

**ABOUT SOME PECULIARITIES OF SEPULCHRAL FUNERAL PRACTICE
AT SCYTHIAN BURIAL GROUND MAMAY - GORA**

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Scythian sepulchral rite and funeral practice have been investigated quite well to the present time. The characteristic of burial rite has been given, the evolution of sepulchral structures has been traced, local peculiarities have been exposed (Olhovskiy, 1991). In the same time constantly increased basis of sources and reinterpretation of early data give new information for more complete studying of this aspect of spiritual culture.

Let's dwell on number of peculiarities of sepulchral-funeral practice of Scythian population, who left burial ground Mamay-Gora, situated near Kamenskoye Gorodishe.

1. In the north-eastern outskirts of burial ground the burial mound explored with 3 pits, which did not contain burials. This complex is related to rather rarely being founded in Scythian world so called sacrificial structures (Olhovskiy, 1991). Undoubtedly, religious significance of the monument connected with sepulchral rites but without burials, confirms by only artefact presence - turtle's test in central pit. Turtle's cult is recorded in Indo-Arian mythology. Besides that, its image is represented in ritual scenes, associated with sepulchral rites, depicted on head-dresses from Bolshaya Bliznitsa and Karagodeushh (Andreev, 1994).

2. Also in the periphery of burial ground, in its northern and north-eastern part, significant conglomeration of so called "sacrificial" pits has been excavated. Its bigger part is concentrated in the direct nearness from the mentioned burial ground. The fragments of Greek amphoras, moulded pottery give evidence of their belonging to Scythians. In one of the pits the safe example of Scythian pot was founded. In number of pits the debris of animal bones were founded. The analogies to similar compact complexes of pits in Scythian sepulchral practice are not known, but close by type conglomeration of pits are accounted in Late-Scythian burial grounds of Lower Dnieper, Crimea and Dniester regions (Malukovich, 1994).

3. Here also eastern and western sectors of ditch were traced and investigated (southern sector has been destroyed as a result of collapse of shore), it does not bound to certain sepulchral complex and has not precise configuration, which is not characteristic for Scythian ditches. In the ditch the fragments of amphoras, moulded pottery, animal bones and what is remarkable - fragments of human bones have been founded.

4. In the number of sepulchral structures of the same site of burial ground side by side with buried skeleton separate human bones and their fragments are recorded. The presence of human sacrifices in Scythian religious practice is known as by written (narrative) sources (sacrifices to Ares - the God of War, people's mortification during Tzar's funeral, manufacture of bowls from enemy's skulls - Herod, IV, 62, 64, 65, 71, 72), and also by archaeological data laying down human skulls (Plavni I) or accompanied persons, perished by violent death, to the burial and artefacts of polished human bones at the settlements (Kamenskoye Gorodishe). But special putting odd fragments of human bones to the burial is not characteristic for the all of the rest massive of Scythian burials considering this burial ground and other monuments chronologically synchronous in it.

5. The following peculiarity is consisted in reinterpretation of functional earmarking of some categories of inventory. Artefacts of wooden bowls are not frequent, but characteristic for Scythian burials of different social ranks. There were stated opinions as to their ceremonial and consumer prescription. In examined burial ground three bowls which contained animal shoulder-blade inside are attracted attention. This category of inventory does not relate to farewell meal, extended in Scythian sepulchral practice. Its analogies in Indo-Iranian ceremonial practice are not known also. But appealing to medieval written sources and ethnographic parallels we found broadly speeded custom of fortune-telling by sheep's shoulder-blade (and also bear's, elk's and other animals' shoulder-blades) among Turkic peoples (Manas, 81-82, Shahashov, 1997). Confirmation of magic or fortune-telling role of shoulder-blade we can see in the artefact of sheep's shoulder-blade in the priestess burial from burial ground Tasmol dated VIII-VII centuries B.C. in central Kazakhstan sheep's shoulder-blade, wrapped into fabric and laid into bronze copper, from burial ground Ternovoye Kolbinskiy in Middle Don region.

Preceded from this point, the assumption of presence of fortune-telling practice by animal shoulder-blade in Scythian Indo-Iranian world unknown to us by other sources is quite real. By the way, the shoulder-blades not only of sheep's but also probably of cattle have been used for fortune-telling according to evidence of archaeological-zoological (osteological) data examinations from burial ground Mamay-Gora. The purpose of this thesis is to attract attention to marked peculiarities, which significantly increase our conceptions about sepulchral-funeral and ceremonial Scythian practice in particular and peoples of Indo-Iranian region as a whole.