



Summary :

The Scythian tumulus of Gaimanova Mogyla, dated to the 4th cent. BC, is the most important one in the necropolis of Gaimanova, the first tribal necropolis in the history of Scythology, where burial customs from all layers of Scythian society are represented.

Other Names

Gaimanova Mogyla

Geographical Location

Zaporizhia region, Republic of Ukraine

Historical Region

Scythia

1. Topography

The Gaimanova necropolis is located at a distance of approximately 6km southwest of the village Balka in the Vasilievski region, in the province of Zaporizhia region of the Republic of Ukraine.

2. History of research

The rescue excavation of the necropolis in the wider Yuzno-Rogazinski area of the Zaporizhia region begun in 1968 by archaeologists of the Ukrainian Archaeological Institute under the direction of A.I. Terenozhkin and B.I. Mozolevsky. Approximately 50 [tumuli](#) were excavated in an area where the Gaimanova tumulus imposed. The excavation of this tumulus, which had been looted in Antiquity, as most of the other tombs in the necropolis, was carried out between 1969 and 1970, under the direction of V.I. Bidzilya.

3. Description

The monumental tumulus of Gaimanova Mogyla is the central burial monument of an extended Scythian necropolis. It is surrounded by 43 other Scythian tumuli, composing a burial group of monumental dimensions.

This is a tomb resting on a stout stone [crepidoma](#), 70m in diameter and 9m in height. According to the ground plan produced by B.I. Mozolevsky, this is indicative of the high rank in the [Scythian](#) tribal hierarchy of the person buried there. It is worth noting that the height of the tumuli of simple Scythians did not usually exceed 1m.¹ In the western part, beneath the tumulus, the space of the funerary table was located and yielded [amphorae](#) sherds, animal bones, arrowheads as well as iron, bronze and silver parts of a harness.

The tumulus had at least three burial complexes. The north complex is an ovoid-shaped catacomb covering an area of 16 sq.m. The north wall of the north burial chamber featured a special niche used for placing the burial offerings. In that niche more than 250 gold artefacts were discovered, as well as four amphorae, two bronze [lebetes](#) of Scythian type, one basket-shaped vessel, and other bronze vases. In front of the entrance to the burial gifts repository a servant burial with weapons was found. Among the funerary gifts of this burial are some iron belt fittings and imported pottery.

Two passage ways (dromoi) led to the central chamber of the north burial complex, and in each one the wheels from two carriages were discovered. The central burial had been looted. Excavations have shown that the central grave of the north complex contained two male and a female burial, close to which the remains of a horse burial were found, as well as two servant burials.

The remains of the central chamber present an unclear picture. Fragments of burial gifts and gold ornaments sewn onto the garments



of the deceased were discovered. On the south wall of the burial complex there was another niche, which contained the remains of a female burial, for which the second dromos had been constructed. Beneath the floor, and near the entrance of the burial chamber, a crypt containing very rich burial gifts was found.

The central burial complex of the tumulus contained a male burial, close to which a catacomb was detected, where two horses with reins decorated with gold plaques were found.

South of the central burial lay the south burial complex, which included two inhumations (a female and a child), as well as a number of burial gifts.

Research revealed that the mound had been raised progressively. Following the construction of the original burial complex, which contained the central burial, two more complexes were added, which contained female burials, completing the tumulus.

4. Finds

The vast majority of the finds are ornamental plaques. The tumulus yielded abundant gold plaques that were sewn onto garments, bearing various decorative, mainly floral motifs, some of which allowed the reconstruction of the headdress, an essential feature of the Scythian female dress.² Among these repousse ornaments there are some in the shape of an **anthemion** or **rosette** or in the form of a male head, possibly of Dionysus, apotropaic in nature.³ Other gold plaques represent griffins with gaping beaks in a heraldic posture, alluding to the symbolic cosmological representations with the depiction of the Tree of Life, especially characteristic in Eastern art.⁴

Apart from the purely Scythian motifs, we find sheets depicting Greek themes, among which are maenads and Erinyes, as well as others depicting the head of Gorgo.⁵ These artifacts indicate the extensive **contacts** of the Scythians with the ancient Greek world and the obvious influence of Greek cult traditions in Scythian society during the 4th cent. BC. This is further attested by the golden head of Demeter originating from the central burial of the tumulus, most likely the product of a Greek workshop.⁶

A gold **repousse** plaque of exquisite craftsmanship, depicting two sheep, comes from the area of the central burial.⁷ In the chamber where the female accompanying the central burial was interred, hundreds of gold sheets were discovered, some bearing depictions of a Scythian divinity with snake-like limbs, other depicting Scythians battling against fictional creatures.

Among the burial gifts of the crypt of the central burial complex were gold sheets that were used to decorate two wooden vessels. Two **rhyta** decorated with gold and silver sheets were also found in the same place, bearing motifs in repousse, as well as some silver vessels, among which a Scythian-type **oenochoe** with depictions of vine.⁸

At the bottom of the crypt a silver gilded cup with relief depictions of Scythians was found; it dates to the 4th cent. BC and is an exquisite specimen of Scythian art.⁹ The scene includes six figures. Under its handles it seems that servants are depicted, judging by their submissive posture. The bearded Scythians on the left edge of the scene are depicted seated on saddles, wearing their traditional attire and holding quivers. One is brandishing a sceptre and the other a whip, both symbols of their high social rank. The faces, hair, beards and details of their clothing have been worked with a graver and have been accentuated by gilding. This vessel belongs to the widespread Scythian-type cup with two horizontal handles and a broad rim. The depiction encompasses six figures, composing, according to V.I. Bidzilya, two independent scenes, directly linked to everyday life of the rich Scythian aristocracy.¹⁰ With respect to the interpretation of the depictions on the cup, the most likely explanation was proposed by D.S. Rajevsky, who rejected the historicity of the depictions, correlating them with the mythological and ritual beliefs of the Scythians. According to D.S. Rajevsky,¹¹ the cup depicts the Scythian genealogical myth also recounted by Herodotus. According to it, Hercules gave his bow, a symbol of power, to his youngest son Scythes, primogenitor of the Scythians.¹²

During the demolition of the crepidoma, close to the entrance of the north burial complex of the tumulus the rest of the bronze decoration of the funerary carriage came to light, as well as parts of a harness. In the same group of burial gifts also belong seven



decorative peg tips depicting deer, a griffin and birds.¹³ Among the blocks of the crepidoma, fragments of stone objects were unearthed, belonging to a mortar and a **lekanis**.

1. Мозолевський, Б.М., *Товста Могила* (Київ 1979), pp. 150, 239.
2. See Клочко, Л.С., "Новые материалы к реконструкции головного убора скифянок", in *Древности степной Скифии* (Киев 1982), p. 122; *Oro delle steppe dell' Ucraina* (Vicenza 1997), p. 88, no. 44.
3. *Oro delle steppe dell' Ucraina* (Vicenza 1997), p. 84, no. 40.
4. *Oro delle steppe dell' Ucraina* (Vicenza 1997), p. 80, no. 36.
5. Ганіна, О.Д. (ed.), *Київський музей історичних коштовностей* (Київ 1974), nos. 55, 56.
6. Ганіна, О.Д. (ed.), *Київський музей історичних коштовностей* (Київ 1974), no. 57.
7. Мозолевський, Б.М., *Сюфський степ* (Київ 1983), p. 123, fig. 97.
8. Ганіна, О.Д. (ed.), *Київський музей історичних коштовностей* (Київ 1974), no. 49.
9. Ганіна, О.Д. (ed.), *Київський музей історичних коштовностей* (Київ 1974), no. 49.
10. Раевский, Д.С., *Очерки идеологии скифо-сакских племен* (Москва 1977), no. 37.
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12. Hdt. 4.9-10.
13. Мозолевський, Б.М., *Сюфський степ* (Київ 1983), p. 134, fig. 111.

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	Funerary Archaeology http://arheologie.ulbsibiu.ro/simpozioane/funerary/boltryk.htm
	Steppe Scythians http://www.pontos.dk/publications/papers-presented-orally/oral-files/Gav_Report-e.doc

Glossary :

	1. lekanis, the, 2. lekane, the 1. low bowl with two horizontal handles and a broad low foot. The handles are regularly ribbon-shaped. The lekanis is shallow, lidded and often decorated. Examples of it appear in marriage-scenes and other scenes involving women, and are themselves regularly decorated with scenes of marriage. It flourished during the end of the 5 th and the 4 th centuries BC. 2. In general, similar to lekanis but the lekane is usually lidless and often undecorated.
	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.
	anthemion (Palmette) A floral decorative motif in the form of a palmette, very widespread in the Greek art and architecture.
	crepis / crepidoma The solid mass of stepped masonry serving as the visible base of a building. The crepidoma usually consists of three steps. The top step from which the columns spring is called the stereobate.
	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.
	oenochoe From the greek words "οἶνος" (wine) and "χέω" (pour). Ovoid, single-handled wine jug usually taller than it is wide. There have been distinguished 10 types based on variations of profile, mouth type and handle form.
	repoussé technique, the The process or the result of decorating a. metallic surfaces with designs in relief, hammered out on the surface of the material from the back to the front. b. ceramic objects, where the motif is impressed into the surface of the vessel (the fresh clay) before firing.
	rhyton, the libation vessel with an outlet at the bottom of the vessel allowing the slow outflow of the liquid.
	rosette, the An ornament with a generally circular combination of parts resembling a flower or plant.



Sources

Herodotus, *Histories* 4. 9-10.