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Edited by Bryan K. Hanks and Katheryn M. Linduff

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Reconsidering Steppe Social Complexity within World Prehistory

BRYAN K. HANKS AND KATHERYN M. LINDUFF

THIS VOLUME brings together a collection of essays that focuses specifically on themes connected with the analysis of social complexity in the third to first millennium BCE in the Eurasian steppe. This dialogue stems from a symposium held at the University of Pittsburgh in February 2006 that sought to evaluate current trends and to determine new directions for the study of Eurasian steppe archaeology. What became apparent during this meeting was that the steppe region has moved firmly into the spotlight of world prehistory and contemporary archaeological theory. No longer viewed as closed geopolitical spheres, the territories of the former Soviet Union and neighboring regions, and the traditions of research that have addressed these areas, have become promising new arenas of international collaboration. Important questions surrounding the emergence and diffusion of agricultural and pastoral adaptations, early metallurgical technologies and their use, and the role of mobile pastoralist societies in China, Central Asia, and Europe have become significant topics within scholarly discourse in recent years. Such issues are clearly reflected in the publication of three new, seminal books in 2007 on the Bronze and Iron Ages of the steppe region (Anthony 2007; Kohl 2007; Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007).

The chapters offered within this volume not only examine these important issues in steppe archaeology but also seek to contribute more specifically to a broader comparative theoretical analysis of early social complexity in world prehistory. Although it is undeniable that regional culture histories provide the basic foundation for descriptive and analytical archaeological patterns, such regional treatments also should be

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viewed from a broader theoretical perspective in order to build and refine models of understanding for the various trajectories of human development that have existed. As the chapters in this volume clearly indicate, steppe archaeology can contribute significantly to this agenda.

As Colin Renfrew discusses in the Foreword, several recent conferences and publications have added substantially to the growing corpus of literature on steppe archaeology. For example, international conferences held at the University of Cambridge (Boyle et al. 2002; Levine et al. 1999), University of Chicago (Peterson et al. 2006; Popova et al. 2008), and the Arkaim Heritage Center in the Russian Federation (Jones-Bley and Zdanovich 2002) represent important benchmarks in the rapidly developing field of Eurasian steppe archaeology.

Broader comparative treatments on early social complexity in other parts of the world have rarely turned to the Eurasian steppe region as a source for examining the emergence of hierarchy and heterarchy; scalar problems connected with socio-economic integration and organization; patterns of political centralization; and the role that subsistence and productive economies have in stimulating the emergence, development, and decline of socio-economic change. In contrast to this, two recent monographs published in English in the Russian Federation have sought to develop more encompassing comparative analyses of early states and the materialization of power within early civilizations (Grinin et al. 2004; Grinin et al. 2008). For example, *Hierarchy and Power in the History of Civilizations: Ancient and Medieval Cultures* (Grinin et al. 2008) brought together scholars addressing these themes for ancient states of the Old World, medieval Eurasian states, and the Maya region for New World states. Such dialogues being produced in English by Russian publishers are a welcome accomplishment in international scholarship and are clearly reinforcing the broader relevance of Eurasian steppe archaeology.

The rationale for our volume adds to this new paradigm by focusing more specifically on prehistoric developments connected with complex, non-state societies. These middle-range societies have been routinely categorized as tribes and chiefdoms, with various levels of complexity. Although ample debate has surrounded the use of neo-evolutionary terminology for the study of early societies, such terminology continues to be used when interpreting prehistoric steppe developments. Surprisingly, the earlier studies that produced such terminology rarely looked at mobile pastoralist or agro-pastoralist societies and instead routinely focused on sedentary, agricultural developments. We intend here to re-evaluate these trends in scholarship in order to determine whether

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such models have a place within studies of early social complexity in the steppe and to see if such applications contribute to, or perhaps challenge, the application of such modeling to the study of early social trajectories in world prehistory. Contributing authors to this volume, therefore, provide important discussions of historically contingent developments in the steppe and neighboring territories that are linked not only to unique social, economic, and environmental adaptations but also to broader theoretical themes that examine the nature of such developments. By addressing these issues from this perspective, a scholarly agenda is put forward that places steppe archaeology at the core of future studies that evaluate and interpret trajectories of change in the human past.

Volume Organization

KEY THEMES that long have contributed to steppe scholarship, stretching from the Soviet period up to the years since its collapse, include the modeling of social development and change, the role of metals in early societies, physical and cultural boundaries that characterize social landscapes, and the materialization of social power through monument construction and use. These themes are also broadly interwoven within world prehistory, and each can be seen as an important consideration within regional archaeologies. Therefore, themes that have both regional and broader comparative significance were selected as foci for the contributing authors of this volume to address in their independent chapters. As such, the volume consists of 15 full-length chapters, organized into four thematic parts with introductory essays: framing complexity; mining, metallurgy, and trade; frontiers and border dynamics; and social power, monumentality, and mobility. While the individual chapters are discussed in more detail within the introductory essays, we outline here the rationale for these specific themes.

FRAMING COMPLEXITY

In the past, mobile pastoral communities on the steppe were thought to follow a generally homogeneous pattern of social organization. Rather than making this assumption, the authors in this first part each bring a fresh approach, combined with newly gathered evidence from their own recent fieldwork, to bear on this issue. The contributors examine various definitions and theoretical approaches to the concept of *complexity* and its relationship to observable changes in economy, technology, and social organization within their research areas.

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Distinct patterns of change in the archaeological record connected with the innovation and diffusion of new technologies, the emergence of warfare and military activities, and settlement patterning and mortuary practices are discussed. In recent years, archaeological evidence has been used to examine such distinct transitions through regional survey and geographic information systems (GIS) technologies, intensive settlement and cemetery excavations, and paleoenvironmental reconstruction. Much of this research has centered on identifying changes connected with the early, middle, and late phases of the Bronze Age, dating approximately from the third to the second millennium BCE. The chapters within this part focus on the conceptual problems associated with these developments and discuss broader theoretical strategies for evaluating the external and internal stimuli that contributed to these significant changes in the archaeological record.

MINING, METALLURGY, AND TRADE

Scholars have known for some time that the steppe region provided abundant resources to metal producers. However, the role these populations played in the emergence and maintenance of new industries and the “values” that became associated with metals and metal objects deserve much more attention. The set of chapters in this second part focuses on the importance of metal technology and its connection with the rise of new political and economic developments in the steppe zone and neighboring territories.

The mining, production, and trade of base metals for the production of bronze and other alloys as well as final products have been evaluated through various analytical models, including core-periphery relationships, multiple-core developments, and the emergence of metallurgical provinces of interaction and exchange. Although such models have illustrated the widespread and complex nature of early metallurgy in the steppe, the chapters within this part stress the importance of testing current understandings of the nature and extent of technological diffusion, the emergence of new social organization connected with mining and production communities, and inter-regional and intra-regional strategies connected with metals trade and exchange. Important issues addressed include the structure and organization of mining communities, elite strategies for political power foundations and their connection with trade and exchange patterns, the scale of interaction and diffusion of technology between steppe and non-steppe-based polities, and the

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cycling dynamics of regional prominence associated with the rise and collapse of metal production centers in the Eurasian steppe region.

FRONTIERS AND BORDER DYNAMICS

The only written records on steppe societies to be handed down are those produced by neighboring groups to the east, west, and south of the steppe region. As a result, steppe societies have been viewed as trade partners as well as irritants to the sedentary way of life. Much has been written since these ancient accounts about the interaction between the “steppe and sown” appeared, but until recently there has been little archaeological evidence to test the claims of the ancient authors.

The group of chapters in the third part examines the dynamics and results of that interaction. While some scholars have argued for the early emergence of state-level steppe societies, others have framed these developments as “supra-tribal” or “complex chiefdoms” (Kradin 2002, 2004). In recent years, the scholarship surrounding this issue has generated several key models for examining the emergence of new steppe socio-political orders and the fluidity connected with changing patterns of cultural identity and ethnicity. Such works have re-evaluated traditional static concepts of core-periphery relationships to illuminate the dynamics of “border” and “frontier” interaction, which clearly existed. Chapters in this part, therefore, investigate archaeological evidence in order to more effectively model the emergence of new patterns of steppe social complexity and identity.

SOCIAL POWER, MONUMENTALITY, AND MOBILITY

The fourth part of the volume focuses on the modeling of early complex societies in the eastern steppe zone and includes important new research and data from Mongolia, a region that has witnessed a surge of international collaborative projects in recent years. Chapters in this part address various strategies of power and centralization used by steppe polities, novel methods for investigating regional diachronic shifts in settlement organization and complexity, and the interpretation of new patterns of monument construction and funerary ritual practices. Many of the key political, social, and economic developments that occurred among steppe societies were situated at the non-state level of organization. Such developments have commonly been framed in terms of tribal and chiefdom levels of societal complexity, as discussed in the third part.

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While the investigation of such middle-range societies has been effectively investigated through the comparative analysis of sedentary agricultural-based societies around the world, much less focus has been placed on evaluating the political and economic strategies and trajectories represented by pastoralist- or agro-pastoralist-based societies. With these problems in mind, this final part of the volume critically examines monolithic models and linear trajectories that have been used conventionally to interpret the organization of steppe pastoralist and agro-pastoralist societies and offers new perspectives on evaluating their pathways toward social change.

Concluding Remarks

THIS VOLUME has brought together many renowned scholars in the field of Eurasian steppe archaeology, and their contributions provide an important perspective on the vibrancy and optimism that exists within this field today and some of the challenges that lay before it. They also provide an important view on the state of the field and suggest not only where future work must be done but also what methods and theories may be particularly productive within such investigations.

The application of new scientific methods such as ancient DNA studies, bone isotope analyses, and the application of new absolute-dating chronologies are having a tremendous impact on current research programs in the region. In addition, greater cooperation among scholars from different disciplines (history, archaeology, etc.) may provide fuller, less-biased views of the human past. Coupled with this, a new generation of scholars is becoming active in larger collaborative archaeological programs. As a result of these important developments, steppe archaeology has made significant strides in the past two decades and shows every indication of being one of the most promising new territories for international research.

Nevertheless, as Colin Renfrew's discussion in the Foreword of this volume sets out, several distinct problems have been framed within the field of Eurasian steppe studies. These include the challenges surrounding the linguistic prehistory of the region, the emergence and spread of spoke-wheeled chariot technology, and the role of the horse in new patterns of social mobility and warfare. This volume stresses, rather, other questions that remain to be more fully understood and that can be productively coupled with the broader conceptual problems that continue

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to challenge the study of world prehistory. These include more-nuanced understandings of the relationship between technology and social practice, more effective modeling of processes of human migration versus diffusion in technologies and ideas, and various pathways to social and economic complexity that appear to be unique within pastoralist and agro-pastoralist orientations. We hope that this volume has gone some way in identifying these problems and in suggesting new approaches to solving them.

In closing, we would like to thank all the contributors for their lively discussions during the Pittsburgh symposium and for their probing analyses in the papers presented here. We would also like to thank Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for her sincere support in the publication of this monograph and two anonymous reviewers for very thoughtful suggestions on how it could be improved. As editors of this volume, we are honored to have had the opportunity to contribute to the exciting new agenda that is emerging in the scholarship of the Eurasian steppe region and we look forward to this volume's contribution to broader comparative studies of social complexity in world prehistory.

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CHAPTER 2

Introduction

LUDMILA KORYAKOVA

IN THE past few years, several international conferences in the United States (e.g., Chicago 2004; Pittsburgh 2006) have focused on the problems of social complexity in the vast region of Eurasia. I remember that during my first trip to the United States in 1994, I met David Anthony, Karen Robinson, Adam Smith, Phil Kohl, and Karlene Jones-Bley. At that time, these individuals were representative of a very small group of American archaeologists whose academic interests were directed to a better understanding of Eurasian steppe prehistory. In retrospect, it has taken some time to overcome the consequences of the long academic separation that existed between Anglo-American and Russian archaeology during the Soviet period. In recent years, the beginning of a much better understanding between scholars of these regions and broader perceptions of Eurasian archaeological materials are being realized.

Both past and recent research has shown that Eurasian prehistory represents a number of socio-cultural phenomena not only of regional but also of wider historical significance. The assessment of these phenomena, particularly the character and level of social complexity of Eurasian cultures in light of modern theoretical models, forms a rather new agenda in Eurasian studies. This volume, and the set of essays that forms part I, contribute importantly to this new orientation.

All of the chapters in the first part focus on the Bronze Age. Geographically, three of the four papers fully or partly concern the Ural mountain region (Epimakhov, Anthony, Frachetti), one paper the Caucasus (Kohl), and another also includes the Semirech'ye area of southeastern Kazakhstan (Frachetti). These regions all played an active