

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SCYTHIAN PECTORAL FROM THE THICK GRAVE KURGAN IN TERMS OF THE ORPHIC DIONYSIAN RELIGION

The article analyzes the semantics of the images and compositions of the three tiers of the Scythian pectoral from the Thick Grave kurgan, a site which dates back to the 4th century BC. This is the first time the Scythian pectoral is considered as a cult object in terms of the Dionysian Orphic religion. The semantics of the images in the integrity of the composition of the three tiers confirms the connection of the Scythians with the religious cult on the island Delos reported by Herodotus. It is also in line with the results obtained by earlier studies about the wide spread of the religious and philosophical doctrine of Orphism in the Northern Black Sea region in the 5th–4th centuries BC, about the popularity of the cult of Dionysus Eleutherius in the northern Black Sea city-states and the widespread holding of Dionysian festivals here, in particular the Anthesteria. The pectoral from the Thick Grave kurgan is unanimously considered a monument of Scythian art, therefore it can be seen as a clear confirmation that the Hellenized Scythian nobility understood the essence of the religion of Dionysus and widely accepted it. Within the framework of the cult of ancestors, the cult of heroes and the cult of leaders that existed among the Scythians, the semantics of images and the integral composition of the three tiers is interpreted in terms of a trietheric cult. The pectoral discovered in the dromos of the Thick Grave kurgan was probably an offering to a buried ancestor or leader as a sign of his apotheosis and glorification by his descendants on the second day of Anthesteria (the festival of souls)— on the Day of Choes.

Keywords: *Anthesteria, Dionysos Zagreos, Dionysos Eleuthereos, Dionysos Melanagais, Dionysos Mitreforos, orphism, Scythians of the North Pontic Area, trieteric cult*

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