



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Challenges in the Early Stages of the Bosporo-Roman War (45–49 CE): Roman Presence on the Kerch Peninsula

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 12, 2024 Accepted: Nov 19, 2024	<p>This article examines the initial stage of the Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE), during which the Romans successfully installed their protégé, Cotys I, on the throne of the Bosporan Kingdom, driving the rebellious Mithridates III (also known as Mithridates VIII) to the Asian Bosphorus. Historical sources reference key Roman commanders, including Aulus Didius Gallus, governor of Moesia, and Gaius Julius Aquila, commander of Roman forces in the province of Bithynia-Pontus. However, the specific Roman units they commanded and their deployment within the Bosporan Kingdom remain unknown. Furthermore, precise details such as the timing of the Roman military campaign's commencement and the army's route toward the Bosporan capital are still obscure. The authors propose that recent archaeological findings from the site of "Adzhiel I," a fortified outpost dating from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE, could shed light on these uncertainties. Located in the Adzhiel ravine within the northern sector of the Uzunlar defensive line—marking the western frontier of the Bosporan Kingdom—the site has yielded ceramic artifacts of British and European origin. These items may suggest the areas within the Roman Empire from which the troops were drawn for deployment in the Northern Black Sea region. Among the notable finds are a fragment of a Roman red-glazed closed lamp featuring a relief scene of a hunting dog attacking a wild boar, the lid of a pyxis possibly of British origin, and a cup with a graffito of the Latin numeral "XX" on its rim. The authors hypothesize that in 45/46–46/47 CE, a Roman military camp may have been established near the water-rich Adzhiel ravine, adjacent to the captured Bosporan fort "Adzhiel I." From this base, Roman forces likely launched raids on border settlements and fortresses, gradually moving eastward toward the Bosporan capital after securing these strategic points. The involvement of the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix (Legio XX Valeria Victrix) is suggested, with some soldiers possibly having accompanied Aulus Didius Gallus when he departed Britain for Moesia in 44 CE, before eventually advancing to the Bosphorus.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> Britain Roman Empire Moesia Bosporan Kingdom Adzhiel Ravine Aulus Didius Gallus Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix (Legio XX Valeria Victrix)	
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### INTRODUCTION

#### Identifying specific Roman military units in the Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE)

The Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE) was a significant armed conflict involving two major factions: pro-Roman forces and anti-Roman forces. The pro-Roman side was led by Cotys I, with Roman military support under the command of Aulus Didius Gallus, the governor of Moesia, and Gaius Julius

Aquila, the procurator from the province of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor. In the later stages of the war, King Eunones of the Aorsi allied with the pro-Roman faction, contributing decisively to the eventual defeat of the anti-Roman forces.

Opposing Cotys and the Romans was his brother Mithridates III (also known as Mithridates VIII), who garnered support from the Siracians under King Zorsines. This coalition, however, faced severe losses during the conflict (Cassius Dio, LX, 28, 7; Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 15–21). Unfortunately, historical sources offer limited information on this war, and the specific Roman military units involved remain unknown (see references (Frolova, 1997, pp. 90-95; Treister, 1993; Vinokurov, Krykin, 2016)).

While scholars have proposed various theories, these lack solid archaeological evidence. For instance, some historians have speculated that Gaius Julius Aquila, as the procurator of Bithynia, may have brought to the Bosphorus several cohorts from the Bithynian army, which likely included not only Roman soldiers but also auxiliary forces recruited from the local population (Magie, 1950, pp. 1397-1398, 1400; Vinogradov, Goroncharovsky, 2009, p. 266; Zubar, Shmalko, 1993, p. 227). Regarding the primary Roman forces, it has been suggested that troops led by Aulus Didius Gallus may have included the Eighth Legion Augusta (*Legio VIII Augusta*), which was redeployed to Moesia in 45 CE (Parker, 2017; Ritterling, 1925; Vinogradov, Goroncharovsky, 2009). However, this connection is inferred solely from the legion's redeployment and is not supported by direct evidence. Consequently, we still lack definitive information about the Roman units that actively participated in the conflict in Crimea.

### **The chronological issues of the initial stage of the Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE)**

Unfortunately, written sources focus more on the final events of the Bosporan-Roman War (Cassius Dio, LX, 28, 7; Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 15–21), leaving many details of the initial phase—including its chronology—largely unknown. Key events, such as the arrival of Roman troops in Crimea, the installation of Cotys I as ruler, and the displacement of Mithridates III (also known as Mithridates VIII) to the Asian Bosphorus, remain uncertain.

The start of Cotys I's coinage in 45/46 CE (Frolova, 1997, pp. 86-87) suggests that Roman forces landed on the peninsula around this time. This date aligns with the Thracian uprising and the subsequent annexation of Thrace as a Roman province in 45/46 CE, despite occasional scholarly doubts (Vinokurov, Krykin, 2016, p. 70). It is plausible that the Roman army embarked for the Bosphorus in 46 CE (or possibly earlier), likely soon after subduing Thrace.

Notably, in 45/46 CE and even into 46/47 CE, Mithridates III's staters continued to be minted, including issues featuring the image of the emperor (Abramzon, Vinokurov, 2016). This coinage activity implies the existence of two opposing centers of power on the Tauric Peninsula following the Romans' arrival. If Panticapaeum was indeed one of these power centers—a widely accepted view—then the other likely lay in another city or settlement in Eastern Crimea.

Two conflicting theories have emerged to explain this situation. According to one hypothesis, Mithridates III was in Panticapaeum, defending himself against Cotys I, who was advancing with Roman support from Chersonesos (Vinogradov, Goroncharovsky, 2009, p. 266). An alternative view posits that Cotys I was already in Panticapaeum, having arrived with the Romans by sea, while Mithridates III was defending himself in a fortress along the kingdom's western borders (Abramzon, Vinokurov, 2016, pp. 716-717).

### **The challenge of determining the Roman troops' exact route on the Peninsula during the campaign against Mithridates III (VIII)**

One perspective suggests that Roman forces from Moesia and Bithynia operated independently, arriving by sea directly at Panticapaeum or Feodosia, with some cohorts from Bithynia possibly reaching the peninsula earlier (Abramzon, Vinokurov, 2016, pp. 716-717; Vinokurov, Krykin, 2016,

p. 67). An alternative view proposes that Chersonesos served as the assembly point for the Roman troops on the peninsula, from where they launched an eastward campaign against Mithridates VIII (III) (Vinogradov, Goroncharovsky, 2009, p. 266).

These opposing perspectives, a result of the fragmentary nature of historical sources, prevent a complete reconstruction of events in the initial stage of the Bosporan-Roman War. Addressing this issue will require further research and the introduction of new sources into scholarly analysis.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this research, an objective approach was strictly adhered to, relying exclusively on facts derived from a thorough analysis of historical and archaeological sources. The selection of specific methods was determined by the nature and characteristics of the sources utilized. The primary written sources include the works of several Roman authors, most notably Publius Cornelius Tacitus and Gaius Plinius Secundus. Based on the accounts in these ancient texts, an analysis was conducted to identify potential Roman military units that may have participated in the Bosporan-Roman War of 45–49 CE.

Among the archaeological sources, particular emphasis is placed on materials from the excavation of a newly discovered site, "Adzhiel I," dating from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE. This site is located on the western frontier of the Bosporan Kingdom, within the northern segment of the Uzunlar defensive line. Discovered in 2017, "Adzhiel I" is being studied by the Adzhiel archaeological expedition, led by S.V. Yartsev.

The primary archaeological research method employed is comparative typology, which enables the identification of distinctive features, essential characteristics, and classification of the material under investigation. This approach allowed for the determination of the origins of specific artifacts, facilitating the correlation of archaeological types with historical events that occurred in the Northern Black Sea region in the mid-1st century CE.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The analysis of sources related to the military service of Aulus**

Didius Gallus suggests that certain Roman units previously stationed in Britain may have been active in the European Bosphorus region in the mid-1st century CE. These troops likely accompanied Aulus Didius Gallus when he departed Britain for Moesia in 44 CE, and subsequently moved to the Northern Black Sea area. It is plausible that these Roman forces, along with other primary military contingents, established a base in a camp within the European Bosphorus. From this location, they likely launched operations against local fortresses and settlements, subjugating the population and compelling anti-Roman forces to retreat toward Panticapaeum.

The mounting threat of a full blockade around the capital may have eventually forced Mithridates VIII (also known as Mithridates III) to withdraw to the Asian Bosphorus. Additionally, part of the Roman forces, utilizing the fleet, might have attempted to cut off the rebellious king's access by sea. Given that the largest fresh water reserves in the European Bosphorus were concentrated in the Adzhiel Ravine on the western frontier of the kingdom, it is likely that the Romans established a temporary encampment in this area.

This hypothesis is supported by findings from preliminary excavations at the newly discovered site "Adzhiel I." Artifacts include rare types of ceramics, notably pieces of clear British origin, for which no local parallels exist in the Bosphorus. Particularly unique is a graffito in the form of the Latin numeral "XX" inscribed on the rim of a cup, further indicating the presence of specific Roman units, possibly from Legio XX Valeria Victrix.

### **Analysis of Aulus Didius Gallus's military contacts before the Bosporan-Roman War: Potential participation of specific Roman units in the Northern Black Sea Region**

The high-ranking appointments of Aulus Didius Gallus—including his tenure as governor of Moesia (44 CE), commander of the military expedition to the Bosphorus (45/46–46/47 CE), and later governor of Britain (52 CE)—were undoubtedly due to his exceptional capabilities as a military leader, demonstrated notably during the Roman invasion of Britain in 43 CE. It is worth noting that his predecessors in Britain, Aulus Plautius and Ostorius Scapula, were also appointed due to their reputations as “outstanding military leaders” (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 14).

However, many details of the Roman invasion of Britain in 43 CE remain unclear in the sources (Cassius Dio, *LX*, 19–23; Suetonius, *Claudius*, 17; Galba, 7; Vespasian, 4; Tacitus, *Agricola*, 13–14; Aurelius Victor, *Caesars*, 4; Eutropius, *VII*, 13, 2–9; Orosius, *VII*, 6.9). This lack of detail makes it challenging to reconstruct the military career of Didius Gallus during this period. Nevertheless, while a comprehensive analysis of the invasion of Britain lies beyond the scope of this study—already extensively addressed in existing research (Bird, 2000; Frere, Fulford, 2001; Hind, 2007; Manley, 2002; Sauer, 2002) – it is relevant to highlight the involvement of key Roman legions.

The invasion of Britain included renowned legions such as Legio II Augusta, commanded by the future emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian, as well as Legio XIV Gemina Martia Victrix and Legio XX Valeria Victrix, both redeployed from the Rhine frontier in Germany (Dando-Collins, 2013, pp. 312–313; Parker, 2017, p. 103). The specific commander of the Twentieth Legion remains uncertain, though historical records mention some of its members, such as centurions Marcus Favonius Facilis and Justius Superus. The overall command of the invasion was held by the governor of Pannonia, Aulus Plautius, who led his forces, including the IX Hispana Legion, from Bononia (Dando-Collins, 2013, p. 313).

During this campaign, Aulus Didius Gallus commanded a specialized mixed unit, the Vettonian cavalry detachment, which comprised both cavalry and infantry (Dando-Collins, 2013, p. 313). This role underscores his significance in the campaign and provides insight into the connections and resources he may have later mobilized during his military expeditions in the Bosphorus region.

Among the Roman military units stationed in Britain, the Twentieth Legion Valeria Victrix (Legio XX Valeria Victrix) held a notably privileged position. It was based in Camulodunum, which Aulus Plautius established as the provincial headquarters and where the first Roman legionary fortress in Britain was constructed (Dando-Collins, 2013, p. 321; Malone, 2005, p. 341). Several pieces of evidence confirm the presence of the Twentieth Legion in Camulodunum during this period. For instance, the tombstone of Marcus Favonius Facilis, a centurion of the Twentieth Legion, was discovered in Camulodunum. He died before 49 CE, the year when the legion relocated westward to Kingsholm (Malone, 2005, p. 340).

In 47 CE, Publius Ostorius Scapula, appointed the first *propraetor* of Britain, established a colony at Camulodunum on conquered lands. Under the protection of a significant veteran detachment, this colony was intended to serve as a stronghold against rebel forces and to enforce Roman laws upon allied tribes (Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 31–32). Notably, some members of the Twentieth Legion were not only distinguished warriors but also ascended to high positions within the Roman Empire. One such figure was Claudius Balbillus, a court astrologer and scholar, who nominally held the title of military tribune of the Twentieth Legion. Balbillus was part of Emperor Claudius's personal entourage and participated briefly in the conquest of Britain before returning to Rome (Hazel, 2001, p. 35; Holden, 2006, p. 29; Malone, 2005, p. 339). Another soldier, the *primus pilus* (senior centurion) Palpellius Clodius Quirinalis, rose to the prestigious rank of prefect of the Ravenna fleet (Malone, 2005, p. 340).

Given these circumstances, it is evident that when Aulus Didius Gallus, one of the leaders of the 43 CE military campaign, was urgently dispatched to Moesia in 44 CE to take up the governorship and

counter enemy incursions, he likely selected the most reliable and experienced personnel for the mission. The choice of soldiers for this operation was not solely based on personal preferences but was also influenced by several practical and political factors.

Decisions regarding the deployment of Roman military contingents from Britain to the mainland were likely made at the administrative center in Camulodunum, where the Twentieth Legion was stationed. Consequently, soldiers from the Twentieth Legion would have been among the primary candidates for this assignment. While Didius Gallus could have chosen experienced veterans from other units stationed in Britain, it would have been improbable for him to overlook the Twentieth Legion, given its prominent status and the heightened attention it received within the empire at the time.

This attention is further evidenced by Emperor Claudius's awarding of a special honorary military distinction to Balbillus, the military tribune of the Twentieth Legion, during the triumph celebrating the conquest of Britain in 44 CE (Suetonius, Claudius, 28.1). In the political climate of the period, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to exclude officers from the Twentieth Legion from consideration for such a critical mission.

Aulus Didius Gallus's remarkable success in Moesia can be attributed in part to his careful selection of trusted personnel. Upon his arrival in the province, he faced a dire situation: "having arrived with all possible haste ... and finding there an alarming situation, for while he was on the way, the enemy had defeated the legion commanded by Manlius Valens; they [the Silures] inflated the rumor of this event in every way in order to frighten the Roman commander arriving to them" (Tacitus, Annals, XII, 40). Despite these challenges, Didius Gallus achieved victory not only by skillfully exploiting conflicts among the barbarian tribes but also through the exceptional professionalism of his close associates, many of whom likely accompanied him from Britain.

This high level of competency did not escape the notice of his contemporaries. Tacitus remarked that "burdened with advanced age and showered with honorary awards, Didius considered it sufficient to restrain the enemy by acting through his subordinates" (Tacitus, Annals, XII, 40). The context of this observation suggests that many of these subordinates were individuals trusted by and loyal to Didius, likely drawn from his previous service in Britain. Thus, when ordered to proceed to the Bosphorus, it is plausible that Didius Gallus once again relied on this trusted cadre of commanders. Given the brief period of his governorship in Moesia, these individuals were most likely veterans he brought with him from Britain.

At the same time, the bulk of the soldiers deployed to the Bosphorus may have consisted primarily of servicemen from the Eighth Legion Augusta (Legio VIII Augusta). This legion had been transferred to Moesia shortly before the Bosporan-Roman War in 45 CE (Vinogradov, Goroncharovsky, 2009, p. 266), making it a logical choice to form the main body of troops for the campaign.

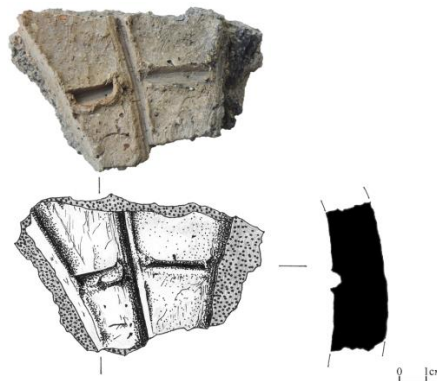


**Figure 1: Steep promontory in the Adzhiel Ravine, where the newly discovered archaeological site "Adzhiel I" is located**

In light of the above, the recently discovered archaeological site "Adzhiel I" warrants significant attention. Located on a steep promontory in the Adzhiel Ravine near the Kazantip Gulf, it lies adjacent to the first two northern passes in the Uzunlar defensive line, marking the western frontier of the Bosporan Kingdom (Figure 1). This site is a recent discovery, and current insights are based solely on preliminary findings.

The site consists of a small fortification featuring a tower and substantial walls exceeding 1 meter in thickness. These walls enclose an area of approximately 10,000 square meters on the plateau-like promontory. Below the fort, along the slope leading to the Adzhiel River, a large ash pit has been identified. Based on the abundance of amphora fragments found at the site, the fortification is tentatively dated to the 1st century BCE–1st century CE.

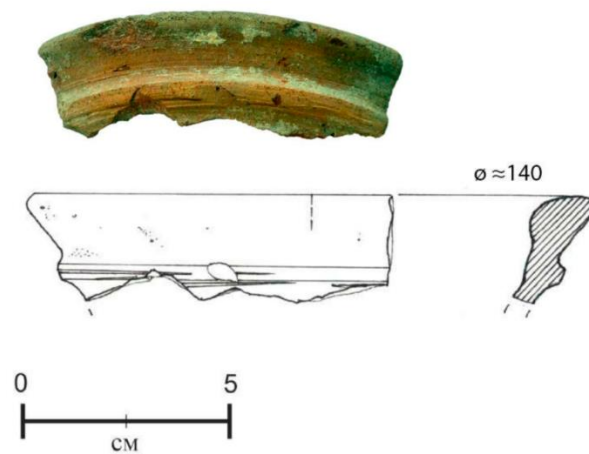
However, some artifacts discovered at this site diverge notably from the typical material culture of the Bosporan Kingdom. Of particular interest is a fragment of a broken beehive, likely of Late Scythian origin, which would have been highly unusual within the context of the fortification (Figure 2). This find raises the intriguing possibility that it may represent evidence of the military use of bees. Historically, bees were often weaponized in Europe, Africa, and Asia, where they were considered among the most fearsome biological weapons (Crane, 1999, pp. 96-99; Neufeld, 1980).



**Figure 2: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Fragment of a vertical stucco beehive with notched grooves on the inner surface**

It is well-documented that bees were effectively employed in ancient warfare, both by attackers and defenders of fortifications. Among these, the Romans are particularly noted for their expertise, as they were both accomplished beekeepers and innovative tacticians. They were among the first to systematically utilize bees in military operations (Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII, 78). Roman forces commonly catapulted beehives over fortress walls or launched them directly into enemy ranks. Such tactics became so prevalent that, as some scholars suggest, they may have significantly hindered the development of beekeeping in the Roman world by the late antique period (Ambrose, 1974, p. 34; Delaney, 2011, p. 2).

At the site of "Adzhiel I," several ceramic fragments have been unearthed that are difficult to explain within the usual context of material culture in the European Bosphorus. These artifacts include pottery and other items that clearly originated from Europe. One notable example is a fragment of a pot with a handle, possibly modeled after a red-glazed vessel (Figure 3). This type of ceramic is known in the Northern Black Sea region exclusively from Roman sites, most notably from the Roman fortress of Charax (Doroshko, Doroshko, 2019, pp. 162, 165, Figures 1, 9).

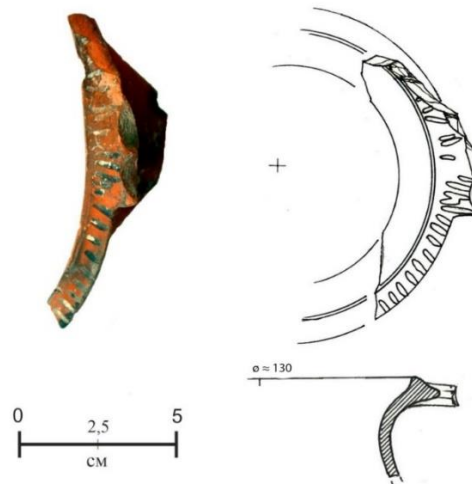


**Figure 3: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Fragment of a complexly profiled pot rim with a handle made of brown clay**

In Europe, similar Roman pottery has been discovered at sites such as the Rhine Limes (Monaghan, 1997, pp. 939-940, No. 3406). However, the closest parallels to the vessels found in the Bosphorus and Charax come from Britain, specifically from a Roman military camp near Chester. This camp was initially constructed in the 70s CE by the II Adiutrix Legion and was later occupied by the XX Valeria Victrix Legion after 90 CE. During their tenure, soldiers of the XX Legion established a large-scale production of ceramic goods at the site (Wood, Griffiths, 2022, p. 2). Notably, due to the transfer of many soldiers from the XX Legion to serve in the II Adiutrix Legion, a clear distinction between the two units during this period is not always warranted (Dando-Collins, 2013, p. 199).

A subsequent ceramic discovery at "Adzhiel I" is particularly unique (Figure 4).



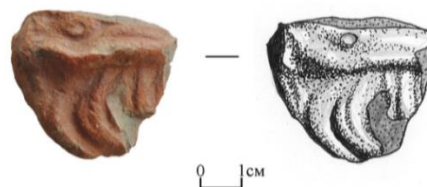


**Figure 4: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Fragment of the rim of a red clay vessel with incised decorations**

One of the notable finds is a fragment of a vessel rim with applied notches. This fragment bears a vague resemblance to a rare two-handled red-glazed jug-amphora discovered on the Heracleian Peninsula (Kovalevskaja, Sarnowski, 2003, p. 229) and in the mid-1st century CE complex at the Late Scythian settlement of Kara-Tobe (Figures 4, 7) (Shaptsev, 2016, pp. 170-171). Roman military presence has been documented at both the Heracleian Peninsula and the Kara-Tobe settlement during this period (Smekalova, Kutaisov, 2017, p. 414). However, unlike the vessel fragment from "Adzhiel I," these examples lack notches on the rim and the pronounced body curvature characteristic of the Adzhiel find.

Instead, the "Adzhiel I" fragment more closely resembles a vessel produced in Britain by the XX Valeria Victrix Legion, which features a rim adorned with notches and a central groove on the outer edge (Wood, Griffiths, 2022, pp. 49, 54). If the British example is accurately dated to the 3rd-4th centuries CE, differences such as the angle of the highlighted rim on the Adzhiel vessel may indicate an earlier production date for this type of pottery.

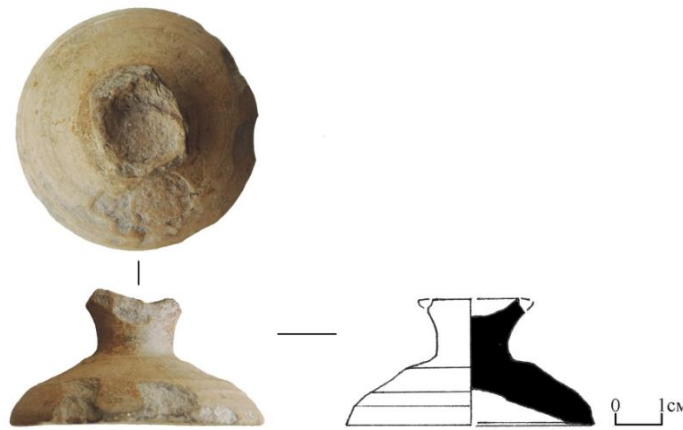
Another rare artifact from the Adzhiel I site is a fragment from the upper portion of a closed red-glazed lamp, featuring a stamped relief scene depicting a hunting dog attacking a wild boar (Figures 4, 5) (Treister, 1993, p. 64). Such lamps were widespread throughout the Roman world, particularly in military camps, and are typically dated from the reign of Tiberius to the early 2nd century CE. In the Northern Black Sea region, only two similar examples have been found, both at Panticapaeum. Their presence is likely associated with the military expedition of Aulus Didius Gallus (Treister, 1993, pp. 69-70).



**Figure 5: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Fragment of a closed red-glazed lamp with a stamped relief depicting a hunting dog attacking a wild boar**



Another rare ceramic artifact uncovered during the excavations at "Adzhiel I" is a pyxis lid with a diameter of 0.05 m, bearing a resemblance to the stem of a Hellenistic kantharos (Figure 6).



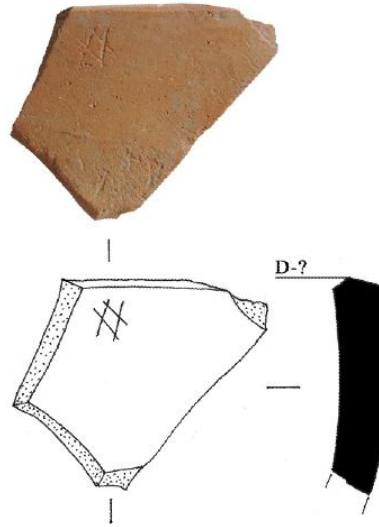
**Figure 6: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Lid of a pyxis**

The item's identification as a lid, rather than the leg of a vessel, is supported by the angle of the handle in relation to the surface of the main body, which is characteristic of lids. Additionally, the light-linen version of the artifact lacks a varnish coating, further distinguishing it from vessel legs. The preserved small upper part of the handle, which is almost entirely broken at the edges, also supports its identification as a lid. No other items of this type have been documented in the Northern Black Sea region.

A distant parallel to this lid has been recorded in Dacia, near the Danube Limes, and is dated to the 2nd century CE (Rusu-Bolideț, Botiș, 2018, p. 139, No. 371). However, the artifact from "Adzhiel I" most closely resembles British examples, particularly in terms of the distinctive uneven ribbing on the upper surface and the downward-sloping beveled walls (Monaghan, 1997, p. 896, Fig. 333, No. 3181). Lids of this type were used with small cylindrical containers designed for mixing ingredients to prepare medicinal ointments. Such jars were commonly utilized not only by women for storing cosmetics but also by Roman doctors for preparing thick ointments in these cylindrical boxes (Baykan, 2017, p. 297).

Since medical services were not typically available to ordinary Roman soldiers, doctors possessing such containers would have likely accompanied high-ranking officers (Scarborough, 1968, pp. 259-260).

The most distinctive discovery at "Adzhiel I," however, is a graffito on the rim of a red clay bowl, featuring two neat oblique crosses forming the numeral "XX" (Figure 7).



**Figure 7: Archaeological site "Adzhiel I": Graffito on the rim of a red clay bowl, featuring two neat oblique crosses forming the numeral "XX"**

Traditionally, such markings are interpreted as either two Greek letters "X," denoting liquid volumes (approximately 6.5 liters) or bulk solid measures (around 2.18 liters), or as a trader's mark representing a price of 2 chalkoi (Saprykin, Maslennikov, 2007, p. 97). However, these interpretations are inconsistent with the dimensions of the cup from "Adzhiel I." Even if the graffito "XX" were taken to signify a measure of bulk solids and the cup assumed to be sufficiently deep, the indicated weight does not align with the standard daily grain ration for a Roman soldier. Additionally, the graffito on the cup does not resemble Greek letters.

No comparable graffiti have been found in the Northern Black Sea region, further emphasizing the uniqueness of this find. The precise alignment of the two oblique crosses on a single line, their deliberate placement on the rim, and the overlapping nature of the marks strongly suggest that this is not a Greek inscription but the Latin numeral "XX." Such numerals were common on vessels associated with Roman military sites during this period. Latin numeric ownership marks on clay vessels are widely documented across Roman provincial sites, especially at military installations (forts and fortresses) and nearby civilian settlements (Dana, Petruț, 2015). These marks often denoted batches of goods allocated to specific legions.

It is more plausible, however, that the graffito "XX" is directly linked to Roman military service. In the Roman army, menial tasks such as cleaning, dishwashing, and fetching firewood or water were typically assigned to new recruits. As soldiers' eating vessels were often identical, numeric marks were applied to distinguish personal property, often reflecting the number of the military unit (Nedelea, 2020, pp. 41, 46-47, 52, 57). Thus, the red-glazed cup with a graffito "XX" on its rim may well have belonged to a soldier of the Twentieth Legion (Legio XX Valeria Victrix).

The analysis of rare artifacts from "Adzhiel I" supports the hypothesis that these items are connected to the campaign of Aulus Didius Gallus in the Bosporus. Evidence suggests that his army paused in the Adzhiel Ravine, near the northern passes of the Uzunlar defensive line. This area likely served as a temporary encampment, chosen for its abundant fresh water, unique on the Kerch Peninsula. Such a base would have been essential for preparing for military operations against the fortified enemy garrisons in the region. Among the units present, it is possible that soldiers from Britain, potentially even from the Twentieth Legion, were included.

### **Arguments clarifying the chronology of the initial stage of the Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE)**

An analysis of material recovered from the excavations at "Adzhiel I" suggests that the Roman forces under Aulus Didius Gallus, in cooperation with Cotys I, advanced from west to east along the main road to Panticapaeum. The strategy employed appears to have been one of gradual encirclement rather than a rapid forced march. The Roman army systematically pushed Mithridates III (also known as Mithridates VIII) eastward, ultimately trapping him in the Bosporan capital. This deliberate approach involved careful planning for the sieges and assaults on the fortified positions encountered along the route.

The prolonged pace of the campaign may have been a result of the Romans' strategy to systematically suppress local resistance, likely relying on a Roman military camp established at "Adzhiel I." Evidence suggests that the destruction of Bosporan settlements in the region (Abramzon, Vinokurov, 2016, p. 716) can be attributed to individual Roman operations launched from this camp. For instance, the attack on the Bosporan fortress at Artesian was likely staged from this location. The presence of a coin of Mithridates III (VIII) found at the site dates this event to the fall of 46 CE or the late summer or fall of 47 CE (Abramzon, Vinokurov, 2016, p. 735). While this deliberate approach may have delayed the Roman advance, it effectively neutralized the threat of attacks from the rear as the army continued its march toward Panticapaeum.

This systematic strategy also explains the concurrent minting of coins by Mithridates III (VIII) and Cotys I during 342–343 AUC (45/46–46/47 CE). Mithridates III (VIII) likely continued issuing his coins in Panticapaeum, while Cotys I, allied with the Romans, appears to have minted his coins at another location. This act symbolized Cotys I's claim to the throne and made any reconciliation between the brothers impossible, as it publicly asserted his authority in opposition to Mithridates.

### **Arguments clarifying the route of the Roman troops during military operations against Mithridates III (VIII)**

Based on the evidence, it is plausible that the Roman army under Aulus Didius Gallus, in coordination with Cotys I, advanced toward the Bosphorus from Chersonesos. Given that the Roman forces arrived by sea in two major contingents—one from Europe and the other from Asia Minor—it would have been necessary to first consolidate these groups at a single location. This gathering would have allowed for the development of a unified strategy and the coordination of various units for the upcoming military operations.

The advance toward the east likely followed two routes: overland through the Uzunlar defensive line and the Adzhiel Ravine, and by sea, with the goal of blockading Mithridates III (VIII) in the capital, Panticapaeum. The sea blockade would have also aimed to prevent his escape to the Asian Bosphorus and his allied barbarian forces. The discovery of a broken Late Scythian beehive at the "Adzhiel I" site—possibly employed by the Romans in capturing a border Bosporan fort—provides further evidence supporting the hypothesis of a land route through barbarian territory.

In light of this, the theory suggesting that Mithridates III (VIII) retreated westward from Panticapaeum to the western border of the state seems improbable. If Mithridates had fled westward to evade the Romans arriving by ship at Panticapaeum, it would be difficult to explain how he subsequently ended up on the Taman Peninsula in the Asian Bosphorus. This inconsistency supports the view that Mithridates remained in the eastern regions of the Bosporan Kingdom before retreating to the Asian Bosphorus under Roman pressure.

### **CONCLUSION**

The preliminary archaeological research conducted in the Adzhiel Ravine has not yet yielded specific details regarding Roman military attire or weaponry. However, full-scale excavations at the

archaeological site "Adzhiel I" have not been carried out, and significant discoveries are still anticipated. Despite the current limitations, the findings from the preliminary investigation allow for some initial conclusions.

The concentration of ceramics of British and European origin, dating to the 1st century CE, is highly unusual for the Northern Black Sea region. These artifacts do not suggest trade relations but instead point to an extraordinary event that brought these items to the region, likely alongside their owners. The Bosporan-Roman War (45–49 CE) stands out as the sole military and political upheaval during this period in the Bosphorus, marked by military operations involving the Roman army under Aulus Didius Gallus.

Given Didius Gallus's prior involvement in the conquest of Britain in 43 CE and the pacification of Moesia in 44–45 CE, it is plausible that his forces included soldiers from the legions stationed in Britain, whom he brought with him when assigned to Moesia. The Roman troops appear to have assembled at Chersonesos before advancing to the Bosphorus by both land and sea. In the area of the Adzhiel Ravine, they likely established a military camp, which served as a base for operations. From this camp, the Romans conducted successful campaigns over several months in the latter half of 46 or 47 CE, culminating in the capture of Panticapaeum and the retreat of Mithridates III (VIII) to the Asian Bosphorus.

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