



Summary :

The royal tumulus of Solokha, dating to the 4th cent. BC, is a most significant Scythian burial monument of the Ukrainian steppe. It is the central tumulus of an extended Scythian cemetery comprising 75 burials, which are arranged around it in three groups.

Geographical Location

Ukraine

Historical Region

Scythia

1. Site - History of the research

The tumulus of Solokha is located 15 km south of the village of Velikaya Znamenka, in the region Kamianka-Dniprovsk of the Zaporizhia Oblast, in Ukraine. This tomb was excavated by N.I. Veselovsky between 1912 and 1917.

2. Description

The tumulus had been looted in the past. Under the mound, measuring 18 m in height and with a diameter of 100 m, two burials in catacombs were discovered.

The central burial, which had been looted, was a shallow pit measuring 5.51x4.96 m, with two elongated niches. One of these niches probably contained a female burial. The grave goods of the female burial included, among else, a number of gold plates that were sewn onto garments in the form of sphinxes, eagles, human heads etc., a fibula, the exquisitely crafted decoration from the facing of a Scythian wooden cup, an **amphora**, a bronze ladle culminating in the shape of a swan, an arrowhead, as well as a gilded **kantharos** with inscribed depictions. This last find, together with finds of a harness, allowed Alekseev to date the burial to the last decade of the 5th cent. BC.¹ The second niche of the burial was used exclusively for vessels. A bronze **lebes** of the Scythian type containing animal bones, a small Etruscan bronze carriage, a Greek bronze vessel and a wooden siclos were found here. West of the tomb, at a distance of 2 m from the central burial, two horse burials were detected in a pit, accompanied by rich grave goods (horse tack).

Apart from the central burial, the tumulus also contained a later, royal burial at the SW part. The pit of the entrance was excavated, 5 m in depth, from where a path 10 m long with a northerly direction led to the burial chamber.

The remains of a young man were found on the path of this tomb, together with sheep knucklebones and arrowheads. At the sides of the path there were two niches. The left one contained ten amphorae, while the right one three bronze lebetes of the Scythian type containing bones from horse, bull and sheep, a metallic siclos, a metal rod for removing the meat from the lebes, a bronze louterion, a section from the silver decoration of a **rhyton**, a bronze strainer with a handle culminating in a high relief head of a swan, as well as plates from the facing of wooden vessels.

The path led to a circular burial chamber with a diameter of 3.20-3.50 m, containing a lavish male burial, which, judging from its grave goods, belonged to a member of the Scythian aristocracy or a member of the Scythian royal family. The deceased was in a supine position, his head facing west. Next to his head there were an ornament of gold plates and beads, the celebrated comb bearing a depiction of three Scythian warriors fighting and a Greek bronze helmet. The neck of the man was adorned with a golden necklace whose extremities culminated in lion heads. Five golden bracelets were found around his wrists. The bones of his feet were covered in numerous gold plates, 300 in total, which would have originally been sewn onto his garments as decoration. Next to his right arm was a bronze nutcracker -an object indicative of his elevated social status-, a bronze **cuirass**, a ceremonial sword covered in gold plates, as well as six silver and a number of other wooden vessels, also covered in gold foils. Along his right leg there was an iron sword in a



wooden sheath, a **gorytus** with arrows and a knife. The presence of two swords is not atypical in burials in [Scythian tombs](#).²

The crypt at the north part of the grave contained another gorytus with silver facing and relief depictions of Scythian warriors, as well as a large golden **phiale**, bearing relief zoomorphic depictions.

West of the central burial, five horse burials containing complete horse tacks have been detected. There is scholarly disagreement concerning the date of this burial. A.P. Mantsevich dates it to the late 5th- early 4th cent. BC, while Alekseev to the first quarter of the 4th cent. BC.³ Along the northern wall of the path, within a niche, the skeleton of a warrior or groom has found, accompanied by a sword, a gorytus and arrowheads.

3. Finds

Some of the grave goods from the Solokha tumulus, apart from being precious for the study of the history of the region's [tribes](#), are also artefacts of great artistic value.

A characteristic example is the golden comb, which is one of the most notable works of ancient toreutics in general, and an exquisite example of Scythian art of the early 4th cent. BC in particular. Its dimensions are: height 12.30 cm and 0.70 cm thick, weighing approximately 294.10 g.⁴

The comb features 19 teeth, and is reminiscent of an ancient Greek temple with a colonnade and triangular **pediment**; its upper part is decorated by a high relief scene involving warriors, mounted and on foot, fighting.⁵ This is a composition in high relief, depicting a fighting scene involving three warriors. At the centre of the scene we have a mounted Scythian warrior holding a spear, possibly a king, whose armaments are of Greek and Scythian provenance. The Greek items, however, are predominant. More specifically he is protected by greaves and a Corinthian type helmet, something extremely rare in Scythian tombs.⁶

The same mixed provenance armaments can be observed on the attacking combatant. Behind the central figure we have another warrior on foot, without a helmet. Both of them attack the dismounted warrior to the right, whose horse is depicted lying on the ground wounded. The scene is remarkable for its dynamism and the realistic rendering of the figures, their armaments and clothing. These characteristics led to be categorized as an object bearing scenes from Scythian everyday life, a view rejected by D.S. Raevsky, who identified this scene as a representation of the Scythian genealogical myth. More specifically, according to his interpretation, the rider in this scene is the second son of Heracles or the Scythian hero Targitau, while his ally is the oldest son of Targitau, Lipoxais. The scholar identifies the third figure as Kolaxais, a third character on the Scythian myth.⁷

The scene is completed on its lower part by a perforated pediment, which is formed by the five recumbent lions. The pediment is the culmination of the scene, giving it stability, while at the same time it acts as a link between the vigour of the depiction in the upper section and the simplicity of the lower one, expressed by the clean straight lines of the comb's teeth. The harmony of the artefact is attributable to the tension between its distinctive features, alluding to the antithesis as well as the coexistence of two different tribes and dissimilar artistic sensibilities. There is disagreement on the dating of the find. V.F. Gajdukevic dates it to the first half of the 4th cent. BC, believing it to be the work of a consummate Greek craftsman from a local workshop of Bosporus.⁸

A valued item in the Scythian collection of the Hermitage Museum is also the ceremonial sword from the Solokha tumulus, which is among the best examples of Scythian zoomorphic art. It is also an exquisite example of carved relief on wood with gold facing. The art of wood-carving was particularly widespread in the northern shores of the Black Sea during the Scythian period.⁹ The length of the sword is slightly under 70 cm. The length of the handle is 13 cm with a width of 5.7 cm.¹⁰ The sheath is 60 cm in length with a width of 12.8 cm. The gold facing weighs 91.55 g. Three fragments have survived from the blade, two of which bear traces of leather, possibly from a boar, and traces of wood. The edge of the hilt is decorated with the depiction of two bird heads. The hilt is also decorated along its length, on both sides, with deer heads. The same depictions decorates the point where the hilt is adjoined to the blade.



The sheath, made up of fir wood, bears relief zoomorphic patterns and a facing of gold plates, affixed with the help of small silver nails. The subject of the depiction -lions devouring their prey- is rendered in three reliefs. In the two upper reliefs we have the representation of a lion to the left devouring a deer. On the narrow end of the sheath a lioness is shown hunting a griffin.

There is disagreement concerning the dating of the sheath. W. Ginters dates the finds to the 4th cent. BC, K. Schefold to the mid-5th, while A.P. Mantsevich, considering the archaism of the depictions suggests a date between the second half of the 5th and the first half of the 4th cent. BC for both sword and sheath.¹¹

Among the noteworthy finds from the tomb are also remains of a gorytus found together with 180 arrowheads.¹² Of the gorytus, which was made up of leather, the silver plate facing with gilded details survives, decorated with relief depictions. The central theme depicts a warrior scene framed on its upper section by the representation of a lion and a griffin, while its lower part features two horned griffins. The faces of the warriors bear certain similarities to the figure of the Satyr found on 4th cent. BC coins from [Panticapaeum](#). This has led V. Gajdukevic to believe that the gorytus was crafted in Panticapaeum.¹³

The golden omphalos phiale of the early 4th cent. BC¹⁴ discovered in the second catacomb of the Solokha tumulus (diameter 21.8 cm, weight 867.8 g) is a characteristic example of the combinations of two artistic sensibilities, the Greek, as it is a purely Greek vessel, and the Scythian, which is expressed in the relief zoomorphic depictions covering almost the entire surface of the vessel. Furthermore, given that the phiale is a sacred object as well as a royal Scythian symbol,¹⁵ its presence among the grave goods is indicative of the status of its owner. The same holds for its material, gold. The theme of the relief depictions is the hunting of lions and panthers, animals symbolizing royal power, while these depictions are also connected to the everyday lives of the Scythian nomads. Fifty six animals are depicted in total, among which are lions, panthers, horses and deer. The arrangement of the hunting scenes, in three bands above the phiale's omphalos, could, according to D.S. Raevsky's view, be interpreted as a cosmogram, for hunting scenes constitute recognizable symbols of the chthonic world.¹⁶

Furthermore, the, perhaps intentionally erased, Greek inscriptions on the phiale, indicate the close commercial relation between the Greeks and the local Scythian aristocracy.

The most numerous grave goods are the golden plates dating to the first half of the 4th cent. BC. These were decorative elements, and were originally sewn onto the garments of the deceased. These plates bear relief depictions mainly of animals, but have a symbolic and mythological meaning. We should indicatively describe four of these,¹⁷ which once adorned the *anaxyrides* of the Scythian king's attire. The plates bear representations of a lion, a deer, a scene where a deer is being devoured by a lion, and a scene depicting the ritual by which two Scythians become sworn brother, rather important in Scythian society. About this last plate we should mention that the above interpretation is only one of the various possible ones. [Herodotus](#), on whose writings this interpretation is based, mentions that the ritual was sealed by giving an oath.¹⁸ Another view connects this scene with the Scythian genealogical myth.¹⁹

At any rate, the finds from the Solokha tumulus and their various interpretations have widened the horizons for the study of Scythian mythology, enriching our knowledge on the beliefs of the Scythian nomads.

1. Алексеев, А.Ю., *Скифская хроника* (Санкт-Петербург 1992), pp. 147-148.

2. See Манцевич, А.П., "Парадный меч из кургана Солоха", in Златковская Т.Д., Мелюкова А.И. (eds.), *Древние фракийцы в Северном Причерноморье* (Москва 1969), p. 96 and 97, where a drawing by A.A. Bobrinsky showing the exact position of the swords is published.

3. See Манцевич, А.П., *Курган Солоха: публикация одной коллекции* (Ленинград 1987), p. 125; Алексеев, А.Ю., *Скифская хроника* (Санкт-Петербург 1992), pp. 147-148.



4. An indicative bibliography: *ОАК за 1913-1915 гг.* (Петроград 1918), pp. 111-112; Гайдукевич, В.Ф., *Боспорское царство* (Москва-Ленинград 1949), p. 125, fig. 18; Манцевич, А.П., "Гребень и фиала из кургана Солоха", *СА* 13 (1950), pp. 217-238; Манцевич, А.П., *Золотой гребень из кургана Солоха / Mantsevich A., Peigne provenant du tumulus Solokha* (Ленинград 1962); Алексеев, А.Ю., "Гребень из кургана Солоха и скифские цари V-IV вв. до н. э.", *АСГЭ* 36 (Санкт-Петербург 2003), pp. 72-88; Шильц, В., "О находке золотого гребня из кургана Солоха: Публикация воспоминаний Алексея Алексеевича Бобринского", *АСГЭ* 36 (Санкт-Петербург 2003), pp. 68-71. Εικόνα: *L'or des Amazones: peoples nomads entre Asie et Europe. VIe siecle av. J. C.-IVe siecle apr. J.-C.* (Paris 2001), p. 47.
5. See also Кузнецов, С.В., "Щиты на золотом гребне из кургана Солоха", in Толочко, П.П. (ed.), *Проблемы скифо-сарматской археологии Северного Причерноморья: К столетию со дня рождения Б.Н.Гракова* (Запорожье 1999), pp. 144-146. See *Σκυθικοί θησαυροί: Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο* (Αθήνα 1981), p. 43, no. 29.
6. Черненко, Е.В., *Скифский доспех* (Киев 1968), pp. 82-83.
7. Раевский, Д.С., *Очерки идеологии скифо-сакских племен* (Москва 1977), pp. 9ff, 117-118.
8. Гайдукевич, В.Ф., *Боспорское царство* (Москва - Ленинград 1949), p. 126.
9. For more details see: Манцевич, А.П., "Деревянные сосуды скифской эпохи", *АСГЭ* 8 (Ленинград-Москва 1966), pp. 23-28.
10. On the handle specifically see: Ebert, M. (ed.), *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte* 12 (Berlin 1928), pl. 81a. On the sheath: Borovka, G., *Scythian Art* (London 1928), pl. 23b.
11. See respectively: Ginters, W., *Das Schwert der Skythen und Sarmaten in Sudrussland* (Berlin 1928), p. 45; Schefold, K., "Die iranische Kunst der Pontuslander", *Handbuch der Archäologie* 7:2 (München 1954), p. 62; Манцевич, А.П., "Парадный меч из кургана Солоха", in Златковская, Т.Д. - Мелюкова, А.И. (επιμ.), *Древние фракийцы в Северном Причерноморье* (Москва 1969), p. 96.
12. See for instance: *ОАК за 1913-1915 гг.* (Петроград 1918), p. 122; Фармаковский, Б.В., "Горит из кургана Солохи", *ИРАИМК* 2 (Петербург 1922), pp. 23-48; Гайдукевич, В.Ф., *Боспорское царство* (Москва - Ленинград 1949), pp. 126-127, 129, fig. 19.
13. Гайдукевич, В.Ф., *Боспорское царство* (Москва - Ленинград 1949), p. 128.
14. Манцевич, А.П., "Гребень и фиала из кургана Солоха", *СА* 13 (1950), no. 13; *Σκυθικοί θησαυροί: Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο* (Αθήνα 1981), p. 39, no. 22.
15. Hdt. 4.5.
16. Раевский, Д.С., *Модель мира скифской культуры* (Москва 1985), pp. 175-176.
17. *Σκυθικοί θησαυροί: Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο* (Αθήνα 1981), p. 40, no. 23-26.
18. Hdt. 4.70.
19. Раевский, Д.С., *Очерки идеологии скифо-сакских племен* (Москва 1977), p. 116.

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Glossary :

	amphora, the
from the greek words "αμφί"(on both sides) and "φέρω" (carry): vessel with long ovoid body and a considerably narrower neck made in various sizes from the smaller perfume oil container to the large storage receivers of liquids and solids. It stands on a small foot and it bears two invariable vertical handles on either side. Some of the distinguished types of the amphorae are these whose lower part is tapering to the point (narrow bottomed), the neck type, the Nicosthenian, the Nola, the Panathenaic, the Tyrrhenian, the SOS type.	
	anaxyrides (trousers)
Type of trousers. They were thought, by the ancient Greeks and Romans, as characteristic of the barbarians' attiré. Among many peoples (Persians, Scythians, Thracians) men used to wear leather-made, wide and comfortable trousers. The Amazons were portrayed wearing skin-tight trousers decorated with horizontal zig-zag lines.	
	cuirass, the
body of armour to protect the torso and the back. It was consisted of a breastplate and a backplate designed to be worn together. The original cuirass was made of leather, but in later times of bronze.	
	dinos, lebes, the
Another name for lebes. Big, open, semispherical vessel without handles and very low neck. It bears no foot and it was used for mixing wine with water and as a prize. When it was standing on a high stand and had two tall vertical handles disposed on a tall neck and a mouth covered with a lid, it was called "lebes gamikos" and was used for marriage rituals.	
	gorytus, the
Bow and arrow holder. This word derives from the word «χωρτός» of the ancient sources which means "to include bows". By placing both arrows and bows in a holder, the warrior was able to have his hands free.	



griffin, the

A legendary creature of eastern provenance with the head, talons, and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.



kantharos, the

a deep drinking vessel with two distinctive high handles and an often tall stem of the foot. Kantharoi are frequently depicted on black- and red-figure vases, held by Dionysos or Herakles.



pediment, the

The triangular structure, over a building façade, between the horizontal entablature and the sloping roof, often decorated with sculptures, reliefs or painted figures.



phiale, the

A (metal, rarely clay) shallow vessel with an open rim. Used primarily in libations.



rhyton, the

libation vessel with an outlet at the bottom of the vessel allowing the slow outflow of the liquid.

Sources

Herodotus 4.5, 4.70.