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TILLYA-TEPE GOLD JEWELLERY AND ITS RELATION TO THE SARMATIAN ANIMAL STYLE OF THE NORTHERN BLACK SEA AREA

Key words: Ancient Bactria, Sarmatian culture, nomads, Animal Style

A remarkable collection of gold jewellery was discovered in the hill of Tillya-tepe (fig. 1), Northern Afghanistan, in six graves of the highest social level by the Soviet-Afghanistan archaeological expedition in 1978/79.¹ These burials are of principal importance not only for the history of ancient Bactria, but also for that of many neighbouring and sometimes quite distant regions.

The graves are dated from the 1st c. B.C. to the mid 1st c. A.D.² They contain many objects, but the most splendid are those of gold with colour inlays. As soon as the collection was found, even before it was first presented in public, the term “Gold-turquoise Style” was coined, due to the turquoise inlays lavishly decorating different images on the gold jewellery and toreutic objects. Once again it gave rise to the discussion about the origin of the Sarmatian Animal Style. To understand the matter of this discussion, let us shortly review the history of the study of this phenomenon.

¹ Sarianidi 1985; 1990–92; 1987; 1989. This collection has been newly presented in many exhibitions worldwide: see, e.g.: Cat. Paris 2007; Cat. New York 2007; Cat. Bonn 2010.

² Sarianidi 1985, 54–55.

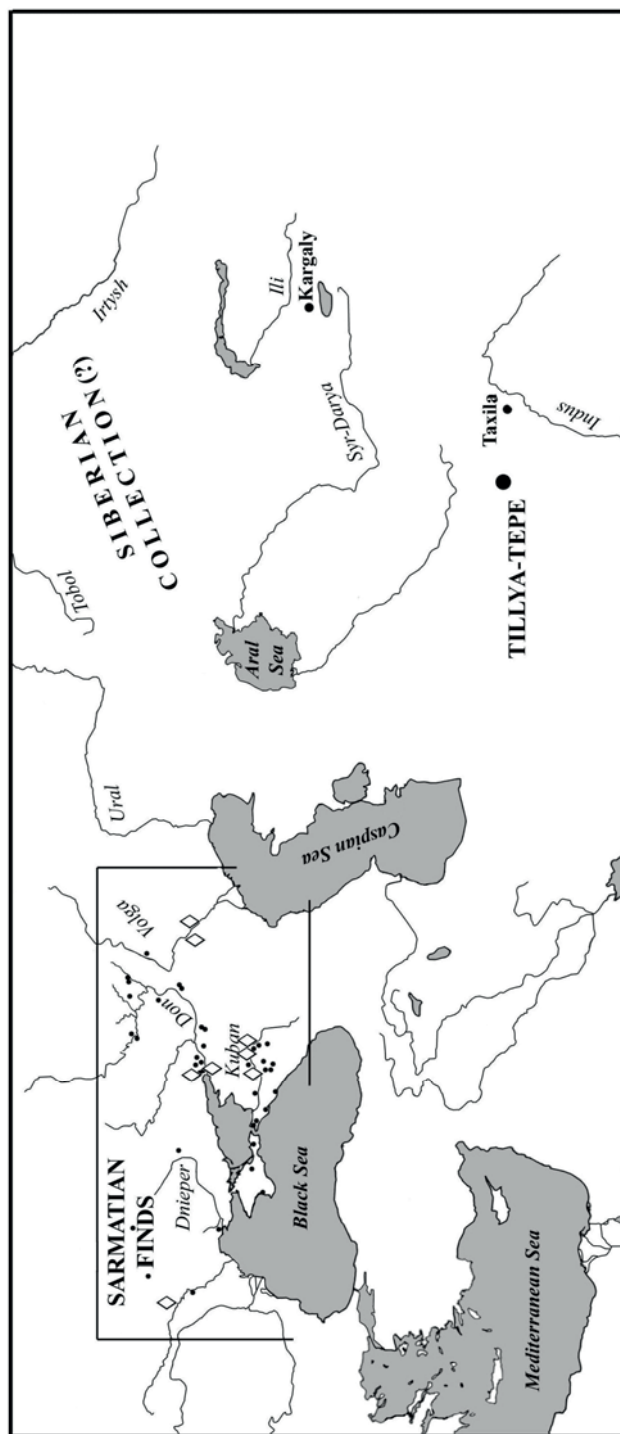


Fig. 1. Map of the principle sites

The term “Sarmatian Animal Style” was suggested in works of Prof. M. Rostovtzeff in the 20-s of the 20th century to make it distinct from the well-known Scythian Animal Style because he thought there was a fundamental difference between these peoples.³ “Sarmatians” he understood as being new Iranian-speaking peoples, who came to the Northern Black Sea region from the East, apparently from the northern boundaries of ancient Bactria, and subdued the Scythians. He mentioned two waves of the Sarmatian migration westwards: those of Saka and Yuezhi. To support his idea with archaeological material he illustrated the first movement by the silver phalerae of horse harness and polychrome brooches, and the second movement by the objects of Sarmatian Animal Style. Having made a detailed description of features of the Scythian Animal Style⁴ Rostovtzeff, however, gave only a general and not very clear characteristic of the Sarmatian Animal Style. As a formal feature of the style he mentioned only the polychromy produced by the colour inlays.⁵

At this point it is necessary to mention that the Animal Style, from the very beginning of its study, was understood as a feature characteristic of the Iranian speaking nomads.⁶ Even a genetic way of transferring of the Animal Style was expressed in some works.⁷ Although many parts of the concept of Rostovtzeff were criticized and revised in Soviet times, the inextricable link of the Animal Style with the culture and history of the Sarmatians remained steadfast.

In the 30s of the 20th century a new concept of the Sarmatian culture has appeared in the Soviet Union. It was no longer connected with its origin with the distant eastern lands, but should have developed in the Ural-Volga area. However, the burials found in this territory did not provide many Animal Style objects. In spite of several attempts to ascribe some poor finds of the Hellenistic period to that of the Animal Style⁸ it was clear, already before the time of discovery of the Tillya-tepe burials, that the Ural-Volga region could not be defined as a land of its origin. Therefore, after the finds from Tillya-tepe came to the

³ Rostovtzeff 1929, 57.

⁴ Rostovtzeff 1922, 51; 1929, 28.

⁵ Rostovtzeff 1929, 55–56.

⁶ Borovka 1928, 5–6, 30; Schefold 1938, 4, 64.

⁷ «Присматриваясь к этническому типу современных кочевников Хор, мы различаем несколько разновидностей, среди которых наиболее выделяется тип *homo alpinus*, свидетельствующий о значительной примеси иностранной крови, по всей вероятности, иранской или скифской. Присутствием этой иностранной примеси, быть может, объясняется сохранение «звериного» стиля среди кочевников Хор» „Looking more closely at the ethnic type of the modern Khor nomads, we can distinguish several varieties between them, among which the most distinguished type is *homo alpinus*, indicating the significant admixture of foreign blood, most likely the Iranian or Scythian. The presence of this foreign admixture, might perhaps explain the preservation of "animal" style among the Khor nomads” (Rerich 1930, 19).

⁸ Malovitskaia 1971; Smirnov 1976.

State Hermitage Museum (Leningrad) for restoration, the ideas of Rostovtzeff about the distant roots of the Sarmatians and the Sarmatian Animal Style immediately surfaced again.⁹

Since then any publication of a rich Sarmatian grave with gold objects ornamented with coloured inlays has referred to the Tillya-tepe items as the closest stylistic analogies. The usual model of interpretation of this phenomenon was migration. According to the ideas of Rostovtzeff, the gold-turquoise items were brought to the North Pontic area by the nomadic tribes from the northern boundaries of ancient Bactria.¹⁰

As I do not share the idea that all objects of Animal Style should be necessarily brought with a wave of migration, I think it is important to find out which items from the Sarmatian graves may be compared with Tillya-tepe jewellery. Afterwards one may try to explain why such objects should appear in the area, so distant from the ancient Bactria.

Stylistic features of the Tillya-tepe collection¹¹

Despite the fact that the motifs depicted on the Tillya-tepe jewellery are quite diverse and presumably may have different origin,¹² the entire collection might be characterized as a stylistic unity.¹³ To find criteria which might be used to define the Tillya-tepe pictorial tradition and for the further comparison with Sarmatian finds, we should try to look for what is “really there”, to “see the shape apart from its interpretation”.¹⁴ To be able to do this it is necessary to analyze formal features of the represented images, making a distinction between the “significant” and “insignificant” elements.

“Significant” and “insignificant” stylistic features. Stylistic features, which serve to express the meaning of representation, are “significant” for the depicted motif. By these “significant” features one gets an impression of what kind of a person or animal species, or whatever is represented. Thus, one recognizes Athena by her attributes – the aegis, a helmet, weaponry spear, and the deer after the type of its antlers. If the “significant” features of an image are

⁹ Zasetskaia 1980; 1989; Raev 1984.

¹⁰ Raev 1979; Skriplin 1997, 56, 60.

¹¹ The stylistic analysis of Tillya-tepe jewellery was first done in the book: Mordvintseva 2003, 10–22.

¹² V. Sarianidi pointed out the “Bactrian”, “Hellenistic”, “Graeco-Roman”, “Siberian-Altai”, and “Scythian-Sarmatian” groups of subjects (Sarianidi 1985, 53–54).

¹³ Sarianidi 1987, 72.

¹⁴ Gombrich 1980, 5.

not very clear, it could lead to the confusion in its interpretation.¹⁵ Distinctive shapes and elaboration of the “significant” elements of an image could serve as characteristic features of a particular pictorial tradition.

There are other stylistic features, which are “insignificant” to the type of represented motif. To these elements belong parts of human and animal bodies, which are not important for their recognition, as well as the additional ornamentation: secondary motives and boarder decoration.¹⁶ We shall try to analyze the Tillya-tepe collection according to these principles.

For analysis I have chosen 20 gold items (figs. 1–4)¹⁷ representing anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images decorated with colour inlays.¹⁸ Functionally these items are represented by two pairs of arm-rings (fig. 3: 6–7), three pairs of temple-pendants (fig. 2: 1–3), four pairs of collar buckles (fig. 3: 2–5), shoe-buckles (fig. 3: 1), plaques (fig. 5: 2–4), a belt and belt fittings (fig. 5: 3, 5–6), a dagger and dagger-sheath fittings (fig. 4: 1–7), a knife-sheath (fig. 5: 1).

Representation of human figures. The main subjects with anthropomorphic figures are: “Mistress of animals” (fig. 2: 1); “Master of animals” (fig. 2: 3); “Carriage drawn by dragons” (fig. 3: 1); “Dionysus and Ariadne” (fig. 3: 2); “Eros on a dolphin” (3: 3–4); “Warrior” (fig. 3: 5); “Bust of the Parthian prince” (fig. 5: 2); “Man with dolphin” (fig. 5: 4); “Goddess on a lion” (fig. 5: 6).

The anthropomorphic characters depicted on the Tillya-tepe objects belong obviously to different pictorial traditions, which may be seen in their costume and attributes. In most cases they are the central persons of the subject. Therefore it is rather hard to trace any “insignificant” feature in the way of their representation. But some observations could still be made.

¹⁵ Gombrich 1980, 4 fig. 2.

¹⁶ Marshak 1971, 16; 1976.

¹⁷ These items were chosen as the main subjects of this study. However, plenty of other objects from Tillya-tepe, plaques and other pieces of jewellery, were also taken in account during the analysis.

¹⁸ On some pieces there are no inlays, but there are sockets, which might be used for inlays. On the illustrations both inlays and sockets are marked with grey colour to show the pattern better.

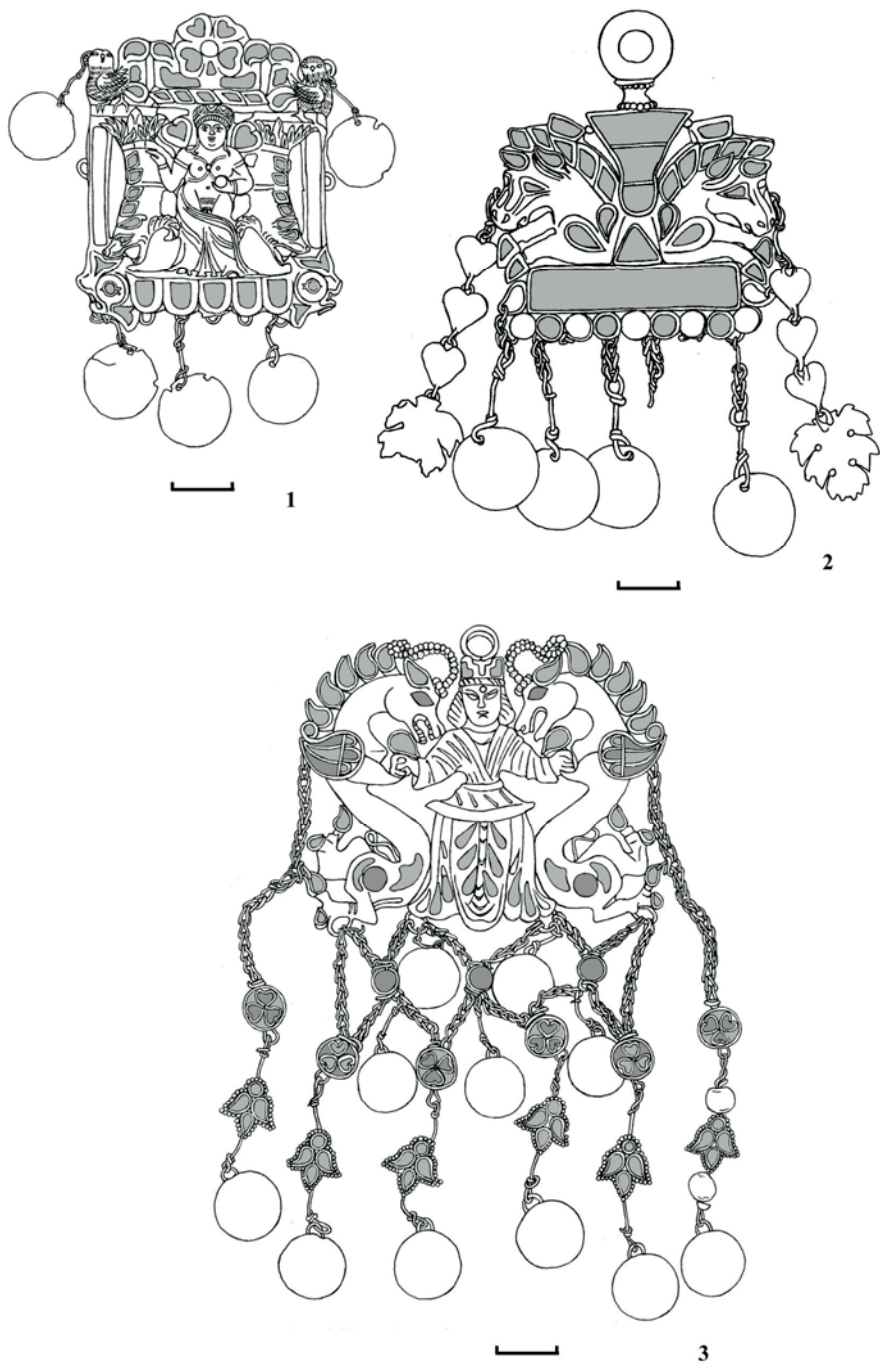


Fig. 2. Tillya-tepe. Temple-pendants. 1 – Burial 6. 2 – Burial 3. 3 – Burial 2



1



2



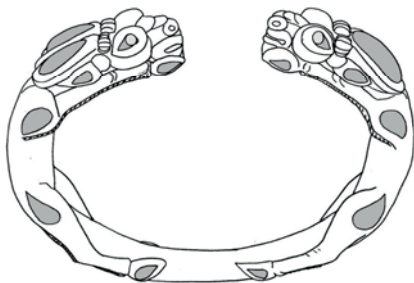
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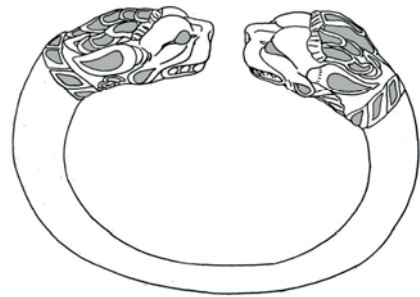
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6



7



Fig. 3. Tillya-tepe. 1 – Burial 4. 2, 7 – Burial 6. 4, 6 – Burial 2. 3, 5 – Burial 3.

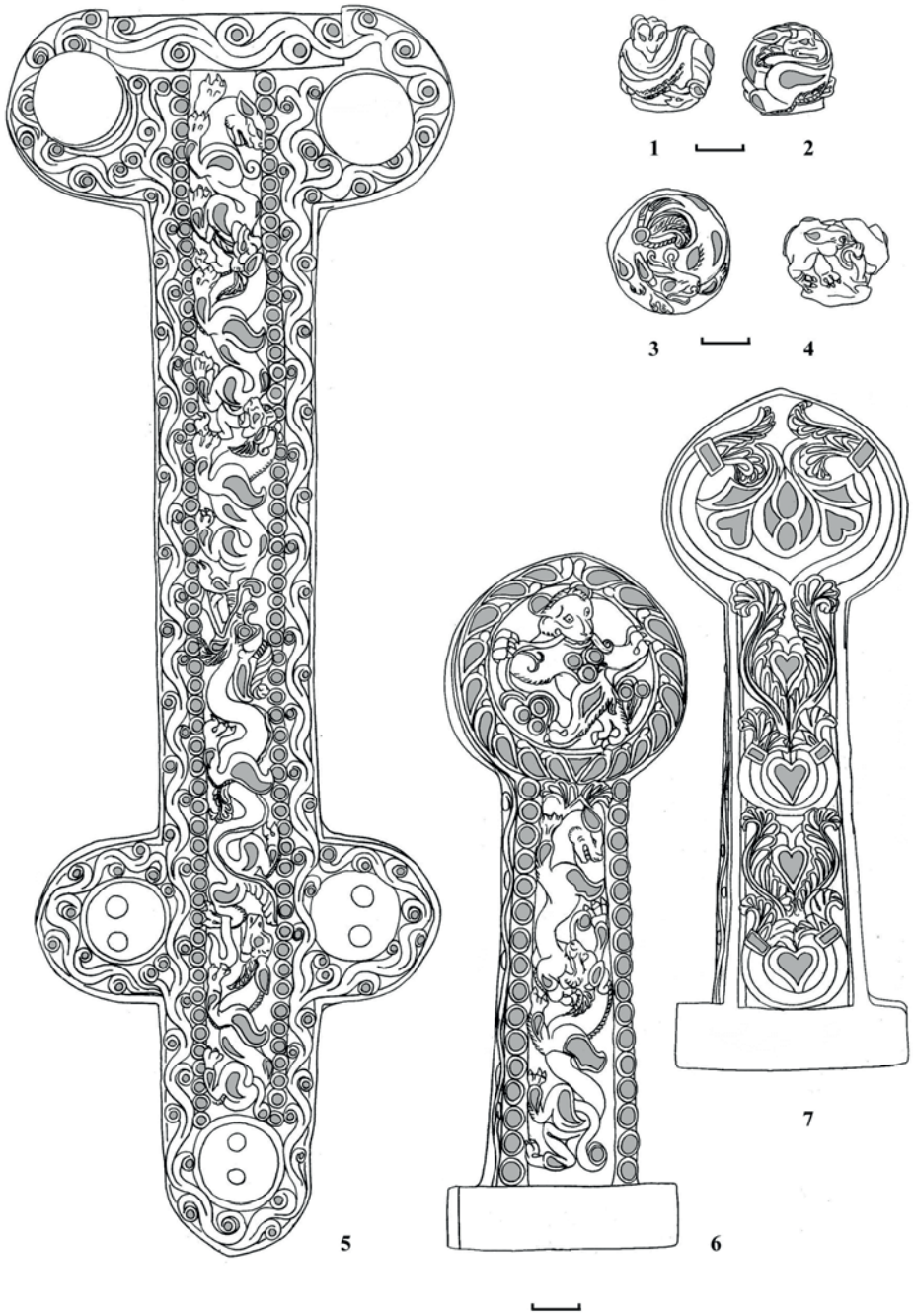


Fig. 4. Tillya-tepe. 1-7 – Burial 4.

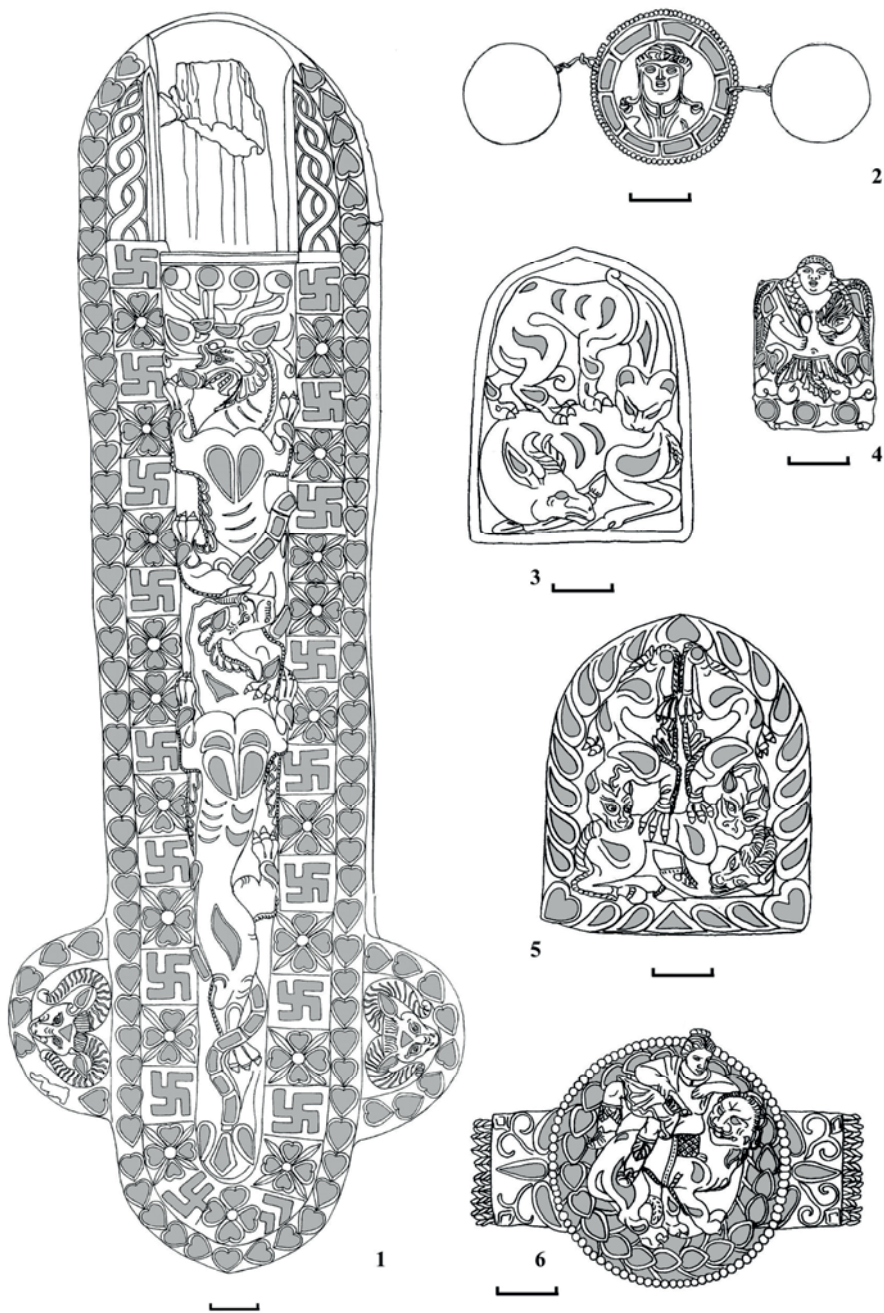


Fig. 5. Tillya-tepe. 1, 3, 5-6 – Burial 4. 2 – Burial 3. 4 – Burial 1.

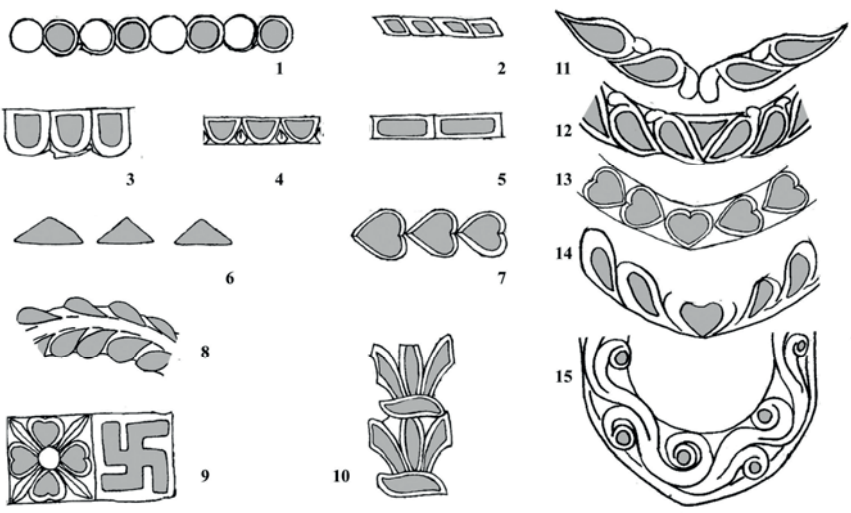
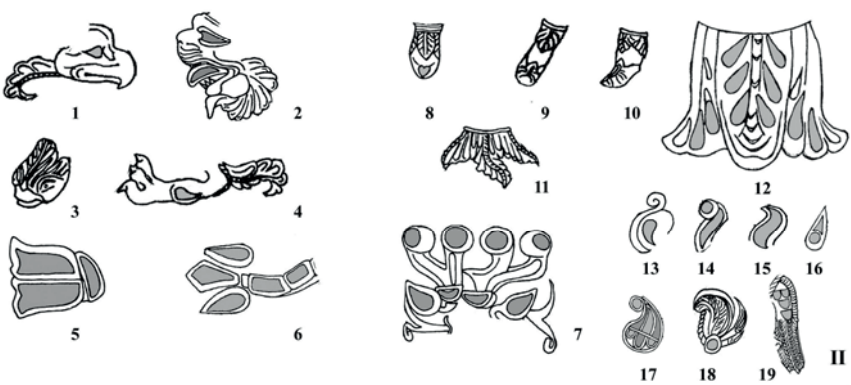
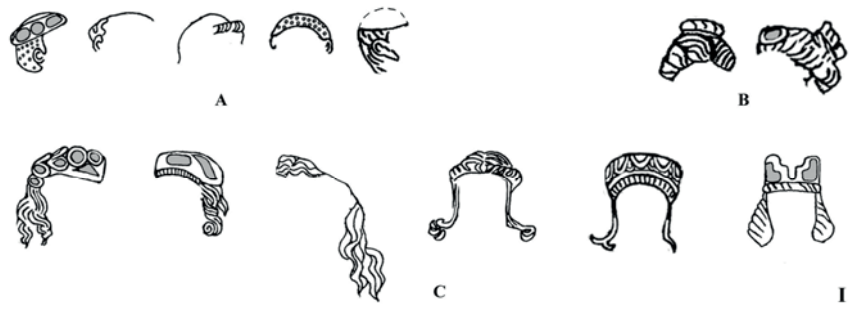


Fig. 6. Tillya-tepe. I – Variants of the hair-style of anthropomorphic images. II. 1–12 – Floral elements of the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images. 13–19 – Variants of the representations of wings. III – Variants of the border ornamentation.

The naked or half-naked bodies of anthropomorphic figures are not ornamented with inlays, a characteristic which makes them stand out from the representations of animals. Their navels and nipples are represented by a punched circle.¹⁹ Most persons are wearing neck- and arm-rings, also the Greek deities. There are some distinctive types of hair-style which are not necessarily connected with the cultural origin of the depicted subject: (A) a bald or close-cropped head; (B) a hair-dress tied in a bun on the nape; (C) a roll of hair over the forehead and curls hanging down to the shoulders (fig. 6: IA-C).

Many human figures include floral elements in their representation. Thus, the deity with a dolphin has acanthus leaves and tendrils underneath; the lower part of the costume of the “Master of animals”, shoes of the “Goddess on a lion” and “Dionysus” are also treated as acanthus leaves (fig. 6: II8–12).

Representation of animal figures. Animal figures are represented both as main subjects as well as secondary motifs. All these figures are ornamented with coloured inlays, which in most cases are used to distinguish different parts of their bodies.

The majority of depicted figures are fantastic beasts of prey with bodies constructed from different parts of animals: winged lions (fig. 3: 1; fig. 4: 3, 5–6; fig. 5: 3); “lion griffin”: horned winged lions (fig. 2: 3; fig. 3: 5; fig. 4: 5–6), “eagle griffin”: an eagle-headed winged lion (fig. 4: 1–2, 5), a winged beast with a horned wolf’s head and a snake’s body with fins (“dragon”) (fig. 3: 5), a beast of prey with a horned wolf’s head and fins (fig. 5: 1, 5), a lion with fins (fig. 5: 1, 5), a lion with a griffin’s crest (fig. 3: 2). Animal-shaped columns, with a floral capital and the base treated as a wolf’s head, are represented on the temple-pendants with “Mistress of animals” as the main subject (fig. 2: 1). A lion’s head, possibly horned (fig. 3: 7), a bear (fig. 4: 6), and a lion (fig. 5: 6) also belong to the class of beasts of prey. Apart from two secondary figures (fig. 2: 1; fig. 3: 5) most of the beasts are represented as main subjects.

Hoofed animals are depicted in five cases, four times as a main subject (fig. 2: 2; fig. 3: 6; fig. 5: 3, 5) and once as a side decoration (fig. 5: 1). In four cases there are images of dolphins (fig. 3: 3–4; fig. 5: 4) or their heads (fig. 2: 1), and in two cases – images of birds, both as secondary motifs (fig. 2: 1; fig. 3: 5).

As one can see, the main classes of animals represented are fantastic beasts of prey and hoofed animals. These two classes are usually shown as symbolic antagonists, representing different parts of the universe.²⁰ They have several common “insignificant” stylistic features: shape of body, form of ears, and indication of shoulders and thighs with a comma-shaped inlay. In two cases the eyes of hoofed

¹⁹ The same way of depicting human figures is visible on the rhyta from Old Nisa (Masson, Pugačenkova 1982, pl. 41) and on some items from Taxila (Marshall 1951, pl. 191: 96–98).

²⁰ Perevodchikova 1994, 28.

and fantastic animals are constructed from two kinds of stones: the pupil is made of carnelian, and the white of the eye is made of turquoise (fig. 3: 1, 6).

A number of representations of the beasts of prey enables us to point out several “insignificant” stylistic features.

Their paws are ornamented with a comma-shaped inlay at the place of the metacarpal bones (fig. 6: II, 4). Hairs under the jaws, known on earlier pictures of animals as the “Achaemenid collar”,²¹ take the shape of an acanthus leaf (fig. 6: II, 1–2). Hairs under the belly and the fins are interpreted in the same way (fig. 6: II, 4). The highest point of the back is often ornamented with a round inlay, and the belly – with a comma-shaped inlay.

The class of birds is represented only by two quite different figures: probably an eagle (fig. 3: 5) and a dove (fig. 2: 1), both are side figures. These few images are not enough to make a conclusion about the usual way of their representation. However, many other depictions have some features which are characteristic for birds. Thus, there are several ways to represent wings (fig. 6: II, 13–19) and beaks.

The fins, a “significant” stylistic feature of dolphins, are represented as floral-shaped inlays (fig. 2: 1; fig. 3: 3–4). Their scales are shown as “egg”-shaped inlays. The fin on the head of another dolphin (fig. 5: 4) is treated as an acanthus leaf shown in relief.

Floral and geometric motives. Floral and geometric elements are very characteristic for the Tillya-tepe pictorial tradition, because in most cases they concern the side decoration.

Abundant variations of acanthus leaves and tendrils are the core of the floral motives (fig. 2: 1–3; fig. 3: 2–4, 7; fig. 4: 5, 7; fig. 5: 5–6). Apart from the acanthus there are many other single plant motives: lotus buds (fig. 2: 3), rosettes (fig. 2: 1, 3; fig. 3: 1; fig. 5: 1); ivy leaves (fig. 2: 2; fig. 4: 7; fig. 5: 1). These elements can be reproduced in relief, decorated with inlays, or simply cut out of gold foil. Particularly interesting is the already mentioned usage of floral motives, primarily the acanthus leaf, as elements of costumes and parts of animals’ bodies (fig. 6: II, 1–12).

Among geometric motives there are few graphic elements: a mesh pattern with dots in the cells (fig. 3: 1, 5; fig. 5: 6) and a running wave pattern (fig. 3: 5). The majority of geometric elements are represented by rows of inlays (fig. 6: III). Usually these rows consist of inlays of one kind. But there are also rows with alternating elements (fig. 6: III, 1, 9) or with an intermediate inlay of triangular or ivy-shaped form (fig. 6: III, 13–14).

²¹ Sarre 1923, fig. 44, 48; Culican 1964, fig. 26, 33, 49, 56, 61, 69, Perevodchikova 1994, 131–133.

The abundance of inlays, made of stone or coloured glass, constitutes the most characteristic feature of the Tillya-tepe jewellery collection. The most popular shapes are: comma (fig. 6: III, 8), drop (fig. 6: II, 12), circle (fig. 6: III, 1), ovolo (fig. 6: III, 3), ivy leaf (fig. 6: III, 7, 9, 13), triangle (fig. 6: III, 6), rhomb (fig. 6: III, 2), and rectangle (fig. 6: III, 5). They are used both as rows of inlays as well as single motives. There are also other shapes, but they were made in form of different parts of a particular image, f.e., details of head-dresses and costumes (fig. 2: 3; fig. 3: 2).

Generally, all inlays, often very minute, are accurately cut to suit the sockets, which they were intended to fill. As a rule they are set in a relief socket. The cloisonné cells and wire frames are rarer. The main colour of the inlays is light blue (turquoise). For contrast deep blue (lapis lazuli) and transparent red (almandine, garnet, and carnelian) are also used.

Many of the observed features correspond with the jewellery and other works of art from North-Western India, Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia.²²

Comparison with the finds from the North Black Sea area

The first step in the comparison should be the search for items, which provide stylistic features similar to those from the Tillya-tepe collection.

For comparison with the Bactrian finds archaeological complexes were chosen from the territory between the Danube Delta and the Lower Volga region. To the period from the 3rd c. B.C. to the 2nd c. A.D. belong altogether 179 items, decorated with animal images, which should originate from 132 complexes. 44 complexes one can place in the period from the 3rd to the 1st century B.C. (fig. 7), 60 complexes are to be dated in the period from the 1st to the 2nd c. A.D. (fig. 8). The rest are chance finds.

Not very many complexes with objects which might be manufactured following the Tillya-tepe pictorial tradition belong to this number of finds (fig. 8: 1–8).

(1) Several items, which could be ascribed to this tradition, are found in the hide-place of the Dachi Barrow 1, in the vicinity of Azov.²³ The archaeological context is dated to the third quarter of the 1st c. A.D.²⁴ Several items from this find could be ascribed to the Tillya-tepe Style: the sword in a gold sheath, a bracelet, and some belt fittings (fig. 8: 1; fig. 10: 1–4; fig. 11: 6).

²² Marshall 1951, pl. 190: 2, pl. 191: 96–98 fig. 71: 9–10; Hackin 1954: Nos. 328, 332, figs. 523–525; Ingholt 1957, pl. IV: 3; Pugachenkova, Rtveladze 1978, 41–42; Pougatchenkova 1978, Cat. 80; Masson, Pugačenkova 1982, pls. 21, 30, 41; Pitschikjan 1992, Abb. 155: 40; Invernizzi 1999: tab. A.

²³ Bespalyi 1992.

²⁴ Bespalyi 1992, 190.

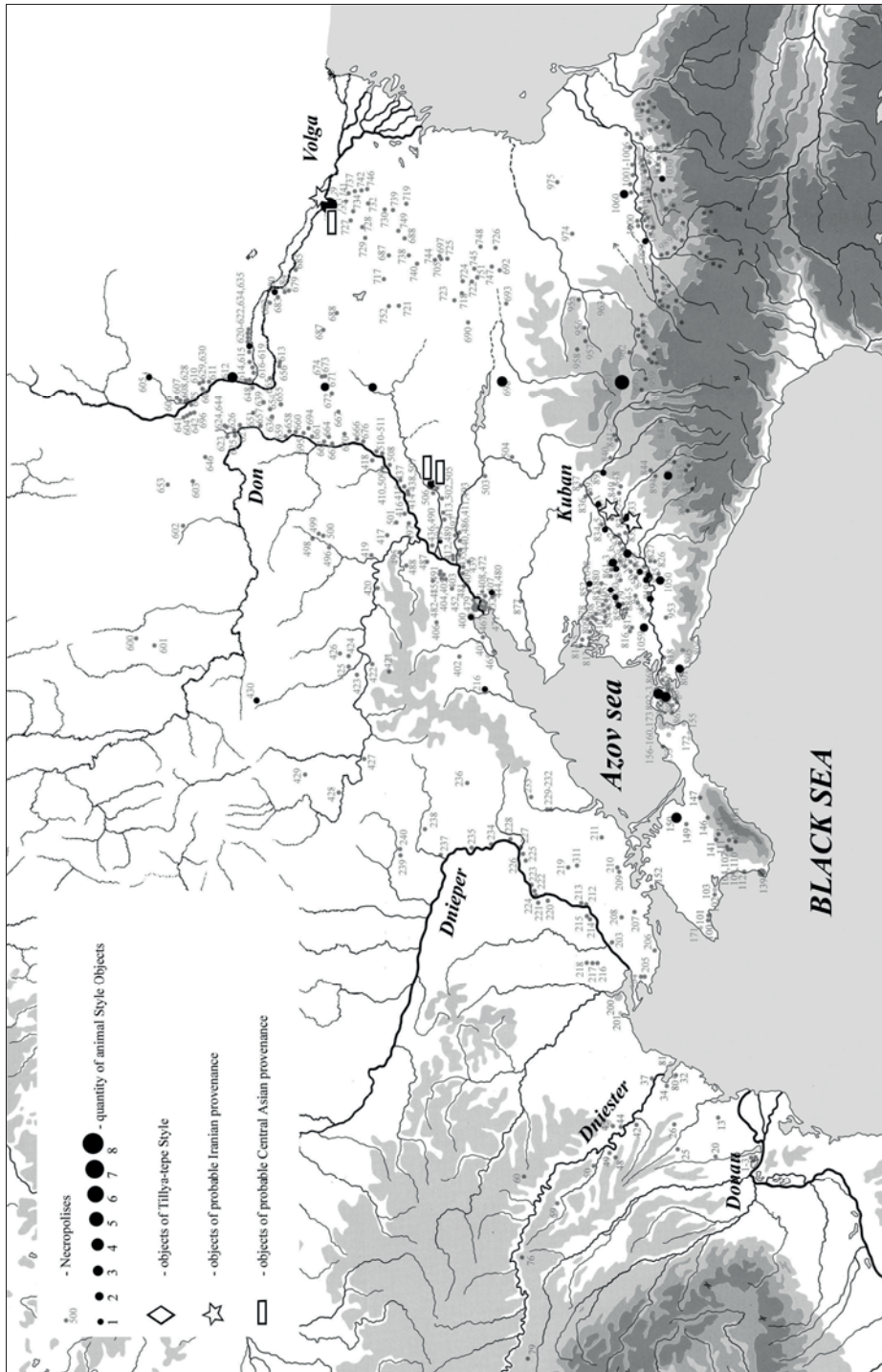


Fig. 7. Distribution of the Animal Style objects in the Northern Black sea area in the period from the 3rd to the 1st c. BC.

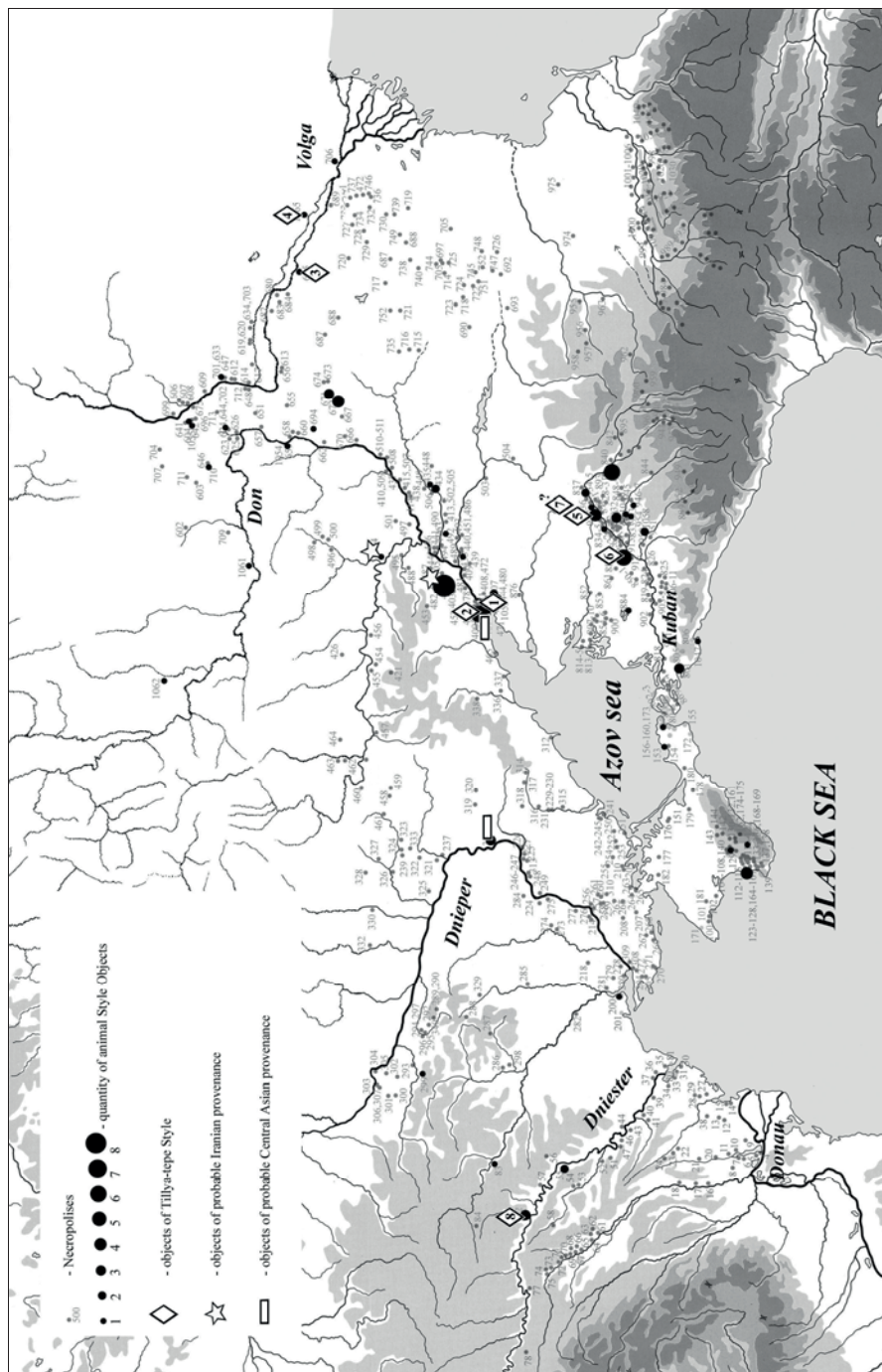


Fig. 8. Distribution of the Animal Style objects in the Northern Black sea area in the period from the 1st to the 3rd c. A.D. 1 – Dachi. 2 – Kobiakovo. 3 – Nikolskoe. 4 – Kochkovatka. 5 – Tiflisskaia. 6 – Ust-Labinskaia. 7 – Kuban region. 8 – Porogi.

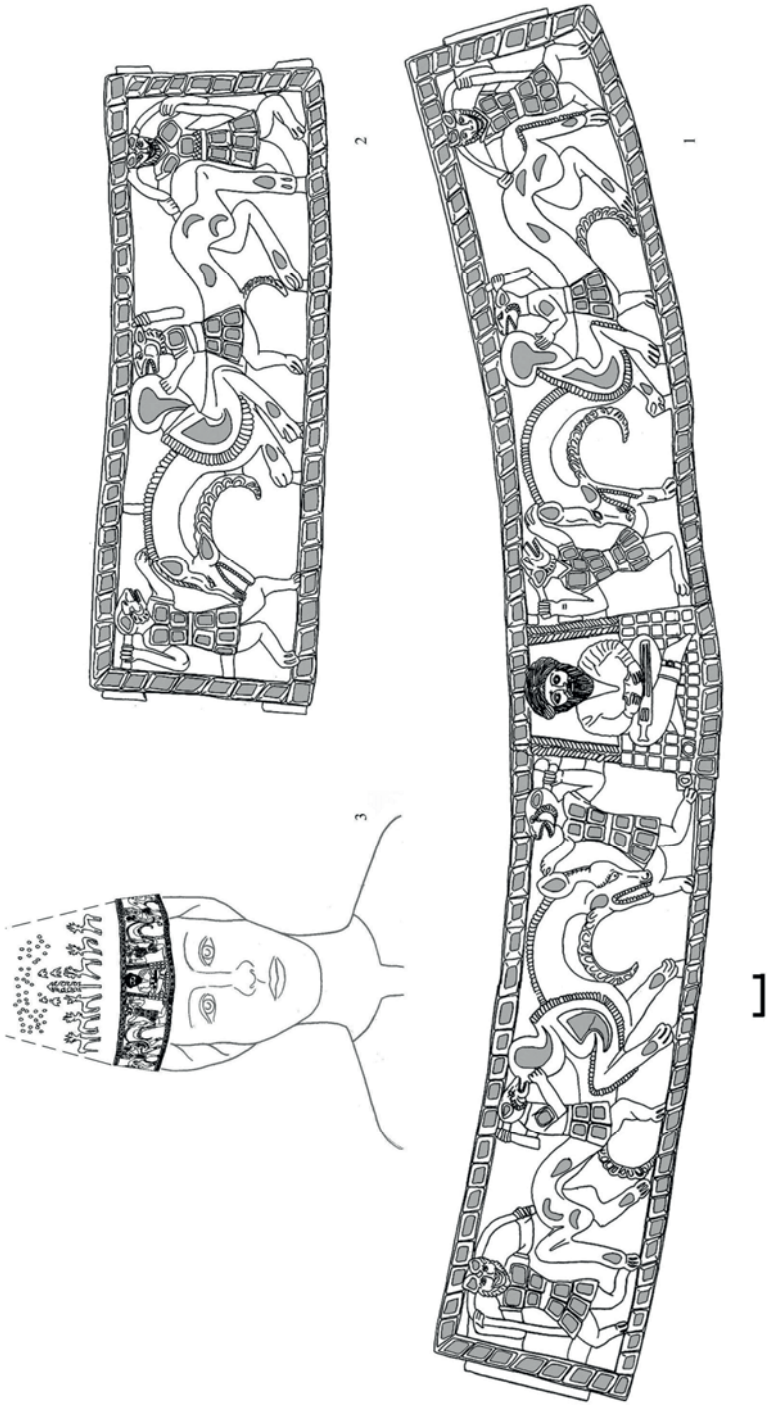


Fig. 9. 1, 2 – Parts of the Kobiakovo crown. 3 – A variant of the reconstruction of the head-dress from the Kobiakovo grave.

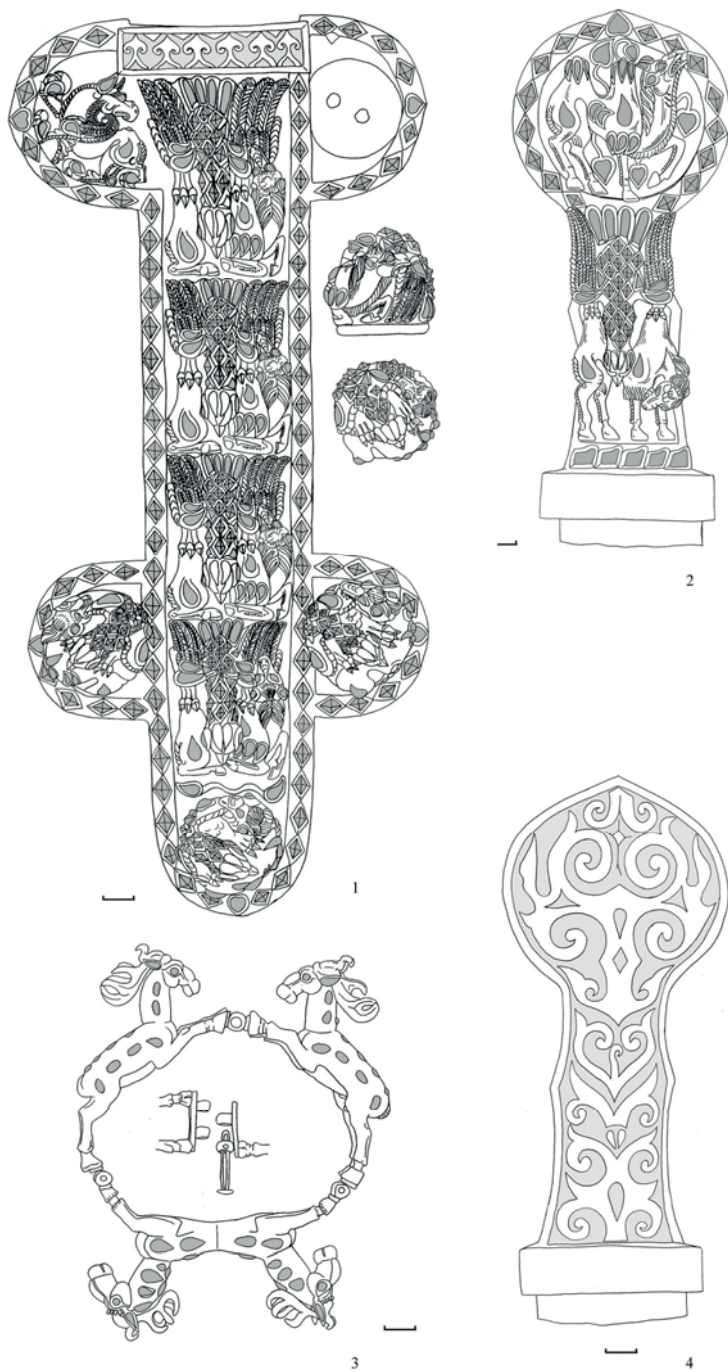


Fig. 10. Dachi Barrow 1. 1–2, 4 – The sword and the sheath. 3 – The bracelet.



Fig. 11. Belt fittings from the Sarmatian graves. 1 – Nikolskoe. 2 – Kuban region. 3 – Kochkovatka. 4 – Tiflisskaia. 5 – Ust-Labinskaia. 6 – Dachi. 7–9 – Porogi.

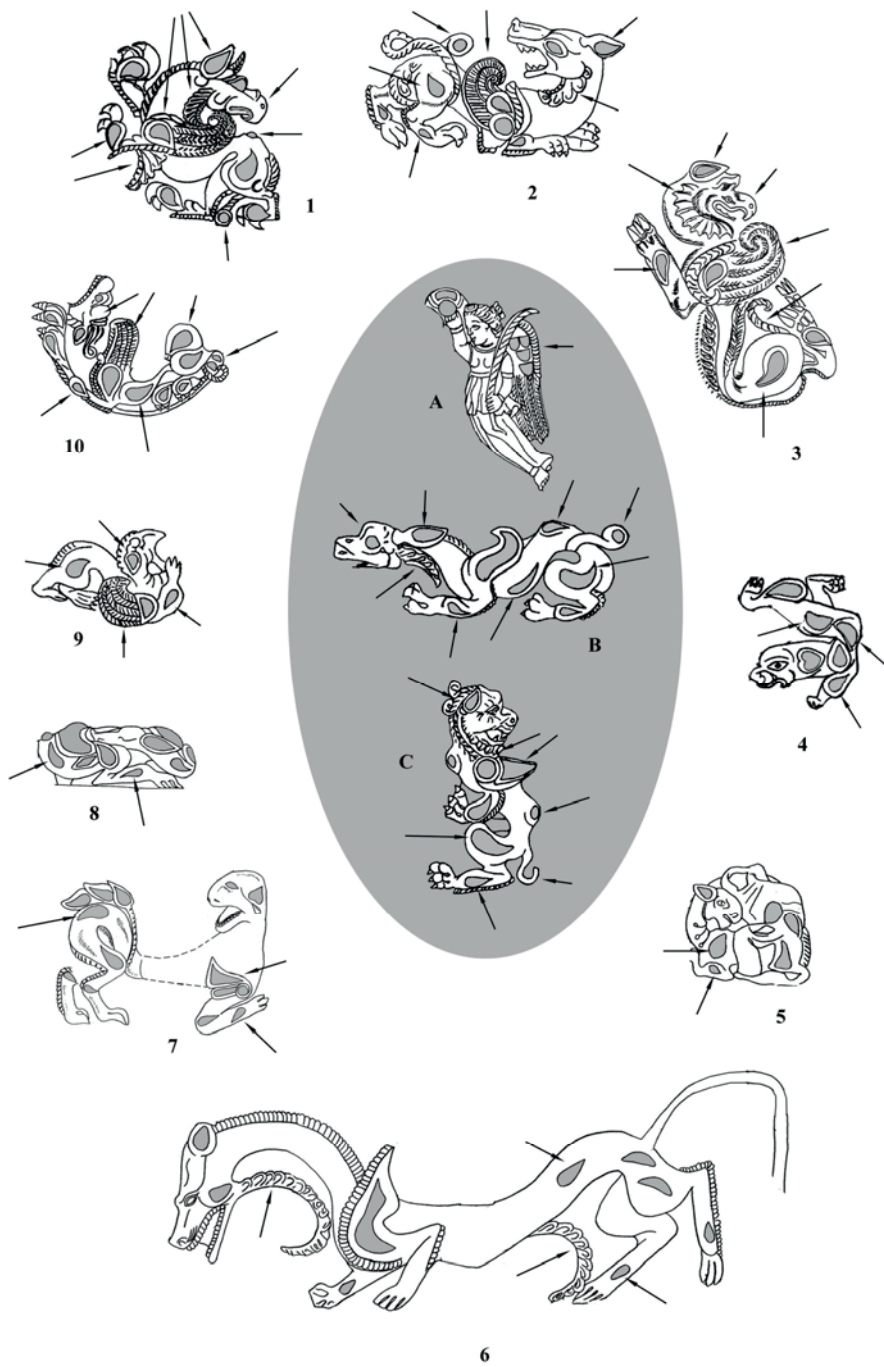


Fig. 12. Comparison of the Tillya-tepe Style features (A-C) with the Sarmatian images (1-10).

The sword and sheath from this assemblage (fig. 10: 1–2, 4) belong to the same type as those from Tillya-tepe, being, however, slightly larger in size. Their decoration is most relevant to the stylistic features of the Tillya-tepe collection. This may easily be demonstrated because of the complexity of the motifs pictured on the sheath.

The image of an eagle-griffin is represented by the same elements, which have been noted for the fantastic beasts from Tillya-tepe (fig. 12: 1). These are: 1) a form of the body with the head turned back, 2) an accentuation of the shoulder and the thigh as well as at the place of metacarpal bones with a comma-shaped inlay, 3) an inlay at the highest point of the back, 4) an acanthus leaf under the jaws, 5) the tail ending with a round-shaped inlay.

Other subjects also show some features of the Tillya-tepe images. The type of wings of the eagles and the eagle-griffin is one, which is well represented on the Bactrian items: with inlays and a thickened ridge with slanting strokes along the upper edge of the wing, and two kinds of feathers (fig. 12: A). The eyes and ears of all animals are shown by comma-shaped inlays.

The representation of the border also correlates with the decorative principles of the Tillya-tepe: it consists of inlays of one kind with an intermediate inlay of ivy-shaped form.

The bracelet from the same assemblage (fig. 10: 3) is shaped in the form of hoofed animals (deers), of which we do not have as many observed stylistic features as of those of beasts of prey. But the form of eyes and ears, shapes of inlays, the way of their setting in cells, enable one to ascribe them to the Tillya-tepe pictorial tradition.

The belt-pendant in the shape of a coiled dragon (fig. 11: 6; fig. 12: 8) has many similarities with Tillya-tepe finds, i.e. shape of the body, setting of comma-shaped inlays in the ear, on the shoulder and the thigh, and at the place of the metacarpal bones. The edge of the pendant is ornamented with a row of rectangular inlays.

Judging by the forms of inlays and their pattern²⁵ some other belt fittings from the Dachi Barrow could also be connected with Tillya-tepe tradition.

(2) The kurgan 10 of the Kobiakovo necropolis, located in the vicinity of Rostov-on Don, is another complex containing an item comparable to the Tillya-tepe collection. It is dated from the second half of the 1st to the beginning of the 2nd c. A.D.²⁶

The female burial contained much gold jewellery. But the only item comparable with Tillya-tepe objects was found lying on the neck of the dead (fig. 9). It was interpreted as a torque.²⁷ In that case the shape, size and construction of

²⁵ Bepalyi 1992, fig. 4: 2–4.

²⁶ Prokhorova, Guguev 1992, 159.

²⁷ Prokhorova, Guguev 1992, 143–146.

this torque would be rather unique, in fact without analogy among known finds. However, the construction of the jewel enables us to suggest its other function. The object, of a slightly conical shape, consists of two parts, a long and a short one, joined by hinges (fig. 9: 1–2). They were found disconnected because of the fall of earth into the chamber. Whereas the short part was found under the neck, the displaced and disconnected forepart was found lying on the neck. However, it might have fallen from the forehead. Additionally, there are gold appliquéés found near the head and, if put together, constitute a conical shape. Therefore one may interpret the whole item as a head-dress in the form of a conical cap, probably made of felt or a similar fabric, which was fixed by a gold crown (fig. 9: 3). The size of the crown matches well with the size of a human head (D – 21 cm, L – ca. 54 cm). A comparable crown was found in the Kargaly Pass, in the vicinity of Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan²⁸ (fig. 1).

The Kobiakovo crown has two different subjects (fig. 9: 1). The central represents a man sitting with crossed legs, holding a bowl in his hands, and a sword on his knees. The other scene shows a dragon surrounded by three anthropomorphic beings, probably monkeys, repeated three times.

There are obvious stylistic similarities between the images on the Kobiakovo crown and the Tillya-tepe jewellery. The main character, a man sitting with crossed legs, does not have any inlay. The dragon (fig. 12: 6) is represented with a wavy body covered with drop-shaped inlays, also at the place of the metacarpal bones. Under the jaws and belly there is an acanthus-shaped element. The edge of the crown is ornamented with a row of equal rhomboid inlays. However, the shape and size of inlays on the dragon's body differ from those in the Tillya-tepe collection. The paws are much smaller. In some cases the inlays, which should appear at the metacarpal bones, are missing. It seems probable that the crown was made in a different workshop, repeating elements of the Tillya-tepe tradition. This coarser style might appear as a development of this tradition.

(3) In the Lower Volga region there is one complex containing a belt buckle of the Tillya-tepe Style. The male burial 1 in the kurgan mound 12 near Nikolskoe village is dated by the Roman bronze patera to the first half of the 1st century A.D.²⁹ I.P. Zasetzkaya has suggested a later date.³⁰

On the belt buckle there is a representation of an eagle-griffin (fig. 11: 1). It provides many features similar to those of the Tillya-tepe collection. A drop-shaped inlay decorates the hip, the wing and the metacarpal bones of the beast. Under the jaws there is a collar in shape of an acanthus leaf. The wing belongs to

²⁸ Bernshtam 1940.

²⁹ Shilov 1975, 152–154.

³⁰ Zasetskaia 1979, 112.

the type with an inlay and a thickened ridge with slanting strokes along the upper edge of the wing (fig. 12: 3). The edge of the buckle is ornamented with a row of rectangular inlays.

(4) From the village of Kochkovatka, Lower Volga region, comes a belt-buckle, unfortunately without context (fig. 11: 3). A single combat between a man of mongoloid type and a winged beast of prey is represented. The human figure does not have inlays. The body of the beast (fig. 12: 7) is decorated with comma- and drop-shaped inlays, also at the metacarpal bones. The ear of the beast is treated as an ivy-shaped inlay. The border of the buckle is ornamented with a row of identical five-sided inlays. All this makes it close to the Tillya-tepe items.

There are several complexes in the Upper Kuban region containing objects, which might be imports from the workshops of the ancient Bactria.

(5) In the burial of the barrow 2 near Tiflisskaia village³¹ an arc-shaped belt-plaque was found with representation of a coiled beast of prey (fig. 11: 4). This form of belt fittings is well represented in the Tillya-tepe collection (fig. 5: 3, 5). The body of the beast is covered with comma- and drop-shaped inlays, also at the metacarpal bones (fig. 12: 5). The border of the buckle is ornamented with a row of rhomboid inlays with an intermediate inlay of triangular form. As there was no dating material in the grave, the stylistic features point to a date roughly from the 1st to the 2nd c. A.D.

(6) The male burial in the barrow 35 near Ust-Labinskaia village³² also contained an arc-shaped belt-plaque representing a single combat of two felines (fig. 11: 5). This plaque provides the same stylistic features as the previous example (fig. 12: 4). The grave is also dated from the 1st to the 2nd c. A.D.

(7) There is one more find without provenance, which is ascribed to the Kuban region (fig. 11: 2).³³ It is a buckle's cover representing a wolf-like winged being. The image of the beast is rendered with elements characteristic for the Tillya-tepe fantastic animals. The animal (fig. 12: 2) is represented with the head turned back, the thigh and the metacarpal bones are accentuated with the comma-shaped inlay, and an acanthus leaf is shown under the jaws. The tail is ending with a round-shaped inlay. The wing is also of the Bactrian type, with inlays and a thickened ridge with slanting strokes along the upper edge. The border of the buckle is decorated by a row of comma-shaped inlays with an intermediate inlay of triangular form.

One more archaeological assemblage with Tillya-tepe Style objects was found quite far from the complexes mentioned above.

³¹ Gushchina, *Zasetskaia* 1994, 76 No. 541 pl. 55.

³² Gushchina, *Zasetskaia* 1994, 67 No. 395 Pl. 45.

³³ Tolstoi, *Kondakov* 1890, 131 fig. 151.

(8) The male burial 1 in the barrow 2 near Porogi village, Western Ukraine,³⁴ contained two pairs of belt-buckles, which can be regarded as that of the Tillya-tepe Style. The burial is dated from the middle to the third quarter of the 1st c. A.D.³⁵

The first pair of buckles shows a man of mongoloid type (“Master of animals”) holding the tails of eagle-griffins, who attack a feline in the centre of the composition (fig. 11: 7–8). The second pair of buckles represents a single combat between two lion-griffins (fig. 11: 9). Both pictures show many features of the Tillya-tepe Style: the usual type of wings, a comma-shaped inlay at the place of ears, hips, belly, and at the metacarpal bones (fig. 12: 9). The first couple of buckles have also a border made of rectangular inlays with an intermediate inlay of triangular form.

Thus, only these eight finds, out of 42 Sarmatian complexes dated from the 1st to the 2nd centuries A.D., represent objects which might be manufactured in ancient Bactria. But how should these finds be interpreted?

If we would take a “migration” as the model of interpretation, the Sarmatian burials containing Tillya-tepe Style objects should also provide similarities in the burial rite and burial goods with the Tillya-tepe graves. Let us make this comparison.

Comparison of the Tillya-tepe and Sarmatian burials

In the case of Tillya-tepe the burial rite is represented by graves of a simple rectangular form, which were inserted in the natural hill. In three cases the heads of the dead were laid in a gold or silver bowl.

Five of six burials were female. They show quite similar burial rite and contained similar grave goods.³⁶ They consisted of gold and silver jewellery: a crown or a head-dress (burials’ Nos. 2–3, 6), ear-rings (Nos. 1, 5–6), massive temple-pendants (Nos. 2–3, 5–6), a pair of hair-pins (Nos. 1–3, 6), chin bands (Nos. 2–3, 5–6), finger-rings (Nos. 1–3, 5–6), collar clasps (Nos. 1–3, 6), beads and pendants (Nos. 1, 3, 5–6), chains and necklaces (Nos. 1–3, 5–6), a torque (No. 3), arm-rings (Nos. 2–3, 5–6), foot-rings (Nos. 2, 5–6), shoe-buckles and fittings (Nos. 3, 6), two foot-soles (No. 3), plaques (Nos. 1–3, 5–6), threads (Nos. 1, 5). Apart from the personal jewellery were found gold and silver pyxides (Nos. 1, 3, 5–6), silver bowls (Nos. 2–3, 5–6), gold and silver foreign coins

³⁴ Simonenko, Lobai 1991.

³⁵ Simonenko, Lobai 1991, 8–14.

³⁶ Burial 1: Sarianidi 1985, 21–23, 230–234. Burial 2: Sarianidi 1985, 23–29, 234–240. Burial 3: Sarianidi 1985, 29–38, 240–250. Burial 5: Sarianidi 1985, 49–51, 256–258. Burial 6: Sarianidi 1985, 51–58, 258–263.

(Nos. 3, 6), a silver or gold staff (Nos. 5–6), Chinese mirrors (Nos. 2–3, 6) and mirrors of another type on a stand (Nos. 3, 5–6), knives (Nos. 3, 6), an ivory comb (No. 3), ceramic vessels (Nos. 3, 6), glass flasks (No. 6), a bronze bell (No. 5), an iron hook (No. 5).

The male burial 4³⁷ consisted of personal gold jewellery: parts of head-dress, a torque, a belt, belt plaques, two arm-rings, shoe buckles and fittings, plaques. Apart from that there were found other gold objects: two chin-bands, a bowl, a long sword in sheath, a dagger in sheath, a knife in sheath, six phalerae³⁸, an Indian coin, two quivers. There were also an iron folding chair and two bows.

As one can see from the description of Bactrian graves, there were some types of object, which are characteristic for both “male” and “female” sets of burial goods. These are gold chin-bands, torques, arm-rings, shoe-fittings, plaques, bowls (also as a stand for the head of the dead), coins, knives. The “male” set differs from the “female” one by containing numerous weapons and a belt. The “female” set consists of more distinctive costume details (crowns, earrings, temple-pendants, finger-rings, collar-clasps, and foot-rings), amulets and cosmetic objects (mirrors, pyxides, glass flasks etc.).

It is interesting to note that, despite the stylistic unity of the Tillya-tepe jewellery, only some items may be characterized as objects of Animal Style representing the “classical” Scythian or Sarmatian Animal Style motifs³⁹: rows of animals, a coiled animal, and a feline attacking a hoofed animal. Such motifs are depicted only on the belt equipment and weapons from the male grave 4.⁴⁰

Now we review the burial rite and the content of the Sarmatian graves containing the Tillya-tepe Style objects.⁴¹

(1) Dachi Barrow 1, probably male burial,⁴² Lower Don Delta (fig. 8: 1). A big square-shaped grave-pit in the centre of the kurgan was completely

³⁷ Sarianidi 1985, 38–49, 250–255.

³⁸ V. Sarianidi, the director of the excavation, suggests that these six roundels belong to the horse harness (Sarianidi 1985, 39). However, there is no sign of any horse harness (bits, or any other functional parts). Therefore it is quite probable that these phalerae belong to the sword and dagger decoration.

³⁹ By the term “Scythian Animal Style” we take in account not only the stylistic features of representation, but also its motif (Perevodchikova 1994, 19–20). One of the popular definitions of the Scythian Animal Style is: “It is representing the particular animals by distinctive means” (Chlenova 1962, 3). The canonic motifs of the Scythian and Sarmatian Animal Style were defined in works of Rostovtzeff and other researchers (Rostovtzeff 1922, 201f; 1929, 28, 55f; Borovka 1928, 31ff; Perevodchikova 1994, 28ff).

⁴⁰ Two pairs of bracelets with animal-shaped endings from the female graves 2 and 6 follow the Achaemenid tradition (Rehm 1992, 20, 38; Pfrommer 1996, 92).

⁴¹ Two of the finds (from Kochkovatka and from the Kuban region) are not discussed, because they have no archaeological context

⁴² Bespalyi 1992, 175–187.

robbed in antiquity. There were at least twelve broken amphorae in the kurgan mound. In the robbed grave there are found fragments of amphorae, fragments of a glass cup, a knife, fragment of a bone pyxis, gold appliquéés, a bead, fragments of gold wire and threads. A separate hide-place in the kurgan-mound contained a width of material (a “banner”) embroidered with gold appliquéés, gold phalerae and other fittings of horse harness, a bracelet, and a sword in gold sheath.

(2) Kobiakovo Barrow 10, female burial,⁴³ Lower Don Delta (fig. 8: 2). A big square-shaped grave-pit was placed in the centre of the kurgan and covered with a mound. The grave goods were found on the skeleton and in three separate groups. Zone of skeleton: head-dress, plaques, two arm-rings, a finger-ring, amulets, and a gold flask. Group 1: a bell, a Chinese mirror, a silver spoon, a knife, an axe, a ceramic bowl, and two incense-burners. Group 2: a red-slip vessel in the form of a ram, a glass goblet, a whetstone, three bells. Group 3: horse harness plated with gold.

(3) Nikolskoe Barrow 12, male burial 1,⁴⁴ Lower Volga (fig. 8: 3). A big square-shaped grave-pit was placed in the centre of the kurgan and covered with a mound. In the earth-filling of the grave there were found a phalera decorated with gold leaf, bronze belt-fittings, three bronze lamellar rings and a wire ring.

The buried person was placed diagonally on the floor of the grave-pit. On the skeleton and nearby were found: a sword, a gold arm-ring, gold threads, a gold belt-buckle, a spear-head, an incense-burner, horse bits and psalia, a gold phalera from a harness. In one corner were found a bronze Roman patera and a gold plaque, in the other corner stood a clay jug.

(4) Tiflisskaia Barrow 2/1908, probably male burial,⁴⁵ Upper Kuban (fig. 8: 5). The grave is described in the publication as a wide chamber.⁴⁶ It was robbed in antiquity. Only gold objects are known from this complex: a plaque, a roundel with bronze backing, a belt-plaque.

(5) Ust-Labinskaia Barrow 35, probably male burial,⁴⁷ Upper Kuban (fig. 8: 6). The burial was made in a catacomb grave with an entrance-pit covered with bricks. The burial was robbed in antiquity. In the grave were found: a gold belt-plaque, gold, stone and glass beads, a gold buckle, a gold frame, a bronze ring, a bronze arrow head.

(6) Porogi Barrow 2, male burial 1⁴⁸, Middle Dniester, (fig. 8: 8). The catacomb was dug in a kurgan mound of the Bronze Age. In the burial there were

⁴³ Prokhorova, Guguev 1992.

⁴⁴ Zasetskaia 1979, 98.

⁴⁵ Gushchina, Zasetskaia 1994, 76 Nos. 539–541 Tab. 55.

⁴⁶ Gushchina, Zasetskaia 1994, 92.

⁴⁷ Gushchina, Zasetskaia 1994, 67, 89 Nos. 395–403.

⁴⁸ Simonenko, Lobai 1991, 8–14.

found two amphorae, a gold torque, a gold bracelet, gold beads, a silver goblet, a knife, a bow with bone linings, a quiver with more than thirty arrows, a sword in a sheath decorated with gold, gold and silver belt fittings, silver shoe-fittings, a silver and a bronze brooch.

Most of the Tillya-tepe looking objects from the Sarmatian graves belong to the belt equipment from the male burials. The represented subjects, scenes with a griffin attacking a hoofed animal, scenes of single combat, single representations of a beast of prey or a hoofed animal, are characteristic for the Animal Style repertory. The crown from Kobiakovo is the only Animal Style object comparable with the Tillya-tepe pictorial tradition coming from a female burial. However, the rather narrative scenes represented here do not belong to the usual motifs of the Animal Style.

When comparing the Bactrian and Sarmatian burials we observe obvious differences, both in the burial rite and in the composition of the grave goods.

None of the Sarmatian burials with Bactrian imports were placed in a simple rectangular pit. Neither is the distinctive custom of placing the head of the dead in a precious bowl represented, nor are coins and funeral chin-bands found in the Sarmatian graves.

Some differences concern particularly the “female” set of grave goods.

If we compare the set of goods of the female burial in the Kobiakovo Barrow 10 with the Tillya-tepe female burials, the difference will stand out clear by. First of all, the Kobiakovo burial contained burial goods usually characteristic of the “male” set: parts of a horse harness, weapon, and a whetstone. The Tillya-tepe female graves do not provide any items of the “male” burial set. On the other hand, the collar-clasps and large-size temple-pendants, characteristic for the Bactrian female complexes, are not represented in the Sarmatian context.

On the contrary, the male Sarmatian graves, although different in the burial rite to the Bactrian graves, show many similarities with the Tillya-tepe “male” set of goods. These are weapon and belt equipment representing motifs, which are canonical for the Animal Style. Only the apparent absence of a horse harness should be pointed out as a distinctive feature of the Tillya-tepe burial 4.

As a conclusion, the female burials of Tillya-tepe and North Pontic region are different both in burial rite and grave goods, and the male burials are different in the burial rite, but close in the content of burial goods showing a similar concept of values. This indicates that the observed link may concern only a distinctive part of population in both Bactria and the Northern Black Sea area, namely that of warriors of the highest social level.⁴⁹ This may also explain the reason for the appearance of such objects in the Tillya-tepe royal grave.

⁴⁹ Kossack 1998, 14.

Distinctions between different local cultural groups of the Sarmatian Animal Style objects. The cultural context, in which the Tillya-tepe Style objects appeared, may also vary according to the region of the find: Volga-Don area, North Caucasus, Dnieper-Dniester region (figs. 6–7). Sarmatian burials from these regions show differences in the burial rite and in the content of the grave goods. This should mean that the appearance of Tillya-tepe Style objects in these graves may demand different interpretations.

To determine the role played by the Tillya-tepe objects for peoples of the North Pontic region, we should review the general pattern of the Animal Style objects in this area.

In Sarmatian times, i.e. from the 3rd c. B.C. to the mid 3rd c. A.D., the number of Animal Style objects was reduced significantly in comparison with the 4th c. B.C., when the classical Scythian culture flourished in the North Pontic area. The pattern of their distribution in the region also changed.

In the Dnieper valley, which provided the most prominent examples of Animal Style in the Scythian period, they do not appear in the Hellenistic period (3–1 c. B.C.) at all.

In contrast, the Kuban region, including the territory of Asiatic Bosphorus, and the North Caucasus show, in principle, no interruption in the appearance of Animal Style objects in rich graves. The categories of such objects remain in the Hellenistic period, mainly the same as in the Scythian time. They are represented mainly by neck-rings. Arm-rings, plaques, drinking-vessels and horse decorations of the Scythian type are rarer. A new type of Animal Style objects in the form of ear-rings or temple-pendants shaped as a reclining goat or ram appeared in the Upper Kuban region, probably influenced by the Hellenistic fashion.⁵⁰

In the Lower Don and Lower Volga region the Animal Style objects first appeared at the end of the 2nd c. B.C. And while in the Lower Don area the gold objects of Animal Style were well known in the Scythian period, it looks to be a completely new phenomenon for the Lower Volga region. Among these novel objects are bracelets, ritual staffs⁵¹ and belt buckles.

The latter are of particular importance, if we bear in mind that the majority of Tillya-tepe Style objects in the North Pontic region are represented by belt buckles or belt fittings. The graves of Scythians, apparently, did not contain belt-plaques or buckles decorated with zoomorphic images. Some of the belt-plates and buckles, which appeared about the mid 2nd c. B.C. in the graves of

⁵⁰ Mordvintseva 2010, 54.

⁵¹ There are wooden, plated with gold elongated plates with carved zoomorphic representations, which might be found near a hand, on the sword or on the quiver (Mordvintseva, Khabarova 2006, 39–42 figs. 10–11).

Lower Don and Volga area,⁵² might be of Central Asian or Iranian provenance.⁵³

From about the mid 1st c. B.C. the pattern of distribution of the Animal Style items changed once more.

In the Volga-Don area appeared a new kind of prestigious object ornamented with images of animals, namely goblets or cups with zoomorphic handles and sets of phalerae of the Iranian type (including the saddlery phalerae with three loops on the reverse side⁵⁴). The belt plaques are represented now by those comparable with the Tillya-tepe Style, but also by the belt-plates of local production imitating “eastern” forms.⁵⁵ The most prominent archaeological complexes contain also daggers in a sheath with four side-conches.⁵⁶ Several female graves in the region contain jewellery (crowns, necklaces, torques and bracelets) and perfume flasks made in Animal Style.⁵⁷

In the Kuban region the following changes in the pattern of Animal Style objects could be observed.

There appeared a considerable number of small roundels with representations of a coiled animal – beasts of prey and goats, the purpose of which, however, is not always clear. In some cases these items may be interpreted as brooches, in others – as belt ornaments.⁵⁸ Judging by the technique and some stylistic features⁵⁹ they were locally made. But at the same time the central images of these roundels represent a coiled beast, which is characteristic for the “eastern” pictorial traditions.⁶⁰ But instead of a three-dimensional, high-relief image, which is intended to be seen from the side, these images are usually made in a low relief, designed to be seen from above.⁶¹

Big belt-plates like those from the Volga-Don area do not appear in the region. The silver belt-plaque from Vodnyi, which repeats a P-shaped form of big

⁵² Verkhnepogromnoe 2–2: Shilov 1956; Mordvintseva 2003, Cat. 45; Novyi 46–4: Iliukov, Vlaskin 1992, 60–61 fig. 12: 24–27 fig. 13: 1–6; Novyi 70–5: Iliukov, Vlaskin 1992, 80–82 fig. 20, 7–19; Cat. Paris 2001, 182 No. 201.

⁵³ These Stylistic groups of objects of Sarmatian objects were discussed in the book: Mordvintseva 2003, 51–52.

⁵⁴ Mordvinceva 2001, 43, 48–49.

⁵⁵ E.g., Vodnyi 1–1 (Mordvintseva, Khachaturova, Iurchenko 2010, Cat. 61), Zaporozhskii Barrow 1 (Mantsevich 1982), Mekhzavod (Cat. Paris 2001, No. 199).

⁵⁶ Like those of Dachi Barrow 1 (fig. 9: 1).

⁵⁷ Khokhlach Barrow (Tolstoi, Kondakov 1890, 132–140) and Kobiakovo Barrow 10 (Prokhorova, Guguev 1992).

⁵⁸ In the Don area such roundels belong to sets of horse harness.

⁵⁹ Particularly indicative are their borders shaped as a relief line, often with parallel strokes.

⁶⁰ Like those from Tillya-tepe (fig. 3: 1–4); See also: Mordvintseva 2003, Cat. 26–28, 30–31.

⁶¹ Mordvintseva 2003, Cat. 49, 50, 81, 88–89, 93–95, 97.

belt-plates, is quite small in size and made in another style (Pontic Graphical Style⁶²), very far from the “eastern” originals.

Phalerae, although decorated with zoomorphic images, are also made in the Pontic Graphical Style. They have never been found as sets in the Lower Don-Volga region.

Cups with zoomorphic handles are known in the Northern Caucasus, but only in the Upper Kuban region. This may indicate certain particular connections of this region with the Don-Volga area.

Rich female graves of the Kuban region also show a remarkable difference to those from the Volga-Don region. Crowns, perfume flasks and pyxides with zoomorphic ornamentation are not represented.

The observation made for the Kuban region may partly be applied to the Crimea, although fewer categories are represented. The Animal Style objects in this area are represented mainly by brooches with pictures of a coiled feline⁶³ and by zoomorphic handles from cups or goblets.⁶⁴ There are no Animal Style objects in the female graves at all.

In the Dnieper-Dniester region the objects with zoomorphic images do not in general show any definite pattern. The only “true” Animal Style objects are those from the Porogi male burial. It is noteworthy that the female burial of the same barrow provides jewellery of usual Hellenistic type. According to its content the Zaporozh’e Barrow⁶⁵ is close to the Don–Volga group. The Mokra burial with a fingerring⁶⁶ and the Gordievka burial with the Kuban-type goat-shaped earrings⁶⁷ are isolated cases in the vast territory. In two cases⁶⁸ bracelets with ends ornamented with animal heads are very much in the Hellenistic tradition and cannot be recognized as Animal Style objects.

Therefore the appearance of Tillya-tepe Style objects in various regions of the North Pontic area may call for different interpretations.

In the Don-Volga area such items appeared at the time, when Eastern-type objects were already customary in that culture. In the previous period the male burials of the region provided not only precious belt-fittings, but also bronze and jet belt-plates.⁶⁹ There were also other features, which indicate the close relationship of this region with the nomadic world of the Eurasian steppe belt. The Tillya-tepe Style objects, along with these innovations, might bear witness to

⁶² Mordvinceva 2001, 37–38.

⁶³ Mordvintseva 2003, 208 fig. 93: 1–3.

⁶⁴ Loboda, Puzdrovskij, Zaicev 2002, 299 No. 6; 301 fig. 4, 1–2.

⁶⁵ A set of phalerae, a bracelet, 2 belt plates (Mantsevich 1982).

⁶⁶ Kašuba, Kurčatov 2005.

⁶⁷ Mordvinceva, Treister 2007, Cat. A61.

⁶⁸ Chance finds from Olbia and Petriki (Mordvinceva, Treister 2007, Cat. B/1.13, B37).

⁶⁹ Korolkova 1999; Mordvintseva, Shinkar 1999, 141 fig. 4: 17, fig. 6: 7.

a certain cultural movement from the East, including infiltration of some new ethnic groups.

The picture looks different in the Kuban region, where the Animal Style tradition was familiar. However, whenever external influence came there, the local tradition developed it further in its own way. It was also the case with the Hellenistic jewellery tradition, which came from the neighbouring Bosporan kingdom. It was apparently so with the far-eastern nomadic tradition, which may have come via the Eurasian steppes. When foreign elements like the Tillya-tepe Style objects appeared in the Kuban region, they were regarded as especially valuable status objects which the local artistic tradition adopted and reworked as 'quotations' from a foreign pictorial language.

For a long time, at least from the 3rd to the 1st c. B.C., the Dniester-Dnieper region was alien to the Animal Style tradition. The appearance of Tillya-tepe Style objects in the burial of Porogi should probably not be interpreted as a sign of migration from the Far East. The isolated assemblages with such objects may reflect mutual social relations between elites of different peoples in the vast North Pontic area.

Thus, the distribution of the Sarmatian Animal Style objects in the North Pontic area enables us to suggest different ways, in which the Tillya-tepe Style objects occurred in various local cultural groups and their different functions in the respective cultures and societies.

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Abstract

Since the Tillya-tepe necropolis was excavated, the Gold-turquoise Style seen on its objects has always been connected with the Sarmatian Animal Style of the North Pontic region. A comparison of the stylistic features of both Tillya-tepe and Sarmatian items, however, shows that only few Sarmatian objects may have Bactrian provenance, and not all of them may belong to the Animal Style. The “true” Animal Style images are represented on prestigious items connected with social status of a warrior. The distribution of the Sarmatian Animal Style objects in the North Pontic area enables us to suggest different ways, in which the Tillya-tepe Style objects occurred in various local cultural groups and their different functions in the respective cultures and societies.

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