

Trading Connections of Olbia Pontica in the 1st-4th Centuries A.D.

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Rezumat: Acest articol discută relațiile comerciale ale Olbiei Pontice de la începutul sec. I p.Chr., când orașul a renăscut după invazia geților, până la începutul ultimului sfert al sec. IV p.Chr. când și-a încetat existența.

Cuvinte cheie: legături comerciale, Olbia Pontica, Marea Neagră, perioadă romană.

Key words: trading connections, Olbia Pontica, Black Sea, Roman period.

Olbia Pontica was restored after the invasion of Getae not earlier than the end of the 1st century BC. The trading connections of Olbia renewed gradually. Dio Chrysostom says, that as it seems to him, the city was restored at the request of surrounding Scythians who were interested in the trade with Greeks, but can't organize the trading place in accordance with Greek traditions (Or., XXXVI). This statement is disputable to some extent; however it testifies the importance of the trade in the economy of Olbia in the 1st century A.D.

According to Olbian inscriptions the board of *agoranomoi* continued to exist. It consisted of five persons, who made dedications to their patron Hermes Agoraio after finishing their term of service¹. They controlled prices, money exchange, weights and measures, order on the market, etc. The board of *agoranomoi* in Olbia consisted of five persons, instead of two-three as it was accepted in the provinces of the Roman Empire². Probably, the duties of *agoranomoi* in Olbia were wider. All above mentioned inscriptions of the board of *agoranomoi* are dated by the end of the 1st – the first half of the 2nd centuries A.D. The archaeological data testified to the development of trading connections of the city at that time. Import from the West provinces of the Roman Empire increased.

Trading activity was adjusted by the legislation and *agoranomoi* saw to the execution of it. Quite possible they took taxes from imported goods. The import duty could be from 1/30 to 1/90 of the value of the goods³. Citizens of the *polis* and foreigners, who rendered important service were released of taxes. But this privilege was exceptional and was stipulated in special decrees.

An important item of export from Olbia to the centers of Classical World could be grain. But this conclusion is true only for productive years. In bad years for the crops grain could be imported from other places. Probably cattle, leather, salted and dry fish were more constant items of export. Dio Chrysostom wrote about salt trade of Olbia with barbarians (Or., XXXVI). Unfortunately he did not inform us about another goods, which were exported from Olbia. He only told the words of Olbiopolitai that the merchants and traders, who came to Olbia, brought bad clothes and wine and took the goods, which were not better (Or., XXXVI). According to this information Olbia imported from the centers of the Classical World first of all wine and clothes. Besides olive oil, ceramics, terracotta figurines, marble statues, glass and metal ware (particularly jewelry, vessels, and art bronzes) were imported.

Olbia was the trade center for the entire Lower Bug region. All foreign trade was held through Olbia. Production of agriculture came from the settlements to Olbia. And all necessary goods were bought by the inhabitants of the settlements on the market of Olbia.

Trading operations on *chora* probably were mainly of exchange character. For the 1st – the first half of the 2nd centuries A.D. there were revealed only a small quantity of Olbian bronze coins. The only exception is denarius of Domitian, which was found on the settlement Petuhovka-2. Roman coins are fixed on the territory of Olbian *chora* in small quantities only from the middle of the 2nd till the middle of the 3rd centuries A.D.⁴. Probably they appeared here from the market of Olbia⁵.

¹ IOSPE, I², 128, 129; NO, 90, O-92/P-25/2669¹.

² See: Jones 1974, 14.

³ Anohin 1986, 488.

⁴ Kryžitskij *et alii* 1989, 207.

⁵ Karyškovskij 1965, 64.

The development of the trading connections of Olbia with the centers of Classical World corresponded to the main stages of its historical development in the first centuries A.D. Already from the very beginning of the 1st century A.D. there are fixed traditional for Olbia connections with the centers of Asia Minor and the South Black Sea littoral: Sinope, Pergamon, Samos, Kos, Byzantium⁶. They brought olive oil, wine, *terra sigillata*, lamps, and glass ware to Olbia. There were strengthened the trading connections with the North Italian centers. Olbia received some olive oil, wine, *terra sigillata*, lamps, glass vessels and in a small quantities fibulas. Their main part for that time is revealed in Bosphorus and Caucases⁷.

In the 1st – the first half of the 2nd centuries A.D. traditional for Olbia connections with the centers of Asia Minor and the South Black Sea littoral still prevailed. Besides there were trading connections with the centers of the North Black Sea littoral and also with Attica, East Mediterranean, Egypt. Not numerous Italian imports were replaced by more considerable import from the western provinces of the Roman Empire on the boundary of the 1st - 2nd centuries A.D. There were brought *terra sigillata*, lamps, marble statues⁸, glass and metal ware (first of all fibulas⁹) to Olbia. At that time the city took the second place after Bosphorus on the quantity of glass things¹⁰.

In the second half of the 2nd – the first half of the 3rd centuries the trade of Olbia achieved the greatest bloom for the first centuries A.D., to what testified so the materials of the excavation and the epigraphical dates as well. Almost all inscriptions on the trading connections of Olbia in the first centuries concern to this time. The main specific weight belonged to the foreign trade. The fullest list of trading contractors of the city contains the decree in the honour of Theokles, the son of Satyr who was wreathed with gold wreaths posthumously by the following cities: Nikomedia, Nikea, Heraklea, Byzantium, Amastris, Teym, Prussa, Odessos, Tomis, Histria, Kallatis, Miletus, Kizik, Apameya, Chersonesos, Bosphorus, Tyras, Sinope¹¹. Apameya, Nikomedia, Nikea, Byzantium, Prussa, Heraklea, Amastris, Kallatis are mentioned in a partly preserved inscription from Olbia¹². The citizens of Prussa, Heraklea and Byzantium are mentioned in another Olbian inscription¹³. There are also other inscriptions: in the honor of the inhabitant of Prussa¹⁴, the gravestone of the inhabitant of Sinope¹⁵, the gravestones of the inhabitants of Bosphorus¹⁶. In Tomis an inscription was found where Satyr, the inhabitant of Olbia, was mentioned and also an inscription according to which Tomis, Histria, Apollonia and other cities of the West Black Sea littoral made a celebration on the honor of their “benefactor” from Olbia¹⁷.

On archaeological materials connections are fixed first of all with the centres of Asia Minor and Black Sea littoral, Attica, Alexandria Egyptian, the Mediterranean, the western provinces of the Roman Empire. Olbia received olive oil, red slip ware, lamps, glass and metal ware, marble statues. At that period Olbia had intensive trade connections with Bosphorus, which could export some quantities of wine, salted sea fish and fish sauces and amphorae. Olbia had no her own mass production of amphora at that time. From the western provinces of the Roman Empire Olbia imported mainly *terra sigillata*, lamps, glass and metal ware, jewellery, marble columns and plates (white and coloured) for the interiors of the houses.

Olbia used mainly its own bronze coins in the inland trade. In the international trade at that time silver denarii were used. Comparison of data on Olbia and Histria shows, that in Olbia there was more not only Roman coins but much more denarii (53.5% – in Olbia and 17.3% – in Histria). It is possible to suggest, that during the period of ruling of Flavians and Antoninians Olbia played more important role in Pontic trade, than Histria, and its amount of currency in circulation was rather developed¹⁸.

Except of Roman denarii there were found in Olbia coins of different centers of the provinces of the Roman Empire: Tyras, Tomis, Kallatis, Odessos, Perinthos, Philippopolis, Philippos, Assos, Alexandria, Nikea, Teym, Amastris, Sinope, Cesaria, Bosphorus and Chersonesos¹⁹. There was more Roman coins and own bronze ones in Olbia than in Histria at that period. That testifies to more intensive trade activity of Olbia than Histria.

⁶ IOSPE, I², 79.

⁷ Gorohovskij 1985, 20.

⁸ According to the conclusion of the Hermitage laboratory on scientific conservation and restoration of statues two statues from the excavations in Olbia in 1986 were made from marble of Asia Minor.

⁹ Gorohovskij 1985, 20.

¹⁰ Sorokina 1984, 235.

¹¹ IOSPE, I², 40.

¹² IOSPE, I², 41.

¹³ NO, 51.

¹⁴ NO, 47.

¹⁵ NO, 101.

¹⁶ OSPE, I², 202-204.

¹⁷ Zlatkovskaja 1951, 112.

¹⁸ Karyškovskij 1988, 118-119.

¹⁹ Karyškovskij 1965, 57-60.

Olbia had also trading contacts with surrounding non-Greek population. But there are no ground for suggestion on considerable spreading of import from Olbia under the boundaries of the Lower Bug region as it is seen on metal ware²⁰.

It should be noted, that Olbia had the closest contacts with Hellenized population of the Lower Dnieper sites. The Lower Dnieper was the contact zone of Greeks and barbarians²¹. Olbia could import grain from these places. So finds of grey pottery produced in Olbia as the whole resemblance of ceramic complexes testify to their close contacts²².

The comparison of tableware ceramics shows, that there are analogies almost to all vessels from the Lower Dnieper sites in Olbia. However the ceramic complex of Olbia is much richer. The ceramic complex of the sites of Olbian *chora* is not as rich as in Olbia, but it is richer than one of the Lower Dnieper sites²³.

Probably Olbia received cattle, leather, honey, wax, grain from non-Greek population. It exported goods of its own production and also ones imported from other antique centers. It carried out intermediary trade. There were first of all clothes, wine, jewelry, ceramics, glass and metal ware.

But in the whole it should be marked that in the first centuries A.D. the trade connections of Olbia Pontica were not so intensive and various as in Hellenistic period. The same is characteristic for other centers of the North Black Sea littoral at that time.

Trading connections of Olbia were broken again in 269-270. The city was destroyed by Goths. After Gothic complete of 269-270 Olbia was restored not earlier the 80's of the 3rd century A.D. Only the city itself with the nearest *chora* in the radius of 5-10 km existed. Another territory of the previous *chora* of Olbia was occupied by the population of Tchernjakhov culture. The Lower Bug region became the contact zone of Greeks and barbarians. Probably the trade of Olbia revived slowly.

There was no own coinage in Olbia at that time. However, not numerous finds of Roman coins are known from the time of Diocletian (284-305) till Valens (364-378)²⁴. These testify to considerable decreasing of the trade and naturalization of the economy of Olbia. To some extent it appeared away from trading ways. Nevertheless, at that time the trading connections with Bosphorus, Asia Minor, the western provinces of the Roman Empire, North Africa were fixed²⁵. Traditional contacts with Asia Minor preserved and even prevailed in comparison with other antique centres.

Obviously, there was some trading reorientation of Olbia: the trading connections with the surrounding population of Tchernjakhov culture became more important. Probably, the significance of intermediary trade increased. It could be suggested, that the trade between Olbia and the population of Tchernjakhov culture was mainly barter one, because finds of coins on Tchernjakhov culture settlements are rare. The population of Tchernjakhov culture could receive from the antique centres wine and olive oil in amphorae, table ware, glass vessels, beads²⁶. The absence of large complexes for salted fish and wineries under the existence of all needed conditions for their development in Olbia at that time can testify to the absence of the market for their production among the surrounding barbarians. And the contacts with antique centres were weakened.

Olbia could export metal ware and ceramics of its own production to the nearest settlements of Tchernjakhov culture. Usually metal-working and pottery were well developed in the tribes of Tchernjakhov culture, but just in the Northern Black Sea littoral remains of these productions are few²⁷. In change Olbia could receive first of all cattle, as it was common article of export for the population of Tchernjakhov culture²⁸. The question about delivery of grain from Tchernjakhov culture settlements is problematic. It is not excluded, that they brought in Olbia some quantity of barley and millet. Receiving of wheat by Olbia, probably, could be excluded, as surrounding population of Tchernjakhov culture cultivated primary *Triticum dicoccum*, which gave little meal.

It is necessary to underline, that scarcely Olbia was the single trading partner for the surrounding Tchernjakhov tribes. Probably, Olbian artisans worked for their needs. However, every of these societies preserved its specific structure and the type of economic activity. In another case the life in Olbia would not stop a half-century earlier, than on the surrounding Tchernjakhov settlements²⁹.

²⁰ Furmanskaja 1958, 60; Ambroz 1966, 93-96.

²¹ Gavryljuk, Krapivina 2005, 66.

²² Krapivina 1980, 97; Gavryljuk, Abikulova 1991, 18-21, 26.

²³ Gavryljuk, Krapivina 1999, 30.

²⁴ Karyshkovskij 1968, 178.

²⁵ Krapivina 1993, 128; Kryžitskij 1999, 336.

²⁶ Magomedov 1987, 77-86.

²⁷ See: Magomedov 1987, 70, 73.

²⁸ Magomedov 1987, 77.

²⁹ Kryžitskij *et alii* 1999, 337.

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