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ON THE PROBLEM OF THE “HUNS-SARMATIANS”¹

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Academic discussion is necessary and commendable, as it stimulates further studies and shows the progress of scholarly research. In particular, this applies to the discussion on the genesis of Sarmatian culture, in which new perspectives should be welcome. Recently, Sergei Botalov and his co-authors proposed the hypothesis that the Late Sarmatian sites of the Ural steppes and Kazakhstan dated to the 2nd–4th c. AD and belonged to an ethnos which they named the “Huns-Sarmatians”.² This hypothesis has been strongly criticised by archaeologists of the Moscow School;³ Marina Moshkova, Vladimir Malashev and Sergei Bolelov – based on a detailed analysis of the historical and archaeological evidence concerning the “Hunnish-Sarmatian” group – have already discussed the weak aspects of this hypothesis. While I agree with many of their remarks, including criticism of some methodological breaches and stylistic mistakes, we should accept at least the novelty of Botalov’s approach, which in my opinion is not as useless as it appears to be to some scholars. Although some criticism of opponents is well-grounded, he addressed, albeit in a disputable and imperfect form,

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¹ This article is part of the author’s project in the Institute for the Study of Ancient World of New York University (NYC).

² Botalov 1993; 1996; 2003; Botalov, Polushkin 1996; Botalov, Gutsalov 2000; Botalov, Kostiuikov, Iaminov 2006.

³ Moshkova 2007; Malashev 2007; Moshkova, Malashev, Bolelov 2007.

the well-known fact of the cultural proximity of the Sarmatians and the cultures of the Xiongnu, China and the herdsmen of Southern Siberia (Pazyryk, Tashtyk, Sargatka) since the 2nd c. BC. This proximity, already noted by Michael Rostovtzeff,⁴ has indeed, until now, had no satisfactory explanation. The Hunnic and Chinese elements of the Sarmatian culture used to be mainly explained by trade or cultural ties.⁵ Meanwhile, the so-called northern branch of the Silk Road, which was the real mechanism of these ties, has never been seriously taken into consideration. Evgenii Lubo-Lesnichenko and the supporters of his point of view (Nikolai Berlizov, Andrei Bezrukov and others) believe that the Sarmatians were directly involved in trade with Chinese merchants. According to Berlizov, these trade relations either resulted in an exchange of goods or were established as a kind of payment to Sarmatians for their services escorting and passing caravans through their land. Berlizov distinguished two chronological stages of these trade relations: 1) late 1st c. BC–early 1st c. AD and 2) end of the 1st–beginning of the 2nd c. AD.⁶

The question arises, however, as to why the Chinese offered a rather peculiar set of merchandise (apart from silk) to the northern barbarians. I am referring here to swords with jade ornaments and to bronze mirrors, which were, in different periods, forbidden to be exported from China,⁷ or to ritual marble and alabaster vessels with Lunar rabbit-shaped handles. It is not determined through exactly which kind of cultural ties some elements of the Xiongnu culture were embedded in the Sarmatian culture. Should we speak about marriage ties, alliances, military links? As examples I can list the bows with bone stiffening laths and lamellar armour, the ceremonial belts with double buckles decorated in Ordos Animal Style and the models of cauldrons. There is also no coherent explanation as to how the Chinese dragon, the “twisted crupper” of Pazyryk style, and the Xiongnu “bilateral” position (a decorative device applied in the art) were incorporated into the Sarmatian iconography.

Although these questions have so far had no clear answers, they remain in the focus of scholarly interest. It was Boris Raev⁸ who first noted the affinity of the Pazyryk and Alanic cultures. Sergei Iatsenko constructed an extensive list of the Central Asian and Chinese elements found in the culture of the Alans, offering his own version of their origin.⁹ The problem of the Sarmatian-Chinese ties formed the key question of the work of Anatolii Skripkin. He has discussed in a

⁴ Rostovtsev 1929.

⁵ Bezrukov 2000, 150–151.

⁶ Berlizov 1993, 34.

⁷ Yü 1967, 129, 130.

⁸ Raev 1984; 1989.

⁹ Iatsenko 1993.

series of papers¹⁰ the Chinese and Central Asian elements of the Sarmatian culture of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. Skripkin showed the ambiguity of the Sino-Sarmatian ties in different times. In his view, the appearance of these elements in the Sarmatian culture can be seen as the result of political and ethnic movements at the turn of the 2nd c. BC, in connection with the fall of Graeco-Bactria and the victories of the Xiongnu over the Yuezhi and Wusun. According to him, these nomads have moved to the west, to Central Asia, and it was through them that the Chinese objects reached Sarmatians.¹¹ A weak point in this scheme is, however, the fact that in the Central Asian sites, which (very conditionally!) can be attributed to the Yuezhi and Wusun, the contribution of the Chinese and Inner Asian cultural elements is less discernible than in Sarmatian graves of the same period.

The relationship between the Sarmatian, Chinese and Central Asian ethnic and cultural traditions can be seen once more in the relics of the Middle Sarmatian period. The unity of these cultural traditions appears more clearly in the elite culture, the identification of which with the Alans there seems to be no objection. We will discuss below some comparable elements of the Alan culture in the second half of the 1st–early 2nd c. AD and of the cultures of Inner Asia. The majority of the similar features of these cultures are already listed by Sergei Iatsenko. It should be noted that, despite in fact using the same material, we came to slightly differing conclusions.

The Pazyryk culture

At the head of the wooden sarcophagus from the “royal” Sarmatian burial of the late 1st c. AD near Porohi village (Ukraine), a round hole 22 cm in diameter was made and plugged with an accurately adjusted spigot.¹² The only parallel to this feature in the cultures of the Scythian and Sarmatian world is the similarly placed holes of approximately the same diameter from the Pazyryk cemeteries Ak-Alakha and Iustyd, which are also plugged by spigots.¹³

Well known are the gold plates with four projections, covering the scabbards of daggers, discovered in the “royal” graves of Dachi and Tillya-tepe cemeteries and dated to the 1st century AD. A scabbard of the same construction was found in the synchronous grave of the nobleman of the Sargat culture near Isakovka (Western Siberia). Some finds demonstrate that Sarmatian ordinary wooden

¹⁰ Skripkin 1993; 1996; 1996a; 1998; 2000; 2000a.

¹¹ Skripkin 2000, 27.

¹² Simonenko, Lobai 1991, 7.

¹³ Mylnikov 2000, 133–134.

scabbards had the same construction as the elite's weapons. The prototypes of this original scheme, including wooden models of scabbards, are known mostly in the burial grounds of Pazyryk culture (Iustyd, Borotal, Ulandryk, Barbugazy, Ak-Alakha).¹⁴ These sites are dated to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. It is interesting to note that similar scabbards (doubtless of Alanian origin) are depicted on the Bosporan gravestones of the 1st c. AD.

The same Bosporan gravestones display bow-cases of a special type – with two cylindrical pockets for arrows and a narrow case for the bow.¹⁵ According to scholars' *communis opinio*, the Bosporan cavalry of the first centuries of the Christian Era were armed and equipped in the Alanian way. Identical bow-cases are represented on the belt clasps from the Siberian collection and Alanian Orlat cemetery in Uzbekistan.¹⁶ Bow-cases of a similar type were found in the Pazyryk burial mounds Verkh-Kaldīn-2 and Ak-Alakha and in the famous tombs with mummies on the Tarim river in Xinjiang.¹⁷

Scholars working in this field have already noted the stylistic similarity between the Pazyryk images and the objects in the Sarmatian “gold-turquoise” Animal Style. Most spectacular in this respect is the original iconographic manner of so-called “twisted crupper”. The next common element in the art of Pazyryk and Alanian cultures is the wood and horn vessels with zoomorphic handles. They are known in the Pazyryk culture, and were reproduced in silver and gold in the Alanian milieu. This kind of artistic ideas could hardly be borrowed through the inter-ethnic communication; rather they were transmitted from generation to generation as part of the mentality.

The Xiongnu

Besides this Pazyryk component, the Sarmatian “golden-turquoise” Animal Style displays one more set of features that may be conditionally called an Ordos-Xiongnu component. On the cast bronze and gold buckles from Ordos, Mongolia and South Siberia we find in their iconography all the main devices, motifs and subjects of the Sarmatian Animal Style. Among them one of the most characteristic is the manner of showing the animal body in profile with a head full face over the central part of a body (“bilateral position”). The panther on the clasps of the sword-belt from Porohi and the deer on the gold chape of a Sarmatian sword from Roshava Dragana are depicted exactly in this way. This position

¹⁴ Kubarev 1987, 58–63; Polosmak 2001, 60, fig. 38.

¹⁵ Goroncharovskii 2003, 74, fig. 23.

¹⁶ Ilyasov, Rusanov 1998, 120–121.

¹⁷ Polosmak 2001, 174–181.

is a specific representational device of Xiongnu applied art, present on the bronze clasps from Noin-Ula, the Dyrestuī cemetery, Kosogol'skiī hoard and some Ordos finds without known provenance.

Doubtless, there was a direct connection between the Alanian and Xiongnu ceremonial belts. First of all, they have principally the same construction – a belt with a pair of symmetric clasps, one of which has a rectangular slit and a little peg-fixture, with applied plaques and suspended belts with metal finials. The Xiongnu preferred open-work rectangular, B-shaped and oval bronze and gold clasps. Alans often used the same forms but different techniques – the core was made of iron and covered by a gold sheet with relief images often inlaid with turquoise, beads or glass.

I am convinced that Alanian belts are genetically connected with those of the Xiongnu. Also the Sarmatian “golden-turquoise” Animal Style – its images, motifs, subjects, iconography – based on the South Siberian style, was apparently formed in close contact with and under the strong impact of the Ordos applied arts. To illustrate this point, one just has to compare the polychrome items from the Siberian collection (most of which appear to have been from Sargatka culture graves) as well as Xiongnu and Sarmatian cultures. This kind of similarity is possible only if both people had protracted and immediate contact, in other words they lived together.

Far to the west, in the graves dated to the late 1st c. AD, a type of weapons was found which had been used only by Xiongnu and their close neighbours. In the 1st c. AD the remains of composite bows of the “Hunnic” type, which began to be used by Sarmatians, appear in their graves. The not numerous finds of the bone reinforcing plates allow us to connect the appearance of the so-called “Hunnic” bow with a migration of the Alans in the second half of the 1st c. AD. The Xiongnu began to use composite bows as soon as the 2nd c. BC.

To the unique finds belong three-blade arrow-heads of the Xiongnu type from the Porohi “royal” grave in West Ukraine and Bitak cemetery in the Crimea. The thousand kilometres between Mongolia and Ukraine would be too long a way for these objects to come through hand-to-hand exchange: such small and utilitarian items would be simply shot out and lost for us. Yet here we have whole sets of them. Thus, it seems that the unique finds of Xiongnu arrow-heads from the Ukrainian sites of Porohi and Bitak result from a migration of their owners from distant Inner Asian lands to the North Pontic area.

Some Alanian graves of the late 1st/late 2nd c. AD in Volga and Kuban regions yielded the remains of iron lamellar armor. All of them have parallels in the armor types of Sargatka culture, Xiongnu, and China.¹⁸ It looks as if this

¹⁸ Retz, Yüi Su-hua 1999, 49, figs. 2:6; 4:3,4.

armor was brought directly from Inner Asia by its owners and users in the mid-1st c. AD.

Specific tamga-signs similar to the Sarmatian (Alanian) tamgas of the 1st c. AD are registered on the rocks of Western Mongolia and in the Baity sanctuary on the Ustyurt plateau near the Aral Sea. An impressive set of objects with such tamgas was found in the “royal” grave near Porohi. Here, tamga-signs similar to the Mongolian ones were placed on sacral objects like the torque, ritual cup, sword and belts. Tamga-signs of the same type are known from the pommel of a Sarmatian sword found in the Roshava Dragana barrow in Bulgaria.

China

The Chinese objects in the Sarmatian graves of the 1st/early 2nd c. AD are not very numerous, but still they deserve attention as essential items showing far-reaching connections. First of all, these are bronze mirrors thoroughly studied by Vladimir Guguev and Mikhail Treister.¹⁹ Some thoughts about them have been provided by other authors.²⁰ In the publications of Russian scholars, Chinese mirrors from Sarmatian burials are dated in general as belonging to the Western Han epoch (209 BC – AD 9). In modern Chinese literature²¹ the parallels to these mirrors have rather more exact dates: the mirrors of the *ssu-ju ssu-hui* type²² are dated to the 1st c. BC according to Ann Bulling,²³ items of the *ching-pai* type belong – in the view of Robert Swallow – to the late 1st c. BC/beginning of the 1st c. AD;²⁴ mirrors of the *ming-kuang* type Swallow dates to the end of the 1st c. BC.²⁵ Chinese parallels for the mirrors from Late Sarmatian burials are usually dated slightly later: objects of *presentation* type after Swallow or *ching-pai/ming-kuang* type after Bulling to the middle of the second half of the 1st c. AD;²⁶ and those of *TLV* type to the early 1st c. AD.²⁷

Strikingly, the mirrors dated to the 1st c. BC were found in the burials of the second half of the 1st/beginning of the 2nd c. AD and later. Thus, the Chinese mirrors appear from 70 to 100 years “later” in the Sarmatian sites of South-Eastern Europe. It is to be noted that the presence of Chinese mirrors, and even

¹⁹ Guguev, Treister 1995, 147–148.

²⁰ Berlizov, Kaminskii 1993, 105; Simonenko 2001, 54–57; Li Dzi Yn 2009, 193–197.

²¹ I sincerely thank S. Miniaev for information and reading the Chinese texts.

²² There are many typological schemes of Chinese mirrors, which are not always compatible.

²³ Zhongguo 1997, 247.

²⁴ Zhongguo 1997, 231.

²⁵ Zhongguo 1997, 233–235.

²⁶ Zhongguo 1997, 368.

²⁷ Zhongguo 1997, 309.

of fragments of them, in noble graves, and the appearance of imitations of them shows the high prestige attached to these items in the Sarmatian milieu.

All these circumstances substantially weaken the position of the supporters of the idea that the Silk Route trade was the way by which Chinese mirrors appeared in the Sarmatian culture.²⁸ A. Skripkin maintains that the cause of the appearance of these objects in the South-Eastern European Sarmatian context was not the contacts of Sarmatians and Chinese merchants, but rather the westward migration of the Alans, who carried these items from their original motherland.²⁹ The rather accurate chronological and cultural context of the burials with the Chinese mirrors (the graves of the Alanian nobility belong to the second half of the 1st – beginning of the 2nd c. AD) certainly confirms this idea.

One more type of Chinese objects in Sarmatian culture, which is usually also considered one of the categories of Silk Route merchandise, is jade ornaments of swords (hilts), of their scabbards and scabbard slides. These things, perfectly well known in the Chinese finds, are very rare west of China. Let us take a closer look at the related finds.

A sword placed in the Chinese lacquered scabbard with a jade slide (representing the Grain Class, according to William Trousdale) was found in the aforementioned burial of a noble warrior of Sargat culture near Isakovka in Western Siberia.³⁰ The short scabbard slide dates to the Western Han epoch. A similar sword with a short non-ornamented jade scabbard slide (Geometric Class according to Trousdale) was discovered in a Sargatka culture grave in the vicinity of Isakovka near Sidorovka village.³¹ Most likely, both burials date to the 1st c. AD; they contain no objects later than the 1st c. AD.

A dagger with a jade hilt and a scabbard slide of the Geometric Class by Trousdale was found at the Orlat cemetery in Uzbekistan. This cemetery probably dates to the 1st c. AD.³² It is interesting that here the jade details were re-used – the hilt is too narrow for the blade,³³ and the scabbard slide was broken long ago and then restored. In addition, it is necessary to note that in China jade scabbard slides were used only for swords.

The several undecorated slides of the Geometric Class (206 BC–AD 220) were found in Alanian burials of the late 2nd/early 3rd c. AD in the South Ural region, Lower Volga and Don basins. Notably, only two swords from them can

²⁸ Thus, e.g., according to Michael Raschke (referenced by Guguev, Treister 1995, 153) these mirrors like other Chinese objects went to the West by such various tribal relations as war, exchange, marriage, gifts etc.

²⁹ Skripkin 1994, 33; 1994a, 11.

³⁰ Pogodin 1998, 30–33.

³¹ *Drevnie sokrovishcha* 1988, 12.

³² Ilyasov, Rusanov 1997/98, 130; Maslov 1999, 229.

³³ *DluU* 1991, cat. nos. 244–245.

be considered of Chinese origin; the remaining weapons with jade scabbard slides and hilts belong to the Sarmatian armor, with re-used jade elements.

A very interesting sword was discovered in the Roshava Dragana barrow in Bulgaria, in the grave of a Thracian nobleman in the Roman military service. This Sarmatian sword was probably a trophy or a gift. Its gold pommel bears Alanian tamga-signs. A jade slide of the Hydra Class, characteristic of the Western Han period, as well as four silver plates with tamgas, have been attached to the scabbard. The gold polychrome chape was decorated by a stag figure depicted according to the typical Xiongnu composition – with profile body and front head. The burial is dated to the late 1st c. AD.³⁴ Even if this sword has Chinese origin, its pommel and chape were replaced by Sarmatians. The Chinese scabbard with a jade slide was additionally decorated by plates with tamgas or vice versa – the early Chinese slide was attached to the Sarmatian scabbard in the 1st c. AD.

The tamgas from Roshava Dragana and from Porohei are of very close similarity. I even cannot rule out the possibility that this sword, before coming to the Thracian nobleman, belonged to the person buried in the Porohei barrow. In any case, it could also be included in the assemblage of Chinese items brought to the North Pontic region by their Alanian owners.

It is noteworthy that on the scabbards of swords of the 1st c. AD, early Western Han slides were used. It seems that the Chinese jade elements of swords like the mirrors were used by their Alanian owners for a long time before being deposited in the graves of South-Eastern Europe. Ying-shih Yü cites Han documents according to which the weapons were prohibited for export from China. Swords with jade scabbard slides came to the northern barbarians (which may have included the ancestors of the Alans) by smuggling³⁵ or as trophies. I therefore doubt whether they are in any way related to trade on the Silk Road.

One of the indicators of the Middle Sarmatian culture of the 1st and early 2nd c. AD is the cast bronze cauldrons with spherical body, sometimes with spout as well as zoomorphic and loop-handles. According to recent data, such cauldrons only became widespread in the steppes from the second half of the 1st c. AD.³⁶ Skripkin included them in the list of innovations in the Middle Sarmatian culture which coincide with the appearance of the Alans in written sources.³⁷ He also rightly compared these vessels with Chinese prototypes³⁸ similar to those found in the kurgans of the Sargatka culture.

³⁴ Buiukliev 1995, 45, fig. 1–3.

³⁵ Yü 1967, 129–130.

³⁶ Demidenko 1997, 137.

³⁷ Skripkin 1992, 19–20.

³⁸ Skripkin 2000a, 97–98.

In my opinion, alabaster vessels with zoomorphic handles belong to the category of Chinese elements in the Sarmatian culture. They greatly resemble Chinese stone and alabaster objects of the same type. Remarkable marble and alabaster mortars were discovered in the graves of noble Sarmatians in Ukraine and in the Lower Volga region. They are decorated by Chinese meander. A Sarmatian vessel from Ukraine has two hare-shaped handles. This mortar is associated with the Chinese myth about the hare, sitting on the Moon and preparing in a mortar the elixir of immortality for Siwang-mu – Mistress of the beasts. According to the myth, Siwang-mu gave this elixir to the archer E, but his wife, the Moon Goddess Chang-e, had drunk it without permission and turned into a frog.³⁹

One more argument in support of the Alanian migration theory is the lack of Chinese objects along the alleged Northern Route of the Silk Road, in the vast lands between China and the Volga. Material evidence of such a flourishing Silk Road trade in the Sarmatian period, the supporters of this hypothesis believe, should have been much more numerous.

By and large, the conclusion is inevitable that the Alanian culture was formed in the close proximity, direct contact and even co-operation with the Xiongnu culture and under strong Chinese impact. At the same time, the Pazyryk link is distinctly visible. What kind of cultural interaction can explain all these links? I am afraid that the final solution of this problem lies beyond the possibilities of archaeology. However, I can, relying on archaeological data, the information of the Chinese written sources and ethnographic analogies, offer the following hypothesis.

The Pazyryk culture ceased to exist in the 2nd c. BC. Leaving aside the problem of its possible identification with Yuezhi and of their westward movement under this name,⁴⁰ I would like to take a risk and suggest that some part of the Pazyryk population was pushed by the Xiongnu into the steppe according to the well-known nomadic migration model in Central Asia. It cannot be ruled out that the Pazyryk tribes came under the direct influence, or even political domination, of the strong Xiongnu. They lived among the Xiongnu as a separate group, preserving their language, but experiencing the permanent cultural pressing of the Xiongnu and China. In that way the original Sarmatian-Xiongnu culture of the Alans – descendants of Pazyryk tribes – was formed. After the division of the Xiongnu into the “southern” and “northern” branches in 48 BC the former became the vassals of China and permanently fought with the latter. During the 1st c. AD, the “northern” Xiongnu gradually moved westward. The Alans may have been part of one of these hordes and continued their move up to the Danube.

³⁹ Zavalov 2006, 89.

⁴⁰ Polosmak 2000, 30.

Thus, the terms “Huns-Sarmatians”, “Hunnic-Sarmatian time”, and “Hunnic-Sarmatian culture” are not so unconvincing as some scholars believe. Certainly from the point of view of scientific correctness one should use these designations with caution – at least because of the failure to prove the continuity of the Xiongnu of Han times and the early Medieval Huns in the Caspian-Pontic steppes. Botalov, who correctly sees the fundamental connection of the Sarmatian culture and the cultures of Inner Asian nomads, fails – in my view – to demonstrate the historical background of this connection. Beyond doubt the Late Sarmatian culture of the South Ural area and Kazakhstan steppes shows a slightly different shape from that of the Volga and Don regions, but both belong to the same cultural community. One cannot rule out the possibility that this included the Huns (if they were living there). However, the archaeological culture of the Xiongnu (Botalov’s “Hunnic historical and cultural complex”)⁴¹ bears no relation to the Late Sarmatian (Botalov’s “Hunnic-Sarmatian”) culture. The Xiongnu became one of the cultural and genetic components of another people, viz. the Alans.

Conclusion

Some scholars use the term “Huns-Sarmatians” or “Hunnic-Sarmatian time” for the Late Sarmatian period (second half of the 2nd–4th c. AD). Indeed, in the culture of the Sarmatians from the 2nd c. BC till the early 2nd c. AD we can discern some cultural features that are similar to the South Siberian Pazyryk, Xiongnu and Chinese cultures. Elements of these cultures found in the areas occupied by the Sarmatians are usually explained by trading and cultural links along the Great Silk Road, without any special exploration of the concrete mechanism of these links.

The Pazyryk features in the Alanian culture can be observed in the characteristic images of the Sarmatian Animal Style, construction of dagger scabbards and bow-cases, and the decoration of horse harnesses, among others. Ceremonial belts with gold plates in the Ordos Animal Style, composite bows, and lamellar armor came to the Alans from the Xiongnu. The remains of silk clothing, jade sword-hilts and scabbard slides, bronze mirrors, and marble and alabaster ritual vessels represent the Chinese influence. Alanian art also absorbed the image of the Chinese dragon, as well as some stylistic methods of Xiongnu art. The integration of all these elements into the culture and art of the Alans could hardly be connected with the trade along the Great Silk Road – such objects were not traded. Rather, it appears that the Alans lived in close contact with the Xiongnu and

⁴¹ Botalov 2003, 108–109, 114–117, figs. 1; 5; 6.

Chinese for a long time, and in this way their culture was enriched with the borrowings listed above.

All these innovations appeared simultaneously in Eastern Europe in the middle of the 1st century AD in the archaeological area identified as Alanian. Analysis of this material allows us to consider that the Alans acquired Chinese and Xiongnu items while still in their more easterly homeland, a location that, until now, had not been unequivocally determined. The Pazyryk, Chinese and Xiongnu elements in the Alanian culture also allow us to assume that the Alans were the successors of the Pazyryk people who lived among the Xiongnu or in the near vicinity for a long time and, as well as of the Xiongnu, experienced the strong influence of Chinese culture. This was most likely somewhere in the territory of modern Western Mongolia or Xingjian. In the middle of the 1st century AD the Alans moved westward and very quickly reached the Sarmatian lands in Eastern Europe. According to written sources, they established political domination over the rest of the Sarmatian tribes and, as usually happens, the cultural stratum of the Alanian nobility ruled over the cultural taste of Sarmatian aristocracy.

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Abstract

In the culture of the Sarmatians from the 2nd c. BC till the early 2nd c. AD we can discern some cultural features that are similar to the South Siberian Pazyryk, Xiongnu and Chinese cultures. Elements of these cultures found in the areas occupied by the Sarmatians are usually explained by trading and cultural links along the Great Silk Road, without any special exploration of the concrete mechanism of these links. The integration of all these elements into the culture and art of the Alans could hardly be connected with the trade along the Great Silk Road – such objects were not traded. Rather, it appears that the Alans lived in close contact with the Xiongnu and Chinese for a long time, and in this way their culture was enriched with the borrowings listed above. All these innovations appeared simultaneously in Eastern Europe in the middle of the 1st century AD in the archaeological area identified as Alanian. Analysis of this material allows us to consider that the Alans acquired Chinese and Xiongnu items while still in their more easterly homeland, a location that, until now, had not been unequivocally determined. The Pazyryk, Chinese and Xiongnu elements in the Alanian culture also allow us to assume that the Alans were the successors of the Pazyryk people who lived among the Xiongnu or in the near vicinity for a long time and, as well as Xiongnu, experienced the strong influence of Chinese culture. This was most likely somewhere in the territory of modern Western Mongolia or Xingjian. In the middle of the 1st century AD the Alans moved westward and very quickly reached the Sarmatian lands in Eastern Europe.