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**Pages of Bosphorus Archaeology History
The Era of the Imperial Archaeological Commission
(1859 – 1917)**

Summary

The Imperial Archaeological Commission (1859 – 1917) played a very important role in the history of Russian archaeology. Its creation by the decree of Alexander II was one of the manifestations of the Age of the reforms to modernize the Russian State. The Commission was an institution with a few staff. It consisted of eight people at first, but it included the Kerch Museum of Antiquities, headed by A.E. Lyutsenko. There is no doubt that of the Archaeological Commission focused its activity on the study of Classical Antiquity mainly and the northern Black Sea region, especially in the area of the Kerch Strait – ancient Cimmerian Bosphorus.

The first chairperson of the Imperial Archaeological Commission was Count S.G. Stroganov (1859-1881). We must recognize that there were serious disagreements between Kerch archaeologists and Petersburg management in the first year of the Commission, but they were quickly resolved. With the active support of S.G. Stroganov excavations of large barrows on the shores of the Kerch Strait started: necropolis of the 4th century B.C. Yuz-Oba, Bolshaya Bliznitsa and Malaya Bliznitsa, complexes of Vasyurinskaya mound, mounds Seven Brothers, Artyukhovsky mound, etc. Commission staff members E.I. Zabelin, V.G. Tiesenhausen and N.P. Kondakov were actively involved in the study of burial mounds. Considerable attention was paid to the Bosphorus cities (excavations held by K.E. Gyorts, I.E. Zabelin and others in Phanagoria, excavations led by A.E. Lyutsenko in Kerch, etc.), but they were aimed at getting ancient “marbles”, i.e. sculptures, reliefs and epigraphic documents. From 1859 “Reports of the Imperial Archaeological Commission”, describing the archaeological research in Russia began to be published.

In 1878, A.E. Lyutsenko resigned, and S.I. Verebryusov took over the post of the Director of the Museum. He proposed the program of Bosphorus Archaeology development, but he did not have time to implement the program of the development in full. S.I. Verebryusov died in 1884. The Commission did not properly organize protection and restoration of the monuments of Bosphorus antiquities. However, the restoration work carried out on the King’s Mound and in the crypt of Melek-Chesmen mound rescued these outstanding monuments for posterity.

A.A. Vasilchikov became the second chairperson of the Imperial Archaeological Commission (1882-1886). He initially relied on S.I. Verebryusov, and then on the

new Director of the Kerch Museum F.I.Gross to study Bosphorus antiquities. N.P. Kondakov continued archaeological excavations in the region. Despite efforts of S.I. Verebryusov and F.I. Gross to be actively engaged in the study of ancient settlements and villages of the Bosphorus, in practical terms, all remained in their old places in that area. Bright archaeological discoveries in the Bosphorus mounds became less frequent, but they continued: Baksy mound (N.P. Kondakov), Malaya Bliznitsa (S.I. Verebryusov), Anapsky mound (V.G. Tiesenhausen). We should note that under leadership of A.A. Vasilchikov not a single issue of “Reports of the Imperial Archaeological Commission” was published. The combined volume for 1882-1888 was released only in 1891, and its chairperson, of course, should be blamed for it. The trend of registration archaeological documentation designated in the time deserved critical evaluation. Descriptions of the excavated objects were given summarily, without disassembling the archaeological complexes.

The third chairperson of the Imperial Archaeological Commission was Count A.A. Bobrinsky (1886-1917). He corrected negative trends and he even participated in excavations in the Bosphorus. In particular, he found the tomb in the mound of Mirza Kekuvatsky. The chairperson of the Archaeological Commission invited Professor Y.A. Kulakovsky from Kyiv to Kerch. He proposed him to study painted crypts. Y.A. Kulakovsky accepted the offer, and his activity was not limited by excavating crypts.

In 1891, F.I. Gross left his post of the Director of the Kerch Museum. It was accompanied by a real scandal. Through patronage of V.G. Tiesenhausen his post was given to K.E. Dumberg. This energetic person proposed to the management of the Commission a program of the Kerch Museum, and the entire system of Bosphorus reforming, providing adequate protection of Bosphorus antiquities, etc.

Gradually having accumulated experience of a field researcher, K.E. Dumberg discovered many wonderful sites: Lion mound, the crypt of Demeter, Akhtanizovskiy mound, etc. Conducting large-scale excavations in the ancient city Panticapaeum was also linked to his work. He interpreted some of the discovered objects as thermae, a temple of Hercules, the house of a Plasterer, etc. All these interpretations are rather conventional. Because of a serious conflict that broke out in the direction of the Commission, K.E. Dumberg left his post in the spring of 1900. V.V. Shkorpil was appointed as the Director of the Kerch Museum. New people came to the Imperial Archaeological Commission: V.V. Latyshev, B.V. Farmakovskiy, S.A. Zhebelyov. They predetermined the development of Russian Classical Archaeology. Since 1912, M.I. Rostovtsev became a freelance member of the Commission.

V.V. Shkorpil focused on the study of necropoleis on both sides of the Strait. He struggled against marauding excavations. A number of important discoveries in the Bosphorus mounds of the Taman Peninsula are associated with his name – Zelenskoy barrow and the barrow of Lysaya mound. Studying cities followed the methodology worked out earlier. One must admit that even at the time the method of wide area

excavations, successfully applied by B.V. Farmakovsky in Olbia was not applied in the Bosphorus. The reasons for this situation are not entirely clear.

Positive shift occurred in the field of publishing reports on the excavations carried out in 1901 in the frames of “Proceedings of the Imperial Archaeological Commission”. Publications of special studies on Bosphorus Archaeology and History began to appear in great numbers. Russian scientists successfully participated in international conferences.

World War I naturally led to the decrease in the intensity of archaeological excavations in Russia. After the February Revolution in 1917, the Archaeological Commission was renamed the Russian State Archaeological Commission (RSAC), but no changes in its composition and activity happened. They took place after the events of the October Revolution. In summer 1918, in conditions of the Civil War, A.A. Bobrinsky left Soviet Russia. Even before him, M.I. Rostovtsev emigrated. In December 1918, V.V. Shkorpil tragically died at the hands of robbers in Kerch. N.Y. Marr took leadership position in the Commission. Soon the Department of ancient and early medieval antiquities was created in the structure of RSAC. B.V. Farmakovsky became the Head of the Department. New times required new organization of science. In April 1919, the Russian Academy of the History of Material Culture was established, and the activities of the Archaeological Commission were completed.

