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**WEIBLICHE ELITEN  
IN DER FRÜHGESCHICHTE**

**FEMALE ELITES IN PROTOHISTORIC EUROPE**

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# INHALT

*Dieter Quast*

Weibliche Eliten – eine Einführung .....	1
--	---

## **Hierarchien und Selbstdarstellung weiblicher Eliten in der Frühgeschichte**

*Matthias Hardt*

Königstöchter – Konkubinen – Hausherrinnen. Gesellschaftliche Stratifizierungen weiblicher Mitglieder der merowingerzeitlichen Oberschicht anhand schriftlicher Quellen .....	7
---	---

*Ursula Koch*

Hierarchie der Frauen merowingerzeitlicher Hofgesellschaften .....	15
--	----

*Ulla Lund Hansen*

Women's World? Female Elite Graves in Late Roman Denmark .....	33
--	----

*Max Martin*

Merowingerzeitliche Wagengräber .....	41
---------------------------------------	----

*Antoinette Rast-Eicher, Patrick Périn*

Die merowingerzeitlichen Frauenbestattungen aus der Basilika von Saint-Denis. Neue interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen .....	67
---	----

*Gabriele Graenert*

Grabausstattung und Standesbewusstsein – eine Problemskizze zur romanischen Beigabensitte mit Fallbeispielen aus der Burgundia .....	77
--	----

*Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska*

Frühe »Awarinnen« und späte »Germaninnen«? Bemerkungen zur Interpretation reicher Frauengräber der Frühawarenzeit .....	89
---	----

*Lotta Fernstål*

Female Boat Graves in Sweden. Aspects of Elite and Cosmopolitanism during the Late Iron Age ....	111
--	-----

*Dieter Quast*

Der Schatz der Königin? Völkerwanderungszeitliche Schatzfunde und weibliche Eliten .....	121
--	-----

## **Weibliche Eliten in Kult, Religion und Jenseits**

*Michael J. Enright*

Warlords and Women in the First Millennium. The Case of the Prophetess, and the Experience of the Followers' Wives and Daughters .....	145
--	-----

<i>Jacek Andrzejowski</i>	
Out of the Social Structure? A Late Roman Period Female Grave from Jartypory, Eastern Poland . . . .	185
<i>Eszter Istvánovits, Valéria Kulcsár</i>	
Satana and Others: Priestesses, Witches and Queens of the Steppe-Region . . . . .	201
<i>Rudolf Simek</i>	
The Late Roman Iron Age Cult of the <i>matronae</i> and Related Germanic Deities . . . . .	219
<i>Margrethe Watt</i>	
Images of the Female »Elite«? Gold Foil Figures ( <i>Guldgubbar</i> ) from the 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> Century Scandinavia . . . . .	229
<i>John Ljungkvist</i>	
Mistresses of the Cult – Evidence of Female Cult Leaders from an Archaeological Perspective . . . . .	251
<i>Anne-Sofie Gräslund</i>	
Female Elites in Viking Age Scandinavia during the Christianization . . . . .	267
<i>Antje Kluge-Pinsker</i>	
Weibliche Würdenträger in klerikalen Kontexten des Frühmittelalters . . . . .	279

## **Vernetzung weiblicher Eliten**

<i>Timo Stickler</i>	
Römisch-barbarische Heiratsbeziehungen in der Völkerwanderungszeit . . . . .	297
<i>Jan Schuster</i>	
Frühe Gräber weiblicher Eliten bei den Germanen und ihre Vernetzung im Barbaricum . . . . .	307
<i>Marzena J. Przybyła</i>	
Die Regionalisierung der reichen Frauentracht und die Nachweismöglichkeiten jünger-kaiserzeitlicher Heiratskreise am Beispiel Nordeuropas . . . . .	321
<i>Karen Høilund Nielsen</i>	
Animal Style and Elite Communication in the Later 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> Centuries . . . . .	361
<i>Alexandra Pesch</i>	
Gold Bracteates and Female Burials. Material Culture as a Medium of Elite Communication in the Migration Period . . . . .	377
<i>Dieter Quast (unter Mitwirkung von Dominique Wiebe)</i>	
Zusammenfassung und Ausblick . . . . .	399
Verzeichnis der Autoren . . . . .	409

## **SATANA AND OTHERS: PRIESTESSES, WITCHES AND QUEENS OF THE STEPPE-REGION**

### **MATRIARCHY IN THE SARMATIAN SOCIETY?**

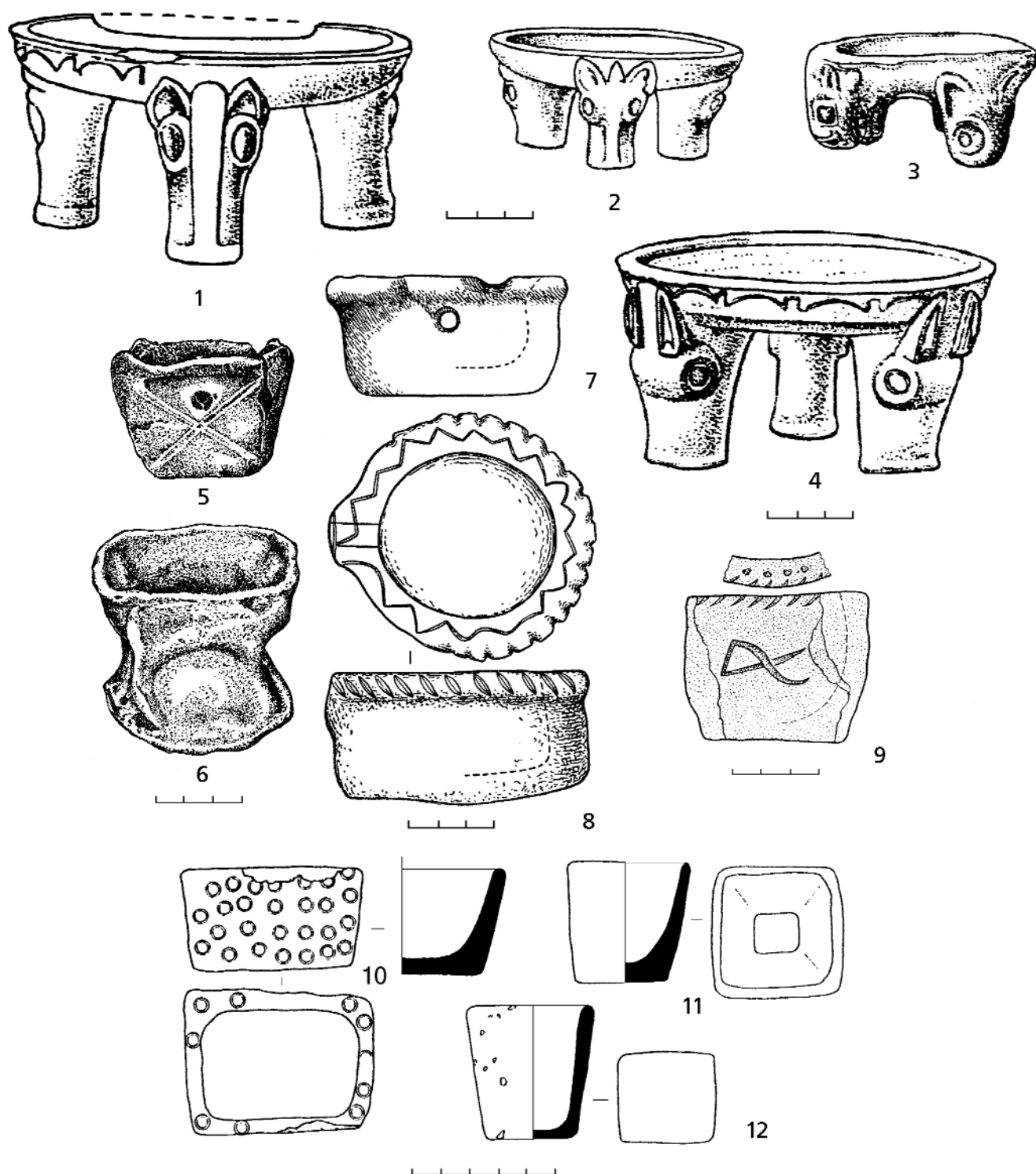
The sacred, ritual role of women in the Iranian societies can be traced back to very ancient roots. It is enough to mention different kinds of Scythian queens/goddesses depicted at a great number of objects. Following Grakov's famous 1947 article on gynecocracy, the female power in Sauromatian/Sarmatian society<sup>1</sup>, it became a common place having been repeated in the contemporary literature – both academic and popular – that early Sarmatians practised matriarchy. That would explain the legends about Amazons, the society of warrior women, constantly repeated in antique literary sources. A characteristic example for this phenomenon can be cited from Pseudo-Hippocrates (17) (5<sup>th</sup> century BC):

»In Europe there is a Scythian race, called Sauromatae, which inhabits the confines of the Palus Maeotis, and is different from all other races. Their women mount on horseback, use the bow, and throw the javelin from their horses, and fight with their enemies as long as they are virgins; and they do not lay aside their virginity until they kill three of their enemies, nor have any connection with men until they perform the sacrifices according to law. Whoever takes to herself a husband, gives up riding on horseback unless the necessity of a general expedition obliges her. They have no right breast; for while still of a tender age their mothers heat strongly a copper instrument constructed for this very purpose, and apply it to the right breast, which is burnt up, and its development being arrested, all the strength and fullness are determined to the right shoulder and arm«<sup>2</sup>.

Sarmatians and Amazons are usually related after Herodotus' passage (IV.116) according to which Sauromatians were born out of the marriages between Scythians and Amazons. »The women of the Sauromatae have continued from that day to the present to observe their ancient customs, frequently hunting on horseback with their husbands, sometimes even unaccompanied; in war taking the field; and wearing the very same dress as the men.«<sup>3</sup>

Apart from literary sources we have archaeological evidence on the peculiar role of women in the Sauromatian/Sarmatian society. This is the unusually high number of female burials of the early Sarmatian periods, supplied with warrior equipment. We would not like to elaborate this very many-folded problem and would only underline that matriarchy is a heavily debated and mostly hypothetical social phenomenon. We tend to accept Hazanov's opinion, according to which the real social phenomenon can be described as matrilineality (families based on tracing descent through the female line) or, perhaps, matrilocality (the state or custom of residing with the family or tribe of the wife) that could characterise early Sarmatian societies. However, the leading role obviously belonged to men. That does not exclude very special role of women, who took part in wars (20% of Sauromatian warrior burials belonged to women)<sup>4</sup> and played a leading if not unique role in sacral life<sup>5</sup>.

The latter circumstance is attested by the fact that especially in the Sauromatian Age (earliest phase of Sarmatian history) and during later phases cultic objects are regularly found in female graves. Among them the most characteristic ones are the so-called stone altars (fig. 1, 1-4), usually decorated with animal depic-



**Fig. 1** Typical cultic objects from Sarmatian female burials: **1-4** Stone altars. – **5-9** Incense burners. – **10-12** Cultic vessels from Hungary. – (1-4 after Smirnov 1989; 5-6 after Pšeničnjuk 1983, 187; 7-8 after Smirnov 1975, 71; 9 after Smirnov 1984, 92; 10-12 after Vaday / Medgyesi 1993, 82). – Without scale.

tions, or other artefacts with the traces of fire. The incense burners (*kurilnitsa*) that could serve as means for rituals connected with smoke, also belong to typically female grave-goods (fig. 1, 5-9). The smoke left the vessels through one or several holes in the bottom or wall of the pot. Remains of different materials at the bottom of these vessels refer to the burning of grass, wheat, resin or other aromatic materials<sup>6</sup>. (In-

cense burners are known up to the latest phase of Sarmatian history, reaching as far as the Hungarian Plain; fig. 1, 10-12.) Judging from a Herodotus' locus (IV.74-75) considering Scythians, we may suggest that incense burners served for smoking or spreading drugs, which has been a widely known way of using them almost up to our days in many societies practising shamanism.

Role of women in the hierarchy of the Iranian nomadic societies is also reflected in a number of literary sources. The earliest of them is the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC story of the Massagetican (Iranian tribe related to Sarmatians) queen Tomyris who fought against Persian monarch Cyrus, and succeeded in defeating him. As an act of revenge for causing her son's death, Cyrus was killed and on the order of Tomyris his cut head was dipped into a vessel full of human blood<sup>7</sup>.

The story of Amage is known from a so-called *strategem* by Polyaeus, an author from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Amage, whose Iranian name means »powerful«, was the wife of a Sarmatian king possessing lands neighbouring the North Pontic coast. The drunkard king hardly dealt with any royal affairs, so she was the one to handle actual problems and was famous for interfering in critical situations, like in the case of the citizens of the Greek town Chersonessos. It was troubled by Scythians and inhabitants asked for alliance. Amage herself headed a troop of 120 horsemen, made a march of 1200 stadions (c. 220 km) riding day and night and suddenly appeared in front of the Scythian royal residence. She killed the king and his companions<sup>8</sup>.

The story of Tirgatao, an Ixomatian (one of the Sarmatian tribes) princess also told by Polyaeus is even more adventurous. She married Hecataeus, king of the Sindi, a people who lived a little above the Bosphorus. Hecataeus was expelled from his kingdom, but later Satyrus, the tyrant of Bosphorus reinstated him on his throne. Satyrus gave him his daughter in marriage, and urged him to kill his former wife, Tirgatao. She found a way to escape, went to the country of the Ixomatae, where her own family possessed the throne. Her father was dead, and she married his successor in the kingdom. Then she roused the Ixomatae and their allies to war, invaded the country of Hecataeus, and afterwards ravaged the dominions of Satyrus<sup>9</sup>. These events were dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> century BC<sup>10</sup>.

Speaking about famous Sarmatian queens we cannot neglect the late-1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Bosporan queen Dynamis, the only woman occupying the Bosporan throne. She, the granddaughter of Mithridates the Great, was actually not of Sarmatian origin, but, according to several hypothesis, her husband or son Aspurgos was said to be Sarmatian or at least closely related to the local Sarmatian-Meotic tribes<sup>11</sup>. Dynamis' roots could mean a lot in the Bosporan Kingdom the culture of which represented a symbiosis of Greek urban traditions and that of Iranian nomads.

Though most of these stories come from second and third hand legends used by ancient writers more or less in a literary way, they still contain some reference to the role of women played in the social hierarchy. The high-status of a female actor can be traced in the Ossetian Nart epic considered to be based on Sarmatian-Alanic mythology. One of the central figures of the epic is Satana, the wise and shrewd *mater familiae* who could use magic and obviously played the role of the sacral female<sup>12</sup>. She was the mother of two main heroes of the Nart clan, invented Ossetian beer and fought like men in armour when necessary.

## PRIESTESSES AND TREES OF LIFE

Let us have a short survey of the outstanding finds from the steppe<sup>13</sup> and from the Carpathian Basin marking the burials of sacred and/or noble/royal women. Most of these steppe burials were dated to a relatively narrow period between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.



**Fig. 2** Hohlač (Novočerkassk, Rostov district/RUS). A sample of the golden objects from the grave: **1** Diadem with garnet and glass insets and an Early Hellenistic gem. – **2** Plaques of the costume. – **3** Neckring. – **4** Cup. – **5** Flacon. – (After Cat. Sankt-Petersburg 2008, 10 fig. 8; 110 no. 27; 114 no. 29; 116 no. 30; 119 no. 32). – Different scales.

### Hohlač (Novočerkassk, Rostov district/RUS)

The finds of the robbed barrow found during construction works in 1864 became famous as the »Novočerkassk Treasure«<sup>14</sup>, dated to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. We have no data on the circumstances of the burial. Judging from the set of the grave-goods, it had to belong to a rich woman. The main finds included a number of golden objects: a torque (fig. 2, 3), two bracelets, three perfume containers, a flacon hanging from a chain (fig. 2, 5), a cylindrical jade object decorated with a lion's figure, a figure of Eros playing a flute, two cups (fig. 2, 4); two silver jugs, three broken bronze vessels, a large number of golden plaques decorating the costume (fig. 2, 2), remains of golden thread, pieces of silver, fragments of a terracotta sculpture etc.

The most famous find of the »treasure« is the three-part golden diadem decorated with garnet and glass insets and an Early Hellenistic gem in the centre (fig. 2, 1). The upper edge of the diadem represents a scene with a Tree of Life in the centre (and, probably, two other trees standing between animals, and a pair of birds) with pairs of animals (stags and goats) approaching the tree from both sides (fig. 3, 3).



**Fig. 3** Animals and Trees of Life on diadems: **1** Kobjakovo, barrow 10. – **2** Ust'-Labinskaja, barrow 46. – **3** Hohlač. – (1 after Prohoro-  
rova 1994, fig. 1; 2 after Zaseckaja 1975, fig. 3; 3 reconstruction drawing by Zs. Benke). – Different scales.

### **Kobjakovo, grave 10 (Rostov-on-Don/RUS)**

The originally 3m high barrow situated in the outskirts of Rostov-on-Don was demolished<sup>15</sup>. During excavations in 1987 (**fig. 4, 1**), on the daily surface under the mound, a place for sacrifices (a burned clay space with pieces of broken Roman objects and a lot of ash) was cleaned. The square shaped, 3.6 × 3.4 m large grave was covered with two layers (reed and birch bark). The dead – a 25-30 year-old woman oriented SE-NW – was placed into a wooden coffin (2.5 × 2.5 m), in all probability, onto a burial bed. The burial was dated to the late 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

The richness of the woman buried here was outstanding. Her dress was decorated with golden plates, her shoes with semi-precious stone and glass beads. The richly decorated costume was completed with a large



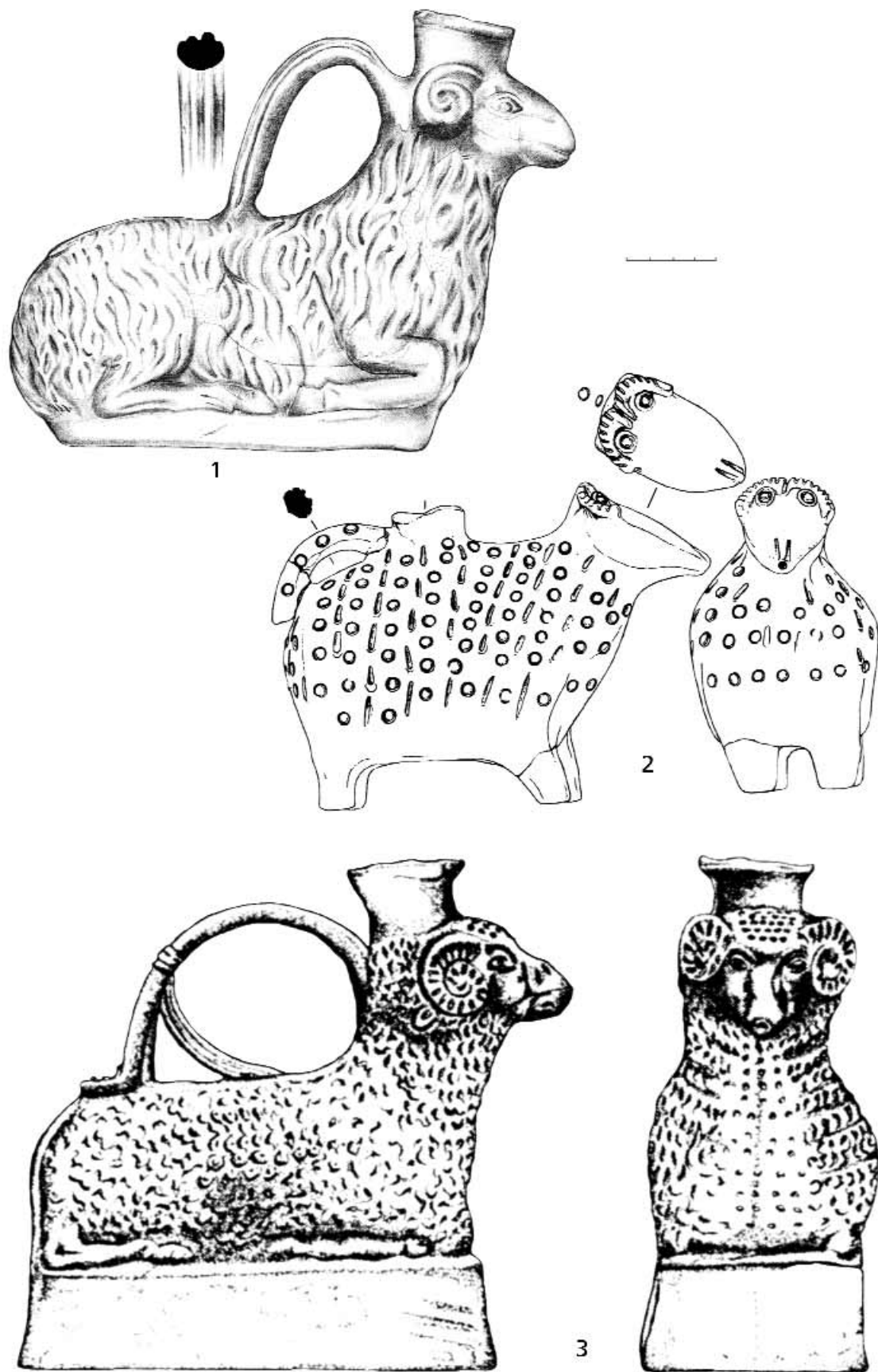


**Fig. 4** Kobjakovo (Rostov-on-Don/RUS) grave 10: **1** The grave during excavation. – **2** Reconstruction of the headgear decorated with golden foil applications. – **3** Golden flacon. – **4** Pair of golden bracelets. – **5** Golden neckring. – **6** Chinese mirror, bronze with babbitt coat. – (1 after Cat. Paris 2001, 221; 2-6 after Cat. Frankfurt 2003, 145. 148. 157). – Different scales.

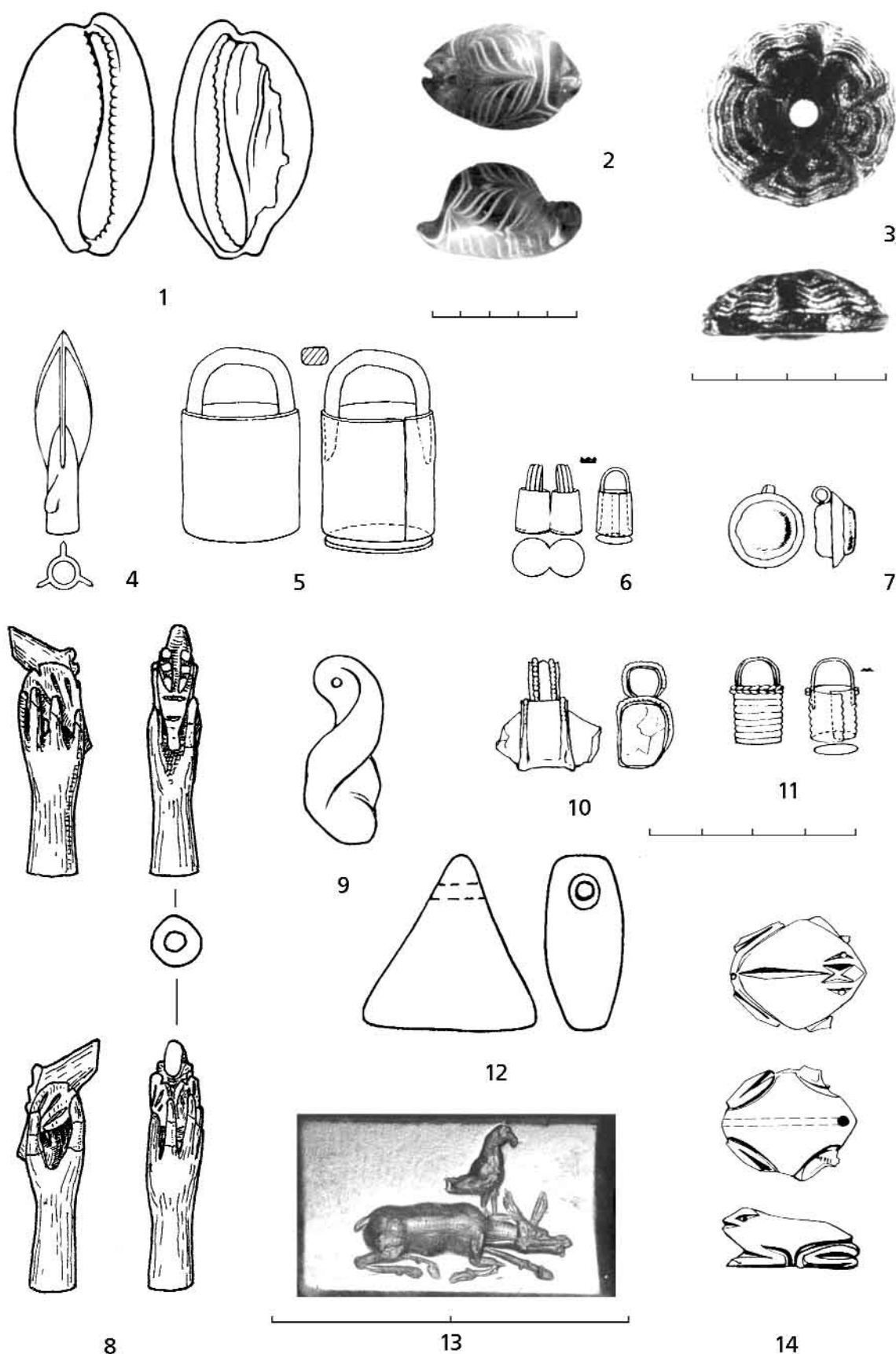
amount of golden jewellery (bracelets, ring, torque) (fig. 4, 2. 4-5). In the central part of the burial, different grave-goods were placed, among them two wooden caskets with bronze mountings, a golden flacon (fig. 4, 3), decorations and pieces of horse harness, a Chinese mirror (fig. 4, 6), an iron knife, a silver spoon, a wooden vessel and a bell.

Among the vessels representing sacral value, several incense burners and a ram shaped red antique vessel must be mentioned (fig. 5, 3). A special feature of the grave is the outstandingly rich set of different kinds of amulets, among them beads made of semi-precious stones, a Skarabeus shaped quartz, a carnelian intaglio depiction of a dog and a star, another intaglio depicting an ungulate and a predatory bird (fig. 6, 13).

The lady from Kobjakovo had a headgear with the same basic elements as the one from Hohlač. The leather headgear was decorated with golden foil applications: in the centre we see the depiction of the Tree of Life, left and right of it three figurines of stags and two predatory birds (figs 3, 1; 4, 2). The headgear was richly decorated with flat, round golden plates. On the neck of the dead woman an outstanding and unique torque was found. The golden openwork torque was decorated with torquoise insets. In the centre of the



**Fig. 5** Ram shaped vessels: **1** Hajdúböszörmény-Vid. – **2** Neizats. – **3** Kobjakovo barrow 10. – (1 after Istvánovits 1998, 138; 2 after Hrapunov 2007, 173; 3 after Prohorova / Guguev 1992, 145). – Different scales.



**Fig. 6** Amulets: **1. 4-12. 14** Sokolova Mogila. – **2-3** Hajdúböszörmény-Vid. – **13** Kobjakovo barrow 10. (1. 4-7. 9-12. 14 after Kovpanenko 1986, fig. 94-95. 101. 104. 107; 2-3 after Kovács 2001, fig. 2-3; 8 after Simonenko 2008, pl. 107, 2; 13 after Cat. Paris 2001, 230 no. 246). – Different scales.

composition there is a man dressed in a nomadic way and sitting in a typical eastern pose, with a cup in his hands and a sword on his lap. Left and right of the central figure there are depictions of a battle between three zooanthropomorphic creatures wearing arms and fighting against a dragon.

Surveying the numerous finds of Kobjakovo, grave 10, we have to notice objects that definitely served as insignia or power: the diadem, the set of torque and bracelets and the richly decorated horse-harness.

### **Ust'-Labinskaja, barrow 46 (Krasnodar Region/RUS)**

This robbed barrow grave was found in 1902<sup>16</sup>. On the basis of a fibula it was dated to the mid-late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. As in the previous cases, the most characteristic objects were the golden plates of different forms, decorating the dress of the dead woman, golden beads, earrings, a fibula, bronze and iron details of cosmetic box etc. The most characteristic features of the burial are the pieces of a diadem, the best parallels of which are known from Kobjakovo. All the pieces were cut out of bronze and covered with golden plaque (**fig. 3, 2**). They are the following: 1. A Tree of Life with seven branches. Figures of birds sit on the upper two branches and on the top, the ends of the lower branches were decorated with protomes of goats. 2. A figurine of a stag. 3. A figurine of a goat. 4. A figurine of a rabbit.

### **Pesčanyj, grave 10 (Krasnodar Region/RUS)**

A second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD grave of a 45-55 year-old woman, situated into the mould of an earlier barrow grave<sup>17</sup>. The burial, made in a simple 1.2 × 1.7 m large, rectangular pit, was found 5.66 m deep, the dead was oriented ESE-WNW.

Similarly to most of the female burials examined here, this woman also had a richly decorated dress (**fig. 7, 1**), with sewn on golden plates on the sleeves and at the lower part. The shoes were ornamented with golden stripes and links, six figurines of horses and several dozens of garnet and glass beads with golden parts inside.

A golden brooch with an antique intaglio depicting Nike and almandine stones was found on the skull of the dead (**fig. 7, 2**). It must have decorated a kind of headgear substituting diadem. The jewellery also included two golden temple rings; a unique necklace consisting of granulated golden beads and precious stones (**fig. 7, 3**). Under the breast, the dress was ornamented with ten golden beads. There was a pair of bracelets, made of bead and gold, on both wrists. The grave-goods included a small silver cup (**fig. 7, 5**), a bronze mirror in a wooden sheath, an iron knife placed onto the mirror, a silver spoon with a wolf(?) shaped ending (**fig. 7, 6**), a small pot with a piece of iron link inside, a Late Hellenistic silver cup incised inside (**fig. 7, 4**), a big cauldron with handles, decorated with a figurine of stag; the top of the cauldron with a similar, but smaller cauldron inside, decorated with a bull-head. On the top of the bronze vessels an iron pole-top was placed, decorated with a stylised Tree of Life and upper parts of stags (**fig. 8, 2**).

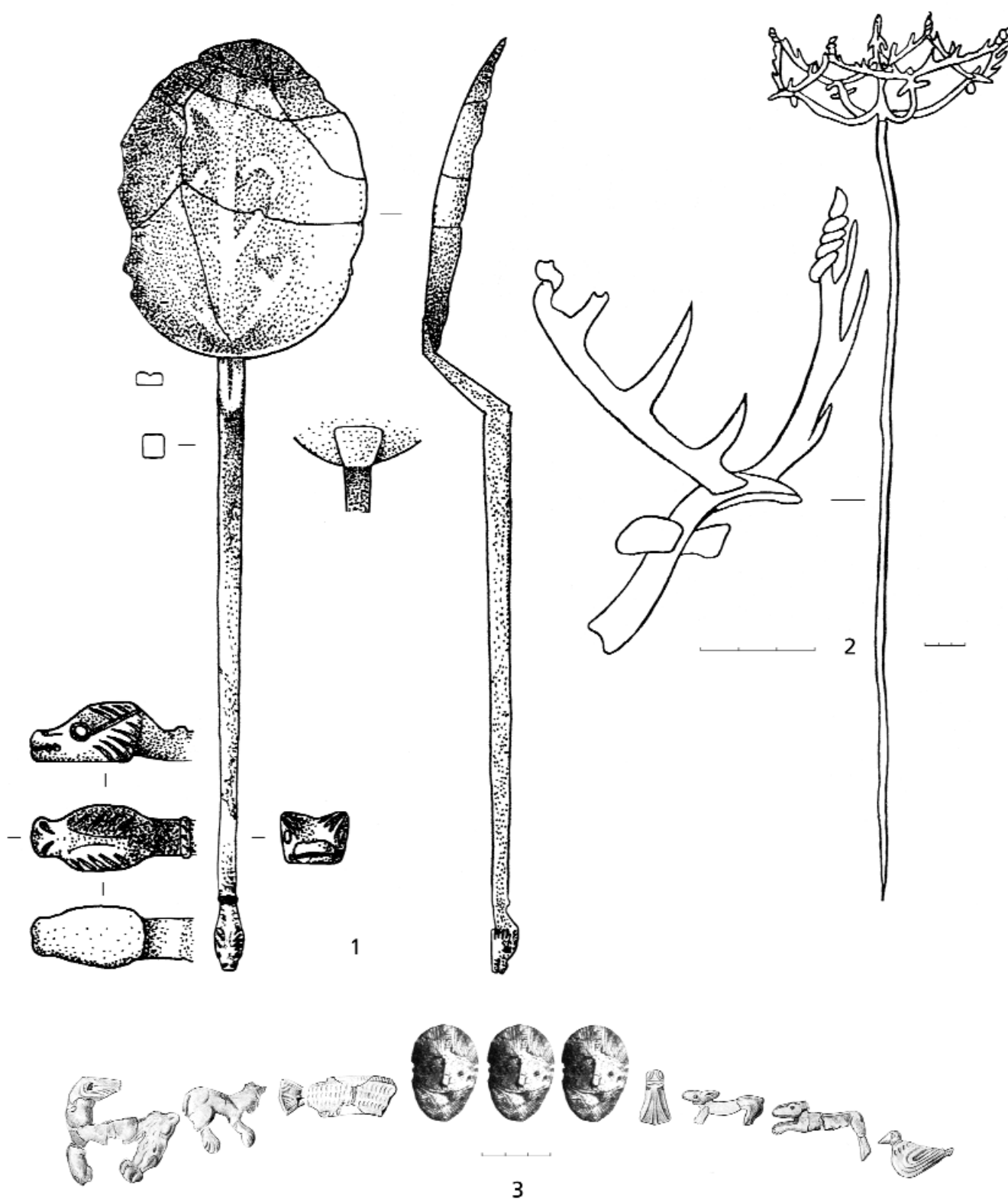
The sacral character of the grave is emphasised by the valuable brooch possibly substituting diadem, the cauldrons, the iron pole-top with the Tree of Life and stags, the spoon with wolf shaped ending.

### **Sokolova Mogila (Nikolaev District/UA)**

A 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Sarmatian grave was buried into the central part of an earlier barrow grave's mound<sup>18</sup>. The outstandingly richly installed grave belonged to a 45-50 year-old woman dressed in trousers(?), a purple dress and a blue cloak (**fig. 9, 4, 6**). The dress was embroidered with golden thread and decorated with several hundreds of golden plates of different shapes, parts of them incrustated with enamel (**fig. 9, 1**).

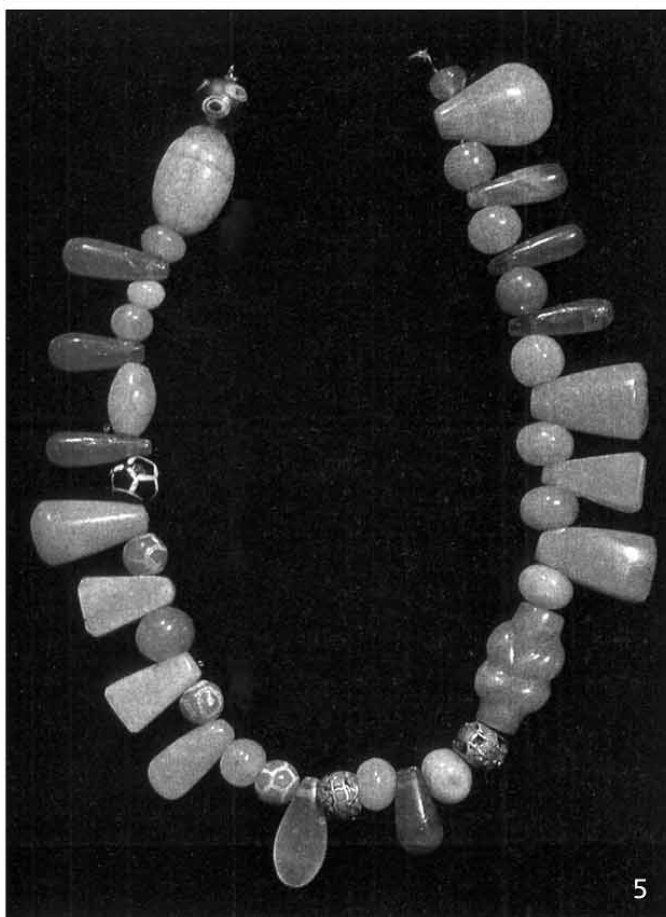
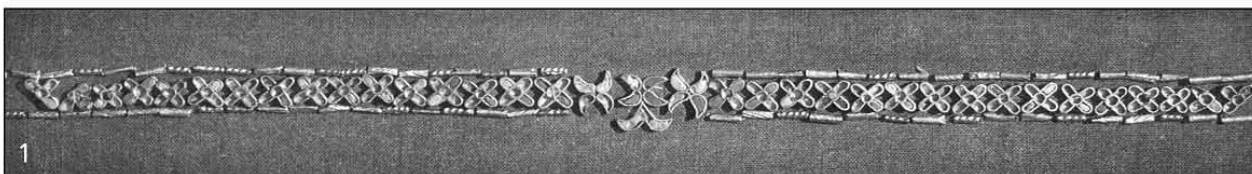


**Fig. 7** Pesčanyj (Krasnodar Region, Russia) grave 10: **1** Reconstruction of the dress. – **2** Golden brooch with an antique intaglio used on the headgear. – **3** Necklace, granulated golden beads and precious stones. – **4** Late Hellenistic silver cup incised inside. – **5** Silver cup. – **6** Silver spoon. – (After Cat. Paris 2001, 169-171. 174). – Different scales.



**Fig. 8** 1 Spoon with the depiction of Tree of Life, Sokolova Mogila. – 2 Iron pole-top with Tree of Life, Peščanyj, grave 10. – 3 Reconstruction of the diadem from Szentes-Nagyhegy, grave 20. – (1 after Simonenko 2008, pl. 107; 2 after Ždanovskij 1990, fig. 34, 2). – Different scales.





The cloak and the shoes were also decorated with golden plates. The jewellery included a pair of polychromic golden earrings, three necklaces consisting of gold chains and pendants out of precious and semi-precious stones (fig. 9, 5), bracelets (fig. 9, 2-3), a ring with figurines of the Isis cult and two golden brooches. The headgear included 30 pieces of chalcedonic and carnelian beads and pendants, with a frog shaped chalcedony amulet (fig. 6, 14) in the middle – likewise the headgear from Pesčanyj.

Beside the pieces of costume and decoration, a great number of grave-goods were placed by the dead, among them imported metal and stone vessels, a wooden cup decorated with golden plate on the rim and an incense burner of clay. The handle of a unique mirror depicts a male figure sitting in an eastern way, holding a *rhyton* in his hands, which reminds us of the representation of the man on the torque from Kobjakovo, who is holding a cup in his hands. Beside these finds two different fans, unique in Sarmatian milieu, and a cosmetic set were placed into the grave. Of special interest is a silver spoon with a serpent shaped ending and with golden inlay depicting the Tree of Life (fig. 8, 1).

The special feature of the Sokolova Mogila burial is the outstanding number of amulets, a total of 67 pieces. A part of them consists of secondarily used pieces of jewellery or objects of other function. Not going into details, we should mention glass, gagate, agate, jaspis, hematite, porphirit, carnelian, amber (fig. 6, 12), limestone and chalk beads. Five amulets represent a *Cypraea* (fig. 6, 1) and four other seashells (fig. 6, 9). One pendant was made of the seed of *Pinus pinea*. Several amulets were made of bone, one of them is an Egyptian figurine related to fertility cult, another is a terminal of a stylus needle representing a hand holding an animal (fig. 6, 8). One of the rings had a carnelian gem depicting a frog, three others had also gem insets with antique scenes. The group of metallic amulets included a bronze pendant in the shape of a hand, a phallus shaped iron pendant, three bucket shaped pendants (gold and iron) (fig. 6, 5-6. 11), a bronze arrowhead (fig. 6, 4), a miniature silver vessel, pieces of several metallic objects, different kinds of golden pendants (fig. 6, 7. 10) and beads made of shark tooth. Ritual significance also must have had a Scarabeus shaped bead, two chalcedonic stamp beads with engraved decorations of a ram and a griffon head and two chalcedonic pendants imitating seashells. In the purse, containing aromatic materials, a piece of pine tree (*Taxus baccata*), possibly used as incense material, was found. A jasper mace is usually interpreted as insignium of power.

The outstanding richness of the costume and decorations, the great number of amulets, the incense burner, the sceptre and other objects that might have served cultic purposes (stone vessels, whetstone, fans, mirror) show that the woman buried in Sokolova Mogila belonged to the highest hierarchy of the contemporary Sarmatian society, representing wealth, power and ritual functions.

### Szentes-Nagyhegy, grave 20 (Csongrád County/H)

The westernmost find of Sarmatian female burial that can be considered, is that of a sacral person who was found in the Great Hungarian Plain<sup>19</sup>. It was excavated and first published by Csallány. Later several attempts were made to interpret this grave, the last one by the authors<sup>20</sup>. Before introducing the Szentes-Nagyhegy find we should underline, that material in question, from all aspects, is much poorer, less char-

Fig. 9 Sokolova Mogila (Nikolaev District/UA): 1 Part of the dress decoration, golden plates incrustated with enamel. – 2-3 Pair of golden barceleets. – 4 Reconstruction of the dress. – 5 Necklace, semi-precious stones and enamelled gold beads. – 6 Embroidery from the lower border of the purple dress. – (After Kovpanenko 1986, 33 fig. 29; 34 fig. 30; 115 fig. 122; 118 fig. 125; 125 fig. 133). – Different scales.



acteristic than in the case of burials found in Russia and Ukraine, listed above. In the course of decades and centuries, Sarmatians (Jazygians and Roxolanians) arriving to the Hungarian Plain lost a lot of colourful features they used to have in the steppe: the burial rite became more simple, the grave-goods poorer and less sophisticated, antique imported goods from Asia Minor and North Pontic were replaced by mass products of the Western Empire. The whole way of life changed radically: in the Carpathian Basin, the nomads of the Eurasian steppe settled down and were mainly engaged in agriculture. But even so, the far reminiscents of the eastern traditions are sometimes met in the graves of the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain, and the one from Szentes-Nagyhegy is an outstanding example of this rare phenomenon.

The burial rite (SW-NE orientation) and most of the attributes of costume and grave-goods resemble an average Sarmatian female burial: a pair of silver earrings, a necklace of carnelian, amber and glass beads, a pendant, a spindle-whorl, chalcedony and chalk beads decorating the sleeves of the dress or the wrinkles, numerous amber and glass beads decorating the lower part of the trousers(?), bronze details of a Roman *scrinium* (wooden box), wheel-made vessel at the feet and an iron knife. The most probable date for the burial is the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

What makes this average assemblage unique is the headgear composed of golden decorations. Several human and animal figures stamped out of golden foil were found under the skull one next another, on a 17 cm long and 8 cm wide surface (**fig. 8, 3**). Remains of a leather like material were observed during the cleaning of the site. Starting from the head up to the right elbow there were almost 150 flitters. The authors agree with Párducz who suggested that »figural ornaments were situated on the headgear, and flitters decorated the veil hanging down from the headgear«<sup>21</sup>. The most interesting pieces of the headgear are three golden masks depicting male faces with moustache and beard; the eyes are shown by red stone inlays. Beside these human faces there is a number of animal figures: a bird, a fish, three rabbits (two of them running), a deer, eight bees or cicadas. The suggested veil was decorated with numerous golden flitters, pieces of golden foil.

Judging from the human and animal depictions we suggested that the woman (priestess?) buried in Szentes-Nagyhegy had a diadem/headgear deriving from the pattern of the earlier, much richer and more characteristic eastern »colleagues«. It should be kept in mind that the Hungarian burial is at least 150 years younger than the latest one from the row of eastern Sarmatian priestesses. The authors suggest that the diadem – at least partly – was brought from the steppe and used in the Hungarian Plain for a long time, probably by several generations. The »compulsory« Tree of Life is missing from the Szentes assemblage, it could be replaced by the human face depictions.

### **Hajdúböszörmény-Vid (Hajdú-Bihar County/H)**

There is one more Hungarian assemblage that includes grave-goods possibly referring to the burial of a sacral person<sup>22</sup>. Nothing is known on the circumstances of the burial, the only information we have is that the set of objects comes from a sandpit. The find contained a big glass amulet, imitating a *Cypraea* (Cowrie) decorated with wavy lines (**fig. 6, 2**), a decorated big glass object (spindle-whorl or sword pommel; **fig. 6, 3**)<sup>23</sup>, chalcedony, carnelian and glass beads, a bronze fibula and a Roman red-coated terracotta vessel in the shape of a ram (**fig. 5, 1**). On the basis of the fibula and the beads the assemblage can be dated to the late-third century.

Istvánovits dedicated an article with a system of arguments showing that ram, the symbol of »farn«, the good fortune and luck in the Iranian world, was especially significant for the Sarmatians. Apart from other evidence, this is proved by the fact that Roman ram shaped vessels are frequently found in Sarmatian graves of the steppe (one of them in the above mentioned Kobjakovo, grave 10; **fig. 5, 3**). The significance of this

Site	Age	Dia- dem	Sceptre/ mace	Mirror	Tree of Life	Flitter	Amulet	Other	Reference
Kobjakovo grave 10 (Lower Don)	25-30	+		Chinese	+	+	+	torque, perfume container, silver spoon, horse harness, ram shaped vessel	Prohorova / Guguev 1992
Hohlač (Lower Don)	?	+			+	+		perfume container	Tolstoj / Kondakov 1890, 132-133
Pesčanyj grave 10 (Kuban)	45-55	+	+	+	+	+		cauldron, spoon with a wolf shaped ending	Ždanovskij 1990
Ust'-Labinskaia grave 46 (Kuban)	?	+			+	+	?	horse-harness	Guščina / Zaseckaia 1994, 72-73
Sokolova Mogila (Southern Bug)	45-50	+	+	unique	+	+	67 pieces	spoon with a snake-shaped ending, decorated with Tree of Life, horse grave in the barrow	Kovpanenko 1986
Szentes-Nagyhegy (Tisza)	young	+			?	+			Istvánovits / Kulcsár 2000
Hajdúböszörmény- Vid (Tisza)	?						glass Cowrie	glass pommel of a sword, ram shaped vessel	Istvánovits 1998; 1997

**Tab. 1** Objects marking the priestess function in Sarmatian graves.

animal became even more evident after a series of finds of Barbarian ram shaped vessels imitating Roman ones in the Crimean cemetery Neisatz (**fig. 5, 2**)<sup>24</sup>.

The presence of the Roman ram shaped vessel, the unique glass Cowrie amulet and the decorated glass knob – most probably pommel of a sword<sup>25</sup> (used as amulet or Pars pro Toto symbolising a typical male grave-good in a female burial?) – attests to the sacral character of the person buried here.

As we could see, already in the earliest Sarmatian (so-called Sauromatian) burials, objects showing the sacral role of women appeared repeatedly. The above mentioned altars and incense burners were frequently accompanied with rich golden jewellery, bronze mirrors, objects decorated with the figurines of the animal style, spoons, different kinds of paints that presumably could be used for tattooing<sup>26</sup>. In the later periods, characteristically in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, women bearing presumably priestess function were still buried with golden decorations, dressed in a costume ornamented with golden flitters and they had a diadem on their head. Among grave-goods of these high-ranking ladies we also have to mention different kinds of amulets, perfume containers, in some cases a sceptre like object, imported antique metal vessels, and/or cauldron with animal shaped handles. A special feature is the presence of a horse or reference to a horse (harness) in the burial. Objects marking the priestess function are summarised in **table 1**.

From the point of view of Sarmatian world of beliefs, the Tree of Life represented in most of the cases is very important. Usually it appears among the decorations of the diadem. In two cases a »regular« diadem was not found, only a substituting head decoration consisting of valuable materials with an object of outstanding significance in the centre (Pesčanyj: golden brooch with an antique gem; Sokolova Mogila: a chalcedony frog). In one case the Tree of Life was depicted at an iron sceptre/stick terminal(?) (**fig. 8, 2**), in another case on a silver spoon (that also must have served a ritual purpose – **fig. 8, 1**). No Tree of Life depictions were found in the Szentes-Nagyhegy burial, but the number of animal figurines cut from golden foil refers to a possible composition originally including a Tree of Life (**fig. 8, 3**).

The significance of the ladies in question is underlined by the fact that their costume, jewels and ritual attributes regularly contain unique objects and show a number of distant trade connections including Egypt, North Pontic region and faraway eastern territories (Caucasus, Iran, India?)<sup>27</sup>. In connection with the also extremely rich Kobjakovo burial, researchers suggest that the priestess buried here served the cult of the god of eternally reborn nature. Judging from several insignia she could be at the same time the wife of a chief<sup>28</sup>. It was suggested that in the Sarmatian society – at least up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. – sacral functions were carried out by women of high social status<sup>29</sup>. The eastern steppe graves shown above belong to the Sarmatian elite of the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, usually related with the Alans, or at least with a new eastern wave. The two Hungarian sites may also represent eastern connections. The elements reminding the steppe world of beliefs can be the results of fresh migration wave of a new Sarmatian tribe, or the consequences of a strong tradition surviving in the new milieu of the Sarmatians of the Great Hungarian Plain.

## Notes

- 1) Grakov 1947.
- 2) Pseudo-Hippocrates 17; English text: <http://herodot.glossa.dk/aer.html#par17> (1.9.2010).
- 3) Herod. IV. 116; English text: <http://herodot.glossa.dk/hdt4.html#par16> (1.9.2010).
- 4) Smirnov 1964, 201.
- 5) Hazanov 1970, 138-148. – Recent summary of the problem Ševčenko 2006.
- 6) Smirnov 1989, 169.
- 7) Herod. I. 214; English text: <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.mb.txt> (1.9.2010).
- 8) Pol. Strat. VIII. 56; English text: [www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus8B.html](http://www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus8B.html) (1.9.2010).
- 9) Pol. Strat. VIII.55. English text: [www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus8B.html](http://www.attalus.org/translate/polyaenus8B.html) (1.9.2010).
- 10) Rostovcev 1914, 58-77. – Harmatta 1970, 19.
- 11) Saprykin 2002, 90-156.
- 12) Colarusso 1989; [www.circassianworld.com/Satanaya\\_Cycle.pdf](http://www.circassianworld.com/Satanaya_Cycle.pdf) (1.9.2010).
- 13) Of course, we did not aim to list the total number of female elite graves of the steppe. We only attempted to show some examples for the burials of royal/noble/sacral women, bearing the most characteristic features of this social layer of the Sarmatian society.
- 14) Tolstoj / Kondakov 1890.
- 15) Prohorova / Guguev 1992.
- 16) Guščina / Zaseckaja 1994, 72f.
- 17) Ždanovskij 1990.
- 18) Kovpanenko 1986.
- 19) Csallány 1932, 150-153. – Párducz 1956, 140-144.
- 20) Istvánovits / Kulcsár 2000, 193-228.
- 21) Párducz 1935, 16.
- 22) Istvánovits 1998; 1997.
- 23) Kovács 2001.
- 24) Hrapunov 2007.
- 25) For details see Istvánovits / Kulcsár / von Carnap-Bornheim 2006, 101-103.
- 26) Smirnov 1964, 202.
- 27) Kovpanenko 1986, 89-104. 130.
- 28) Guguev 1992, 126.
- 29) Ševčenko 2006, 150f.

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- Cat. Sankt-Peterburg 2008: Sokrovišča Sarmatov [Exhibition Cat.] (Sankt-Peterburg 2008).
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**Satana und andere: Priesterinnen, Hexen und Königinnen der Steppenregion**

Die Herrschaft von Frauen in der sarmatischen Gesellschaft ist in der Populär- und Fachliteratur eine weitverbreitete Ansicht. Dieser Fragenkomplex beinhaltet auch die Annahme des Matriarchats in der frühen sarmatischen Gemeinschaft. Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht einige Themen, die dieses Problem betreffen, und versucht die Rolle von Frauen in der Oberschicht in der nomadischen Steppe zu rekonstruieren. Zu ihnen gehören auch Satana, eine Hexe und Magierin, die Heroe der Ossetischen Nartensage, Königinnen aus literarischen Quellen und Priesterinnen, deren Gräber im Kuban-, Don- und Südlichen Bug-Gebiet gefunden wurden. Das Hauptmerkmal dieser Begräbnisse ist das Vorkommen von Diademen, die den Baum des Lebens und verschiedene Tiere (meistens Hirsche und Ziegen) abbilden. Ebenso wurde eine Vielzahl von anderen Elementen, die sakralen Charakter aufweisen, entdeckt: darunter eine Auswahl von Amuletten, Räucherkelchen und Spitzen von Eisenstangen, die ebenfalls den Baum des Lebens und Hirsche darstellen. Der westlichste Fund eines sarmatischen Priesterinnengrabs ist uns aus Szentes-Nagyhegy (Ungarn) bekannt. Es ist nur eine ferne Erinnerung an die Gräber der Steppe, aber die Ähnlichkeit des Kopfschmuckes (ein Diadem?) beweist, dass die sarmatische Gesellschaft selbst weit entfernt von ihrer östlichen Heimat einige alte Traditionen und insbesondere die sakrale Rolle der Frau bewahrt hatte.

Übersetzung: G. Pare

**Satana and Others: Priestesses, Witches and Queens of the Steppe-Region**

The ruling role of women in the Sarmatian society is a common place widely spread in popular and special literature. This group of questions includes the hypothetical matriarchy of early Sarmatian society. We survey some of the topos concerning this problem and try to reconstruct the role of women standing on the upper stage of steppe nomadic hierarchy. Among them, Satana, a witch and magician, the hero of the Ossetian Nart epic, queens of literary sources and priestesses the graves of whom were found in the Kuban, Don and Southern Bug region. The main characteristic feature of these burials is the presence of a diadem depicting the Tree of Life and different animals (mainly stags and goats). A number of other elements referring to the sacral character were also found: a large variety of amulets, incense burners, iron pole-tops also depicting Tree of Life and stags. The westernmost find of a Sarmatian priestess grave is known from Szentes-Nagyhegy (Hungary). It is only a distant reminiscent of the steppe graves, but the similar character of the headgear (diadem?) shows that even far from its eastern homeland Sarmatian society preserved some ancient traditions and kept the sacral role of women.

**Satana et autres: prêtresses, sorcières et reines des steppes**

Le rôle dominant des femmes dans la société sarmate est un lieu commun largement répandu dans la littérature populaire et spécialisée. Cette problématique inclut le matriarcat supposé de la société sarmate précoce. Nous analysons ici certains des thèmes concernant ce problème et tentons de restituer le rôle des femmes occupant la plus haute strate de la hiérarchie nomade des steppes. Parmi ces femmes, Satana, une sorcière et magicienne, héroïne de l'épopée ossète des Nartes, des reines des sources littéraires et des prêtresses dont les tombes ont été découvertes dans la région du Kouban, du Don et du Boug méridional. La caractéristique principale de ces inhumations est la présence d'un diadème présentant l'Arbre de vie et différents animaux (principalement des cerfs et des chèvres). Plusieurs autres éléments se rapportant au domaine sacré ont également été découverts: une grande variété d'amulettes, de brûle-incens, de pointes de lances en fer présentant aussi l'Arbre de vie et des cerfs. La tombe de prêtresse sarmate la plus occidentale qui soit connue a été mise au jour à Szentes-Nagyhegy (Hongrie). Il ne s'agit que d'une lointaine réminiscence des tombes des steppes, mais la similitude de la coiffe (diadème?) montre que, même loin de sa patrie orientale, la société sarmate a gardé certaines traditions anciennes et conservé le rôle sacré des femmes.

Traduction: G. Pierrevelcin