

Pioneers of Archaeological Research on Nomads in Medieval South Siberia

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The archeological monuments of South Siberia (the territory between the middle reach of the Chulym river in the west, the Biryusinsk Plateau in the east and the West and East Sayan Mountains in the south) have attracted researchers' attention for a long time. Research in Siberian archaeology began with the academic expeditions of the eighteenth century; however the beginning of identification of medieval nomadic monuments in South Siberia was marked with the studies by V. V. Radlov in the second half of the nineteenth century. He was the first to translate Orkhon and Yenisei inscriptions and also the first to suggest a general archaeological periodization for burials from the Bronze Age to the mounds of the Yenisei Kirghiz,¹ although it is now considered outdated. A. V. Adrianov made his contribution to studying mounds of the *chaatas* type (*chaatas* - "war-stone", the Khakass local word for clannish cemeteries of the Yenisei Kirghiz).

S. A. Teploukhov made a breakthrough in Siberian archaeological study, starting in the 1920s. He developed the first scientific classification of the archaeological cultures of the Minusinsk basin,² which generally retains its scientific significance up to the present. Teploukhov identified a total of thirteen cultural and chronological stages from the Early Bronze Age to the medieval period. To reach a better understanding of the historical situation in the Minusinsk Basin in the medieval period, Teploukhov referred to Chinese chronicles. As a result, the medieval materials in his periodization acquired a relative chronology and ethnic association, and constituted the four final stages of this cultural and chronological scheme.

The tenth cultural stage is represented by mounds of the *chaatas* type. Teploukhov described the surface burial constructions known as *chaatas* as round, low mounds of stone surrounded with big, tall stones. Body burials are rare in these shallow quadrangular holes, more often small calcinated bones were buried. Among the grave goods, high narrow-necked vessels of well washed clay

¹ V. V. Radlov, *Iz Sibiri: Stranitsy dnevnika*. Moscow 1989, 410-480.

² S. A. Teploukhov, "Drevnie pogrebeniya v Minusinskom krae," *Materially po etnografii*. 3:2 (1927).

with stripes of impressed ornament made on a potter's wheel are distinguished. Teploukhov dated *chaatas* cemeteries to the fifth–seventh centuries AD. He considered that at that period the Kirghiz settled in the Minusinsk region more or less firmly.³

Teploukhov connected the beginning of a new, eleventh, stage with the conquest of the Yenisei Kirghiz by the Turks in the seventh century. This stage is characterized by single graves under high stone banks. In the grave found by Teploukhov in a saddleback by the river Tashtyk, there was a burial in an extended position oriented towards the north-west, near it, in the south-west part of the hole, there was a horse skeleton. Grave goods consisted of iron three-bladed arrowheads, iron and bronze buckles with tongue, decorated bone plates from a quiver, iron stirrups, etc. Burying a man together with a horse, a rite typical of nomads, was a new type of archeological monument for the Minusinsk region. Teploukhov suggested that this grave belonged to one of the Altai Turks, who had appeared in that region in the seventh century.⁴

Graves covered with small stone banks and clustered into cemeteries were related by Teploukhov to the twelfth stage. Burials of men both with and without horses were found in the graves. The grave goods are represented with iron and bone buckles, snaps from harnesses or snaffle bits, copper facings for vessels, iron adzes and drabbles, as well as ornaments of Chinese origin. A stone sculpture of that period depicts a man dressed with a belt and holding a vessel in his hands. Teploukhov correlated archeological monuments of the twelfth stage with tumultuous events of the history of South Siberia: the conquest of the Yenisei Kirghiz by the Uyghur in the eighth century and then a new rise of the Kirghiz in the ninth–tenth centuries.⁵

The cemetery of Saragashinskiy descent not far from the village of Bateni belongs to the latter stage (eleventh–twelfth centuries). "In earth holes under slabs, sometimes in the covering of thin boards, there were single skeletons put on their backs". Of all the grave goods Teploukhov specifically noted iron hissing arrowheads and iron drabbles with big rings.⁶

Besides his research in the Minusinsk Basin, Teploukhov also headed the Tuva archaeological expedition in 1926–1927 and 1929. The goal of the expedition was to study monuments in Tuva and establish their cultural and historical periodization. Tuva is situated south of the Sayan mountains, which represent the physical and geographical border between northern and central Asia. Teploukhov believed (especially after his work in P. K. Kozlov's Mongolian expedi-

³ S. A. Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskih kultur Minusinskogo kraia," *Materialy po etnografii* 4:2 (1929), 54–55.

⁴ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskih kultur Minusinskogo kraia," 55.

⁵ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskih kultur Minusinskogo kraia," 55.

⁶ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskih kultur Minusinskogo kraia," 58.

tion) that studying monuments of the region was extremely important for a better understanding of the cultural influence of central Asia on northern Asia. According to Teploukhov, the cultures that developed in Tuva over quite a long period of time differed from the cultures of the Minusinsk Basin and were more closely connected economically with the cultures of the Mongolian steppes. He believed that the peoples of the steppe performed the role of middlemen in exchange trade between the civilized southern countries making and selling metal goods and the tribes of the northern Asia forest area who supplied furs.⁷

The classification of Tuvinian burial constructions by Teploukhov was quite provisional and included six groups of burial monuments of the Iron Age. The fifth and sixth groups were related to the medieval period. The fifth group of monuments consisted of graves and holes for sacrifices covered with stone banks and containing rich grave goods, which enabled him to date them to the Tang period (seventh–tenth centuries AD). He dated the final, sixth, group of burials to the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries. Teploukhov found no similar late monuments in the Minusinsk Basin, and their presence in Tuva helped to supplement the classification of metal cultures of the Minusinsk region.⁸

In his papers, Teploukhov proposed a number of interesting concepts, many of which were not completely clear to scholars until recently. Having a considerable training in the natural sciences and being a follower of the paleoethnological approach, he considered it necessary to carry out a complex study of people and the environment in which a social culture developed. According to Teploukhov, it is only by these complex paleoethnological studies in Asia that is possible to solve “such fundamental issues as human origins, movements of peoples, the emergence and spreading of this or that culture and cultural influence, and their alternation”.⁹ Nowadays this complex approach to a research phenomenon is promoted as the primary and most promising one.

Besides, in modern Russian science the method of archaeological microdistrict study has become a very popular one. In the 1920s Teploukhov was the first to apply it to studying and systematizing archaeological monuments in South Siberia, having selected for his excavations a site with a territory of 6×12 kilometers, near the village of Bateni in the center of the Minusinsk Basin on the left bank of the Yenisei.

Teploukhov was the first Russian archeologist to propose an ecological approach to archaeological study. He placed great significance on the natural environment within which the archaeological cultures of South Siberia were formed. For instance, Teploukhov believed that the diverse landscape types of the Minusinsk region created a beneficial economic foundation for human society. He

⁷ Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv permskoj oblasti, st. 613, list 3, doc. 167, f. 1–2.

⁸ «Arkheologicheskaya Tuvinskaya ekspeditsiya (1929 g. Ruk. S.A. Teploukhov),» in *Otchet o deyatel'nosti Akademii Nauk SSSR za 1929 g. Otd. 2. Otchet o nauchnykh komandirovkakh i ekspeditsiyakh*, Leningrad 1930, 14–16.

⁹ Teploukhov, “Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskih kultur Minusinskogo kraja,” 41.

regarded this region as a contact zone and considered its study "a key to understanding the ancient cultures of the whole of Northern Asia".¹⁰ The Minusinsk region, in Teploukhov's opinion, possessed very rich raw material resources: "land rich in wild animals and game birds, excellent pastures, fertile soils, ... rich ore mines".¹¹

He repeatedly emphasized the determining influence of the geographical environment on historical processes as a whole as well as on the development of ancient and medieval communities in particular.

Firstly, Teploukhov considered that the unusual diversity of the natural environment in the Minusinsk Basin saved the local population from the severe consequences of climate fluctuations. Secondly, he believed that "the mountains and forests were familiar to the local population, while not being an insuperable obstacle for partial immigration of certain elements of culture into the Minusinsk Basin and for relations between the local population and the rest of the world". At the same time he supposed that in the early periods these natural borders were insurmountable for "the mass migration of peoples and for the entire penetration of alien cultures",¹² and that the main movements of tribes started in the period of migration of peoples.¹³ Thirdly, he regarded ancient people as part of nature and noted the influence of natural factors on the formation of social stratification. Fourthly, within the context of concepts of anthropological geography, Teploukhov defined the very reasons for migration: "There are reasons to believe that periodic changes in climate conditions of Asia were the reason for migration of peoples".¹⁴

Teploukhov stated the dependence of the area of habitation of a particular ethnos on the geographical borders of a region. He wrote: "Cultural and general zones also coincide with natural regions viewed in historical perspective. However wide were the fluctuations of ethnic borders in different periods of the life of Northern Siberian and Central Asian peoples, eventually they always stopped at the geographical borders".¹⁵

Unfortunately, in 1933 Teploukhov was prosecuted for political reasons, his scientific activity was cut off while it was still on the rise, his concepts were forgotten for several decades. After all, Teploukhov's term "cultural and economic zones" (*kul'turno-bytovye zony*) was a forerunner of the modern concept "econom-

¹⁰ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskich kultur Minusinskogo kra-ya," 41-42.

¹¹ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskich kultur Minusinskogo kra-ya," 57.

¹² Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskich kultur Minusinskogo kra-ya," 57.

¹³ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskich kultur Minusinskogo kra-ya," 49.

¹⁴ GAPO, st. 613, list 3, doc. 167, f. 2.

¹⁵ Teploukhov, "Opyt klassifikatsii drevnikh metallicheskich kultur Minusinskogo kra-ya," 41-42

ic and cultural types".¹⁶ His ecological approach prompted D. G. Savinov to distinguish "cultural and ecological areas" and to study in full the natural environment and culture of early medieval societies of central Asia and South Siberia.¹⁷

The next great contribution to studying medieval nomads in South Siberia was made by S.V. Kiselyov. From 1928 to 1940 Kiselyov conducted systematic research in Khakassia and the Minusinsk region as well as in Altai. As a result he multiplied the volume of historical data many times over. Together with his wife and colleague, L. A. Evtyukhova, Kiselyov studied archaeological monuments from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages over twelve field seasons. In the course of his research he found and explored Kirghiz burials, which became fundamental for archaeology: among them the burials at Malye Kopyony and Tes', the Uibatsky *chaatas*, and the Kirghiz settlement near Malye Kopyony. Along with written sources, Kiselyov made use of archaeological sources for historical reconstruction. He was the first to describe the task of studying the class social order and process of state formation among the Yenisei Kirghiz.

His decades-long research allowed Kiselyov to compose a fundamental work, *The Ancient History of South Siberia*, in which archaeological sources complemented and redefined the data from Chinese manuscripts.

In 1934 in Altai, Kiselyov studied Old Turk fences with sculptures in the locality of Kulada on the river Karakol.¹⁸ One of the most wide-scale researches was carried out on the Chuisky high road in 1935.¹⁹ Following S. A. Teploukhov, Kiselyov paid special attention to the natural and climatic conditions of ancient people's lives, and that is why he selected the Kuray steppe for his excavations. Wide-scale work in a valley in the middle reach of the Chuya river was undertaken due to the fact that in this area, rich in natural resources, there were great opportunities for extensive cattle breeding in ancient times and in the Middle Ages. The district was rich in diverse archaeological monuments and in a few locations was cut with ancient irrigation channels. Kiselyov believed that this territory was more closely connected with the south, with the steppes of the higher Chuya, joining with the steppe areas of north-western Mongolia. He considered studying relations between Altai and the central Asian South to be one of the most urgent tasks of Russian archaeology.²⁰ During one field season, he excavated twenty-three mounds of the "runic script age". The evidence of burial ceremonies and grave goods enabled him to date these monuments back to the Old Turkic period. Besides, Old Turkic stone fences were studied.²¹

¹⁶ M. G. Levin, N. N. Cheboksarov, "Khozyaistvenno-kul'turnye tipy i istoriko-etnograficheskie oblasti (K postanovke voprosa)," *Sovetskaya etnografiya* 4 (1955), 3-17.

¹⁷ D. G. Savinov, G. V. Dluzhnevskaya, *Ekologiya i kul'tura rannesrednevekovykh obshchestv Tsentral'noy Azii i Yuzhnoy Sibiri*. Saint-Petersburg 2008, 5, 211-225.

¹⁸ S. V. Kiselyov, "Iz rabot Altaiskoy ekspeditsii Gosudarstvennogo istoricheskogo muzeya v 1934 g." *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 1 (1935), 98.

¹⁹ *Arkhiv Instituta istorii material'noy kultury RAN*, st. 2, list 1, 1935, doc. 161.

²⁰ GARM Archive, inventory no. 59-43, f. 28.

²¹ S. V. Kiselyov, "Nekotorye rezul'taty Sayano-Altayskoy ekspeditsii 1936 g." *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 1 (1936), 282-284; *Idem*, "Kurayskaya step' i Staro-Bardinskiy rayon, 1935

Kiselyov accomplished excavations of Old Turkic mounds near Tuekta. In his opinion, they differed more in the social status of the buried than chronologically. On these grounds, Kiselyov proposed that this differentiation could be correlated to a traditional Old Turkic stratification into noble people, free armed people and the layer of slaves deprived of rights.²² This model is typical of social concepts of the 1930s, nevertheless it does not detract from virtues of the researcher's works.

The main location of excavations in 1936–1938 was the Uibat *chaatas* cemetery, where Tashtyk and Old Kirghiz burials dominated.²³ His research into one of the late groups of Tashtyk burials enabled Kiselyov to reveal a connection between the Tashtyk and Old Kirghiz cultures:

“... burial ceremony, ... analogies in ceramics and burial constructions with earlier Tashtyk ones make us suppose that burials found by us, being of late Tashtyk period, are dated presumably by the time before the fifth century, and at last we find in them a relation between classical ‘Tashtyk’ and the age of stone mounds, the culture of Turkic tribes named in the Orkhon inscriptions as ‘Kirghiz’.”²⁴

Simultaneously with excavating rich Tashtyk burials, wide-scale excavations of large mounds of the Kirghiz nobility were carried out for the first time.²⁵ Excavation of a significant number of Old Khakass mounds showed that the ceremony and structure of burial construction were the direct continuation of Tashtyk tradition. Kiselyov saw the proof of continuity between magnificent burials of the Tashtyk nobility and Kirghiz graves rich in grave goods as well.²⁶

As a result of his investigation of the Uibat *chaatas* cemetery, a vast collection of archaeological material for the least studied period in the history of the Minusinsk region (the first millennium AD) was created. According to Kiselyov, it was in that period that the formation of the Khakass ethnos was taking place. He came to the conclusion that the Tashtyk culture was the foundation for the formation of Old Khakassian (Kirghiz) culture. The results he obtained, on the one hand, enabled Kiselyov to disprove the longstanding paradigm of the isolated character of the development of the Minusinsk region and to draw parallels in the historical development of certain regions (Sayan, Altai, Mongolia), and, on the other hand, supported the thesis of the indigenous character of the majority of Khakass people.

god,” in *Arkheologicheskie issledovaniya v RSFSR 1934–1936 gg.* Moscow-Leningrad 1941, 298–304.

²² S. V. Kiselyov, “Sayano-Altayskaya arkheologicheskaya ekspeditsiya v 1937 g.” *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 2 (1938), 238.

²³ Kiselyov, “Kurayskaya step’ i Staro-Bardinskiy rayon, 1935 god,” 306–308.

²⁴ S. V. Kiselyov, “Nekotorye rezul’taty Sayano-Altayskoy ekspeditsii 1936 g.” *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 1 (1937), 250.

²⁵ *Arkhiv Instituta istorii material’noj kultury RAN*, st. 2, list 1, 1936, doc. 255.

²⁶ S. V. Kiselyov, “Sayano-Altayskaya arkheologicheskaya ekspeditsiya v 1938 g.” *Vestnik drevnei istorii* 3 (1939), 256.

In view of all of the above, it is rather odd to find in modern papers statements like this: "Employment of other scholars' findings by Kiselyov virtually without any changes is quite natural as his work had mainly reviewing and summarizing character".²⁷

Kiselyov was the first Russian archaeologist to describe in detail the characteristics of the economy of the Yenisei Kirghiz, which combined various kinds of economic activities: cattle breeding, farming, handicrafts and trading,²⁸ and thus he showed its complex character. For the first time, through integrating archaeological and historical sources, Kiselyov restored the general picture of the social order and state system of the Kirghiz, under which people were not yet completely dependent on the nobility. Whereas Radlov identified 'el' with the people, Kiselyov believed that *el* was an entity of the steppe nobility headed by the Kirghiz Kagan.²⁹ Certain sections of his work cover the mental culture of the Kirghiz.³⁰

A separate chapter of Kiselyov's monograph *The Ancient History of South Siberia* is devoted to the Altai Turks. The scarcity of written evidence of the Altai Turks of the eighth–tenth centuries increases the significance of the archaeological monuments investigated by Kiselyov. He was the first to distinguish three chronological groups of medieval burial constructions in Altai, and to carry out comparative analysis of material culture of the Orkhon and Altai Turks.³¹ In the long run, Kiselyov not only introduced for scientific use new archaeological materials obtained from his excavations, but he also conducted one of the first historical reconstructions of the life of South Siberian medieval nomads.

Thus, both Teploukhov and Kiselyov made significant contributions to the study of medieval nomads. They were the first to systematize archaeological records and thus to create the periodization of medieval monuments. They also conducted the comparative analysis of written and archaeological sources and suggested new approaches to the study of nomadic culture, approaches that are successfully applied by modern researchers.

²⁷ S. A. Vasyutin, P. K. Dashkovskiy, *Sotsialno-politicheskaya organizatsiya kochevnikov Tsentral'noy Azii pozdney drevnosti i rannego srednevekov'ya (otechestvennaya istoriografiya i sovremennyye issledovaniya*. Barnaul 2009, 138.

²⁸ Kiselyov, *Drevnyaya istoriya Yuzhnoy Sibiri*. Moscow 1951, 568–593.

²⁹ Kiselyov, *Drevnyaya istoriya Yuzhnoy Sibiri*, 593–596.

³⁰ Kiselyov, *Drevnyaya istoriya Yuzhnoy Sibiri*, 604–635.

³¹ Kiselyov, *Drevnyaya istoriya Yuzhnoy Sibiri*, 488–558.