THE URALS AND WESTERN SIBERIA IN THE BRONZE AND IRON AGES

This book is the first synthesis of the archaeology of the Urals and Western Siberia. It presents a comprehensive overview of the late prehistoric cultures of these regions, which are of key importance for the understanding of long-term changes in Eurasia. At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the Urals and Western Siberia are characterized by great environmental and cultural diversity, which is reflected in the variety and richness of their archaeological sites. Based on the latest achievements of Russian archaeologists, this study demonstrates the temporal and geographical range of its subjects, starting with a survey of the chronological sequence from the late fourth millennium BC to the early first millennium CE. Recent discoveries made in different regions of the area contribute to an understanding of several important issues, such as development of Eurasian metallurgy, technological and ritual innovations, the emergence and development of pastoral nomadism and its role in Eurasian interactions, and major sociocultural fluctuations of the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Ludmila Koryakova is professor at the Ural State University and Institute of History and Archaeology, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She has received fellowships from the European Community (INTAS Foundation), the Russian Academy of Science, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and she is the author of more than eighty publications in Russian, European, and American books and journals.

Andrej Vladimirovich Epimakhov is a Ph.D. Research Fellow at the Institute of History and Archaeology, Russian Academy of Sciences as well as Assistant Professor at Southern Ural State University.

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LUDMILA KORYAKOVA

Institute of History and Archaeology
of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences
& Ural State University

ANDREJ VLADIMIROVICH EPIMAKHOV

Institute of History and Archaeology
of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences
& Southern Ural State University

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FOREWORD

Philip L. Kohl

Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, United States

I remember taking an overnight flight from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) to Kyrgyzia (Kyrgyzstan) via Sverdlovsk (Ekaterinburg) in late winter 1986. Just before landing in Sverdlovsk, the stewardess asked me to remove the earphones of a primitive portable cassette player that I had just turned on. Her manner was brusque and peremptory. She demanded to know what I was doing, what I was listening to, and claimed that many passengers believed that I – an obvious, solitary, and clearly suspicious American – must be receiving hidden instructions from someone in the West, perhaps Washington, on this then-novel listening device. I handed her the cassette player and had her listen to the Brahms violin concerto I had been enjoying. . . . Such was Cold War paranoia even as late as the early Gorbachev years in the closed military-industrial center of Sverdlovsk nestled on the Siberian side of the Ural mountains, the same city over which Gary Powers's U2 spy plane had been blown out of the sky in 1960.

In her preface, Ludmila Koryakova refers to the fact that the Urals and western Siberian areas covered in this volume remained a highly restricted military zone until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Until that time, contacts with the West were practically nonexistent. This isolation affected all fields of knowledge, including archaeology. There was some Western awareness – albeit limited – of Soviet archaeological accomplishments in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and European Russia, but the vast region stretching east of the Urals into western Siberia and northern Kazakhstan was then and has – until the publication of this important study – essentially remained a very large "white spot" on the archaeological map of Western scholars. This volume richly corrects this deficiency. It documents the discoveries of scores of Soviet/Russian archaeologists, ordering and analyzing the Bronze and Iron Age materials from a vast central part of Eurasia. In doing so, it shows us the strengths and distinctiveness of the Russian archaeological tradition.

Whereas Cold War realities clearly inhibited scholarly interaction on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the extent of the information gap varied widely and tended to be sharply asymmetrical: in general, Soviet/Russian archaeologists

were far more familiar with the Western archaeological literature, including theoretical developments in Anglo-American archaeology, than Americans or Europeans knew about the accomplishments of their Soviet/Russian counterparts. The authors of this book are well read in Western archaeological theory, but they consciously and correctly, in my opinion, eschew any extended critical discussion of their guiding concepts and proceed with their main task: writing a coherent cultural prehistory of the Urals and Western Siberia during the Bronze and Iron Ages or roughly from the third through first millennia BC. To accomplish their principal goal, they record a sequence of "heuristically useful" archaeological cultures and more generically defined "intercultural communities" (*kulturnaya obshchnost'*), exhibiting greater spatial and temporal stability and "internal horizontal connections" among culturally related peoples. They also focus on shared metallurgical developments and redefine E. N. Chernykh's inductively derived concept of metallurgical provinces (here termed "techno-cultural networks"). They characterize their general approach as "materialistic . . . presuming causal priority of the material base (in a broad sense) as a primary means of the operation of a society."

With this conceptual and archaeologically appropriate philosophical base, they summarize the evidence. Readers may be overwhelmed by the pageant of archaeological cultures and materials presented, an almost inevitable reaction given the spatial and temporal parameters of their study. This problem clearly reflects the extent of archaeological work undertaken throughout this area and the fact that more investigations almost always document greater cultural diversity, resulting in the definition of even more archaeological cultures. Moreover, the roster of established archaeological cultures also reflects past reality in that it is associated with the mobile types of societies that emerged on the steppes. That is, the bewildering proliferation of archaeological cultures is intrinsic to the nature of steppe archaeology; both "splitters" and "lumpers" of this record can justify their procedures. To some extent, the indistinct differences among many defined archaeological cultures necessarily reflect the dominant herding way of life among steppe peoples, a mobility that fostered intercultural contact and assimilation. There is no correction for this constant merging or mixture of material remains, although it is helpful to be aware of it.

Western readers may be struck by the occasional ethnic, linguistic, and even "racial" attributions of specific archaeological cultures. Koryakova and Epimakhov recognize the problems of such identifications, "their contingent character," and, relatively speaking, attempt them infrequently. They employ them only in "rather clear and well-studied situations," where they can compare such attributions with "well-defined linguistic areas as specialists determine them." Some well-regarded identifications are explicitly accepted even though the evidence they themselves present is sufficiently comprehensive to query them. Thus, E. E. Kuzmina's well-known linguistic attribution of the different variants of the Andronovo cultural tradition, representing essentially

"the entire population of the Urals and Kazakhstan of the Late Bronze Age to the eastern Iranians," is regarded as "reliable requiring no additional proof." Later, we read the "support for the Proto-Iranian (or Indo-Iranian) linguistic attribution of the Alakul and Fyodorovo cultures, or related branches of the Andronovo cultural confederation, requires the supposition that the extension of these languages increased and partly overlapped the distribution of the Proto-Ugric languages. . . . All . . . [the] data representing the Andronovo-like cultures in western Siberian forest-steppe and southern forest are evidence for the hypothesis that suggests very active contacts between the Indo-Iranian and Finno-Ugric languages, expressed in numerous mutual borrowings, a part of which relates to the second millennium BC." If read carefully, their discussion reveals some qualification, a degree of uncertainty characterizing even this relatively well-enshrined linguistic identification. The basic problem, of course, is that material remains are nearly always ethnically, linguistically, and "racially" porous, freely adopted by different peoples speaking different languages and exhibiting different physical characteristics.

No "early civilization" arose on the steppes stretching east of the Urals during Bronze Age times. Archaeologists of the ancient Near East or other areas with substantial evidence for cities and large public art and architecture may be puzzled by their descriptions of sites, sometimes less than one hectare in size, as "large" or "monumental." Here a relative, historical perspective is required. The Sintashta/Arkaim planned settlements with their "outstanding characteristics" and "sophisticated system of fortifications" distributed across "The Country of Towns" may appear relatively puny by Near Eastern standards, but they constitute significant, if, still in some respects, enigmatic, discoveries for the archaeology of the Bronze Age steppes. The numerous complex animal sacrifices in burials at Sintashta in particular, as well as the unequivocal evidence of horse harnessing and the use of lighter spoke-wheeled vehicles ("chariots"), and impressive array of metal weapons – all constitute major discoveries. As Koryakova and Epimakhov point out at length, the degree of social complexity evident in these remains, particularly in the relatively uniform and standardized domestic architecture, is difficult to establish.

From its inception, Bronze Age archaeology on the steppes has focused on the excavation of raised kurgans and not concentrated on locating settlements, the cultural deposits of which often are thin and not clearly visible from the surface. This problem is compounded by the fact that dwellings typically consisted of semisubterranean pit houses that were dug into the ground, making them hard to locate. Similarly, many of the Sintashta-Arkaim settlements are not distinctly visible from the ground; most were discovered through the use of aerial photos, confirmed subsequently by helicopter flyovers and on-ground follow-up inspections. Recently, other planned settlements, difficult to discern directly on the ground, have been documented using different remote sensing techniques. Thus, for example, the later transitional Late Bronze to Early Iron

Age planned settlement of Ciça with multiple concentric rings of dwellings extending over c. 8 ha. or nearly three times larger than the largest Sintashta-Arkaim sites were found farther east in the Irtysh-Ob interfluve between Omsk and Novosibirsk in western Siberia. The site was discovered utilizing magnetometer measurements. One can only wonder how many more settlements-habitation and special-purpose sites of various periods will be discovered across the steppes through the use of aerial photography and more sophisticated remote sensing technologies and geophysical explorations. The more general problem evident here and throughout their study concerns the state of current archaeological understanding. How representative is the evidence in hand? Which regions and areas of concern are well investigated and understood and which lack such determinations? The discovery of the Sintashta-Arkaim settlements was unexpected. How many more important surprises still await us?

Perhaps the most basic and important thesis expounded at length in this study (and reflected in its very structure – Parts 1 and 2) is that the Iron Age of central Eurasia qualitatively differed from its Bronze Age. The mobile dominantly cattle herding *pastoralism* practiced during the Bronze Age must be distinguished from the mounted Eurasian *nomadism* that emerged subsequently only during Iron Age times. Koryakova and Epimakhov opt for what they term the "'later' hypothesis" and cite approvingly A. Khazanov's observation that "Eurasian nomadism as an economic and sociocultural phenomenon could not appear earlier because in many respect it depends on the economic and sociopolitical relations with settled statehood societies." These early nomadic societies and ultimately the first steppe empires (and first appearance of "royal" kurgans) came into being in part because they were caught up in larger systems of interregional interaction and exchange, including regular relations with sedentary states to their south (from China to Rome, including the states of southern Central Asia, such as the Parthian and the Kushan states). True Eurasian nomadism, which they believe first emerged farther east on the Mongolian steppe and then diffused west to the area of their concern, required a level of technological control not just over cattle, but also over horses, sheep, and Bactrian camels, each species of which had to adapt or be made to adapt to the climatic extremes of life on the steppes, particularly to forage throughout the long cold winter when the steppe was covered in snow.

Their well-informed account of the ecological, ethnographic, and historical dimensions of nomadism provides an essential overview to this important topic, as well as a detailed introduction to the basic Russian sources. Their discussion on the nature of mounted Eurasian nomadism is most valuable for its characterization of a type of society that dominated the steppes and adjacent regions for millennia almost into modern times. From this perspective, the earlier Bronze Age is seen as a time of experimentation. At a certain point, lighter carts (or "chariots") pulled by horses, supplanted, though never fully replaced, the

ponderous, oxen-driven solid wheeled vehicles that had emerged earlier probably in the fourth millennium BC farther to the west. Bactrian camels and wooly sheep also assumed greater and greater importance until they became essential components to the "complete package" of true nomadism. Many questions immediately follow from their presentation. For example, to what extent or how is the advent of iron and the gradual dominant utilization of iron tools and weapons related to the emergence of this new type of nomadism with its full complement of several essential distinct species of animals and technological practices essential to that way of life? How did the gradual shift to the production and exchange of iron implements disrupt or change the nature and extent of interactions among closely related societies across the steppes?

A valuable study raises as many questions as it answers. English readers should be grateful to Ludmila Koryakova and Andrej Epimakhov for making such important and complex archaeological materials available to them. This book undoubtedly will remain the basic reference to the later prehistory of central Eurasia for decades to come. The Cold War barrier that isolated this region from Western consideration has now completely melted away. Among many other welcome advances, our understanding of our shared prehistoric past has considerably grown.

PREFACE

This book would never have been written if our region – the Urals – was still a closed military zone as it was until 1991. Since that time, many Russian archaeologists have been able to discuss our research with foreign colleagues and investigate to what extent our findings represent well-known processes of social change and to what extent our cases are novel and thus especially interesting. Few Western archaeologists have had the chance to examine our work and the prehistoric societies we have studied. Many encyclopedias of archaeology and maps of prehistoric cultures leave northern Eurasia as a blank spot, as if this area was not populated.

Thus, the motive for us to write this book is clear, although the project was daunting. It is difficult to write a book for an audience that has little knowledge of our area, and it is also difficult to write in a second (or third) foreign language.

Once I decided to write this book, I presented lectures to foreign universities, delivered papers at international conferences, and discussed the project with colleagues. In particular, Professor Colin Renfew urged me (in 1999–2000) to continue with the idea of writing an archaeological synthesis and felt that *Cambridge World Archaeology* would be an ideal place for it. Andrej Epimakhov contributed his work on regions in which he is an expert. We are grateful to Professor Renfrew for his confidence in us and to the editorial board of *CWA* for accepting the book. Two anonymous reviewers have been patient in helping us clarify both substance and style. We hope that readers will be equally patient with the English version of what is undoubtedly a difficult text filled with names of strange territories, artifacts, and cultures.

We managed to write the text while living for periods of time in Russia, France, and England. Thanks to electronic communications, we were always in contact, although we live in different cities in Russia (Ekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk).

Our book is an advanced introduction to the late prehistory of a substantial part of Eurasia – the Urals and Western Siberia, predominantly within the

steppe and forest-steppe zones. There is no book in any language that attempts to synthesize information in the Eurasian Bronze and Iron Ages. Naturally, we had to choose among many interesting finds and just as many interpretations and discussions of their significance. Although the book includes our own fieldwork, it surveys extensive literature and archival materials that are not easily accessible, even to Russian archaeologists.

The book was written with the financial help of various bodies, primarily the INTAS Foundation (EU), CNRS (France), Leverhulm Trust (UK), a joint grant of the Ural and Siberian divisions of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and grant 05-01-83104a/U of Russian Foundation for Humanities.

I am deeply grateful to my French colleagues and friends – Marie-Yvane Daire and Luic Langouette – for their generosity and support both in Russia during our joint fieldwork and in France during my stay in Rennes. I thank all the staff of the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie (CNRS) of the University of Rennes 1. I am also most grateful to my other French friends: Francine David, Marie-Celine Ugé, and her parents for their hospitality and constant help.

I finished writing the first draft of this book in Durham, England. It is my pleasant duty to thank Professor Anthony Harding for his help in all phases of my stay in Durham, as well as for his reading of the very raw text. I also thank members of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Durham, and Professor Pavel Dolukhanov from Newcastle upon Tyne, who also read the draft version of the book, and his wife Marianna for her practical support in England. In addition, I thank St. Mary's College in Durham, where I wrote numerous pages of this book. The hospitality of the staff and their lively interest in our work was invaluable.

I cannot express in mere words my gratitude to my very good friend Karlene Jones-Bley, who not only constantly encouraged me but also spent a great deal of her time, and even her health, patiently reading numerous electronic texts and correcting my Russian-English.

I want to thank my Russian colleagues and friends who took a major part of my administrative work and teaching on their shoulders during my absence from Russia. Thank you to Svetlana Sharapova, Sofia Panteleyeva, Natalia Berseneva, Dmitry Razhev, Andrew Kovrigin, Alexander Shorin, Alexei Zykov, and all the other members of the Institute of History and Archaeology and the Department of Archaeology of the Ural State University.

I further thank Gennady Zdanovich who opened the door for me to Bronze Age archaeology and inspired my interest in this subject and Svetlana Zdanovich for her most generous hospitality. Andrej and I appreciate the help, advice, and materials of Iya Batanina, Alexander Tairov, Dmitry Zdanovich, Sergei Kuzminykh, Galina Beltikova, Vladimir Stefanov, Olga Korochkova, Yuri Chemyakin, Viktor Borzunov, Evgeny Chibilev, Emma Usmanova, Nikolai Vinogradov, and Vladimir Kostukov.

I address special words of gratitude to my coauthor – Andrej Epimakhov – for his responsibility, patience, readiness to accept numerous "perestroika" in the text, and his valuable contribution to the first part of the book and to the illustrations.

In conclusion, I want to express my deep gratitude to my family for their constant support and forbearance of my long and frequent absences.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my parents – Anna Maltseva and Nikolai Zmatrakov – whose lives were unfairly difficult and short.

Ludmila Koryakova