

Horsemen Interments of the Golden Horde

The informational potential of the archaeological material
for social reconstructions

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"Horsemen interments", which are usually understood as burials containing the partial remains of a horse (skin, skull and leg bones), a whole horse carcass or articles of harness, are viewed in the majority of cases as an ethnomarking feature of medieval nomads of the Eurasian steppes. With reference to the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, they are seen as an ethnocultural feature of sari-kypchaks.¹ Among 850 interments of the Golden Horde period excavated in the steppes from the Urals to the Carpathian Mountains, 37.4% are horsemen interments, being present in all the conventionally divided local groups; pre-Urals, Nizhne- and Srednevolzhskoi, Don and others. This fact makes us take another look at the semantic meaning of the horsemen interments and view them in relation to the social stratification of the Golden Horde nomads. As an example, we took sepulchral monuments of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries from the southern pre-Urals and the Volga region, including the southern territory of the present-day Czelyabinsk region, the south-east of Bashkortostan, the Orenburg region and western Kazakhstan, and the Astrakhan, Volgograd, Saratov and Samara regions of Russia. The samples under analysis comprise 510 interments, which allows us to make statistical calculations with a low signification barrier (=0.8%, with probability degree of 0.95).²

¹ U. S. Hudyakov, "Kypchak tribes of Western Siberia in the XI-first half of the XIII centuries," *The history of Tatars since ancient times*. Vol. II. Kazan 2006, 482–491; V. A. Ivanov, "Kypchaks in Eastern Europe," *The history of Tatars since ancient times*. Vol. II. Kazan 2006, 496–503.

² V. F. Gening, E. P. Bunyatin, S. G. Pustovalov and N. A. Rychkov, *Formalized-statistical methods in archaeology (The analysis of sepulchral monuments)*. Kiev 1990, 64.

In the 510 interments under study, the horsemen interments comprise around one-third (34.1%), of which about half (17.1% of the total) contained horse burials and the other half (17%) articles of harness but without horse remains.

Among the burials with a whole horse carcass, the majority (5.5% of the total) are burials where the horse carcass lies to the left of the human remains: Tlyavuglovsky, Barrow (Bar.) 1; by the Ural village, Bar. 5 and 9; Khabarny I, Bar. 4; by Bolshevik II village, Bar. 1; by Bolshevik III village, Bar. 1; Bely Kluch, Bar. 5; Noviy Kumak, Bar. 9, 28 and 35; by the Glory Obelisk (Orsk), Atkarsky, interment 1; Mordovo, Danilovka, Sloboda Rudnya, Bar. 1; Malyaevka, Bar. 2. In more than half of the cases (2.9% of the total) a burial contains a horse carcass lying on the step: by Bolshevik II and III villages; Noviy Kumak, Bar. 9 and 35; Bely Kluch; by the Glory Obelisk. In other cases, a horse carcass lies next to the human remains at the bottom of the grave. In almost half of the burials (2.4% of the total), the horses were bridled and saddled (bits were found in horse skull teeth, stirrups among the bones). The horse's orientation agrees with the man's, so that if the horse and the man were set on their feet, they would be in the position of a rider ready to mount (Fig. 2, 1-4, 6).

With the same frequency as among the interments with whole-horse burials, in the interments containing parts of a horse (hide, skull and leg bones), these are also placed to the left of the human remains (2.9% of the total): Ivanovsky IV, Bar. 1; Lake Raim, Bar. 4 & 24; Novoorsky I, Bar. 2; Lebedevka VI, Bar. 10; Bashkir stoilo (stall), Bar. 4; Atkarsky, interments 5, 6, 10, 15; Bakhtiyarovka II, Bar. 9, 23, 47, 49, 52, 59, 66, 67, 68, 96 and others. In all these cases, horse skin lay next to the human remains at the bottom of a grave. The horse's orientation also agrees with the man's. In half of the cases, the horse was bridled and saddled (Fig. 2, 3).

The other instances of burial of horse remains together with human remains are isolated interments, but they are representative for the analyzed sample of interments of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries from the Southern Urals and the Volga region, and so they should be also enumerated for completeness sake. The horse skin is to the right of the man at: Lebedevka VIII, Bar. 6; Kara-Oba, Bar. 6; Novopavlovsky, Bar. 7; Kirovsky III, Bar. 5; Bakhtiyarovka II, Bar. 76; Dmitrievka, Bar. 9; Kolobovka, Bar. 4 (altogether 1.5% of the total). The horse skin in the filling of the grave pit: Mokrinsky I, Bar. 13 and 14; Visenmiller III, Bar. 2; Svinukha (Lesnoye), Bar. 14; Zaumorye; Bakhtiyarovka II, Bar. 46, 72; Bakhtiyarovka III, Bar. 84, 95; Abganerovo II, Bar. 2 (1.9% of the total). The horse skin laid on a wooden platform over the human remains: Pokrovsk, Bar. 1; Svinukha (Lesnoye), Bar. 1, 5; Mirniy (Freedenberg), Bar. 3; Zolotushinskaya (northern group), Bar. 1, Zharsuat I, Bar. 1 (1.1% of the total). The horse carcass buried in a separate pit: Mechey-Kirov, Bar. 4; Pchel'nik, Bar. 8; Berezhnovsky I, Bar. 43, 47; Berezhnovsky II, Bar. 5; Tzarevsky, Bar. 1, 4, 5; Leninskoye, Bar. 2 (1.7% of the total).

However, most of the "horsemen interments" in the studied group of Golden Horde burials are represented by burials without a horse, but contain articles of harness, bits and stirrup (17%). Among these, the complete set of harness (conditionally) - bits and stirrup - is found rather seldom, in just 31% of 87 burials with

the articles of harness (5.3% of the total number of the analyzed Golden Horde interments in the southern pre-Urals and the Volga region).

In half of these interments, the articles of harness were disposed by the feet of a human (8.7% of the total) (Fig. 2). In other cases, bits and stirrup were placed beside the bed on which the remains of the body were laid in the grave (Alabaital, Bar. 1; Pchel'nik, Bar. 22; KhudaiBergen III, Bar. 12; Komsomolsky VI, Bar. 3) or their original location could not be fixed.

Burial grounds of the Golden Horde period in the southern pre-Urals and the Volga region do not consist of large numbers of interments. For example, in the largest burial ground, Bakhtiyarovka II, 35 interments of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries have been found. After this, the larger ones are: Pchel'nik burial ground with 18 interments; Bakhtiyarovka III, Zaumorye, Tzarevskom with 15 interments in each; Svinukha had 14 interments, Pokrovsk 13, Rovnoe 12, Mokrinsky 11, Raim Lake 10, etc. The majority of the presently known burial grounds contain from 1 to 5 interments of the Golden Horde period.

"Horsemen interments" were found in 93 burial grounds of the period studied and are distributed among them as follows. The absolute majority of these burial grounds (50.5%) contain interments with horse harness only. The second place, according to the frequency of occurrence, belongs to the burial grounds where interments with horse skin were found (23.6%). The third place goes to the burial grounds containing only interments with a whole skeleton of a horse (14%).

Burial grounds containing "horsemen interments" of different types are quite rare: 6.4% of the burial grounds had interments of a whole horse skeleton and interments with horse harness (Bolshevik II, Noviy Kumak, Pchel'nik, Tlyavgulovskiy, Aktarsk, Berezhnovka I); 4.3% of burial grounds contained interments with horse skin and horse harness only (Lake Raim, Svinukha, Bakhtiyarovka II, Abganerovo II); and finally, in only two burial grounds - Aktarsky and Berezhnovskiy II - all three types of "horsemen interments" were found.

The disposition of the "horsemen interments" shows that they do not have any strict localization and are spread through the Ural-Volga steppes (Fig.1). For instance, the burial grounds with a whole horse skeleton (carcass) are distributed between the Volga region and the pre-Urals in nearly equal proportion (46.2% and 53.8% correspondingly). The majority of interments with parts of a horse (skin, skull and leg bones) (78.4%) were found in the burial grounds of the Volga region, the rest in the southern pre-Urals. Similarly, the interments with horse harness are distributed in such a way that 40.2% are found in the pre-Urals and 59.8% in the Volga region.

One cannot say that the "horsemen interments" of the Ural-Volga region from the Golden Horde period stand out from other synchronous interments in other characteristics of the sepulchral rite. For example, 5 out of 11 Ural interments containing a whole horse skeleton are made under simple earth tumuli (by the Urals village, Noviy Kumak, Bar. 28, Belyi Kluch and by the Glory Obelisk), three interments were made under mixed stone-earth mounds (Tlyagulovskiy, Bar. 1, Bolshevik II and Noviy Kumak, Bar. 35), two were under stone mounds (Khabarniy

I, Bar. 4, Bolshevik III) and one under an earth tumulus bridged by a stone "shell" (Noviy Kumak, Fig. 9). All the interments in the Volga region were made under simple earth mounds.

Similarly, the interments containing horse skin were all made under earth mounds. But one of the pre-Ural interments with an earth mound was bridged by a stone "shell" (Novoorsky I, Bar. 2), in two cases the interments were surrounded by a stone ring (Levedevka VI, Bar. 10; Levedevka VIII, Bar. 6) and in two cases the interments were in small fence made of adobe bricks bridged by earth mounds (Mokrinsky I, Bar. 13 & 14).

The same situation is observed in interments containing only the articles of horse harness: all Volga region interments were made under simple earth mounds, while in the pre-Urals such interments only prevail in 23 cases (65.7%). Among the rest, two interments were made under stone mounds (Zhaksk-Kargala, Bar. 4, Lebedevka IV), and four under stone-earth mounds (Tlyavgulovskiy, Bar. 1, Pchel'nik, Bar. 20, Novocherkassk VII, Bar. 1, Bolshevik II, Bar. 3).

As for the orientation of the remains, which can also be viewed as one of the ethnocultural characteristics, in the absolute majority of cases (89%) it is westerly (with deviations to the north or to the south), as is traditional for the medieval nomads of western Europe. About 10% of the "horsemen interments" (all found in the southern pre-Urals steppes) are orientated in a northerly direction.

The range of finds in the "horsemen interments" of the southern pre-Urals and the Volga region do not change the above-described situation. The absolute majority of the "horsemen interments" are the burials of male warriors, whose accompanying equipment consists of iron arrowheads, placed in an elm quiver, a knife, a fire steel, and, very rarely a sabre. At the same time about half of the interments with a whole horse skeleton may also be interpreted as female, because their inventory is represented by necklaces made from glass beads, bronze mirrors and parts of an elm head-dress, a 'boka' (Ural, Bar. 5, Khabarhiy I, Bar. 4, Bolshevik II, Bar. 1, Noviy Kumak, Bar. 28, Belyy Kluch, by the Glory Obelisk, Aktarskiy, Bar. 1, Sloboda Rudnaya, Bar. 1, Malyaevka, Bar. 2, Krutez I, Bar. 1, Solodovka II, Bar. 2, Leninskoye, Bar. 12).

The same grave contents are found among the burials with horse skin (Bashkir Stoilo, Bar. 4, Lake Raim, Bar. 4, Aktarskiy, Bar. 10, Bakhtiyarovka II, Bar. 49, 52, Vizenmiller III, Bar. 5, and others), and in the burials containing only horse harness (Pchel'nik, Bar. 5 & 22, the second verst from Iletsk defence, Bar. 5, Alebastrovo II, Bar. 5 & 11, Rossypinskiye, Bar. 2, Maryevka, Abganerovo II, Bar. 10).

All the above data give us grounds to think that the "horsemen interments" of the Golden Horde nomads from the Ural-Volga region most likely perform not an ethnic but a social reference point and that they show the property status of the deceased man or woman buried in the grave. They are distinguished from the whole corpus of interments of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries only because they contain the remains of a horse carcass (skeleton), parts of a horse (skin, skull and leg bones) or articles of harness. If we take into consideration that it is the horse that serves in nomadism as an indicator of wealth and an individual's place in the social hierarchy, then only a family with a secure financial position could

afford to kill a horse and bury it with its dead owner. To bury only the horse's skin, having used its meat for the funeral feast, is a second, more modest, level of wealth and social importance, and to put only a horse bridle into the grave is the third level.

We should also take into account that another group (21.9%) stands out among the interments of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries from the Ural-Volga region. In this group, the interments have not a single feature of the "horsemen", but still contain articles of weaponry; iron arrow-heads, quivers, bone bow-plates, military equipment. And here we could see, perhaps, the lowest property status and level of social importance.

Thus, the "horsemen interments" from the Ural-Volga region of the Golden Horde epoch offer us the opportunity to designate several levels in the property and social hierarchy of a nomadic society of the Golden Horde, reflected in the archaeological material. Establishing the social nomenclature and the content of these levels requires information from other sources, but the fact of their existence can hardly be contested.

1-Alabaital; 2-Andreevsky; 3-Alebastrovj II; 4-Bashkir stoilo; 5-Bolshevik II; 6-Bolshevik III; 7-Djangala; 8-Djangala (Novaia Kazanka); 9-Djangala (Saraidin); 10-Jarsuat; 11-Ivanovsky IV; 12- Kamenno-Ozerny; 13-Komsomolsky VI; 14-Lebedevka II; 15-Lebedevka IV; 16-Lebedevka VI; 17-Lebedevka VIII; 18-Liman; 19-Linevsky individual; 20-Linevsky; 21-Mechei-Kirov; 22-Mokrinsky I; 23-Novoorosky; 24-Novocherkassky VII; 25-Novy Kumak; 26-by the Glory Obelisk; 27-Ozero Raim; 28-Pchel'nik; 29-Rossypinsky; 30-Tamar-Utkul; 31-Tlyavuglovsky; 32-Ural; 33-Khabarny I; 34-KhudaiBergen III; 35-KhudaiBergen IV; 36-Chelkar IV; 37-Chelkar V; 38-2-ja versta ot Ileckoi Zashity; 39-Atkarsk; 40-Pokrovsk; 41-Vizenmiller II; 42-Tzarevsky; 43-Leninsk; 44-Avgustovka; 45-Zaumorie; 46-Svinuha; 47-Petrovsk; 48-Kazitckoe; 49-Skatovka; 50-Bakhtiyarovka II; 51-Bakhtiyarovka III; 52-Saratov; 53-Berezhnovsky I; 54-Berezhnovsky II; 55-Rovnoe; 56-Boaro; 57-Kirovsky III; 58-Mariental; 59-Dmitrievka; 60-UstKurdjum; 61-Friedenberg; 62-Zolotuchinskoe; 63-Danilovka; 64-Sloboda Rudnja; 65-Davydovka; 66-Marievka; 67-Pasture of Petrovsk; 68-Alexandrovsky; 69-Blumenfeld; 70-Baranovsky.

ILLUSTRATIONS

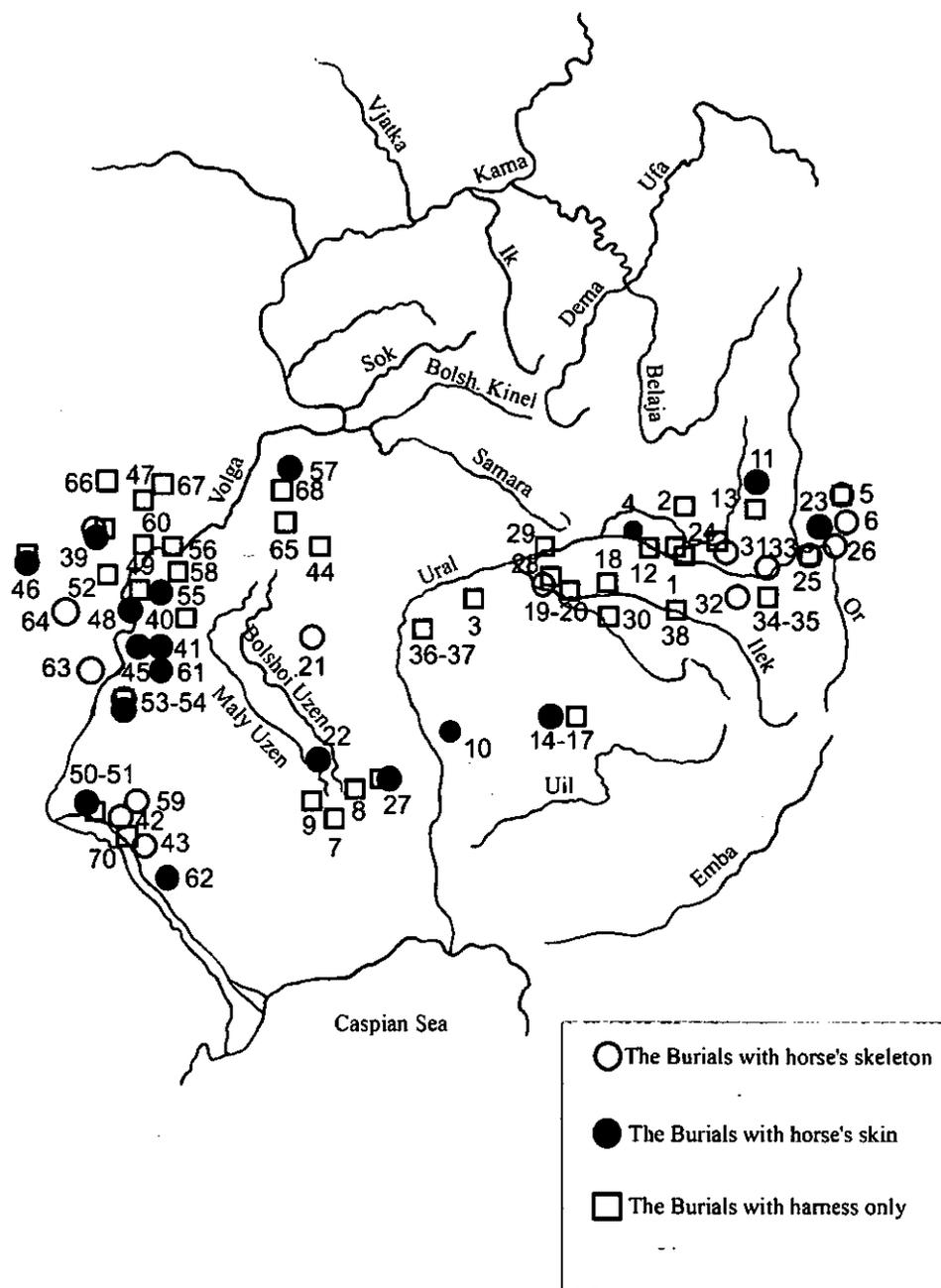


Figure 1. Map of the "Horsemen interments" in the Ural and Volga region

HORSEMEN INTERMENTS OF THE GOLDEN HORDE

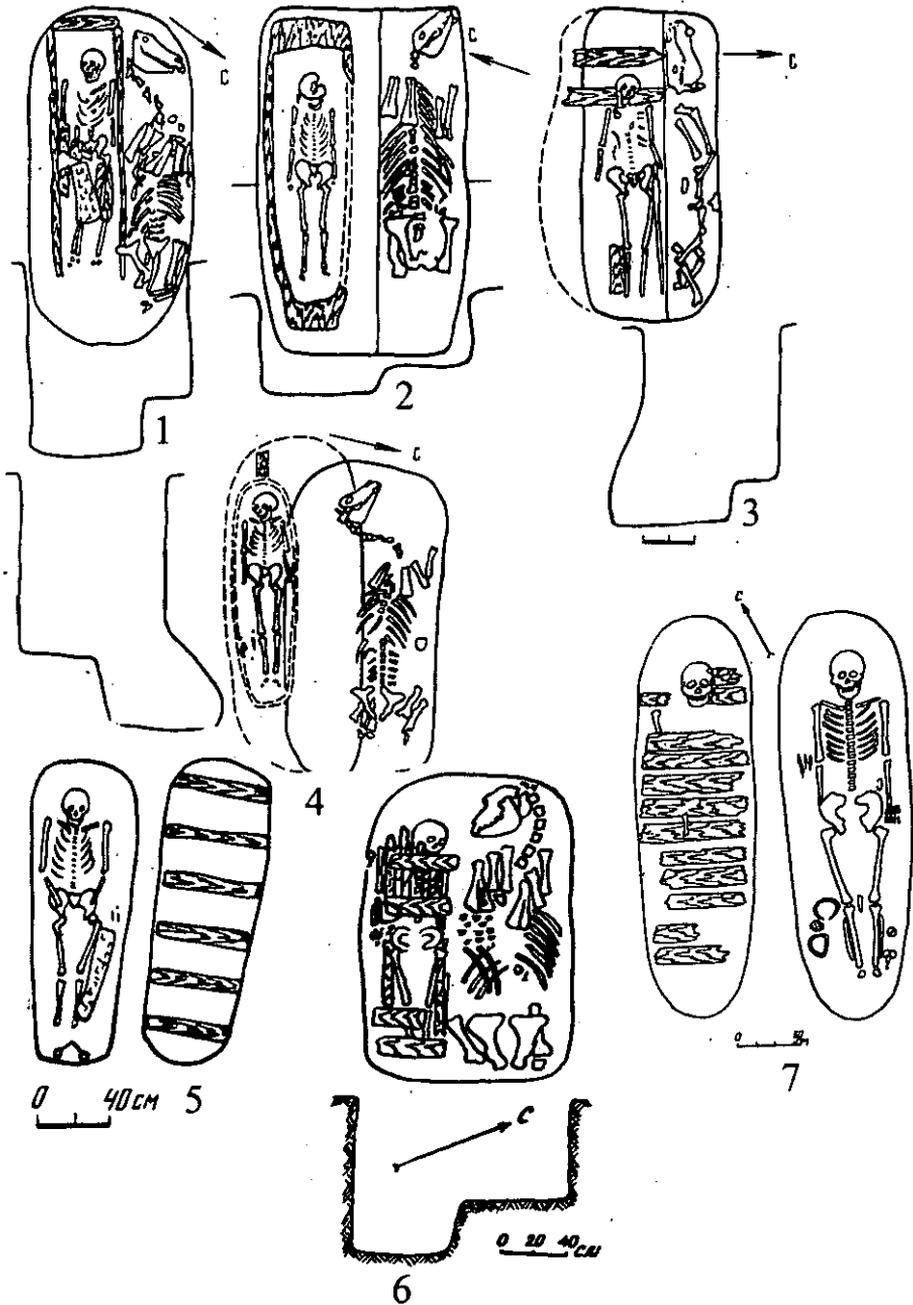


Figure 2. The types of "Horsemen interments" in the Ural and Volga region

1-Noviy Kumak, Bar. 8; 2-Noviy Kumak, Bar. 14; 3-Noviy Kumak, Bar. 2; 4-Noviy Kumak, Bar. 28; 5-Noviy Kumak II, Bar. 2; 6-Tlyavuglovsky, Bar. 2; 7-Novocherkassky VII, Bar. 1.