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VIOLENCE AGAINST MEMORY: COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES OF SCYTHIAN BARROW REUSE

ABSTRACT

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This article provides a diachronic analysis of barrow reuse during the Bronze Age and Scythian times, focusing on a case study from the right bank of the Molochna river basin (North Azov, Ukraine). It compares the successive chronological phases of barrow-building cultures from the Yamna to the Scythian time regarding their spatial arrangement, patterns of secondary burial inclusions, and burial reopenings. The spatial analysis shows that all barrow clusters appeared in this territory during the Yamna phase. In all subsequent phases, barrows continued to be constructed exclusively within these pre-existing clusters. Various types of burial inclusions and mound modifications were typical for all Bronze Age phases. However, while Scythian burials maintained the reuse of predecessor's barrows, they seldom made secondary burials in contemporary barrows. Simultaneously, the number and scale of burial destructions significantly increased during the Scythian time. This shows a shift in attitudes towards barrows within distant and living memory and their role in communicating inheritance claims.

Keywords: Burials, barrow reuse, Scythian time, Bronze Age, spatial analysis, memory
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INTRODUCTION

In the Scandinavian saga of Hervor, a young woman visits her deceased father's barrow to claim his legendary sword. While she considers it her rightful inheritance, the dead are initially resistant to answer her request. Only after she threatens them, do the spirits open the entrance to the fiery underworld, where she obtains the sword – a decision that ultimately seals her tragic fate (*Hervararkviða*, transl. T. Percy).

This story is an example of ongoing interactions between the living people and the dead through the places of remembrance. The burial mounds are other tangible remnants of these interactions, as they were rarely permanently completed after the initial funeral ceremonies but instead often underwent reconstruction and rearrangement over time. The inheritance dispute, being one of the reasons behind burial reuse, has long been discussed by researchers (Roymans 1995; Bradley 2002; Lee 2007; Crescioli 2020). According to them, establishing a symbolic connection with ancestors and creating links to the past could possibly provide a legal foundation for present power relations.

For the steppe nomads, land and pastures were arguably the most important resource. The burial mounds, as the most prominent landscape markers, could be useful for designating and controlling the borders, which might increase the political value of ancestors even more. In Herodotus' Histories, during Darius I's unsuccessful pursuit of the Scythians, he received this famous response:

> "But if all you want is to come to that quickly, we have the graves of our fathers. Come on, find these and try to destroy them: you shall know then whether we will fight you for the graves or whether we will not fight" (Herodotus IV: 127, transl. by A. D. Godley)

Whether it was a distracting trick or not, this quote shows how barrows could be engaged in negotiations about land.

However, Scythians were not the first pastoralists in the Pontic region. By the time of their appearance there, the steppe had already witnessed millenia of barrow-(re)building practices, each rooted in its own past. This article will attempt to diachronically compare strategies for the reuse of burial space through a case study of the right bank, Molochna valley in the Azov steppe.

Two main patterns of burial placement were distinguished by Sarah Semple in her study of Anglo-Saxon barrows, where she used the terminology 'associative' and 'intrusive' reuse (Semple 2008, 410, 411; Crewe 2012, 18). The first involved building new barrows in close proximity to the older ones, while the second – adding new burials into the barrows of the predecessors. Her research showed that these patterns could reflect the social hierarchy of the communities involved in these practices. Associative positioning was connected with the absence of centralised power and the presence of conflicting groups controlling the territory. In contrast, the intrusive placement of burials signalled the elite's right to appropriate older monuments (Crewe 2012, 18).

These two strategies of burial reuse will serve as a framework for the study and the general structure of the first half of the article. It will examine the Bronze Age attitudes towards barrow placement and secondary burial inclusions to better understand the context in which Scythian sites first emerged. However, the primary focus of the second half will be on the latter. This section will discuss whether the reopening of burials and post-funeral manipulation of the deceased's bodies could be viewed as a third burial reuse strategy. With this approach, the study will analyse changes in the role of barrows as a medium for memory and individuality that might have taken place in the region during the Scythian time.

DATASET AND METHODOLOGY

The database used for the current research consists of 92 barrows with 435 burials, excavated between 1978 and 1987 by the Kherson Archaeological Expedition (Kubyshev *et al.* 1979; Kubyshev *et al.* 1982; Kubyshev *et al.* 1983; Kubyshev *et al.* 1987). The earliest barrows in the region were attributed to the Eneolithic time, specifically the Mikhailivka and Kemi-Oba archaeological cultures. A larger group of 23 barrows belonged to the Yamna (Pit Grave) culture. For the purpose of this study, Eneolithic burials were integrated into a single phase with the Yamna burials. One barrow was associated with the Catacombna culture, while seven others – to the Zrubna (Timber Grave) culture. There were also seven sites associated with the Bronze Age, although their identification was less precise. Scythian barrows represented the majority of the sites (45 barrows), and all Scythian burials in the region with chronological identifications dated no earlier than the late 5th century BC while the youngest – no later than the 4th century BC. For the quantitative study of Scythian burial destructions, broader geographical data was used, which included 243 burials from the Azov steppe zone.

The sites were located within the territory of the Black Sea Lowland, which is part of the East European Plain in the middle watershed of the Velyky and Maly Utliuk rivers, as well as on the right bank of the Molochna River (Fig. 1). The total area of the investigated region was approximately 150 km^2. The topography of this region exhibited a minimal slope, indicating predominantly flat terrain. The lowest points, averaging 5 metres above sea level, were located in the river valleys. The highest points in the watershed areas reached 35 metres. At present time, this region has undergone significant alterations due to the construction of irrigation systems and dams.

This area was chosen for the study because it had been thoroughly explored during field research. Therefore, the current spatial data likely closely represents the actual barrow groups and their spatial interconnectedness, rather than being influenced by a sample selection bias during excavations. While the field reports were the primary source of information, there is partial support from maps of the region before and after the active excavation period. Notably, the 19th-century topographical military map of the Russian Empire

does not show evidence of large numbers of barrows that were not documented during excavation. Additionally, apart from one barrow group, no other mounds were observed in the modern Wikimapia data, further supporting the assumption that the excavated barrows indeed represent genuine spatial clusters (Fig. 2).

Spatial analysis was implemented in the QGIS software along with statistical analysis in Python (Jupyter Notebook). The Digital Elevation Model (DEM) used for map creation and analysis is the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) 1 Arc Second dataset.

The dataset included a point layer containing the locations of barrows, each attributed to its corresponding time period based on field report evaluations. To identify statistically significant patterns and concentrations in the spatial distribution of barrows within the study area, the Spatial Clustering tool was used. The Distance Matrix was set to calculate Euclidean distances (straight-line) between all barrow points. In the resulting dataset, the mean, median, and range of distances within each group were calculated to understand the central tendency and spread of the data according to the time periods.

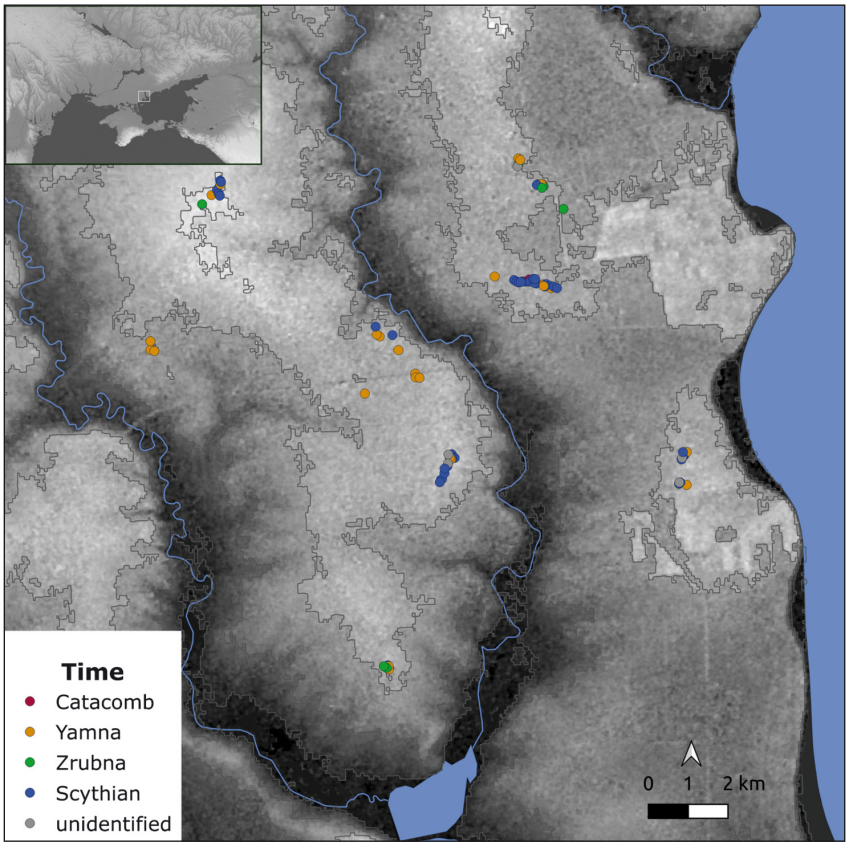

Fig. 1. General map of the studied area

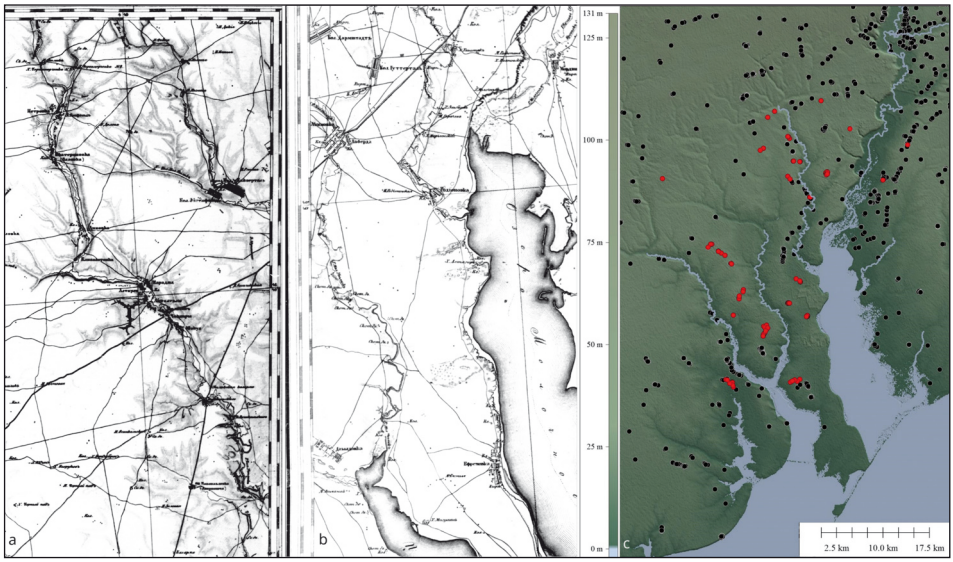

Fig. 2. a, b – 19th-century topographic military map of the region (after http://freemap.com.ua/); c – Wikimapia data of Molochna river valley: red dots are the locations of explored Scythian sites, black dots are currently visible barrows (after https://wikimapia.org/)

The Minimum Spanning Tree (MST) analysis was implemented to create a general network for all the sites by considering each barrow as a node and determining the links that create the most efficient network, minimising the total distance required to connect all nodes. Results based on these methods were analysed to explore the potential influence of the placement of Scythian kurhans by comparing their locations to those of earlier barrows and comparing their spatial patterns.

SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT

All barrow groups displayed linear patterns that followed the natural features of the landscape, primarily along riverbanks or valleys. The majority of groups contained sites from multiple chronological periods. While in the studied area new mounds were rarely constructed in the Catacombna and Zrubna periods, the largest number of barrows emerged there in the Scythian time. Notably, all spatial clusters had already formed during the Early Bronze Age. Although Yamna barrows constitute 36% of all barrows in the region, no new clusters were established in later phases; instead, the burial mounds were added to the existing clusters (Fig. 3).

The location of the barrows in all chronological stages gravitates towards the places of the highest elevation. While the mean elevation of the investigated region is 17 m above sea

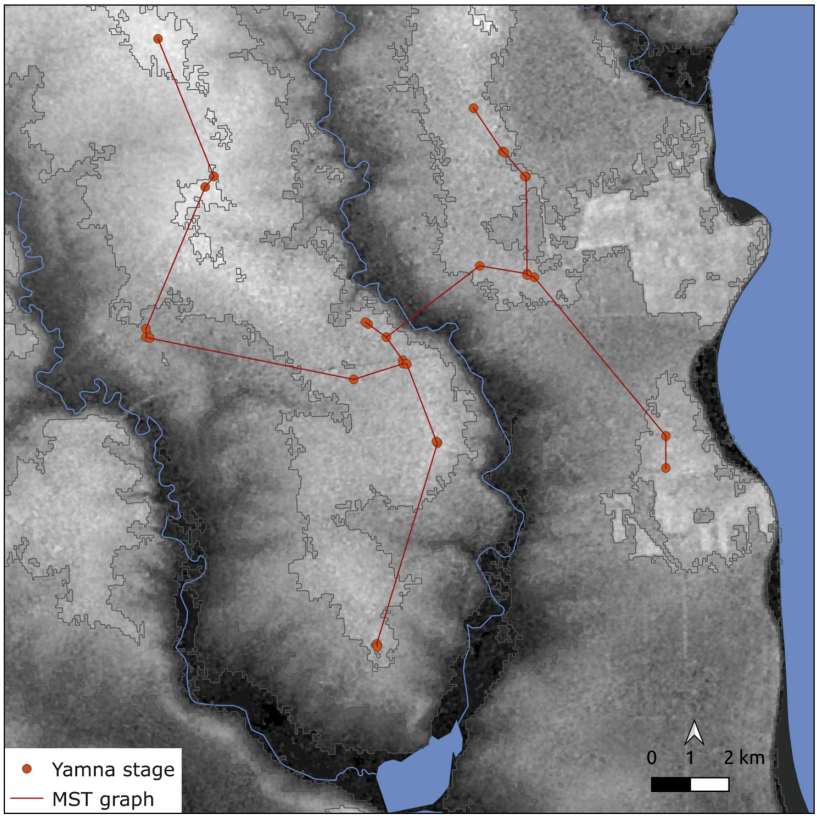

Fig. 3. MST graph of the barrow clusters of the Yamna phase

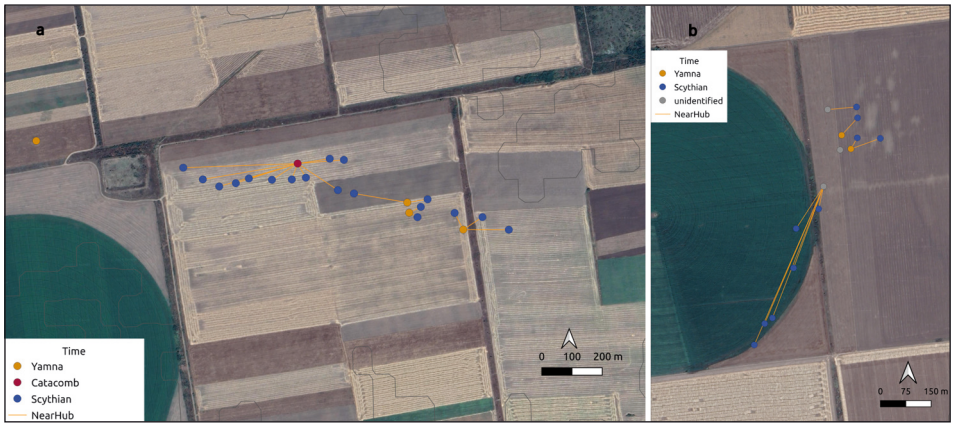

Fig. 4. a – Mala Ternivka barrow group; b – Vovchanske 1 barrow group. The connections between Scythian and the closest Bronze Age barrows

level, the mean terrain height of the barrows' locations is 23 m. This parameter is similar for all chronological groups, although Yamna barrows demonstrated a slightly larger variance in terrain preference.

The Scythian barrows were located in close proximity to the preceding barrows (Fig. 4: a). The median distance to the closest Bronze Age mound was 97 meters, while the minimum distance was 26 meters. In 23% of cases, the latter were the closest barrows to the Scythians. However, in the most numerous groups, this proximity became less significant, and the closest barrows also belonged to the Scythian period. It could be suggested that earlier barrows primarily served as points of reference during the initial stages of barrow construction. For instance, in the Vovchanske 1 group, which has a large number of Scythian barrows, the distance to the Bronze Age barrows significantly increased (up to 513 meters), but the average minimum distance remained the same (Fig. 4: b). This observation is slightly supported by the chronology of Scythian sites in that group, where the earliest Scythian barrows (from the late 5th century BC) were located closer to the Bronze Age barrows.

Despite having similar spatial patterning, the Yamna and Scythian stages demonstrated differences in terms of the within-group placement of the barrows (Fig. 5). Yamna mounds tended to be widely allocated in groups of 2-7 mounds. The average distance between groups was 6542 meters, while the within-group distance was 789 meters. In the case of Scythian barrows, which were located in the same territorial clusters as preceding barrows, the between-group distance remained similar. However, the within-group distance for Scythian time barrows was reduced to 380 meters. Moreover, the location of Scythian barrows also had a stronger linearity pattern, particularly in relation to other Scythian barrows.

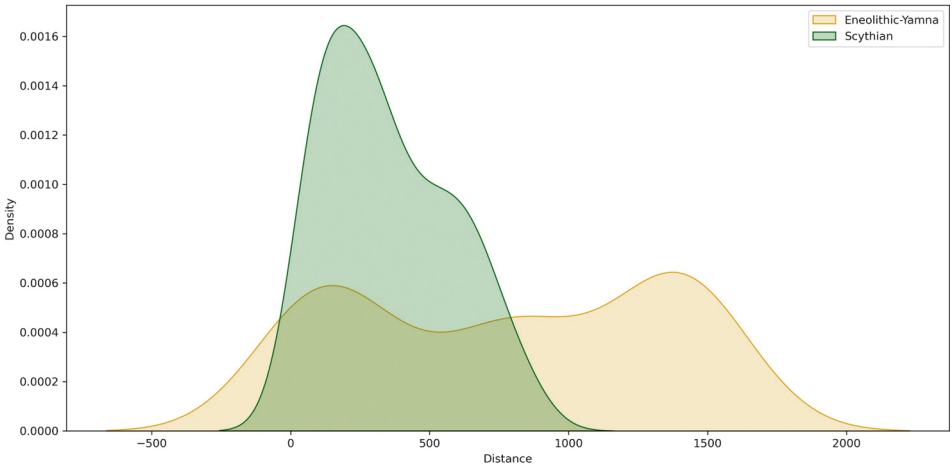

Fig. 5. KDE plot of within-group distance between barrows at Yamna and Scythian phases

Another difference that emerged during the Scythian time was related to topographical preferences. While the MST graphs of barrows from all chronological phases had a similar structure, a slight deviation from the original network appeared only in the Scythian time (Fig. 6), specifically within the group Vovchanske 2, which has the lowest topography. Interestingly, although one Yamna barrow was used for secondary Scythian burial, no new kurhans were constructed in that area. This observation could be explained by the fact that during the Scythian time, barrow placement was strongly associated with the highest geographical points, resulting in lesser importance for clusters located in valleys.

It needs to be once again addressed that these observations were mostly limited to the Yamna and Scythian stages, which both exhibited a higher preference for constructing barrows in lower river valleys. For example, the number of Zrubna barrows was significantly higher to the north and east of the Azov steppe. Despite this, the continuity of past monuments played a crucial role in determining the positioning of barrows across all

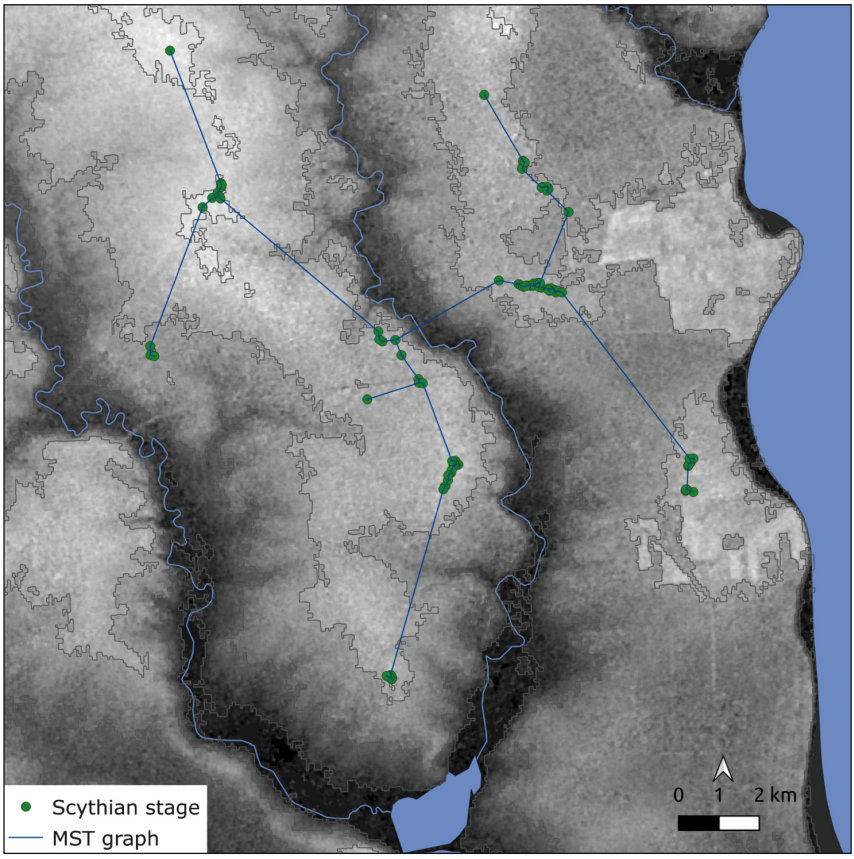

Fig. 6. MST graph of the barrow clusters of the Scythian phase

chronological stages. However, during the Scythian time, the tradition of barrow building reached its peak in this region, displaying a more deliberate attitude toward the placement of the burial mounds, emphasis on visibility, and supposedly territorial control through the strategic barrow locations.

SECONDARY BURIALS

In the studied area, various types of barrow reuse and secondary burials were common. However, each chronological stage exhibited distinct patterns of barrow construction and burial placement (Fig. 7).

During the Eneolithic-Yamna phase, 37% of all the barrows in the studied area were built, but these barrows were accompanied by an equally large number of secondary burials. On average, each barrow contained at least three burials, while those with only one burial were less common. The barrows with the earliest and most diverse Eneolithic layers had the largest number of secondary burials, mainly of the Yamna phase. For instance, Velykyi kurhan ("Big Barrow") near Volodymyrivka village contained 15 Yamna burials, and Vovchanske 1 barrow had 20 burials. Without more precise chronological dating, we can only speculate that these secondary Yamna burials occurred earlier than the majority of newly constructed Yamna barrows in the area.

The clear spatial hierarchy, which would later be observed in Scythian barrows, was not typical for Eneolithic-Yamna barrows. Although the mean diameter of the mounds was 32 meters, the burials tended to be placed within five meters from the centre, with a slight

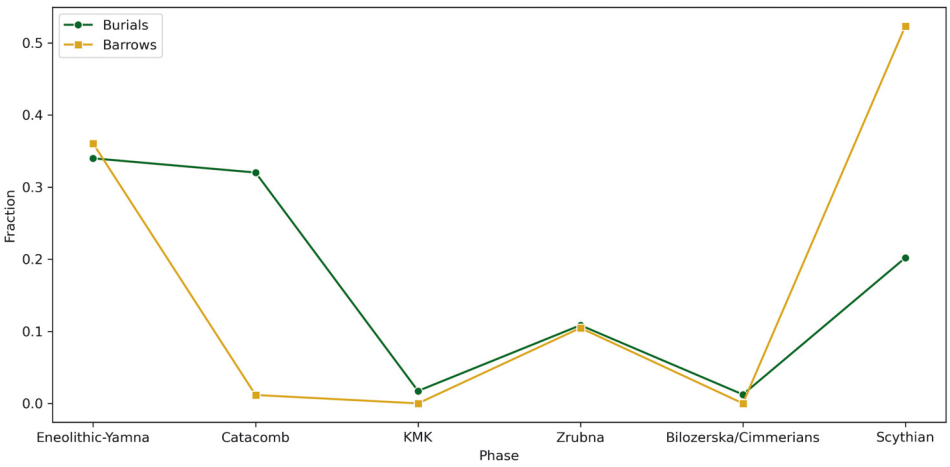

Fig. 7. The proportion of barrows and burials in the current sample, which shows the dynamics of barrow-building and barrow-reuse traditions

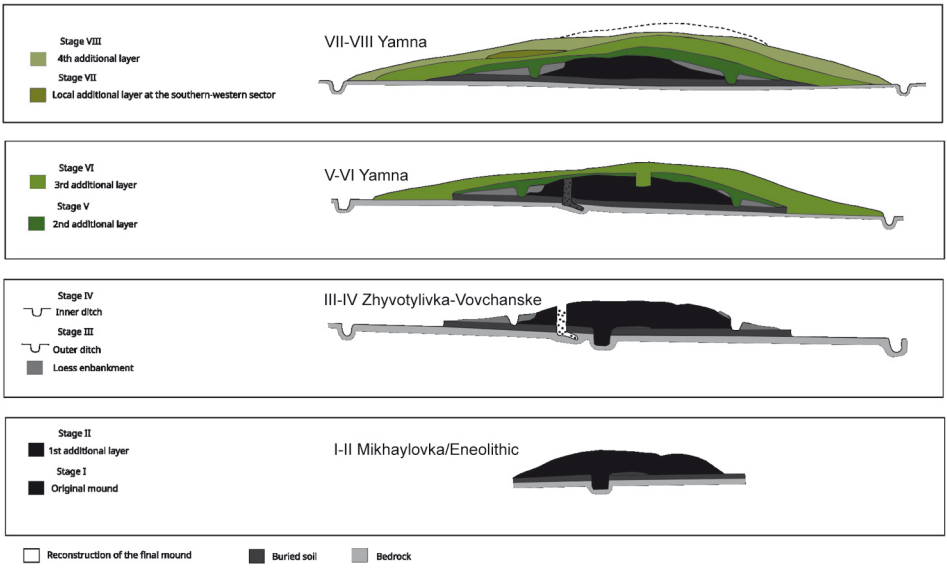

Fig. 8. Reuse stages of the barrow Vovchanske 1 (drawing by the author after Kubyshev *et al.* 1979)

preference for the western side of the mound. Burials were typically oriented latitudinally, with occasional variations likely connected to seasonal changes. The average burial depth was 0.7 meters below the level of the buried soil and remained consistent regardless of location. In most cases, graves contained only one person (79% of Yamna burials), while collective burials were less common (9%). Additionally, cenotaphs were observed in 11% of the Eneolithic-Yamna burials.

During this phase, various modifications to the mounds were widespread. Approximately half of the barrows (52%), had additional layers made for secondary Yamna burials. They were occasionally made locally, directly above the new burials. The longest-functioning barrows also had other types of modifications. For instance, the Zhyvotylivka-Vovchanske horizon of the Vovchanske 1 barrow (Fig. 8) contained three burials, two of which were accompanied by ring ditches but did not have new layers (Kubyshev *et al.* 1979, 38-39). Later additions during the Yamna phases increased its diameter fourfold, from approximately 15 to 60 meters.

During the Catacombna phase, inclusions in the earlier barrows were the primary type of burial. Only one new barrow was observed in the studied area within the Mala Ternivka group. However, the overall number of burials remained similar to the previous phase (32% of the subset), and they were distributed across all territorial clusters. Typically, there were multiple burials in one barrow, with an average of four.

In general, constructing additional layers for the mounds was less common during the Catacombna phase; this was observed only in four barrows. The location of the burials

showed a strong preference for the peripheries of the mounds. The majority of Catacombna culture burials (63%) were situated at the eastern fringes of the barrows. Graves were usually oriented circularly, with their long axis perpendicular to the centre of the mound. The burial depth was typically around 1 metre from the level of the buried soil. Most graves contained a single individual, while collective burials usually consisted of an adult and one or more children. The observed patterns differ significantly from both previous and consequent attitudes to the barrow "geography", where the central position of the graves appeared to be the most important.

The Zrubna phase once again demonstrated dynamics similar to the Eneolithic-Yamna phase. In the studied territory, 44 Zrubna burials (11%) were discovered, along with seven new barrows (8%). Considering that the majority of barrows had only one Zrubna burial, we can assume that new barrows were built for approximately 16% of the Zrubna burials. However, this parameter may be lower for this particular case-study area. According to V. Zabavin's research, barrow-building tendencies for the Zrubna culture were more frequent in the arid, deeper watershed steppe zones of the Dnipro-Molochna area (Zabavin 2018, 71, 72).

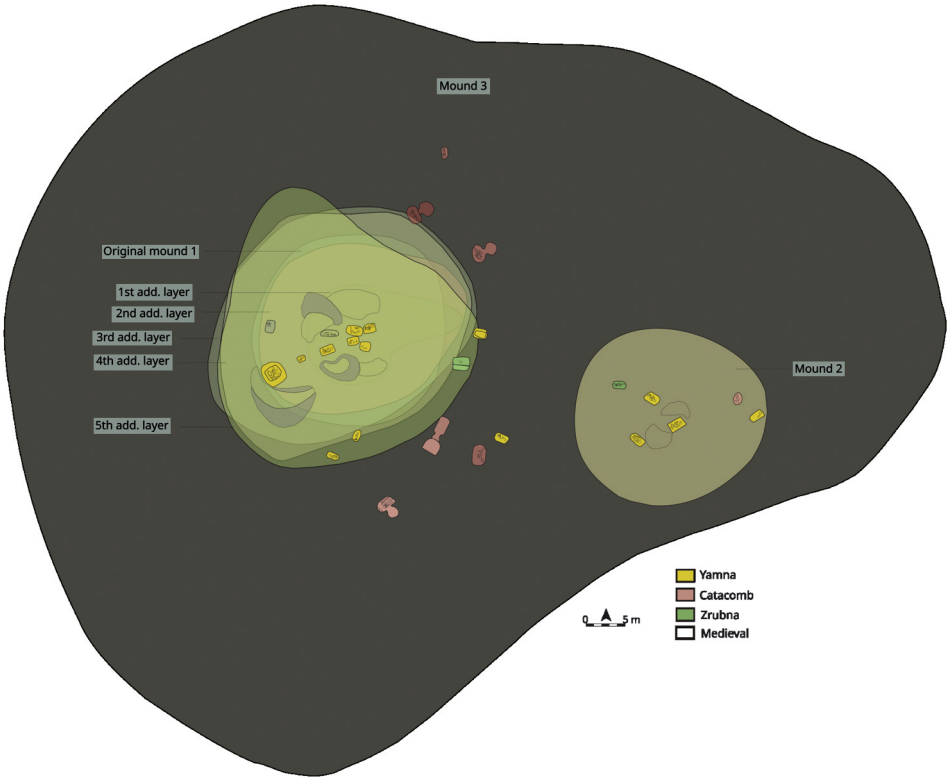

Fig. 9. Velyky Kurhan ("Big Barrow") near Volodymyrivka. Two Yamna barrows connected by a third mound of the Zrubna phase (drawing by the author after Kubyshev *et al.* 1982)

More than half of the burials (57%), both primary and secondary, were located close to the centre of the mound. The orientation of the graves followed a latitudinal pattern regardless of their location. Burials were usually no more than one metre in depth from the level of the buried soil, with peripheral ones often incorporated into the mound. In the majority of cases (86%), burials contained only one person, while the remaining cases involved adults with children.

Mound modifications, often quite labour-intensive, were frequently observed during the Zrubna phase burials. A particularly interesting phenomenon was the creation of mounds above burials situated in the space between two older barrows, resulting in a new, larger mound (Fig. 9). In the studied territory, the barrows Davydivka 1, 2, and Velyky Kurhan near Volodymyrivka belong to this type of mound and reached their final form (about 120 m) during the Zrubna phase. Similar "super-mounds" were also observed for Yamna barrows; for example, Yurovka 2 consisted of three mounds joined by another Yamna phase mound. V. Zabavin suggested that such Zrubna burials, placed beneath the joining mound, could have higher social significance (Zabavin 2018, 81).

A different situation appeared in this territory during the Scythian time. While 82 Scythian burials (20% of the burials in the sample) were discovered, there were also 45 barrows (53%), the construction of which was attributed to this phase. Almost half of the burials were the only one burial within the barrow (Fig. 10). Peripheral burials were more typical for "elite" barrows and, in most cases, were created simultaneously, serving an accompanying function (Boltrik 2000, 135). Notably, Scythian secondary burials in the earlier barrows were also predominantly single. They often had slightly earlier dates than the new Scythian barrows. The general chronological dynamics of the North-Western Azov region indicate that from the 6th to the mid-5th centuries BC, grave inclusions in the preceding barrows were the most widespread burial ritual in this territory. However, the case of the lower Molochna valley suggests that both secondary burials and the emergence of the kurhan necropolis were broadly dated to the late 5th century BC. Therefore, there is little evidence to suggest a significant chronological gap between them.

Most Scythian burials (67%) were located at the centre of the barrow. The orientation of the graves was predominantly latitudinal, with exceptions mainly typical to peripheral burials. Simultaneously, the depth of the burials was generally similar regardless of their location, distributed normally with an average depth of 2 metres from the level of the buried soil.

Most graves contained the remains of a single adult individual. In collective burials, there was a notable prevalence of pairs of different genders, with one exception: the burial at Radyvonivka 12, where the remains of a young woman with a child were discovered. However, observations across a broader area reveal that in the case of "elite" burial mounds, such as Berdyansky, accompanying individuals of the same gender were often interred together in the central burial.

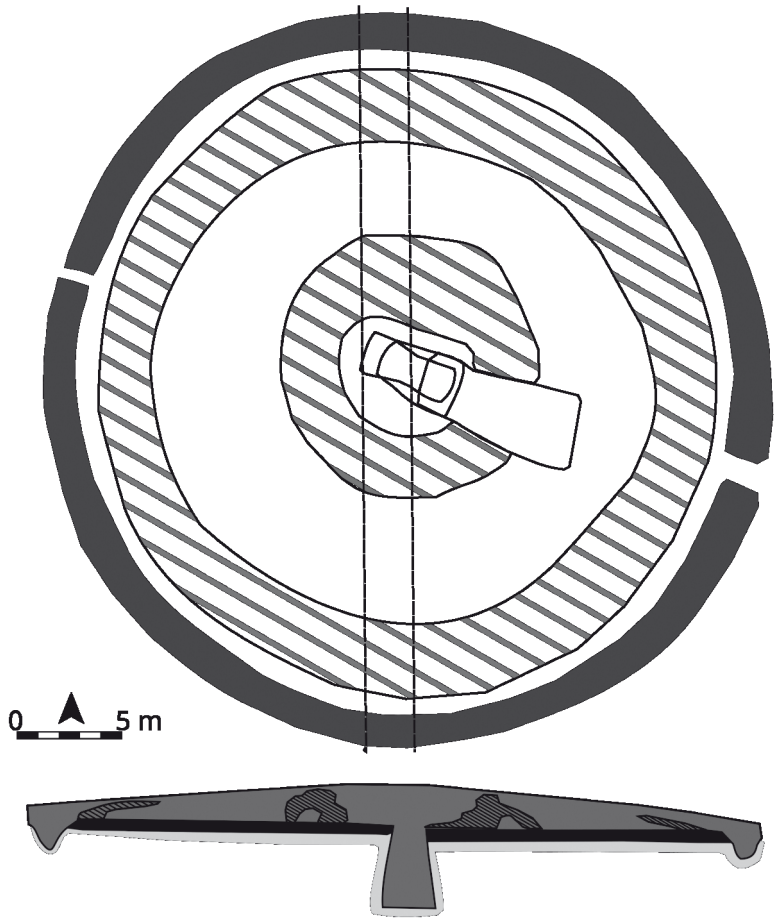

Fig. 10. Scythian barrow Volodymyrivka 4 (drawing by the author after Polin and Kubyshev 1997)

Modifications to the mounds were less typical for Scythian barrows, primarily due to the lower prevalence of secondary burials. However, a few cases demonstrate that such practices existed, albeit mainly for secondary burials in Bronze Age mounds. For instance, the construction of one of the burials inserted into the Bronze Age barrow Vovchanske 5 was accompanied by the addition of a new mound layer. Similarly, according to the report by S. Polin, the second burial in the Scythian barrow Volodymyrivka 1 was made later, along with an additional mound layer (Kubyshev and Polin 1997, 5, 21, 22).

These observations showed that the barrows of predecessors served as focal points for creating new ceremonial spaces for all pastoralist groups inhabiting the steppe. While the emergence of new barrows within the same territorial clusters could be explained by simi-

larities in landscape features (such as high elevation points and proximity to river crossings), the patterns of secondary burials were more complex. As we have seen, the burial rites of some groups, mainly the Catacombna culture, strongly favoured inclusions in already existing barrows. However, most cases demonstrated some combination of barrow construction and secondary burials. Scythian secondary burials within the Bronze Age barrows in the current sample appeared approximately around the time of the first Scythian barrows. Furthermore, their spatial distribution (Fig. 11) indicates that they were uniformly spread across most of the barrow clusters. This pattern suggests a deliberate placement of one or two burials within each barrow group. The inclusion of burials into earlier mounds could be a feature of a symbolic claim to new territory and not just a lack of sufficient human resources for intensive architectural projects.

It is also important to differentiate between reuse across subsequent chronological phases and reuse within the same phase. Although the difference in chronological span

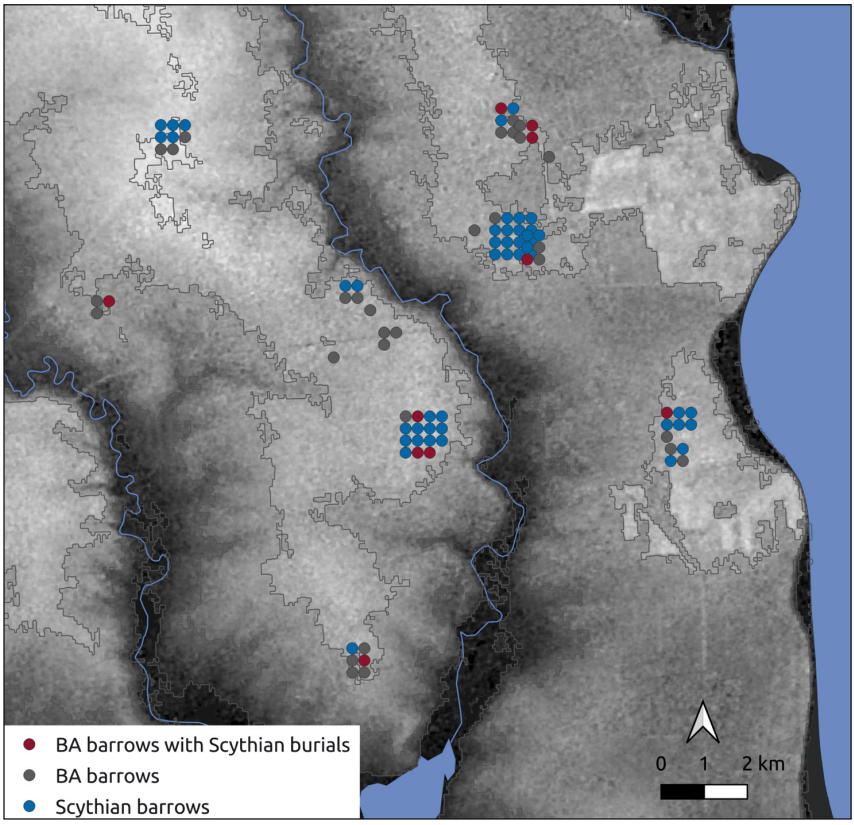

Fig. 11. Map of the distribution of Scythian secondary burials in BA barrows. Points are displaced around the centres of the groups

and the lack of precise dating within phases make it challenging to compare patterns directly, for this study, I propose assuming that similarity in burial customs implies some level of cultural continuity. Consequently, all groups exhibited a similar attitude toward barrows from previous phases; they either modified existing mounds or constructed new ones nearby. However, in the case of within-phase barrow reuse, the Scythians demonstrated a different approach compared to the Bronze Age, especially for groups with a tradition of building barrows. While Bronze Age barrows were reused throughout all phases, Scythian barrows were exceedingly seldom modified and used for secondary burials.

BURIAL REOPENINGS OR BURIAL DESTRUCTIONS

The reopening of graves, and particularly their destruction, can be seen as another form of post-funeral modifications to barrows. While this practice was quite widespread, its role in burial rituals remains a complex question.

The proportion of undamaged Bronze Age burials in the studied sample was relatively high, and even reopened burials mostly remained unscathed. Multiple instances of grave disturbances have been observed in Catacombna burials in the Molochna region. The burial of Mala Tervivka at 2/9 contained only partial remains (hand and leg bones) of the deceased individual, along with their tomb inventory, without any other signs of disturbance. According to research by S. Pustovalov, anatomically incomplete burials represented the cult of the head in Catacombna culture. Most of these graves consisted either of skull interments (notably with clay masks) or, conversely, bodies with skulls absent (Pustovalov 2015, 53). However, what I find particularly interesting is that some Catacombna burials exhibited minor changes in the anatomical position of bones. For example, there were cases of swapped left and right tibia bones or displaced distal and proximal ends of bones (Pustovalov 2015, 54). These potential mistakes not only serve as evidence of post-funeral manipulations with the deceased bodies but also reflect a careful treatment and intention to maintain their integrity even after death.

The picture of Scythian graves, however, is drastically different. Within the same region, only 29% of all Scythian burials have been identified as intact, with a similar percentage (33%) in the sample limited only to the secondary burials in Bronze Age barrows (Fig. 12). The extent of ruination also significantly impacted the preservation of entire burial complexes. To better understand this phenomenon, three main questions must be addressed: Were the burial reopenings made by Scythians? Is treasure hunting the most possible explanation for this? And, if not, were these actions contrary to or aligned with the original intentions of the creators of the burials?

The first question is perhaps the easiest to answer: The destruction of the original integrity of Scythian kurhans probably occurred repeatedly. While a major wave of grave

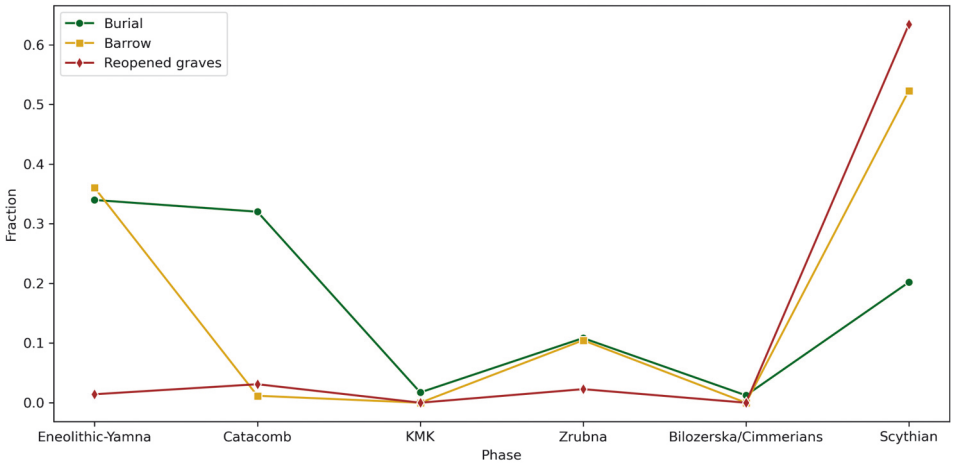

Fig. 12. The proportion of barrows and burials in the current sample, along with the proportion of reopened graves in each chronological phase

looting began with the colonisation of the steppe in the 18th century AD by a population not associated with nomadic traditions, researchers agree that many initial reopenings had already taken place during Scythian times (*e.g.*, Boltrik 2000, 135; Ochir-Goryaeva 2016, 114; Polin 2017, 527). According to S. Polin, the precise nature of the looters' shafts strongly indicates their exact knowledge of underground burial planning (Polin 2017, 530). However, Yu. Boltryk argued that the majority of these shafts, especially in "elite" barrows, were actually ritual dromos passages constructed by the barrow architects (although looters could later use them) (Boltrik 2000, 135).

The intentional choice of central graves for robbing could indicate motives beyond simple treasure hunting. In a detailed overview of post-funeral rituals among the Eurasian nomadic population, Maria Ochir-Goryaeva suggested that the primary purpose of reopening burials and manipulating the remains of the deceased was the legitimisation of power by successors through obtaining their status regalia (Ochir-Goryaeva 2016, 120). According to her observations, the most significant destruction primarily affected central, planigraphically "prestigious" burials within wealthy kurhans (Ochir-Goryaeva 2016, 122). To explore this further, I conducted a quantitative study of burials in the broader Northern Azov region, which revealed a consistent trend: overall, 89.5% of burials located in the centre of the barrow were robbed or otherwise destroyed, while among the side burials, this share was only 35.6%. Notably, the majority of surviving central burials were Scythian burials in Bronze Age kurhans, as well as female burials (Davydivka 4). When we focus on data from barrows where several burials were made during the Scythian period, the picture of the reopening ratio becomes even clearer: all but one central burial in such kurhans were destroyed, while among the side burials, such cases constituted 30.7%.

The fact that robbers often knew the layout of the central tomb in detail leaves no doubt that the existence of other burials was unknown to them. While different states of preservation contributed to a somewhat distorted picture, side burials in "elite" kurhans typically contained a significant number of items made from precious metals. Even in barrows where all burials were reopened, a significantly larger number of gold items (mostly costume details) were preserved in the accompanying female burials. For instance, the Northern catacomb of the Melitopol Kurhan, with a female burial also suffered damage. Despite this, a large number of valuables, including golden dress ornaments and decorations, were left in place. According to S. Polin, in this case, the robbers were able to take only the largest items, which were likely also present in the burial, while leaving the smaller ones behind (Polin 2017, 533). However, this confirms that the numerous golden ornaments, although also taken by the robbers (as evidenced by findings in the barrows), were not their main goal. Instead, the status attributes of leaders and warriors held greater interest. Repeated reuse of such artefacts also explains why Scythian prestigious artefacts often had slightly anachronistic features. A well-known example is the handle of a 5th-century BC Achaemenid sword found in the Chortomlyk Kurhan, dated to the late third quarter of the 4th century BC (Topal 2021, 297). While we cannot definitively determine the origin of such occurrences, it is clear that the connection with the past played an important role in increasing the value and status of these objects.

The practice of removing precious objects from graves appears to have been widespread among Bronze Age societies. According to research by Marie Louise Stig Sřrensen and Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, one form of post-burial treatment assumed that corporeal remains could lose their importance after a certain stage (possibly, decomposition), and the connection between these remains and associated objects also could change (Stig and Rebay-Salisbury 2023, 185-190). Consequently, the removal of objects may have been socially accepted and did not necessarily require careful handling of the remains. However, observations of reopened Scythian graves revealed treatment beyond mere disrespect for the deceased and the necessity of taking the valuables. M. Ochir-Goryaeva described several Pazyryk burials turned into chaos by the "grave robbers":

> "...the robbers tore off the lid from the coffin, damaging it at one end, ... after emptying the coffin, the robbers placed the lid back on it in an inverted position...The sarcophagus was cut into pieces by the robbers ... parts of a woman's body were found in various places within the burial chamber ... The male body, decapitated by the robbers, was oriented with its feet to the west" (Ochir-Goryaeva 2016, 126; Gryaznov 1950, 21; Rudenko 1960, 38, 39)

In the studied sample, skeletal remains were often found scattered within burial chambers as well. Another common situation involved mutilations, particularly decapitations, which natural factors could not explain. For instance, in the Vodoslavka 6 kurhan, the skulls of two buried individuals – a man and a woman – were found under the wall, separated from the bodies (Fig. 13). However, the bones of the rest of the skeletons were found

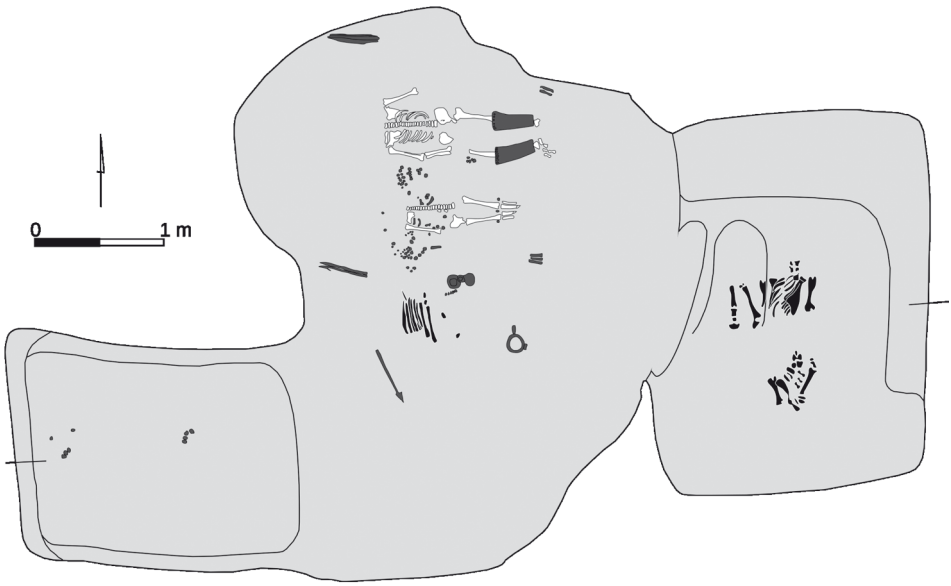

Fig. 13. Reopened grave Vodoslavka 6/1 with two beheaded individuals (drawing by the author after Kuprii *et al.* 2019)

in an anatomical arrangement, and a significant portion of the tomb inventory remained undamaged (Kupriy *et al.* 2019, 185).

This already brings us to the third question stated at the beginning of this chapter: whether these actions could qualify as violent since the post-funeral destructions could also be an intentional part of a burial ritual. Both ethnographic and archaeological evidence exists for such practices, involving the destruction of human remains and their symbolic substitutes. Richard Bradley referred to this as "remembering by forgetting":

> "Instead of a permanent memorial, the dissolution of the image provides a vivid metaphor for the decay of the human body, and it is this process that is called to mind. By destroying an object that has achieved renown, it is possible to ensure that it will form part of public tradition." (Bradley 2002, 42)

The key element in these phenomena lies in the duality of display-destruction activities. The personified object is exhibited to the community before its eventual demolition. However, this aspect was absent in the case of Scythian burial destructions. While their funeral ceremonies likely included such "incorporating practices" (Rowlands 1993) during wakening sacrificial rites, once the body was placed in the burial chamber, it remained hidden from public view. Scythian graves, especially during the Classic period, were typically located deep underground, 10 to 16 metres, and protected by layers of stone and eel-

grass. These precautions made re-entering the grave an extremely difficult and dangerous process, therefore not suitable for prolonged post-funeral ceremonies.

Therefore, the data from Scythian burials tends to support the hypothesis that burial destructions resulted from violent actions toward the dead, aimed at altering their communal memory of them. These reopening could serve a similar purpose as placing secondary burials in Bronze Age barrows – asserting claims to land by conflicting groups. For example, Svitlana Bessonova associated Scythian burial reopenings with the cult of ancestors. According to her perspective, the destruction of male burials aimed to deprive enemy tribes of their protection (Bessonova 1983, 63). While the deceased, particularly their bodies and burial sites, remained active in the community's discourse, they could also become entangled in intertribal conflicts. The majority of "elite" Scythian barrows suffered from large-scale destructions. One notable exception is the Great Ryzhanowka Kurhan, which is one of the few intact barrows that could paradoxically support the aforementioned idea. Its chronology was dated to an uncommonly late period – around 280-260 BC, according to Serhii Skoryi and Jan Chochorowski (Skoryi and Chochorowski 2018, 143). By the 3rd century BC, Scythian society was already in decline, and the role of the kurhan shifted as burial practices gradually transitioned to flat graves.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM COMMEMORATION TO FORGETTING

One of the main observations of this study is the difference in Scythian's reuse of Bronze Age barrows compared to the treatment of barrows that emerged in Scythian time. In this section, I will attempt to explain this phenomenon by distinguishing how barrows and individuality could be communicated in the context of distant and living memory construction. Although the term "memory" in both cases does not refer to the cognitive process but rather to the learned and shared narratives about the past (Devlin 2007, 37), the concept of distant memory aligns more closely with societal mythology, unlike living memory, where events and names could still circulate in oral tradition.

The initial stages of colonising new pastures by the steppe nomads required the establishment of a symbolic connection with the distant past. In this context, kurhans served as a medium to invoke this connection through the conducting of mimetic funeral practices. As these barrows were essentially anonymous, they posed no threat and could be integrated into existing narratives as ancestral burials. Therefore, for example, the widespread practice of placing secondary burials in Bronze Age barrows still maintained the typical Scythian burial space organisation, which emphasised the centrality of the grave.

In contrast, Scythian kurhans were seldom, if ever, reused by contemporaries, as they were perceived not as anonymous but as being associated with individual people. These burials could serve as a material extension of the buried people who continued to live in

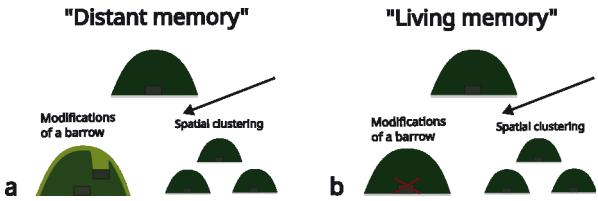

Fig. 14. Model of Scythian barrow reuse

the communal memory. According to Paul Treherne, for Homeric warriors, an oral tradition of epic poetry and a funerary monument both served as responses to the existential threat of death:

> "There was only one way that the self, the subject, could transcend death: in the minds of the living... In particular, by achieving a 'beautiful death', the warrior 'inscribes his reality as an individual subject on the collective memory of the group' thereby achieving a certain immortality" (Treherne 1995, 123).

Likewise, Patroclus' barrow served solely as a commemoration of him, not of his family or kindred. This individualistic view of death was deeply ingrained in the heroic ethos and may have also resonated with other steppe warriors.

At the same time, the materiality of remains associated with a people had the potential for manipulation of the memory about them. Considering the significant efforts that were dedicated to preserving the integrity of the body and arranging the inventory during the creation of the burial, destructive post-funeral actions should be seen in the opposite way – as disintegration or reappropriation of the memory. Loosely following Marshall Mcluhan's terminology, the connection between the funeral and individuality in these cases displays the communicative aspect of *reversal* (McLuhan and McLuhan 1988, 99): a medium created for commemoration turns into its opposite, an instrument for forgetting.

Considering this, the initial burial reuse model, which combined the patterns of spatial arrangement along with the modifications of the barrow, should be adjusted to fit these different types of memory treatment (Fig. 14). Distant memory allowed for a peaceful incorporation strategy that created an idealised version of the past to meet present needs. But when the monument's legacy and association were seen as potentially dangerous and contradictory, it needed to be destroyed and defeated. While these approaches were opposite in execution, both aimed to establish a new connection with the past, heritage, and land. However, the latter also expresses the volatility of social relationships happening in Scythian times, which probably involved not only the dead but also the living communities. In this way, Hervor's cautionary tale, in which she gained the sword and victories but lost her children, poetically mirrors the eventual decline in the barrow-building tradition, which also marked the end of the nomadic Scythian culture.

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