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AN INSCRIBED BOWL FROM THE VOLGA REGION: KING  
ARTHEOUAZES AND AMPSALAKOS

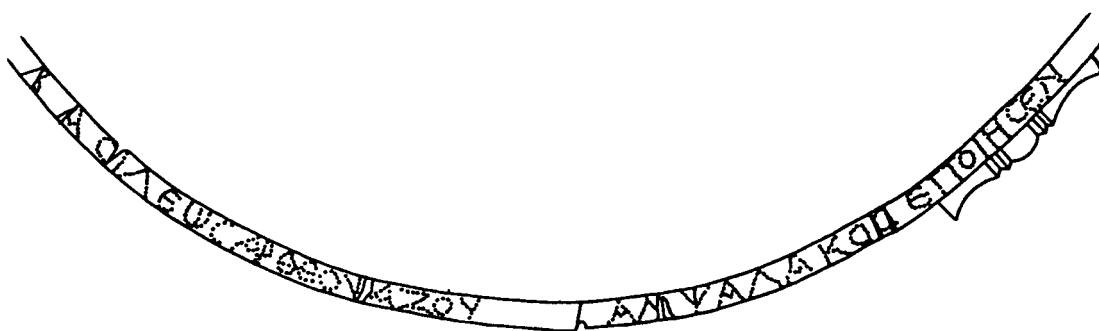
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## AN INSCRIBED BOWL FROM THE VOLGA REGION: KING ARTHEOUAZES AND AMPSALAKOS

The recent excavation of a so-called "Sarmatian" burial has thrown a little new light upon the lifestyle of the elite of and beyond the north-east frontier of the Roman empire. The burial was located near the village of Kosika, 111 km north of Astrakhan, on an elevation which lay at right angles to the nearby course of the lower Volga. Its grave-goods and its typological similarity with burials elsewhere, on the lower Don and in the Ukraine, indicate that it was deposited in the first century or at the beginning of the second century AD.<sup>1</sup>

Among the numerous and rich grave-goods was found a hemispherical silver bowl, 153 mm in height and 311mm in diameter at its lip, which measures 7 mm across. The bowl, partly gilded, weighs 1285.2 g. The flat surface of the bowl's lip bears a punched inscription in Greek, which occupies almost half its circumference:<sup>2</sup>



ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΘΕΟΥΑΖΟΥ      ΑΜΨΑΛΑΚΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΗΣΕΝ

"Of King Artheouaz(es); Ampsalakos made (it)".

<sup>1</sup> The excavation at Kosika and the grave-goods found there are described in detail in V. V. Dvornichenko and G. A. Fyedorov-Davydov, "Sarmatskoye pogrebeniye skeptukha I v. n. e. u s. Kosika Astrakhanskoy oblasti", *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 1993. 3. 141–79. Cf. the articles of M. Treister, Yu. Vinogradov and myself, soon to appear in *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* 1994. 3, which set Kosika in the context of Sarmatian art and archaeology in general and also question the use of the all-embracing term "Sarmatian".

<sup>2</sup> On the bowl, see Dvornichenko and Fyedorov-Davydov (n. 1) 148; on the inscription, *ibid.* 179, nominally an abstract, but presenting additional argument. I am very grateful to Prof. Yuri Vinogradov, who was kind enough to provide me with the above drawing and a photograph.

As Vinogradov has shown, a range of inscriptions from north of the Black Sea suggests that the name Ampsalakos is at home among the peoples of the steppe.<sup>3</sup> However, the king's name is more problematic. It resembles the name Artavasdes, which is of course attested among kings of the first century AD, though the form of the name in the inscription on the bowl remains distinct. The name Artavasdes (in its various forms) is Iranian: it is particularly familiar among the kings of Armenia, but it is also well attested among the elite of Achaemenid Persia and was later borne by kings of Characene and Media, so that an Armenian connection is possible but need not be supposed.<sup>4</sup>

The bowl is adjudged to be of Sarmatian workmanship. Accordingly, it is argued that Ampsalakos was a craftsman who came from north of the Black Sea, but worked at the Armenian court where he was employed in producing silver-ware of a style that would meet the taste of the Sarmatian elite north of the Caucasus. On that hypothesis, the bowl (and indeed much of the other precious goods in the burial at Kosika) is interpreted as a diplomatic gift from the Armenian king to the member of the Sarmatian elite buried at Kosika.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, silver-ware was the currency of diplomacy in and around ancient Transcaucasia, for it was also a mark of wealth and status among the rulers of the region.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, our literary sources make it clear that the different groups of Sarmatians were the objects of energetic diplomacy in the first century AD, whereby they received gifts from, for example, the Iberians and the Parthians (Tac. *Ann.* 6.33.2). To that extent, it is reasonable to suppose that an Armenian ruler sent silver vessels as gifts to members of the Sarmatian elite.

However, as we have seen, there is no need to suppose that King Artheouazes was a king of Armenia. At the same time, elaborate hypothesis about the movements of Ampsalakos is unnecessary: if he is adjudged to be a craftsman of the north (as seems to be agreed), who was skilled in Sarmatian workmanship, he is best situated among the Sarmatians themselves. Perhaps most important, the inscription on the bowl gives no indication that it has been presented as a gift. On the contrary, the genitive form of the king's name in our inscription would seem most naturally to suggest ownership: that is, the inscription proclaims not that the bowl was given by the king, but that it is the bowl of the king.

Therefore, King Artheouazes could very well be the wealthy man deposited in the burial at Kosika: we might expect such an Iranian name among the elite of the Sarmatians, *Medorum suboles* (Plin. *NH* 6.19; cf. Diod. 2.43). Of course, a degree of caution is required, for the bowl may indeed have had a complex history: for example, it could have been seized as loot

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<sup>3</sup> See, at length, Vinogradov (n. 1), also publishing an inscription from Mangup (Crimea), apparently of the first century AD, which mentions an embassy to Umabios(?) and(?) the kings of Aorsia.

<sup>4</sup> Kings called Artavasdes in Armenia: PIR<sup>2</sup> A 1163–5; cf. I 176. Artabazos/Artabazes among the Achaemenid elite: e. g. Hdt. 7.66; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4.27 and 5.3.38; Diod. 11.74; Plut. *Alex.* 21. Characene: PIR<sup>2</sup> A 1160. Media: PIR<sup>2</sup> A 1162.

<sup>5</sup> So Vinogradov (n. 1).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, D. Braund, "King Flavius Dades", *ZPE* 96, 1993, 46–50; cf. id. *Georgia in antiquity*, Oxford 1994, esp. ch. 8.

from King Artheouazes. But, if its maker, Ampsalakos, can be located on the northern steppe, then (in view of its find-spot) it may be asserted with some confidence that even if King Artheouazes was not the man buried at Kosika, then he ruled somewhere in the general vicinity. That is, the newly-discovered inscribed bowl does not illustrate Armenian diplomatic activity, but it does shed new light on the nomenclature of the steppe to the north of the Caucasus, providing the name of a king there, possibly buried at Kosika.

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