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THE THRACO-CIMMERIAN PHASE IN CENTRAL ASIA: EVIDENCE FOR THE 'PONTIC MIGRATION'

KARL JETTMAR

When Robert Heine-Geldern condensed observations and suggestions made by many linguists and archaeologists to the bold theory that tribes coming from the Pontic area reached the borders of China in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. (Heine-Geldern, 1935; 1951) most of the regions through which they were claimed to have passed were archaeologically unexplored.[1] Besides there was no clarity as to which people or group of peoples formed the ethnic background of the so-called 'Thraco-Cimmerian' complex. The term itself was an anticipation. This lack of archaeological evidence was, of course, very much to the disadvantage of Heine-Geldern's theory but at the same time there was every hope that excavation would finally bring the proofs so badly needed.

Today the chronology of the Pontic steppes is much better known (Terenožkin, 1965), important finds have been published (Ščepinskij, 1962; Kovpanenko, 1962) but it is still extremely difficult to discern the different ethnic groups which must have settled here.

In the steppes of Middle Asia the situation was just as disappointing. For a long time the assemblages tentatively put in the crucial period (ninth and eighth centuries B.C.) had convincing connections neither with the West nor with the East. It is true that S.P. Tolstov saw similarities between some types of sherds excavated east of Lake Aral and the pottery of the 'Cimmerian' period in Eastern Europe. He even attributed one group of sites in the delta of the Syr-Darya to immi-

1. Soviet excavations concentrated on parts of Southern Siberia. In Soviet Middle Asia (Western Turkestan) only Neolithic sites had attracted considerable attention (*cf.* Jettmar, 1967: 59-62).

grants from the West and frankly called this culture 'Tokharian' (Tolstov, 1952: 22-9). But nobody, in fact, was ready to accept his thesis which was based on a weak chronology. So we were still dependent on stray finds in remote areas (Minussinsk) already mentioned by Sándor Gallus and Tibor Horváth as evidence that there must indeed have been some kind of connection across the steppes.[2]

It is my intention in this paper to stress the fact that the excavations at Tagisken and Ujgarak offer a new approach to the problem.

Tagisken is in the heart of Middle Asia, in the delta of the Syr-Darya, 200 km southwest of Kzyl-Orda. Here, Tolstov's Khwarezmian expedition excavated mausolea, made from air-dried bricks, wood, and reed, belonging to the beginning of the first millennium B.C. (Tolstov dates them in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., Grjaznov even earlier) and 38 mounds ('kurgans'). Most of them are said to belong to the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., a few to the fifth century B.C.[3] Ujgarak lies only 30 km. to the east of Tagisken. In this necropolis 50 kurgans were opened. Only a small part of the finds has as yet been published.[4] Evidently this complex, too, belongs to the seventh-fifth centuries B.C.

Now it is fascinating to see that the objects found in the kurgans of both cemeteries show striking affinities with some of the Thraco-Cimmerian bronzes of East and Central Europe, most of them belonging to the ninth and early eighth centuries (Kossack, 1953-34: 148). This involves a problem of chronology. The material from Tagisken and Ujgarak is supposed to be at least one century later. This could be a reason to check the basis of Tolstov's chronology—a very difficult task as no complete inventories of the graves are available. More probable, however, is the explanation that the traditions were better preserved in Central Asia than in dynamic and competitive Eastern Europe.

2. Gallus & Horváth, 1939: Pl. 82-7. A few new clues have emerged, *cf.* Jettmar, 1967: 168.
3. Tolstov, 1962a: 80-6; 1962b: 127-36, Tolstov, Ždanko & Itina, 1963: 36-47. Tolstov & Itina, 1966. Grjaznov, 1966.
4. Tolstov & Itina, 1966: 152, Tolstov, Ždanko & Itina, 1963: 50-1.

It would be very easy to show the affinities, if I could make use of the material from both sites presented already in two expositions:

(a) In Moscow during the VIIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, August, 1964.

(b) 'Historic Treasures from the Soviet Union' shown in Holland, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany (Essen, Villa Hügel), 1966/67.

Strangely enough, most of the pieces from both sites displayed in these expositions are as yet unpublished (e.g. buttons in shape of helmets) but even among the few items represented in the figures of Tolstov & Itina's article are specimens showing similarities so close that no doubt remains. There are buttons decorated in relief (Tolstov & Itina, 1966: Fig. 7/7); one of them is reproduced here together with a piece from Kisköszeg (Figure 1 A,B) and a cruciform tube bearing the same ornament in the centre (Tolstov & Itina, 1966: Fig. 7/8) which is also comparable to a piece from Kisköszeg (Figure 2 A,B). These objects were found in the very same tomb (kurgan No. 55, Tagisken) dated in the seventh century B.C. on the basis of early arrow-heads.

On the other hand, many bronzes of this complex, Tagisken-Ujgarak, have definite counterparts among stray finds made in China and Mongolia. This is true in respect of the cruciform tubes (Figure 2 C) and to the buttons in the shape of a helmet with four openings at the base (Janse, 1932: 187-96, P1.I-III).

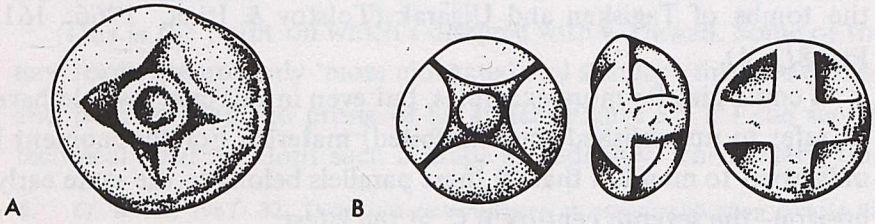

FIGURE 1. A: front view of a decorated bronze button from Tagisken (slightly enlarged; after Tolstov & Itina, 1966); B: bronze button from Kisköszeg–front, side, and rear views (about natural size; after Janse, 1932).

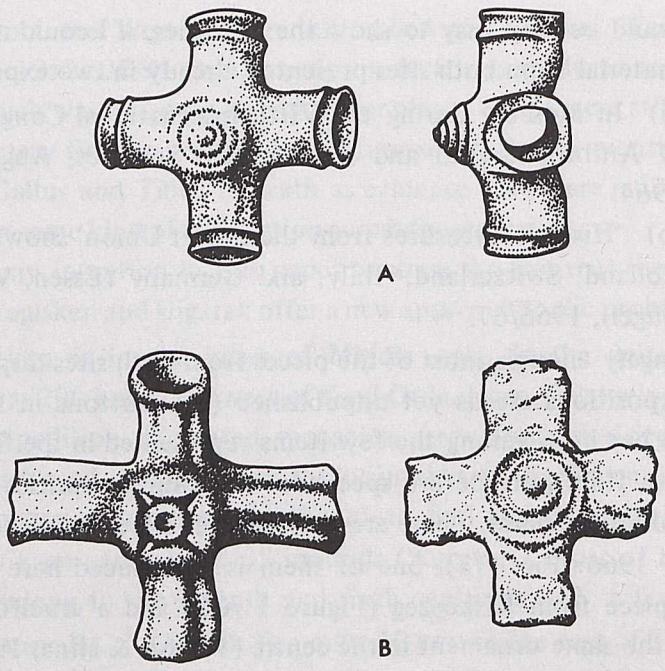

FIGURE 2. A: bronze cruciform tube from Kisköszeg (about natural size; after Janse, 1932); B: bronze cruciform tube from Tagisken (natural size; after Tolstov & Itina, 1966); C: bronze cruciform tube from China (natural size; after Janse, 1932).

In China we find snaffles with cheek-pieces pierced by three holes. The central hole is larger wherein the bridle-bit, also in bronze, is fitted (v. Dewall, 1966: 35-6, Pl.VIIIb, d). Among the Ordos bronzes there are pieces which have an opening large enough to insert the lower part of the loop at the end of the bridle-bit. One specimen of this kind is in The Sackler Collections. This type occurs, too, in the tombs of Tagisken and Ujgarak (Tolstov & Itina, 1966: 161, Fig. 8/3, 4).

I could give far more examples, but even in this case I would have to refer to unpublished (but exhibited) material. For the moment I only want to mention that all these parallels belong to the same early horizon—the seventh century B.C. at the latest.

So we see that this newly explored complex east of Lake Aral is like a connecting link between the cultures at both ends of the

steppe belt. In any case it shows that just before the Scythian way of life was finally established there was a period of far-reaching communications. This may be an argument for a migration theory as proposed by Heine-Geldern. Evidently it was not Southern Siberia but Central Asia that was the main scene of action, as predicted by O. Maenchen-Helfen (*BMFEA*, 30: 167-75).

A conception which was coined so many years ago cannot, however, be accepted without proposing major modifications.

1. Almost certainly there was not one isolated migration but a rather intricate pattern of movements starting perhaps in the last centuries of the second millennium B.C.[5]

A study of Chinese horse-gear can yield an important clue to the existence of such early communications. For a better knowledge of the development of the early horse-bridles in China we are indebted to Magdalene v. Dewall. The Shang evidently used bits made from perishable material, perhaps braided strips of leather. The cheek-pieces for such bits were 'heavy square plaques, not enhanced by any decoration whatsoever.[6] At the beginning of the Chou period new tendencies in design came forward in a broad stream although the plain Shang model did not die out suddenly. The preference was now given to more and more elongated and slender pieces.' (op. cit. 1966: 32). As it is presented here this seems to indicate a local or internal development in the tenth century B.C. and indeed v. Dewall was convinced that no foreign stimulus was necessary to produce such a modification.

This is the point on which I disagree with v. Dewall. Some of the new forms are not only 'more elongated and slender', they are curved and pointed—like the prong of an antler (Figure 3 C). I can see no technical need to adopt such a shape so suddenly. The construction

5. *Cf.* Kothe, 1963: 32. There is a certain degree of over-simplification even in this interesting paper.

6. Actually I would suppose that they were covered by lavishly ornamented pieces of leather and lacquer looking, perhaps, not too different from the famous plaques which are found among the Luristan Bronzes.

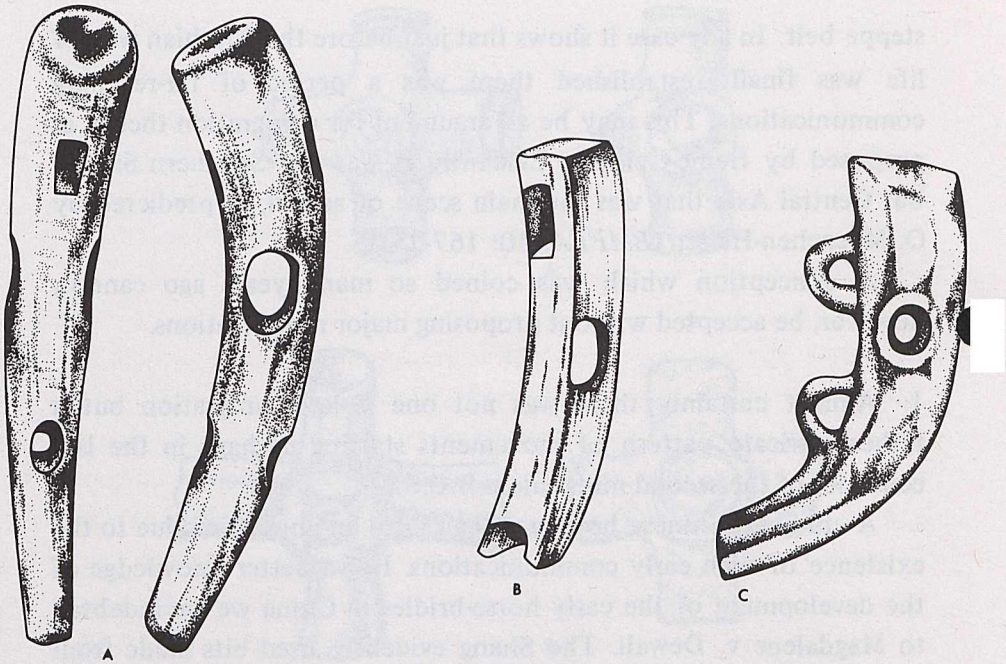

FIGURE 3. A: cheek-piece of a bridle made from antler, Sághegy, Hungary (after Mozsolics, 1954); B: cheek-piece made from bone from Mt. Tapchar in Transbaikalia (after Sosnovskij, 1941); C: bronze cheek-piece from Hsin-ts'un (after v. Dewall, 1964).

of the bridle did not change as it did during the later part of the Chou period when the cheek-pieces were put as toggles into the rings at the ends of the bit.

In such a case we have to look for a foreign tradition which could have influenced the local one.

Evidently such a tradition existed. Cheek-pieces made from antlers were used in a large area stretching from Central Europe (Figure 3 A) to the Volga region and Kazakhstan (Mozsolics, 1954; 1960. Smirnov, 1961). Similar pieces appear at different periods in the Near East. In the whole series the specimens belonging to the same time as the Chinese ones also resemble them most in shape. It was just this late and simple type, with one central opening and two others at a different angle, that penetrated farthest east. One psalion of this kind was found in Ferghana, another one in Transbaikalia

(Figure 3 B; Smirnov, 1961: 65). If we suppose that this find has connections with the West—and Smirnov has no doubt about it—then we have every reason to bring the sudden change in China into the same picture.

I think when we have examined the bronzes of one of the great Ordos collections we shall find more arguments for such contacts, some of them long before the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.

2. But I do not believe that this is enough for an adaptation of Heine-Geldern's theory to the present state of research. We must add the hypothesis that the Westerners settling in the border-zone of China did not completely lose contact with their former homelands. Perhaps some bands even returned and encouraged further expeditions. This could be the background for the establishment of a system of transcontinental trade many centuries before the silk-road came into being. This system rendered possible the diffusion of ideas and techniques taken over by the frontiersmen from the centres of Chinese civilization far to the West. So the Pontic migration finally provoked a kind of cultural backlash.

Arguments for such a reverse current are numerous and they cover a long period.

Cruciform tubes were already used in China by the Shang, during the last centuries of the second millennium, as a part of their horse-gear (v. Dewall, 1964: Pl.8/1 'Monumental Tomb Wu-kuan-ts'un'). So they cannot be derived from the Hallstatt culture or the Thraco-Cimmerians (*cf.* Heine-Geldern, 1951: 230). The reverse would be more probable. We have a similar problem to face when we speculate about the origin of the socketed celt (*cf.* Childe, 1953).

The finds from Ujgarak mentioned above contain at least one object to be derived from the East, a round open-work plaque with a lateral loop showing a beast (panther) in the characteristic posture of the 'curled-up animal' (Figure 4 A). In the centre, the legs encircle an opening. The prototype of this peculiar and, as far as I can see,

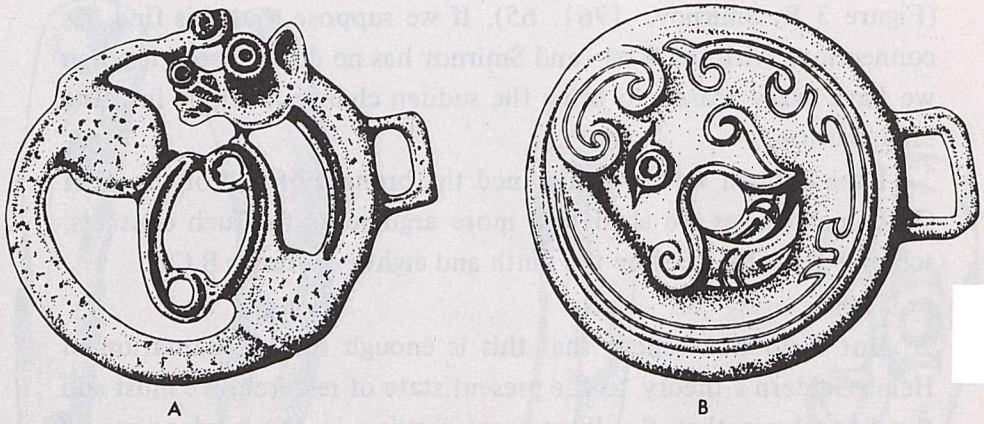

FIGURE 4. A: bronze ornamental plaque from Ujgarak (after Elisséeff, 1967); B: Early Chou cheek-piece from the Mu-fei Collection, bronze (after v. Dewall, 1966; both reduced in size).

unexplained object is, in my opinion, to be found in the round disc-shaped cheek-pieces of the Early Chou period (Figure 4 B).[7]

At this point we may recall the fact that the 'curled-up animal' as a common motif in the decoration of so many objects is perhaps of eastern origin indicating the Chinese thread in the texture of the animal style.

Rudenko published the elaborately carved and painted frontlet found with one of the horses in the second kurgan of Pazyryk (Rudenko, 1948: 12; Jettmar, 1967:9, P1.93). Today there can be no doubt that this frontlet is a late derivation from the slender mountings of the horse muzzle found in many graves of the Early Chou period (*cf.* v. Dewall, 1966: P1.4e, 5a).

However, we cannot simply say that there was no migration at all, but only trade in both directions and stimulus diffusion, because

7. *Cf.* v. Dewall, 1966: 37, Pl. 6c. The ornamental plaque from Ujgarak (in Figure 4) may now be included in the illustrations of this article as it was reproduced by V. Elisséeff in the catalogue from the great exhibition 'L'art russe des Scythes á nos jours-Trésors des musées soviétiques' (Octobre 1967–Janvier 1968).

I think it is impossible to explain the shape of the specimen without reference to the Chinese prototype. On the other hand, the plaque from Ujgarak was evidently the model for the famous round gold plaque in the Siberian collection and the 'enrolled animal' found in the Kulakovskij-Kurgan near Simferopol. By chance, all three pieces were shown in the exhibition in Paris.

we need an explanation for the linguistic facts. Abaev has just come to the conclusion that Tokharian must originally have been spoken in an area between the Pontic Scythians and the Thracians, Slavs, Illyrians, etc., as some loan words were evidently transferred through this medium. In a later period there were direct contacts between the Scythians on the one hand and the Thracians, Slavs and Illyrians on the other—that is to say, the Tokharians must have left their central position as a consequence of their move to the east (Abaev, 1965).

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