



Uliap

Summary :

Group of Scythian-date tumuli near the village of Ulyap, Russia. The earliest tumulus uncovered is dated to the 7th c. BC, but the actual Ulskie monuments were in use from the 6th to the 4th c. BC. Many tumuli of the group functioned as sanctuaries and not burial structures. The excavations yielded rich votive offerings.

Other Names

Ulskie, Ulka

Geographical Location

Russia

Historical Region

Black Sea

Geographical Coordinates

1. Location

Group of Scythian-date [tumuli](#), located near the village of Ulyap, Krasnogvardeiskii district, Adygee Republic (Russia). Its ethnic attribution is debated, but the most probable hypothesis is that it belonged to the local population (the so called Maeotians), whose aristocracy was strongly influenced by the [Scythians](#).

The village of Ulyap was earlier called Ul'skii, thus some of the tumuli excavated there are known also as 'Ulskie' or 'Ulka' tumuli. The complex comprises three groups of tumuli: the first is located in the western part of the village, the second at its eastern outskirts ('Ulskie') at a distance of 1 km to the east of the third group ('Ulyapskie'), as well as burial grounds around them.

2. History of excavations

The tumuli were partly excavated by N. Veselovskii in 1898 and 1908-1910 (one tumulus of the western group and 9 of the 'Ulskie' group: in all cases only the central part of each tumulus was excavated). In 1981-1983 A. Leskov excavated two tumuli (10 and 11) of the 'Ulskie' group, as well as the tumuli and burial ground of the 'Ulyapskie' group. In 2007, V. Erlikh excavated unexcavated parts of tumulus 1 of the 'Ulskie' group.

3. Chronology and finds

The earliest tumulus of the complex is the single excavated tumulus of the western group, contemporary with the late Kelermes tumuli, which are dated to the second half of the 7th c. BC. A looted burial in a rectangular grave ca. 1,5 m was discovered here. The 'Ulskie' tumuli date to the first half of the 6th – mid-5th c. BC. Many tumuli of the group including the biggest one (1/1898) and tumulus 10/1982 functioned as sanctuaries, and not as burial monuments. Others (such as tumulus 1/1909) served burial purposes; the burials were placed in wooden tombs constructed above ground before the placement of the tumulus. All tumuli were robbed in antiquity, but many objects (including ca. 300 golden pieces) have survived. The biggest tumulus (tumulus 1/1898) was 15 m high and contained more than 400 horse skeletons (the largest number in all known Scythian tumuli). Others also contained numerous (several dozens) horse skeletons. The most interesting finds are a golden plate with the image of a goat being attacked by griffins (1/1898), fragments of [Greek painted pottery](#) and a terracotta figurine (1, 2/1898), bronze terminals of different types (1/1908, 2/1909, 10/1982), a gold terminal in the shape of a horse head (2/1909), numerous details of horse harnesses, arrowheads, golden plaques and ornaments found in different tumuli of the group.

4. Overview of the tumuli construction and contents



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The majority of the tumuli of the 'Ulyapskie' group were constructed in the Bronze Age and appeared as natural hills in the Scythian period. On the top of some of them sanctuaries were erected, which were subsequently covered by tumuli; on others and between them a burial ground was established (more than 250 graves were excavated), which were in use from the 6th to the 4th c. BC. The graves contained Greek and local pottery, weapons (swords, spear- and arrowheads), horse harnesses, and ornaments. The richest finds were unearthed in cult complexes, especially those covered by tumuli 1, 4 and 5, which date to the early 4th c. BC, but also contained some earlier objects. Among them, one should mention two 5th c. BC **rhyta** (tumulus 4). The first, adorned with a panther head is probably of Achaemenid origin, while the second is Greek. It is decorated with a protome of Pegasus and a depiction of the Gigantomachy. Several bronze vessels, also of **Greek craftsmanship**, as well as a silver **phiale**, a gold torque, several dozens of gold plates with images and two fragmented Panathenaic **amphorae** of the 5th c. BC were found in the same tumulus. Under tumulus 1, an assemblage of objects and animal bones was discovered on a surface of ca. 110 m². There is also local and Greek pottery (including 6 amphorae from Mende), weapons, horse harnesses, bronze Greek vessels, a silver Iranian goblet, gold plaques and plates, and gold and silver terminals with relief representations of a wild boar and a deer. Tumulus 5 contained similar objects, together with numerous beads, including Egyptian ones.

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Glossary :

	amphora, the from the greek words "αμφί" (on both sides) and "φέρω" (carry): vessel with long ovoid body and a considerably narrower neck made in various sizes from the smaller perfume oil container to the large storage receivers of liquids and solids. It stands on a small foot and it bears two invariable vertical handles on either side. Some of the distinguished types of the amphorae are these whose lower part is tapering to the point (narrow bottomed), the neck type, the Nicosthenian, the Nola, the Panathenaic, the Tyrrhenian, the SOS type.
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 phiale, the

A (metal, rarely clay) shallow vessel with an open rim. Used primarily in libations.

 rhyton, the

libation vessel with an outlet at the bottom of the vessel allowing the slow outflow of the liquid.