

# Ethno-Cultural Interactions in Northern Eurasia in the 3rd-1st Millennia BC

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## Resumen

En el III milenio AC, junto con la aparición del transporte sobre ruedas y los animales de tiro, las grandes migraciones se hicieron posibles. En este período, la región septentrional del Mar Negro se convirtió en una zona generadora de tales migraciones, expandiendo hacia Oriente y Occidente a los portadores de la cultura Yamnaya de tumbas en fosa. Un segundo núcleo generador de migraciones surgió al sur de los Urales, en donde se han reconocido los rasgos culturales que definen al pueblo indoeuropeo (la ciudad de Arkaim, la necrópolis de Sintashta, etc.). Gentes de esta zona cruzaron los desiertos de Asia Central y alcanzaron el Indostán. En el I milenio AC, se produjo una ola de reflujo de poblaciones de lengua indoiraniana desde Asia Central hacia las estepas del Mar Negro. Esos últimos inmigrantes recibían el nombre de "Escitas".

## Palabras clave

Edad del Bronce, indoeuropeo, Escitas.

## Abstract

In the 3rd millennium BC, when the wheeled transport and draught animals appeared, large-scale land migrations became possible. In that period, the northern Black Sea region was a generator of such migrations diffusing eastwards and westwards bearers of the Yamnaya (Pit-Grave) culture. A second source-point of the migrations arose in the South Urales. There the features of the Indo-Aryan archaeological culture have been recorded (the townsite of Arkaim, burial ground of Sintashta, etc.). Migrants from that area crossed the deserts of Central Asia and reached Hindustan. In the 1st millennium BC, a reverse flow of Iranian-speaking people from Central Asia to the Black Sea steppe was taking place. These latter migrants have become known under the name of Scythians.

## Keywords

Bronze Age, indoeuropean, Scythians.

The Bronze Age was the era of the first civilizations, which, in the opinion of Maria Gimbutas, was related with the activation of Indo-European peoples, who destroyed the Neolithic culture of "old" Europe or the "Civilization of the Goddess", in that author's own definition. However, in order to establish the actual role of Indo-Europeans in that ancient history, we have to consider the primal origins of the civilization or its triggering mechanism. For that purpose, we must designate at least the general outlines of the phenomenon we are going to search for. Some years ago, V. Gordon Childe proposed ten main signs of



**Figure 1.** Sahara. Charioteer of the period of expansion of the Peoples of the Sea.

a civilization, which fundamentally distinguish the latter from sociums below that state of development. Wolfram Eberhard reduced the ten signs of Childe to five which are sufficient for distinguishing civilizations from more primitive cultures remaining temporarily or forever behindhand. These indications are: 1) stratified society and bureaucratic organization; 2) grain farming with the use of domestic animals; 3) the presence of at least a single centre of an urban type (with the urban architecture, cultural centres including temples or palace complexes); 4) the use of metals; and 5) the existence of a script and keeping documents. As separate, the first four indicators (often borrowed) may occur in various cultures at the threshold of civilization, but their aggregate and comprehensive realization are encountered in very restricted parts of the Old World. Firstly, these are Mesopotamia and Egypt. The impact of the earliest centres of civilizations may have led to the optimum result, i.e. to the genesis of a new civilization, where it was produced by the three most important impulses of evolution – migration, cultural diffusion and convergence (Vasil'ev, 1976: 3-36).

In regions relatively close to each other in the cultural and social advancement, as for instance are those over the Near East, continuous mutual influences and mutual enrichment yield to no chronological recording due to the "quick mastering of the borrowings and their becoming an organic part of the own". In such unclear instances it may seem natural to accept the suppositions about a spontaneous evolution independent from the external impacts. On the other hand, archaeological studies of the second half of the 20th century and applications of the radiocarbon method have elucidated the appearance of such fundamental inventions as the wheel and its use for transportation over the areas of Central and Eastern Europe.

It seems that the convergent and autochthonous evolution cannot be opposed to migration. The case of migration of a certain group of population is probable a) where there are technical means enabling to realize such a movement; b) where the migration is the product of a vital necessity; and c) where the fact of migration is corroborated by the evidence of archaeological and anthropological investigations. As a rule, archaeological data alone prove to be insufficient where reliable indications of a migration are necessary in accordance with the requirements which archaeologists themselves have specified. It is true even in those cases where written sources and linguistic evidence are available. By contrast, monuments of the rock art, if they are found, are an irrefutable argument in favour of the intrusion of foreign ethnics to the adjoining or some very remote regions.



**Figure 2.** Pottery of the Afanasyevo culture: 1 – Altay, 2 – Minusinsk Depression, 3 – Tuva.

Thus it is known from Egyptian sources that during the rule of Pharaoh Merneptah (1225-1215 BC), “foreign peoples” appeared west of the Nile delta and, having united with the Lybians, they penetrated the depth of the delta and reached the Heliopolis Channel and the Canopic Mouth. On the April 15 of the fifth year of the rule of Merneptah, a battle took place near the city of Periru at Natre Lakes and the Lybians, together with their allies, were defeated. In the struggle against the Egyptians, on the side of the Lybians five other peoples participated whose names are differently transcribed but since the times of Emmanuel Rouget they are equated with Lycians, Achaeans, Tyrsi (Etruscans), Sicilians and Sardinians, which all are known generally as the “Peoples of the Sea”.

That migration had left no archaeological traces in Egypt itself and therefore it was sometimes considered as simply a robbers’ attack. However, these views run contrary to the rock paintings at Tassili with representations of warriors depicted in the bi-triangular style. Their bodies consist as if of two triangles, the limbs are elongated and the heads are rendered in the form of simple sticks. They are clothed in tunics tightened at the waist and are holding a spear in one hand and an object resembling a four-corner basket in the other. The first rock paintings discovered at Tassili were executed precisely in that “bi-triangular” style. They attest the appearance of some new group of people in the Sahara who used battle chariots and domestic horses unknown here before. Originally these chariots were attributed to the Garamants,



**Figure 3.** Stele of the Yamnaya culture. Kernosovka, Odessa oblast, Ukraine.

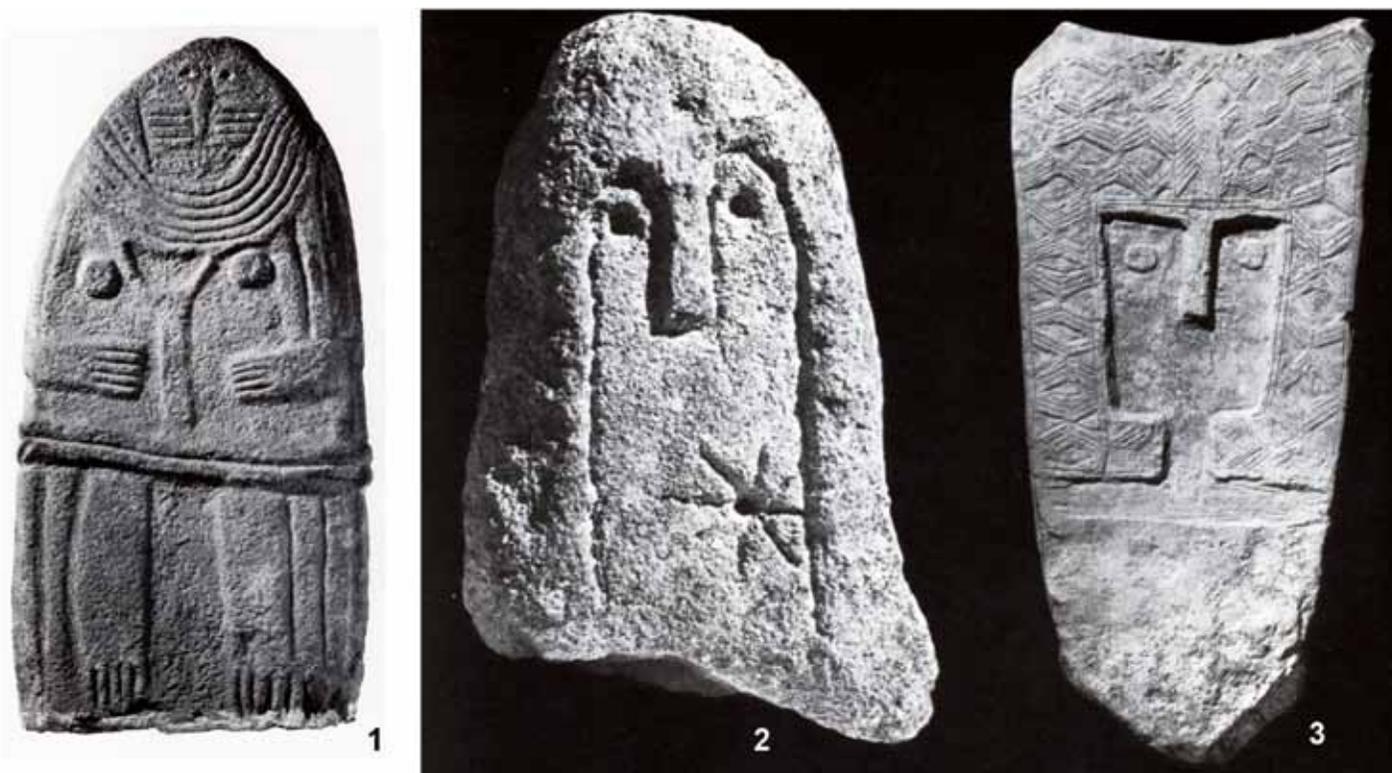
but after a careful analysis, Dusseaut and Salomon Reinach concluded that the extremely peculiar style of representation of racing horses is absolutely similar to the style of the “flying gallop” (Figure 1). This is the style characteristic of the Crete-Mycenaean art, corroborating once again the fact of the intrusion of the Peoples of the Sea mentioned in Egyptian inscriptions. Thus the migration of maritime peoples which has left no archaeological traces is recorded in the rock paintings of the Sahara (Lhot, 1973: 89-145).

The African example is here adduced intentionally. With the implication of the local cultural tradition established in this region since the Neolithic period, the appearance of new unusual artistic subjects and styles unmistakably manifests the advent of dynamic ethnoses which are related with the Indo-European invasion of the Eastern Mediterranean. The representations of charioteers in the African inland suggest a complicated character of the given migration concerned with marine and land raids. The employment of effective means of transportation is among the most important components in the realization of a migration, whereas the motives for it may include climatic changes, overpopulation or the “stimulus of new lands” for which the efforts exerted are, according to Arnold J. Toynbee’s opinion, a stimulus on its own. However in any case, the discoverers of “new lands” are to have in their disposal the means for attaining these lands. Whereas the sea migrations may have been realizable already as early as the period of the cardial ware, the Eurasian steppe expanses were successfully, i.e. quickly mastered only with the invention of the wheel and domestication of draught animals.

In a series of his works, V. Gordon Childe has defined the main propositions of his theory about Sumer as the centre where the wheel was first invented as the most important mechanical means of transportation of heavy loads.

In turn, Alexander Häusler enumerates finds of wheel transports from the European part of Eurasia and grounds the independent origin both of West-European finds and the vehicles from Ciscaucasia and Black-Sea steppe. The spread of wheeled vehicles in Eastern Europe is related to the ancient Yamnaya (Pit-Grave) cultural and historical unity which arose in the 4th millennium BC and had existed until the early 2nd millennium BC (Novojonov, 1994: 9).

In publications on wheeled vehicles there are two hypotheses explaining their origins: four-wheeled wagon derives from sleighs and the two-wheeled cart – from travois/slide cars. The two-wheeled cart possibly developed as a light-load variety of the heavy two-axle wagon. The most ancient evidence of the use of rollers combined with sledges is found in pictograms from Uruk. Only in the 2nd millennium BC, the A-frame carts which may be compared with a slide car appear in Transcaucasia. Representations of the carts of that type are found among rock drawings in Ukhtasar in the Gegam Mountains and on the Yazyly Hill in Gobustan, as well as in Dagestan. Remains of similar carts have been uncovered at the burial ground of Lchashen in Armenia of the 2nd millennium BC.



**Figure 4.** Bronze Age steles from France.

In the southern part of Mesopotamia, in layer IVa of Uruk radiocarbon dated to 3200-3100 BC, clay tablets were found with representations of roofed wagons on four wheels or rollers drawn by bovinds. On one of such vehicles, a box is shown with a sitting human. By the end of the 3rd millennium BC, all the types of vehicles had been improved and on their wheels metal felloes appeared. There are records of the use of various vehicles in ritual practices. At the same time, it is held that battle chariots appeared in the Near East with the Indo-European nomadic tribes, although this problem is still far from having been finally resolved. In Central and Eastern Europe, the most ancient representations have been discovered on a clay vessel of the Funnel Beaker (TRB) culture from Bronosica, 45 km from Krakow. The vessel is dated to 2750-2550 BC. Another find is from the settlement of Radošina of the Boleraz group in Slovakia. It is a clay object of rectangular shape with the edges ornamented with strokes and protomae of bovinds (?) on the front wall. The wall, in turn, is terminated with an arcuate top. Neither wheels nor traces of their junction are here discernible. From graves of the late phase of the Baden culture, peculiar pottery has been recovered – models of wagons with high trough-like sides decorated with a geometric design (Budakalász, grave 117 and Szigetszentmárton north of Budapest). The vessels/models are dated to within a range of 2500-2200 BC.

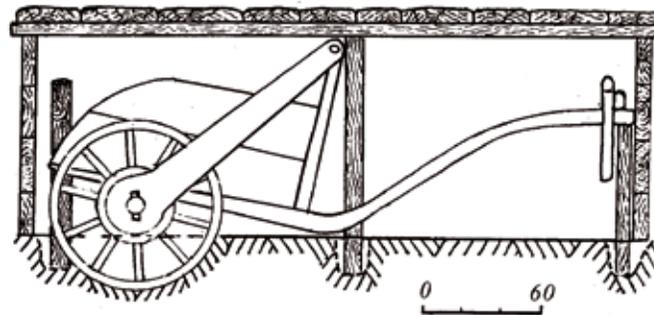
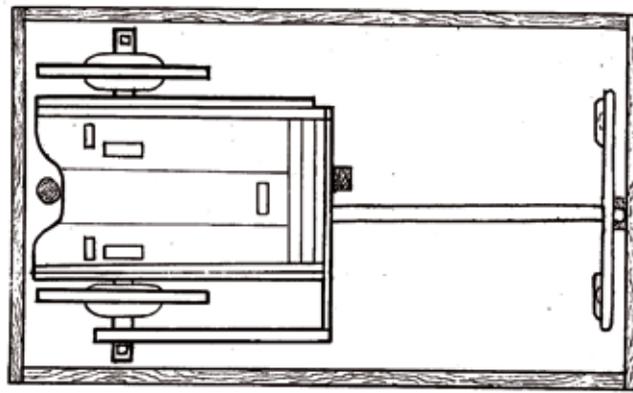
In 1884, in the locality of Lohne-Züschen in Germany, a stone cist was excavated with poorly discernible representations of two- or four-wheeled vehicles cut out on one of its slabs. The vehicles had small wheels and were drawn by bovinds executed in plan projection. As already mentioned above, similar images are known in the Gegam Mountains (Syunik and Ukhtasar). Dating of the vehicles from Lohne on the basis of some accompanying pottery which may be attributed to the Funnel Beaker culture, gave the time span within 2600-2200 BC. Noteworthy is the widespread tradition of representing teams of bovinds in the manner similar to that of Lohne. These are distinguishable by a rare perspective rendering the animals strictly in the view from the top. In this way, only bovinds are depicted. Their distinctive feature is the sticking forwards horns of a sickle-like or lyre shape, the legs being either not shown altogether or represented on both sides of the body as if the animal were spread over the ground. Most commonly, single figures of bovinds or scenes of ploughing are represented in that perspective in petroglyphs of Northern Italy and South France. Emmanuel Anati attributes them to the Neolithic or Aeneolithic period with the dates generally within the range from 3800 to 2800 BC (period II –A-B) (Anati, 1976, p.71-78).



**Figure 5.** Stele from Troy.

The so ancient appearance of ploughing (?) teams of bovids (and perhaps previously their use in threshing of cereals) suggests the possibility of a very rapid transition to the wheeled transport. The wheeled plough, as one may judge from the petroglyphs of Samaly-Tash, was invented relatively long ago, still before the advent of Indo-Europeans to Central Asia. A serious argument against equation of a number of drawings in Saymaly-Tash to chariots is proposed, because on them either pairs of bovids are harnessed or teams of a bovid together with a horse, as was not infrequently practised in arable farming with the use of draught animals. These petroglyphs were executed in the bi-triangular style, which fact, in turn, reminds us of the cultures of painted pottery of the Susa I and Susa II periods dated to the 4th-3rd millennia BC. As to the extensive migrations to Central and Middle Asia, they are related primarily with the bearers of the Yamnaya (Pit-Grave) and other cultures of the East-European Plain and Ciscaucasia close to the Yamnaya chronologically and by origins, as well as with invasions of the people of Srubnaya (Timber-Grave)/Andronovo culture which evidently reached Hindustan (Kuzmina, 1994).

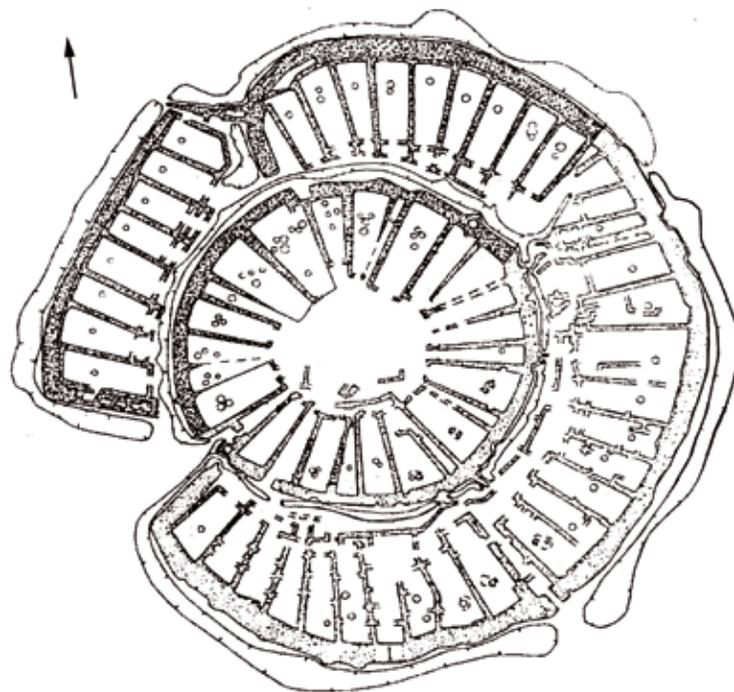
On the Azov and northern Black Sea littorals and in the Kuban River region, the most of the earliest burials with remains of vehicles have been found. There, there is located the starting area of the most extensive migrations of the ancient Indo-Europeans eastwards. Presumably, these people were the proto-Tokhars, of which the language is preserved in the manuscripts with Buddhist texts discovered in the cave temples of East Turkmenistan. Advancing over the steppe zone of Eurasia in the 3rd millennium BC, the proto-Tokhars occupied the Altai mountains, the Minusinsk Depression and the basin of the Upper Yenisei River where they had left objects of the Afanasyevo culture discovered by Sergey A. Teploukhov (Figure 2). Traces of the route of that unprecedented migration have been found in Karaganda Region of northern Kazakhstan, where a number of burials of the Yamnaya culture were excavated. Some of the invaders left the Sayan-Altai advancing southwards and settled in the oases of what is now Xinjiang in China. Here, they probably had been residing until the Turkish expansion. Proto-Tokhars possibly used four-wheeled covered wagons drawn by bovids (more particularly oxen), as suggested by one of the monuments of the Okunevo art, viz. the Znamenskaya stele from the Minusinsk Krai in Siberia. Inside the wagon in this representation, the driver is depicted and the oxen are rendered in the regular perspective in profile. As it seems, this drawing was executed not by immigrants, who actually have not left after them any works of art, but by the indigenous population mixed with the newcomers (Semenov, 1993).



**Figure 6.** Chariot from the burial ground of Sintashta (Southern Ural region). Reconstruction after Vladimir Feodorovich Gening and Genadiy Borisovich Zdanovich.

The expansion of the Yamnaya people was directed not only eastwards but also to the area of the agriculturalists, that is especially distinct in the North Balkans. In a number of cases, the burials of the Yamnaya culture were installed immediately in the deserted Tripolye sites. In the western area of the Yamnaya culture, numerous anthropomorphic steles are found, with the greatest numbers distributed over the Crimea, northern Azov and Black sea littorals and Dobrudja in Bulgaria. These monuments were widespread also in the upper courses of the Dnieper, Southern Bug and Dniester rivers. Some of the steles are chance finds and some other has been revealed in the foundations of Greek-time buildings and in kurgans, so that their dating is only presumable. However, certain examples were used for roofing early Yamnaya burials and therefore are linked more or less reliably with that culture.

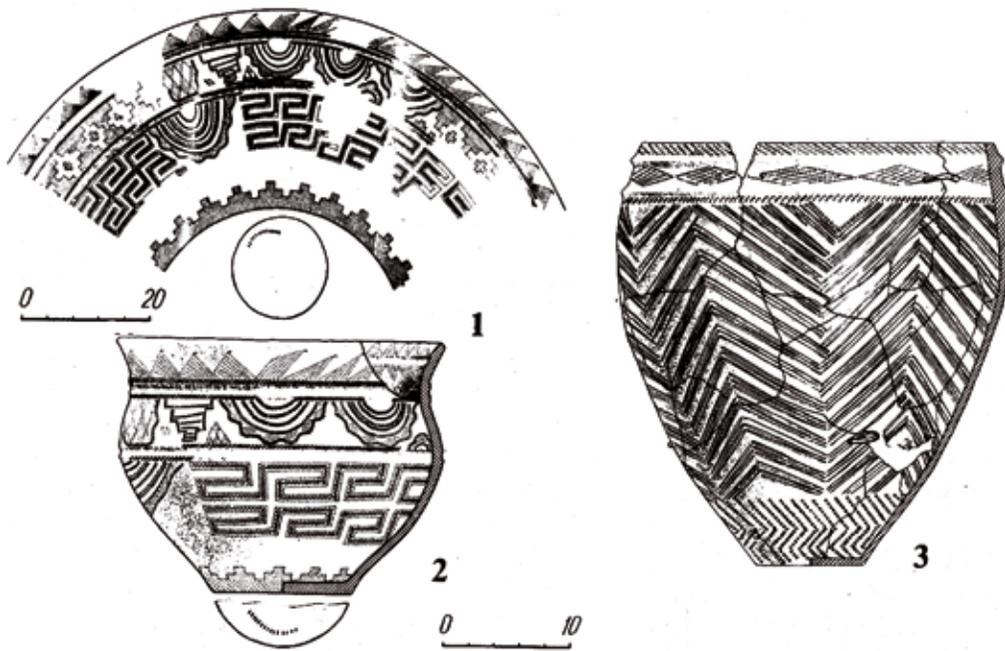
The scholars concerned with the Black Sea steles not once have taken notice of their relation with the West-European monuments and pointed out to a series of similarities between the megalithic statues of France. These similarities are in the treating of the nose and eyes in the form of two lines perpendicular to each other, belts and necklaces, T-shaped sceptres and shepherd's sticks, figurines of paired humans in the lower field of the slab and representations of feet on its back side. All that, in the opinion of Alexander A. Formozov, gives us grounds to regard the similarities between the two groups of statues as a reflection of the real cultural interlinks between Western Europe and the Black Sea area of the Yamnaya culture. However, the region of the Black Sea steles, as the eastern periphery of the megalithic world of Europe (Figure 3), was open also to influences of the Near-East civilizations. One of the indicators represented on a number of statues is a staff or a shepherd's stick with the curled top. It is identical in its structure to similar representations on the statues menhirs of the Late Neolithic epoch in southern France (departments Ardeche and Gard) (Figure 4). The same sign is represented in the glyptics of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, as well as at somewhat later sites of Etruria and Rome. The staff or baton was an insignia of the sacral power and religious authority of the kings and the god Osiris. On the anthropomorphic steles of the northern Black Sea region and southern France this symbol was an indication of female personages (goddesses?) and implied the religious attributes related to fertility. Another sign of authority was a whip depicted on statues of Osiris who also possessed a staff. The whip, however, is represented only on the French statues menhirs but is absent on the Black Sea littoral (Smirnov, 2004).



**Figure 7.** The fortified site of Arkaim (Chelyabinsk oblast, Southern Ural region).

In what way did the interactions between the so remote regions as the eastern and western Mediterranean were realized? A fragment of a statue menhir with a whip, found by Carl W. Blegen during excavations of Troy, possibly indicates a migration of some group which had borrowed from Egypt or Babylon certain symbols related with the social hierarchy of the ancient civilizations (Figure 5). The contacts of the Near and Middle East with the Black Sea region, during the period when bearers of the Yamnaya culture were absent here, may have been realized via the mediation of the Maikop culture named after the kurgan near the city of Maikop in the Kuban River region. That barrow with the height amounting to 11 metres was excavated in 1897 by Nikolay I. Veselovskiy. The process of interaction between separate cultural groups was especially manifest during the periods of Troy I and Troy II in the 4th-3rd millennia BC in the Circumpontic zone embracing the north Black Sea region, Caucasus and Anatolia. The common elements of these cultures include fortifications, elite sub-kurgan burials, forms of pottery with the corded, incised and relief decorations, stone and horn axes, knives, vehicles and rich personal ornaments. Evgeniy N. Chernykh particularly stressed the role of the Caucasian metallurgic kilns in the establishment of the system of trade and cultural links within the "Circumpontic cultural and historical province", the influence of which has been traced far outside its limits (Merpert, 1988).

The most ancient Yamnaya culture, as mentioned above, occupied the steppes from the lower reaches of the Danube to as far as the Ural River. It was an "organism" far from being homogeneous, as suggested e.g. by the spread of stone statues, some peculiarities of the burial rite, ceramic production, external contacts and the internal dynamics of the evolution of the culture itself. As early as at least in the mid-3rd millennium BC, there were migrations directed from the area of the Yamnaya culture to the Sayan-Altai mountain plateau. At the same time, in the forest-steppe zones, the Yamnaya people were in contacts with the bearers of the Corded Ware culture. Later on, the area of the Yamnaya cultural and historical unity was invaded by tribes of the Catacomb culture, which dissected the territory into separate isolated enclaves. In the course of the mutation of the Yamnaya culture, the Poltavka group of sites arose in the Volga region, on the basis of which the new Srubnaya (Timber-Grave) culture was established in the area between the Volga and Ural rivers. East of that area, the closely related Andronovo unity came into being. The genesis of the two cultures is fairly complicated, but judging by the evidence available, these were people speaking Indo-Iranian languages. The southern Urals and eastern Kazakhstan, as well as the already mentioned region between the Volga and Ural, were the ancestral home of the Vedic Aryans and Iranians – fire-worshippers whose sacral texts Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Yajurveda etc., as well Avesta, are extant until today.



**Figure 8.** Pottery of the Steppe Bronze Age culture. Burial ground of Sintashta (Southern Ural region).

These steppe tribes had battle chariots with harnessed pairs of horses. The remains of these chariots have been uncovered during excavations at the burial grounds of Sintashta and Nikolaevka II (southern Trans-Urals) and in northern and central Kazakhstan (cemeteries of Berlik V, Satan, etc.). In the areas of the Srubnaya and Alakul cultures, depictions of chariots on clay pots also put into graves are found (Figure 6).

In the southern Trans-Uralian region, the steppe peoples created unique cult centres embodying the mythological model of the universe. The town-site of Arkaim, located on the Bolshaya Karaganka River in the Chelyabinsk Region, is one of the best studied among such centres. The basis of the layout of that settlement is constituted by concentric circles formed by trapezoid dwellings. In the centre there was a nearly rectangular square measuring 30 x 40 m. Two of the circles were divided by radial defensive walls into four sectors. The entrances were on the south-west, north-west, north-east and south-east. The diameter of the outer wall of the settlement was equal to 143-145 m, its height amounting to 3.5 m. The construction was based on log cages filled with earth and measuring 3 x 4 m. On the outside, they were daubed with a thick layer of clay. The encircling ditch was 1.5-2.5 m deep (Figure 7).

The fact that Arkaim was a ceremonial centre is attested by certain analogies with such sites as the Scythian Arzhan kurgan in Tuva, as well as round town-sites of the Circumpontic zone pertaining to the Bronze Age. Architectural studies of Arkaim make it possible to compare its layout with that of the Avestan refuge of Var, built on the instruction of Ahura Mazda by the first man Yima to enable selected humans, animals and plants to survive during a terrible global winter. It is exactly this text of Fragar 2 of the Videvdad, which, when applied to Arkaim, enables us to consider the latter as the special model of the mythological Universe (Gening Zdanovich, Gening, 1992).

In the mid-2nd millennium BC, agricultural oases of the piedmont zone of Kopet-Dagh began to be penetrated by bearers of the Bronze-Age steppe cultures. This is suggested by the appearance of handmade ware with geometric decoration at the largest tells of the Namazga VI period. The ornamentation was very simple consisting of herringbones, zigzags, oblique crosses, and occasionally hatched triangles. The migration routes of those groups are marked with finds of the identical pottery throughout the vast area of deserts and semideserts extending from Ust-Urt as far as the northern spurs of the Khorasan mountain system. In addition to chance finds, small cemeteries with burials performed according to the Srubnaya culture rite are found along those routes (Figure 8).

More information-abundant sites have been investigated by Anatoliy M. Mandelshtam in the Bishkent Valley situated at the low reaches of the Kafirnigan and Surkhan-Darya rivers in Tajikistan. There, at the cemetery of Tulkhar, several groups of burials have been distinguished allowing on the basis of a series



**Figure 9.** Burial at the Tulkhar cemetery. Late Bronze Age. 17th century BC. Pamir.

of traits to establish their belonging to the culture of the Vedic Aryans. One of the groups contained the remains of people cremated somewhere aside and spilled into a small depression dug in the bottom of the burial pit and covered with a stone slab. Close nearby, solar symbols in the form of a swastika or a circle with four spokes were inlaid with stones (Figure 9).

The second group of interments was performed according to the rite of inhumations in pits with a ramped descent. The skeletons were single or paired lying crouched with the head oriented mostly to the east. The grave offerings were represented majorly by ceramic vessels, various objects of copper and bronze and ornaments. In these graves, always sheep bones were encountered as well as small fireplaces. In the female graves the latter were in the form of round depressions and in the male ones these were small square pits. Around the perimeter, the fireplaces were lined with stones. They invariably contained slight quantities of ashes and pieces of charcoal suggesting that fire was kindled there with some ritual purposes.

Mandelstam, who had studied the hymns of Rigveda concerned with passing of the deceased into the other world, arrived at the following conclusions as to the rites recorded at the Tulkhar cemetery: "The essence of the cremation as the mortuary rite of the Vedic period is defined by a complex of notions related primarily to Agni who is the messenger between the human and the divine orders and between the Earth and the Heaven. In one of the younger texts (Taittiriya of Brahman, II, 1, 1, 6) he is called the head god. Agni is in addition the forefather of the humankind. Taking into account these qualities of Agni, cremation may be understood as the way of passing to the ancestors – the places of their residence on the Heaven. Thus we may consider the cult of fire as primarily a life-giving element in the basis of the rite of cremation manifested at the early Tulkhar cemetery. This basis implies also the presence of notions about the materialistic nature of human's existence after death."

Inlays in the form of a "wheel" or a swastika in the burial pits in the very general meaning are supposed to be a symbol of the Sun. The problem of the implication of the depictions of the "wheel" was summarized in the beginning of the past century by Oscar Montelius who has demonstrated that we are dealing with the symbol of the Sun which reproduces not only its outer appearance but also its basic feature – the movement. In certain cases, the wheel was also a symbol of the death and resurrection. Here it is appropriate to return to Sintahta and other necropoleis of steppe people of the Bronze Age, where chariots with horse teams or their depictions on pottery have been found. Horse is a psychopomp – the animal conveying the souls of the deceased to the afterlife and occasionally the Sun was represented as a stallion. To that degree in which the Sun manifests the traits of the equid nature and the attributes related with it, it displays also chthonic elements. Thus the solar wheel on the bottom of the graves at the Tulkhar



**Figure 10.** Charioteer. Late Bronze Age. Chaylag-Khem, Republic of Tuva.

burial ground serves the same goals as the drawings of chariots and wheels on pots in graves of the Subnaya culture – this is the chthonic Sun, every evening descending beyond the fringe of the western horizon.

Another type of burials, viz. those performed according to the inhumation rite, also demonstrates certain traits reminding us of the Vedic Aryans. In the ritual of cremation, corresponding to the younger texts, into the both hands of the deceased, kidneys of sacrificed animals were to be inserted. These were intended as the offerings to the brindled four-eyed dogs of Yama guarding the entrance to the kingdom of the dead. In the inhumation rite, symbolic offerings replacing animal kidneys were put into the hands of the deceased. These objects, in the form of red pebbles or lumps of clay dyed with cinnabar, have been uncovered between the fingers of people interred in the inhumation part of the Tulkhar necropolis (Mandelstam, 1968).

However, the most interesting feature of the burial rite was in the presence of the small “fireplaces” always of a square plan in male graves and round ones in female graves. If the burials were paired then they contained both of the two types of fireplaces. In the fireplaces, probably special sacrificial offerings were burnt. The key for understanding these features may be found if one compares them with the sacral fires of ancient India. There, three major types of sacrificial fire were known with their functions strictly regulated. The first type is the *garhapatya* – the “fire of the lord of the house” and it is the main one. That was a domestic hearth which had acquired a sacral character. In it, sacrifices were prepared. The fireplace of that type had a rounded shape. The second type of fire – *ahavaniya* – was a sacrificial fire in the proper sense of the word. Nothing was cooked in it, but sacrifices to the gods were performed there. The fireplace/altar was of square shape. The third fire – *dakshinagni* or the “southern” one was a kind of charm against the evil powers – the dangers imminent from that side where the Aryans placed the land of the Death and ancestors. That hearth/altar had a semicircular plan.

The types of fire enumerated are paralleled by the sacred fires worshipped by the Iranians. These are *Burzin-Mihr*, *Farnbag* and *Gushnasp*. It is presumed that they have the common roots with many other religious notions justly considered as Indo-Iranian. The existence of square and round fireplaces/

altars linked with different kinds of fire in ancient India may be accepted as the phenomenon analogous to the presence of similar two forms of "fireplaces" at the earlier Tulkhar cemetery. That burial ground demonstrates the presence of the same religious notions that are manifested in Vedic texts of different periods. Its relation with steppe cultures of the Bronze Age is not quite clear due to the long-term stay of those people at the new place of residence and partial adoption of the settled mode of life. The other groups of their former fellow tribesmen may have advanced further to the north of Hindustan, where the downfall of the Harappa civilization is tied with the invasion of steppe peoples. Substantial evidence of the large-scale migration of the steppe tribes of the Bronze Age is in the rock art of the mountains of Central Asia and North Pakistan, where in numerous complexes of rock drawings, over 350 depictions of vehicles are recorded (Figure 10).

The bearers of the Indo-Iranian and East-Iranian dialects, widely settled throughout the Central Asia and Near East in the early Iron Age, manifest themselves fairly distinctly as representatives of cultures of the Scytho-Cimmerian type.

In the 7th century BC, they already occupied the vast area from the inland of Central Asia to the near-Pontic steppes and represented a single continuum tied up by the so-called "Scythian triad" i.e. horse harness of specific forms, armament and the Scythian animal style. The Scythians proper, as a tribal unity or ethnos known to Herodotus, inhabited the northern Black Sea region. Slightly earlier – in the 7th century BC – barrows of the Scythian elite appeared in the Kuban River area. Evidently, they contained the graves of the chiefs who headed the military expansion to the Near East.

Beyond the Tanais (Don River), there had been living the Savromatians who "speak Scythian" (IV. 117). Savromatian sites, mostly large steppe kurgans, are widespread on the Lower Volga, in the southern Urals and in the north-western Kazakhstan. Among the most interesting, there are the Filippovskiye Kurgans excavated in 1986-1988 near the village of Filippovka in the Orenburg Region and containing unique masterpieces of art. Their peculiarity is in the use of wood plated with sheet gold.

Further to the east from the Caspian Sea, the area was occupied by Sakai-Massagets also mentioned by Herodotus. Herodotus, in particular, states that "the Massagets wear clothing similar to the Scythian and have a similar mode of life" that suggests their ethnic closeness. On the Bekhistun rock towering above the road leading from Mesopotamia to Khamadan, 36 km to the east of Kermanshah, there are carved inscriptions narrating about the events concerned with the activities of the Persian king Darius I. They mention the Sakai Paradaraia "who are beyond the sea", Sakai Tigraxauda "with pointed caps" and Sakai Haumavarga worshipping the haoma (the sacral beverage from the plant mentioned in the Avesta and analogous to the "soma" of the Vedic texts).

Further on to the east, in the territory of the Chinese Turkestan, in the north-western Mongolia, and on the Sayan-Altai Plateau also there are traces of cultures of the Scythian-Siberian circle. The ethnonyms of the bearers of these cultures are presently unknown from any sources of the Classical period, but the Chinese dynastic chronicles mention the names of tribes of Yuezhi and Usun, which may be identified as the extreme eastern branch of Central-Asian Sakas. Actually there, in the inland of the Internal Asia there was the ancestral home of the Scythians who had reached by the 7th century BC the Pontic steppes, Assyria and Babylon. The written sources no longer shed light on the history of those peripheral Central-Asian peoples. Only archaeology and artistic monuments – petroglyphs and the deer stones decorated with engravings in the Scythian animal style enable us to tie the world of those most ancient nomads with the Eurasian tribes close to them culturally (Semenov, 2008).

In the area of the Sayan-Altai Plateau and Trans-Baikal, the following cultures of the Scythian type have been identified: the culture of slab graves (Buryatia, Chita Region, Khalkha-Mongolia), the Tagar culture (Khakassia and the south of the Krasnoyarsk Krai), Aldy-Bel and Uyk-Sagly cultures (Tuva and the northern Oirat-Mongolia), the Pazyryk and Mai-Emir cultures in the Altai, and the Tasmola culture in Kazakhstan. This list does not exhaust the entire spectre of the archaeological definitions concerned with various local and chronological variants of cultures of the Saka type in Central Asia, East Turkmenistan,

Ordos or Inner Mongolia. However the tying link of all these formations is the "Scythian triad" since the other constituents of the culture, such as the pottery and burial rite (settlements of nomads are as a rule unknown), demonstrate essential differences.

To date, we are able to state that the "Scythian triad" as the nucleus of the culture of the Scythian-Siberian unity was formed exactly in the depths of Central Asia. By now, the most ancient Scythian complex including horse harness, the art of the animal style and items of armament has been recorded in the kurgan of Arzhan in Tuva, excavated in 1971-1974 by Prof. Mikhail P. Gryaznov. The time of the creation of that monument, on the basis of the multi-disciplinary dating, is possibly the 8th century BC. Some of the samples of the wood from the construction of the barrow yielded the dates of the 9th or even 10th century BC. Excluding such extreme chronological boundaries and accepting the average radiocarbon dates, we must remember that the Scythian triad at Arzhan is represented already in its completed form. In fact, it had taken a relatively long time span to establish the basic elements of the culture of the earliest nomads, including the semantic and semiotic levels which became the integral part of the world-view of the culture's bearers. It is not by chance, that a number of scholars gave up the problem of the ancestral home of the Scythians believing that "the discovery of the royal kurgan at Arzhan in Tuva has resolved in general aspects the problem of the origin of the Scythian culture and Scythians themselves. It has been established that their (Scythian) homeland must be searched for in the inland of Asia rather than in the northern Black Sea region or the Near and Middle East". In the general Central-Asian cultural context, the monuments of the Scythian art are not represented in the "glamour of bronze and gold", but are part of the "popular" creative work. These include carving on bone and wood, rock images and monumental deer stones installed near the kurgans or directly on them. Taking this fact into consideration we have grounds to state that the origins of the early nomadic (Scythian) works quite possibly may have been exactly on the Sayan-Altai Plateau.

As a result of the increasingly cold climate which fell on the early centuries of the 1st millennium BC, part of the nomads of Central Asia began to advance over the steppe zone westwards. Some of their groups settled down along their route in the southern Urals or Volga region, others crossed the Middle Asia and having rounded the Caspian Sea invaded countries of the Near East; the third group reached right away the northern Black Sea littoral. Hence the discord and jumble arose in the evidence of Greek-time sources concerning the time of the Scythian penetration to some territories or other where they appeared "all of a sudden" in the 8th or 7th century BC.

Later on, the Scythian culture, which in the areas of its new residence became the culture of the tribal elite familiarized in the Near and Middle East with the achievements and luxury of the local despoties, lost its original laconism and simplicity of forms. This is not however true for their Sayan-Altai homeland. The end of the Scythian culture, as well as of the continental Celtic one, falls on the so-called Hunno-Sarmatian period (3rd century BC – 3rd century AD), followed by the "Great Migration of Peoples" which resulted in the downfall of the Roman Empire. Thus Europe entered the completely different epoch – the Christian phase of its development.

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