

**L'INSTITUT D'ARCHEOLOGIE
DE L'UNIVERSITE JAGELLONNE DE CRACOVIE**

**RECHERCHES ARCHEOLOGIQUES
NOUVELLE SERIE 1**

KRAKÓW 2009

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Kraków 2009

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Wojciech Blajer

CONSEIL EN REDACTION
Jan Chochorowski, Krzysztof Ciałowicz, Piotr Kaczanowski, Janusz K. Kozłowski,
Ewdoksia Papuci-Władyka, Jacek Poleski, Joachim Śliwa, Paweł Valde-Nowak

TRADUCTION
Piotr Godlewski, Romana Kielbasińska et auteurs des articles

SECRETAIRE DE LA REDACTION
Marcin S. Przybyła

ILLUSTRATIONS
Urszula Bąk, Elżbieta Pohorska-Kleja, Urszula Socha et auteurs des articles

MAQUETTE DE COUVERTURE
Jacek Poleski

MISE EN PAGES
Wydawnictwo i Pracownia Archeologiczna "PROFIL" Magdalena Dzięgielewska

EN COUVERTURE
Trois figurines d'ivoire de site prédynastique de Tell el-Farkha

ADRESSE DE LA REDACTION
Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, ul. Gołębia 11, PL 31-007 Kraków
www.archeo.edu.uj.pl/ra

ISSN 0137-3285

Cette publication est financée aux moyens destinés à l'activité statutaire
de la Faculté d'Histoire de l'Université Jagellonne

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Anna Gawlik

Scythian influences on the western and north-western borderlands of Great Scythia¹

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Jan Chochorowski, Instytut Archeologii, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków

Reviewers:

**Prof. Dr. Zbigniew Bukowski, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii, Polska Akademia Nauk,
Warszawa**

Prof. Dr. Marek Gedl, Instytut Archeologii, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków

The territory of the Black Sea steppes was inhabited in the Early Iron Age by nomadic communities of Iranian ethnos, identified with historical Scythians. Great mobility, activity and liveliness of these communities, combined with expansive character of nomadic cultural model, contributed to the civilization and ethnic changes not only on the Pontic steppes but also on borderland areas, mainly in the forest-steppe zone.

The area of strong political (and cultural) domination of the Scythian element has been conventionally named “Great Scythia”, with reference to the term “Scythia” used by Herodotus. He described Scythia as a territory shaped vaguely like a square, closed from the south by the Black Sea coast. According to this author, Scythia reached from the River Ister (Danube) in the west as far as the River Tanais (Don) in the east. The northern fringes of Scythia, which were least known to Herodotus, he defined by listing the names of peoples who resided there. Broadly understood Scythian culture,

occupying vast areas and internally divided into many local groups is an archeological equivalent of historical Scythia. Despite evident differences between individual centers, this cultural unit (and especially its material culture) is characterized by significant uniformity.

Scythian influences are not limited only to the southern parts of Eastern Europe but reach much further. They are clearly seen for example in Central Europe, and single Scythian arrowheads are met even in Western Europe, e.g. in France.

The aim of the present study is the discussion of Scythian influences on “foreign” cultural environments. Manifestations of Scythian cultural pressure are analyzed in the light of occurrence of Scythian type findings on the western and north-western borderlands of Great Scythia, which is the basis for determining the chronology, range, intensity and general character of Scythians influences.

My studies incorporate the following territories: from the west – Bessarabian Upland and Moldavian Plateau with the sub-

¹ Dissertation defence in 2005.

Carpathian zone of Oltenia and Muntenia, from the north-west – Podolia, Volynia, then south-eastern Poland, Polesie and upper Dnipro basin. It is thus an extensive area, geographically diversified, where various cultural units developed, and where individual regions are characterized by various degree of saturation with Scythian findings.

The presence of Scythian elements on such a vast area cannot have one common origin. It should be related both to internal processes in the Scythian milieu itself (determined by climate changes or political situation in the Pontic zone) and to the development of other ethno-cultural groups.

Archeological record which is the basis for the present discussion comprises the finds which not only have their equivalents in Scythian culture assemblages, but can be considered as archeological indicators of this cultural model. Sometimes they are treated simply as symbols of ethnic affinity. In archeological literature there functions a term “Scythian triad”, referring just to this type of artifacts.

The most important sources are artifacts included into the “classic” Scythian triad, namely weaponry (swords, arrowheads, parts of quiver and “gorytos” [quiver-and-bow-case], battle axes, parts of cuirass), elements of horse tack (bits and cheekpieces, so called pronizi, phalerae, nose-plates, cheek-plates) and objects decorated in the Animal Style (e.g. mirrors). To the group of artifacts with direct analogies in the Scythian inventories from the Pontic zone there were also included cauldrons, stone and wooden vessels with metal fittings, discoid mirrors, mirrors with lateral handle, the so-called “strap ornaments” and clasps, ear-rings and metal appliquéés. On the other hand, a number of finds, like spearheads, beads and pottery, which have a relatively universal form, and are popular also outside the Scythian milieu were excluded from the detailed analysis,

as they do not meet the criteria of cultural indicators.

Analysis of the collected material allowed distinguishing four chronological horizons:

- 1st period, from the end of the 8th century to the beginning of the 7th century BC,
- 2nd period, from the 7th to the beginning of the 6th century BC,
- 3rd period, dated for 6th–5th centuries BC,
- 4th period, dated for 4th–3rd centuries BC.

The second and the third horizons can be further divided into shorter phases A and B.

The earliest Scythian type finds coming from the area discussed in this work are related with the first chronological horizon and are dated for the transition from the 8th to the 7th century BC. They should be synchronized with the so called Gumarovo horizon in Scythian culture. This is the earliest stage of the Scythian culture development, connected with the first wave of nomadic migration from the Central Asia towards the Black Sea coast. The Gumarovo horizon is characterized by isolated sites sparsely scattered from the southern Ural to the north-eastern Bulgaria, on the borderland between the steppe and forest-steppe zones. In this work, the first chronological horizon is represented almost exclusively by single rhomboid arrowheads of the so-called Zhabotin type concentrated along the Dniester, with no cultural context recorded. They appear within the cultural milieu of the Basarabi-Sholdaneshty culture, the so called Neporotovo group of the late Chernoleskaya culture and on the Vysocko culture sites. Their spread could be related with intercultural exchange along the communication and trade route, which at that time undoubtedly was marked out by the Dniester River. However, a group of 8 arrowheads found in the upper layers of the late Chernoleskaya culture fortified settlement at Rudkivcy can

suggest a more direct contact (for instance military) between the nomads and the communities on the middle Dniester River. Nomadic influences in the middle Dniester basin are confirmed also by an isolated find of a bronze dagger referring to the so called Siberian daggers.

The second chronological horizon brought significant changes in Scythian finds, both in their quality and number.

During phase A of the second horizon – which means during the first half of the 7th century BC – the number of sites (6) as well as their distribution (along the Dniester) remains generally unchanged. On the other hand, Scythian elements – an iron bit and a cheek piece – are present in grave inventories of the Neporotovo group. With the same cultural environment is also connected – as an isolated find – a bone plaque for a wooden cheek piece in the form of the head of a griffon-ram (Nivra). A group of sepulchral sites is represented by two “purely Scythian” burials coming from two opposite extremes of the Bessarabian Upland (south and north). These are the burials under kurgans typical of the steppe Scythian environment, like for example a catacomb grave which is a feature identified with Scythian (Iranian) ethnic element. Grave inventory also refers to classic Scythian burials (arrowheads, bone elements of gorytos, discoid mirror) and reflects rituals and beliefs characteristic of this environment.

Thus, in the 7th century BC, we have the confirmation of the presence of nomadic element on the western fringes of the Pontic steppe. Westward directed influences reflect early stages of the Scythian expansion. The first waves of nomads migrating from Asia did not stop on the Carpathian Foreland, but entered Transylvania and Great Hungarian Lowland from across the Carpathian. The presence of Scythian assemblages in the northern and southern

margins of Bessarabia is, first of all, determined by the location of convenient passes for crossing the Eastern Carpathians. Another important fact is that the central part of the Moldavian Plateau and the Bessarabian Upland was intensively settled at that period.

The presence of Scythian elements dated to the first half of the 7th century BC is evidenced also on the territory of the Milograd culture, deep into the forest zone, where one of the sites yielded 13 arrowheads. However, in this case it is difficult to determine the character of Scythian influences.

In the second half of the 7th century BC Scythian influences become significantly stronger. Increasing Scythian impact is reflected for instance by the quantitative ratio of the sites with Scythian finds dated to the second half of the 7th century and the beginning of the 6th century BC (i.e. phase B of the second chronological horizon – 67 sites) to the sites coming from earlier period (the first horizon and phase A of the second one – 12 sites). There also exists a considerable group of artifacts which can be only generally dated for the 7th century BC (33 sites). Increased number of sites is noticeable particularly on the territories located east from the Carpathians, i.e. in Moldavia, Bessarabia, on the Dniester, as well as in Volynia and south-eastern Poland.

At that time, that is in the second half of the 7th century BC (the so called third stage of the early Scythian culture according to G. Kossack and I. N. Medvedskaya), another wave of nomadic migration took place, directed against the forest-steppe areas of north-western part of the Black Sea zone. In consequence, these regions are more saturated with Scythian finds, and on the other hand the local, farming people became more active. This elicitation is evidenced by large fortified settlements, often extending over several hundred hectares. A similar

situation is observed in Moldavia, where in the second half of the 7th century BC the early, Thraco-Getae environment becomes consolidated and there appears a network of fortified settlements, but the latter were covering a significantly smaller area. With time, Scythian influences reach far into Central Europe and the Scythian invasions cause serious political unrest as well as cultural transformations (e.g. the appearance of the Vekerzug culture).

One of the most noticeable consequences of Scythian expansion against the west was the appearance of the Western Podolia group on the middle Dniester, included into the so called forest variant of the Scythian culture. However, it differs from the classic groups inhabiting the right- and left-bank Dniipro basin, for example large fortified settlements are lacking. All sites of the Western Podolia group discussed in this work (53) are dated for phase B of the second chronological horizon. Most of them are burials. Grave inventories refer to classic burial assemblages from the archaic period of the Scythian culture by the presence of swords-acinaces, early arrowheads, parts of quiver and gorytos, battle axes, scale armors, gold, bronze or electron ear-rings, elements of horse tack: cheekpieces, curbs, so called *pronizi*, discoid mirrors with lateral handle (among other things of the Olbia type), bronze cauldrons, stone and wooden vessels. As we can see, it is a rich and diverse set of artifacts. Cemeteries with rich, “prince” burials occur as well. Grave assemblages, though referring to the Scythian burial rites (for example a wooden chamber), bear numerous traces of earlier traditions (late Chernoleskaya and Holihady cultures). The analysis performed in this work makes it possible to assume that a group of Scythian nomads settled down in the territory of Western Podolia. While dominating over the indigenous people, at the same time the invaders contributed to

emergence of a new cultural quality. Various cultural traditions were mixed and assimilated. However, the social elites cultivated above all the nomadic traditions – which is testified by the archeological record.

On the territory of Moldavia and Besarabia the number of sites with Scythian elements also increases, but their distribution (on the northern and southern margins) remains the same. This indicates that there existed two main routes of nomadic tribes’ migrations towards the Carpathian Basin. The southern one was more important (bigger number of sites). It cannot be excluded though, that part of the sites in the north is a result of direct neighborhood with the Western Podolia group communities and of intercultural exchange. Pressure exerted by the Pontic zone nomads on the early Getae or Thraco-Getae culture must had been significant and not always peaceful as the territory of Moldavia is the region where finds of swords-acinaces of Scythian origin (Suseni-Măcișeni type) are most numerous. It is one of the biggest concentrations of these artifacts in the whole Black Sea zone.

In phase B of the second chronological horizon Scythian elements occur for the first time in sub-Carpathian zone of Oltenia, where early grave assemblages of the Ferigile culture appear. In these burials battle axes and nail-type earring were found. It is characteristic that these artifacts can be connected with the pressure exerted by newly emerged “scythoid” groups in the Carpathian Basin (at that time mainly the Transylvanian group) rather than with Pontic influences. A prestige character of the finds in question indicates that peaceful contacts between the two environments were prevailing. Also in Moldavia one can distinguish a group of objects – daggers of the Dănești type – related to this direction of influences.

With the second chronological horizon, and above all with phase B, are connected

Scythian elements known from the Vysocko culture, where they constitute the chronological indicators of its late phase. These finds are represented both by arrowheads (more than 44) and by early nail-type earring (31 specimens). A similar set of Scythian type artifacts can be found in the territory of south-eastern Poland: earrings (13 items) and early arrowheads – 6 specimens. The main difference lays in the fact that in the Vysocko culture these two groups occur both as isolated finds and in the sepulchral context. In south-eastern Poland earrings are concentrated along the San River, that is in the Tarnobrzeg group assemblages as elements of grave inventories, while arrowheads are isolated finds. Exceptional in this area are two bronze *pronizi* in the form of predatory bird's head (Maćkówka, Przewodów), having the closest analogies in the Western Podolia group milieu. Early nail-type earrings have their equivalents not only in the Western Podolia group (28 pieces), but also in the Kiev group of the Scythian culture where they are very numerous.

The presence of Scythian elements in the Vysocko culture is inseparably connected with direct neighborhood with the Western Podolia group settlement. One cannot exclude that also in the case of the Tarnobrzeg group milieu certain objects, for example earrings, spread that way. It is the more so because the westernmost Western Podolia sites reach the upper Dniester. However, the role of the Vysocko culture population should be taken into consideration as well, as it could perhaps transmit cultural impulses not only from the Western Podolia, but also from the middle Dniipro areas – the region where the idea of nail-type earring was born. The character of artifacts (in majority earrings – elements of women's dress) suggests commercial and intercultural character of Scythian influences in this zone and marks their north-western limits.

Similar dating applies also to single earrings and arrowheads discovered on sites of the Cherepin-Lagodiv group.

A parallel set of Scythian elements (earrings, arrowheads, *pronizi*) appears in the second half of the 7th century and in the beginning of the 6th century BC on the area of the Milograd culture. Two clusters are present within this unit: one is connected with the course of the Dniipro River and the second is located in Podolia. The finds from the Podgorcevo group can be considered as resulting from direct contacts between populations of the Milograd culture and the Kiev group of the Scythian culture. Their further diffusion along the Dniipro (the Upper Dniipro group) is an effect of trade exchange within the Milograd culture itself. The appearance of Scythian elements in Polesie is somewhat more complicated. Burials under barrows, equipped with iron spearheads and golden earring, are known from this territory. This fact can be explained in two ways: either as a consequence of inner migration from the east to the west within the Milograd culture, or as a result of cultural influences coming along the Horyn River from the Western Podolia group.

A subsequent chronological horizon, the third one (dated for the period from the 6th to the beginning of the 4th centuries BC) is characterized by significant changes in the distribution of sites with Scythian elements. Already in phase A (6th – beginning of the 5th centuries BC) the settlement of the Western Podolia group disappears. We practically lack assemblages which could be dated for the second half of the 6th century. The crisis affected also other groups from Volynia and Podolia, where lack of settlement is clearly seen.

On the other hand, in the area between the Dniester, Prut and Seret Rivers one can still notice two zones clustering sites with Scythian elements (the northern and the

southern one). The number of sites is bigger in the southern zone. Among the finds prevails weaponry, that is arrowheads and swords, majority of which are dated for phase A (the 6th and the beginning of the 5th centuries BC).

In the 7th and in the beginning of the 6th centuries BC, the main centre of the Scythian culture development was located in the North Caucasus. During the 6th century the activity of Scythian element shifts to the west. This is connected with the end of Scythian domination in Asia Minor, the appearance of Greek colonies on the Black Sea and climatic changes enabling the inhabitation of Pontic steppes to a higher degree than it was possible before. This is for instance noticeable on the Budzhak steppes area where the number of Scythian burials increases distinctly in the 6th century BC. Thus, beginning from phase A of the third chronological horizon the Thraco-Getae communities of Moldavia and Bessarabia enter into direct contact with steppe element from the south. This can be the reason for increased number of Scythian elements in the southern zone.

At the end of the 6th century BC conflict arose between the Scythians and the king Darius I, which was the important turning point for the Scythians. It marks a chronological caesura between the early and middle stage of the Scythian culture development. Regarding the territories discussed in this work, there appears the question of Agathysae tribe, which is located by some scholars exactly between the Dniester, Prut and Seret Rivers. According to Herodotus, the Agathysae did not take active part in war with Darius, but were powerful enough to challenge the Scythian hegemony. Following this interpretation, a part of Scythian weaponry can be related with the military actions at the end of the 6th century BC.

Artifacts from the territory of Moldavia and Bessarabia dated to phase B of the third chronological horizon are definitely less numerous than in the previous period. Moreover, most of them can be referred to the first half of the 5th century BC. These facts allow us to assume that the occurrence of Scythian elements in this region is somehow correlated with the existence of the Transylvanian group. With the extinction of this group at the end of the 6th or in the beginning of the 5th century BC, the intensity of Scythian influences reflected in the archeological record decreases.

Discussion of the ways of the Scythian elements transmission to foreign cultural environments must take into account something like a "trend" or "fashion" towards Scythian weaponry among neighboring peoples. Already Tukidydes mentioned this speaking about the Getae and their neighbours. As an example one can mention the knives from Moldavia, imitating the hilts of Scythian swords (Rădeni type).

At that period, in the sub-Carpathian zone, Scythian objects become one of characteristic features of the Ferigile group burials. They include swords, battle axes and bridles of Vekerzug type. All these artifacts can be connected with influences from the Transylvanian group and the Vekerzug culture. Similar phenomenon is observed in the sub-Carpathian zone of Oltenia as well.

With the extinction of the Transylvanian group in phase B of the third chronological horizon, artifacts referring to Scythian culture disappear from the Ferigile group inventories. An exception is the burial from Tigveni, where Scythian elements (cheek-piece, nose-plate) are a result of contacts with Greek colonies on the western coast of the Black Sea, and indirectly with the Scythian environment.

Contrary to the territories of Western Podolia and Volynia, no symptoms of

settlement crisis are seen in the late phase of the Tarnobrzeg group development. Paradoxically, in spite of the collapse of the Western Podolia centre, the number of nail-type earring coming from the 6th and 5th centuries BC distinctly increases (65 pieces). Earrings appear also in the materials of other Lusatian culture groups (Chełmno group, Eastern Wielkopolska group) as well as in the Pomeranian culture (Drohiczyn) and even in Jutland. A large number of earrings is, above all, the consequence of adopting this ornament by the Lusatian culture communities. Basing on Scythian originals they created new forms, unknown to the Scythian world. A local (Lusatian) origin of some earrings was proved by the discovery of fragments of a mold for casting such objects on the settlement at Zawada. However, there exists a small group of weaponry dated for the 5th century BC which can be linked with the Black Sea zone, namely a sword and two arrowheads. These artifacts reveal eastern influences, but those coming from the Milograd culture, particularly from the Podgorcevo group. This statement is additionally supported by the fact that certain earring types occur only in these two cultures, while they are lacking in the Scythian groups of the forest-steppe zone.

In the Tarnobrzeg group we also have finds which are genetically related with the Vekerzug culture milieu. The majority of them are arrowheads, usually being part of grave inventories, and isolated iron battle axes. These findings are dated to the second half of the 6th and the 5th century BC.

The changes are also visible among assemblages and artifacts of the Milograd culture dated to the third chronological horizon. Scythian elements disappear from the territory of Polesie, but are still present in the Upper Dnipro group. They include earrings and single arrowheads. Here casting molds for nail-type earrings are known as well.

Contacts with the Scythian culture look somewhat different in the Podgorcevo group. In this region Scythian elements are the most numerous finds, starting from arrowheads and finishing with earrings. There also appear other categories of finds connected with Scythian weaponry, namely the swords. It is a consequence of direct neighborhood between the Podgorcevo group and the Scythian culture (the Kiev group in the first place), which provoked more frequent and diverse contacts between these environments. Against this background one can distinguish the site at Asharevichi, where as many as 22 arrowheads were found within the layer of destructed fortifications. These artifacts can be dated for the 5th century BC. They are interpreted either as a result of domestic struggle within the Milograd culture, where the Scythian weaponry was in use, or as a manifestation of military presence of the nomads in this region.

In the 5th century BC, after victorious war against Darius I, political pressure exerted by the Scythian tribes on the middle Dniester territories increases. As a result, almost all large fortified settlements from the 7th and 6th centuries BC cease to function. Catacomb graves appear in this region and contain, among others, the burials of heavy-armed Scythian warriors. Thus the political unrest in the 5th century BC had without any doubt some repercussions in the Milograd culture as well.

Final stage of Scythian influences falls to the transition from the 4th century BC to the beginning of the 3rd century BC. The number of sites containing Scythian elements is comparable to that coming from the first half of the 7th century BC. The situation is even more paradoxical as the highest number of Scythian burials in the Black Sea steppe zone (over 3 thousands) falls to this late-Scythian stage. In the Milograd culture materials the fourth chronological horizon is

represented only by single arrowheads from Podgorcevo and Upper Dnipro groups and two phalerae. From Volynia comes an isolated sword dated to the 4th–4th/3rd centuries BC. Also from the Sandomierz Basin only one isolated find is known (an analogically dated arrowhead). It is therefore clear that the Scythian interest in the forest-steppe zone markedly decreases. The nomads' attention is directed to highly-profitable contacts with Greek colonies, and to the west. From this period come the biggest and richest burials of Scythian rulers, containing numerous imports of Greek craftsmanship.

Situation looks somewhat different in the territory of Moldavia and Bessarabia, where the settlement of classic Getae culture is already present, with its developed network of fortified settlements. Scythian finds are scarce (arrowheads, parts of horse harness/tack) and confined actually to the northern regions of the area in question, but they are, for example, parts of golden, ceremonial horse headgear, nose-plate in the form of a fish, and cheek-plates.

The appearance of such an assemblage in the northern part of the area between the Dniester and Prut Rivers is a consequence of internal processes taking place in Scythia in the 4th century BC, and especially at the

transition from the 4th to the 3rd century BC. At that time, the Scythian culture vanishes from the Black Sea steppes. The collapse is believed to be related with the next wave of nomads – the Sarmatians, who drove the Scythians out of the Black Sea steppes.

The nomads of the Early Iron Age (both the Kimmerians and the Scythians) had a significant effect on socio-cultural and ethnic processes in Eastern and Central Europe. They left a lasting mark not only in material culture, but also in such areas of cultural identity as spiritual culture, socio-political relations and economy. Thus the range of the Scythian world influences was extraordinarily broad. A period of Scythian domination affected especially the tribes living in a direct neighborhood of Scythia and, to a certain degree, it was connected with the ambivalent attitude of farming communities towards the nomads. On the one hand, the Scythians posed a serious threat to these communities and on the other hand there was a certain fascination with the Scythian cultural model and with its exclusivity and warrior's ethos. Therefore Scythian influences reflect not only the strength and activity of the Scythian element, but also the cultural preferences of individual groups inhabiting the fringes of Great Scythia.