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## FUNERAL MEAL IN SCYTHIAN BURIAL RITE (CASE STUDY OF NORTHERN AZOV REGION, 5<sup>TH</sup> AND 4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES BC)

*In the article the author investigates the Scythian funerary practices in the Northern Azov region, focusing on the role of food offerings and animal sacrifice. In the study the relationship between food remains in personal burial spaces and communal feasting at the burial mound surface are highlighted.*

*Keywords:* Northern Azov region, burial feast, Scythians, burial mounds, animal sacrifice.

### Introduction

In the foundational study of the anthropology of food *Deciphering a Meal* M. Douglas examines how taking and sharing a meal communicates a broader system of cultural meanings (Douglas 2002, p. 240). Like language, food is a tool for conveying certain messages, which can be found in a system of recurring analogies, as each individual case is a social event that reflects the structure of the phenomenon in general. Partaking in a meal shows unity and connection between relatives, friends and guests, while sharing food with outsiders can be considered as a violation of social boundaries (Douglas 2002, p. 236). Reinforcing and confirmation of social ties appears to be especially important in funeral circumstances. The ambivalent attachment of the living and the dead, described by B. Malinowski, often results in a series of initiation ceremonies aiming to simultaneously break and strengthen their relationship (Robben 2004, p. 2; Malinowski 2004, p. 20-21). In the variety of these rituals, the food plays a major role through the transformation, caring, and creation of a memory (Cann 2018, p. 4-8).

Although there is a lack of direct ethnographic analogies to the Iranian nomadic burial mound traditions, Scythian art as well as Herodotus' records indicates that food and wine consumption was the emerging topic in their culture and religion. For instance, the ritual of "fraternisation" depicted on

famous golden plaques from the Kul-Oba burial mound required drinking wine from the same vessel. Notably, Herodotus' description of Scythian burial rites involves food consumption and animal sacrifice on multiple occasions. Before the funeral, the body of the dead should have been presented to the kindred and served with the same dishes as the alive participants of the ceremony. Following a year after the deceased was buried, particularly the chief's one, the horses along with the servants were supposed to be slaughtered and put up around the mound (Herod. IV, 71-73).

In the current research it is examined how the arrangement of food in the burial mound could also communicate the social norms as well as indicate different liminal points of the Scythian funeral ceremony. Using the case study of the Scythian sites in the Northern and North-Western Azov region, the patterns of food assemblage and placement regarding the burial mound are explored and compared:

- individual space which contained the remains of the food offerings typically placed together with the body of the deceased along with their personal belongings;
- communal space of the *tryzna* which associates with the findings on the surface and the periphery.

According to the parts of the ritual mentioned above, the role of horses as sacrificial animals in the context of the funeral meal is also analysed.

### Sites overview

In the current research 204 Scythian burials (136 barrows) in the Northern Azov region (Pryazovia) are examined (fig. 1). The analysis includes both the burial mounds, built in Scythian time, as well as the secondary burials in the Bronze Age barrows since the rites related to the food consumption and the construction of peripheral architectural elements, particularly the circular ditches, have been observed for all cases (fig. 2). The groups of sites are primarily concentrated in the

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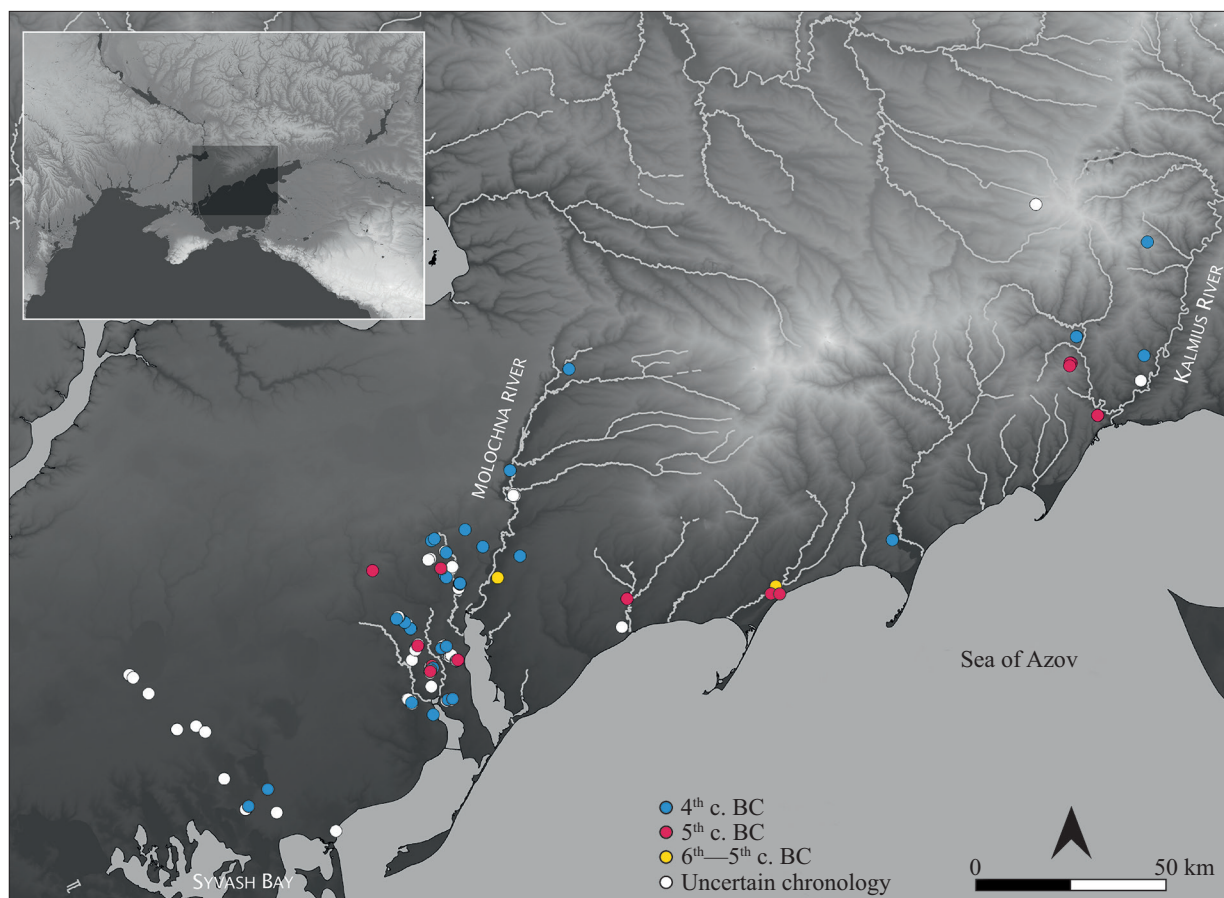


Fig. 1. The map of the Scythian sites in the Northern Azov region

lower streams of large rivers. The most numerous and well-documented necropoleis were discovered in the basins of the Molochna River and Utliuk estuary. Small clusters of Scythian burial mounds are located at the mouths of the Korsak, Obitochna, and Berda rivers. Farther east, the current research area is limited to a group of barrows in the Kalmius River basin. The western boundary of the studied area is the Kherson Syvash region, where barrows had been built mostly at the edge of the seashore and near the temporary lakes in the absence of natural permanent rivers.

The chronology of the Pryazovia sites is mainly limited to the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. A few Scythian burials that possibly belonged to the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Kostiantynivka 2/3, Novooleksiivka 17, Novopylypivka 17/9, and Nohaisk 3) were located in the Bronze age barrows. The first group of Scythian burial mounds appeared at the Eastern fringe, in the Kalmius and Obitochna areas. However, later in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the number of sites there had become significantly lesser, compared to the North-Western region.

Excavations of the Scythian burial mounds in the Pryazovia have started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> centu-

ry, but their results were generally poorly documented and published with the exceptions for the richer complexes such as Shulhivka. The majority of the sites, analysed in the study, were investigated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the construction of irrigation systems to the west of Molochna River. While a significant amount of data has been gathered over several decades of field research, allowing better understanding of the region beyond the wealthiest complexes, the quality of documentation significantly varies between different groups of sites. Given that the burial mound is also particularly prone to destruction<sup>1</sup>, the lack of reported findings on the surface, especially animal bones, rarely can confidently infer the 'evidence of absence'. Nevertheless, the chronological and cultural proximity of the sites in the current subset allows plausible reasoning about the general trends in the Scythian Pryazovia.

<sup>1</sup> The embankments of the richest burial mounds in Pryazovia, Melitopol and Berdiansk, were significantly damaged by urban development and unprofessional excavations even before the official research has begun (Terenzhkin 1955, p. 23; Cherednichenko, Murzin 1996, p. 69)

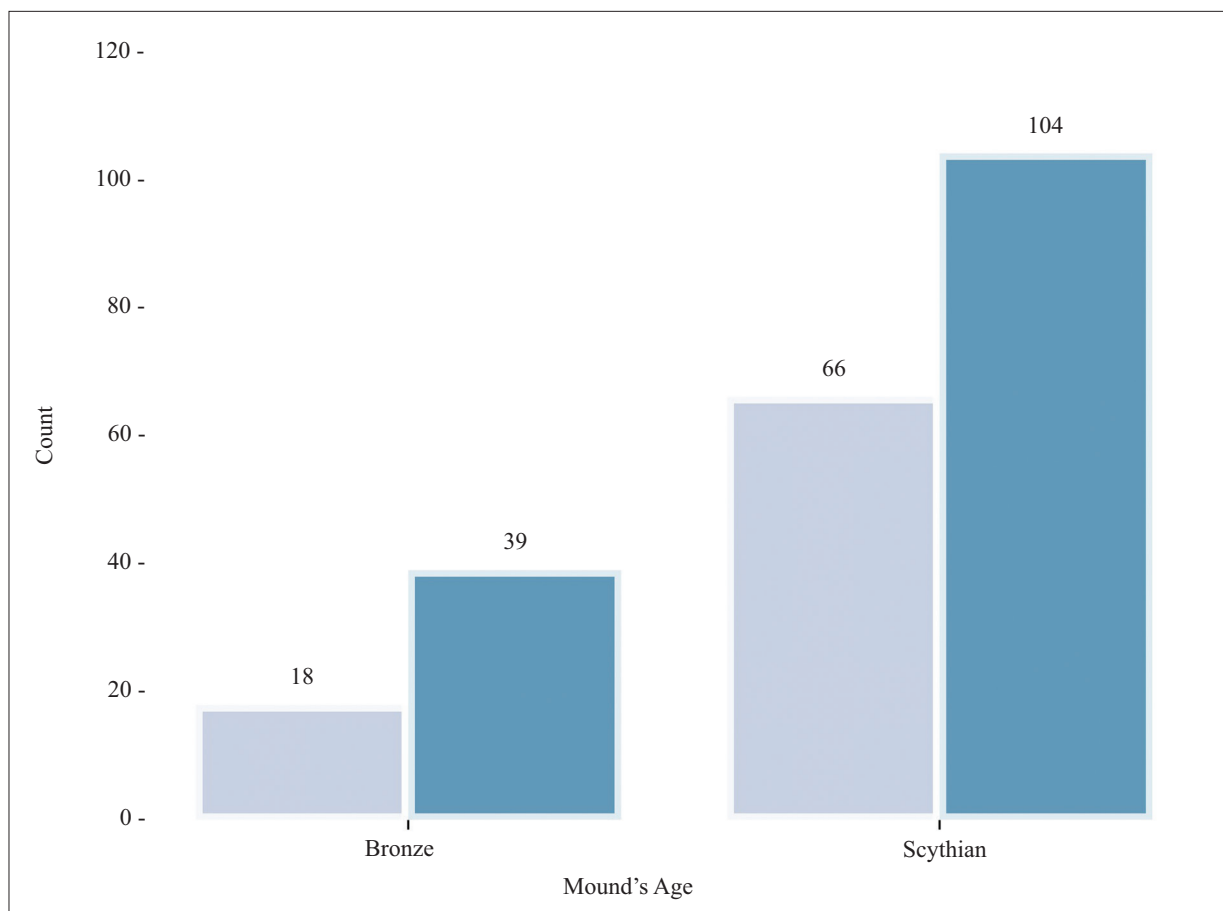


Fig. 2. The distribution of food-associated findings and the total number of the Bronze Age burial mounds with secondary Scythian burials and Scythian barrows

### ***Food offerings***

Offering food to the deceased, along with other burial inventory, is often seen as a way to demonstrate care for them during their journey to the afterlife (Cann 2018, p. 55). This gift-giving practice is a fundamental principle of the legal and economic systems typical for pre-modern societies (Mauss 1990), and may be particularly significant in the context of funerals (Geary 1995, p. 78). Inheritance of property, such as livestock or land for nomadic cultures, required the restoration of balance and the social bonds. This was achieved through giving burial offerings, as well as the barrow itself, in return. The process of animal sacrifice and object destruction had transformed their value so much that they, particularly their absence, themselves became the embodied memories (Rowlands 1993, p. 146-147). The focus of these practices therefore was the transmission of cultural norms and reestablishing of social order within the community. While still could be integral to a personhood and individuality as a possession or gifts, burial sacrifices also served to construct the memory for the alive participants.

The inventory associated with the food offerings are found in the burials of individuals of all biological sexes, ages, and wealth which shows that the idea behind the ritual was essentially egalitarian. However, the specific ways of serving and arranging the meal were more diverse. In order to identify potential patterns, the placement of animal bones along with the particular items that were associated with the food, primarily knives, wooden dishes and cauldrons, were examined.

Animal bones were observed in 47 % of the burials (52 % of the barrows). This percentage remained consistent across central and peripheral burials. Although the number of horse bones found in the grave together with knives or remains of a dish was high, the ratio was substantially dominated by sheep and goats. The percentage of cattle was significantly lower. It should be noted, however, that at some sites, particularly where remains were scarce, differentiation between horse and cattle bones was not possible. The remains of cattle have not been recorded at any 5<sup>th</sup>-century sites in the Azov region, which indicates that it did not play an important role in the burial ritu-

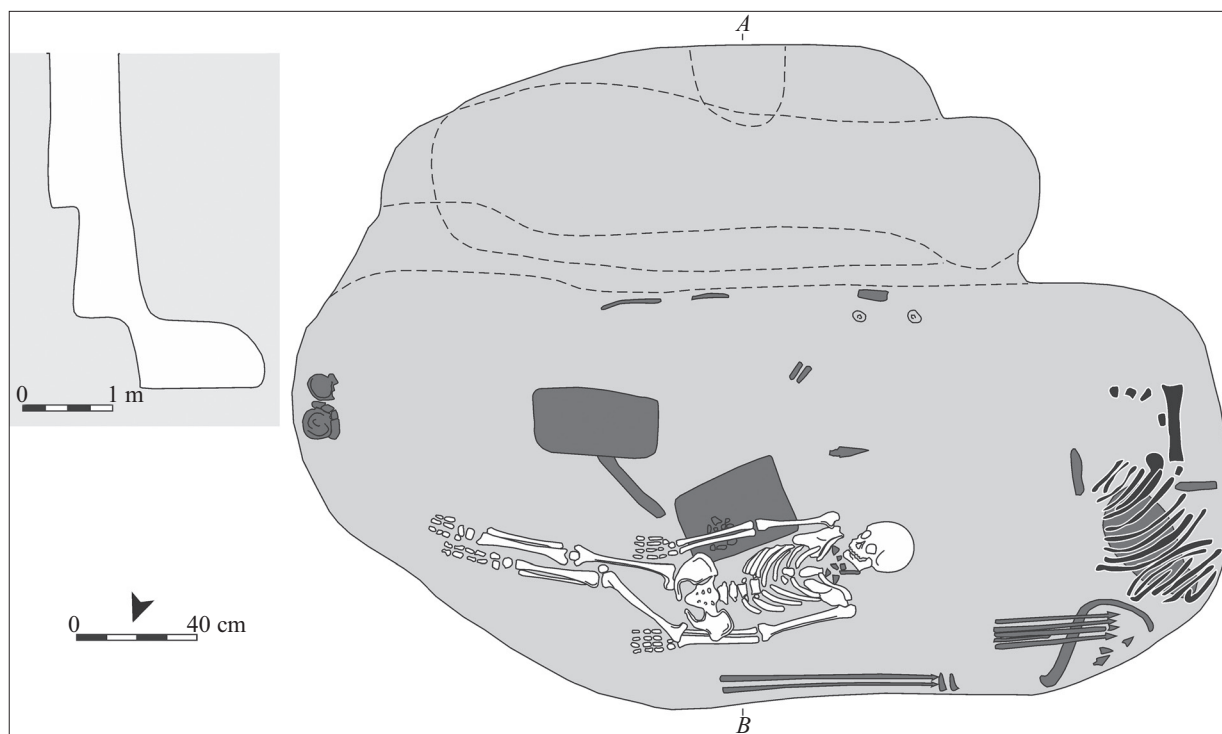


Fig. 3. The chambered burial of a woman with weapons, Akkermen 16/2 (after: Фіалко 2012, с. 44)

al at that period of time. In the Mariupol 6 burial mound, the remains of a hearth with eggshells and oyster shells were found in the burial pit. Remains of several species were present in 26 % of the burials, primarily at wealthier sites. In Berdiansk, Melitopol, and Shulhivka not only multiple species (horses, cattle, sheep/goats) were present, but also the number of individuals was much higher than average.

At the sites where bone types were recorded, the front part of the skeleton was predominant among all animals. Ribs, limbs, and vertebrae were the most commonly found bones for horses, whereas sheep were often found with complete remains. For cattle, scapulae and femurs were the most frequently encountered, but the limbs and ribs were also present. The bones showed no signs of calcification or cooking, suggesting that they were placed in the burials immediately after slaughter.

In several burials (10 %), some of which were completely destroyed, remains of foodware were observed while the animal bones were absent. It is plausible that this practice was more widespread than documented, as animal bones may not have been adequately recorded. Alternatively, it is possible that specific food-related items were utilised as a symbolic substitute for animal sacrifice in situations of limited resources.

Iron knives with a curved spine, typically featuring a bone or wooden handle, were discovered

in 36 % of the burials. Meanwhile, wooden dishes were uncommon, with only 11 cases identified, their presence could be inferred through the discovery of metal details. It is likely that wooden tableware was present in at least 14 % of the burials. Among burials with at least one of these types of inventory, knives and dishes were found together in 15 % of cases. Although cauldrons were infrequently discovered in Pryazovian burials, their presence could sometimes be identified through copper oxides on animal bones. As such, they were present in at least 10 % of the burials. Cauldrons were more commonly found in 'chiefly' burials alongside other warrior attributes, mainly swords and armour. However, they were also present in burials like Berdiansk eastern grave (EG), Vovchanske 8/2, and Melitopol northern catacomb (NC), which were characterised by 'female' inventory. Nonetheless, these burials were located at the periphery of the barrows, and none of the central female burials contained cauldrons. The majority of findings were presented by various types of bronze cauldrons, including those with vertical handles (Melitopol NC, Dvohorba 2, Vovchanske 8/2), horizontal handles (Berdiansk southern grave (SG)), and vertical and horizontal handles (Berdiansk SG, Dolynske 3/2). The only iron item was discovered in Mariupol 6 burial mound (Пиневич 1927, с. 11). Cauldrons often showed signs of usage in fire and were occasionally repaired.



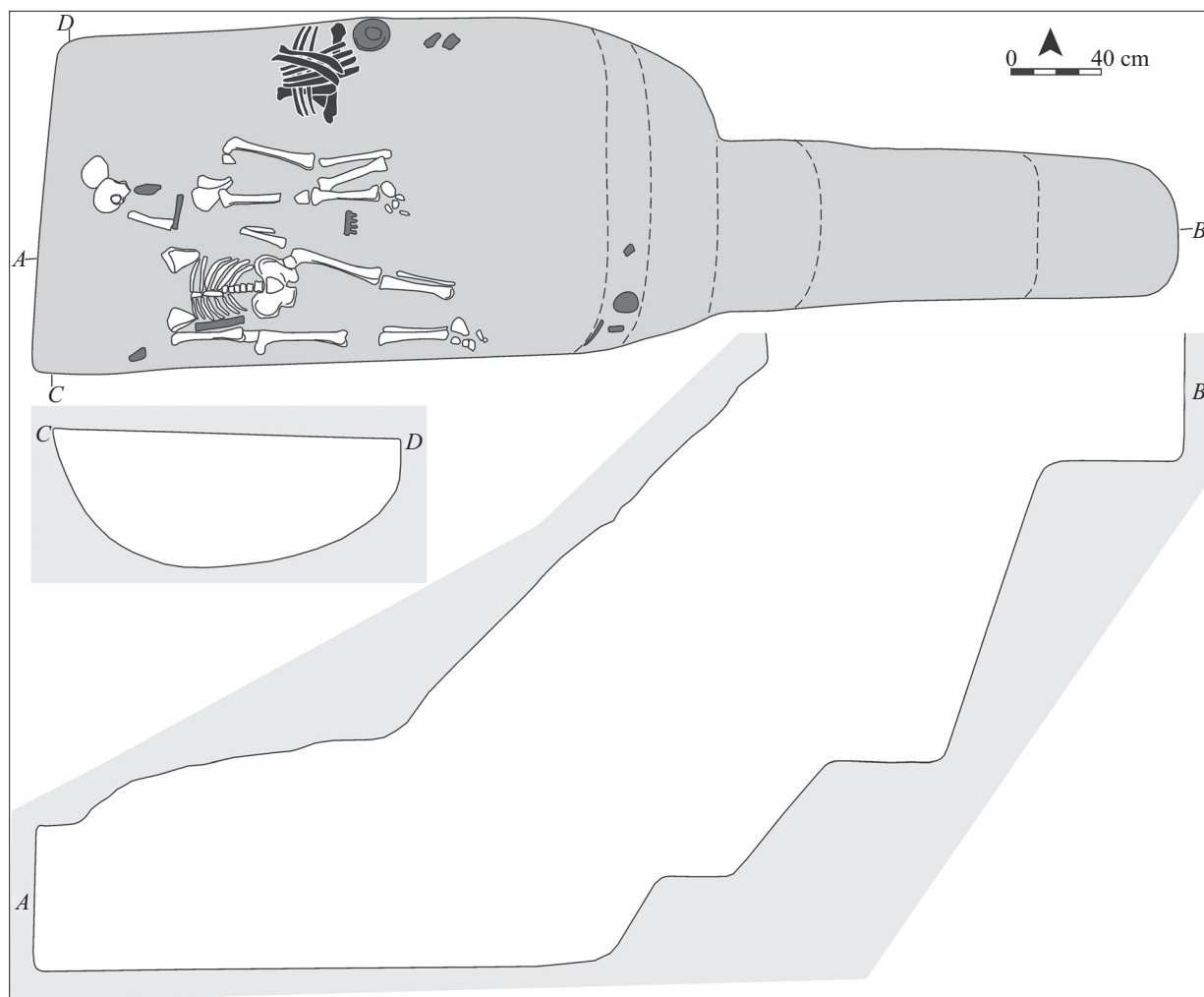


Fig. 4. The chambered burial of a couple, Podove 3/2 (after: Кубышев 1977)

The majority of food offerings (58 %) were found behind the head of the buried individual, near the wall, or in one of the corners (fig. 3). In some cases, it was located near the legs or on the sides of the deceased, with a preference for the right side near the shoulder or knee. Although there was no significant correlation between osteological sex and food placement, gender as identified by burial assemblage may provide a better indicator of a potential connection. To mitigate the impact of chronological and territorial factors, only burials from the Molochna River region were analysed. Among 29 burials, where the position of the body and the location of food (primarily with knives) were recorded, all except one item of food placement near the legs or sides of the body were associated with the 'female' equipment such as mirrors, weaving details and jewellery (fig. 4). The exception was Nove 5/1 burial, which had an exclusive warrior inventory, however, it was identified as a female by skeletal remains. In the Yakymivka 11/3 burial, which consisted of a male and

female couple, bones of a horse with a knife in a wooden dish were found near the head, while a cauldron with remains of a sheep was found near the feet. These patterns suggest a dynamics not dissimilar to the one observed in pluralisation of gendered pronouns when single male burials differ from female and paired burials (fig. 5). It is also observed in different details of the funerary rite, particularly the orientation of the buried people.

However, these arrangement patterns appear to be specific for the Molochna River region. The majority of the 5<sup>th</sup>-century Scythian burials in the Kalmius area were built in pits (fig. 6). In such cases, the food was usually stored in the dedicated niche. In the chambered Shevchenko 3 burial, the skeletons of horses were located near the entrance of the chamber. However, the bones in the latter should rather be considered not as part of a meal, but as accompanying horse burial. This is supported by the fact that, unlike the others, there were the remains of a complete animal without a knife, but with fragments of a deliberately damaged bridle

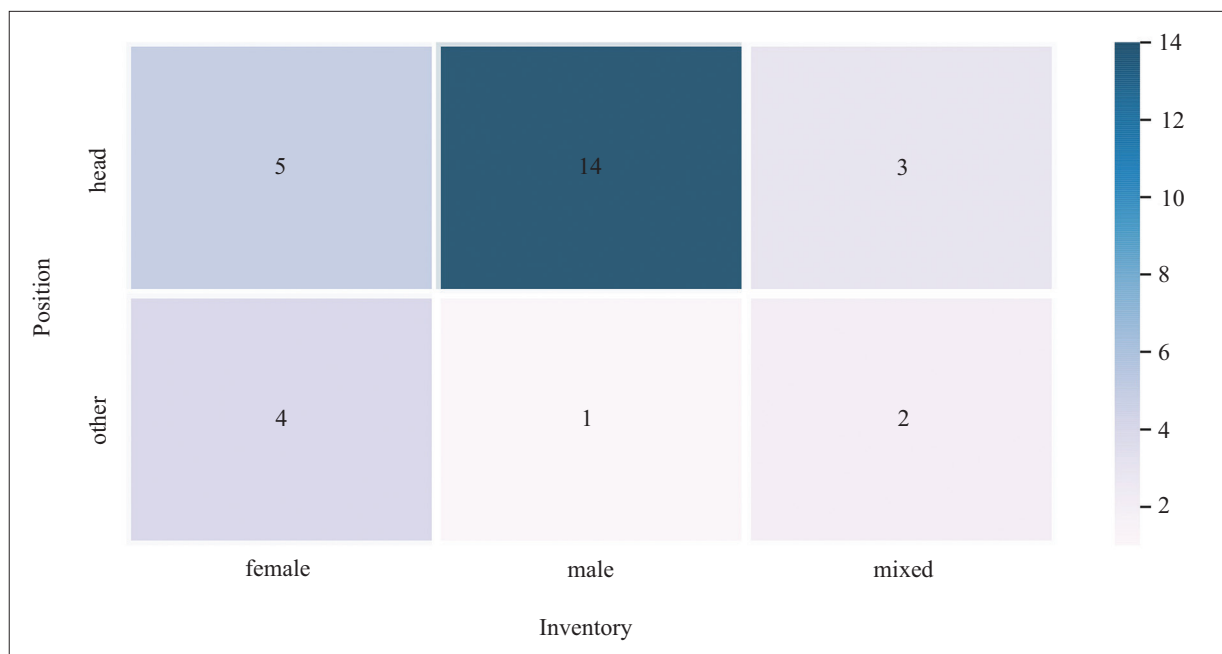


Fig. 5. The correlation matrix between the inventory type/gender and the position of the food offerings in the grave

(Зарайская, Привалов 1992, с. 147). A different situation from Molochna picture emerges in this region in the two 4<sup>th</sup>-century burials with remains of food offerings. In the male burial of Biloarivka 5/12, the bones of a sheep with a knife were found near deceased's feet. The authors of the research suggest that this feature may be attributed to the Sarmatian influence (Зарайская 1991, с. 93). In the Khomush-Oba burial, the femurs, shoulder blades, and vertebrae with ribs of a cow on a wooden platter were also placed near the legs, while a tarpan femur with a knife was located near the head (Кравец 1992, с. 170).

Although precise osteological analyses for the Pryazovian complexes have not been published<sup>2</sup>, preliminary observations align with the assumption that Scythian burial rites closely linked food and status. According to M. van der Veen, the prestige of a meal can be expressed in quality and the quantity of food, where the latter is more typical for less hierarchical societies (Van Der Veen 2003, p. 412). Even though cattle were more likely to be found in Scythian barrows along with a greater variety of animal remains, which suggests it was viewed as a more luxurious animal, the general quantity of food, regardless of the species, may be a better indication of the buried individual's wealth. However, the differences in the meals were

also manifested in the way animals were stored. Primarily, a cauldron filled with meat, as opposed to the more common wooden bowl with a knife, could indicate a different practice of distribution and consumption of food, and therefore the person's social status.

### *Wine drinking*

The prevalence and arrangement of vessels used for storing and drinking wine show more distinct chronological differences compared to food. During the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries in Pryazovia, the number of imported vessels was relatively low. The only remains that constituted the complete amphora are recorded in the Nohaisk 6 burial mound. A few amphora fragments have been found in the filling of Sheliuhy 8/4 and Mariupol 6/1 burials. In the latter, they were also located near the legs of the deceased. Imported drinking vessels are even rarer, with gray-clay cups found in the Vovchanske 8/1 and Shevchenko 10/1 burials. In addition, in the Vovchanske burial, a red-clay lekythos was also discovered (Полин 2014, с. 228), which is a unique finding in the Pryazovia. A bronze tableware set, comprising a ladle and sieve, was found in a niche with food remains in the Shevchenko g.2 1/1 burial. These vessels are suggested to be more often found in the contact centres with Greek colonies (Ромашко, Скорий 2010, с. 84); however, contrary to the majority of similar cases, no amphorae were recorded in the mentioned burial.

<sup>2</sup> More detailed information about the osteological remains of the animals in the Pontic region was provided for the Chorotomlyk burial mound group (Zhuravlev 1991, p. 347-364).

Conversely, golden-decorated wooden cups were recorded in four cases among the 5<sup>th</sup> century burials, which is significant given the overall scarcity of these vessels and shows a higher prevalence during this period. Later, they were discovered only in the central burials of the largest burial mounds in the region. Along with other wooden vessels, the prevalence of simpler types that did not have any metal details on them cannot be accurately traced. However, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the golden-decorated ceremonial cups concentrated primarily in the chiefly Scythian burials of the Pontic steppe (Caй 2013, c. 34-35). In this regard the Homer's description of the cup of Achilles, who among other Greek heroes was particularly popular among the Scythians as evidenced by his iconography in local toreutics, appears to be insightful:

*"Inside this lay a wrought goblet, nor did any other man drink the shining wine from it nor did Achilleus pour from it to any other god, but only Zeus father. He took this now out of the chest, and cleaned it with sulphur first, and afterwards washed it out in bright-running water, and washed his own hands, and poured shining wine into the goblet and stood in his middle forecourt and prayed, and poured the wine"* (Illiad 16. 260)<sup>3</sup>

The focus on using personal cups for wine drinking also stands in contrast to the use of communal vessels. According to J. Griffin, the mentions of golden cups in the *Iliad* indicate the pivotal moments of special emotional expression for the hero, and their appearance emphasises the importance of the occasion (Griffin 1980, p. 17-18). Their significance in Scythian burial ceremony is recounted by Herodotus, who distinguishes the placing of the golden cups in the burials of the kings *"for silver they do not use at all, nor yet bronze"* (Herod. IV, 71)<sup>4</sup>.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC imported vessels became more common in the burial inventory of Pryazovia. The amount of burials with any type of Greek pottery among the chronologically identified sites is 41 %. Although, this number is biased, considering that the dating has often been done according to these vessels, therefore the proportion according to all burials in the sample that have not been

dated earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> century (16 %) is probably closer to reality.

More cases with the findings of intact/complete amphorae are recorded for the above-mentioned period. Their number is particularly high in the wealthiest barrows in both Molochna and Kalmius regions. Catacomb no. 4 in Dvohorba Mohyla burial mound contained 19 Heracleian amphorae, Berdiansk central grave (CG) — 20 biconical Thasos amphorae and Melitopol — 11 red-figure Mendean amphorae. The traces of wine have been recorded in the amphorae from the Berdiansk barrow (Болтрик, Фиалко, Чередниченко 1994, c. 144) which shows that these vessels have been deposited filled with the drink. Wine-drinking Greek cups are mostly represented by black-glazed kantharos and kylikes.

Metal tableware is still found comparatively rare. The majority of intact items belonged to the different types of kylikes and cups. In Melitopol NC the handles and the leg of a silver kylix were found on the left of the deceased's head. A set of a silver kylix and a cup are recorded together with food assemblages on the right side of the buried people. The largest assortment of metal drinking utensils comes from Berdiansk EG. A silver kylix, a bronze louterion, an oenochoe and a handle of an unidentified vessel were located by the southern wall of the catacomb next to the entrance near the accompanying teenage buried person.

The Berdiansk burial mound is especially interesting as it shows the relatively well-preserved wealthy burial complex. Particularly noteworthy is that the space between the meal and wine assemblages was divided into separate chambers. The southern grave contained two cauldrons filled with animal bones, while amphorae, five red-figure and black-glazed scyphoi, three golden-decorated wooden cups along with the red-figure krater<sup>5</sup>, which is one of the most rare and prestigious tableware items in the Pontic region (Фиалко 2001, c. 86), were in the central grave together with the buried person. These items were located by the southern wall near the body of the 'cupbearer' with a wooden flute (Чередниченко, Мурзін 1996, c. 71). Such assortment of the vessels for storing, diluting and drinking wine along with their separation from the food indicates their value not only as a possession of luxury gifts, but also as an adoption of Greek cultural practices of wine consump-

<sup>3</sup> Translation by R. Lattimore.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by G. C. Macaulay.

<sup>5</sup> The second krater in Pryazovia is found in the Taschenak barrow. Unfortunately, this item is fragmented and lacks the location context.

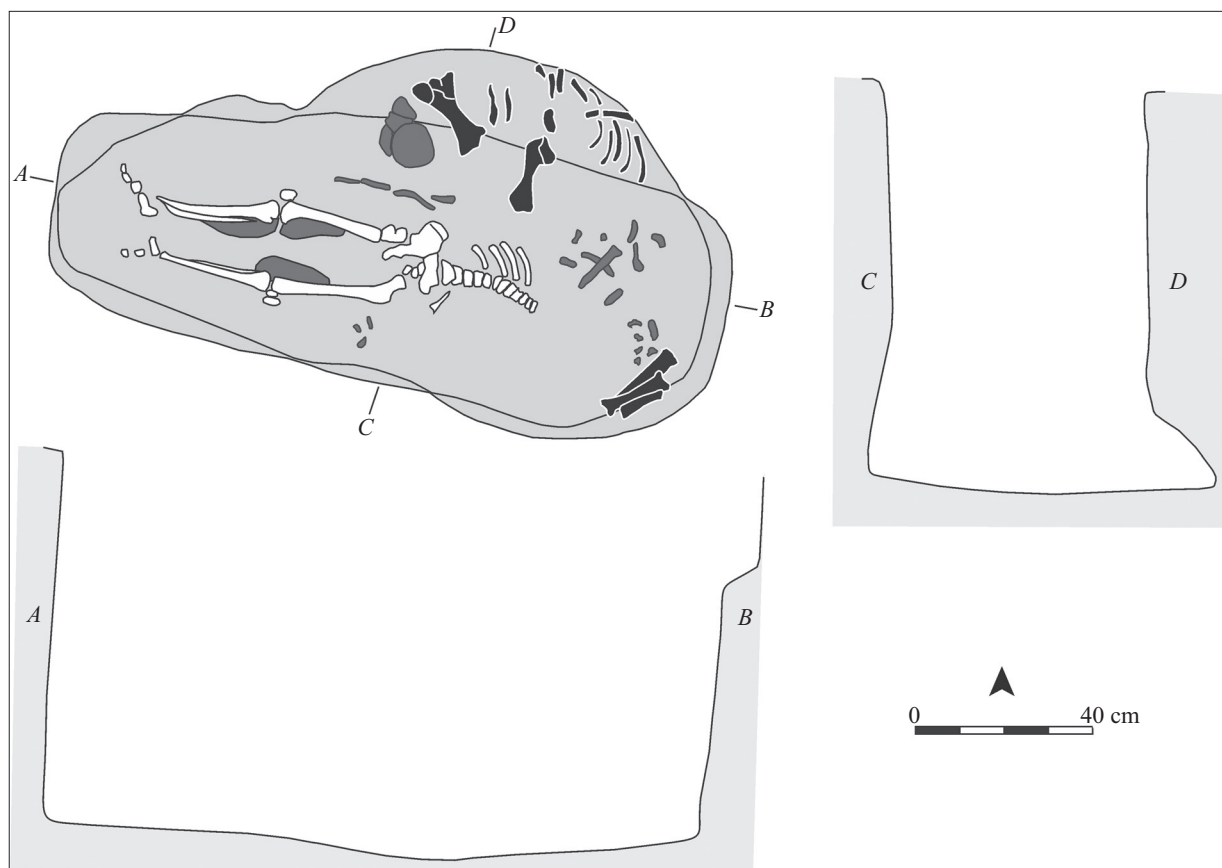


Fig. 6. The burial in a pit, Shevchenko 10/1 (after: Зарайская, Привалов 1992, с. 127)

tion. Some variations of symposium rituals are well-known in societies having close contacts with the Mediterranean centres (Craven 2002, p. 118-139). For Scythian regional chiefs the participation in the similar feasts could be considered as important status events, establishing close ties with the Greek aristocracy.

Contrary to the food arrangement, the serving of wine drinking vessels clearly exhibits the qualitative difference between customs, therefore possible difference in lifestyles. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the groups of Scythians that preferred to drink in a Greek way were distinguished particularly among the wealthiest burial mounds. This shows that the feast was used to display the status of the buried person with the focus on exclusivity and cultural connections.

### **Tryzna**

The term “*tryzna*” derives from the Slavic funeral tradition of commemorating the deceased, which usually involved a variety of commensal practices. In the context of archaeology, it generally refers to any ritual activity associated with the surface of a burial mound. However, it should

not always be used interchangeably with the term “burial feast.” While the latter was a significant event during *tryzna*, it was not the only activity that constituted the remains on the site.

In Pryazovia area, *tryzna*-associated remains were recorded in 55 Scythian sites, which accounts for more than one-third of the total sample. Considering that the surface findings are more susceptible to destruction, this number undoubtedly indicates a high degree of prevalence of this funeral practice. The distribution of findings on the barrows with primary and only secondary Scythian burials appears to be even across the sites of both types. As such, it is reasonable to assume that the funeral ceremony concluded with it, even if a new mound had not been constructed (although the symbolic addition of a new layer could also have taken place).

The most common traces of the *tryzna* ritual are ashes and charcoal from the fireplace, fragments of amphorae, and animal bones. Imported pottery is rarely deposited in the complete form, and in most cases, only single amphora sherds are found in the mounds. A few cases have been reported in which the remains found at the site with the *tryzna* constitute a complete vessel. Among these, the Heracleian amphorae were found in the mounds



of Nove 6, Volodymyrivka 1, and Kremenivka 7 sites. In the latter two, they were accompanied by Soloha type amphorae. At the bottom of the ditch of Novomykolaivka 11 barrow, 250 sherds (walls along with 4 handles, 4 neck fragments, and 3 feet) of red-clay amphorae were discovered. Other types of Greek pottery, such as a black-glazed kylix from the Ohrimivka 4 barrow (Полин 2014, с. 401), have been found less frequently. The quantity and condition of the amphorae remnants suggest that wine drinking or libation rites could involve the breaking of these vessels.

In ten barrows (7 %) the ditches contained stone plates and grinder stones together with animal bones and ceramics. Metal objects are less common. In a few cases single bronze arrowheads were deposited in the ditches alongside animal bones. Horse bridles in the *tryzna* context have been found only at the richer complexes (Taschenak, Perederieva Mohyla) and at Kremenivka site. Other rare, but notable objects that could belong to the concluding stage of the funeral ceremony are the golden bucket-shaped vessels, also known as large golden cones or large 'cord stoppers' (vorvorkas). Such terminological disambiguation is unsurprising as their function has long been debated among the researchers (Болтрик 1996, с. 104-109; Алексеев 2003, с. 214-218; Мурзин 2018, с. 131-136; Гуляев 2019, с. 172-184). In Pryazovia, only two examples of these objects have been found. The first is the well-known decorated 'helmet' from Perederieva Mohyla's krepis. Another one, smaller golden cone was found in the central burial of the Sheliuhy 8 burial mound. In the latter case, it was deposited under the eelgrass flooring, 1 m from the centre of the mound. One of the latest hypotheses attributed these objects to a cannabis-smoking device. According to Yu. V. Boltryk<sup>6</sup>, they could be used to enhance the warrior spirit before the battle. However, the fact that they were often located not in the grave with the personal belongings, but on the barrow's surface suggests that they were more likely used during some form of communal funeral ceremony. Unfortunately, the only laboratory analysis results that allegedly confirmed the presence of opioid and cannabis traces on the golden cones comes from the Sengileevskoe 2 burial mound, which has not been published yet.

Similar to the food offerings in the burial, the most common traces of the *tryzna* rituals are animal bones. However, the observations of the barrow's surface reveal a different scenario. The predominance of horse skulls, mandibular bones, and teeth in the burial mound ditches suggests a deliberate selection of these animals, particularly their heads. In isolated cases, dogs/wolves, boars, and birds were also present.

The animal remains, which likely included meat consumption, were more commonly observed in 'Princely' barrows. Unfortunately, the mounds of the richest burial mounds in Pryazovia were not sufficiently preserved to conduct a quantitative investigation. Nonetheless, the general tendency in the Pontic region suggests a strong correlation between the wealth of the complex and the scale of the funeral feast. For instance, the animal bones found in the Oleksandropil burial mound were particularly diverse, containing at least 71 horses, 16 cows, as well as sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, and, notably, deer<sup>7</sup>. Different parts of all animal skeletons were present (Журавлев 2018, с. 688).

The analysis of the distribution of animal remains within the burial structures revealed a statistically significant relationship between the animal species and their location ( $\chi^2 = 45.8$ ,  $p = 3.7e-08$ ) (fig. 7). It should be noted that skeletal remains from only six burial mound necropoleis (Yakymivka, Vovchanske, Volodymyrivka, Syvaske, Danylo-Ivanivka, Akkermen) and three large barrows, Melitopol, Shulhivka, Berdiansk, had zooarchaeological identifications (Секерская 1984, с. 101-102; Журавлев 1988). Since the number of observations in the field reports is limited, additional data had been gathered from reports and publications in which the minimum number of detected individuals was indicated (e.g., by the number of skulls) to confirm the statistical results.

The location of the findings indicates the significant role of the ditch and particularly its breaks, which were typically symmetrically arranged on the eastern and western sectors of the burial mound periphery. Among all sites where findings were discovered on the surface, they were found in the filling of the ditch in 72 % cases. However, it is possible that the better preservation of artefacts in the ditch explains this pattern. This factor is also relevant when examining barrows surrounded by krepis. In these barrows, food remains and sacri-

<sup>6</sup> Presented in a speech at the Conference "Archaeological studies: Achievements and Prospects 2023", National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy", Kyiv

<sup>7</sup> The actual number of animals at the surface was probably lesser as the osteological material was counted for a whole complex.

ficial items were often traced under the foundation of a stone wall, which reliably protected them from external influences.

Placing ritual meal remnants near the ditch breaks is a typical feature for the Scythian burial sites and is related to the symbolism of the ditch as a border between the world of the living and the dead, united at the rips (Ольховский 1991, с. 176). Elaborating this metaphor, the connection between the ditch and the *tryzna* is better understandable in the context of the 'liminal triad' (Gennep, Vizedon, Caffee 1960, p. 11; Robben 2004, p. 213-223). The time of the barrow construction was sacred for the participants. Both the deceased, who had to be prepared for the afterlife, and the community itself were undergoing a transitional stage. Herodotus' mention of the ritual purification that took place after the completion of the mound (Herod. IV, 73) illustrates this point. The funeral feast celebrated the end of the transformative phase and the transition to the incorporation phase, which marked the establishment of a new state of affairs and a return to the normal course of life. Thus, the barrow ditch signified not only a spatial boundary, but also a temporal one.

### ***External tryzna complexes***

In a few instances, a burial mound and a *tryzna* formed a pair complex which consisted of two barrow-like encircled structures. The Shevchenko 10 burial mound (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) is a particular example of this type of site. During the investigation, a nearby mound had also been examined. Although there were no signs of the burial, the mound was surrounded by a circular ditch with two latitudinal rips. Fragments of a small Scythian vessel ornamented with vertical incisions were discovered in the north-western sector of the ditch. Additionally, traces of charcoal were observed in the opposite south-western part of the circle. A. Moruzhenko, in the field report of this site excavation, suggested that this mound was likely part of a single com-

plex with the Shevchenko 10 barrow, based on the location of the site and the absence of the grave (Моруженко и др. 1981, с. 38). However, this information was not mentioned in the later publication of the site.

Yakymivka 7 and 8 are another possible paired ritual sites. These mounds were located near each other, with a distance of only 40 m, and were situated on the periphery of the Scythian barrow group. Both mounds were surrounded by a ditch of a similar diameter, but no graves have been found within them. On the surface of the mound no. 7, multiple clusters of ashes and charcoal were observed, along with ceramic sherds from at least two Scythian vessels. In addition, a fragment of an amphora foot was found in one of the ash clusters, which gives the date of the complex between the late 5<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The ditch of the mound no. 8 contained animal bone fragments, but no other objects were discovered. The close proximity of these sites and their similar size consider a possible connection between them. The presence of ritual artefacts and burnt offerings suggest that Yakymivka 7 and 8 may have been used for ceremonial purposes (Болтрик и др. 1985, с. 23-24). The discovery of the Sarmatian pottery in both above-mentioned cases is also noteworthy, as it indicates that a variety of nomadic people could use these sites as places of worship over an extended period.

Kremenivka site has drawn the most significant attention among other similar complexes. Excavated by the Donetsk expedition led by S. N. Bratchenko in 1977, the site's interpretation has become a subject of multiple discussions among the researchers ever since. While the mound no. 5 was a stone-made oval platform with a few amphora fragments beneath it, most findings came from the adjacent site no. 7. According to the field report, it was surrounded by a granite cromlech with breaks in the southern and northern sectors (Братченко и др. 1977, с. 25-27). However, subsequent research has suggested that it was more likely a remnant of a stone krepis that survived after plowing on the

**Table 1. The number of sites with animal bones by location in the burial mound**

Animal	Mound	Ditch	Ditch breaks	Burial pit	Burial chamber
Unspecified	3	12	6	10	19
Cattle	0	1	0	3	16
Sheep/Goat	2	1	0	4	26
Horse	10	9	6	11	18
<b>Total</b>	15	23	12	28	79

periphery (Гершкович, Ромашко 2013, с. 63-64; Полин 2014, с. 599). The central-northern sector of the site yielded animal bones, at least nine amphorae, a black-glazed Attic bowl, local ceramics, a bronze cauldron, a mirror, and a horse bridle head plate. S. V. Polin and Ye. G. Karnaukh consider Kremenivka an example of barrow-*tryzna* complexes, albeit an exceptional one due to the cyclopean stone construction of the mound. Based on their dating of the amphorae, they argue that these sites were synchronous and reflected a single-act ritual event (Полин, Карнаух 2012, с. 116; Полин 2014, с. 590-599). S. V. Polin also insists that the majority of the Scythian ritual monuments across the Pontic steppe area represent a one-time episode that took place immediately after the burial. Therefore, Herodotus' recounting of repeated commemorative feasting remains without support of archaeological evidence (Полин 2014, с. 594).

At the same time Ya. P. Hershkovych and O. V. Romashko proposed another hypothesis about the Kremenivka complex, suggesting that it was a sanctuary of Ares. They argue that the stone platform functioned as an altar, while the nearby site no. 7 was a votive spot, explaining why the majority of findings were located there. Their chronological identifications suggest long-term activity of the site until the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Гершкович, Ромашко 2013, с. 70). While its resemblance to Herodotus' description of the Scythian warrior-god cult is rather questionable, the unique combination of architecture and assemblage, as well as the geographical isolation of the monument distinguish it from typical Scythian funerary complexes.

While the evidence of paired complexes is rare in Pryazovia, observations in the broader Pontic region suggest the existence of at least two types of sites: burial mounds with external *tryznas* and non-burial paired complexes. Although the main difference between these types is the absence of a grave in the latter, both typically have similar circular enclosures. Animal sacrifice and ritual meals were also key events in the formation of all barrow-like sites.

### ***The sacrifice of horses***

Animal bones are often the only preserved remains of the Scythian funerary meals, which emphasise the fundamental importance of animals in the subsistence of pastoralist societies. The restoration of balance that happened during the rites of

passage required animal sacrifice and to a greater extent this applied to the ultimate passage among all — the death. In the B. Lincoln's research on the religion of East African pastoralists it is noticed that the value of human life can only be compensated with the sacrifice of cattle, thus fulfilling the debt owed to divine forces:

*“On the most obvious level, a valued gift is offered to a deity by the sacrificer, and on further examination we see that the gift is in some sense offered as a substitute – the life of the ox standing in place of the life of the man. Further, through the sacrifice men enter into relations of proximity with the deities and with celestial sovereign, and in this sense the sacrificial animal serves as a mediator between man and god. There is truth in all these views of sacrifice, and also in Lienhardt's contention that the sacrifice and the systemic division of meat constitute a recreation of the social order. But the most important element in the ideology of sacrifice is that by sacrificing man returns to god what was his gift in the beginning of time and what was always rightfully his.” (Lincoln 1981, p. 32-33)*

In Scythian society, however, namely the horses, and not cattle played the major role in both economy and religion. According to O. Ye. Fialko and Yu. V. Boltryk the role of the horses in the burial ritual defined their position in the burial mound in relation to the person's grave as well as their quantity (Фіалко 2003; Болтрик, Фіалко 2005, с. 254). The authors distinguish several, occasionally crossing, roles:

*Horses-carriers* that should have accompanied and protected its owner on the way to the afterlife. Typically, they were buried in separate grave fully equipped and their quantity corresponded to the number of the people in a central burial;

*‘Lead-saddle’ horses* from the personal herd of the deceased, distinguished with an especially rich bridle. They also may have been placed in a central grave;

*Offertory horses*, which include the particularly numerous sacrificed horses. Such barrows with over a hundred sacrificed animals are found in the earliest Scythian sites in the Siberian and Caucasian regions. For the Pontic sites the quantity of the horses, even in the richest barrows does not exceed 16;

*Tryzna horses*, that are the remains of a burial feast usually found in the burial mound ditches;

*Horses-guardians* also should have been located on the barrow outskirts and resemble Herodotus' story of a massive horse slaughter the year after the burial.

In this regard the special significance of horses in the funeral rites of the peoples of Siberia and the North Caucasus is quite notable as they could preserve some relics of the Scythian traditions (Текуева, Нальчикова 2019, с. 26-33; Бубенок 2021, с. 131-142). For instance, even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Tuvans retained the custom of leaving a horse near the grave for a certain amount of time or riding around the mound at the end of the burial ceremony. A similar rite existed among the Ossetians, where, in addition, a hair from the horse's mane or the tip of the ear could be cut off and left in a burial. Such customs could replace horse slaughter in situations of economic expediency (Бубенок 2021, с. 139). Similarly, teeth or a horse bridle found in the Scythian burials could not only add, but also substitute the animal sacrifice.

In a few cases the placement of the horses' heads on their limbs is recorded. At Shevchenko 1 group 2 (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) the horses were located at the krepis above the eastern part of the main burial chamber and were arranged in a single row along the south-north line, about 1 m apart from each other, facing west. The remains of two individuals consisted of skulls, one consisted of limbs, and another one contained a skull and limbs. The number of animals found corresponded to the number of buried individuals. In a similar pattern, the skulls of a horse, an ox, and a sheep were found lying above the limbs in the central and eastern part of Berdiansk SG. This ritual supposedly traces back to the Zrubna culture (Зарайская, Привалов 1992, с. 118-156; Березанская и др. 1986, с. 57). However, in the latter the oxen were preferred, highlighting the different roles that cattle played in Iranian pastoralist societies.

The horse remains found in the ditches are of particular importance for current research. Without doubting that horses were part of the Scythian diet, however in funerary ritual they seem to be less associated with food. While the meal remnants inside the burials may offer better insights into the dietary habits of common members of Scythian nomads, the preference of horses for the sacrifice is evident. As M. Douglas notes, some animals may be deemed "*suitable for the table, but not for the altar*" (Douglas 2002, p. 242), the horses on the contrary held a special status as both a source of sustenance and the most important sacrificial animals in the Scythian belief system, and thus occupied the highest position in their sacred hierarchy. The general rarity of animal carcasses and bones with soft tissues in the ditches of the most studied sites raises questions about the attribution of these findings as leftovers

of a burial feast *per se*. While it is possible that in common Scythian burials there could have left fewer traces of the communal meal, the presence of cranial bones (as well as teeth and mandibular bones) is a more persistent feature. Therefore, the horse remains on the burial mound's surface could also belong to different stages of a burial ceremony. Considering the position of the horse skulls at the latitudinal ditch breaks, which are the supposed entrance to the sacred barrow space, they're better reflecting the 'horse-guardian' role in the classification of O. Ye. Fialko and Yu. V. Boltryk.

## Conclusions

The death of a human being or the occurrence of natural or societal disasters are events that result in loss and necessitate the need for restoration. Sacrifice serves as the primary medium through which this balance is established. The ideological importance of animals in this cycle is apparent for pastoralist societies, as they were the fundamental element of subsistence. However, their role could vary in different circumstances. During the construction of a burial mound, the animal sacrifice could take place on at least two distinct occasions: while gifting offerings to the deceased and during the final part of the funeral ceremony, called "*tryzna*".

Food offerings were found in the majority of Scythian burials and were typically placed alongside the bodies. The way the meal was arranged was highly standardised and likely connected to societal attitudes towards the body and individuality. In the words of L. N. Stutz, 'proper burial' was supposed to affirm the eternal order of things and redefine the individual after their death (Stutz 2015). The way food was served in Scythian burials showed clear distinctions not only between social rank, but also between gender and probably marital status. Generally, greater wealth was associated with a larger quantity and variety of meat. Also, the placing of food into cauldrons correlates with a 'chiefly' types of inventory, possibly indicating the role of its owner in bestowing the food to the kindred. Gender differences were less pronounced, but the position of food deviated from the standard primarily in the burials with female assemblage. The paired burials were also often followed with the similar to the female pattern, though this connection requires further investigations. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the preference for Greek imported vessels and the spatial separation of wine drinking inventory showed that cultural connections were a prestigious way to display status.



A different picture is connected with the *tryzna* ritual and the remains of the burial feast at the burial mound's surface. Unlike burial offerings, where preference to animal species was not noticeable (although sheep were more numerous), horses were the necessary element of the feast. In 'Princely' barrows, the remains could include a large number and variety of animals, indicating their generosity and wealth. Supposedly, the deceased's social status influenced the number of people who participated in the funeral ceremony, from the construction of the mound to the cadaver embalming and the subsequent abundance of the feast. However, among other animals the horses were an obligatory element in these actions. Notably, they, particularly parts of their heads, were often found buried in a ritualised manner close to the latitudinal ditch breaks. They were chosen for sac-

rifice not because they were often eaten during the ceremony, but rather other way around, they could be eaten precisely, because they were the only animal that could serve this sacrificial role.

Overall, the memorial function of a burial mound was achieved through both creation actions in monumentalisation and destruction in sacrifice. The communal consumption of sacrificed animals marked the end of the liminal period thereby overcoming the crisis, providing closure, hope, and a return to normal course of life.

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## ПОМИНАЛЬНА ТРАПЕЗА В ПОХОВАЛЬНОМУ ОБРЯДІ СКІФІВ (ЗА МАТЕРІАЛАМИ ПАМ'ЯТОК ПІВНІЧНОГО ПРИАЗОВ'Я У V—IV ст. до н. е.)

Стаття розглядає роль поховального бенкету, жертвоприношення тварин і супровідної їжі у скіфському поховальному обряді. У ній аналізується, яким чином поширення і характер розташування решток тварин та інвентаря, пов'язаного зі споживанням їжі, сприяло трансляції соціальних норм під час поховальної церемонії. Окремо обговорюється значення різних видів тварин, передусім коней, у ритуалі жертвоприношення. Географічні межі пам'яток, що складають основу аналізу, охоплюють Північне Приазов'я, між Присивашсям на заході та басейном р. Кальміус на сході. Хронологічні межі дослідження охоплюють другу половину V—IV ст. до н. е. База даних пам'яток охоплює як кургани, споруджені у скіфський час, так і впускні скіфські поховання в курганах доби бронзи, а також непоховальні пам'ятки зі слідами ритуальних дій. Проведений аналіз виявив закономірності за кількісними, а також якісними показниками: різним способом сервірування та розташування страв, які пов'язані із соціальними, гендерними, географічними і хронологічними чинниками. Індивідуальний простір поховання, пов'язаний із супровідною їжею, демонструє відмінності у стандартизації, які корелюють не лише з багатством поховання та ймовірним соціальним статусом небіжчика, але й між статтю та кількістю похованих осіб. Інша ситуація спостерігається на поверхні кургану, місцем проведення тризни та поховального бенкету спільноти. На відміну від решток тварин у похованні, де переважали певних видів тварин не спостерігається (з кількісним переважаючим дрібною худобою), коні були обов'язковим елементом тризни. Особливу увагу заслуговує тенденція розташування голів коней поблизу широтних переминок у кільцевих ровиках. Ґрунтуючись на цих спостереженнях та етнографічних матеріалах, можна припускати, що вибір коней для ритуальних жертвоприношень обґрунтовувався не тим, що вони були поширеною їжею під час поховального бенкету, а навпаки, їх споживання в цьому контексті було можливе тільки тому, що саме коні були основною твариною, яка могла виконувати жертвову роль.

*К л ю ч о в і с л о в а:* Північне Приазов'я, поховальний бенкет, тризна, скіфи, кургани, жертвоприношення тварин.

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