

Animals and Animal Images among the Sarmatians

An Analysis of Elite Burials in the North Pontic Region in the Period from the 3rd Century BC to the mid-3rd Century AD

Nay, by Saint Jamy.

I hold you a penny,

A horse and a man

Is more than one,

And yet not many.

William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, III.2

ABSTRACT

The geography and climate of the North Pontic region suited the development of various economic models. A comparative analysis of sacrificial animal remains and images of »potential victims« in elite burial complexes in the territory of »Sarmatia« has made it possible to identify regions with different patterns in the cult sphere that were presumably influenced by the political contacts of elites and the economic model used. The population of »Sarmatia« was thus not ideologically unified; it consisted of several elite groups that can be preliminarily identified as representatives of »nomadic« (Volga-Don, partly Kuban region) and »agricultural« (Crimea, Dnieper and partly Kuban regions) ideologies.

KEYWORDS

Sarmatians / North Pontic region / elite burials / burial rite / animals / animal style

General Remarks

»Sarmatians«¹ is the name that ancient authors applied to various peoples who inhabited the northeast of the ancient oecumene which, in modern archaeological literature, is designated as the North Pontic region. They called this part of the world »Sarmatia«, at least in the period no later than the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD (Podosinov 2002, 57). The main agents of the cultural-historical processes were, on the one hand, the Greek and later Greco-Roman centres of civilization situated on the northern shores

of the Black Sea and, on the other hand, various non-urban hinterland societies, known under specific ethnic names – Aorsi, Siraki, Roxolani, Alani, etc. –, many of which practiced a nomadic way of life. Historical information on these population groups is very limited and selective and can be regarded as a *topos* – a commonplace term – in narratives written by the classical authors, who were alien to the cultures they described (Mordvintseva 2015).

¹ The name is of Iranian origin (Tokhtas'ev 2005, 296).

Although most scholars acknowledge that different population groups inhabited the North Pontic region (Skripkin 2017, 7), they often use the general term »Sarmatian« to refer to all archaeological remains found in this territory. Thus, when anyone refers to the »Sarmatian origin« of some burial custom or type of object, it is not clear either to which part of the vast territory ascribed to the Sarmatians (or occupied by the Sarmatian archaeological culture) one should apply this reference, nor how often this feature is represented there and what phenomenon its usage might reflect (ethnicity?, economy?, prestige?, political identity?, geographical conditions?). In this respect, the general definition of a feature or a type of object as »Sarmatian« seems to be meaningless. It does not add anything new to the *topos* already created in the archaeological literature about the Sarmatians.

Meanwhile, one can map archaeological features that are characteristic for cult practices, or which are group signs and symbols, and then see regularities in processes and structures from particular times and places. Thus, one can indicate some areas inside the »Sarmatian territory« that were possibly inhabited by concentrated self-identified population

groups who were represented by their elites. In doing so, I would like to analyse the practice of burying sacrificed animals (or remains of them, respectively) in the elite burial structures of the non-urban population of the North Pontic region and to compare it with the animal images found in the same territory. A special attitude of the »Sarmatians« to animals and their images in a form of »animal style« already constitutes a part of the archaeological *topos*. This was expressed most directly by Michael Rostovtzeff: »They often saw these battles between animals and they loved to reproduce them« (Rostovtzeff 1973, 55).

The research presented here is based on 557 funerary complexes of the »barbarian« elite² from four chronological periods: 1) 3rd to 2nd century BC; 2) 1st century BC; 3) from the 1st to the mid-2nd century AD; 4) from the mid-2nd to the mid-3rd century AD. They were found in four regions of the northern Black Sea: the Lower Dnieper (10/10/42/17 burial assemblages³), the Crimea (21/30/49/17), the Lower Don-and-Volga (25/35/69/29), and the Kuban (52/54/66/32). I have included these complexes in a database according to the presence of prestige objects known from written sources, ancient images and archaeological contexts.

Sacrificed Animals in Funerary Rituals

The use of animals in funerary rituals is an act of sacrifice that involves: 1) the sacrificer (individual or collective) wishing to make an impact and instigating it, and/or their representative (a professional attendant in the sacred sphere), 2) the object of offering, i. e. the purpose for which the sacrifice is made, and 3) the victim itself (Mauss 2000, 16–24). In the course of the sacrifice, the victim, or part of it, may be either consumed or left untouched (Lowry 2005, 23). What was left of the animal either belonged completely to the sacred world, or completely to the profane world, or was divided between both (Mauss 2000, 46).

The archaeozoological study of (sacrificial) animal remains can provide a variety of analyses: a comparison of species composition, sex and age of sacrificial animals, detection of pathological changes and their identification, identification of traces of lifetime violent influences and traces of the dissection of corpses, seasonal dating of animal slaughter, and many more (Zdanovich 2005, 9). However, the number of animal bones from the funerary contexts

of the northern Black Sea region studied by specialists is small and contains regional peculiarities. The only characteristics available for a comparative analysis are in most cases the species of the sacrificial animal, its position in the grave or graveyard and the form of its presentation in the sacred space. We can compare these characteristics with the data from standard burials and settlements (if present) and use them to assess the complexity of rituals being performed in various parts of the North Pontic region.

In connection with the death and burial of a member of the social group, the following may be chosen for sacrifice: 1) the least costly species (i. e. the most abundant or readily available animals used in daily subsistence and/or the best suited to crowd feeding), 2) the most costly species (the least abundant and/or best suited to elite feasting), or 3) species or taxa with particular symbolic qualities (Lowry 2005, 28). Accordingly, the choice of an offering could take place using the alternative models: economic, costly signalling (prestige), and symbolic.

² For analysis, burial assemblages that contained special prestige markers known from the written, pictorial and archaeological sources were chosen.

³ Numbers in brackets represent the quantity of analysed elite burial complexes for the four chronological periods described before.

Sacrificial animal remains can be found inside the grave or within the complex funerary structure («accompanying inventory»), or outside the grave and the complex funerary structure, for instance, within the necropolis, but without any outer visible connection with the specific grave («adjacent inventory»; for terms, see Smirnov 1997, 30–31). In the first case, one could argue with certainty that the sacrifice of the animal and the burial happened simultaneously. In the other case, there is a high probability that the animal was sacrificed during post-burial rites and might not be connected with a specific burial.

The remains of a sacrificed animal can be presented in the form of a »full animal«, a »partial animal«⁴, a »part of the animal«⁵, a »symbolic part of the animal«⁶ and a »stuffed animal«⁷. The alienation of the »full animal« for the sacrifice means the non-participation of the sacrificers in its consumption. In this case, we can suppose the »symbolic« and »costly signalling« sacrificial strategy. The presence of a »symbolic part of the animal« in the grave should not necessarily mean an animal sacrifice performed in connection with the funeral.

Lower Dnieper

First Period

The archaeological sites of the region are represented by ritual deposits⁸ (fig. 1), i. e. individual insertions into already-existing barrows and settlements (Mordvintseva 2017). Elite burial assemblages contain ritual deposits (often called »hoards«), one of the main components of which was a horse harness. As a rule, they do not contain animal bones. Only in one case (10%)⁹, outside the hoard proper, but under a mound, were the leg bones of horse and cattle found next to stone fragments interpreted as an altar (Beylekchi 1998, 8).

Second Period

Flat necropoleis appear in addition to ritual deposits and single barrow burials (fig. 2). Elite burial complexes are represented by ritual hoards and several

barrows as well as flat graves¹⁰. In one flat burial (10%), a scapula of a »large animal« was found together with a knife (Gudkova/Fokeev 1984, 8–10).

Third Period

The composition of recorded archaeological sites changes significantly (fig. 3). There are no ritual deposits anymore, and barrow burial grounds appear. The animal remains come from nine elite burials (21%). In the barrows, mainly the bones of sheep/goat, usually a front leg with shoulder blade, often together with a knife, have been found (Mantsevich 1982; Simonenko 1993, 64–66; Kostenko 1993, 38–41, 48–50, 69). In single cases, the remains of a river turtle¹¹, a fish vertebra, a bear fang, and a claw of a large animal (bear?) are represented (Kostenko 1993, 38–41; Sanzharov 1986; Simonenko 2008, 60).

A cattle (leg?) bone was lying on a red-slip dish in one flat grave and, in another, a deer tooth was found among »amulets« of the female burial inventory (Vyaz'mitina 1972, 22, 59). In addition, in flat necropoleis, animal bones were also discovered as »adjacent inventory«, in separate structures or pits, as well as in the entrance pits of catacombs (Vyaz'mitina 1972, 169). In the Zolotaya Balka necropolis, the bones represent a »full animal« (sheep, horse, dog), a »partial animal« (horse), and a »part of animal« (cattle, horse) (Vyaz'mitina 1972).

Fourth Period

Two indeterminate animal bones were found on each side of an interruption in the ditch surrounding the elite burial (6%) in a barrow («adjacent inventory») (fig. 4; see Gudkova/Fokeev 1984, 42–44).

Comparison

Comparing elite burials with standard ones, we can notice similar trends in the sacrificing of animals within burial sites of the same type. For flat burials, horses and cattle were chiefly used as sacrificial animals, while in barrow burials of the third period sheep/goat bones predominate. The placement of a »part of the animal« is found in all types of burial sites. At the same time, a »full animal« and a

4 A »partial animal« is defined as »an artificially organised lay-out of the undivided head and distal parts of an individual animal in the absence of a hide« (Zdanovich 2005, 13).

5 A part intended for consumption.

6 A part not intended for consumption.

7 As a »stuffed animal« I understand an imitation of a whole animal or its part, made of organic materials (e. g. sewn from hide and stuffed with straw).

8 Ritual deposits are burial goods assemblages not containing any human remains.

9 Here and below, this is the percentage of assemblages with animal bones out of the total number of elite burials in the region and period under consideration.

10 A »barrow grave« is a burial in a barrow mound, a »flat grave« is a burial without a barrow mound.

11 It is not certain that a turtle was placed deliberately into the grave.

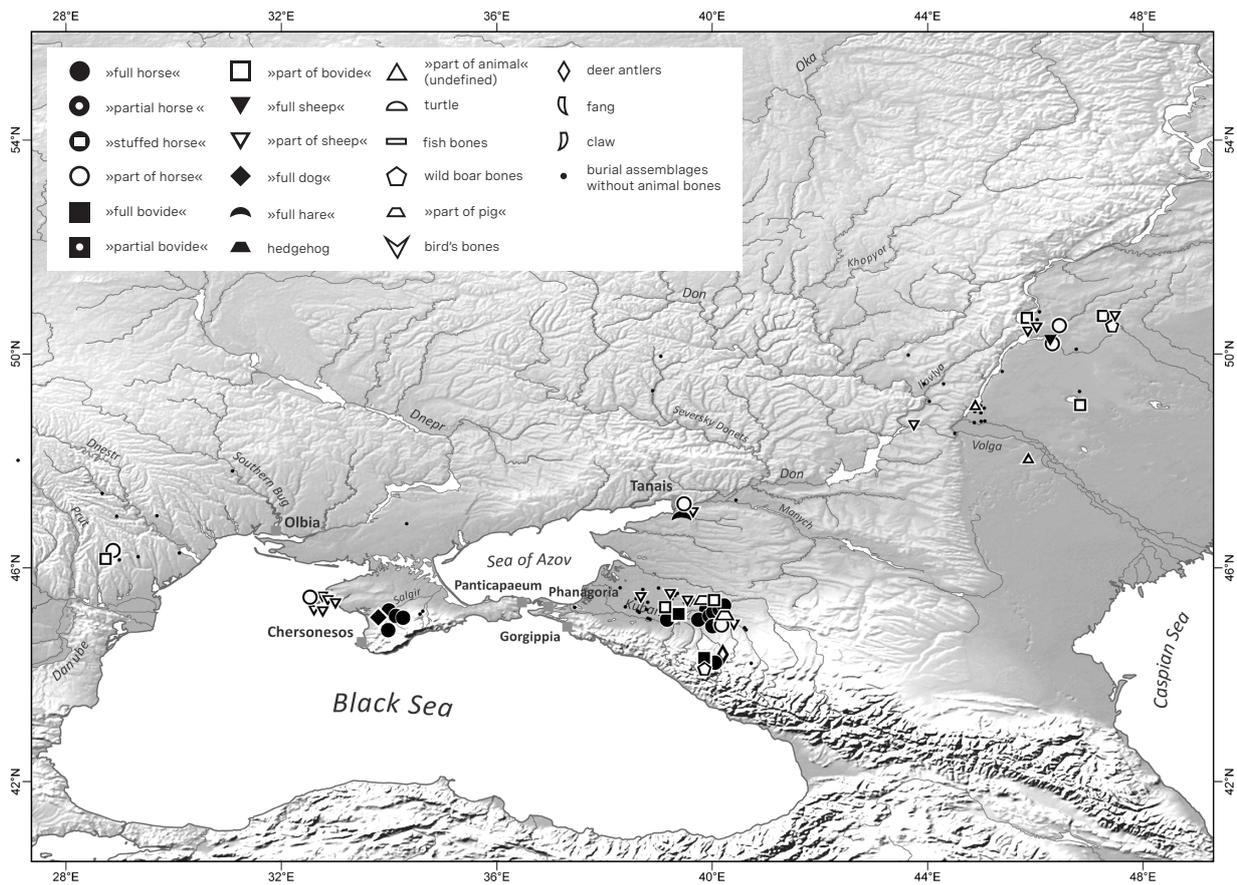


Fig. 1 Animal bones in the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region, 3rd to 2nd century BC. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

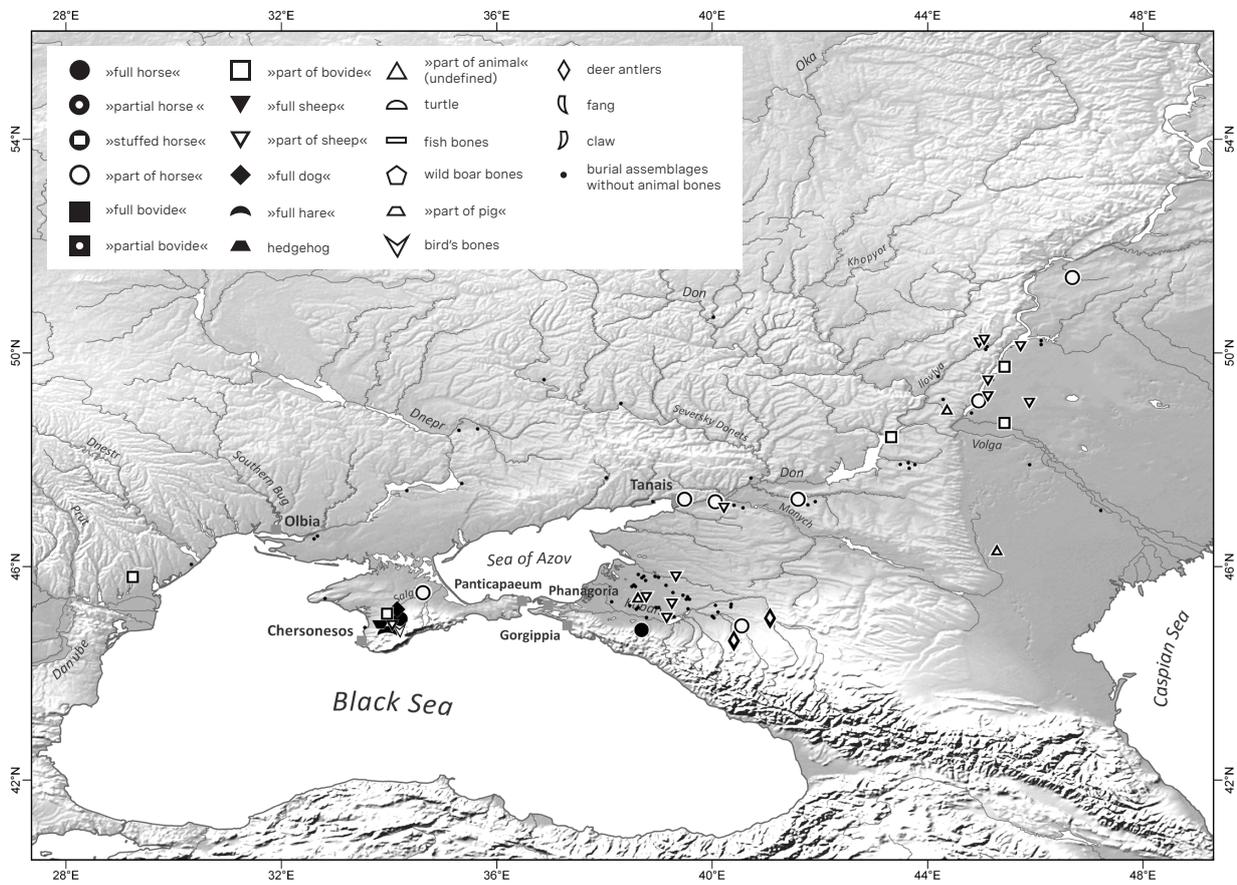


Fig. 2 Animal bones in the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region, 1st century BC. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

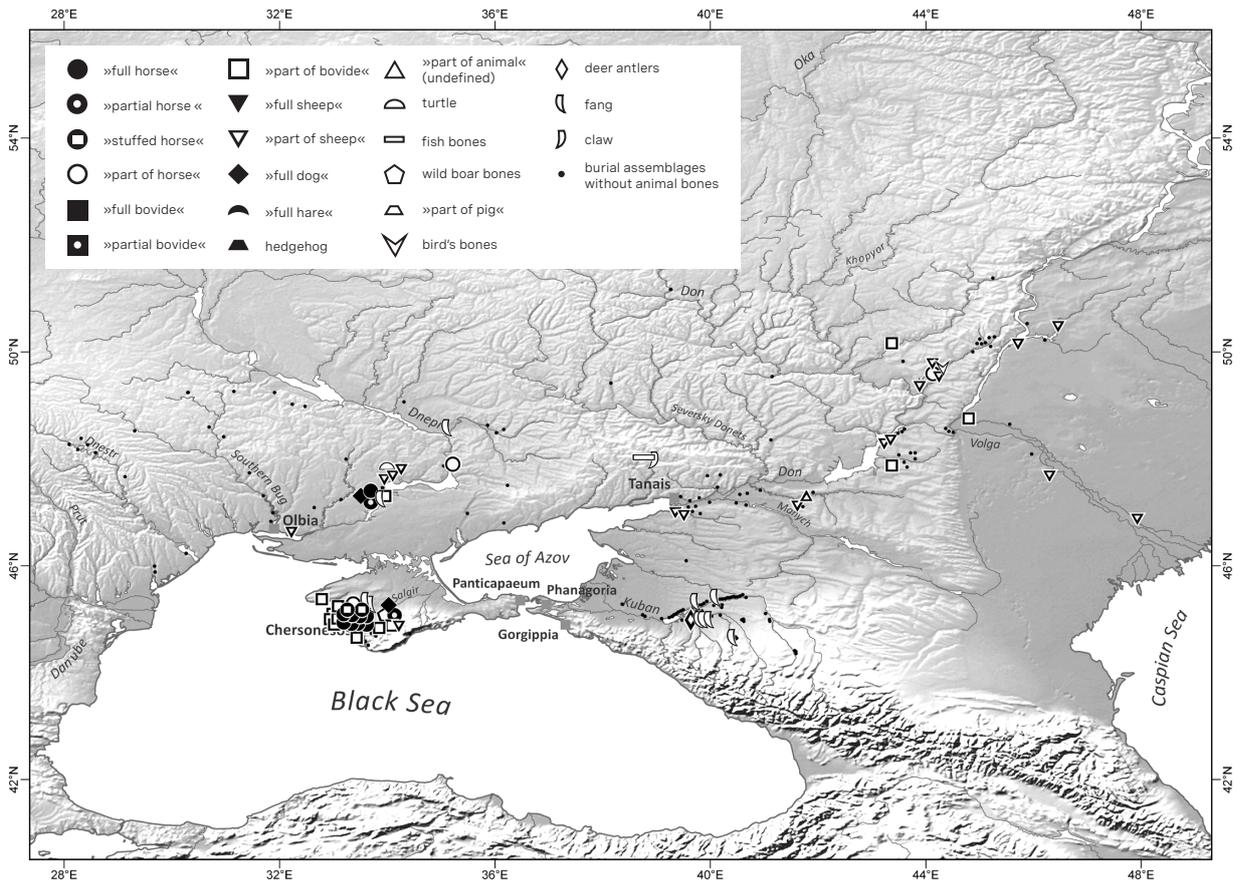


Fig. 3 Animal bones in the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region, 1st to mid-2nd century AD. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

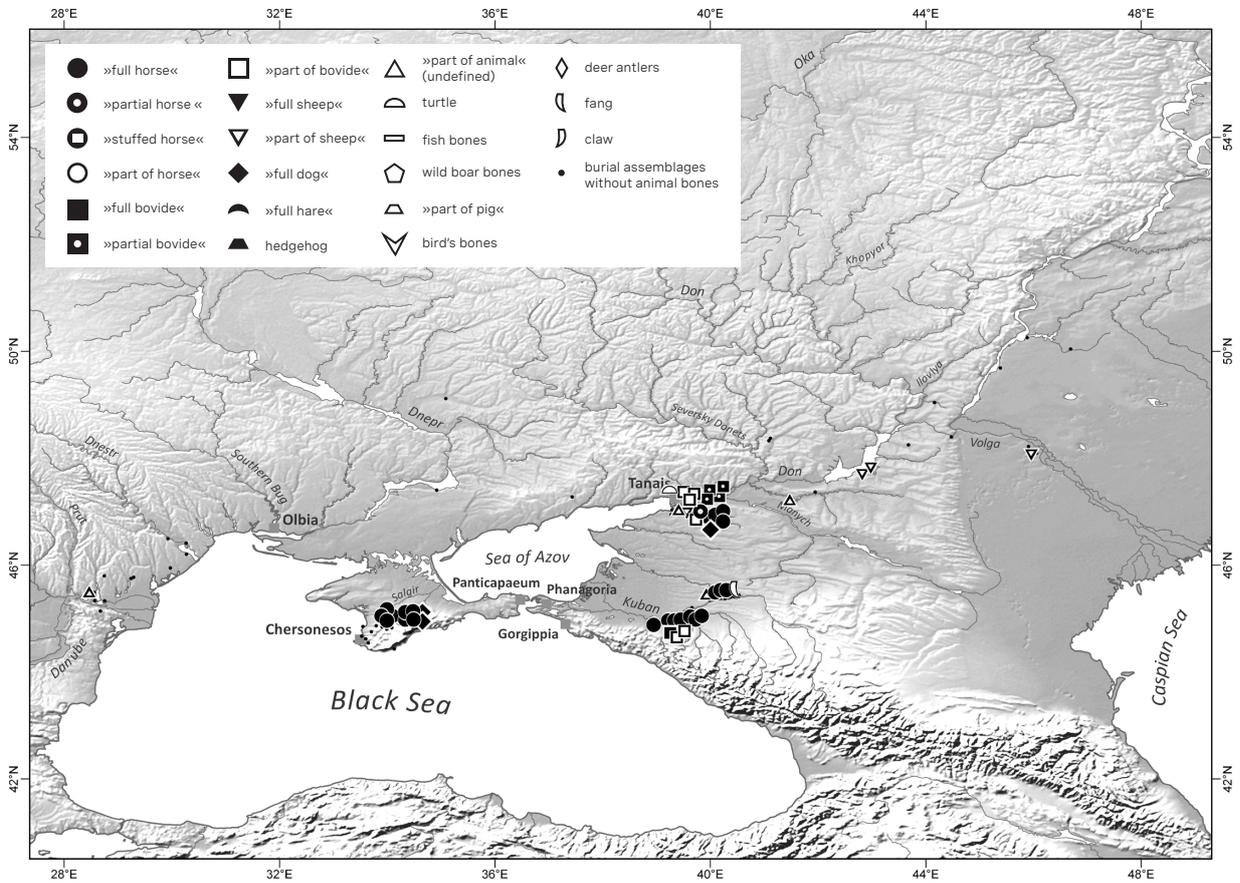


Fig. 4 Animal bones in the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region, mid-2nd to mid-3rd century AD. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

»partial animal« are noted only in flat necropoleis of the third period.

These results can also be compared with the data from settlements, which were analysed, unfortunately, only in a rather broad chronological form, from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD (Bylkova 2007, 104, 112). At the hillforts of Annovka and Lyubimovka, cattle are represented by 32.14 % and 23.66 %, sheep/goat by 28.57 % and 42.75 %, pig by 19.64 % and 15.27 %, horse by 12.5 % and 12.98 %, and dog by 7.15 % and 5.34 %, respectively (Zhuravlyov 1991, 75. 80–86). Wild animals (reindeer and wild boar predominate) make up almost one third of the total number of individual animals at Annovka, and less than one sixth at Lyubimovka. At the Znamenka and Gavrilovka hillforts, sheep/goat bones account for 34 % and 35.5 % of individuals, cattle for 26 % and 28 %, pig for 12 % and 17 %, horse for 20 % and 14 %, and dog for 8 % and 5.5 %, respectively (Pogrebova 1958, 155. 225). Deer and wild boar represent 26.5 % and 20 % of the wild animals, respectively. At Zolotaya Balka hillfort, bovids dominate both in terms of bones and individuals, accounting for 36 %, sheep/goat for 28.3 %, horse for 25.6 %, pig for 5.6 %, dog for 2.2 %, and one camel bone was found, too. Wild animals account for 10 %.

Thus, in the case of an individual funeral, the sacrificial animals were often chosen from among the most widely consumed domestic animals (cattle and sheep/goat). This can be explained by the »economic« strategy. However, the absence of pigs among the funerary sacrifices is remarkable and should probably be attributed to certain ideologies.

Horses played a special role in the thanatological doctrine of the settled population, since they were used for collective (post-funeral?) rituals performed at the flat necropoleis. The sacrifice of horses and dogs, especially in the form of a »full animal«, could be carried out as part of both »prestigious« and »symbolic« strategies.

Wild animals were quite often consumed in daily life, which we see from the settlement materials. However, in most cases their symbolic parts (the fangs and claws of predatory animals and deer teeth) are found in the barrow burials (i. e. of the »nomadic« population) of women and children, presumably as amulets.

Crimea

First Period

Among the archaeological sites (fig. 1) there are settlements, flat necropoleis, a stone mausoleum with elite burials, single burials in barrows and barrow stone crypts (Mordvintseva 2020, 34–35). Animal bones come from eleven elite burial complexes (52 %). In the catacombs with multi-layered burials in the Belyaus flat necropolis, »animal parts« and »symbolic parts of an animal« were found: sheep/goat (in one complex, a shoulder blade with ribs and jaw; in five cases, a leg bone, together with a knife) and a cattle femur and wild boar tusks (Dashevskaya 2014). In the mausoleum in Neapolis Scythica, indeterminate animal bones were found (Pogrebova 1961, 191–193). Outside the sarcophagi containing the inhumations, four horses were buried together with elements of a harness and funerary inventory (a red-slip cup, a fragment of a bronze ring), as well as a dog skeleton (Pogrebova 1961, 212–213). A complete horse skeleton with elements of a harness was lying on its side in the entrance pit of a catacomb dug into a Bronze Age barrow near the village of Chisten'koe (Zaytsev/Koltukhov 2004).

Second Period

The composition of archaeological sites, in general, remains the same (fig. 2; Mordvintseva 2020, 36). The mountain sanctuary at Gurzufskoye Sedlo began to function (Novičenkova 2013). Animal bones come from six elite burial complexes (20 %). A horse vertebra together with a knife and a boar tusk were found in the earthen catacomb in Belyaus (Dashevskaya 2014, 32–33). In the mausoleum in Neapolis Scythica, animal bones were found in four burials: a dog skeleton (male burial 68); the skeletons of a hare, a bird, and a hedgehog¹² (female burial 4); uncertain animal bones (female burial 67) and a cattle leg bone (male burial 16) (Pogrebova 1961, 196. 202. 205. 210). In the entrance pit of earthen catacomb 19 in the Eastern necropolis (Neapolis Scythica), containing a female and three children's burials, two complete horse skeletons were lying on their sides (Symonovich 1983, 36–37). In the mound of the Nogaychik Barrow, there was a ritual site marked by a burnt layer with an unburnt entrance containing burial no. 5, an ostentatious female burial, in the centre and a pit with two horse skulls, each with harness, by the entrance (Mordvintseva/Zaitsev 2003, fig. 2).

¹² It is not certain that the hedgehog and bird were placed deliberately into the grave.

Third Period

The spectrum of archaeological sites has slightly changed (fig. 3; Mordvintseva 2020, 36–38). On the Crimean south coast, flat necropoleis with cremations appear (Mordvintseva et al. 2016). The sanctuary of Eklizi-Burun began to function on Mt Chatyr-Dag (Lysenko 2013). In the flat necropoleis in the foothills zone, along with earthen catacombs containing multi-layered burials, individual burials are widely spread. Animal bones come from 20 elite burial complexes (41 %). In the mausoleum in Neapolis Scythica, a cattle leg bone lay near the head of the buried person (Pogrebova 1961, 209). Elite burials in the Eastern necropolis contain: indeterminate bones of domestic animals (grave 14) and the bones of cattle and wild boar, as well as two dog skeletons on top of the burials (grave 75), and the skull and legs of a horse (a »partial animal«) in the entrance pit of catacomb 23 (Symonovich 1983, 34–37. 50–52). Cattle leg bones were found in burials in the Belbek-4 and Belyaus necropoleis (Gushchina/Zhuravlyov 1999, grave 172; Dashevskaya 2014, 21–22).

Various forms of animal sacrifice are recorded in the Ust'-Al'ma flat burial ground. As a rule, cattle leg bones, along with a knife, had been laid in the graves (Loboda et al. 2002, 317–337; Puzdrovskij/Zajcev 2004, 229–239. 246–253; Puzdrovskij/Trufanov 2017a, 19–20; 2017b, 24–26. 38–40. 67–68. 76–78). Wild boar tusks were found in burials with a »female« inventory (Puzdrovskij/Trufanov 2017a, 22–25; 2017b, 8–11). Special rituals concerned the horses, whose burials have been studied in a number of cases (males of *Equus equus* or hybrid forms of *Equus equus* and *Equus gmelini Antonius* of small stature; Puzdrovskij/Zajcev 2004, 262). In many cases, it is not possible to associate them with a specific funerary complex. As a rule, the horse is lying on its belly, with its legs tucked up and its head placed on a shelf cut in the ground for this purpose. In about one third of the cases, the horses are bridled. Apart from the burying of a »full animal« as an »adjacent inventory«, several cases of the making and burying of a »stuffed animal« were investigated, thanks to the specific features of the soil preserving the organic remains so well. These horse »dolls« are life-size, made of leather and stuffed with chopped reeds. One bridled »doll« in the form of a full-sized animal was found in a catacomb with a female inventory (Zaytsev 2000), another one in the form of a horse's head, also bridled, was lying among »male« grave goods on top of a wooden dish with a cattle thigh bone, a wooden bowl and a knife (Zaytsev/Mordvintseva 2002).

Fourth Period

Flat necropoleis appear in new territories, and karst caves were also used for burials now (fig. 4; Mordvintseva 2020, 38–39). Animal bones come from six elite burial complexes (35 %). All of them are represented by a cattle bone (a femur, judging by the images in the illustrations) with a knife (Gushchina/Zhuravlyov 1999, grave 215, 285; Khrapunov et al. 2001, 123–127; Zaytsev/Mordvintseva 2007; Khrapunov 2013a, 23; Puzdrovskiy/Trufanov 2017a, 12–13. 17–18). At the burial sites of Neyzats, Opushki and Neapolis Scythica, there are separately located graves of horses, which had been laid on their sides and on their stomachs with their heads, quite often in a bridle, placed on a special shelf. In rare cases, a horse skeleton was placed in the entrance pit of the burial structure (Khrapunov 2013a, 24). Within the territory of the Opushki burial ground, more than 50 horse burials in separate ground pits form a compact plot. Often dogs' skeletons accompanied the horses (Polit 2019; Khrapunov/Shabanov 2021).

Comparison

Most of the elite burials come from the foothills geographical zone of the Crimea. Standard burials in this zone show similar patterns for animal sacrifices in the »accompanying inventory« within the same site. There are similar species (sheep/goat and, less frequently, cattle, in the first period, and cattle from the second to the fourth period) and similar forms of their presentation (a »part of the animal«, usually a leg). The bones of wild species are noticed in singular cases. As a »symbolic part of an animal«, wild boar tusks have been found among amulets in graves of all periods. In some flat necropoleis, which apparently held an elite status, »full animals« (horses and dogs), »partial animals« and »dolls« (horses) are recorded. In the necropoleis of the capital's fortress (Neapolis Scythica), sacrifices of bridled horses have been practiced in all chronological periods. In the third chronological period, horses were buried in the necropolis of Ust'-Al'ma, and in the fourth chronological period in the necropoleis of Neizats and Opushki.

Burial grounds have been less studied in the mountain and south coastal geographical zones, so there is a paucity of osteological material. In the Glazastaya cave necropolis (on the eastern edge of the mountain landscape zone), which dates to the 3rd century AD, the skulls of rams, goats, and deer were set on stones in the anteroom of the karst cavity, as well as near the remains of the deceased (Lysenko 2003,

90 fig. 4, I). In the cave necropolis of Ai-Nikola (south coastal zone), dating from the late 2nd to 3rd century AD, the almost complete skeletons of two hares were recorded, each accompanying a human burial (Myts et al. 1999, 170. 177 figs. 3C. 4C).

In addition to burial grounds, animal bones come from sacral and profane complexes in settlements and sanctuaries.

Neapolis Scythica is the largest and best-studied fortress located in the centre of the foothills zone. Its stratified 2nd- and 1st-century BC cultural layers contained the remains of cattle (15.7 %), sheep/goat (39.2 %), horse (19.8 %), pig (17.2 %), dog (7.5 %), and donkey (0.6 %). Hunting prey remains were absent. In the 1st-3rd-century AD layers, the bones of cattle (26.4 %), sheep/goat (27.3 %), horse (18.2 %), pig (15.4 %), dog (7.3 %), saiga (1.8 %), kulan (1.8 %), camel (0.9 %), and deer (0.9 %) were found. Hunting prey totalled 4.5 % (Tsalkin 1960, 94–95. 104 tab. 39 appendix 16). Among the materials from the Barabanovskaya Balka settlement, which dates from the 2nd to 4th century AD, the remains of 13 mammal species have been identified: cattle (9.5 %), sheep/goat (34.5 %), pig (20.2 %), horse (15.5 %), donkey (4.7 %), kulan (3.6 %), saiga (3.6 %), dog (1.2 %), domestic cat (1.2 %), hare (1.2 %), fox (1.2 %), ferret (1.2 %), wild boar (1.2 %), and deer (1.2 %) (Khrapunov 2016, 34–36).

In Neapolis Scythica, sacral structures have been also studied. Within the public cult buildings of the 2nd century BC (first period), pits with the bones of sacrificed (?) animals were found, and there were the almost complete skeletons of five sheep aged 1.5–2 years (Zaytsev 2004, 28). Deer skull fragments with antlers and a cluster of small sawn-off antler fragments were found in the corners of two buildings belonging to the second period (Vysotskaya 1976, 64; 1979, 168–169). The fourth period yielded several assemblages: a pit with the complete skeletons of four cows; a pit with 400 animal bone fragments (eight pigs, five sheep/goats, one cattle, one horse) together with two miniature cult vessels and pits with sacrificed (?) animal bones in hand-formed pots (Vysotskaya 1976, 61–62; 1979, 165–168 figs 79–80). One such pit contained the bones of five small bovines, twenty chickens and three quails. Some of these assemblages were located at a special site enclosed by a monumental wall (Vysotskaya 1976, 62–63).

In the mountain zone, several sacral structures are known. At the sanctuary of Eklizi-Burun, located on the top of Mt Chatyr-Dag, mainly parts of domestic animals were found (Lysenko/Serdyuk 2023). The ratio of species in the studied part of the archaeozoological complex for the »lower« layer (period 3 according to the scheme used in this contribution)

is: cattle (8.4 %), sheep/goat (46.2 %), pig (45.3 %), horse (0.1 %); for the »upper« layer (period 4): cattle (12.3 %), sheep/goat (41.1 %), pig (46.1 %), horse (0.2 %), dog (0.1 %), and deer (0.2 %). Among the bones, teeth and skull fragments dominate. This is the basis for the assumption that the complete heads of small animals were brought to the sanctuary, and the heads of large animals were probably processed somewhere else, whereas only the lower jaws were brought to Eklizi-Burun. The general characteristics of a part of the osteological collection of another mountain sanctuary, Gurzufskoye Sedlo, are largely similar to the data obtained from Eklizi-Burun (Novichenkova 2002, 19. 36).

The settlement structures of the south coastal zone are practically unstudied. There is some information about faunal remains from two sites. In the seaside settlement of Chugunun-Kaya, dating from the 2nd to the 3rd century AD, fish bones and marine mollusc shells were found (Lysenko 2005, 230–236), and in the cultural layers of the Chatyr-Dag-2 settlement, dating to the first half of the 2nd century AD, c. three dozen animal bone fragments were studied (pig and cattle). Structure XI contained small fragments of the bones of a cow aged over three years, a pig, and a young sheep (Lysenko 2010, 264–265).

Representative material was obtained from sacral structures in the south coastal zone. The osteological remains found in the Taraktash cult complex, dating from the first to the second half of the 4th century AD and located near the northeastern border of the zone, contained the limb bones and sometimes the skulls of wild (9 %) and domestic (83.8 %) animals. Domestic species are represented by cattle (3 %), sheep (26 %), pig (3 %), horse (0.3 %), dog (1.1 %), and rooster (50.4 %; Lysenko 2009, 388). At the sanctuary of Autka, in the southwestern part of the zone (late second to first third of the 4th century AD), a compact accumulation of sheep, pig and dog jaws lying in a dense layer was found (Lysenko 2012).

Comparing the data discussed above, we can state significant regional differences in the choice of a species for ritual slaughter and in the manner of its sacrifice. In the south coastal and mountain sanctuaries, the craniological parts of sheep/goat and pigs prevail, while, in the burials in this zone, the bones of sacrificial animals are recorded in isolated cases (cave necropoleis). It is possible to assume that the strategy used was mainly »economic« when sacrificing at sanctuaries but »symbolic« in some cave necropoleis.

Cult practices of the population in the foothills zone differ from those in the mountain and south coastal zones, both in the choice of the sacrificed animals and in the form of their presentation. In the

first chronological period, sheep/goats occupy the main place among species found in graves and, from the second to the fourth period, it is cattle. In general, this can be assessed as an »economic« strategy. However, there are practically no pig bones in the funerary complexes, which would seem logical when using the »economic« strategy, given their rather large percentage among the kitchen remains of the settlements. Moreover, the presence of pig bones among the others in the intramural sacral complexes indicates the selective approach in choosing a sacrifice for different purposes. Finds of »symbolic parts« of wild animals among amulets, even in the ordinary graves of women and children, underline their symbolic importance for the Crimean people, although hunting did not contribute much to their diet.

Horses and dogs obviously played a particularly important role in the ideology of the non-urban population of the Crimean foothills during all four chronological periods, and they had a particular role in the funerary rites. These animals are presented in many forms: as an animal »accompanying« the specific burial and as a post-funeral offering made by a group of people on special occasions. Their sacrifice was both symbolic and, in case of horses, costly signalling.

Volga-Don Region

First Period

Archaeological sites are represented by votive deposits in the western part of the region and barrow mounds in the eastern part (fig. 1). Animal bones are absent in hoards; they come from 15 elite barrow burials (60 %). In half of the cases, these are the bones of a ram (front leg with a shoulder blade; shoulder blade), as a rule together with a knife (Smirnov 1959, 243–244; Mordvintseva/Shinkar 1999, 138; Lyakhov/Mordvintseva 2000; Lukashov/Pryamukhin 2002, 208–209. 2II; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 60. II7–II8. I27). In one female burial, the full skeletons of a sheep and two hares were found, as well as individual bones from at least three horses in a large bronze cauldron (Bespaly/Luk'ashko 2008, 97–101). Horse bones (front leg with shoulder blade; ribs and part of the spine) are found in two more burials (Rau 1927, 36–40; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 122–123). Bovine bones (leg and ribs; ribs and vertebrae) come from three burial assemblages (Lyakhov/Mordvintseva 2000; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 23–24, 2I7). An accumulation of boar bones was lying on the edge of the grave in Piterka, in addition to cattle and sheep bones found inside

the grave (Lyakhov/Mordvintseva 2000). In three cases, animal bones have remained indetermined (Bulatov et al. 1975; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 48. 6I).

Second Period

The composition of archaeological sites has not changed, new barrow groups appear in the Lower Don sub-region (fig. 2). Animal bones come from 16 elite burial complexes (46 %). The hoards contained no animal bones. Horse bones (ribs and shoulder blade; ribs, sternum, foreleg; limbs; skull; indeterminate parts) were found in six burials (Rau 1927, 53–55; Shilov 1975, 141–145; Il'yukov/Vlaskin 1992, 80–82; Glebov 2002; Otchir-Goriaeva 2002), cattle bones (ribs and legs; pelvic bone) in three (Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 45. 68. 202), sheep bones (foreleg with shoulder blade; leg; carcass without head; ribs and leg bones; ribs, foreleg, vertebrae) in eight (Shilov 1975, 142–145; Il'yukov/Vlaskin 1992, 80–82; Zasetskaya et al. 1999, 59–60; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 19–20. 63; Skvortsov/Skripkin 2008). In five burials, animal bones (mostly horse) lay either inside a cast bronze cauldron or next to a damaged one. Fish scales were found in one burial assemblage (Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 19–20). A piece of a deer antler lay among amulets in one female elite burial (Zasetskaya et al. 1999, 59–60). One burial contained the claws of an eagle (Shilov 1975, 144–145).

Third Period

Votive depositions disappeared in the western part of the region (fig. 3). Settlements with flat burial grounds appeared in the Don delta, close to the Bosporan city of Tanais. Animal bones are found in 21 elite burial assemblages (30 %). Horse bones lay in a cast bronze cauldron in one robbed male burial (Sergatskov 2000, 74–75). Bovine bones (no specification, three vertebrae in one case) accompanied four assemblages (Bespaly 1992; Mys'kov et al. 1999; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 128–130. 132–133). Sheep bones are represented in 13 elite burials, mainly in form of a front leg (Sinitsyn 1946, 91–92; Sergatskov 2000, 74–75. 84–87; Dvornichenko et al. 2002; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 2I5). In two cases, the species remained indetermined. As a rule, animal bones lay together with a knife. One male burial contained fish bones (Il'yukov 1994, 200–201). In one case, bird bones were present (Sergatskov 2000, 71–72). A deer's tooth and tips of deer antlers lay in a pile of amulets (Bespaly 1986, 77–78; Dvornichenko et al. 2002).

Fourth Period

The spatial distribution of archaeological sites remained the same (fig. 4). Animal bones come from 15 elite burials (52 %). A custom of burying a horse or a bovine (complete or partial skeleton) on its stomach or on its side in the entrance pit of the burial chamber is noticed for the flat necropoleis in the Lower Don region (fig. 5; Larenok 2008a, 84–88, 209–210; 2008b, 131–133; Vereshchagin 2008, 21–24). In addition, the bones of a dog and the metapodia of a sheep were discovered (Larenok 2008b, 141–144). The bones of sheep/goat (tibia; ribs and vertebrae; hind leg; pelvis and leg) are mainly represented in the burial mounds (Dvornichenko/Fyodorov-Davydov 1989, 18–19, 41–44; Bespaly 1990; 2000; Mordvintseva/Khabarova 2006, cat. 64, 140–143). In one case, a horse skull was found (Bespaly 1990) and, in another case, the bones of a »cow« (Guguev/Bezuglov 1990).

Comparison

Since funerary sites are the only type of archaeological source in the region, at least for the first and second periods, only their comparison with standard burials is possible. Anatoliy Skripkin analysed a database of 594 burials dating from the 3rd to the 1st century BC in the course of a project on the statistical processing of burial sites in Asian Sarmatia (Skripkin 1997). As a result, he characterized »the meat-based food for the dead« as »an essential feature of the funeral rite«. Sheep, usually a leg, occupy the main place (39.4 % of burials in the Trans-Volga region/29.6 % of burials on the right bank of the Volga/32.1 % of burials in the Lower Don region/51.2 % of burials in Kalmykia). Bones of other species are rare: horse (1.4 %/2.3 %/2.1 %/4.6 %), cattle (0.6 %/0.8 %/4.3 %/0 %), and birds (0.2 %/0.8 %/2.1 %/0 %) (Skripkin 1997, 180, 184 tab. 22).

In the elite burials we are discussing here, the percentage of cattle and horse bones is much higher, totalling 50 %. About half of them were found inside a cast bronze cauldron or next to a broken one. This kind of object should be regarded as a prestige

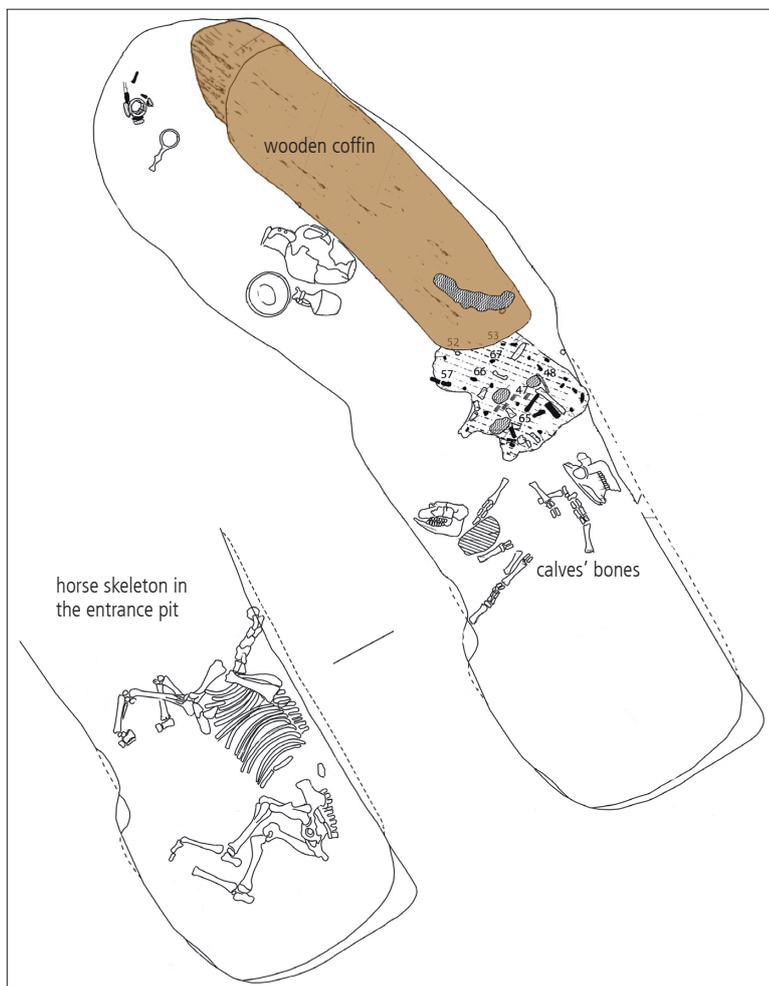


Fig. 5 Grave 7 of the Kobyakovo necropolis, dating to the first half of the 2nd century AD, with a horse skeleton lying in the entrance pit of the grave. – (After Vereshchagin 2008, fig. 59).

item directly associated with the elite status of the deceased (Mordvintseva 2023, 40–41). Thus, we can conclude that the »costly signalling« strategy of prestigious consumption was chosen for some distinguished representatives of the elite. Occasionally, a »symbolic« strategy was also used (wild boar bones). Finds of »symbolic parts of an animal« (fragments of deer antlers and teeth, the claws of an eagle) are apparently not associated with the sacrifice of these animals.

For the third period, Igor Sergatskov (2002) carried out a statistical analysis of 973 burials in Asian Sarmatia. He presented the results in a table that only provides a general percentage of unspecified bones: Trans-Volga with 8.12%/Volga-Don interfluve, northern part, with 3.75%/Volga-Don interfluve, southern part, with 10%/Lower Don with 5.49%/right bank of the Lower Volga with 8.06%. The decoding of the statistical processing reveals that it concerns the bones of sheep, horse, and dog. According to Sergatskov, sheep (usually, a foreleg with a shoulder blade) predominate among sacrificial animals (Sergatskov 2002, 95–96). Thus, we might conclude that, in the case of sheep bones, an economic strategy was probably used (62% of the elite burials). The cattle and horse bones originating from barrow burials in the steppe part of the Volga-Don region, especially those found in a bronze cauldron, should be regarded as the result of the »costly signalling« strategy. The »symbolic parts of animals« (teeth and pieces of deer antler) found chiefly in the female inventory are assumed to be amulets.

The published statistical analysis of 278 burial complexes belonging to the fourth chronological period also presents data in a highly generalized form (Moshkova 2009). According to the analysis, the number of burials containing animal bones (mostly sheep), is 23.92% out of all the examined burial assemblages (Moshkova 2009, 95). Among the sheep bones, mostly legs with a shoulder blade or legs with pelvic bones were found. Horse leg bones, according to the statistical analysis, were recorded only in barrow mounds in the southern part of the Volga-Don interfluve, including the right bank of the Volga (Moshkova 2009, 96). The sacrifice of sheep was apparently carried out as part of an »economic« strategy. In the flat necropoleis of the Don-Delta, burials of horses, cattle (in the form of a »full animal« or a »partial animal«), and dogs are represented among the »adjacent« inventory. Their sacrifice may have

been carried out following the »symbolic« and »costly signalling« models.

This partly corresponds to the data obtained from the cultural layers of the Lower Don settlements. The ratio of domestic animal species in the studied part of the archaeozoological complex of the Kobyakovo settlement: cattle (27.3%), sheep/goat (27.3%), horse (12%), pig (11.5%), donkey (2.1%), and dog (15%) (Kamenetskiy 2011, 257). The bones of wild animals accounted for 1.6% of the total number of bones (Kamenetskiy 2011, 260). In the Podazovskoe settlement, the bones of domestic animals were distributed as follows: cattle (2626/55¹³), sheep/goat (2231/152), pig (362/28), horse (574/14), and dog (250/11). According to Igor Kamenetskiy, the condition of the horse and dog bones indicates their consumption (Kamenetskiy 1974, 214). The bones of wild animals accounted for about 1% (Kamenetskiy 1974, 214). On the settlements of Khapry and Sukhoy Chaltyr, »cattle provided the bulk of the meat: 91% in Khapry, and 44% in Sukhoy Chaltyr«, with a small number of pigs in Sukhoy Chaltyr and their complete absence in Khapry (Kamenetskiy 2011, 257). A significant number of wild animals (40%) was noted in the settlement of Sukhoy Chaltyr (Kamenetskiy 2011, 257). Comparing the data of the Don settlements with the graves in the same territory, one notes that pig bones are not represented in the burial complexes. This indicates selectivity in the choice of species for sacrifice at the funerals.

Kuban Region

First Period

Archaeological sites are represented by barrow mounds in the steppe and foothill zones and settlements and flat necropoleis along big rivers (fig. 1). Animal bones are represented in 22 elite complexes (42%). Horse bones (in the form of a »full animal« lying on its side or on its belly in the grave or a separate pit, usually bridled, sometimes with grave goods; in two cases there was also a dog skeleton), cattle (complete skeletons and individual bones), sheep (head and legs), and in one case pig (humerus) come from elite graves in flat burial grounds and barrow mounds located along the Kuban and on its left bank (Mordvintseva/Treister 2007, cat. A377. A379; Mord-

13 The first number indicates the number of bones examined (NISP), the second one indicates the minimum number of individuals (MNI).

vintseva et al. 2010, cat. 250. 215–217. 362–391. 497; Beglova/Erlikh 2018, 13–14. 20–22. 52–64. 74–77. 81–84. III–III2). Sheep bones (indeterminate bones; scapula, ribs, pelvis with a leg; head and legs) and, rarely, horse bones as a »part of animal« were found in barrow burials on the right bank of the Kuban (Marchenko 1996, 191 complex 142. 293 complex 288; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 110. 218. 551–552). A wild boar skull, in addition to the full skeletons of horses and a cow, accompanied an ostentatious male burial in the foothills of the North Caucasus (Mordvintseva et al. 2012). In the sanctuary-mound of the Tenginskaya burial ground, the tusks of a wild boar and a deer antler were found (Beglova/Erlikh 2018, 52–64). Unidentified animal bones were noted in seven burials. In the barrows on the Kuban's right bank, in most cases, a knife was found along with the animal bones.

Second Period

The number of settlements along the Kuban increases, new clusters of settlements appear along the Kirpili River on the Kuban's right bank (fig. 2). Animal bones come from nine elite burials (17 %). A bridled horse skeleton was found in the Severskiy Barrow (Smirnov 1953). Horse teeth were placed together with grave goods in the barrow mound (a ritual deposit?) on the Kuban's left bank (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 205–212). Sheep bones accompanied five elite barrow burials on the Kuban's right bank (Chernopitskiy 1985; Savchenko 1994, 92–94; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 147. 433–434. 465–479). A deer antler lay behind the head of a buried man in a barrow grave in the foothills of the North Caucasus (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1989, 91–92. 123–124). In one case, the animal species was not identified.

Third Period

Barrow graves ceased on the steppe of the Kuban's right bank (fig. 3). Animal bones are represented in seven elite burials (11 %). A horse's tooth comes from a barrow burial in the foothills of the North Caucasus (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1989, 92–96. 123–124). Six barrows in the so-called »Golden Cemetery« in the middle reaches of the Kuban contained wild boar tusks and a fragment of a deer antler (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 61. 70–71. 74–75). The absence of animal bones in the elite burials of this period may be due to the unsatisfactory documentation of the burials' composition during the early 20th-century excavations.

Fourth Period

The number of archaeological sites becomes smaller, and they are concentrated mainly along the Kuban (fig. 4). Animal bones come from 15 elite burials (47 %). In the flat burials on the Kuban's left bank, horse skeletons (from one to three individuals) were found – lying on their sides, in the entrance pit of the grave or in a separate pit, bridled, sometimes with grave goods (Sazonov 1992; Mordvintseva/Treister 2007, cat. A62–A66; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 269. 270–272. 273. 274–275. 521–527. 605–606). In some cases, complete skeletons or individual bones of cattle accompanied them (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 267–268. 269. 273. 539). In some barrows in the »Golden Cemetery« on the Kuban's right bank, complete skeletons of horses, including bridled ones, sheep bones and a wild boar tusk were found (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 532–534. 542).

Comparison

Despite the great number of settlements in which animal bones make up the bulk of finds, there is very little information on them (Kamenetskiy 2011, 254). In the lower reaches of the Kuban, in the Semibratnee settlement, domestic animals predominate (95.1 %). The ratios of animal species in the period from the 3rd to the 1st century BC are as follows: cattle (88/9), sheep/goat (31/9), pig (27/11), horse (43/5), dogs (19/6), deer (19/3), and wild boar (3/2). In the period from the 1st to the 3rd century AD, the ratios are: cattle (84/11), sheep/goat (25/9), pig (27/10), horse (17/2), dog (2/2), deer (15/3), and wild boar (7/2) (Tsalkin 1960, 103 tab. 13).

Materials from barrow mounds and flat necropoleis show significant differences in the species composition of sacrificial animals and the forms of their representation. In the barrows on the Kuban's right bank, there is a complete predominance of sheep bones (96 %), mostly the front leg and shoulder blade (64 %) (Marchenko 1996, 106). In the flat necropoleis, the picture is more complicated.

In the ordinary flat graves of the first period, located along the Kuban, a »whole animal« (12 %) or »parts of an animal«, that is, head, legs (78 %) and limbs with ribs (10 %), are represented (Marchenko 1996, 97). Animal species were identified for 95 burials: pig (59 %), horse or cattle (21 %), and sheep (12 %) (Marchenko 1996, 98). The knife, as a rule, was absent. Interestingly, pig bones are presented singly in the elite burials, which is evidence of the »costly signalling« strategy for a sacrifice at an elite funeral.

»Full animals« (mainly horses) were also buried outside the human burials, in separate pits, randomly across the necropolis. Thus, a group of six horses (stallions) and a dog was studied in flat grave 2-1945 in Ladozhskaya (Berlizov/Anfimov 2005, 114–115). The bodies of horses were placed on their sides or stomachs with bent legs, and the authors of the publication suggest that the animals were tied to a post. All the horses had bridles but were not wearing them, and iron bits had been laid under the lower jaw of each animal. Their skulls have traces of lethal blows. Two horse skeletons were covered with the chopped bones of another horse, a bovine, and a ram. Beside each horse, three roe deer antlers were found, still attached to a part of the skull. In grave 3-1945 in the same cemetery, next to the burial of a man accompanied by just two hand-formed pots, there were two horse skeletons with an oblong hole in the centre of each skull's frontal bone, indicating lethal violence, with iron bits under the lower jaw. Above the horses, there was a dog skeleton lying on its side.

From the 1st century BC, a new tendency is noticed in the flat necropoleis. In the eastern group of sites, in 20 % of the burials dating to the second and third periods, the »sacrificial food« is represented by the front leg and shoulder blade of a sheep. In the western group, such burials constitute 43 %. At the same time, the pattern »knife with sacrificial food« also appears in the flat burials (Marchenko 1996, 107), thus resembling the pattern noticed for the Volga-Don region.

Thus, in the first period, the sacrifices performed by the nomadic population of the Kuban's right bank steppe (mostly sheep) and by the agricultural population of the settlements along the Kuban and on its left bank (horse, cattle, rarely sheep/goat, pig) differ significantly. The sacrifice of a sheep in the barrow burial grounds and a pig in the flat necropoleis was probably carried out as part of an »economic« strategy. The complex manipulations during the sacrifice of horses testify to their ideological significance in the carrying out of funerary rituals and the application of both the »costly signalling« and »symbolic« strategies.

In the 1st century BC, the funerary rites of the population who settled along the Kuban and on the Kuban's left bank changed; the custom of placing a sheep's leg in the grave appeared and the practice of burying horses in separate pits ceased. This probably testifies to the adaptation of some nomadic customs by the settled population under the direct ideological influence of foreign groups in a zone of intense contact (Ulf 2009, 87, 95–97). The sacrifice of a horse in the Severskiy Barrow, situated separately from

other elite burial structures and close to the Asian part of the Bosporan kingdom, looks more like an exception. The next radical change took place in the second half of the 2nd century AD, when horse sacrifices were carried out in both flat necropoleis and barrow burial grounds, apparently within the »costly signalling« and »symbolic« strategy.

Symbolic parts of wild animals (deer and wild boar) were found mainly in the funerary assemblages of the Kuban's left bank and in the foothills of the North Caucasus. In many cases, they marked male elite burials, which indicates the great symbolic role of hunting in emphasizing an elite status.

Discussion

Domestic animals were absolutely predominant among the species found in the elite burial assemblages of the northern Black Sea region: sheep/goat, cattle, horse, and dog. Wild animals (boar, deer, in single cases birds of prey and bear) are represented mainly by »symbolic parts« (tusks, claws, antlers) as amulets. In single cases, wild boar bones are found, once in the forest-steppe, once in the North Caucasus mountain zone.

The remains of sacrifices represent several patterns: 1) the absence of animal bones in burial assemblages; 2) »sheep/goat leg + knife«; 3) »horse/cattle bones + cast bronze cauldron«; 4) »cattle leg + plate«; 5) horse/cattle and dog as a »full animal«, a »partial animal« or »stuffed animal«. Their distribution has chronological and spatial peculiarities.

The absence of animal bones in the presence of horse harnesses among the grave goods was noticed for the Lower Dnieper and the western part of the Volga-Don region in the first and second chronological periods. These complexes contain ritual deposits (hoards), which differ significantly from the elite burials of the neighbouring population groups. In itself, the absence of sacrificial animal bones in a burial assemblage does not necessarily mean a complete rejection of funerary sacrificial rituals. The obligatory presence of harness items in the hoards may have been symbolic markers of a sacrificial victim, the remains of which are not presented *in situ*. This pattern completely disappears in the 1st century AD.

Another version of »absence of animal bones in graves« is noted for the Crimean south coast (third and fourth periods). The sacral sites of this area show the sacrificing of cranial parts of pig and sheep/goat.

The pattern »sheep leg + knife« was noted mainly for barrow burials (standard and elite) of all chronological periods in the steppe part of the Volga-Don

interfluve, as well as for barrows of the first and second periods on the Kuban's right bank steppe. It is also recorded in some flat burials in northwestern Crimea in the first period and those in the Kuban region in the second and third periods. The choice of a sacrificial animal could be determined by economic factors (sheep were the most accessible species in nomadic or semi-nomadic societies), but the influence of an ideological factor cannot be ruled out.

The pattern »horse/cattle bones + cast bronze cauldron« is recorded in the elite burials of the Volga-Don region from the first to the third chronological periods, but much less frequently than the pattern »sheep leg + knife«. The choice of the victim was obviously carried out within the »costly signalling« and »symbolic« strategies. It is worthwhile to compare this pattern with the Scythian sacrificial custom described by Herodotus in his *Histories* (IV.61)¹⁴: »[...] having flayed the victims, they strip the flesh off the bones and then put it into caldrons [...] into these they put the flesh and boil it by lighting under it the bones of the victim [...]. And they sacrifice various kinds of cattle, but especially horses«.

The pattern »cattle leg + plate« is most typical for the elite burials in the flat necropoleis of the Crimean foothills (from the second to the fourth chronological period) and the Kuban region (in the first and second periods). This can be regarded as an »economic« model, since cattle represented the main source of nutrition in these settled territories.

Complex rituals in which cattle, horses and dogs were sacrificed were performed in the flat necropoleis of the Crimean foothills (all periods), the Kuban region (first, second, and fourth periods), the Lower Dnieper (third period), and the Don delta (fourth period), i. e. in areas inhabited by the settled population. In the Crimean foothills, the Kuban region, and the Lower Dnieper, burials of horses, dogs and cattle were mainly carried out in separate pits in flat necropoleis, while in the Don delta complete and partial animals were buried in the entrance pits of the catacombs. The choice of the species was obviously governed by its symbolic and/or prestige value.

While the sacrifices dealing with a »part of the animal« shared the victim between the sacred and profane worlds, a »full animal« sacrificed belongs completely to the sacred world. The making of a »stuffed animal« resembles agrarian rituals of the revival of the victim. Such a ritual is described for Prytaneum: »The meat of the bull was divided among those present, and the skin was sewn together, stuffed with straw, and the animal stuffed with straw was harnessed to the plow« (Mauss 2000, 81).

Burials of horses (»full animals« as well as »partial animals«) are also well known in the Bosporan necropoleis (Maslennikov 1981, 78–79; Korpusova 1983, 30; Khrshansovskiy 2000, 248). The ritual burials of dogs (including those combined with a horse burial) are found in almost all Bosporan cities, but they are largely characteristic of the European Bosporus (Moleva 1998, 61; Khrshansovskiy 2000, 243, 247). This burial custom can be traced back to the 5th-century BC Bosporan religious practice (Nymphaeum), but it was practiced most widely in Hellenistic times and in the first centuries AD. Judging by the fact that only horses and dogs were honoured with separate burials in the Bosporan necropoleis, Vladimir Khrshansovskiy assumed that in funerary and memorial rites they had a special status of transitory mediators from one world to another. It is remarkable that the barbarian societies practicing the sacrifices of horses and dogs are mostly adjacent to the Bosporan cities.

Thus, the choice of the victim and the form of its representation were largely determined by the cultural ecology, and the observed patterns should mark the cultural and economic affiliation of the population and its ideological (and political?) orientation.

In the following we will consider the images of animals found in barbarian elite burial contexts in the northern Black Sea region, and compare the results with the analysis of sacrificial remains. Let us try to answer the question of whether the choice of a sacrificial animal and animal images placed on the grave goods were somehow connected.

Images of Animals and Their Connection to the Sacrificed Animals

The close connection between the »Sarmatians« and the »Animal Style« has been recognized by many researchers (Rostovtzeff 1922, 23–25, 105; 1929, 28, 42–44; Smirnov 1976, 80; Zasetzkaya 1980, 54; 1989, 41–42, 44). However, there are no uniformly accept-

ed classification criteria of this art. The most popular definition of the »Animal Style of the Eurasian nomads« is »depicting certain animals in a certain way« (Tchlenova 1962, 3). The analysis of »Polychrome Animal Style« objects from the northern

¹⁴ <https://lexundria.com/hdt/4.61/mcly> (Herodotus, transl. G. C. Macaulay; accessed 16.8.2025).

Black Sea region has demonstrated the presence of several stylistic groups, probably associated with different handicraft traditions (Mordvintseva 2003; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007). A comparison of animal images with real species, carried out by a professional zoologist, revealed the fact that it is sometimes impossible to determine the genus and even the order (Serdyuk 2003, 96), because many of the images do not bear enough recognizable features that would allow us to identify the animal species.

For the analysis, I include images of those animals, the remains of which, in one form or another, were found in the elite burials: horse, sheep, ram, bovid, wild boar, deer, dog, pig, fish, turtle, hare, and bird (»potential victims«¹⁵ of sacrificial acts). In particular, I will focus on the purpose of the objects with images (utilitarian vs. extra-utilitarian or ritual) and their origin (imports or locally produced items).

Lower Dnieper

First and Second Periods

Images of animals (figs 6-7) were found in eight elite complexes (40 %) on utilitarian items (horse harness phalerae; costume details: belt plates, brooches, earrings, fingerrings, bracelets). Forty-five per cent of the zoomorphic characters are »potential victims«, the rest represent lions, fantastic animals and snakes. On one silver phalera from the Starobelsk Hoard two pairs of animals turned towards each other are depicted: a lioness facing a bull, and a lion facing a boar (Mordvinceva 2001, cat. 51). Similar scenes adorn the phalera from Tvarditsa: a lion facing a lioness, and a lion-griffin facing a deer (Mordvinceva 2001, cat. 79-80). Motifs of a standing deer with its head turned back are represented on horse bronze cheek-plates from Bubuech (Mordvintseva 2000). On the brooch from Sokolovo (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A370), there is a horse as part of the »rider« motif. An iron belt plate covered with gold foil from the Veselaya Dolina ritual deposit depicts a bird pecking at a fish (a symbol of Olbia¹⁶) and a dog (cf. fig. 10, 1; Mordvinceva/Redina 2013).

Most of these items were made in the North Pontic region (Mordvinceva 2001, 36-37; Mordvinceva/Redina 2013). Stylistic features of the horse cheek-plates from Bubuech have parallels in the Central European artistic tradition (Mordvintseva 2000). Objects decorated in a similar way originate

from chronologically close complexes in the Lower Dnieper and Crimea, which probably suggests a local production.

Third Period

Animal images (fig. 8) come from ten elite complexes (24 %); they are represented mainly on utilitarian objects (costume decorations: bracelets, torques, belt details, sew-on plaques, fingerrings, earrings; as decorative details on weapons and harnesses; vessels: cast bronze cauldrons, a silver goblet, a wooden vessel) and less on extra-utilitarian ones (figurines). Sixty per cent of zoomorphic images represent »potential victims«, the rest are predators and fantastic animals.

The majority of the depictions are ungulates. The handle of a silver goblet from Porogi is formed as a horse (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A234.I). Bracelets and a torque with ends in the form of an ungulate's head represent a series of stylistically similar images (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A84. A234. B37; see fig. 15, 7. 9). Earrings and the handles of a bronze cast cauldron are formed into a goat shape (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A61. B10). In Zaporozhskiy Barrow, belt plates depicting a bull being tormented by fantastic creatures and horse phalerae with the image of a swastika-coiled goat were found (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A84; see fig. 15, 1. 4). The bronze cauldron from Kalmius (fig. 10, 3) has a spout in the form of a bull's head, a deer-shaped handle and the motif of »a bird pecking a fish« (Mordvinceva 2013). One figurine and a plaque are decorated with the depiction of a bird (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. B46; Simonenko 2008, 71 cat. 92).

Some of the utilitarian items are imported samples of the Polychrome Animal Style (»Tillya-tepe group«; Mordvintseva 2003, 210 fig. 95). The motif of a swastika-shaped goat, and P-shaped plates with a torment scene are local derivatives of the »Central Asian group« (Mordvintseva 2003, 211 fig. 96). According to the manufacturing technique and stylistic features, earrings in the shape of a goat belong to the Kuban artistic and production tradition (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, 13). Bronze cauldrons deserve special attention; they can be associated with the performance of funerary rituals, in particular, sacrifices. Cast cauldrons with goat-shaped handles belong to a series of items known from the burials of the nomadic elite of the Volga-Don and the Kuban regions (see below). The cauldron from Kalmius

¹⁵ A conditional term that I will apply to images of those animals whose parts or complete skeletons were found in the elite burials.

¹⁶ The motif of an »eagle on a dolphin (fish)« was very popular in the northern Black Sea region. In particular, it was depicted on the coins of Olbia (Anokhin 1989, 23-24).

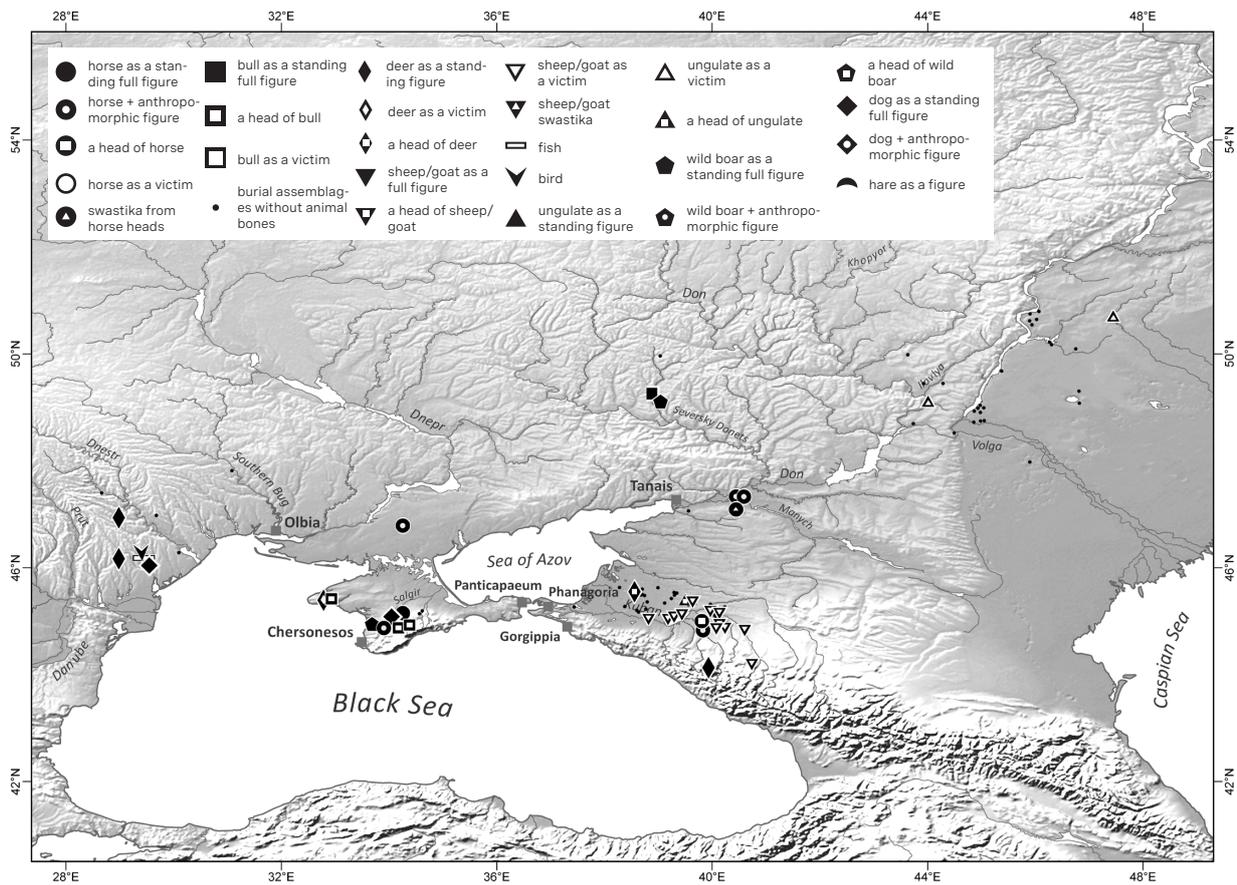


Fig. 6 Representations of »potential victims« from the elite burial contexts of the North Pontic region, 3rd to 2nd century BC. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

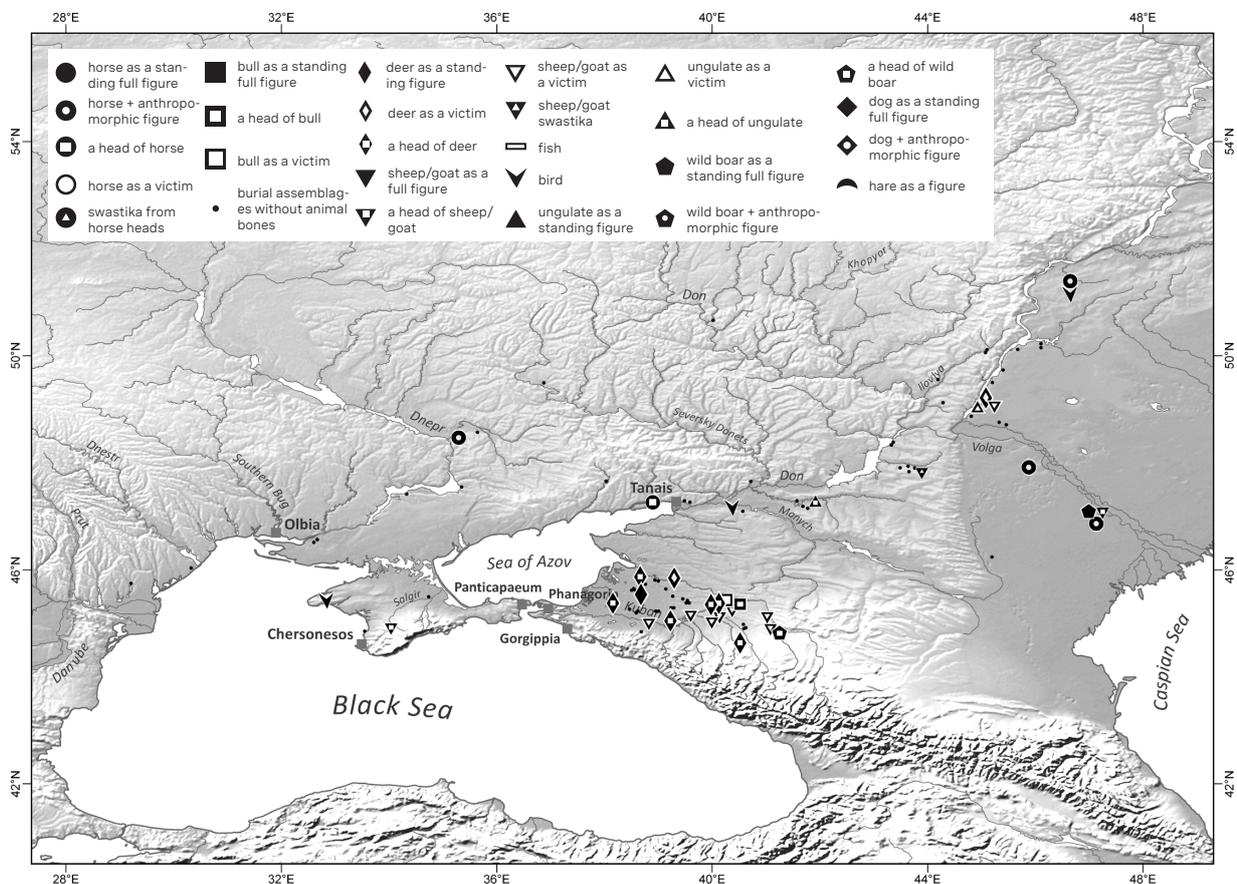


Fig. 7 Representations of »potential victims« from the elite burial contexts of the North Pontic region, 1st century BC. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

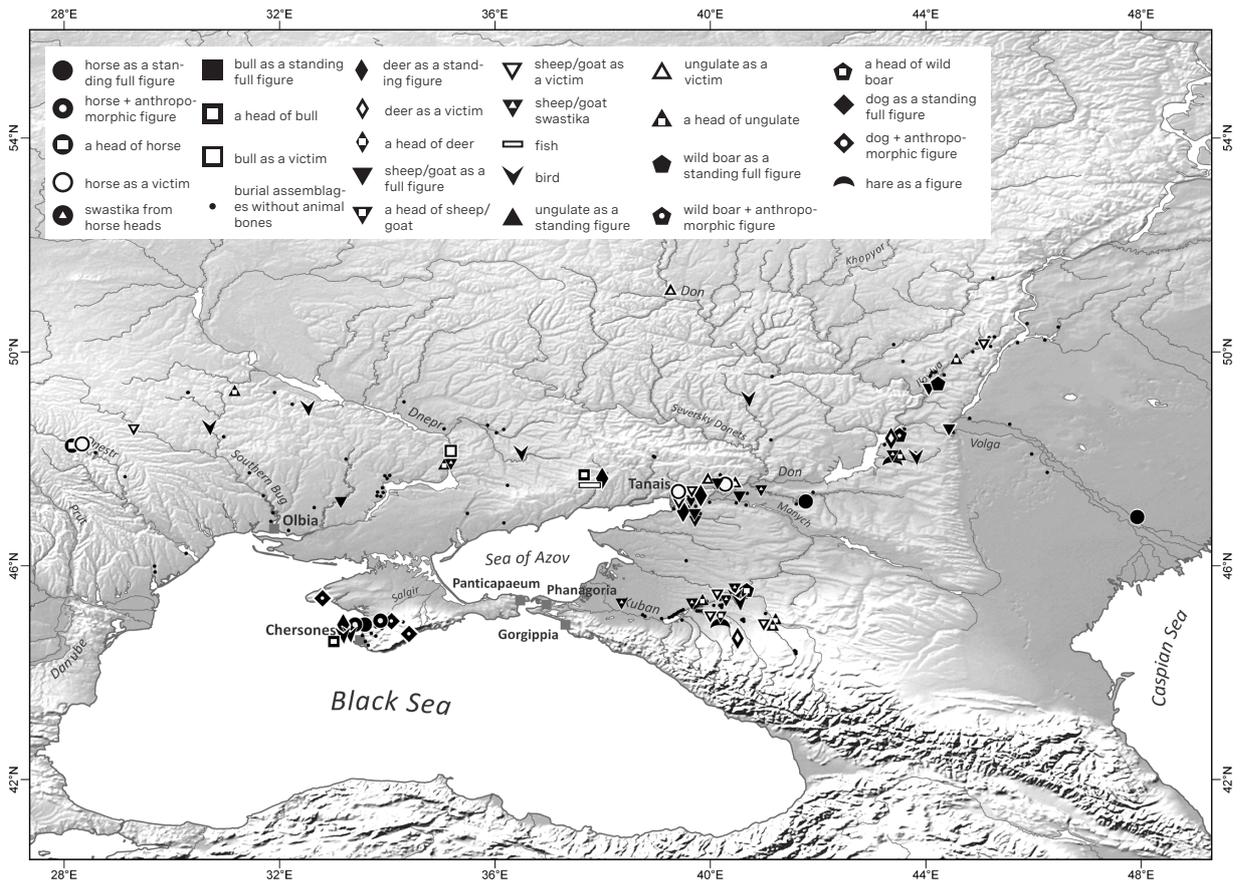


Fig. 8 Representations of »potential victims« from the elite burial contexts of the North Pontic region, 1st to mid-2nd century AD. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

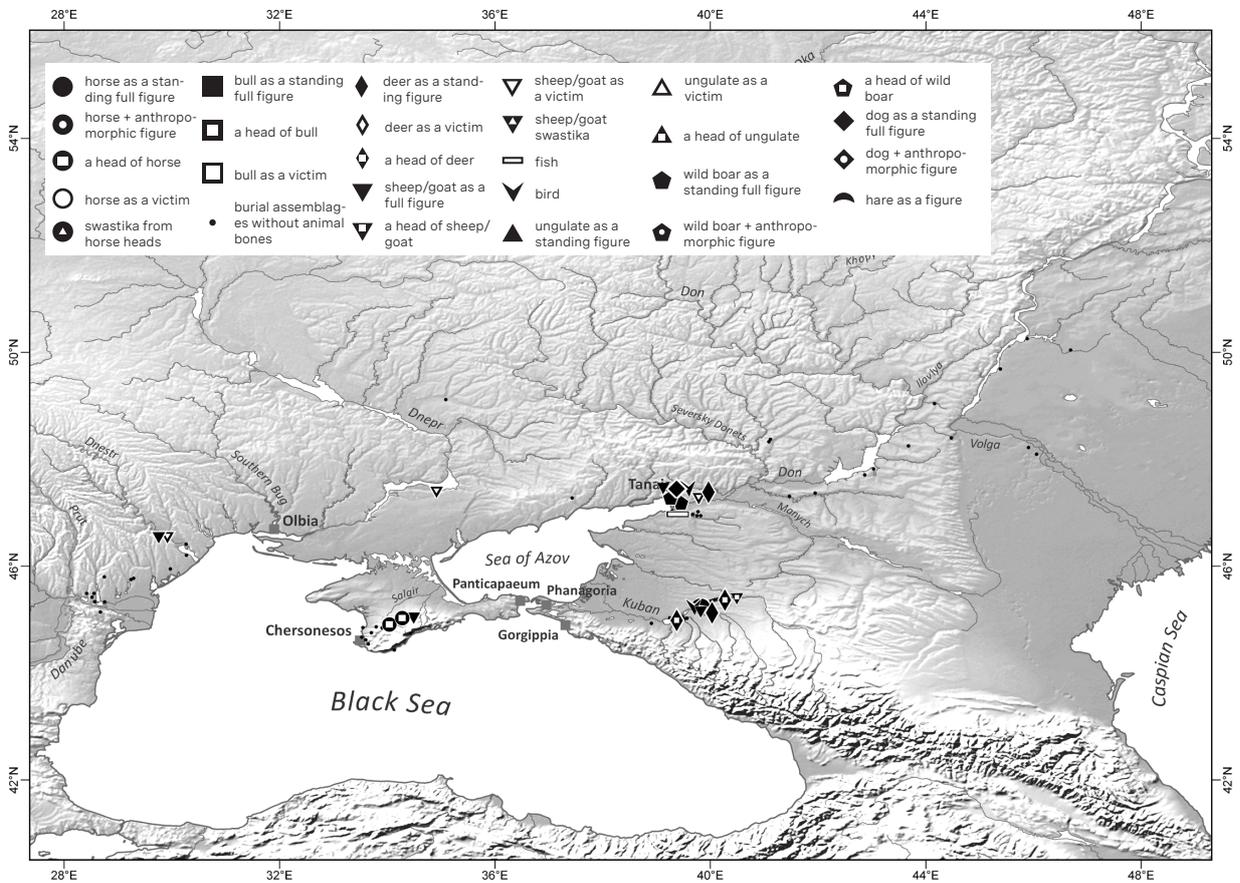


Fig. 9 Representations of »potential victims« from the elite burial contexts of the North Pontic region, mid-2nd to mid-3rd century AD. – (Map V. Mordvintseva).

(**fig. 10, 3**) is particularly complex in design and execution, combining symbols that are more characteristic of the settled rather than the nomadic cultural environment (e.g. the scene of making a ceramic vessel, or the Olbian symbol of a »bird pecking a fish«) (Mordvintseva 2013).

Fourth Period

Images of animals (**fig. 9**) were found in four elite complexes (18 %), on utilitarian objects (a bowl, a whetstone, red-slip vessels) and extra-utilitarian ones (a wooden figurine of an indeterminate animal overlaid with gold) (Simonenko 2008, 82 cat. 138). Seventy-five per cent of the characters show a »potential victim«; the handle of a wooden vessel is carved in the form of a predator. A whetstone with the incised image of a goat (Kurchatov/Bubulich 2003, fig. 4, 7) is apparently of local manufacture. Two imported red-slip vessels are ram-shaped (Simonenko 2008, cat. 138. 161). Such vessels are also known in the elite burials of other parts of the North Pontic region (see below), which indicates the selectivity in the choice of this particular vessel form and, accordingly, the special symbolic significance of the ram.

Crimea

First Period

Animal images (**fig. 6**) were found in ten elite burials (49 %), mostly on utilitarian items (mirrors; costume decorations: bracelets, earrings, pendants, belt details) and extra-utilitarian ones (altars, plaques). Fifty-seven per cent of the depicted characters are lions, fantastic monsters and snakes, 43 % are »potential victims« (horse, bull, dog, wild boar). In the Mausoleum in Neapolis Scythica, belt buckles in the form of highly stylized figurines were found, which are presumed to represent a dog (**fig. 11, 1**) and a horse (**fig. 11, 2**). The ceramic altar in the Mausoleum's main burial shows garlands and bucrania (Zaytsev 2004, fig. 121). The handle of a mirror from the Eastern necropolis is decorated with a bull's head (Zaytsev 2004, fig. 124, 4). A bronze plaque depicting a lying deer (Dashevskaya 2014, 15–16 tab. 14, 2) and a pendant in the form of a bull's head (Dashevskaya 2014, tab. 29, 7) were placed as amulets in children's burials in the Belyaus flat necropolis. In Chisten'koe Barrow (Zaytsev/Koltukhov 2004) horse cheek-plates depicting a human figure, masks and a wild boar, stylistically similar to those found in the Bubuech Hoard (see above), as well as a belt plate depicting a

»master of animals« – a man's figure surrounded by winged horses –, were found (**fig. 10, 2**). All items are locally made. They imitate images of Greek (altar) and Central European (belt details, mirror, harness decorations) origin (Mordvintseva 2020).

Second Period

Images of animals (**fig. 7**) were found in six elite burial complexes (20 %), including utilitarian (costume items: neck-rings, bracelets, earrings, brooches; vessels) and extra-utilitarian (finials; amulets) items. »Potential victims« make up 21 % of the images; most of the characters are predators (lions), fantastic animals, and snakes. Rams' heads adorn the bronze finial from Neapolis Scythica (Pogrebova 1961, 205), whereas a bird of prey is found on another one from Belyaus (Dashevskaya 2014, 24–25). Both finials are likely to be imports.

Third Period

Images of animals (**fig. 8**) were found in ten elite burial complexes (21 %), both on utilitarian (bracelets, ceramic lamp, brooches) and extra-utilitarian (painted on a wooden coffin; wooden ritual vessels; pendants and figurines) objects. »Potential victims« make up 62 %, the rest are represented by predators, snakes, and dolphins.

One image comes from the Crimean south coast: a brooch depicting Artemis at the altar accompanied by a dog (Mordvintseva et al. 2016). Most of the images were found in elite burials in the Ust'-Al'ma burial ground in southwest Crimea (Zaytsev 2000; Loboda et al. 2002; Zaytsev/Mordvintseva 2002; Puzdrovskij/Zajcev 2004; Puzdrovskiy 2007). The silver figurines of an eagle and a deer were originally bound together with a silver chain (**fig. 12, 3**). Wooden items are of particular interest because they could be made specifically for funerals. A large spouted wooden cauldron from catacomb 595 (containing a bridled horse »doll«, see above) was decorated with several animal figurines. Most of these were deliberately cut off before burial, except for the horse-shaped figure. Above this figurine, there was an amphora-shaped item, movably fixed in a groove. The horse's ears were also cut off (**fig. 12, 4**). Grave 700 yielded several wooden vessels: one is basin-shaped with four animal figurines and the other a cup with a bird of prey sitting on its edge (**fig. 12, 2**). A wooden coffin from catacomb 550 was painted with an image of a rider flanked by creatures apparently belonging to the Underworld, one of which is holding out an object (rhyton?) to the rider (**fig. 12, 1**).

In addition to the images found directly in the elite burials, funerary steles with images of a horseman in combination with a dog (fig. 11, 4-7) are known from necropoleis in the Crimean foothills (Neapolis Scythica, Belyaus, Bakhchisaray). They were made as replicas and derivatives of the Bosporean or Roman funerary monuments (fig. 11, 3) and have been broadly dated to the first centuries AD (Voloshinov 2004).

Fourth Period

Images of horse heads represented on horse forehead decorations (fig. 9) come from two elite burials (I2 %; Khrapunov 2007; Zaytsev/Mordvintseva 2007). A funerary relief depicting a rider (fig. 11, 6) apparently belongs to the beginning of the period; in the 19th century, it was interpreted as the image of a Scythian king, Palakus (late 2nd century BC; Voloshinov 2004; Zaytsev/Mordvintseva 2007). At the Neyzats necropolis, ritual pit 2 was discovered, filled with hand-formed pots, including ram-shaped ones (fig. 12, 5; Khrapunov 2013b, 350), which are obviously derivatives of red-slip vessels representing the same animal, but standing – not lying down. This find testifies to the special symbolic meaning of these animals.

Volga-Don Region

First Period

Images of animals were found in seven elite complexes (28 %) on utilitarian (harness decorations; a quiver hook; sew-on plaques; belt details) and extra-utilitarian (ritual plates) objects (fig. 6). »Potential victims« make up 33 % of the images, the rest of the characters are represented by predators and fantastic animals. Horses are depicted several times on the phalerae of the Fedulov Hoard in the western part of the region, in the form of a zoomorphic swastika and as secondary characters in the »rider« and »Helios in quadriga« motifs (Mordvinceva 2001, tab. 2, 3-4; 3, 6). A quiver hook from the Kachalinskaya Hoard has the shape of an ungulate being tormented by a predator (Sergatskov 2009). An ungulate (horse?) is depicted on a ritual plate from Piterka (Lyakhov/ Mordvintseva 2000). The phalerae could have been made in a Bosporean workshop (Mordvintseva 2001, 36-37). A local item, possibly made especially for the burial, is a wooden ritual plate with carved images and covered with gold foil. Such objects are known only in the highest elite burials of the Volga-Don region – one in the Kuban region (Mordvintseva/Khabarova

2006, 39-42), but, as a rule, fantastic animals and predators were depicted on them.

Second Period

Images of animals were found in fifteen elite burials (43 %) on utilitarian (phalerae; table vessels; a whetstone; costume items: plaques, buckles, neck-rings, bracelets, earrings) and extra-utilitarian (ritual plates) objects (fig. 7). Among the characters, the proportion of »potential victims« increased (63 %). The head of an ungulate is used as a motif on a buckle from Novyi (Il'yukov/Vlaskin 1992, 42-45 fig. 7 complex 22), and on a pectoral (ram) from Kosika (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A114). The bracelets from Kalinovka have ends that are shaped into lying ungulate figures (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A101). An ungulate (ram) is depicted on the phalerae from Zhutovo (Mordvinceva 2001, cat. 39), on the buckle (goat; see fig. 15, 2) and in the torment scene on the end of the bracelet (deer) from Vernepogromnoe (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A32) as well as in the torment scenes on the pectoral from Kosika (deer). A silver vessel from Kosika depicts fighting horsemen, and it has handles in shape of a wild boar (fig. 14, 1-2; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A114). Horsemen as single figures are represented on the silver phalerae from Krivaya Luka (Mordvinceva 2001, tab. 19 cat. 38). Sew-on plaques are made in the form of birds (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A3; Skvortsov/Skripkin 2008). In Mayerovskiy Barrow, the mirror's handle depicts an anthropomorphic figure between two horses (Skvortsov/Skripkin 2008). The forehead phalera from the Taganrog Hoard depicts a horse protome (Mordvinceva 2001, cat. 47).

The closest parallels to the image on the phalera from Taganrog are represented on the coins of Tyras (Karyshkovskiy/Kleyman 1985, fig. 21, 7-8). This item was probably made in the North Pontic region under the influence of Greek pictorial tradition (Mordvinceva 2001, 37). The silver vessel with boar-handles and a fighting scene from Kosika was apparently produced in Transcaucasia (Treister 1994). The mirror from Mayerovskiy probably originates from the Kuban local workshops that also made most of the jewellery items found in the grave. Other images are originals, replicas and derivatives of items of the Iranian cultural circle, to which the term »Animal Style« is usually applied (Mordvintseva 2003).

Third Period

Images of animals were found in 30 elite burials (43 %) on utilitarian (phalerae; a sword; tableware;

flasks; bronze cast cauldrons; costume items: diadems, bracelets, neck-rings, necklaces, belt details, sew-on plaques) and extra-utilitarian (ritual plates; amulet rings) items (fig. 8). Fifty-five per cent of the images represent a »potential victim«, the rest of the characters are mostly fantastic animals and predators.

There are images of a goat on sew-on plaques (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. B45. A109), cast cauldrons (handles; see Raev 1986; Sergatskov 2000, 77–80; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A81; Bospaly/Luk'yashko 2008, 61–63), phalerae (fig. 15, 3, 5; Mordvinceva 2001, cat. 93; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A106), a bracelet (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A280), and a ritual plate (Sergatskov 2000, 24–26). Ungulates with antlers (deer? elk?) are represented by a goblet handle, on plaques and a diadem, as well as on a pyxis and a flask-pendant (being tormented by fantastic predators, see fig. 15, 6) from the Khokhlach Barrow (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. B45), on a bracelet from the Dachi Barrow (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A67), and a belt plate from Mekhzavod (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A128). The heads of unidentified ungulates adorn the ends of a neck-ring (fig. 15, 8) and bracelets (Berkhin 1959, 37–41; Mordvintseva 2003, cat. 82 fig. 34; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A160). The handle of a goblet from Krivolimanskiy (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A116) is made in the form of a horse figurine. A red-slip vessel in the shape of a ram was found in Kobryakovo barrow 10 (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A109). The handles of cast bronze cauldrons are in the shape of a wild boar (Sergatskov 2000, 67–71) and a horse (Dvornichenko et al. 2002). The vessel from Verbovskiy is similar to that found in the Kosika burial of the previous period; it depicts scenes of the hunting of a wild boar and the tormenting of a deer (fig. 14, 3–4) (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A31). Figurines of birds and a hare adorn precious goblets (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A72. A163).

Bronze cast cauldrons, which were probably associated with sacrifices, have been decorated with zoomorphic handles only in the given chronological period, and vessels of this type, as a rule, also have a drain spout, which may indicate complex manipulations that were performed using them. The rest of the items belong to the range of »Animal Style« products, both imported and made in the northern Black Sea region (see Mordvintseva 2003).

Fourth Period

Images of animals were found in four elite burials (14 %) on utilitarian (wooden vessels; harness ornaments; cast bronze cauldrons) and extra-utilitarian

(amulets) objects (fig. 9). Images of a »potential victim« make up 82 %; in isolated cases, a fantastic animal and a predator are represented. Figures of dogs, birds, and a ram are set on the rings/amulets from Valovyi (Bezuglov et al. 2009, 24–45). The handles of cauldrons and wooden vessels are shaped in the forms of a wild boar and a horse (Bezuglov et al. 2009, 24–45. 48–63). The harness ornaments in the form of fish and elk figurines are made locally, specifically for funerals (Bezuglov et al. 2009, 48–63; Volkov/Guguev 1986, 73–74). An imported red-slip ram-shaped vessel was found in a barrow in Rostov-on-Don (Volkov/Guguev 1986, 73–74).

Kuban Region

First Period

Animal images were found in 20 elite burials (38 %) on utilitarian (phalerae; a rhyton; costume items: earrings, neck-rings, bracelets) and extra-utilitarian (ritual plate, quasi-candelabra) objects (fig. 6). Sixty-four per cent of the images are »potential victims«. Goat-shaped earrings (fig. 13, 1–2) present a series of similar images from at least twelve female flat graves by the middle Kuban and on the Kuban's left bank (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. II2–II3. 201. 215–217. 450. 495. 497; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A373. A375. A377; Beglova/Erlikh 2018, 81–84. III–II2). The heads of ungulates (deer) are represented on the ends of neck-rings (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 49–50; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A103). Full figures of a deer adorn a quasi-candelabrum from Mezmay (fig. 13, 7; Mordvintseva et al. 2012). Some harness decorations feature double horse heads and the »Helios in quadriga« motif (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 362–391).

All these items come from local workshops. Ritual iron rods ending in deer heads or full figures of deer and, as a rule, with a tripod (quasi-candelabra), were apparently made especially for funerals. Such objects have not yet been found in settlements. It is difficult to judge whether these objects reflected the idea of light in the burial, but they were definitely associated with the high social status of the deceased.

Second Period

Animal images were found in 19 elite funerary complexes (35 %) on utilitarian (phalerae; a sword; a rhyton; a bronze cast cauldron; a spoon; costume details: a diadem, buckles, brooches, earrings, neck-rings, bracelets) and extra-utilitarian (quasi-candelabra; a silver phiale; animal figurines; eye-covers) items

(fig. 7). »Potential victims« are depicted in 59 % of the cases, the rest of the characters are predators and monsters.

The image of a goat is depicted on earrings (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 75–78; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A378) and phalerae (fig. 13, 4; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A39), and a ram is depicted on brooches (fig. 13, 3; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 115; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A24). A series of deer images are presented on quasi-candelabra, a phiale and eye-covers (Chernopitskiy 1985; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. B14; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 205–212. 331–347. 405–420. 465–479). A figurine of a deer as an amulet was found in a female barrow burial near Kalininskaya (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 148–149). The ends of neck-rings and bracelets are shaped into the form of a deer or ungulate head (fig. 13, 5; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 105–108. 148–149. 358–361. 600–604). A bull is depicted together with an eagle-griffin on the plaques of the sword-scabbard from the Zubov Barrow (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. B14) and is represented in the shape of the handles on the cauldron from Peschanyi (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 405–420). All items are made in local workshops. The quasi-candelabra and gold ritual eye-covers (round plates with the image of a lying deer for placing on the eyes) were intended especially for funerary purposes. The cauldron from Peschanyi was probably used in the sacrificial ritual.

Third Period

Images of animals were found in 16 elite burial complexes (24 %) on utilitarian (tableware; phalerae; costume elements: neck-rings, bracelets, brooches, belt details) and extra-utilitarian (finials; amulet-rings, eye-covers; quasi-candelabra) items (fig. 8). Images of a »potential victim« account for 67 %, the rest of the characters are predators and fantastic monsters.

The heads of horses and ungulates adorn a series of neck-rings and bracelets (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A4–A5. A120. A306). The eye-covers from Yaroslavskaya depict a lying deer (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A166). A frequent motif is the image of a swastika-shaped goat (belt plaques, phalerae, a belt plate; fig. 13, 6; Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A275. A278. A306; Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 59–63). The goat is also depicted on brooches in torment scenes and on amulet-rings (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A323. A372). A ceramic vessel (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 60–61 cat. 290–309) and the handles of silver bowls (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A97) are bird-shaped. A red-slip vessel (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 55 cat. 222–227) and a brooch (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A4) depict

a ram. A boar's head crowns a finial (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A276). A brooch from Khatazhukaevskiy depicts a hare (Mordvinceva/Treister 2007, cat. A323). The red-slip vessels are imports. Other items originated, apparently, from local workshops. Eye-covers, quasi-candelabra and, possibly, amulet-rings were made especially for the funerals.

Fourth Period

Images of animals were found in four elite complexes (17 %) on utilitarian (belt details, plaques) and extra-utilitarian (quasi-candelabra) media (fig. 9). All characters belong to the »potential victim« group: overlays in the form of rams' heads (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 45–46) and birds (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 68 cat. 427–439), finials of quasi-candelabra shaped into the heads of goats or deer (Mordvintseva et al. 2010, cat. 270–272. 528–531), gold-plated bronze plaques in the form of a goat, a deer, and a hare (Gushchina/Zasetskaya 1994, 72–73 cat. 480–499). All of them were apparently made by local craftsmen for the burials.

Discussion

Most of the »potential victims«, with the exception of domestic pig and tortoise, are represented in the form of full figures or their heads. The heads of animals (deer, wild boar, horse, bull, goat, ram, as well as ungulates of an indeterminate type) were, as a rule, decorative elements of jewellery – pendants, neck-rings, bracelets. Only in isolated cases were images placed on other media (for example, a horse's protome on the phalera from Taganrog).

Full animal figures were depicted as separate motifs and in interaction with other characters on a variety of media – clothing decorations, tableware, weapons, horse harnesses and extra-utilitarian objects. Horse, dog, goat, deer, boar, and bird can be shown as separate figures. All ungulates are represented either standing or lying down with their legs tucked under their bodies (a victim's pose). The ungulate is shown in the same pose when predatory and fantastic animals torment it. In this connection, it is interesting to note that horses were also buried with their legs tucked under their stomachs. The swastika-shaped curled up hoofed animal (ram or goat) obviously represents a special emblem, possibly connected with the idea of sacrifice.

»Potential victims« are also shown in interaction with other animals (»confrontation« and »torment«) and with anthropomorphic characters. In a »confrontation« scene, a predator or a fantastic an-

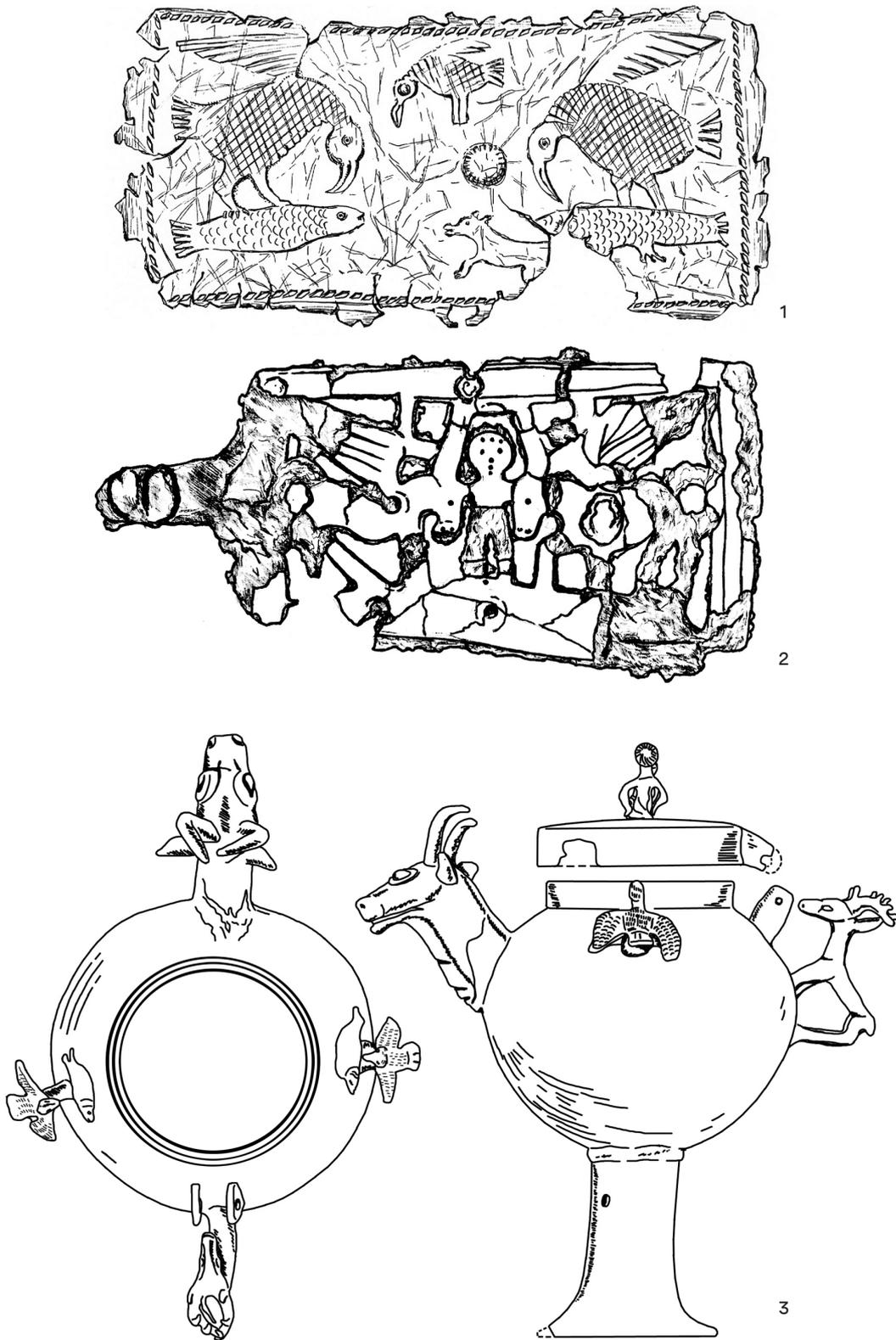


Fig. 10 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. 1 Veselaya Dolina. – 2 Chisten'koe. – 3 Kal'mius. – (1 after Mordvinceva/Redina 2013; 2 after Zaytsev/Koltukhov 1997; 3 after Mordvinceva 2013).

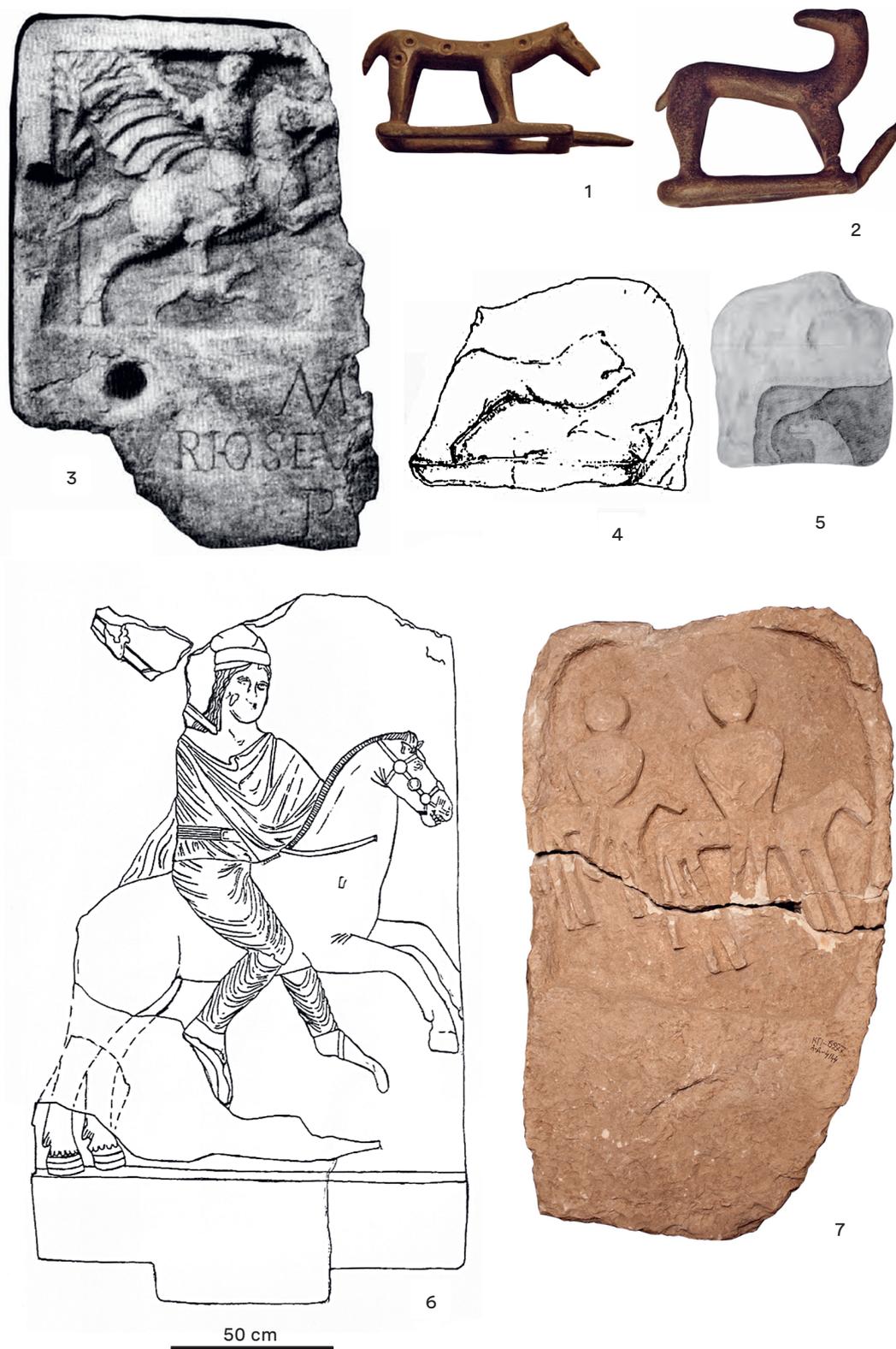


Fig. 11 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. **1-2, 5-6** Neapolis Scythian. – **3** Charax. – **4** Belyaus. – **7** Ramazan-Sala. – (1-2, 7 photos V. Mordvintseva; 3-4 after Dashevskaya 2014; 5 after Zaytsev 2004; 6 after Tunkina 2002).



Fig. 12 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. **1-4** Ust'Al'ma necropolis. – **5** Neysats necropolis. – (Photos V. Mordvintseva).



Fig. 13 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. 1 Elizavetinskaya. – 2 Lenina. – 3 Starokorsunskaya. – 4 Vozdvizhenskaya. – 5 Elitnyi. – 6 Vodnyi. – 7 Mezmay. – (1–6 photos V. Mordvintseva; 7 after Mordvintseva et al. 2012).

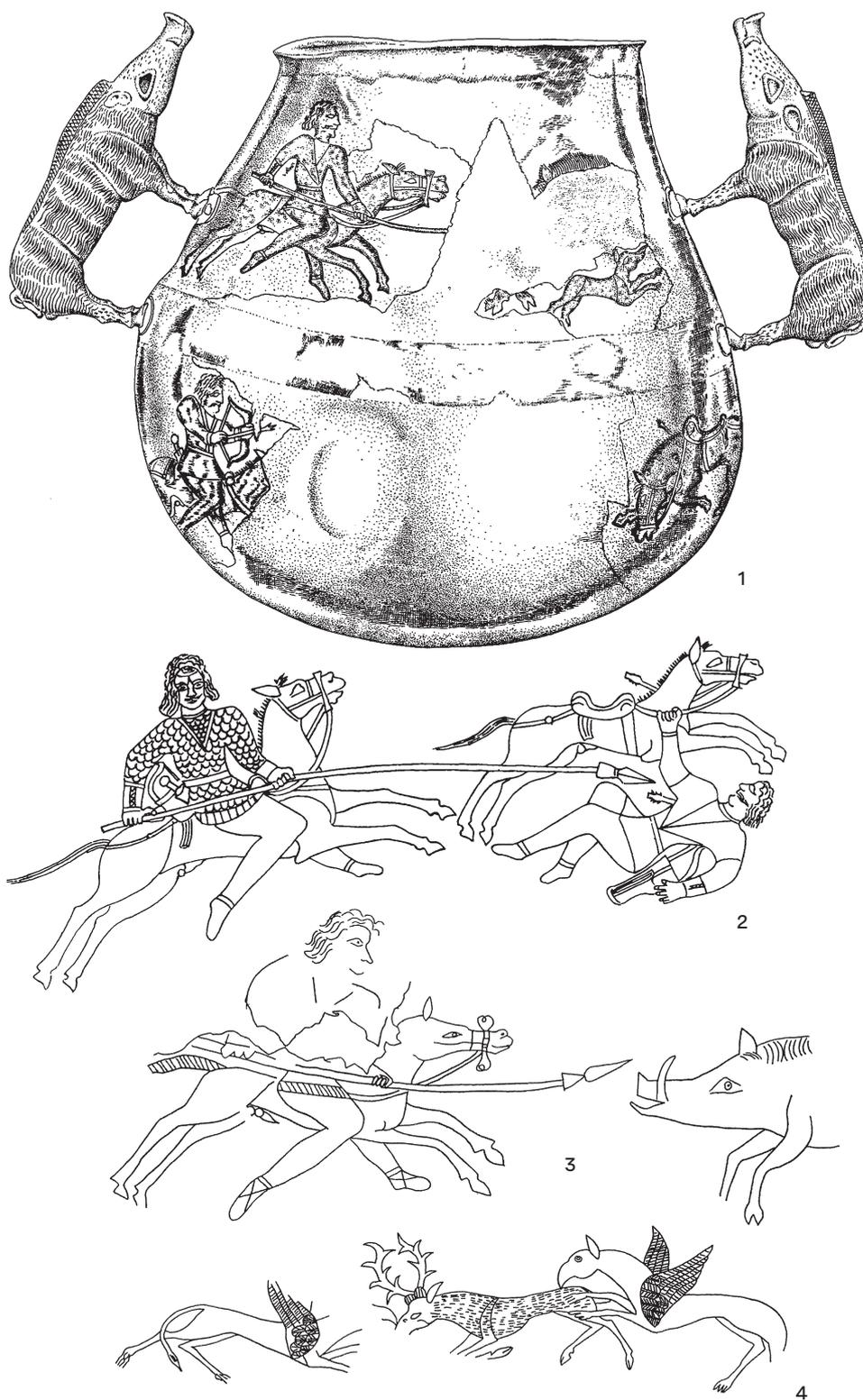


Fig. 14 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. 1 Kosika. – 2-4 Verbovskiy. – (After Mordvinceva/Treister 2007).

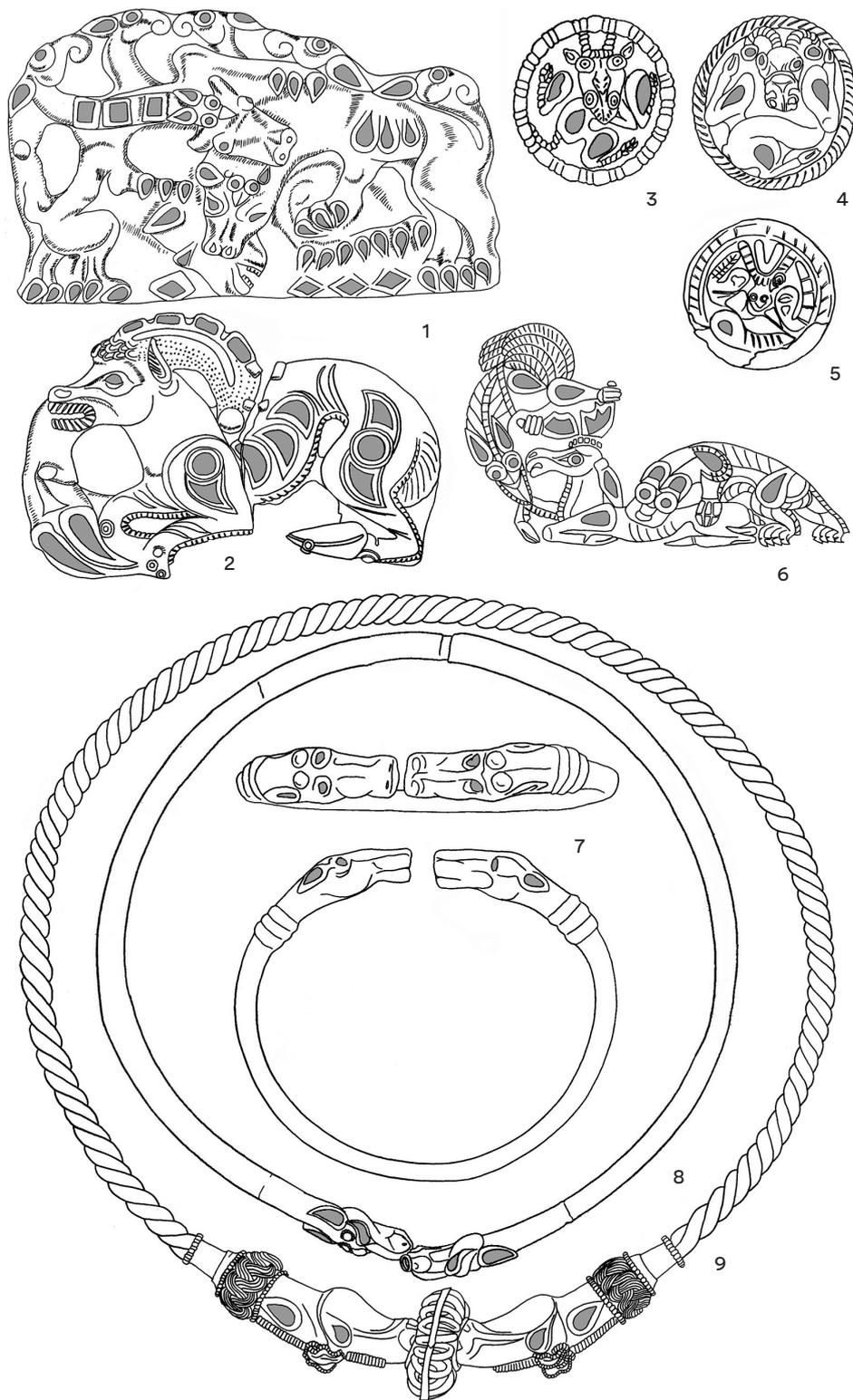


Fig. 15 Animal representations from the elite burial assemblages of the North Pontic region. **1. 4. 7** Zaporozhskiy Barrow. - **2** Verkhnee Pogromnoe. - **3** Kirsanovskiy. - **5** Oktyabr'skiy. - **6** Khokhlach Barrow. - **8** Titchikha. - **9** Porogi. - (After Mordvintseva 2003).

imal is depicted facing the »potential victim«. In a »torment« scene, fantastic monsters and predators attack a hoofed animal lying in the pose of a victim.

Only three zoomorphic characters appear in combination with anthropomorphic figures: a horse (rider, hunting scene, scene of a battle of horsemen, »master of animals«, »Helios in quadriga«), a dog (companion of the rider, companion of Artemis), and a boar (hunting scene).

The mapping of various motifs (figs 6-9) allows us to trace the following developments:

In the first period (fig. 6), two major areas can be distinguished, »eastern« and »western«, which differ in their types of image. The »ungulate in the victim's pose« marks the Kuban region and the northern part of the Volga region. In the territory west of the Don, the »victim« motif is practically absent, with the exception of the Belyaus necropolis in north-western Crimea, where a plaque of Scythian animal style as an amulet was discovered. The motifs of a bull's head and bucrania are recorded only in the Crimea. Animal images in combination with anthropomorphic characters are noted in the sedentary cultures of the Lower Dnieper, Crimea, Lower Don, and the Kuban's left bank.

In the second period (fig. 7), the »ungulate in the victim pose« is found, in general, in the same territories: east of the Don and the Kuban region. Three subareas can be distinguished in the »eastern« area: the Kuban region, the Don-Volga interfluve, and the Lower and Middle Volga. In the Kuban region, ritual objects (quasi-candelabra decorated with deer heads) are widely represented in elite burials. In the Lower and Middle Volga, in the territories presumably occupied by nomads, objects with animal images combined with anthropomorphic characters (»master of animals«, »rider«, »horsemen fighting«) appear. In the »western« area, images of the »ungulate in a victim's pose« are absent.

In the third period (fig. 8), the boundaries of the »western area« seem to be breached. We observe the distribution of »ungulates in a victim's pose« and neck-rings/bracelet ends in the form of ungulate heads throughout the northern Black Sea region, except the Crimea. The Crimean foothills are also distinguished by the presence of images of horses and dogs in combination with anthropomorphic characters (»rider« motif). The specific motif of a swastika-like curled-up goat marks the area of the Kuban region (»Golden Cemetery«) and the Lower Don up to the bend of the Dnieper.

In the fourth period (fig. 9), images of the »ungulate in a victim's pose« are represented exclusively by imported red-slip vessels in the form of a ram in the area from the Dniester to the mouth of the Don.

The hand-formed vessels from the Neyzats necropolis in the Crimea (fig. 12, 5), which imitated the imported ones, represent, however, standing (!) and not lying animals (so, not in a victim's pose).

Thus, we can conclude that the types of images of the »potential victim« mark, in a way, the cultural-political affiliation of the elites due to their high symbolism. In the regions where the elite burials contain images of animals in combination with anthropomorphic characters there are, as a rule, no images of the »ungulate in victim pose«. The population of these regions was sedentary and practiced agriculture as at least one of the main types of economy. In the culture of this population, a significant influence of Greek urban centres can be traced. This is especially evident in the example of the Crimea. Images of a rider or a deity surrounded by horses are obviously derivatives of motifs widely represented in the pictorial repertoire of the Greek cities of the northern Black Sea region, especially the Bosporan kingdom. Behind such images there was, apparently, a certain narrative, in particular the idea of a horse as a vehicle through which the soul of the dead enters the underworld (Propp 1986, 171-173).

In territories where the distribution of images of the »ungulate in victim pose« (usually a goat or a ram) and scenes of torment were noted, either nomadic livestock breeding was practiced, or this was one of the main types of economy (Volga-Don and Kuban steppes). It is highly probable that the sedentary population along the Kuban and on the Kuban's left bank shared the ideology of the steppe nomads because they had already been accustomed to it in earlier (Scythian) times. The images of the »ungulate in victim pose« were obviously also associated with a certain narrative. The appearance of such images to the west of the Don in the 1st century AD is evidence of either the movement of the population in this direction, or the spread of the corresponding ideology. The core territory directly controlled by the elites transmitting these signs and symbols may be marked by the spread of the »swastika-shaped goat« emblem, placed exclusively on some insignia (ceremonial belts, harness decorations). The disappearance of self-produced objects with images of the »ungulate in victim pose« in the fourth chronological period probably indicates the spread of a different ideology in the North Pontic region.

When compared with the results obtained from studying the remains of sacrificial animals, it can be stated that the distribution of economic-cultural and ideological patterns sometimes coincide. Thus, the barbarian population of the Crimean foothills, economically, culturally and ideologically, was extremely close to those of Chersonesos and the Bos-

poran kingdom, and always reacted to the changes taking place there. For at least three chronological periods, the population of the Volga-Don interfluvium combined a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle with a certain ideology, including narratives represented by images of »ungulates in victim pose«. The appearance of signs of a nomadic economic and cultural type in the Lower Dnieper region in the third chronological period coincides with the distribution

of the corresponding images. In contrast, the settled population of the Kuban region was already familiar with narratives that were apparently formed in a nomadic (and hunting?) environment. To obtain more elaborate characteristics of the ideologies in the North Pontic region, it is necessary to study the entire set of images, including those not containing animals.

Conclusions

A comparative analysis of the remains of sacrificial animals and images of the »potential victim« in the elite burial complexes in the territory of »Sarmatia« has made it possible to identify regions with different patterns in the cult sphere, which could have been formed under the influence of certain economic, cultural, and ideological factors.

When studying the sacrificial remains in elite burial assemblages, several patterns were identified. The absence of horse bones in the presence of horse harnesses can be noticed for the Lower Dnieper and western part of the Volga-Don region in the first and second periods. The combination »sheep leg + knife« was typical for the barrow burials in the steppe part of the Volga-Don interfluvium in all periods and on the Kuban's right bank in the first and second periods, as well as for the Kuban region flat burials in the second and third periods and northwestern Crimea in the first period. The combination »horse/cattle bones + bronze cast cauldron« are characteristic for the uppermost elites of the Volga-Don region from the first to the third chronological period. The combination »cattle leg + plate« spread in the Crimean foothills from the second to fourth periods and in the Kuban region in the first and second periods. Burials of a »full animal«, »partial animal« or »stuffed animal« (horse, cattle, dog) took place in the Crimean foothills in all periods, the Kuban region in the first, second and fourth periods, the Dnieper's bend in the third period and the Don delta in the fourth period. The choice of the victim was largely determined by the ecological and cultural environment, and the observed patterns mark the cultural and economic affiliation of the population.

Among images of the »potential victim«, two meaningful patterns were identified: the »ungulate in victim pose« (by itself or in a torment scene) and the image of an animal (horse, dog, wild boar) in combination with anthropomorphic characters (»rider«, »horsemen fighting«, »master of animals«, »Helios in quadriga«). For the first and second periods, two large distribution areas of these patterns are distinguished: »western« – with subareas: 1) the Crimea, and 2) the Lower Dnieper and the western part of the Volga-Don region), and »eastern« – with subareas: 1) the eastern part of the Volga-Don region and the Kuban's right bank, and 2) the Kuban's left bank). In the third period, the »eastern« area expands westwards. In the fourth period, the »eastern« pattern practically disappears.

Thus, the population of »Sarmatia« was not ideologically unified; it consisted of several elite groups that can be preliminarily identified as representatives of »nomadic« and »agricultural« ideologies. The »nomadic« component intensified in the 1st century AD, possibly as a result of changes in the foreign policy balance, and the emergence of new nomadic associations in the western part of the Eurasian steppe, which maintained close contacts with the Parthian rulers (Mordvintseva 2023, 69–70). The settled population of »Sarmatia« was in contact with and influenced by the urban centres of Greek and later Roman civilizations. This influence in the second half of the 2nd century AD turned out to be decisive, perhaps because of the successful conquests of the Bosporean rulers, especially Sauromates II (Anokhin 1999, 153–155).

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