, 746, 777, 1225; Solomonik, *The Most Ancient Jewish Settlements and Communities in Crimea*, 17-19; S. A. Leybin, "The Review of Sites of Judaic Culture in Crimea," in: *Evrei Krima* (= Jews of Crimea), (Simferopol-Jerusalem 1997), 91 (in Russian); Dan'shin, *Judaic Community of Phanagoria*, 68.

¹⁰ Leybin, *The Review of Sites of Hebrew Culture in Crimea*, 91.

Jews in Bosphoros in the fifth century.¹¹

Evidence that Hebrews lived in Late Ancient Chersonesos and Bosphoros may be taken from pictures on amulets and gems.¹² Besides that, the cult of the Most High God spread in these cities in the first centuries A.D. Many scholars suppose that this cult was related to this or that extent with the Judaism influence.¹³

There are isolated finds with Jewish symbols discovered outside Chersonesos and Bosphoros, which can be connected with the Late Ancient and Early Medieval periods. One tombstone depicting *menorah* and a palm branch was found in Sudak (fig. 1.6). It was secondary used in the masonry of the eleventh or twelfth centuries stone cist.¹⁴ Unfortunately, similarly to the previous case, it is difficult to date this tombstone, though it is clear that it was produced earlier than in the eleventh century.

A number of tombstones were found in the nineteenth century in the region of Alushta and Partenit¹⁵ (fig. 1. 4-5). They most probably date to the Late Antiquity.

A few Jewish tombstones were found in the south-western Crimea. One slab is from the archaeological reconnaissance near the village

¹¹ Overman, Maclennan, and Zolotarev, *To the Studies in the Jewish Antiquities of Tauric Chersonesos*, 58-59; Aibabin, *Ethnic History of the Early Byzantine Crimea*, 84-88.

¹² Solomonik, *To the Question of the Population of Tauric Chersonesos*, 120; idem, *The Earliest Hebrew Settlements and Communities in Crimea*, 13, 16.

¹³ Solomonik, *To the Question of the Population of Tauric Chersonesos*, 120-121; Aibabin, *Ethnic History of the Early Byzantine Crimea*, 46-47; Dan'shin, *Judaic Community of Phanagoria*, 64; I. A. Levinskaya, "Those who Worship of the Highest God," in: *Etyudy po antichnoy istorii i kul'ture Severnogo Prichernomor'ya* (=Essays on the ancient history and culture of the Black Sea North Littoral) (Saint Petersburg 1992) (in Russian).

¹⁴ M. A. Frondzhulo, "An Excavation in Sudak," in: *Arheologicheskiye issledovaniya na Ukraine 1965-1966* (=The archaeological investigations in Ukraine 1965-1966) (Kiev 1967), 193 (in Russian).

¹⁵ V. Kh. Kondaraki, *A universal description of Crimea*, vol. 9 (Saint Petersburg 1875), 4 (in Russian); D. A. Khvol'son, *Gravestone Inscriptions from Crimea* (Saint Petersburg 1884), 138-149 (in Russian); V. F. Miller, "An Archaeological Survey of Alushta and its Outlying Areas in 1886," *TIMAO* 12 (Moscow 1888), 132-133 (in Russian).

of Vilino¹⁶ (fig. 1.2). Taking the analogies of the tombstones from Pantikapaion and Phanagoria into account, E. I. Solomonik has dated the Vilino find to the first centuries A.D., which also corresponds to the archaeological context. This slab was found near the *amphora* of the first centuries A.D.¹⁷ The settlement near the village of Vilino appeared from the end of the fourth to the beginning of the third centuries B.C. and existed to the second century B.C.; then the life on the settlement revived in the second century A.D. and finally fell in the third century A.D.¹⁸ In my point of view, this tombstone belonged to a native of the Late Ancient Hebrew community of Chersonesos or Bosporos.

One more tombstone with Jewish symbols was found by N. I. Repnikov in 1928 in the region of Mangup (fig. 1.3). It is difficult to date the monument. In E. I. Solomonik's point of view, the tombstone finds its analogies in the monuments of the second to third, fourth to fifth, and eighth to ninth centuries.¹⁹ Thus, at the moment it seems impossible to date this tombstone more or less reliably. It should be mentioned that there is a nomadic symbol cut on the backside of this tombstone. This pattern was typical to ancient and medieval Hebrew tombstones from Phanagoria, where it was quite common.²⁰ It should be mentioned that although the settlement on Mangup appeared already in the Late Antiquity,²¹ no such items has been found during the more than a century long archaeological excavations of the Mangup cite of ancient town. No such monument has been discovered in the investigations of the outlying areas of Mangup as well. It is interesting to note that at the footstep of this table mountain there was a settlement, the excavations of which has dis-

¹⁶ E. I. Solomonik, "A New Find of a Slab with Seven-Candles Picture in Crimea," in: *Krymskiy muzey (=The Crimean museum)* 1(Simferopol 1995) (in Russian); Leybin, *A Review of Sites of Hebrew Culture in Crimea*, 91-92.

¹⁷ Leybin, *A Review of Sites of Hebrew Culture in Crimea*, 91-92.

¹⁸ S. G. Koltukhov, V. M. Zubar', and V. L. Myts, "A New Region of the *Chora* of Chersonesos in the Hellenistic Period," *Archeologia* 2 (Kiev 1992), 85 (in Ukrainian).

¹⁹ Solomonik, *The Earliest Hebrew Settlements and Communities in Crimea*, 14.

²⁰ Dan'shin, *Jewish Community of Phanagoria*, 66.

²¹ Gertsen A. G., "Archeological Excavations of Karaite Settlements in the Crimea," [sic] in: *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, I (Jerusalem 1994), 183; A. Gertsen, "Jewish Community of Mangoup According to Archeological Data," *MAIET* 7(Simferopol 2000), 203.

covered different items including an ancient Greek inscriptions, which certainly had been imported to the site from somewhere.²²

It was 2003 when I published two new evidences of the Hebrews' life amidst the population of the early mediaeval Bosphoros. Both finds were made by the East Crimean Archaeological Expedition of Institute of Archaeology of Russian Academy of Sciences under the supervision of S. V. Mokrousov on the settlements of the agricultural *chora* of Bosphoros in the Azov Sea Coast of the Kerch peninsula. The first find was excavated in 1999 on the Zelyonny Mys settlement 8 km to the west from the present village of Kurortnoye (fig. 1.8). This is a big fragment of amphora neck of the type with walls corrugated like incoming waves. There is a fragment of *dipinto* of *menorah* on this fragment (fig. 2.1).²³ The second find was discovered in 1990 in Zolotoye Vostochnoye v Bukhte settlement, 5 km to the east from the present village of Zolotoye (fig. 1.9). Similar to the first already discussed item, the analyzed find is a fragment of amphora wall of the type with corrugation like incoming waves with a fragment of *dipinto* of *menorah*. The difference between the two above-mentioned *menorahs* is that the Hebrew symbol from Zelyonny Mys consisted of nine candles (fig. 2.2).²⁴ Thus, *menorah*-shaped *dipinti* were painted on the amphorae of the same type and that is why may be dated within the period from the second quarter of the sixth to the beginning of the seventh centuries.

This paper publishes a source that is preserved in the collection of Kerch Historical and Cultural Preserve. This is a marble plate fragment with *menorah* scratched in its outer surface (figs. 4; 5). This chance find was made by S. Ya. Berzina when she supervised the digging of a foundation pit at the crossing of Karl Liebnecht Street and Rosa Luxemburg Street (present-day Sverdlov Street and Teatral'naya Street) in Kerch in 1956-1957.²⁵

Unfortunately, no advanced classification and chronology of mar-

²² V. A. Sidorenko, "A Fragment of a Decree of the Roman Period from a Medieval Basilica Near Mangup," *MAIET* 5 (Simferopol 1996), 35 (in Russian).

²³ Yu. M. Mogarichev, "On the Problem of Early Mediaeval Jewish Communities in the Crimea," in: *Khersonesskiy sbornik* (Sevastopol 2003), 294-295, fig. 3.1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, fig. 3, 2.

²⁵ I am obliged to L. Yu. Ponomaryov for the materials provided.

ble plates has been developed yet. Ceramic variants of such ware appeared in Athenian Agora in the sixth century B.C. There were two groups, shallow with flat bottom (similar to a small table with raised edges of its top) and in the form of deep bowl. Both types of marble *louteria*, sometimes with inscriptions, were sacrificed into temples.²⁶

Marble plates are known in Crimea in late ancient and early mediaeval layers of Chersonesos and Bosporos. This way, the excavations of Byzantine layers of Chersonesos uncovered several items of the type. They were made as a rule of a good white marble or, rarely, of other stones. Their general appearance and the shape of ledges allow one to suggest at least three types of such vessels.²⁷

First type has solid thick rounded sides, in the shape of large bowls. As one of the latest examples, I can mention the find of fragmented vessel more than 15 cm high in the North-East area of the ancient Chersonesos (quarter XCVII, room 1).²⁸

Second type of plates is of lower proportion, with curved sharp edge.

Third type of plates is also flattened with horizontally out-curved edge. For example, it was 1993 when the excavation of layer 1 (rubbish fill) of rooms 35-37 of the so-called barracks in the Port Area uncovered a fragment of such plate with its edge decorated with incised line.²⁹ This fill of rubbish contained various materials of the wide chronological period, from the fourth century B.C. to eleventh century A.D., with predominating artifacts of the Byzantine period.³⁰ A fragment of similar plate was excavated in 1994 in the north-east section of the barracks when dismantling the south-east wall of room 35, amidst the fourth to

²⁶ B. A. Sparkes and Z. Talcott, "Black and Plain Pottery of 6th, 5th, 4th Centuries B.C.," in: *The Athenian Agora XII* (Princeton (N. J.) 1970), 218-219.

²⁷ My heartfelt thanks to S. V. Ushakov for the information about the finds of marble plates in the site of ancient Chersonesos.

²⁸ M. I. Zolotarev, S. V. Ushakov, and D. Yu. Korobkov 1991 Report of the excavations in the North-East area of Chersonesos. Album of Illustrations (*NPTC* Archive, file 3080), fig. 90 (in Russian).

²⁹ S. V. Døychkov, M. I. Zolotarev, D. Yu. Korobkov, A. V. Magda, S. V. Ushakov 1993 Report of the joint team's excavations in the barracks site in the Port Area of Tauric Chersonesos (*NPTC* Archive, file 3174), fig. 50, 41, 56 (in Russian).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

sixth century material.³¹ Another fragment of marble plate was found in 1998 in the same barracks, in the fill of a pit in the north-west section of room 36-A, amidst various materials, the latest also dating from the fourth to the sixth century.³² Complete profile of the plate survived; there is a deep groove in the inner surface between the edge and the wall. This fragment is 9 x 6, 5 cm (collection list no. 37317).

It is well-known that stone plates and other vessels were used both in Christian³³ and Jewish rituals.³⁴ It is possible that the analyzed marble plate fragment with *menorah* originated from a synagogue that undoubtedly existed in the late ancient and early mediaeval Bosphoros.

³¹ S. V. Døychkov, M. I. Zolotarev, A. V. Magda, S. V. Ushakov 1994 Report of the excavations in the Port Area of Chersonesos (in the so-called barracks) (*NPTC* Archive, file 3226), fig. 36.8, 37.4 (in Russian).

³² S. V. Døychkov, M. I. Zolotarev, D. Yu. Korobkov, S. V. Ushakov 1998 Report of the excavations in the Port Area of Chersonesos (the building of the so-called barracks) (*NPTC* Archive, files 3398, 3396), fig. 56.8 (in Russian).

³³ E. Michon, "Rebords de bassins chretiens ornes de reliefs" in: *Revue biblique* XII (Paris 1915), 485-540; XIII (Paris 1916), 121-170; G. Roux, "Problemes deliens. Tables chretiennes," in: *Bulletin de correspondance hellenique* CV (Paris 1985), 71-78; . Jastrzebowska, "Daniel sur un fragment de Mensa du Vieux Dongola," in: *Ars Graeca. Ars Latina. Studia dedykowane Prof. Annie Rozyckey Bryzek* (Krakow 2001), 25-36.

³⁴ Z. Weise and E. Netzer *Promise and Redemption. A Synagoge Mosaic from Sepphoris* (Jerusalem 1996), 14-21.

List of abbreviations

<i>ADSV</i>	óAntichnaya drevnost' i sredniye veka (The Antiquity and the Middle Ages)
<i>DB</i>	ó Drevnosti Bospora (The Antiquities of Bosporos)
<i>MAIET</i>	óMaterialy po arkheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii (Materials in Archaeology, History, and Ethnology of Tauria)
<i>MIA</i>	óMaterialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii (Materials and Studies in Archeology)
<i>NE</i>	ó Numizmatika i Epigrafika (Numismatics and Epigraphy)
<i>NPTC</i>	ó National Preserve of Tauric Chersonesos
<i>PIFK</i>	óProblemy istorii, filologii, kul'tury (The Problems of History, Philology, Culture)
<i>SA</i>	ó Sovetskaya arkheologia (Soviet Archaeology)
<i>TIMAO</i>	óTrudy imperatorskogo Moskovskogo arkheologicheskogo obshchestva (Proceedings of the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society)
<i>VDI</i>	ó Vestnik drevney istorii (The Journal of Ancient History)
<i>VEUM</i>	óVestnik Yevreyskogo universiteta v Moskve (The Journal of the Jewish University in Moscow)
<i>ZAN</i>	óZapiski Akademii Nauk (The Journal of the Academy of Sciences)

Illustrations

- **Fig. 1:** The chart of the Late Ancient and Early Medieval Hebrew finds in Crimea. 1. Chersonesos. 2. Vilino. 3. Mangup. 4. Partenit. 5. Alushta. 6. Sudak. 7. Bosporos. 8. Zelyonny Mys. 9. Zolotoye Vostochnoye v Bukhte.
- **Fig. 2. 1:** Fragment of the amphora neck with *menorah dipinto* from the settlement of Zelyonny Mys. 2. Fragment of the amphora with *menorah dipinto* from the settlement Zolotoye Vostochnoye v Bukhte.
- **Fig. 3:** Marble plate fragment with image of menorah. Photograph.
- **Fig. 4:** Marble plate fragment with image of menorah. Drawing taken from a photograph.

Fig. 1

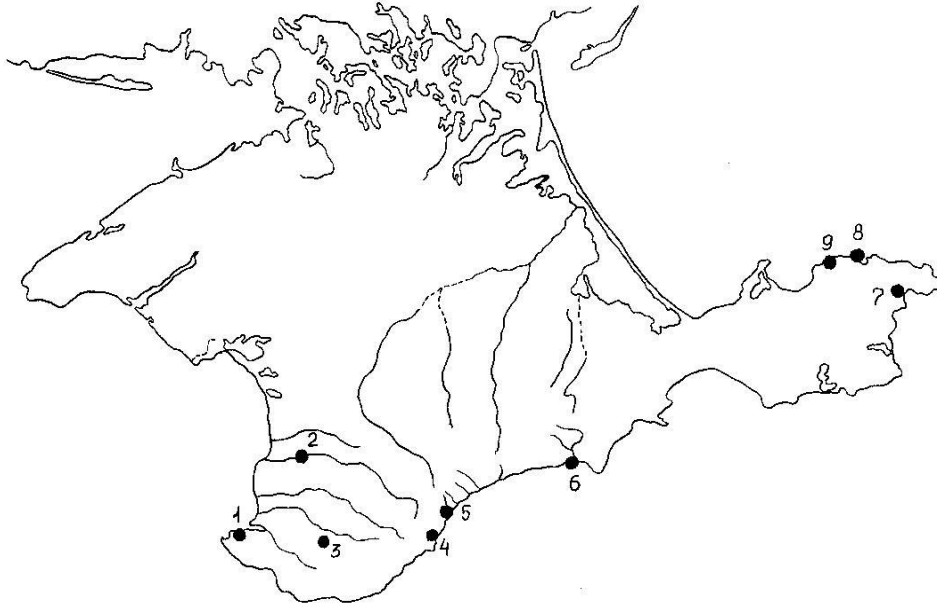


Fig. 2

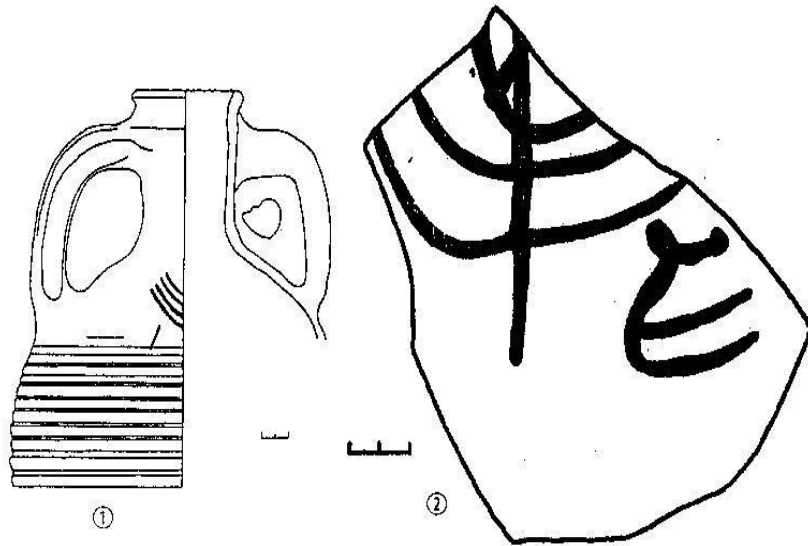


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

