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Early Iron Age Archaeology in Middle Siberia: The Relations Between Inhabitants of the Taiga and the Steppe

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The article presents new archaeological data for the Scythian period from the southern forest regions of Middle Siberia. The data reconstruct the relations between the taiga hunters and gatherers of the Angara River Basin and the nomadic inhabitants of the Eurasian steppes. In addition to indigenous elements, all the complexes identified in the Lower Porozhinskoy, Kamenskoy, and Shilkinskoy cultures in the Enisey area of the Angara River Basin show influences from the nomads of the Altai Plateau and the Minusinsk Depression. During the seventh – early sixth centuries BC, the inhabitants of the steppe and taiga had peaceful relations; but beginning in the middle of the 6th century, they fought with each other. The author believes that one of the reasons for this change was a struggle for control over the metal deposits (copper, tin, presumably gold) that were located in the taiga.

Keywords: Middle Siberia, South taiga, steppe, burial site, funeral acts, settlement, implements, Early Scythe epoch, cultural relationship, connections.

The epoch of early Iron Age is interesting because of the appearance of various forms of objects and folkways, widespread in the Middle Siberia both in the southern steppe zone and forest-steppe tribes of that time, and also in the area of northern taiga peoples. That time, is known by wide inter-tribe contacts and significant inflow of the population to the vast territory not only of Siberia, but of Eurasia on the whole. The peoples of the southern taiga regions, occupying the boarder territory between the forest and forest-steppe zones, were also involved into these processes, which led to the forming of a number of original cultures. A larger archeological material is needed, in order to acquire a well-founded solution of the problem of the cultures' origin, of

their connection with other cultures of contiguous territories. The sources, available for today, allow just chalking out some ways of the raised problem solution.

The Yenisei Angara region covers the bottom-land territory of Yenisei and Angara in the western part of the Middle Siberia south taiga sub-zone and is nominally limited by the Predivinsk village in the south, by the Yeniseisk town in the north and by the Motyginov village and the Taseevo village in the east, i.e. it is to the north of the Krasnoyarsk forest-steppe. Combination of forest masses with unpopulated territories and overflow land meadows and presence of iron sources at the foothills of the Yenisei mountain range – all these facts alleviated the adaptation of population

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groups to different cultural-economic conditions, while the branchy river system contributed to their contacts with the contiguous and far territories.

Before our investigations, the history of ancient tribes of I century B.C. of the Yenisei Angara region has been poorly studied. Up to 1920-s, through the materials, gathered by N. Spafarij, D. Klemenec, A. Elenov, N. Kube and reconnaissance made by N. Vitkovskij, G. Merhart, A. Tugarinov and others, only few sites, which had not been yet investigated by excavations were discovered. Alongside with that, there was a whole series of separate bronze things, which were studied by G. Merhart. In spite of poorness and typological limitation of materials, nevertheless, he suggested singling out the Krasnoyarsk-Kansk forest-steppe and taiga as an independent bronze cultural centre [30: 26-27]. Comparing them with the data from Minusinsk steppe, he noticed not only these cultures interaction and mutual influence, but also supposed a cultural flow of Iron Age tribes from south to north. He asserted that some part of bronze findings of the forest-steppe and taiga "are decidedly of south origin". At the same time in «Minusinsk culture» he distinguished a row of bronze things, decorated by geometrical ornament (eyeless celts, knives), which main areal was limited by northern territories. It testified of permanent contacts of the Yenisei region steppes population and their northern neighbors. Though, the researcher quite reasonably noted that geometrically ornamented celts from northern regions were not originated from Minusinsk [16: 32-35]. Studying bronze mirrors, «paring knives», daggers, celts and geometrical ornamentation on similar things of «Krasnoyarsk», «Minusinsk» and «Tomsk» cultures, G. Merhart made an important conclusion of their simultaneous existence in the frames of Iron Age epoch (VI century B.C. – VIII century B.C.). And separate elements of these cultures testified, to his mind, of their connections

with eastern cultures of Russia European part, in particularly with Sejma and Anan'insk. Thereat, «Krasnoyarsk culture» appeared an intermediary between the Minusinsk valley and Sejma on the early stage [30: 76]. It is important to notice, that alongside with this, G. Merhart considered that the culture of the Yenisei northern region steppe was formed on the basis of Neolithic stage; while the usage of iron implements did not change the neolith. Ancient bronze «Krasnoyarsk» culture gradually changed over to the Iron, but alongside with that, the part of population, which had moved here from the south, lost its diggings and was deprived of its entire household and its ancient culture [16: 36]. «Krasnoyarsk» culture did not go farther to the north, to the taiga regions, where, to G. Merhart's mind, iron processing was unknown. Through the ceramics, being at the researcher's disposal, he found out that there were only separate elements assimilated there. And again, according to his mind, the north was inhabited by hunters and fishers, while the south – by agricultural people. G. Merhart underlined, «... that Minusinsk bronze culture, as it was, in its original variant, did not interfere the Krasnoyarsk region, as far as in spite of plentiful export to the north, it itself appeared in the region of Krasnoyarsk haches for the first time ... in its final phase and greatly changed» [30: 50].

B. Petri also writes in his works about the direct penetration of steppe people into «underdeveloped» forest regions. Basing on the materials from Irkutsk surroundings, he supposes that, when the bronze epoch culture was being developed in Siberian steppes, at that time there was still Stone Age in Baikal forest region. To his mind, the Iron Age began there only after some tribes had intruded there from the south. He explains the findings of separate bronze things in taiga regions through the supposition, that the ancient people of Baikal territory robbed graves of

their southern neighbors and captured the things, being there [19: 45].

A similar point of view is expressed by G. Sosnovskij, who considers that, there could be no independent Bronze Age in taiga because of physical-geographical conditions. To his mind, while the Bronze Age was flourishing in the steppes, in the Angara region there was a mixed culture of an intermediate type – from the Stone Age to the Bronze one, having been preserved in the form of neolith implement relicts. Here, one can meet only separate copper and bronze things, borrowed from southern territories. Though this culture had an independent character, but at the same time, it was influenced by different Siberian cultures. Minusinsk centre of bronze culture had a significant influence over the taiga and the forest of Angara region, according to G. Sosnovskij, but it was not the only one. The whole collection of things, found in the Angara region, does not resemble Minusinsk exhibits, they originate from another site, which place has not been ascertained yet [22: 125].

Following G. Merhart and B. Petri, V. Kartsov also supports the thesis of cultural underdevelopment of the tribes inhabiting the territory to the north of Minusinsk steppes; he was the first to generalize archeological materials of the Krasnoyarsk region. Basing on the data from the Krasnoyarsk forest-steppe, he supports and develops the thesis of the Tagarians' migration to the north under the pressure of nomads, who left here the monuments of Neo-metallic epoch. According to V. Kartsov, the monuments include kurgans, containing collective burials, and sites, within which cultural layers there have been found vessels of pot- and goblet-forms, and also ivory, bronze and iron of late Tagarian and early Tashtiyk periods. V. Kartsov prolongs the existence of Neo-metallic epoch in the Krasnoyarsk forest-steppe up to the middle of I century B.C. Moreover, he considers that at first the Tagarian culture was

parallel to the local Paleolithic-metallic one, and besides, they had mutual influence over each other [4: 40-45].

The ideas of the northern taiga peoples' underdevelopment in comparison with the tribes of the steppe south, suggested in 1920-30-s, were reconsidered after the Second World War time. In the works of G.A.Maksimov [9, 10], R.V.Nikolaev [17], N.L. Chlenova [25, 26], N.P. Makarov [8] and other researchers the parallel cultural development of taiga and steppe zones in Iron epoch, the fact about the interference of separate things from the steppe south into the forest-steppe and taiga regions were mentioned many times. Basing on occasionally found objects, treasure-troves and single burials, A.P.Okladnikov [18] and N.L.Chlenova [28] supposed, that not only objects penetrated from Eurasia steppes into the taiga, but also some groups of steppe tribes' representatives, including skilled craftsman, able to make such objects. The latter could come for gold or to exchange their artistic bronze for gold [27: 60, 29].

New data allow approaching the raised problem solution at a new level. These materials have been acquired by the author from the Yenisei Angara region, from stationary-studied stratified multi-layer and one-layer monuments with closed objects. The research of monuments (even of one of them) within the limits of one archeological micro-district allows ascertaining their chronological succession. Adding the materials from adjacent territories makes it possible to define their cultural affiliation, to imagine the character and the reasons of ancient tribes' migration right here, to find out their cultural ties and interactions with their neighbors. These complexes formation was going under different cultural-chronological circumstances.

In the epoch of cultures' formation in the early Tagarian period in the South Siberian steppes, the south taiga territory was inhabited

by the tribes of Nizhneporozhinsk culture, singled out on the basis of the burial sites' data of Nizhneporozhinsk, Ust'-SHilka-2 (tombs №№ 3, 6), village SHilka-13 and multi-layer settlements Nizhneporozhinskoe -1 (layer 2), Ust'-SHilka-1 (layer 2), SHilka-9 (layer 4), Bobrovka (layer 4b) and others. This culture's burial sites of VII-VI centuries B.C. are characterized by the rite of corpse-backwards-laying, which was performed in oval ground pits, later with a stone setting on the covering. Skeletons were directed by their heads towards south-west. All the settlements were of open type, situated both in the Yenisei flood bed, and on the terraces of the native bank. Carcasses of the wickiup-type dwellings with two supporting pillars were built over the rectangular, shallow (up to 30 sm.) ditch. Nizhneporozhinsk ceramic complex is characterized by the combination of «waffle» ceramics, typical for Bronze Age, and smooth-walled ceramics (approx. 1: 3). Ornamentation retains autochthonous traditions of late Bronze Age, being expressed in a smooth stripe around the objects' necks, rows of finger-holes, and also roll mouldings, both smooth, and cut by different holes and finger tucks. Almost all bronze implements (eyeless celts with a wide coupling along the bushing edge, straight-blade one-hollow and eyelet knives with engravings of helici form lines and a hoof-form sign, bodkins with a mushroom head and a marked neck and so on) have analogies by their form in the early Tagarian Minusinsk bronze. Besides, the existing bronze fineries (four-petal plates made of five semi-spheres, butterfly-form plates with a lengthway bushing, bell-form pendants and others) are analogically similar to those from the Altai plain, in particular, to the materials of old Aleisk culture. We can see the synthesis of the Altai (old Aleisk) and the Minusinsk (Tagarian) traditions in the burial site rite. We can suppose that the following things are of Altai origin: the ground pit's arrangement, the south-west orientation, the

skeleton stretched on its back, the presence of a narrow «early Scythian» belt in women's tombs, «periaptic» set of bronze pendants (bell-formed and foraminous, in the form of semiabstract gryphon, and made of deer's teeth). The keeping of a knife, a bodkin and a needle in a special sack near the skull was taken over from Tagarians. It is important to note, that all these «borrowed» elements were found in one and the same tomb together with the «autochthonous» features, expressed in the carrying of necklaces made of paste, serpentinite and agalmatolite beads – pronizkas.

Along with Nizhneporozhinsk, there are also ceramic complexes of Kamensk type in the Yenisei Angara region [13], which were found and studied in the ancient villages Makovskoe (excavations by R. Nikolaev), Strelkovskoe-1 and Strelkovskoe-2 (excavations S. Fokin), settlements JAzaevka (layer 3), Zimovejnoe (layer 1) and others. Materials of this group of monuments are close to Malokorenninsk culture, singled out by L. Hlobystin for the northern taiga and the Yenisei valley forest-tundra regions [24] and they can demonstrate its earlier south variant. The ceramics is characterized by round-bottom pots, with rims decorated by a broad molding ribbon, by pricked and prominent smooth ornament stamps with a sharpened end. Dwelling carcass roofing had no supporting pillars and was built over rectangular ditch, deepened up to 20-30 sm. The Kamensk ceramic complex is genetically connected to the local traditions, appeared on the banks of the Yenisei River in early Bronze period. The presence of the broad molding ribbon along the rim makes it close to the ceramics of the Cjepan'sk type [20, 21, 6] or the Karabul'sk ceramics [1: 36], singled out by the monuments of the South Angara region. Rarely met bronze objects are also of local taiga origin (celts of Krasnoyarsk-Angarsk type, knives with geometrical haft ornament and so on). Kamensk

group of monuments should be connected with the burials of VI-V centuries B.C. Ust'-SHilka burial site (№№ 8, 10), performed under the rite of corpse-dismemberment or secondary burying, arranged in rectangular ground pits. During the rite, commemoration fire was used. Remnant skulls and singular bones were attended by beads – pronizkas, by a knife or an arrowhead with an anthropomorphic figure, thereat, all the bronze objects had been done specially for the burying and purposefully damaged (broken or bent). In one of the tombs a fox's lower chap (apparently, a skin was laid) was found. The commemoration rite and all the attending things are easily referred to the East Siberian taiga monuments and indicate to their origin native roots, to their development almost without any external influence.

In the given region monuments of VI century B.C., belonging to quite other culture were found, more over, their sudden discovery can be explained only by a new population coming. These materials are a part of the Shilka culture [12] and are represented on the banks of the Yenisei River by the ancient towns SHilka-2, Ust'-SHilka-2, by the ancient villages Kamenka, CHermjanka (excavations by N. Makarov and M. Batashev), and also by the ancient villages (sites) Ostrovki-1 (layer 1), Strelkovskoe-1 (layer 1), SHilka—9 (layer 3), SHilka-7 (layer 1) and others. The Shilkinians' dwellings were deep single-chambered of rectangular form 20-40 sq.m, with a hip roof, apparently, trimmed-pyramidal, and with a ground covering. Poling defensive system of ancient towns consisted of a wooden fence and was attended by a fore-gate object, brought out of the limits of the fortified site. All the settlements with an insignificant cultural value were attended by smooth-walled pots, decorated by two-three rows of cut roll mouldings and by a belt of holes, vessels-smoky-fires, small and full-size cups, thick-walled vessels with horn-shaped handles and jars. This ceramic complex could not

be made locally; it appeared in a mature, formed variant and was added by the local elements ready made. It also reflected the traditions of both northern and eastern taiga neighbors, and also of southern forest-steppe tribes. The implements are represented by bone and bronze things, and also by iron of small size [14]. The presence of bronze splashings and ceramic ladles speaks for local bronze-making production. Burying sites (tombs №№ 4 и 5 of Ust'-SHilka burying site) were arranged in ground pits under the rite of corpse-backwards-laying, followed by cremation in the tomb. The attending implements, which most part being analogical to those ones of the Altai plain monuments, are: an iron eyelet caulker with an inward flow, big and small semi-spherical plates for the belt cross, «chain» pendants, belt accessories with butterfly-form plates, and plates made of three semi-spheres with a wild boar depiction in a static pose. Gold earring with a hollow spherical pendant, covered by shooting, and a blue glass bead have more ancient parallels with the monuments of Kazakhstan and Volga-Don interfluvial area. A vessel, though molded of bronze, but with thin-walls had been, possibly, brought from Ordos or China. Besides, there were some more imported objects, such as a quiver set (stone arrowheads with horn cartridge clips) of taiga origin.

Thus, the singled out complexes existed at the same time and parallelly, and it can be proved by the fact, that different cultures' burials are arranged in one and the same burying site, in the Shilka River estuary, more over, the tombs are organized in a row, but in groups. We should note that there is no any continuity between the monuments of the mentioned cultures, except the steppe form bronze implements distribution. It is especially clearly seen through ceramics.

With the help of the presented materials, we shall try to reconstruct the relations between the south steppe tribes and the tribes of northern taiga

during the early Scythian period. In the initial period (VII- the beginning of VI centuries B.C.) south taiga zone of the Yenisei valley was occupied by the population of forest origin and forest type of economics. They also inhabited northern regions of the Krasnoyarsk forest-steppe. There is a strong probability, that it was due to natural and climatic changes, specifically due to climatic cooling and humidification, which caused, in their turn, the forest boarder shift towards the south, especially along the Yenisei River estuary. The available data allow noticing a peaceful character of the relations between the south taiga population and their southern and south-western neighbors. We can observe a mild penetration of steppe culture elements into the taiga territory, and it is also proved by some details of the burial rite, finery and form copying of bronze implements. It could be seen more distinctly through ceramics. In the Nizhneporozhinsk complexes there are jar-formed vessels with a drop-shaped rim profile, vessels with horn-shaped handles, mugs, being similar by their form to early-Tagarian ones. Absence of polishing traces on the utensils' walls and presence of various ornaments on the dish indicate to their local production, which was performed according to the autochthonous traditions, but imitating or, most probably, under the influence of their south neighbors. Apparently, there was performed a direct mutual exchange of material culture objects. Nizhneporozhinsk people formed their own peculiar culture on the local basis, but under a strong influence of the steppe men as of South Siberian, so of the Altai plain. Most likely, they represent as an intermediary between the cultures of steppes, forest-steppes and Siberian taiga people, especially what concerns knowledge distribution and world outlook of wanderers. Reverse influence of the forest people over the steppe men is expressed in distribution of some ornamentation elements of ceramics and bronze

implements, and that has been already mentioned in literature [25, 15].

In the middle of VI century B.C. the relations between the steppe men and northern forest tribes of the Middle Yenisei valley became complicated. Antagonistic character of their relations can be proved by the appearance in south taiga of ancient armament towns and burying sites, containing arsenal. From that time the steppe tribes began to penetrate into south taiga regions in a strong migration wave. So, the native Nizhneporozhinsk people and other forest tribes were partially wiped out, partially forced out, partially assimilated and conquered by the outlanders. Their invasion brought to Shilka culture's combining - its elements being combined with the new-coming ones in the researched materials. It is important to note, that the dominating component in cultures' combining was the tribes of the Altai plain, but not of Tagarians, though they were geographically closer to Shilka. Mapping of the existing monuments has showed that Tagarian ceramics was distributed to the North along the Yenisei River valley only up to the Kazachinsk rift [11], i.e. only up to the most southern ancient town of the Shilka people.

Now, a new question arises: why alien Shilka people did not let the Tagarians penetrate into the North? The results of spectral analysis of the Yenisei Angara region bronzes help to find out the answer [23]. Most of south taiga bronzes are tinny, i.e. they are not of Minusinsk (Tagarian) origin, except some singular imported objects. Presence of bronze-making production traces speaks for local bronze eliquation, and there was a rich source of tin and copper somewhere relatively nearby. It was at the Yenisei mountain range. Local tin mining was of various types and attended by pegmatites and quartz veins. All of them belong to a gold-bearing belt, spread in meridional and north-west directions from the right bank of the Angara River to the south and

up to the Chapa River basin (a tributary of Stony Tunguska) to the North-West. placer deposits of cassiterite were found on the watershed of Bol'shaja Murozhnaja and Podgolechnaja Rivers, and also in the southern part of the mountain range, on the platforms of Handala River headwaters and right tributaries of Murma River [7]. Within the boundaries of the Yenisei mountain range there are also copper-bearing ores, they have been found on SHumahinsk massive, in some clays along the Enashimo River, on Borisihinsk massive, and also at the Yenisei River part of the mountain range, in the lower course of the Angara River and Bol'shoj Pit [5]. Are these the very deposits that were the main target of steppe men's penetration into taiga regions, very important raw materials, which were defended by Shilka people from Tagarians? And was the deposits' possession the matter for showdowns in the period of mass distribution of bronze implements and arms? Most probably, the answer is positive. Exactly the presence of ore in the Yenisei mountain range attracted the attention of the steppe wanderers of the Sayan-Altai region, as far as at that time (in VII-VI century B.C.) the Yenisei Mountains were yet relatively unoccupied (under-populated) in comparison with the Sayans or Altai mountains. Of course, alluvial gold could be discovered parallelly, at the same time, and that could be of significant meaning at the beginning of the Scythian epoch [29].

Though, the Shilka people did not manage to stay there for a long time and to control the territory of the Yenisei Mountains (or, may be, there was no longer any necessity, as far as they got iron). They either blended into taiga various-ethnic environment, or stepped back to their habitual forest-steppe open areas, where they preserved their culture up to the boundary of Ages.

In the second part of I century B.C. a new cultural-ethnic environment was formed in the south edge of the Yenisei Valley taiga zone, the culture preserving the continuity of the previous time. Materially, on the whole the culture was principally different, but it preserved the traditions of the Scythe-Tagarian steppe world. At that time, the contacts with the steppe cultures were, possibly, of a certain economical value, in the form of taiga products exchange, mainly, furs, for the things, given by the steppe tribes. The coexistence of the peaceful taiga people and late Tagarian population of the Krasnoyarsk forest-steppe region is proved by the presence of four skulls with the features of mongoloid race between the Caucasian skeletons in the kurgans of Kovrigino, Korkino -1 and -2 [2: 103]. Fragments' presence of vessels-smoky-fires with rectangular ears, potsherds, decorated by parget and wavy flagellum roll mouldings, in the kurgan at the Military town [3] also indicates at the usage of forest elements in Tagarian environment.

Thus, systematic research of the Middle Yenisei Valley, bordering forest-steppes and south taiga, has given an opportunity to create a qualitatively new definition model of southern borders of forest people displacement and their interrelations with southern neighbors. We consider that, in their basis there were complex and contradictory ethnic and cultural processes, caused by multiple migrations of various-ethnic population groups of different economical-cultural types, the migrations not least of all being caused by the struggle for iron deposits, by impact of natural, climatic and other factors.

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