THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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JURCHEN ARTIFACTS FROM THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS*

Introduction

Thirteenth–fourteenth-century medieval archaeological materials from nomadic populations of the Northern Caucasus include several assemblages associated with the Early Mongolian elite. All the assemblages in question originate from demolished burials. The finds include artifacts from Gashun Usta, Stavropol Territory (held at the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg) (Kramarovsky, 1995, 2001), the surroundings of Semenovod village (held at the Stavropol Museum of Regional Studies), and Novoberezanskaya stanitsa (held at the Krasnodar Archaeological Museum) (Narozhny, Okhonko, 1999), as well as from the northwestern part of the Caspian area (Narozhny, 2005a). Elements of belts found at these sites can be attributed to Genghis Khan’s legacy as being dispersed by his grandsons over the vast territory of Eurasia (Kramarovsky, 1995). A number of 13th–14th cent. burials at the Novopavlovsk cemetery (Stavropol Territory) containing no less impressive “elite” objects typical of the Genghisids and Jochids provide evidence of a process of “ethnic” islamization, relevant in tracing ethno-cultural changes in the Golden Horde, specifically in its Northern Caucasian provinces. By the first third of the 14th cent., these changes had evidently affected the Mongolian burial rite: the ethnically diagnostic custom of placing the head of the deceased facing the north was changed to the head being placed facing the west (Narozhny, 2003b, 2005b; Narozhny, Okhonko, 2007). In the same area similar changes can be witnessed in the Cuman burial rite (Narozhny, 2003b, 2005b).

One of the groups gaining influence in 14th-century Northern Caucasus alongside the Cumans, the “Mongols,” and their descendants, were the Karakalpak (Chernye Klobuki) who migrated there in the 1260s apparently with Nogai’s troops (Narozhny, 2000b, 2003a, b; 2004) as he moved from his Prut-Dniester demesne (Dobrolyubsky, 1990). The immigrants were far from being exclusively armed men (Anfimov, Zelensky, 2002). The presence of adornments in the Northern Caucasian burial assemblages belonging to Karakalpak women and of their later Golden Horde derivates indicates that the Karakalpak migration from areas south of Russia and from the Prut-Dnestr province involved the whole population, which invaded the new territory in a traditional medieval Turkic and Mongolian manner involving traveling with numerous ails, in khogons, and hordes (Zhukovskaya, 1988).

The Cuman and Karakalpak migrations marked the second wave of Turkization among sections of the Northern and Northwestern Caucasian peoples. This process is reflected in Karakalpak ornaments and their later local replicas found in assemblages from the Tsemdolina burial ground near Novorossiysk (Armachuk, Malyshew, 1997; Narozhny, 2003a; Armarchuk, 2006), as well as from other burials in the Northern Caucasus dating to the period of the Golden Horde (Narozhny, 2000b).

Artifacts from the Askiz archaeological culture have also been identified in the Northern Caucasus (Rudnitsky, 1999; Narozhny, 2000a). Along with other Southern Siberian artifacts from the upper Don (Tropin, 1999),

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the Middle and Lower Volga (Kolkina, 2001; Rudenko, 2001), they suggest that the medieval ancestors of the modern Khakassians may have participated in the Genghisid campaign of the late 1230s. Written sources and archaeological finds indicate that the Northern Caucasian population of the Golden Horde included entire groups of migrants from Hulaguid Iran (Narozhny, 2006). However, modern groups of that territory are only partly suggestive of its ethno-cultural variety during the Golden Horde period. Thus, the evidence available points to the presence of migrants from the Far East, specifically the Jurchens among the Northern Caucasian populations of that period.

**Far Eastern artifacts in the Northern Caucasus**

In recent years, a number of unusual artifacts finding no parallels in Eastern Europe have been found in the Northern Caucasus. Only in 2000 were their Far Eastern analogs discovered.

**Fish pendants.** Five finds of this sort are known. The first fragmented bronze cast, fish-shaped plate was published in 1991 (Eremin, Myalkovsky, Narozhny, 1991). It was found by students of the Grozny Oil Institute who were carrying out field studies as part of a geological group in the northwestern Caspian steppe zone (Fig. 1, 1). The fragment of the fish figurine (Fig. 2, 1) was found among sand drifts in the outskirts of the modern village of Bazhigan. This incidental find is attributable to the period of the Golden Horde. The second and third pendants recovered in the area of the North-Caucasian railway crossing No. 13 (see Fig. 1, 2) were heavily fragmented. The interior surface of both fish figurines is ornamented with a netlike décor in the form of crossing oblique lines (engraving). The tail is engraved with longitudinal slanting lines. Both figurines are bronze cast. For technical reasons, it has not been possible to reproduce the photographs of these artifacts.

In 2004, two more similar bronze items (see Fig. 2, 2, 3) were published (Narozhny, 2004). These were found in the early 1990s by a group of geological workers in the area of crossing No. 13 (see Fig. 1, 2) 500 meters from those mentioned above. These pieces are highly reminiscent of fish-shaped pendants widely spread among the Jurchens in the Far East (Shavkunov, 1973, 1990).

Unfortunately, no additional information on the occurrence of the five fish figurines mentioned is available. It is known only that the Bazhigan figurines were located 150 – 300 m from each other lying among dispersed animal bones which included vertebra and rib fragments. A fragmented knife and an arrowhead were revealed near one figurine fragment (see Fig. 2, 1). However no information about these artifacts is available. A fragmented pendant from crossing No. 13 (see

![Map of the Northern Caucasus showing where Jurchen-type artifacts were found.](image-url)