

The Royal Grave from the Time of Mithridates Eupator in the Crimea

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The paper is devoted to the richest and most remarkable grave from Sarmatian times in the Crimea. The grave was discovered under the direction of the Soviet archaeologist Askold Ščepinskij in May 1974. The barrow was named Nogajčik, after the area near the excavation site (Fig. 1).

The complex has never previously been completely published. Jewellery and limited information about the burial rite were published by A. Simonenko in 1993.¹ Simonenko was not in possession of all the information about the barrow but he suggested dating it from the end of the 1st to the beginning of the 2nd century AD.²

Another publication of the complex was prepared by A. Ščepinskij and appeared in *Zeitschrift für Archäologie* in 1994.³ The grave was presented in the context of the Sarmatian antiquities and dated to the end of the 2nd century BC – 1st century AD.⁴ The publication included some features of the burial rite and some sketches of items not mentioned in the review made by Simonenko. It happened, however, that the article was insufficiently known in Russia and Ukraine, so the different date proposed by Ščepinskij was never discussed by other archaeologists.

Jewellery from the barrow was also treated in a special article by Michael Treister.⁵ He attributed these ornaments to the Late Hellenistic period and was puzzled by the large gap between their date and the accepted date of the grave itself.

Being involved in working with documentation left by A. Ščepinsky, Ju. Zajcev and I have prepared a full publication of this monument.⁶ The subject of the present paper is the chronology of the Nogajčik burial.

The burial rite of the grave is as follows. The inhumation utilised a wooden sarcophagus painted with white, blue and lilac colours. The sarcophagus was lined with a carpet or with a similar fabric mainly of a red colour. The bottom of the sarcophagus, particularly its central part was filled with pieces of incense. The top of the sarcophagus was covered by fabric embroidered with gold appliqué of various types.

The body in the sarcophagus was that of a woman aged between 35 and 40, 1.70 m in height. Her head was covered with pieces of gold appliqué, possibly a head-dress. A pair of ear-rings lay nearby (Fig. 2.3). A torque (Fig. 2.1) was placed around the neck. The ends of the torque, which bear images of



Fig. 1. Situation of the Nogajčik barrow.

animals, were at the back. Another necklace (Fig. 2.4) and a brooch-pin (Fig. 2.5) were placed on top of it. The chest of the deceased was ornamented with beads of stone, glass and gold. Two dresses of the dead woman were made of silk of mixed quality.

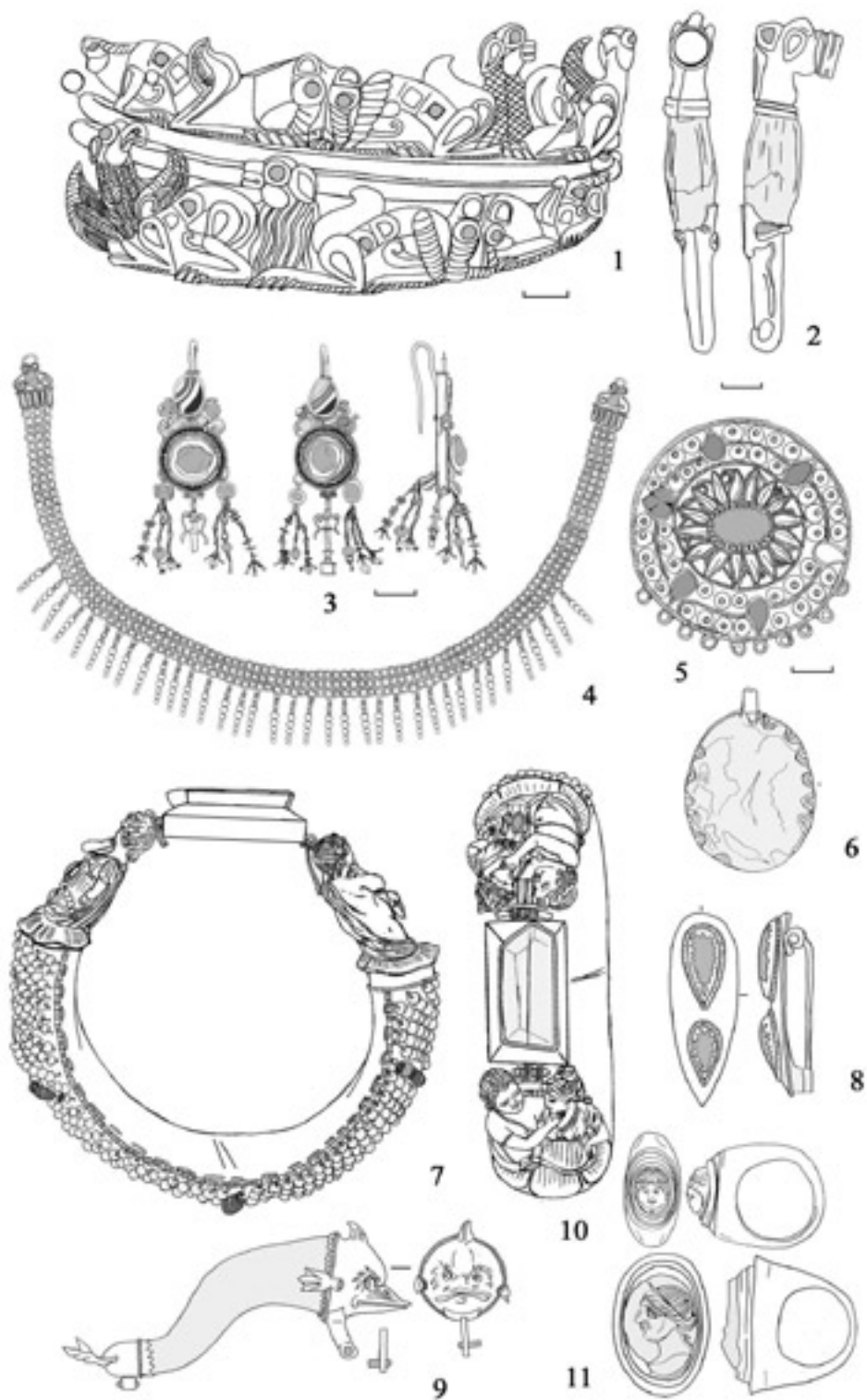
Both hands of the dead woman, ornamented with massive armlets (Fig. 2.7) were inserted into silver cups. The feet were ornamented with bracelets of gold wire and tiny beads of black glass and jet.

All other items were found to the right of the body. These are: a red-slip unguentarium (Fig. 3.2), a black-polished jug, a mirror-like object in a vessel of bone, and a silver gilded vessel (Fig. 3.3). A substantial number of items, mainly of gold, were found in the south-west corner of the sarcophagus placed inside a leather receptacle ornamented with bronze appliques.

The burial goods could be divided into several groups.

Fig. 2. Jewellery from grave 18: 1) torque; 2) amulet-bead; 3) earring; 4) necklace; 5) brooch-pin; 6) pendant; 7) armlet; 8) brooch; 9) dolphin-brooch; 10-11) finger-rings.

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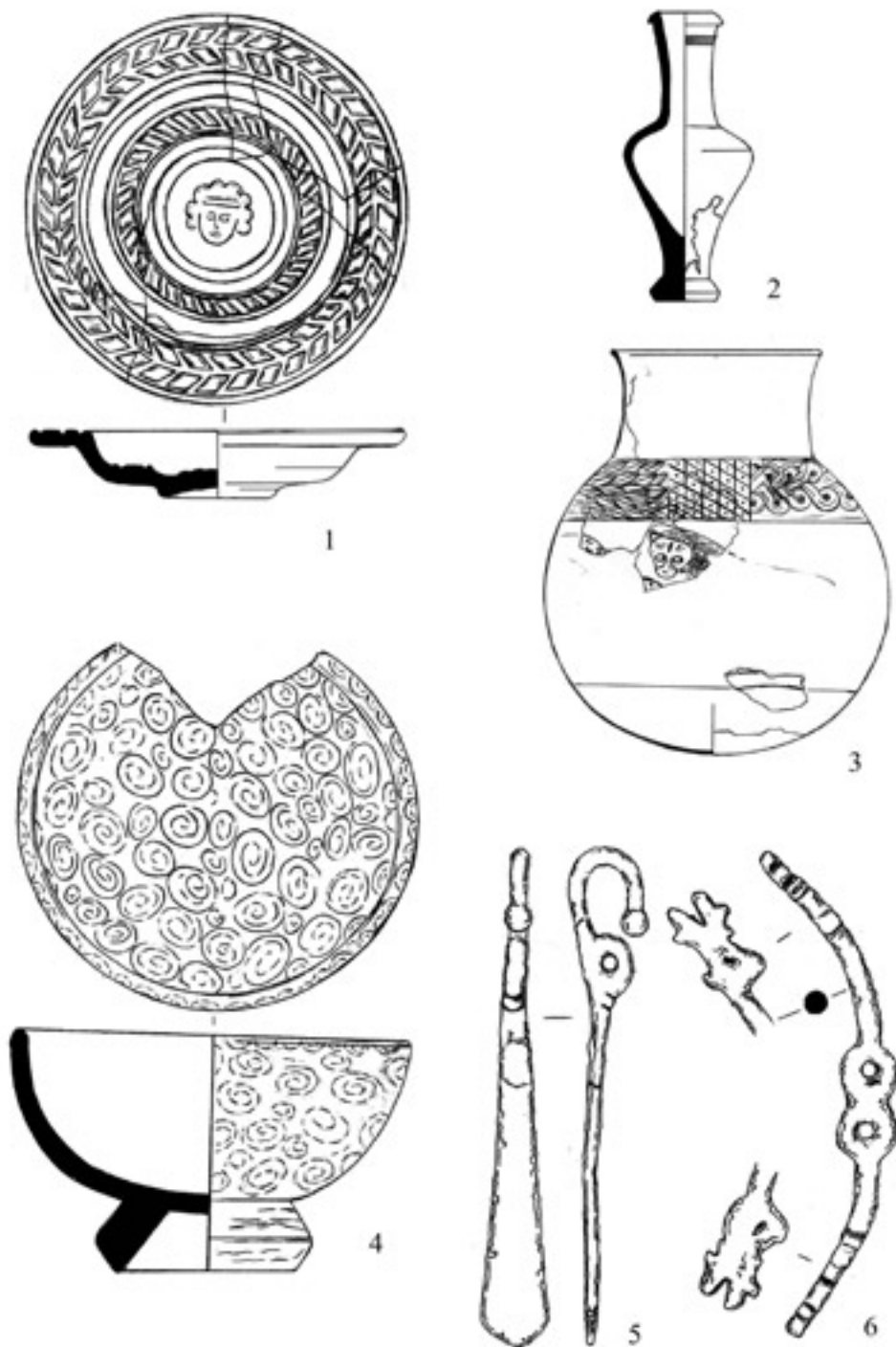


Fig. 3. Imported vessels and objects of horse harness: 1) plate of faience; 2) unguentarium; 3) silver cup; 4) millefiori cup; 5-6) objects of horse harness.

JEWELLERY (Fig. 2)

Bracelets (Fig. 2.7). These items decorated with images of Eros and Psyche could with justice be called the most impressive *objets d'art* found in the Barbarian Crimea. M. Treister has examined such aspects of the bracelets as: subject matter, application of sculpture figures, use of pearl-beads, and hinge construction.⁷ However, some special important details of bracelets were never mentioned.

Figures of Eros and Psyche emerge from the open flower with four petals. The same type of rosettes decorates the handles of a silver cup from the same grave. This rare motif is characteristic of Late Hellenistic objects.⁸

Another expressive element of the bracelets is the use of small beads of agate and their imitation of black glass with crossed white bands mixed with green round beads and small rings of gold ornamented with granulation.⁹ The use of such beads and rings is characteristic of the 2nd-1st cent. BC.

Earrings (Fig. 2.3). The earrings are of the well-known type of Hellenistic ornaments with central disk and pendants.¹⁰ Under the upper inlay there is an important detail – a gold U-shaped band with tiny granulation, which is known as an “Isis-crown”. Such a detail appears on articles of the 2nd century BC.¹¹ Small rosettes made by granulation and amphora-pendants with central beads are also quite distinctive.¹²

Special attention should also be paid to the small granulated rings made with green beads and agate inlays. Such characteristics prompt the suggestion that the earrings and bracelets were made as one set.

Finger-rings. Both finger-rings (Fig. 2.10-11) are of Hellenistic type in shape. Their frames can be dated to 3rd-2nd centuries BC.¹³ One has gold inlay with the image of a female deity (Aphrodite, Demeter?) executed in relief (Fig. 2.10).

Another (Fig. 2.11) is inlaid with an intaglio cut in glass of reddish-brown colour, which was formerly thought to be cornelian.¹⁴ Simonenko has mentioned that this intaglio “of Roman time” was set in an early frame.¹⁵ This suggestion is unorthodox. Usually gems were valued and passed from generation to generation and only framed at a later date. The reverse situation is still unknown.

Gems can be dated by their subject, style, technique of cutting, shape and material of inlay. The Nogajčik intaglio bears the representation of a woman's head wearing a crown. Her hair-dress is shown with parallel locks combed back into a chignon. These features are characteristic of portraits of Arsinoe III.¹⁶ Finger-rings with her image were very popular in northern Black Sea region. In necropoleis of Greek cities more than 10 examples have been found.¹⁷ All them are dated from c. 200 BC to the first decades of the 2nd century BC. The bronze example with an image of this queen comes from the barbarian catacomb of the 2nd century BC in South-West Crimea (this material has not yet been published).

Since we discovered that the intaglio is not made from a “genuine” stone as was formerly believed, the discussion of its provenance and date should be reopened. Judging by its shape the inlay should be dated to the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. But according to D. Plantzos, stylistic features argue that the intaglio was made in the so-called “Coarse Style”.¹⁸ In Plantzos’ view such objects were copied by casting from proper representations, the work then being completed with a cutting tool until the illusion of a cut stone was created. Therefore such representations look coarser than proper ones. These features are visible on the Nogajčik intaglio, which should therefore be dated after the gems made in the “Coarse Style” to the 2nd century BC. Consequently the intaglio and the frame of the finger-ring are synchronous.

Necklace (Fig. 2.4). This item was mistakenly treated by Simonenko as a diadem.¹⁹ This example belongs to the well-known type of Hellenistic jewellery with a simple chain and elaborated ends. Exact parallels can be found among objects from the necropolis of Taranto and some other localities of the 3rd – early 2nd century BC.²⁰

Brooch-pin (Fig. 2.5). This type of ornament was particularly popular in the North Caucasus (Kuban’) region in Late Hellenistic times. There is a wide range of articles made in the same style and technique.²¹ The distinctive features of the style are: S-shaped pieces of wire with a granule at the curl, tiny cones with granulation, ornamental rows composed of plain and curled wire.

Pendant with scaraboid (Fig. 2.6). The inlay is made of a local variety of chalcedony. The peculiarities of the frame could be indicative of the date for this item. These are: the combination of plain and curled wire, the zig-zag edge, and an absence of layout. Similar objects are dated to the second half of the 2nd century BC.²²

Flagon-pendants. Tiny flagon-pendants (Fig. 4.1) were popular elements of Greek necklaces from the 6th century BC and onwards. Most of them are original in style. The small pendant from the Nogajčik barrow has more or less close analogies in jewellery of the 2nd century BC from Pelinnaion²³ and Genoa.²⁴

Another flagon-pendant (Fig. 4.2) belongs to a special type with a cylindrical lid and two loops on both sides. K. Skalon identified five groups of such articles and dated them from the 1st to the 7th centuries AD.²⁵ For such typology she notes the tendency to make their proportions longer. According to this observation the pendant from Nogajčik is the most “stocky” and consequently the earliest in the series of such items. Its ornamentation, particularly the band of trefoils inlaid with blue, light-blue and green glass has direct analogies in ornaments of the 2nd century BC.²⁶

Pyxis (Fig. 4.3). This perfume-vessel is stylistically close to the articles of so-called Pontic Graphical Style of Late Hellenistic times.²⁷ A distinctive rosette on the bottom, which was not ever mentioned in publications, also provides this date.

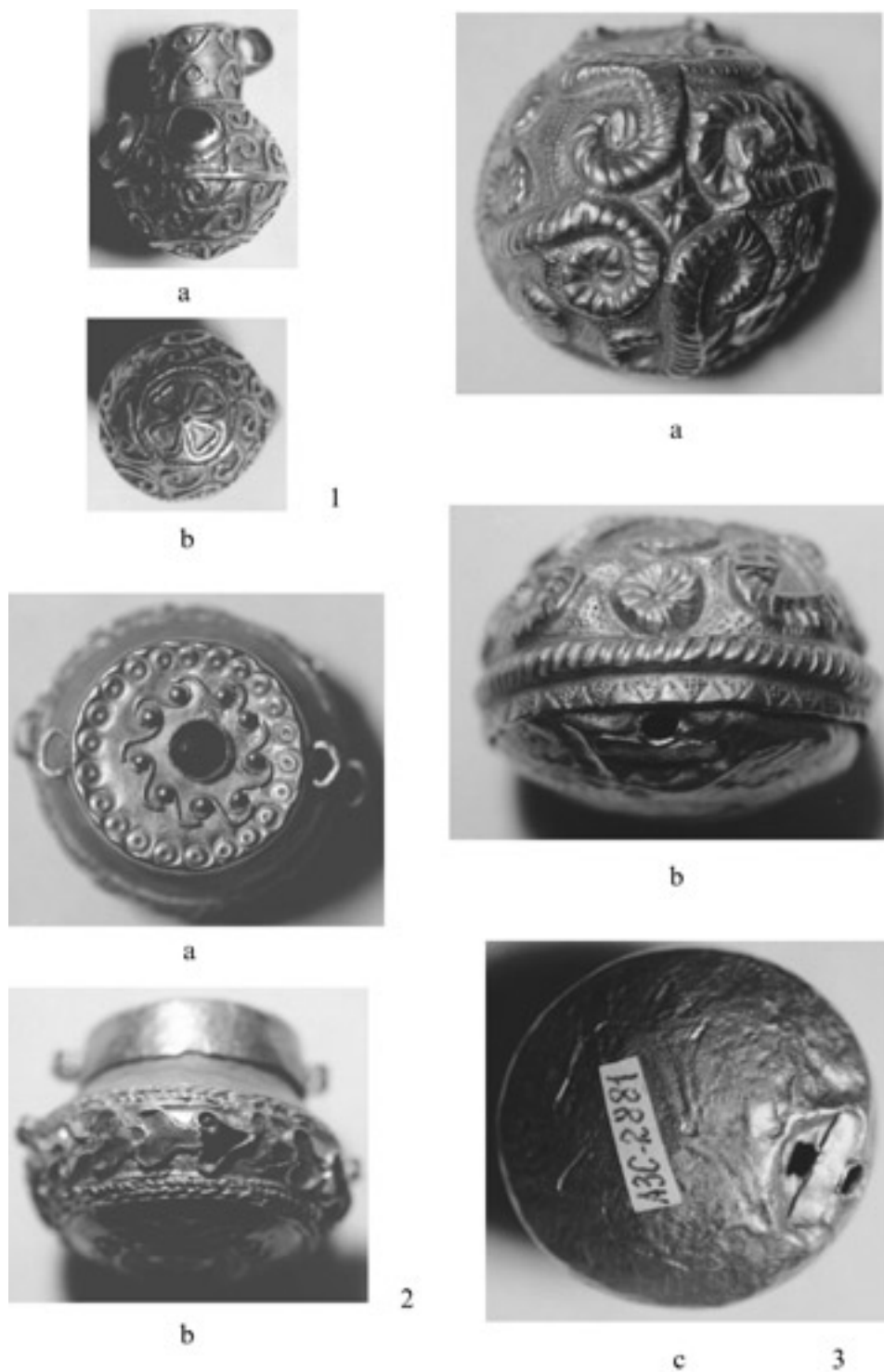


Fig. 4. Gold miniature vessels: 1) tiny flagon-pendant; 2) flagon-pendant; 3) pyxis.

Fibulae. In terms of its artistic value alone the brooch in the shape of a dolphin (Fig. 2.9) is unique. In construction the item belongs to the type of two-needled fibula. The earliest example of such a fibula is dated to the 3rd century BC.²⁸ The majority of two-needled fibulae in the Crimea and the North Caucasus are dated to the 2nd-1st centuries BC²⁹ but later examples are also known.

Another brooch has a construction traditionally dated to the 1st century AD.³⁰ But B. Michlin has drawn attention to the fact that such fibulae have been found in complexes of the 2nd-1st centuries BC.³¹ Fibulae of this construction (with lamellate bow and solid receiver) were found, for instance, in lower levels of the Mausoleum of Scythian Neapolis dated from the end of the 2nd to the early 1st century BC.³²

Beads. Most beads can only be dated very approximately. Four polychrome beads with longitudinal-wavy ornament, one of which is ornamented with gold ends, are dated mainly from the 3rd to the 1st centuries BC. Large roundish, ribbed beads made of different material are often found in the burials of the 2nd-1st centuries BC in the Mausoleum of Scythian Neapolis.³³

Thus, according to the above analysis the jewellery from the Nogajčik barrow belongs to the Late Hellenistic period, mainly to the 2nd century BC.

ARTICLES MADE IN ANIMAL STYLE

Torque (Fig. 2.1). The type of torque, the peculiarities of technique and style and three-dimensional relief are features which could locate the torque chronologically.

The torque belongs to the multi-coil wire type with separately made ends. Ornaments of this type are richly represented in the Siberian collection of Peter the Great (where they date from the 5th to the 2nd century BC) and the Oxus Treasure.³⁴ Torques (and bracelets) of such construction were also found in the Sarmatian graves of the 2nd-1st centuries BC.³⁵ In later times (1st century BC – 1st century AD) they were replaced by the pipe type with a hinged clasp.

Images of animals were cut from a semi-product: traces of cutting can be seen everywhere. Torques in the Siberian collection show the same feature. These articles are also similar to the Nogajčik torque in the way they represent the tail of the last animal.

Amulet. This chalk bead set in a gold frame also has many analogies among objects of the Siberian collection.³⁶

IMPORTED VESSELS

Kylix and cup. The shape and ornamentation identify this cup as Late Hellenistic.³⁷ The handles of the kylix are made in the shape of an open flower – which is also a Hellenistic feature. Both vessels could be dated to the 2nd – early 1st centuries BC.

Vessel with animal images (Fig. 3.3). This interesting example follows the well-known type of Scythian vessels of the 5th-4th centuries BC.³⁸ The latest example of this type was found in the Zelenskoj Barrow dated to the beginning of the 3rd century BC.³⁹ Its ornamentation is truly Hellenistic: a wreath with different types of bands, and the subject matter, which could be reconstructed as two pairs of animals.

“Millefiori” cup (Fig. 3.4). Vessels made in “millefiori” technique are very rare in the North Black Sea region. The technique was fairly popular in the period from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. The earliest examples are simple in shape and their ornamentation frequently consists of such elements as two-coloured, chaotic spirals. The Nogajčik cup bears a close resemblance to vessels from the Antikythera ship-wreck of the early 1st century BC.⁴⁰

Plate of faience (Fig. 3.1). Parallels to this small plate made of greenish-blue faience have been found in Syria and dated to the first half of the 1st century BC.⁴¹

Ungutarium. No examples of any similarity to the Nogajčik vessel have been found in the North Black Sea region. It is known that from the middle of the 1st century BC fusiform unguentaria were replaced by unguentaria of a bulbous type.⁴² Around the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD fusiform unguentaria disappeared. So this item could hardly be dated to any time after the middle of the 1st century BC.

OBJECTS OF LOCAL CULTURE

Bronze appliqués. These items are characteristic exclusively of the complexes of the 2nd-1st centuries BC.⁴³ They are well represented among the earliest burials in the Mausoleum of Scythian Neapolis and in the Sarmatian graves of the North Caucasus region.⁴⁴

Silver ring with a cross. Such objects were found mainly in the Crimean graves of the 2nd -1st centuries BC.⁴⁵

Black-polished jug. It belongs to the North and Central Caucasus pottery of the 3rd -1st centuries BC.⁴⁶

“Mirror”. This object could not be used as a mirror because of the absence of any plain surface. Perhaps it was a kind of ritual object. But its general appearance evinces a similarity to mirrors of the so-called Bactrian type. They were widespread from the Central Asia to the Dniester and the suggestion that they were produced at Bactrian centres⁴⁷ is incorrect. Their local

North Caucasus provenance is evident because of the multitude and variety of versions of this mirror-type found in the Sarmatian graves of this region.⁴⁸ Judging by such characteristics as the large disk and the low protuberance in the centre, the Nogajčik item could be dated to the end of the 2nd – early 1st centuries BC.

Spiral bracelets. These items were fairly popular in the Late Scythian culture in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC.

RARE OBJECTS

Some other objects are hard to date exactly. These are a plate made of faience, a vessel of alabaster, four gold pendants with images of lions and horses, silver spoons of simple shape, objects of jade, etc.

Thus, the majority of grave goods belong to the 2nd century BC. However, some objects, such as the ungvntarium and millefiori cup would produce a later date – but not later than the middle of the 1st century BC.

One more circumstance induces us to accept the early 1st century BC as a reasonable date for the Nogajčik burial. Simultaneously with the grave there was a ritual pit dug in the centre of the kurgan mound. It was made at the same depth as the grave and afterwards both constructions were re-covered with a stratum of burned earth and a new mound. The ritual pit consisted of two horse heads laid on the bottom and two sets of horse trappings with a head-piece laid at the top of the pit directly beneath the burned earth (Fig. 3.5-6). Such sets are very specific artifacts. Usually they are dated to the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC, but in some cases to the early 1st century BC.⁴⁹

Thus, with all the data summarized, the complex of the Nogajčik burial can be dated with confidence to the early 1st century BC, to the time of Mithridates Eupator, i.e. two centuries earlier than was formerly believed. For the Crimea and for the North Pontic region generally this complex is not only the richest grave, but, as regards its composition, it is almost unique. It is nearly the only burial, which, on the basis of its components can be compared to the so-called ritual hoards widespread in Eastern Europe in the 3rd – early 1st centuries BC.⁵⁰

Notes

- 1 Simonenko 1993, 70-75.
- 2 Simonenko 1993, 117.
- 3 Ščepinskij 1994.
- 4 Ščepinskij 1994, 101.
- 5 Treister 1997.
- 6 Mordvintseva & Zaytsev (forthcoming).
- 7 Treister 1997, 123-133.
- 8 Barr-Sharrar 1994, Abb. 5-7.

- 9 Hackens & Lévy 1965, pl. XXI.
- 10 Rudolph 1995, 110.
- 11 Maksimova 1979, Art. 40; De Juliis (ed.) 1989, 166, 168, Cat. 80, 82-83; Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 261, figs. 194, 217, pls. 25 and 31; Davidson & Oliver 1984, 70.
- 12 Deppert-Lippitz 1985, fig. 194, pl. 31; Treister 1997, 136-137.
- 13 Boardman 1970, 213, 385.
- 14 Simonenko 1993, 73.
- 15 Simonenko 2001, 192.
- 16 Plantzos 1999, pl. 93.14.
- 17 Neverov 1976, 169, 172, pls. 2.9-10, 3.1-2; Treister 1982, 69; 1985, 126-139.
- 18 Plantzos 1999, 75, 78.
- 19 Simonenko 1993, 70.
- 20 De Juliis (ed.) 1989, 219-220, 452-453, no. 4; Hoffmann & Davidson 1965, no. 274, fig. 266; Ruxer & Kubczak 1972, pl. XVI, no. 2.
- 21 Marčenko 1996, figs. 106.13, 112.2, 113.11; Raev, Simonenko & Treister 1991, 480-482, fig. 17.7.
- 22 Anfimov 1987, 171.
- 23 Ninou 1978, pl. 6.10.
- 24 Lo Porto 1975, 642, pl. 52.2.
- 25 Skalon 1959, 127-140.
- 26 Despoine 1996, Abb. 166.1.
- 27 Mordvinceva 2001, 37, Kat. 19, 43-44, 47-49, 64, 67-69, 72.
- 28 Škorpil 1916, 26, fig. 8.
- 29 Marčenko 1996, 31; Michlin 1980, 206-207.
- 30 Ambroz 1966, 25, 43, 45.
- 31 Michlin 1975, 190-191.
- 32 Michlin 1975, 191.
- 33 Pogrebova 1961, 169-171.
- 34 Dalton 1964, nos. 23, 116, 120, 135, 136 etc.; Rudenko 1962, pls. 1.1, 2.4, 3.4, 4.3, 4.5, 5.5, 8.1, 8.2, 8.7, 8.8, 9.6-8, 10.3-4, 15, 16, 17, 19.1-2, 23.23-24, 23.28-31, 23.34-37.
- 35 Šilov 1956, 44; Berchin 1959, 39; Sergackov 2000, 141.
- 36 Artamonov 1973, fig. 281.
- 37 Strong 1966, 108; Horedt 1973, 151.
- 38 Reeder (ed.) 1999, nos. 164, 165; *Scythian Art...*, nos. 171-173, 188-192.
- 39 Škorpil 1916, 30, fig. 15.
- 40 Weinberg 1965, figs. 15-17; Weinberg & McClellan 1992, nos. 69-70.
- 41 Parlasca 1976, 145, figs. 13-15.
- 42 Thompson 1934, 347; Hempel 2000, 434, 436, fig. 10, Phase E3 und Phase F.
- 43 Pogrebova 1961, figs. 8.7, 10.V.
- 44 Marčenko 1996, figs. 60.12, 85.4, 97.12, 107.8, 109.7.
- 45 Daševskaja 1991, 36, pl. 62.6 and 11; Pogrebova 1961, fig. 11.2.
- 46 Abramova 1993, 40-41; Marčenko 1996, figs. 32-33.
- 47 Simonenko 2001a, 58.
- 48 Marčenko 1996, 21-23.
- 49 Simonenko 1982, 244; Dzis-Rajko & Suničuk 1984, 149.
- 50 Ščukin 1994, 97-98; Mordvintseva 1999, 146-147, fig. 8.