

The role of the ancient Turks in the translation of cultural achievements to Siberia in the early Middle Ages

Y. S. KHUDYAKOV



The spread of cultural achievements, technical innovations and high technologies from one civilization and people to another was an important and necessary condition for the development of material culture in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The nomadic people of the Eurasian steppes for many centuries played an important role in the translation of new inventions and technologies. Due to their mobile, nomadic way of life, based on access to resources for their livestock, resettlements over large distances during migrations, military activity and the necessity of exchange with people who had other kinds of developed economic activities, nomads had contact with other tribes much more often than did settled farmers or *taiga* hunters. In the course of these contacts, they adopted and broadcast cultural innovations. The role of nomads was especially great in the transfer and spread of the innovations they borrowed in the civilizations of the cities and settled farmers among the populations of the forest-steppe and wooded zones of northern Asia, which did not have direct contact with the countries of Europe and East Asia for many centuries. As a result of military conflicts, trade and political dependence in the military unions of the nomads, the Siberian hunting and fishing tribes could apprehend the technologies for metal processing and manufacturing products from bronze and iron. They borrowed the kinds of the weapons and methods of manufacture that were the most effective for the time, began to use military and horse equipment typical of nomads, their mobile utensils, and jewellery. The nomad influence was significantly reflected in the development of social relations, the political and military organization, the religion and art of the forest people.

In the early Middle Ages, in the life of ethnic groups living on the northern periphery of Central Asia, the role and value of nomadic people and their states strongly increased. In this period some ethnic groups of *taiga* hunters were in po-

litical dependence on the nomadic states, paid them a tribute, formed military contingents for participation in wars on their side, and borrowed elements of their state system, military organization, system of titles, language and other features of their culture. As a result of contact with the nomads of Central Asia, the forest-steppe and *taiga* tribes came to use things made in the craft centers of the Middle East and the Far East. During periods of stability in the nomadic states, trading caravan routes connected Siberia with China, Central Asia, Iran and Europe.

During the early Middle Ages, the most essential role in the distribution of cultural innovations among the population of the forest-steppe and *taiga* areas of Siberia was played by the ancient Turks. The Turks' influence on the Ugrian and Samodian ethnic groups, who were living on the periphery of the nomadic world in western, southern and eastern Siberia, occurred as a result of direct contacts with them and other Turkic-speaking nomad tribes included in the Turks' states.

In the middle of the eleventh century, at the end of the early Middle Ages, all the nomadic people and tribes living in the steppes of Eurasia were incorporated under the authority of Turkish khagans into a uniform powerful state, the First Turk Khaganat. The aristocracy of nomadic ethnic groups of various origin, racial characteristics, culture and language, appeared in the sphere of the political and military influence of the ancient Turks. They began to be guided by and aspire to imitate the Turkish aristocracy and to borrow characteristic elements of ancient Turkish military cultures, among which were the most effective kinds of arms, military equipment, horse harnesses, marching utensils and jewelry. Similar instances of the aspiration to borrow models of the weapons, military and horse equipment can also be found among the vassal tribes living on the northern periphery of the borders of the khaganat, in the forest-steppe and forest areas of Siberia that were dependent on the ancient Turks and other Turkic-speaking nomadic people. They adopted new components of military life-style directly from the ancient Turks, as well as from other Turkic-speaking nomads, having experienced the influence of the prevailing Turk ethnos.

The main object of culture which the nomads aspired to borrow first of all was the weaponry which helped the ancient Turks to achieve many outstanding victories over their opponents in the nomadic world. Among the armaments of ancient Turk soldiers there were highly effective, long-range, complex bows with a wooden base and bone overlays. These differed from the previous bows used in the era of the Huns by their smaller size, compactness, convenience of application and more rapid shooting, which had great value for a victory over the enemy in fighting at a distance. During the early Middle Ages, the design of the bows of the ancient Turks underwent significant changes. Originally they had bows with ending, median lateral and frontal overlays. Later the length of the kibity (lever) and the quantity of overlays were reduced. During the period of existence of the Second Eastern Khaganat and the next centuries, ancient Turkish infantrymen began to use bows of the simplified design with one pair of median lateral over-

lays.¹ Application of such bows made it possible to increase considerably the speed and frequency of shooting.

Under the influence of the ancient Turks, similar bows were borrowed and began to be used everywhere by nomad tribes and the population of the *taiga* areas of western Siberia. Median lateral bone overlays from these bows have been found during excavation of the archeological monuments of the Verhneobsky culture in the valleys of the rivers Tom and Ob (Fig. I, 1). Verhneobsky infantrymen were also armed with other types of bows. Among these there were bows with ending and median lateral overlays. For stronger fastening, the overlays are not only pasted, but also attached to the wooden base of the bow (Fig. I, 8).² Ancient Turkish soldiers used different types of arrows with iron tips for shooting at their enemies. Among finds of ancient Turkish arrowheads, the most distributed were tips with three blades in feather, extended (pentagonal and lengthened) and hexagonal forms. These tips had wide blades with round apertures.³ Under the tips, on the staff, carved bones were attached to make a whistle so that a whistling sound issued during the flight of the arrow. Ancient Turkish infantrymen also used other types of arrows for shooting. However, the northern vassal tribes borrowed specifically three-bladed arrows with extended - pentagonal and lengthened - hexagonal feather (Fig. I, 3). At the same time the population of the Ob river used arrows recognizable from the nomads' previous Hun-Sanbi era, for which three-bladed symmetrical-rhombic and circle tips were typical. Similar arrows were used by the inhabitants of the valley of the river Tom.⁴

Probably the Samodian and Ugric tribes in western Siberia, which represented the Verhneobsky and Relkinsky cultures, also borrowed from the ancient Turks means of protection and some other kinds of weapons for near and hand-to-hand fighting.

During their stay on Mount Altai after resettlement from east Turkestan, the Turks headed by the tribe Ashina, had already used *palashi* and breast armour. Later they began to use shock spears, swords and *palashi*, fighting axes, daggers, and both chain-mail armour and scale armour for protection, helmets and boards, covering their fighting horses with protective body clothes. In the Turkish khaqan army there were military divisions of armed cavalry.⁵

Some of the weapons from this rich arsenal were borrowed by the peoples of the Verhneobsky and Relkinsky cultures who lived in the forest-steppe and forest areas of western Siberia. In the structure of the weapon complexes of these cultures, there were swords and *palashi*, tips of copies of shock spears and cranked

¹ Y. S. Khudyakov, *Arms of medieval nomads of southern Siberia and Central Asia*. Novosibirsk 1986, 141.

² T. N. Troizkaya and A.V. Novikov. *Verhneobskaya culture in Novosibirsk near Ob' river*. Novosibirsk 1998, 35.

³ Khudyakov, *Arms of medieval nomads*, 145.

⁴ Troizkaya-Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 36-37; A. M. Ilyushin, *Ethnocultural history of the Kuznetsk hollow in epoch of the middle ages*. Kemerovo 2005, 83.

⁵ Khudyakov, *Arms of medieval nomads*, 153-159.

daggers, plates from breast armour and sphere-conic helmets. These finds, from the monuments of Blijniye Elbany, Tatarskiye mogilki, Chingisy, Sapogovo, Saratovka, Relka and others in the pool of Ob and Ñim', speak of the high level of development of military science and close contacts with ancient Turks and Kyrgyz in the military sphere.⁶

Apparently, the bearers of the Verhneobsky and Relkinsky cultures could borrow belts and harness complexes executed in heraldic style. Among these items of armament there were belt attachments, metal plates, overlays and strap ends (Fig. I, 11-13, 15-21). Similar things were found in tombs in Relka, Umna, Yurt-Akbalyk, Kamenny Mys, Saratovka and others on Ob and Ñim'.⁷

Such items of armament were widely spread in the sixth-eighth centuries over the whole territory of the steppes of Eurasia in the western area from Altai to the Danube.⁸ However, in the territory of the headwaters of the Ob and Ñim' rivers, such things could be obtained from Mount Altai where they were found in the complex of things from the monuments of Kudyrge and Chatyr.⁹

At the end of the early middle ages in the Eurasian steppes, ancient Turks played the most important role in the spreading of a new type of saddle with a rigid skeleton and aimings.¹⁰ Probably, the early forms of aimings were borrowed by representatives of the Verhneobsky culture. Similar aimings were found during the excavation of the Verhneobsky monument at Krohalyovka 23 in the area of Novosibirsk (Fig. I, 22). They could get to western Siberia from Mount Altai where similar aimings were also found.¹¹ Other elements, for example horse furniture, including a bit of simplified design with endings of links, were also borrowed. These were found in the monuments of Krohalyovka, Umna, Yurt-Akbalyk and others in the area of Novosibirsk, Vaganovo and Saratovka in the

⁶ M. P. Gryaznov, *History of ancient tribes of the Ob' river on excavation near village Bolshaya rechka*. Materials and researches of USSR archeology, Moscow-Leningrad 1956, 100; A. P. Umansky, *Verhneobskaya culture's burial grounds on Verhnii Chumish. Bronze and the Iron age of Siberia*. Novosibirsk 1974, 139; L. A. Chindina, *Burial ground Relka on the average Ob'*. Tomsk 1977, 27-29, 32-33; Troizkaya-Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 43; Ilyushin, *Ethnocultural history of the Kuznetsk*, 83.

⁷ Chindina, *Burial ground Relka*, 36-39; Troizkaya-Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 55; Ilyushin, *Ethnocultural history of the Kuznetsk*, 83.

⁸ A. K. Ambroz, *East European and the Central Asian steppes from the fifth to the first half of the eighth century*. Eurasia steppes in the early middle ages, USSR Archeology, Moscow 1981, 16-17.

⁹ A. A. Gavrilova, *Burial ground Kudirghe as a source for the history of the Altai tribes*. Moscow-Leningrad 1965, 38-39; Y. S. Khudyakov and V. A. Kocheev, *Ancient Turks mummy burial place in district Chatyr at village Jana-Aul in Mountain Altay*. The Humanities in Siberia: Archeology and Ethnography, Novosibirsk 1997, 16.

¹⁰ S. I. Vainshtein, *Some questions about the ancient Turkic culture (relating to the archeological researches in Tuva)*. Soviet Ethnography, Moscow 1966, 62-74.

¹¹ Troizkaya-Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 45; Y. V. Grichhan and Y. A. Plotnikov, *Archaic aiming from Mountain Altai*. Eurasia: Cultural heritage of ancient civilizations, Novosibirsk 1999, 76-77.

area of Kemerovo and in Mount Altai (Fig. I, 14).¹² Similar bits were spread in the early Middle Ages over a large territory. They have appeared in the valley of the rivers Tom' and Ob' from Mount Altai where they were applied by the ancient Turks.

The problems of ethnic-cultural contacts of ancient Turks with the Samodian and Ugriic tribes of Western Siberia have been discussed in the scholarly literature. In L. A. Chindinoy's opinion, in the seventh century the territory of the Verhneobsky culture was included in the Turkish state, part of the population was assimilated by the Turks and began to bury their dead in a typical Turkish ceremony accompanied by a riding horse. At the same time, the Samodian tribes of the Relkinsky culture kept their independence and enjoyed peaceful relations with the Turks.¹³ T. N. Troitskaya and A. V. Novikov consider that the spreading of Turkish authority over the population of the Verhneobsky culture passed through several stages. During the existence of the first and the second East Khaganats, this population established stable connections with the ancient Turks of Altai. Exactly in this period the influx of the complex of material things of the ancient Turks into Western Siberia was at its highpoint. They consider that it was not attempted expansion, but cultural influence. In their opinion, the ancient Turks moving to western Siberia territory took place later, during the existence of the Ugur Khaganat.¹⁴

On the contrary, D. G. Savinov supposes that the representatives of the Verhneobsky culture were ancestors of a Turkic-speaking *ethnos*, the Kypchaks.¹⁵ Other scholars think that the process of Turkish influence on the population of western Siberia started later. Ugriian and Samodian tribes of the forest-steppe areas of this region might experience the Turkish influence during the existence of Kimaks and Kirghiz Khaganats and the Mongol empire.

The influence of Turkish nomads on the population of the forest-steppe and wooded areas of western Siberia continued during the long historical period which began after the Huns' conquest of the Sayano-Altai. Ancient Turks played the most appreciable role in this process during the existence of the first Turkic Khaganat in the sixth–eighth centuries, when the population living on the border of the northern part of the state had apprehended the greatest inflow of innovations in the sphere of the ancient Turks' material and spiritual culture, and also borrowed some elements of their funerary rights. In the following period of the existence of the second East Turkic Khaganat, similar borrowing was not so appreciable. Probably this speaks about the unstable position inside the khaganat and the orientation of its external expansion in a southerly direction. In Siberia the claims of the east Turks were limited to Sayano-Altai.

The new stage of Turkic influence on the Samodian, Ugriic and Ketts population of Siberia was connected with the rise of the Kyrghiz and Kymaks states.

¹² Troizkaya–Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 44–45; Ilyushin 2005, 83; Gavrilova, 1965, 80.

¹³ Chindina, *Burial ground Relka*, 132.

¹⁴ Troizkaya–Novikov, *Verhneobskaya culture*, 85.

¹⁵ D. G. Savinov, *South Siberian tribes in the epoch of the ancient Turks*. Leningrad 1984, 27.

These states had large areas, which were not populated by Turk ethnoses included in the military-management system of these khaganats. The result of this was the unification of some components of the culture connected with military activity, administrative managerial control and the functioning of state power. Later these processes led to the increasing role of Turkic languages in the life of the population of the khaganats and the dissemination of Turkish culture. It became common to find Turkic-speaking nomadic people in the steppes of Eurasia. Among the Ugric, Samodian and Ketts population of Siberia, Turkic-speaking Kyrghiz and Kypchaks began to play the leading role. This role continued in the following period of the inclusion of these areas into the Mongol empire and the Golden Horde.

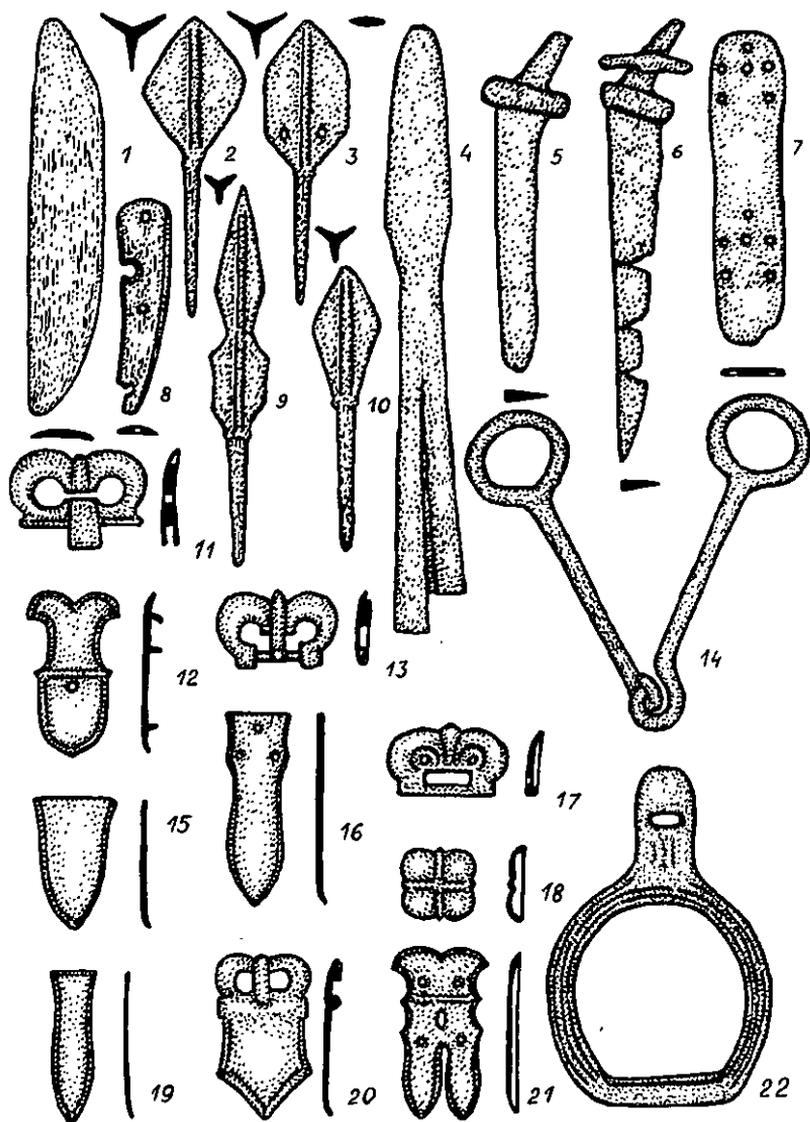


Figure 1. Examples of arms, belt sets and horse harnesses distributed in the population of Western Siberia as a result of ancient Turk influence.

Legend to Figure 1:

Examples of arms, belt sets and horse harnesses distributed in the population of Western Siberia as a result of ancient Turk influence: 1, 8 - bow overlays; 2, 3, 9, 10 - arrow tips; 4 - spear; 5, 6 - daggers; 7 - armour plate, 11-13, 15-21 - metal plates and metal jewellery, 14 - bits; 22 - aiming.

Locations of finds: 1, 21 - Umna; 2, 3, 6, 11 - Saratovka; 4, 5 - Chingisy; 7 - Bligniye Elbany; 9, 22 - Krohalevka; 10 - Krasniy yar; 12, 15, 19 - Yurty; 13, 16, 17, 20 - Relka; 14, 18 - Yurt-Akbalyk.