Early medieval finds from the delta of the Don – an attempt at identifying the earliest group of the masque type belt mounts in the Eastern European steppe

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ABSTRACT
Our article focuses on the finds allegedly found in the vicinity of Belovode (Rostov oblast). The cast masque type belt fittings from the assemblage belong to the earliest horizon of the object type in terms of form. Similar belt mounts are known on the steppe east of the Don and from the Volga–Urals Region. Based on these, a north-south trade / communication route can be reconstructed.

KEYWORDS
Belovode, masque type belt fittings, Sivashovka type burials, Volga–Urals Region

INTRODUCTION
One of the most emblematic types of early medieval Eastern European finds is the masque type belt fittings made by cast and pressed technique.¹ The Russian literature calls these objects heraldic type belt mounts. Due to the greatly varied shapes and ornaments of the finds, many researchers proposed their own typological system.² However, these systems are not uniform either in their terminology or their typology. Dating of the mount type is often not settled yet. The distinction between the Balkan and Eastern European masque type fittings became obvious early on, in the studies of A. Ambroz. The belt fittings richly ornamented with curved apertures belong to his first stylistic group, and some from the coastline of the Black Sea in the Crimean Peninsula. The origins of both were identified as Byzantine.³ These mounts are from reliably dated mid-6th to early 7th century layers of Byzantine forts in the

¹The article is supported by the Thematic Excellence Programme – NKFIH-832-15/2019.
²Including, but not limited to Ambroz 1971; Somogyi 1987; Aybabin 1990; Bálint 1992; Gavritukhin–Oblomskiy 1996; Kovalevskaya 2000; Balogh 2014; Gavritukhin 2018.
³Ambroz 1971, 118. A. Komar called this group of finds Sadovec-Pleven group (Komar 2006, 114).
Lower Danube region. A. Ambroz assigned all other Eastern European masque type fittings to his second group without any further classification. In this group I. Gavritukhin divided the belt fittings of the Volga–Ural Region on a stylistic basis. The stylistic group concerning our study was described with the following criteria:

a) Cast T-shaped mounts having a rectangular plate with straight or curved sides
b) Symmetric mounts with rhombic-shaped connecting part
c) Strap-ends with straight sides, slightly pointed end, with round or other geometric apertures
d) Short and wide box-shaped strap-ends
e) Trefoil- and quatrefoil-shaped flat mounts
f) Pseudo-buckles belonging to the so-called Type 5 after Gavritukhin.
g) Simple ornamentation: the big sized round apertures are common while the geometric and keyhole-shaped apertures are rarer
h) Mounts with slightly curved “fish-tail”

According to I. Gavritukhin the early dating of the stylistic group is supported by the coincidence of mid-5th to mid-6th century Post-Hunnic or Shipovo-horizon objects, like in grave 165 of Birsk. In our article we attempt the identification and dating of the finds that fulfil the criteria of the first stylistic group of the Volga-Ural Region in the so called Sivashovka-type burial of the 6th–7th century material from the East European steppe region. In this task we first present an “assemblage”, allegedly originating from the Don Delta (Fig. 1).

**THE BELOVOD’E FINDS**

A number of early medieval objects were handed over to the Azov History, Archaeology and Palaeontology Museum-Reserve in 2012. According to their finders they were found near Belovod’e in a sandpit, when one of its walls collapsed.

Description of the finds:

1. Golden cast crescent-shaped earring (Fig. 2. 12) The thick lower part narrows to its ends which are joint. Diameter: 1.3 cm. thickness: 0.2–0.6 cm, weight: 3.22 g.
2. Elements of the silver belt set
   a) “D-shaped” profiled buckle frame (Fig. 2. 1; Fig. 3. 1).
      It has widened D-shaped and its front side is thickened. The cross section of the frame and tongue is D-shaped. The tongue is bent, its front end is thickened. There is a ncrest on the rear part. The inlay is missing. Length: 4 cm, maximum width: 3.4 cm.
   b) Scutiform hollow mount with round aperture near its edge (Fig. 2. 4; Fig. 3. 4). Cast. Its lower end is pointed, the upper one is double curved. In the middle, at the joint of the two curves, there is a round aperture, which almost touches the rim. There is a rivet on the back. Length: 3 cm, width: 2.5 cm.
   c) Pseudo-buckle (Fig. 2. 2; Fig. 3. 2). Cast. It consists of a scutiform plate with bevelled edges and a B-shaped frame. The frame is solid, its surface is smooth with two round apertures in the edges. The tongue is curved, profiled with a small protrusion on the rear end. The movable frame was connected to the plate with two cut-out straps. The other side of the stripes join to a rectangular plate which extends along the whole buckle plate. A rivet is connected to that. Length: 4.7 cm, width: 2.8 cm, thickness: 0.9 cm.
   d) Buckle frame with bevelled edges (Fig. 2. 3; Fig. 3. 3). Fragmented pseudo-buckle(?). Cast. The scutiform plate has pointed end. The missing buckle frame was fastened to the plate with two stripes. The buckle was movable. The other side of the stripes join to a rectangular plate which extends along the whole buckle plate. A rivet is connected to that. Length: 2.8 cm, width: 2.3 cm, thickness: 0.7 cm.
   e) Remains of a box-shaped strap end with side band (Fig. 2. 9–11; Fig. 3. 10–11). It has straight sides and rounded end. There is a hole by its upper end in the middle, it contains a rivet. The front and back plate are fragmented, the side band is intact throughout but its shape is deformed. Plate 1 – length: 5.3 cm, width: 2.7 cm; Plate 2 – length: 4.7 cm, width: 2.6 cm; side band – L.: 5.8 cm.
   f) Hollow silver strap end (Fig. 2. 8; Fig. 3. 9). Cast. Its upper edge is straight, the tip is gently pointed. There is a smooth vertical ridge on the front side. There are two incised lines parallel to the upper end and two round apertures in the upper third. There is a rivet on the upper part of the back. Length: 3.7 cm, width: 2 cm.
   g) Rectangular mounts with slightly curved ends (2 pieces) (Fig. 2. 7; Fig. 3. 7, 8). Cast. Its sides are straight, but ends in “fish-tail”. There is a smooth vertical ridge on its surface. An incised line divides the front side in 1:2 ratio. There are two round apertures in the smaller and four in the bigger part arranged symmetrically. There are three rivets on the back. Mount 1: length: 4.3 cm, width: 2.2 cm. Mount 2: length: 4.3 cm, width: 2.1 cm.
   h) Hollow T-shaped mount (2 pieces) (Fig. 2. 5, 6; Fig. 3. 5, 6). Cast. The ends of the shield shaped part are pointed, there are two round apertures in the upper third. The crossbar is curved. There are two rivets on the backside of the mount with thin plate. Mount 1: length: 3.7 cm, maximum width of the scutiform part: 1.9 cm. Mount 2: length: 3.5 cm, maximum width of the scutiform part: 2 cm, width of the crossbar: 2.3 cm.
3. Solidus of Emperor Zenon (Fig. 2. 13). Constantinople mint, Officina 10. Obverse: DNZNENO | PERPAVC. Pearl-diademmed, helmeted, cuirassed bust facing, head slightly to right, holding a spear in right hand over the shoulder, shield decorated with a horseman in left. Reverse: VICTORI | AAVCCC I Victory standing facing, head left, long jewelled cross resting on the ground in the right hand, star in the right field, in exergue CONOB. Weight: 4.35 g. At the lower margin, in the breast area of the emperor pierced. The face of the emperor and the figure of Victoria worn off, otherwise in good condition. MIR 7 (Aug. 476 – 11.4.491).

The tongue deserves special attention for the cell designed on the rear of the tongue. Similar ornamentation is known mainly from the Hunnic period, but sporadically it occurred in the 6th, and even the early 7th century. Its exemplars are an Abkhazian from Abgidzrakhu and two Crimean specimens from Sakharnaya Golovka, and Suuk-Su. Only one steppe burial had a similarly ornamented tongue. This object from the grave 2 of mound 3 from Ilovatka has B-shaped frame and scutiform plate, and at the rear end of the tongue there is a semicircular red glass inlay (Fig. 4. 18). This burial is regarded as one of the earliest to have masque type mounts.

**Box-shaped silver strap-end with side band**

The assessment of this object is difficult, since some fragments of the silver plate are missing. Based on the available pieces its width was approximately 2.7 cm, and its length was no more than 5.3 cm. I. Gavritukhin classified these strap-ends based on the proportions of their lengths versus their widths. In his classification the Belovode specimen belongs in the intermediate proportion class. The common traits of these are a width greater than 2.2 cm, but their length is not greater than three times their width. Precisely documented evidence of this type from the steppe is available from grave 2 of mound 3 in Ilovatka (2.4×4.7 cm) and grave 15 from Spokoynaya (2.6–2.7×5 cm), but based on its drawings the strap-end from Chapaeovsky grave 2 mound 29 is also of the intermediate class. These stumpier specimens appeared in the Volga–Ural Region relatively early, in I. Gavritukhin’s opinion as early as the last third of the 6th century.

Most Sivashovka type burials yielded box-shaped strap-ends, but their exact dimensions are rarely determined. As the available data demonstrates, the strap-ends from Belovode and Spokoynaya are wider than most of their parallels, as those are 2–2.5 cm wide. A strap-end of extreme proportion is the one found in grave 6 of mound 13 in Malai – its length is five times its width (Fig. 4. 27).

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**ASSESSMENT OF THE FINDS**

**Crescent-shaped earring**

According to A. Mastykova this type had sporadically appeared in Central Asia and the Middle East as early as the first centuries of the first millennium AD. However, due to their simplistic design, as well as their chronological and geographical distance from later objects, their origin is debatable. The mass distribution of this object type in Eastern Europe and the Carpathian basin occurred in the Hunnic Period. From this period golden, silver and bronze specimens are known. In the steppe burials the golden ones dominated. As A. Mastykova points out, such earrings were described in 6th–7th century graves containing masque type fittings. Examples of such burials are Borisovo and Spokoynaya (2.6–2.7×5 cm), but based on its drawings the typology of crescent-shaped earrings has not been prepared till date. This makes dating of certain specimens rather difficult.

**“D-shaped” profiled buckle frame**

The silver buckle has no exact parallel in the archaeological record of early medieval Eastern Europe. The closest analogy of the frame’s shape is known from the grave 60 in the Borisovo cemetery. That frame is made of bronze, and had an iron tongue.

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9Mastykova 2009, 72.
10Mastykova 2009, 72; Tejral 2011, 220–223.
11The Grave 2 of Mound 8 in Kubey, Pokrovsk–Voschod, Verkhne Pogromnoye or Mound 2 of Shipoivo can be mentioned as an example (Tejral 2011, 221). However, M. Kazanski dated all of them except the grave from Kubey to the Post-Hunnic Period (Kazanski 2020, 109).
12Mastykova 2009, 72; Skarbovenko–Lifanov 2012, 63, ris. 7, 10.
13Sakhaney 1914, 97–98, 128, ris. 19, 3.

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14Few examples: Regöly (Tejral 2011, 205, Abb. 158, 3); Kerch, catacomb excavated on 24th June 1904 (Tejral 2011, 293, Abb. 222, 2); Szeged–Nagyiszékos (Tejral 2011, 310, Abb. 238, 9).
15Ambroz 1989, 16.
16Gavritukhin 2018, 77.
17Gavritukhin 2018, 77.
18Gavritukhin 2018, 77.
19Gavritukhin 2018, 77.
20Komar et al. 2006, 271.
21Gavritukhin–Oblomskiy 1996, 85; Gavritukhin 2018, 77.
22Komar et al. 2006, 271.
23Besides the above-mentioned specimens: Bogachevka Grave 12 of Mound 8: 1.8–2×5.5 cm (Genen–Korpusova 1989, 10), Chertnomorskoe Grave 11 of Mound 1: 2×5.6 cm (Komar–Orlov 2006, 393), Kostogryzovo Grave 7 of Mound 1: 2.2×6–6.2 cm (Komar et al. 2006, 330); Sivashovka Grave 2 of Mound 3: 2.5×6 cm (Komar et al. 2006, 271).
24Atavin 1996, 258, Tab. 21, 1.
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Cast silver strap-end

The strap-ends with parallel sides, slightly pointed tip ornamented with two round apertures and a ridge on their axis are common objects in Eastern Europe. N. Limberis and I. Marchenko derived this type from their Hunnic prototypes that are characterised by narrow, longitudinal ridge. These strap-ends are dated to the second half of the 5th century. The classical specimens occurred sporadically in Crimea and the Caucasus, but they were most prevalent in Volga–Ural region and the eastern bank of Lake Aral.

The cast strap-ends with two round apertures occur in the Sivashovka-type burials as well. Such specimens were discovered in grave 12 mound 1 of Vostochniy Malai II, east of the Azov Sea (Fig. 4.7), in Zinovievka and grave 7 of mound 1 in Berezhnovka-II in the Lower Volga Region, and in grave 2 of mound 3 from Sivashovka on the northern coast of the Black Sea. Only one strap-end was found in Zinovievka, whereas in Malai two, in Berezhnova and Sivashovka three specimens occurred.

T-shaped mounts

The two T-shaped mounts known from the assemblage have a scutiform plate. Regarding its shape, this type of mounts are quite common among the burials in the steppe region, however, their plates, unlike the specimens form Belovode, were most prevalent in Volga–Ural region.

Fig. 1. Assemblages with early masque type belt fittings in Eastern Europe. 1: Belovod’e; 2: Malai; 3: Vostochnij Malai; 4: Greki; 5: Ilovatka; 6: Verkh Saya; 7: Urya; 8: Armievo; 9: Starij Kadom; 10: Birsik

1. kép. Korai maszkos vereteket tartalmazó leletegyüttesek Kelet-Európában. 1: Belovode; 2: Malaj; 3: Vosztocsnij Malaj; 4: Greki; 5: Ilovatka; 6: Verh Saja; 7: Uija; 8: Armievo; 9: Sztarj Kadom; 10: Birszik

25 Limberis–Marchenko 2011, 434–435.
26 Komar et al. 2006, 270.
27 Limberis–Marchenko 2011, 434–435.
28 Rykow 1928, 227, 109. kép 2.
29 Maksimov 1956, 78, ris. 47.
30 Komar et al. 2006, 270.
31 According to A. Komar, the Sivashovka specimens are pressed because he thought he had discovered a volute motive on their upper part (Komar et al. 2006, 270). However, according to the photos (Komar et al. 2006, 268, ris. 12, 10–12, 31–33; Komar 2013, Tab. 17, 20–22), they were probably cast.
Fig. 2. Finds from the Belovod'e "assemblage". Photos of N. Iudin

2. kép. Tárgyak a belovodei „Jeletegyűettesből”. Fotók N. Yudin
Fig. 3. Finds from the Belovod’e “assemblage”. (After Yudin 2014)

3. kép. Tárgyak a belovodei „leletegyüttesből“. (Yudin 2014 nyomán)
are mostly ornamented with U-shaped apertures. Other T-shaped mounts with scutiform plates ornamented with two round apertures are very rare, only four specimens are known from the Caucasus, the Crimea, and the western shore of the Black sea. T-shaped mounts with identical ornamentation often have a different form, their plates are rectangular with straight or curved sides. These mounts are common in the Volga-Ural Region (Fig. 5. 7, 33, 42), where they belong to the first stylistic group of the masque-type belt fittings of I. Gavritukhin. Among the Sivashovka-type burials, only grave 6 of mound 13 in Malai contained such mounts, however, they were pressed unlike the more typical cast ones (Fig. 4. 36).

**Scutiform mount with round aperture near its edge**

A round aperture is located on the upper edge of the scutiform plate, located between two slightly curved rims. Similar belt fittings are rare in the steppe. The grave 2 of mound 29 in Chapaevskiy contained a similar one. A barely visible ridge is on its longitudinal axis, while an ∞ shaped aperture is located near its upper end. Identical mount was found in the grave 2–3 of the mound 15 in Verkh Saya cemetery, in the Ural Mountains. The belt garniture contains a strap-end with two round apertures, pseudo-buckles and T-shaped mounts is dated to the first half of the 7th century by R. Goldina. The third analogy is known from the grave 53 of Stariy Kadom located in the Middle Oka Region (Fig. 5. 30). The other belt fittings of the assemblage, like the T-shaped mount with rectangular plate, mount with slightly curved end, cast strap-end with two big round apertures and ridge in its axis, are also belong to the first stylistic group of I. Gavritukhin.

**Rectangular mounts with slightly curved ends**

Although identical specimen is unknown to us, the masque-type belt fittings with curved or 'fish-tail' ends formed the one of the most common type. Based on the curvature of the sides and the upper end, we can distinguish an early and a late group. The first one, which includes the mount from Belovode as well, is characterized by a slightly curved ends while their sides are almost parallels. Among the nomadic burials, only Vostochniy Malai II mound 1 grave 12 contains such belt fittings, however, these are smaller than the Belovode specimen, they are ornamented only with four round apertures and their lower end is flat (Fig. 4. 3, 6). Similar ones were found in the grave 15 in Akhmylovo, in the Oka Region and in the grave 191 of Armievo in the Sura Valley (Fig. 5. 4, 5).

**Pseudo-buckles**

An intact and a damaged silver pseudo-bucke are known in the assemblage. These belong to the type 3 of I. Gavritukhin, based on two round apertures on the solid lower frame. Similar specimens are known from the Bylym, Caucasus, and Khatsky, from the Middle Dnieper Region or from Urya in the Ural Mountains (Fig. 5. 38, 39).

Three assemblages with such items are known from the Sivashovka type burials. The pseudo-buckles from grave 2 of mound 29 in Chapaevskiy also belong to the type 3. While the Belovode specimens have a smooth surface on their plate, then the Chapaevskiy ones are ornamented with two round apertures. The pseudo-buckles from grave 6 of mound 13 in Malai belong to the type 1e of I. Gavritukhin (Fig. 4. 21–24). This type is characterised by the pressing technique, the two round apertures on the solid frame and the imitated tongue.

**The interpretation of the Belovode finds**

Stylistically, the togetherness of the mounts and buckles is out of question, however, it is debated whether the earring and the solidus minted between 476 and 491 belong to the same assemblage. The crescent shaped earrings appeared in the male graves from the Hunnic period. The grave 2 of mound 8 from Kubey can be dated to the first half of the 5th century based on the material. The specimen from the above mentioned grave from Vostochniy Malai, dated to the
middle of the 6th century, represents a special type, since four grains were attached to the lower part of the earring. Its best analogy is known from Mokraya Balka. The latest crescent shaped earring from grave 2 of mound 5 in Lebedi IV was found with masque type belt fittings, although, this jewellery was made of bronze instead of gold. However, we should note that, that these earrings have a different design, which can be explained with the different manufacturing technique. Thus, it can be possible, however, it cannot be proven either, that the crescent-shaped earring and the belt set belong to the same grave. Unfortunately, we can ascertain less about the origin of the solidus of Zenon.

The earliest horizon of the Sivashovka type burials

The analogies of the masque type belt mounts from Belovod'e can be found on the one hand in the Volga-Ural area on the other among the Sivashovka type burials. Following the method of I. Gavritukhin, in the following, we collect those assemblages in which the masque type belt fittings are accompanied by such items, which can be dated to the post-Hunnic period.

The grave 12 of mound 1 in Vostochnyi Malai II plays a key role in the emergence of the masque type belt fittings because this assemblage combines the object types of the post-Hunnic and the following period (Fig. 4. 1–8). Because of that both the publishers and M. Kazanski dated the grave to the middle of the 6th century. The earliest object associated to the assemblage is the Hunnic-style copper cauldron, which was found in the upper layers of the barrow in several pieces. According to Zs. Masek its best analogies were found in Suncheleyevo in the Middle-Volga Region and in Lipnya-gova in Southern Siberia. However the cauldron of Vostochnyi Malai belongs to an archaic type, so Zs. Masek suggested that it is not certain whether the Malai specimen was connected to the burial. The double-edged sword with crossguard ornamented with cloisonné technique deserves a special attention among the finds. M. Kazanski assumes the Byzantine origin of such weapons, which were used in the post-Hunnic period. In contrast, the analogies of P-shaped suspension loops of the scabbard were widespread in the 6th-7th centuries. Therefore, it is conceivable that the older weapon was put in a new scabbard before the funeral. As it was mentioned above, the crescent shaped earrings were common in the Hunnic and the post-Hunnic period as well.

The grave 2 of mound 3 in Ilovatka is one of the earliest Sivashovka type burials, which was dated between 610–641 by A. Komar (Fig. 4. 14–20). The cutting weapon described as a dagger plays a key role in the determination of the chronological position of the assemblage. It is not clear whether the 22 cm long fragment was single- or double-edged. The inner side of U-shaped chape is serrated inner side and it is ended in stylized bird heads. Similar weapon with the identical chape was found in the grave 17 of Baital-Chapkan, which was considered as a scramasax by M. Kazanski. I. Akhmedov dated the chapes with stylized bird heads to the post-Hunnic period, to the second half of the 5th, to the first half of the 6th centuries. Similar object is known from Abkhashia, from the grave 2 of Shapka–Justinanov kholm. The buckle with rectangular plate with gem inlays has an outstanding significance regarding the dating. According to M. Kazanski, this type was used between the middle of the 5th and the middle of the 6th centuries. However, the best analogies of the Ilovatka finds are known from the catacomb 357 of Klin Yar. The B-shaped buckle with movable scutiform plate on which a circular inlay is designed on its tongue. Its analogy is known in Ilovatka. Additionally, a U-shaped chaped was found in the dromos of the catacomb in Ilovatka, however, its inner side is smooth. Some horse bones were deposited next to the dromos which allegedly belonged to the catacomb. Based on the radiocarbon dating, the animal was buried between 547 and 600 with a probability of 62.8%. Back to the burial of Ilovatka, the style of the masque type mounts allows an early date of the assemblage. These forms are roughly manufactured and they are ornamented only with big-sized circular apertures.

The scramasax of grave 6 mound 1 of Greki I (Fig. 4. 9–17) did not survive, but according to the description and the photos, the best analogies were found in the burials in Ilovatka and Baital-Chapkan. Not just the weapon connects this assemblage to the grave of Ilovatka, but the belt fitting with curved sides and ornamented with plastic rib and round apertures, which type is known only from these two burials (Fig. 4. 14–16, 20). The grave of Greki is very similar to the burial of Vostochnyi Malai based on the burial customs. The WNW–ESE orientation, the niche grave and, the whole horse skeletons are characterized by both graves.

The grave 6 mound 13 of Malai contains only a few finds, just an iron knife was found beside the pressed belt fittings (Fig. 4. 21–36). A. Atavin dated to the second and the last third of the 7th century based on the pseudo-buckles and the

61Smirnov 1959, 219, 221, ris. 7, 5.
62Kazanski 2012, 333.
63Akhmedov et al. 2016, 247–249.
64Voronov–Yushin 1973, 182, ris. 11.
65Kazanski 2018, 91–96.
66Belinskij–Härke 2018, 301, Fig. 118, 62.
67Belinskij–Härke 2018, 301, Fig. 118, 61.
68Warren–Higham 2018, 130, Tab. 18.
69Smirnov 1959, 221, ris. 7, 7–8.
70Chkhaidze 2011, 117–118, 133, ris. 3.
71Chkhaidze 2011, 134, ris. 4, 9–11; Smirnov 1959, 221, ris. 7, 7.
72Chkhaidze 2011, 132, ris. 2; Limberis–Marchenko 2011, 422, ris. 4.
manufacturing techniques of the belt mounts. This view can be traced back to that topos of the research that the pressed mounts appeared only after the cast ones. The following arguments are against this late date based on that rigid above-mentioned rule. It was already mentioned, that the T-shaped fittings with rectangular upper part with less-curved end belong to the first, early style group of the Volga-Ural region. The ribbed oval bronze buckle without any plate is more important. A. Atavin mentioned the B-shaped buckles of Mokraya Balka as analogies, which were dated to the second half of the 5th and the first half of the 6th centuries by A. Afanasiev. However, almost identical specimens are known in the type A6 of M. Schulze-Dörrlamm. Based on her distribution map, this type occurred mainly in the Carpathian Basin and in the Balkans, where they were used between the end of the 5th to the second half of the 6th centuries.

Concluding remarks

In summary, a certain group can be outlined based on the belt mounts from Belovode, which can be described with the following features:

1. The mounts are cast, however, regarding the Mound 13 Grave 6 of Malai, it is also possible, that the pressed specimens appeared relatively early
2. The form of the mounts is simple, besides the strap-ends, the scutiform or T-shaped fittings, the mounts with “fish-tail” end and the pseudo-buckles are common
3. A barely visible ridge was found in the midline of the mounts
4. The most common ornamentation are the relatively big-sized round apertures which are frequently arranged asymmetrically
5. The upper part of the so-called fish-tail mounts is less curved

Currently, grave 12 mound 1 of Vostochniy Malai II, grave 6 mound 1 of Greki I and grave 6 mound 13 of Malai from the eastern shore of the Azov Sea and grave 2 mound 3 of Ilovatka from the Lower Volga Basin belong to this group from the Sivashovka type burials. Regarding their style, the belt fittings from “Belovode” have not good analogies from the North-Caucasus or the North Pontic region. Thus, even the exact site of the finds is not sure, they originaled most likely from the area between the Don and Kuban Rivers.

The first group of the Volga-Ural region outlined by I. Gavritukhin contains the best analogies to our belt fittings, thus, it can help us to date the above mentioned Sivashovka-type graves more precisely (Fig. 5). Many of the northern assemblages like the steppe burials still include finds from the late 5th, early 6th centuries, which shows the transitional character between the post-Hunnic period and the assemblages characterized with masque type belt sets.

The contemporary burials of the above-mentioned earliest Sivashovka type burials located east of the Don River can be found on the northern shore of the Black Sea as well. The grave from mound 1 of Bobshoy Tokmak, grave 1 mound 22 in Malaya Ternovka and grave 2 mound 8 of Sukhanovo can be characterized with Sucidava-type buckles, while grave 1 mound 3 of Shelyug contained Sadovec-Pleven type masque belt mounts. According to A. Komar these burials belong to the so-called Sukhanovo-horizon and can be dated to the second half of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th centuries. Thus, the separation of the two groups is not based on their different chronological position. The representation of the Black Sea group originated from the Byzantine militarily fashion of the Northern Balkans, while the belt fittings of the other group from the Don eastwards emerged as a result of a north-south directed trading-communication system (see Fig. 1). This also points to the formation of the masque type belt fittings: while earlier an attempt was made to derive this style from the Byzantine-Sasanian cultural circles, the new evidences suggest that we can expect the parallel appearance of at least two – technically close – groups, which started to merge from the first half of the 7th century.

The absolute chronological position of the group outlined in the article is an open question. The burial of Vostochniy Malai, which can be considered as the oldest assemblage of the above-outlined group, consists of many such types of objects, which does not exclude the possibility of the date to the post-Hunnic period, to the middle of the 6th century. However, we would like to take a stand carefully in this question: in our opinion, the burials of this group were made in the second half of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th centuries at the latest. Hopefully, the publication of further assemblages of this group or the scientific methods like 14C can help with more precise dating.
Fig. 4. Belt fittings from the early Sivashovka type burials. 1–8: Vostochniy Malai II, Mound 1 Grave 12; 9–17: Greki I, Mound 1 Grave 6; 18–20: Ilovatka, Mound 3 Grave 2; 21–36: Malai, Mound 13 Grave 6 (1–8: after Limberis–Marchenko 2011; 9–17: after Chkhaide 2011; 21–36: after Smirnov 1959 and Atamin 1996)

4. kép. Maszkos veretek a korai Szivasovka-típusú temetkezésekből. 1–8: Vosztocsni Malaj II, 1. halom 12. sír; 9–17: Greki I, 1. halom 6. sír; 18–20: Ilovatka, 3. halom 2. sír; 21–36: Malaj, 13. halom 6. sír (1–8: Limberis–Marchenko 2011 nyomán; 9–17: Chkhaide 2011 nyomán; 21–36: Smirnov 1959 és Atamin 1996 nyomán)
Fig. 5. Belt sets of the 1st stylistic group in the Volga–Kama Region. 1–13: Armievo, Grave 191; 14–21: Birs, Grave 165; 22–34: Starij Kadom, Grave 53; 35–43: Urya; 44–49: Verkh Saya, Mound 26 Grave 1–2 (1–13: after PoLesskIkh 1979; 14–21: after Mazihtov 1968; 22–34: after Shtov 1988; 35–43: after GavrItukhIn 2001; 44–49: after GolDIna et al. 2018)

5. kép. A Volga–Káma vidéki első stíluscsoporthoz tartozó póterdős-szülők. 1-13: Armievo, 191. sír; 14-21: Birs, 165. sír; 22-34: Starij Kadom, 53. sír; 35-43: Urya; 44-49: Verh Saja, 26. halom 1-2. sír (1-13: PoLesskIkh 1979 nyomán; 14-21: Mazihtov 1968 nyomán; 22-34: Shtov 1988 nyomán; 35-43: GavrItukhIn 2001 nyomán; 44-49: GolDIna et al. 2018 nyomán)
Kora középkori leletek a Don deltájából – Kísérlet a Kelet-európai sztyeppéről származó maszkos veretek legkorábbi csoportjának meghatározására

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A kora középkori Kelet-Európa egyik legemblemátikusabb leletcsoportját az öntött és préselt ún. maszkos fémveretek alkotják, melyeket az orosz nyelvű szakirodalom heraldikus veretek elnevezés alatt tart számon. A rendkívül változatos formájú és díszítésű maszkos veretek tipológiai rendszerezésére több kutató tett már javaslatot. Azonban ezek a rendszerek sem az alkalmazott terminológia területén, sem a kidolgozott típusokat illetően nem egységesek, és a verettípusok keltezése kapcsán is számos kérdés még mindig nyitott. Egyedül az Al-Duna vidékről és a Krím félszigetről sűrűn díszített veretek keltezhetők megbízhatóan a 6. század második felére, 7. század elejére. Az összes többi kelet-európai maszkos veretet egy csoportba sorolják, s használataukkal általában az egész 7. század folyamán számolnak. Ezen csoporton belül stilisztikai alapon csak a Volga–Urál vidéki vereteket sikerült két stíluscsoportra bontani. Ráadásul úgy tűnik, hogy az első stíluscsoport veretei már a 6. század második felében elterjedhettek. Tanulmányunkban kísérletet teszünk a Volga–Urál vidéki első stíluscsoport ismérveit felmutató lelethorizont meghatározására és keltezésére a Szivasovka-típusú temetkezéseknek nevezett 7. századi sztyeppei emlékanyagban. Ennek kiindulópontjaként egy, állítólagosan a Don-deltából származó „lelegetyütest” mutatunk be.