

FIELD REPORT

New Excavations of the Early Nomadic Burial Ground at Filippovka (Southern Ural Region, Russia)

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Abstract

From 2004 to 2007, nine burial mounds were excavated at the Filippovka burial ground, located in the Orenburg region of Russia. The most significant burial is a huge royal kurgan (Kurgan 4) that was largely undisturbed. Excavation of this kurgan yielded burial goods of precious metals, examples of sophisticated Animal Style art, and important new information on burial ritual. A depiction of an Achaemenid king on an object found in Kurgan 15 suggests a burial date in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E.; other finds, however, suggest a fourth-century B.C.E. date. In either case, the burial belongs to the Early Sarmatian culture of the southern Ural region and provides significant information on the cultural origin of the southern Ural early nomadic population. The goal of this report is to introduce the finds to western scholars who may not have access to the Russian-language publications of this and other materials from Sarmatia.*

BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW

For almost 1,000 years, early nomads, known in the ancient literary sources as Sarmatians, dominated the steppes of eastern Europe. Their world was contemporary with the Scythian kingdom and, according to Diodorus Siculus (2.43), contributed to its fall in the third century B.C.E. The militancy of the Sarmatians is discussed in written sources and is also documented archaeologically; armaments and horse harnesses are among the most frequent finds in Sarmatian male burials. Weaponry is also often found in female graves, which may correlate with ancient Greek sources about Amazon women who fought alongside men.

Militant Sarmatian groups played a significant role in the formation of the ethnopolitical situation in eastern Europe and Central Asia in the Early Iron Age (ca. the first millennium B.C.E.). It has also been suggested

that armed Sarmatian troops took an active part in the events connected with the fall of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, located in Central Asia and founded by Alexander the Great in the second century B.C.E.¹

In the first centuries C.E., the movement of Sarmatians across the steppes of eastern Europe, from the northern Caucasus and Bosphorus to the Danube, became a catalyst for the so-called Great Migration of the Peoples, a phrase used to denote all movements of different tribes and groups of people in Europe in the fourth through seventh centuries C.E., mainly from the periphery of the Roman empire up to and inside its borders. Invasions of “barbarian” peoples (e.g., Germans, Sarmatians) began at the end of the second century C.E. and eventually led to the collapse of the Western Roman empire at the end of the fourth century. In this context, the conflict between the “barbarians” and the peoples of the Roman empire had a special significance, for it has been suggested that the remaining Sarmatian and Alanic populations were incorporated into the Gothic empire of Hermanarich. The Goths, as is well known, damaged the Roman empire and precipitated its split into western and eastern realms in 395 C.E. The final dissolution of the Roman empire occurred in the fifth century because of the attacks of the Huns, whose warriors must have included remnants of Sarmatian groups. The fall of the Roman empire and the formation of the Byzantine empire, with Constantinople as its capital, are important events for the history of ancient Russia; indeed, Hermanarich’s country may have been the antecedent of the Kievan Rus.²

Archaeological study of the Sarmatian people began early in the 20th century, when Rostovtsev, a renowned Russian historian, became the first scholar to

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¹Skripkin 1990.

²Petrukhin and Raevsky 2004, 137–39.

connect a group of archaeological sites, principally barrow cemeteries in the southern Urals, with the historical Sarmatians.³ Unlike the ancient authors, Rostovtsev did not correlate the origin of the Sarmatians with Herodotus' (4.57.110) Sauromatae. Grakov, the founder of Soviet Sarmatian research, was of a different opinion; already in 1947, he had identified four consecutive periods in the development of Sarmatian culture and had designated the earliest phase as Sauromatian.⁴ Smirnov, a leading Soviet Sarmatologist, presented a similar view in his 1964 seminal work, *Savromaty: Rannyyaya istoriya i kultura sarmatov*.⁵

Despite these divergent points of view on the question of Sarmatian ethnogenesis, Russian scholars all agree that the Sarmatian proto-homeland, the place of origin for this centuries-old culture, was in the southern Ural steppes and the forest steppe of the eastern Urals. And it is in these regions that the earliest cemeteries of Sarmatian type are located.⁶ One of these cemetery sites includes the barrows of Filippovka (fig. 1), which Pshenichniuk, a pioneer of scientific research on them, dated to no later than the fourth century B.C.E.

Pshenichniuk identified the Filippovka barrows as belonging to the Early Sarmatian culture because artifacts recovered from them were similar to those found in Early Sarmatian assemblages in the southern Urals.⁷ These objects, which include weaponry (e.g., arrowheads, "transition"-type swords) and details of horse harnesses (e.g., iron bits, iron cheek pieces, bronze cheek pieces), are comparable to those recovered from sites in the Kuban region, located in the northern Caucasus, that date to the fourth century B.C.E.

The Filippovka barrows also produced a large and varied series of artifacts made in the so-called Scytho-Siberian Animal Style. This style looks so archaic that some researchers have dated it to as early as the sixth century B.C.E., thus placing the date of the barrows to the Sauromatian (i.e., pre-Sarmatian) Age.⁸

The issue is further complicated by the fact that a significant number of these finds came from the "secret pits" of Kurgan 1, one of the largest burials in the cemetery. Kurgan 1 is situated near the central burial ground and was almost completely robbed in antiquity. In these secret pits, valuable objects were deposited all mixed together, without any discernible order. These finds are thus similar to a coin hoard, in which materials from different chronological periods are buried together in the same archaeological context.



Fig. 1. Map of the Orenburg area, showing location of the Filippovka cemetery.

FILIPPOVKA BURIAL GROUND: LOCATION AND BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATION

The latest Bronze Age sites in the southern Ural region date to the ninth to eighth centuries B.C.E.; the earliest Iron Age sites are, for the most part, no earlier than the second half of the sixth century B.C.E. (table 1). There is thus a considerable chronological lacuna between the known sites of the two periods; this may mean that the populations that inhabited the region in the Early Iron Age were nomads.

From 2004 to 2007, excavations were carried out at the Filippovka burial ground in the Ileksky district of the Orenburg region, in the watershed of the Ural and the Ileik rivers (see fig. 1). The materials recovered during the excavations shed light on the issue of the cultural origin of the Iron Age southern Ural nomadic population and on Sarmatian burial ritual.

The Filippovka burial ground is already well known to archaeologists because of the outstanding finds unearthed there by Pshenichniuk during excavations from 1986 to 1990. The cemetery includes 29 barrows

³Rostovtsev 1918.

⁴Grakov 1947.

⁵Smirnov 1964.

⁶For background on these issues, see Davis-Kimball et al.

1995, 85–135.

⁷Pshenichniuk 2000, 29–30.

⁸Korolkova 2006.

Table 1. The Major Cultures and Periods of Northern Eurasia.

Culture	Region	Date
Koban	northern Caucasus	ca. 700–400 B.C.E.
Cimmerian	Crimea, Ukraine	ca. 900–800 B.C.E.
Early Scythian	Ukraine, northern Caucasus	ca. 700–600 B.C.E.
Scythian	Crimea, Ukraine, northern Caucasus	ca. 600–300 B.C.E.
Sauromatian	Don, Volga, Urals	ca. 600–400 B.C.E.
Early Sarmatian	Don, Volga, Urals	ca. 400–200 B.C.E.
Middle Sarmatian	Crimea, Ukraine, northern Caucasus, Don, Volga, Urals	ca. 200 B.C.E.–100 C.E.
Late Sarmatian	Caucasus, Don, Volga, Urals	ca. 200–400 C.E.
Early Saka	Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tuva	ca. 800–600 B.C.E.
Saka	Kazakhstan	ca. 600–500 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.
Pazirik	Altai region	ca. 500–400 B.C.E.
Tagar	Siberia, Minusinsk	ca. 700–300 B.C.E.

belonging to the Early Sarmatian Age (ca. second half of the fifth–fourth centuries B.C.E.). The two largest barrows (Kurgans 1, 4), situated in the center of the site (fig. 2), are about 80 m in diameter, with a maximum height of about 8 m. Traditionally, barrows of such size are called “royal” because of their large dimensions and the materials found in them. Indeed, most of the best known and most spectacular artifacts from the site were found during the excavation of Kurgan 1.⁹

2004–2005 EXCAVATIONS

Pshenichniuk’s excavations at Filippovka ended in 1990, and a new campaign was undertaken in 2004 by the Institute of Archaeology (Moscow) of the Russian Academy of Sciences. These new excavations were directed by the author. In this campaign, nine new kurgans were excavated; only six are described briefly here.

Kurgan 11

Kurgan 11 measured 3.5 m high and 60 m in diameter. A broad, rectangular grave pit with a dromos on its south side was found under its mound. A square fireplace of pisé construction was evident at the center of the pit. There was also clear evidence that fires had been kindled several times on its surface. Both the pit and the dromos were roofed with tree trunks.

Although this kurgan was plundered several times, four human skeletons were found in the burial pit, together with various artifacts, including horse harnesses, bronze arrowheads, a bronze mirror, a large bronze brazier, an iron sword and helmet, wheelmade pots originating from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and other goods that—according to the local chronological system—date the burial to the second half of the fifth to fourth centuries B.C.E. In addition, a fragment of a bronze cauldron was found at the edge of the mound, and two upright spears were found in a corner of the grave pit.

Kurgan 13

Kurgan 13 is similar in size to Kurgan 11. Many horse bones, some of them still articulated, were found outside the mound, at its base on the south side. Excavation of this kurgan revealed a circular grave pit under the mound, 2.5 m below ground level, and a dromos heading southwest from the southern wall of the pit. Both pit and dromos were roofed with tree trunks that had been completely burned; the walls under the tree trunks were calcined, and much of the soil was fused into lumps. A square structure of pisé, similar to the fireplace found in Kurgan 11, was found in the center of the pit. It was apparent that this pit had been robbed many times, both in the past and recently. Nevertheless, an iron sword, a bronze

⁹Much of this material appeared in the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (12 October 2000–4 February 2001), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes*, and is illustrated in Aruz et al. 2000.

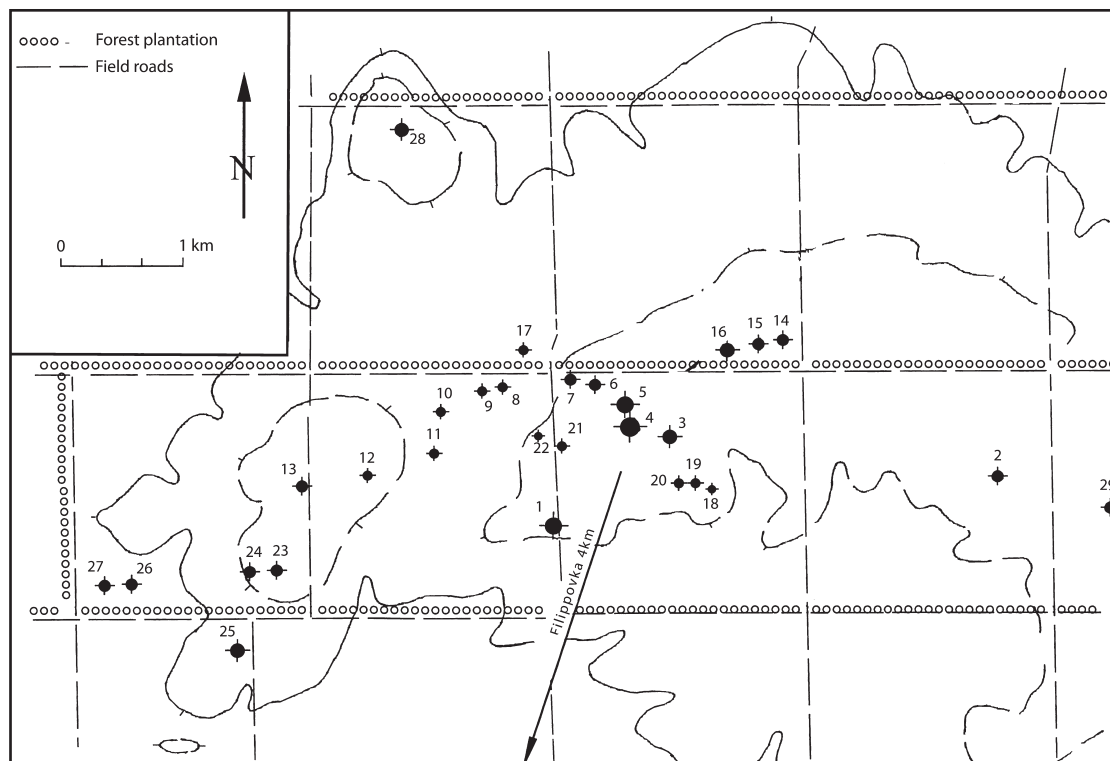


Fig. 2. General plan of the Filippovka burial site (drawing by D. Mesheryakov).

arrowhead, and a small gold openwork cylinder were found on the floor.

Kurgan 13 has two underground corridors that run from the funeral chamber to a spot beyond the edges of the mound. One of these corridors, measuring 15 m long and 2.5 m deep, ends at the wall of the dromos but does not break through it. No artifacts were found in this corridor.

The second underground corridor, 18 m long and 3 m deep, begins west of the kurgan and ends at the grave pit. Remains of a lamb—leg bones with hoofs—were found on a step at the beginning of this corridor. Numerous horse bones, some of them in correct anatomical articulation, were recovered from the floor at this location. An iron sword, an iron knife, and a bronze arrowhead were found in the central part of the corridor. Farther along, not far from the grave chamber, we found the remains of a human skull with the lower mandible and the first two neck vertebrae attached.

Although earlier scholars believed that these corridors were left by ancient robbers of the kurgans, our excavation reveals that they are in fact contemporary

with the mound. The presence of the skull suggests that they were built to accommodate individuals who were performing ritual activities or who were bringing new offerings to the deceased.¹⁰

All the artifacts found in Kurgan 13 date to the second half of the fifth through the fourth centuries B.C.E.

Kurgan 26

Kurgan 26 was robbed in recent years. But under the destroyed mound, a 3 m deep, circular grave pit was found. A dromos extended to the south. A quiver containing more than 200 bronze arrowheads of various types was among the grave items recovered.

Kurgan 28

Kurgan 28 was robbed very recently, using heavy machinery. Despite the damage caused by the looting, we could determine that (1) the grave pit was circular and lay about 3 m below the surface, (2) the dromos of this burial extended directly south, and (3) there was an original underground corridor that extended under

¹⁰ Yablonsky and Mesheryakov 2006.

the mound from the southeast. Excavation revealed five human skeletons in the grave pit, as well as some burial goods. At the entrance to the corridor, we excavated the remains of iron scale armor. The skeleton of a young male placed in the central part of the corridor was accompanied by an iron sword, bronze arrowheads, a bone spoon with a handle depicting a wolf, and bone ornaments with Animal Style motifs. The iron sword and bronze arrowheads associated with this skeleton are the same types as those found with the skeletons in the grave pit under the mound. Again, this suggests that the corridors in this and other kurgans were not dug by robbers but were constructed by the builders of the kurgans, presumably for ritual purposes. The burial goods associated with the skeleton in the corridor and those in the burial pit belong to the second half of the fifth to fourth centuries B.C.E.

Kurgan 15

Kurgan 15 contained multiple burials. Ten skeletons were laid on the ancient surface under the mound and placed around a small raised fireplace of pisé, once again with traces of fire on its surface. The rectangular burial pit was covered with a circular roof made of a layer of logs placed radially. Excavation of the skeletons revealed a gold and enamel plaque, originally likely part of a more complex ornament, depicting a male figure wearing a tiara (fig. 3). The plaque finds stylistic parallels in a series of clay stamps from the palace in Persepolis, which date from the middle to the second half of the fifth century B.C.E.¹¹

Kurgan 16

Excavation in the burial chamber of Kurgan 16 revealed a dromos extending to the south. Both the chamber and the dromos were covered with logs that were completely burned during the funeral ritual. The chamber was robbed in antiquity, but a wheelmade ceramic flask originating from Khorezm was found there. A small, rounded niche opened off the northern wall of the grave pit, opposite the dromos (fig. 4). In this niche, the skeletons of a young man and the back part of a horse were found. The man had apparently been placed upright; his skull and the rest of his bones lay in the correct anatomical position. The shin bones (*antikenemions*), for example, were found upright against the wall of the niche. The bones of the feet overlapped the horse bones; this placement indicates that the man stood on the back part of the horse. No goods were found in the niche. It is suggested that we may have here the remains of a human and horse sacrifice.



Fig. 3. Golden and enamel ornament from Kurgan 15 (A. Mirzakhonov).

Secondary Burials

Secondary grave pits were dug into the mounds over Kurgans 15 and 16 after the initial burials. These secondary burials were located at the edges of the mounds. Two in the mound over Kurgan 16 were female; one of these, Burial 3, also contained a neonatal child or fetus. Associated funeral goods included ornaments, horse harnesses, bridle plaques, tools for leather currying, and a wooden cap ornamented with gold and silver details. The second burial, Burial 4, was an older female, approximately 50–60 years of age. A set of tools for tattooing was found with her; this toolkit included a bronze mirror, an iron knife, a bone needle inside a small leather bag, a bone spoon, and a stone palette with special hollows for mixing colors (figs. 5–7).

One of the secondary burials (Burial 3) in the mound for Kurgan 15 was a male, approximately 30–35 years of age. He was found with a silver bow hook made in the Animal Style and a silver plaque of a fish that must have been part of the decoration of a wooden vessel (figs. 8, 9).

EXCAVATION OF KURGAN 4, THE ROYAL BARROW

In 2005, an attempt was made to loot Kurgan 4 with a walking excavator. Looters excavated two trenches, each 5 m wide and more than 7 m deep. The two trenches were placed at an angle to each other; in the

¹¹ Schmidt 1957, 25. A secondary burial in Kurgan 15 is described below, together with those of Kurgan 16.



Fig. 4. View of the grave pit and niche in Kurgan 16.

center of the mound where the trenches intersect, the robbers dug a large, deep pit. They then widened part of the trenches to create an irregular, almost rectangular, shaft down into the burial pit. Because of this attempt to loot the burials, we backfilled the trenches and shaft later that year, but further demolition of the barrow—both by natural and human factors—seemed unavoidable. So in 2006, we undertook a large-scale rescue excavation of the mound and burial chambers (fig. 10). This was a massive project, since it involved moving the huge mound of the barrow and was financed by the Russian Scientific Fund for Humanities, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and by private donors.¹²

Before excavation of the mound could begin, we had to clear a 30 m wide space around the barrow down to the level of the subsoil. This work revealed, north of the barrow, a water-collecting pit that was more than 3 m deep. On the south side, below the base of the mound and at the ancient ground level, several concentrations of horse bones were found, including parts of nine individual skulls and four

almost-complete skeletons. The heads were aligned north–south, facing north. Under the mound, excavation revealed the wooden roofing of the burial



Fig. 5. Bone needle in a leather bag from Kurgan 16 (A. Mirzakhanov).

¹²I would like to thank Jim Veddors and Lesley Veddors for their support of this project.



Fig. 6. Bone spoon from Kurgan 16 (A. Mirzakhanov).

chamber. As in Kurgan 15, the circular roof was built of seven to 10 layers of radially placed logs. The roof construction had been set on fire in antiquity, and the logs were badly burned.

In the southwestern quadrant of the barrow, in the lower layers of the mound, we unearthed a sacrificial assemblage. It included an animal skin and the nails of four massive paws that may have belonged to a large predator. The skeleton of a large predatory bird, perhaps that of a falcon or eagle, had also been placed on the skin. Numerous pieces of bronze and bone horse harnesses, such as plates, decorations, strap rings, and halter buckles—several of them made in the Animal Style—as well as pairs of bronze and iron bits and mouthpieces were also found on the skin. In total, about 200 objects had been placed on the animal skin.

The Burials Under the Mound

Under the mound, we found five individual burial pits. Burial 1 appeared in the uppermost layers and was a grave of an adult man interred in a wooden coffin without any grave goods. On the top of the coffin, we excavated four hoofs and four *astragali*, the bones located between the hoof and the shank of a horse. These bones were all found in the correct anatomical order. There is also a horse skin placed on the coffin. This was clearly a secondary burial dug into the earlier barrow; it belongs, in all probability, to the Early Medieval period.

Two additional secondary burials (Burials 2, 3) were found in the eastern part of the mound; another burial (Burial 4) was found in the western part (see fig. 10). The axis of all these grave pits follows the contour of the edge of the mound where they were located. This alignment is common in Early Sarmatian barrows of the Volga and Ural regions, where additional secondary burials frequently form circles around the central burial in two, or sometimes even three, rows.¹³ Burial 5, located in the central part of the mound, was the primary burial of the kurgan. Because excavation re-



Fig. 7. Stone palette from Kurgan 16 (A. Mirzakhanov).



Fig. 8. Silver and golden hook from Kurgan 15 (A. Mirzakhanov).



Fig. 9. Silver overlay (in the form of a fish) for wooden vessel from Kurgan 15 (A. Mirzakhanov).

¹³Yablonsky 1994, fig. 60.

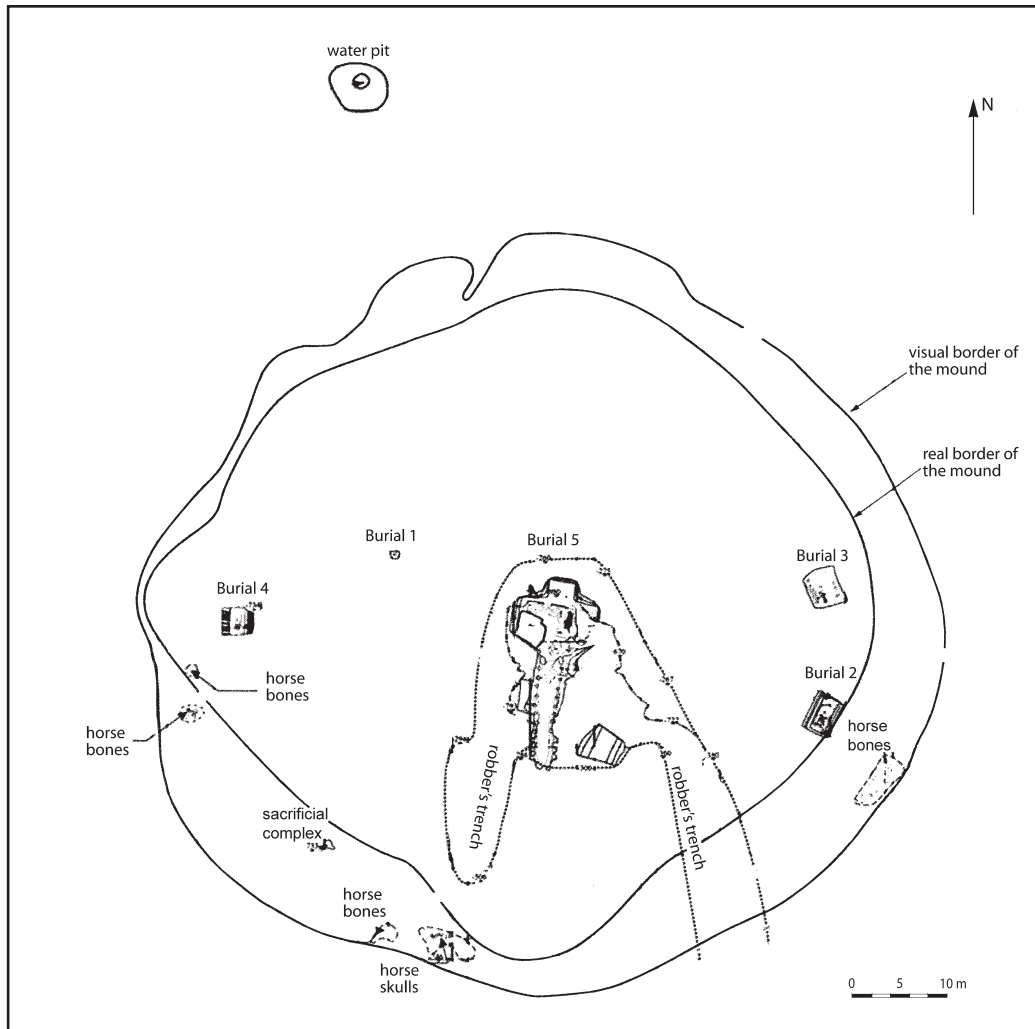


Fig. 10. Plan of Kurgan 4 after excavations.

vealed that Burials 2–5 were contemporary, we date all these burials to the Early Sarmatian Age.

Burials 2–4 could be traced from the level of the ancient surface before the mound was constructed. They were clearly made at the time when the layers of the mound surmounting the central burial (Burial 5) were already in place. Burials 2–4 were not reached by the looters, so they, along with the primary burial (Burial 5), represent closed archaeological assemblages.

Burial 2. Burial 2 contained a male, 50–55 years of age, thought to be a warrior. He was interred in a rectangular pit, more than 3 m deep. The pit's sides were carved out at about shoulder height to accommodate a covering of timber logs. The corpse was in the extended supine position, with the head to the south.

Iron scale armor was found in the southeastern corner of the grave. In the southwestern corner, a massive iron spearhead was placed vertically into the floor of the burial chamber; its wooden shaft was not preserved. A cast-gold torque (neck ring) was on the breast of the deceased. The ends of the torque were decorated with figurines of recumbent feline predatory animals, probably lions (fig. 11).

A short iron Scythian sword (*akinakes*) was placed across the hips, with the hilt at the right hand. The sword has a golden, butterfly-shaped crosspiece and a handle covered with gold ornament in the Animal Style. The blade is decorated with an engraved hunting scene on one side and the immolation of deer in gold inlay on the other (figs. 12, 13).¹⁴ The point of

¹⁴The sword was restored by Marina Shemakhanskaya (State Institute of Restoration, Moscow). I thank Shemakhanskaya for the photographs of the sword that appear here.



Fig. 11. Golden neck ring from Kurgan 4, Burial 2 (A. Mirzakhonov).

the sword lay atop a heap of more than 200 different kinds of bronze arrowheads. There are *tamga*-like signs of different types on some of the arrowheads.¹⁵

A massive cup-shaped, conical golden object with a hole in the bottom was found near the left elbow of the skeleton. An enormous golden cast buckle in the form of a recumbent tiger was placed just above it (fig. 14). The buckle has two slits perpendicular to each other, which serve as the mounting for the crossing of the suspension belts. The conical object is an *umbo*, a metallic detail placed by Scythians and other nomads at the center of a quiver (fig. 15) (all that remained of the quiver were woven twigs with traces of leather on the surface).¹⁶ Depictions of such *umbones* are well known from Scythian art of the fifth to fourth centuries B.C.E.¹⁷ The deceased was laid on a grass mattress that covered the entire floor of the burial pit.

Burial 3. North of Burial 2 was Burial 3, a male, 25–30 years of age and identified as a warrior. The skeleton was found at the bottom of a deep pit with a roof of logs at about shoulder height. Like Burial 2, the skeleton was supine, with the head oriented to the south. At the bottom of the pit, close to its wall and to the right of the skeleton, two metal elements of a spear were found in situ: a massive iron spearhead typologically close to the one from Burial 2, and a silver-cast spike in the shape of a pipe with an iron pommel. Judging from their relative positions, the original length of the spear was 3.2 m.

The neck of the deceased was decorated with a cast-gold spiral torque ending with figurines of recumbent feline animals, probably lions. Across the hips, an iron *akinakes* sword was placed with its handle toward the right hand. Above the point of the sword was a quiver full of arrows; more than 60 arrowheads were preserved, some with *tamga*-like signs on them. A golden *umbo*, similar to the one found in Burial 2, and a silver

¹⁵ *Tamga* is a Turkish word that is used for any symbolic sign, including a sacral one.

¹⁶ Romans generally used the term *umbo* for the boss at the



Fig. 12. Gilded iron sword from Kurgan 4, Burial 2 (A. Mirzakhonov).



Fig. 13. Detail of gilded iron sword from Kurgan 4, Burial 2 (A. Mirzakhonov).

center of a shield.

¹⁷ Olkhovsky and Evdokimov 1994, 73.



Fig. 14. Golden sword belt (in the form of a tiger) from Kurgan 4, Burial 2 (A. Mirzakhanov).

and gold buckle with holes for both a belt and a sword strap were placed at the left hip (fig. 16). The surface of the buckle is covered with gold foil, decorated with a stamped multifigural composition in the Animal Style. A belt hook was found by the left hip bone, below the neck of the femur. It is made of cast silver, with deep details picked out in gold to show eyes, teeth, and other features. This buckle depicts an eared griffin and a panther, just like the composition mentioned above from Kurgan 16 (see fig. 8). At the left hip, we also found an iron war axe.

A wooden cup was placed between the skeleton and the spearhead. Some of the wood and a golden rim mounting were preserved (fig. 17). The mounting can be described as an openwork plate, with an engraved depiction in Animal Style. Remains of a grass mattress were preserved at the bottom of the burial chamber.

Burial 4. This burial, unlike the other secondary burials of Kurgan 4, was dug through the mound (in this case, from ca. 1.5 m above the ancient surface) and through the ancient soil surface, extending 4 m into the ancient ground. The long axis of the grave ran parallel to the edge of the mound in this area. As in Burials 2 and 3, the pit was roofed with logs at about shoulder height; imprints of the logs were visible, and on the eastern side, we found a massive iron spearhead like those from Burials 2 and 3. At the bottom of the burial chamber, we found two skeletons, a synchronous double burial. Both skeletons were lying extended, on their backs, with their heads oriented to the south. The skeleton on the east side belonged to a young man; the one on the west side, to a young female. The male head was turned to face the female.

An iron *akinakes* sword was found near the head of the male; a silver vessel was above it (fig. 18). This vessel has a wing-shaped spout, and only one of its



Fig. 15. Golden *umbo* from the quiver from Kurgan 4, Burial 2 (A. Mirzakhanov).

hollow handles was preserved. It is decorated with a relief figure of a bearded bull. The other handle was already missing at the time of burial, since it was evident that the place where it was once attached had been repaired by being thoroughly soldered and polished. This vessel has a close parallel in a fifth-century B.C.E. vessel in the Duvanli Collection (Bulgaria).¹⁸ Chronological evidence for the vessel from Filippovka places it in the second half of the fifth to the first half of the fourth centuries B.C.E.¹⁹

The male of Burial 4 wore a cast-gold torque with terminals depicting the foreparts of rams. On his



Fig. 16. Golden sword belt (depicting a tiger) from Kurgan 4, Burial 3 (A. Mirzakhanov).

¹⁸Filov 1934.

¹⁹Balakhvantsev and Yablonsky 2008, 35.



Fig. 17. Golden overlay for wooden vessel (depicting a deer) from Kurgan 4, Burial 3 (A. Mirzakhanov).

wrists were massive golden cast bracelets. One of the bracelets is circular, its overlapping ends decorated with depictions of an animal with ears and a long, narrow face. The other one, a more massive piece, is omega-shaped, with open ends, and is decorated with figurines of rams (fig. 19). Golden bracelets of similar shape and style are known from the Oxus Treasure, where they are dated to the fifth through first half of the fourth centuries B.C.E.²⁰ An iron *akinakes* sword lay across the deceased's hips, and at the right arm, we found a quiver containing 98 bronze arrowheads of different types. An iron quiver hook covered with golden foil and decorated in the Animal Style was found next to the quiver.

At the feet of the skeleton, we traced brown remains of two disk-shaped wooden bowls. Beads, pearls, and pieces of undetermined iron objects were found above the fragments of one of the bowls. A disk-shaped silver mirror with a bone handle attached with a rivet was in the other bowl. The mirror is decorated with an engraved depiction of a wolf. In addition, golden beads, pieces of anthracite, and red paint were found. This is a typical set of accoutrements for a female Sarmatian burial; it is therefore interesting that here it was placed at the feet of a male burial.

The other skeleton in Burial 4 belonged to a young woman, 18–20 years of age. She lay extended, on her back, with her head oriented to the south. Along her right shoulder bone, we found several gold plates with stamped decoration depicting lions. Near her left hand, we found 19 plaques that must have adorned a

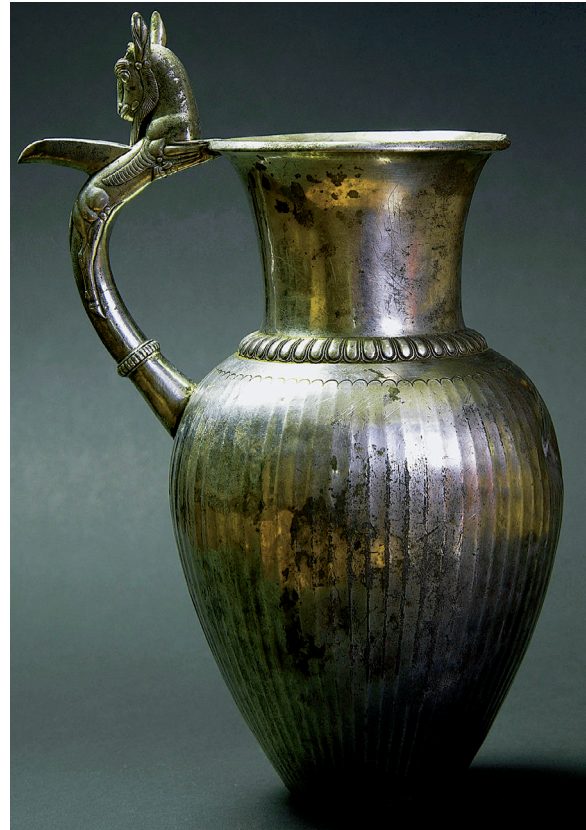


Fig. 18. Silver amphora from Kurgan 4, Burial 4 (A. Mirzakhanov).



Fig. 19. Golden bracelet from Kurgan 4, Burial 4 (A. Mirzakhanov).

cloak. Eight of the large plaques are each decorated with a tiger en face on both sides, with the head slightly raised above the forelegs; on the hips of the animals

²⁰ Dalton 1964; Zeimal 1979.

are indentations in the shape of commas, bordered with granulation. These indentations and the interior surface of projecting ears are filled with whitish/light bluish enamel (fig. 20). The remaining, smaller plaques bear profile depictions of tigers with part of their bodies twisted and their back legs on top of their heads. On the reverse sides of the plaques are double loops for sewing onto a backing.

The young woman's neck was adorned with a cast-gold torque with terminals of recumbent lions with raised, outwardly turning heads. In contrast to the other torques described here, the surface of this torque is fluted rather than smooth. She wore two massive bracelets on her wrists. Both of them are of cast gold and omega-shaped, stylistically similar to the bracelet on the male burial in the same grave. The ends of her bracelets are decorated with figurines of goats. Scattered among her foot bones were various beads, a bronze duck-shaped pendant, and 12 cauldron-shaped bronze bells in a heap. We also found, at her feet, a row of four large beads (chalk beads and an eye bead) that probably decorated the shared funerary veil of the couple.

Burial 5. This burial was found under the central part of the mound. It was a large, rectangular grave with a dromos leading to the south from the central part of the southern wall of the burial chamber. The chamber was roofed with logs lying in a radial position in seven to 10 layers. The exterior ends of the logs were covered with heaps of twigs. Both logs and twigs were badly burned, and the lower layers of earth in the mound above the logs were red from burning. The central part of the timber roofing was destroyed twice—during the ancient and modern robbing of the burial chamber—and did not survive.

A square-shaped sacrificial surface was evident in the center of the burial chamber. It was covered with clay, as for a fireplace. A 1 cm thick layer of ash covered its surface, and its walls were oriented to the cardinal points. The northern wall of the burial chamber was cut by an ancient robbing pit, which completely destroyed the burials here. Only small beads, some of them golden, and the chaotically scattered remains of a wooden coffin were preserved.

The southwestern quarter of the burial chamber was destroyed in 2005 by the excavating machine that dug an approximately 20–25 cm pit through the bottom. At the northern part of this pit, two golden bells remained in situ. The western wall of the pit cut along the spine of a skeleton of a teenager. The burial was originally placed along this wall. A bead was found at its feet. The excavating machine also destroyed the entrance and the middle part of the dromos.

Fortunately, the original surface of the burial chamber was not touched by the plunderers. Here, we re-

corded the traces of a lightweight interior roofing made of thin, 8–10 cm wide wooden planks that had fallen down. Some of them lay directly on the floor of the chamber and on the surface of the fireplace, suggesting that this roofing collapsed when the chamber was still empty.

At the entrance to the chamber, next to the mouth of the dromos, we found fully articulated skeletons of three horses. One of the skeletons was half destroyed by the excavating machine. The skeleton of the middle horse, however, was placed in a wooden coffin.

The deceased were placed in pairs around the fireplace, along its walls. The orientation of the corpses was not systematic: Skeletons 2 and 3 were oriented with their heads to the west, Skeleton 4 to the north, and Skeleton 5 to the south. The bodies were placed in coffins with covers. The corners of the coffins were reinforced with thick logs fixed with pairs of bronze mountings attached by large cast-bronze nails with mushroom-shaped heads and spikes that are rectangular in cross-section. One of the skeletons had a golden earring and an iron bracelet decorated with golden foil and golden and silver wire. An additional two coffins were found in situ. Although they were not destroyed by the robbers and were found with their covers still in place, they proved to be empty.

We excavated a sacrificial assemblage in the space between Coffins 2, 3, 4, and 5. In the upper part of the assemblage, we recorded a large wooden vessel consisting of two connecting spherical cups and covered with ornamented silver plates. Rams' heads looking in different directions grace the paired handles of the cups. The heads are covered with thick gold foil, on which the surface details (e.g., eyes, mouth, ears, horns, cheeks) are stamped. The feet of the rams, also covered with gold foil, are depicted in the lower part of the vessel. In the middle part of the foot of the vessel, the forelegs and hind legs of the rams meet.

A bronze lamp in the form of a zebu bull (with a characteristic hump on the neck) was found beside the ornate wooden vessel. This lamp was positioned so that the head of the recumbent bull faced north (fig. 21). A round hole for pouring oil is evident between the hump and the back of the bull's neck, and a long cylindrical pipe joins the face (for the wick).

Underneath the vessel and the lamp lay a small basket-purse woven of thin twigs. Under this basket, we found a bone spoon with its handle engraved in the Animal Style; an iron knife with a handle of cast-silver covered with gold and decorated with a deer with antlers; a fragment of an iron object covered with a thick gold plate; and wooden handles of whips with ornamented, cylindrical, hollow, golden details. Additional objects were found around the fireplace: a half-spherical glass cup; two large bronze figurines



Fig. 20. Golden and enamel plaques (depicting tigers) from Kurgan 4, Burial 4 (A. Mirzakhonov).

of rams; small gold dress ornament plates, each with a stamped depiction of a lion in profile; and a large, cross-shaped, stamped golden plate depicting rams' heads joined at the center.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The main scientific significance of the material recovered from Kurgan 4 can be summarized as follows: These precious finds have parallels with material from other barrows in the cemetery, especially Kurgan 1, and the material comes from closed archaeological assemblages, undisturbed by the plunderers of burial chambers. The objects were found *in situ* and thus come from a precise archaeological context. Many of the objects, such as the silver vessel, the arrowheads, and the swords, are well known and well dated from other Sarmatian archaeological contexts. The same is true of the golden bracelets and torques. All these objects, together with artifacts found in other barrows, afford us the opportunity to refine the chronology of each object and of the site as a whole and to date it to the second half of the fifth through the fourth centuries B.C.E.²¹

All the data attest to the idea that, from the point of view of periodization of different phases in the development of Sarmatian culture, the Filippovka cemetery is a transition site between the Sauromatian and the Sarmatian epochs. It represents the earliest stage

of formation of the Early Sarmatian culture in the southern Urals. Kurgan 4, chronologically and typologically, compares favorably with the other barrows and is outstanding in its size and richness.

The excavation of Kurgan 4 is exceptionally important for the reconstruction of the special features in the burial rite of the cemetery. Almost all the barrows were plundered by ancient and/or contemporary robbers, who, digging deep pits into their centers, demolished not only the burial chambers but also their wooden roofs. In the case of Kurgan 4, we were extremely lucky: both ancient and contemporary robbers found the central burial chamber but, surprisingly, left most



Fig. 21. Bronze oil lamp with zebu from Kurgan 4, Burial 5 (A. Mirzakhonov).

²¹ Balakhvantsev and Yablonsky 2008; Treister 2008.

of it untouched. This thus allowed us to trace the construction of the fireplace made for sacrifices, as well as a light supplementary (lower) roof for the burial pit. It also allowed us to discern the system used to make separate burials in the collective chamber. And, for the first time in this cemetery, we found undamaged, massive timber coffins made with special bronze clamps and nails.

We were also fortunate to find supplementary burials in situ with their original grave goods intact. This allowed us to reconstruct the original arrangement of the cloaks and to record the decorative gold plaques sewn onto these cloaks. In one of the burials, we were able, thanks to the preservation in situ of the spearhead and its spike, to reconstruct the exact length of the spear of a Sarmatian warrior to 3.2 m. We were also able to reconstruct, in detail, the characteristic features of Sarmatian quivers. Our knowledge of heavy armor is now complete, thanks to the discovery of scale armor in one of the burials.²²

As a result, we now have very reliable data on the appearance of the Early Sarmatian heavy-armed warrior. He wore a forged-iron helmet with a nose piece and cheek pieces. Scale armor of leather protected his body. He carried a twig-woven quiver for a bow and sometimes more than 200 arrows, covered with leather and decorated with an *umbo*; an arms belt with a buckle for crossing the belts; a richly decorated quiver hook; a long spear with a massive head and spike; a short iron *akinakes* sword; and iron axe. This complete image recalls a picture from a novel featuring medieval western European knights; these Sarmatian “prototypes,” however, are 2,000 years older.

The bones and skulls found at the bottom of the burial mound—evidence of the ritual burial of horses and their use in sacrificial feasts—remind us that Claudius Ptolemaeus (*Geog.* 5.3.16) described the Sarmatians as *hypophagi* (“horse-eating peoples”). Likewise, the vertically placed spearhead and the mounds of twigs at the edges of the burial surface call to mind Herodotus’ (4.62) writings on the burial rite of nomadic Scythians.

It is important that “ordinary” finds from Kurgan 4 (arrow- and spearheads, swords and daggers, beads and earrings) are comparable to those found in other, less-rich, barrows in the cemetery. Moreover, the placement of the burials and goods in Kurgan 4, around the sacrificial fireplace, corresponds exactly with the burial at the ancient surface of Kurgan 15 in the same cemetery. There, among other finds, we unearthed part of a golden object depicting an Achaemenid king. Judging from analogues—depictions on seals from the

Persepolis palace and other finds from the territory of the ancient Achaemenid empire—this artifact can be dated to the second half of the fifth century B.C.E.²³

In addition to the artifacts found in the 2006 excavations, I would like to emphasize that we also recovered important paleoanthropological and paleozoological information and collected samples of buried soil, wood, and organic materials from the grave pits and coverings that will serve the aims of soil analysis, palynology, and microbiology. We hope these examinations will supplement archaeological data with scientific results.

There remains much work to do to interpret the varied and numerous materials found at the Filippovka site, but even today, we can definitively state that this is an archaeological discovery that will long attract the attention not only of archaeologists but also of anyone interested in ancient history.

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²²Rukavishnikov and Rukavishnikova 2008.

²³Balakhvantsev and Yablonsky 2008.

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