ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX WITH EXTREMELY EARLY BANNERS FOUND IN THE TERRITORY OF THE FORMER USSR
(End of I and Beginning of II Millennium AD)

S.A. YATSENKO

In 1986, where the Don flows into the Sea of Azov, on the eastern edge of the town of Azov, E.I. Bespalyi and I.N. Parusimov investigated a royal burial belonging to nomads and dating from the end of the I and beginning of the II millennium AD (site of Dachi, Burial-mound 1). The only part that had not been looted was a hiding-place in the form of a small pit in the western part of the mound, which contained a set of articles decorated with gold: weapons, a horse’s bridle, items of apparel et al. (see Note 3, pp. 175-191). Yet, even these remains, to judge from the quantity of gold articles (approximately 16,000) make the burial-mound at Dachi the richest burial in the history of the nomad peoples of Eurasia. Most of the materials from this burial have already been published.¹ Yet, three, and probably the most interesting of the finds — remains of articles made of organic materials and decorated with gold plates have not been described in detail,² since E.I. Bespalyi made over the right to publish them to the author of this short article.

The people, to which the burials at Dachi belonged, has today already been established beyond doubt. No later that 72 AD the Lower Don was referred to as the centre of a new tribe of nomads — the Alan-Scythians (Ios. Flav. De Bello Iud., VII, 7,4; Ambros. De excid., V, I).

**Conditions in which the finds were made and their state of preservation**

The publication of the burial-mound contains a plan of the pit in question which measured 60 × 60 cms, but this only gives a rough idea of the shape of the collection of small pieces of jewellery (Plate 1). Given that the excavations had to take place at great speed (it was getting dark, there were no guards present, only

---


a large crowd of curious onlookers) and in a confined space, it was not possible to record in the drawing the spot where each of the many thousands of plates of one and the same type and piled on top of each other in layers had lain. Yet observations of the main principles in accordance with which they had been laid out and the working drawings executed at the time were made available to me by E.I. Bespalyi at the end of the field season in question.

At the bottom of the pit were several articles, of which the basic material was organic, densely packed together: they were richly decorated with gold plates sewn on to them. Altogether 15,207 gold plates were found. To judge from the notes in the field-diary and oral information provided to me by the excavator in question, four layers of decorated articles could be made out in the stratigraphy of the pit. The fact that the edges of the decorated areas on the finds were well preserved in each layer shows that these articles had not been folded: i.e. they had not been made of textiles, but from firmer material, which, moreover, had not sagged under the weight of the numerous pieces of decoration, and must evidently have been from leather. All the articles in question had been decorated with plates only on the one side.

**Rectangular object**

The vast majority of the plates (rhomboid in shape — a total of 11,720 items) (Plates 3, 4) had covered in solid rows a rectangular object measuring approximately 90 × 60 cms. When this had been laid in the pit, part of it had had to be bent under (approximately a third of its overall length had been found lower down: accordingly layers 2 and 3) (Plate 2, 1). On it there had also been patterns, which had not been recorded in sufficient detail (possibly plant patterns), made up of semi-spherical plates arranged in a single row (of these only 2,590 have been found). This is probably a small ritual rug similar in dimensions and proportions to that on which there sits a male deity on a gold comb found in the nearby princely burial in Burial-mound No. 10 from Kobyakovo dating from the same period.

The most interesting articles are two others measuring 60 × 40 cms which had been laid out underneath and on top of the ‘rug’. These were small cloth banners with two protruding sections or teeth (Plate 4). When they had been placed in the

---
