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100 KEY EVENTS IN UKRAINIAN HISTORY

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PANTICAPAEUM AS THE OLDEST CITY IN UKRAINE AND EASTERN EUROPE

Historical science considers that the European civilization emerged in the western part of Europe. That was the place where Athens and Rome appeared. Those were the sources of the first technologies and roads. Scholars and warriors of those lands left descriptions of their achievements in the chronicles. Regarding Ukraine, large cities on its territory are, as a rule, just casually mentioned. However, it was the Ukrainian terrain that happened to be the land of Panticapaeum, the oldest city in Eastern Europe. Studies provide evidence that the city was founded in 615—610 BC.

The ruins of Panticapaeum are located in the modern town of Kerch in the eastern part of the Crimean peninsula. The ancient city was founded on the mountain called Mitridat by ancient Greeks. Panticapaeum was quite a large city of the time — the built-up area was about 100 hectares. As to the name of the ancient city, it is still controversial in the scientific community. Some researchers believe that the city was called after the Pantikap River, which once flowed there. Others prove that the name of Panticapaeum meant the "Fish Way," because it is known that in Old Iranian *panta* meant the *way*, *route*, while *kapa* meant *fish*.

Panticapaeum ruins

Panticapaeum has long been explored by archaeologists. They continue finding some surprising discoveries. For example, it is known that the rulers of Panticapaeum coined their money long time ago. The first gold and silver pieces, found in the ancient city, contained an image of a lion's head on the obverse and a square on the reverse side. These coins were stricken till the last quarter of the 5th century BC, after which the coin design was somewhat changed. They depicted a head of a bull and a hexagram star.

Panticapaeum coins

It is reported that since the foundation of Panticapaeum its patron had been Appollo,

like in ancient Troy. The main temple of Panticapaeum was devoted to this god. Other temples were built in honour of Aphrodite and Dionysus. In addition to temples, Panticapaeum was famous for its royal palace, a traditional square and an amphitheatre. A strong stone reinforcement system was built around the city. Nearby there was a necropolis, which consisted of a long series of burial hills, stretching along roads from the city to the steppe. From the southern side the city was surrounded with the biggest number of the burial hills, called Yuz-Oba, which is translated as *100 hills*. Beneath these hills Scythian nobility representatives were buried. Once there was an Acropolis as well, with spacious streets and squares. One could enjoy the view of luxurious temples and palaces. Today only ruins can be seen there.

Excavations in Panticapaeum site on Mitridat mountain

Reconstruction of ancient Panticapaeum Acropolis

The legend says that Panticapaeum was founded during the time of the Argonauts by the son of Aeeta, the king of the mythical country of Aea. He, chasing the Argonauts after stealing Medea and the Golden Fleece, arrived from Colchis at the shore of Cimmerian Bosporus and received a permit to found a city there from the Scythian king Agaete. Another legend tells that it was in that ancient city on the territory of modern Kerch that legendary Hercules was born.

Terracotta Hercules from Kerch

SCYTHIAN VICTORY OVER KING DARIUS'S PERSIAN TROOPS

At the end of the sixth century before Christ the area of modern southern Ukraine suffered from the invasion of the troops of Persian king Darius the First. That campaign was reported in the works by ancient Greek historian Herodotus.

Herodotus

In 514 the Persian army crossed the Thracian Bosporus. The Persians built a bridge of boats near the mouth of the Danube and invaded Scythia. Over a month Darius was moving eastwards chasing the Scythians. Herodotus noted that Scythians fielded three military detachments against the Persians. But that was done not to confront them. According to their idea, a detachment commanded by king Scopasis, retreating, had to take the Persians to the banks of the Don along the Azov Sea coast. The other Scythian warriors headed by kings Idanfirs and Taksakis were to encourage the enemy to go north. According to Herodotus, these tactics of the Scythians were quite successful. The Persians moved inland of the uninhabited Scythia by hundreds of miles. Eventually, Darius camped on the bank of the Oar River. That was the place to hold the battle between the Persian troops and Scythians, mentioned in the works by Herodotus.

The Histories by Herodotus

Thus, both armies lined up for the battle. The detachments of the Persian troops deployed for the attack were ready to attack the enemy, but at that time hares ran across the field. Therefore, the Scythians, being inborn hunters, forgot about the Persians and started hunting. The battle was over prior to its commencement. This curious story of the battle was provided by Herodotus. Considering the absence of any other sources, it is

hardly possible to identify whether the ancient Greek historian's story is true. We can but suggest that, due to the significant quantitative advantage of the enemy army, the Scythian commanders planned to imitate the battle, understanding that the vast steppe expanse itself was an efficient tool in fighting against the foe.

Therewith, the situation of the Persians was indeed rather miserable. Unexpectedly for himself Darius I realized that the odds of winning were against him. To keep on moving in the strange steppes was too dangerous, so he had nothing to do but retreat. In addition, even the return to the Danube crossing with no serious losses from starvation and diseases would be a success for him. It would be a bigger success if he was able to cross the Danube, since his allies, the Greeks, had undertaken to guard the bridge for two months only. Therefore, leaving his camp at night on the Oar River, the king rushed to leave Scythia with the best and able part of his army. The Scythians got a great deal of trophies and captives. At that time the detachment of king Scopasis approached the bridge guarded by the Greeks, and required their promise that the bridge would be drawn in due time. Nevertheless, it turned out later that the Greeks were reluctant to draw the bridge and destroyed only a part of it from the Scythian side. So, when Darius with his troops came up to the Danube, the bridge was quickly renewed. The Persian army successfully crossed to the right bank of the river and returned home. It is to be noticed that Darius's campaign failure in moving to the Northern Black Sea coast united the population of Scythia in their struggle against the external enemy. As to the Persian king himself, he learnt from that unsuccessful campaign and did not participate in any foreign campaigns any longer and, instead, sent his commanders to head the armies.

Image of Darius I
on an ancient Greek vase

Scythian warriors
on electrum vase
from Kul-Oba

SCYTHIAN VICTORY OVER ZOPYRION, A MILITARY COMMANDER OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

In 331 BC a new intervention against the lands located in the south of modern Ukraine began. This time it was led by ethnarch of Alexander the Great in Thrace — the commander called Zopyrion. Having collected an army of 30,000 warriors, he set off to the lower reaches of the Danube towards Scythia.

The first target of the Macedonian commander was Olvia, situated on the Crimean Peninsula. At the time the city was a military ally of the Scythian tribes. Having conquered Olvia, Zopyrion intended to leave Scythians with no support. Historical sources report that the approach of the Macedonian commander's army took Olvia citizens unawares and they were not ready for defence. It is mentioned that before the attack of the Macedonians the city had been affected by internal controversies, therefore, the troops of the city-state were not able to stop the enemy troops far from the city. The level of danger was assessed properly only when Zopyrion came close to the walls of Olvia. As a result, many Olvia citizens were captured by Macedonians. That tragic fact was confirmed by the excavations, during which on the territory of the ancient city a mass grave was found. And chronologically it belonged to the times of the city seizure by the ethnarch of Thrace. The grave contained the skeletons of young people, who had been killed.

However, the chronicles say that at that complicated time for Olvia there was one citizen called Kallinik, who managed to organize the city dwellers

View of Olvia excavation. Mykolayiv region, Ukraine

and defend their homes. The talented organizer was able to convince the citizens to forget their arguments and unite their forces to defend their city. For the sake of the victory Kallinik offered a step that was unusual for the slavery age — at his request citizens freed their slaves and provided them with the citizen rights. Moreover, authorized ambassadors were urgently sent by Olvia to sign a new alliance with the Scythians.

Then the events developed in a highly adverse way for the Macedonians. Fulfilling their alliance obligations, Scythian troops backed Olvia. The rumours of their approach became a warning to Zopyrion. After a meeting with his field commanders, he decided to terminate the seizure and return to Thrace. That was the fatal error made by the Thracian ethnarch. The retreat to the vast steppes of the Black Sea region was a failure and the Macedonian army was entrapped by the numerous Scythian tribes. Realizing that it was impossible to escape, Zopyrion had to fight, and that fight turned out a complete failure and destruction for him. The commander also shared the fate of his warriors.

It should be mentioned that Scythians did not stop there. After Zopyrion's army, they destroyed the city of Nikony, which served the quarters to the Macedonian troops. After that the Thracian tribes, feeling that the power of Macedonia was weak, rebelled against Alexander. The deadly war burst out. Nonetheless, the Scythians fairly believing that they did not need to conquer any new lands, abstained from that war. Soon the union of the Scythian tribes sent an ambassador to Alexander the Great. They entered a peace treaty between Scythians and Olvia on the one part and Macedonia kingdom, on the other.

Olvia, ruins of an ancient residential area