REVIEW

TAYMYR: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NORTHERNMOST EURASIA

By Leonid P. Khlobystin, 2005. Contributions to Circumpolar Anthropology No. 5. National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
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An important synthesis of archaeology and prehistory in northern Siberia, encompassing the Taymyr Peninsula, is represented in this monograph written by the late Leonid P. Khlobystin (1931–1988). This region (and northern Siberia in general) has seen relatively little archaeological investigation compared with the Lena River basin, the Altay and Sayan mountains in southwestern Siberia, Angara River and Lake Baikal areas in southern Siberia, and the Russian Far East. The Taymyr Peninsula is the northernmost portion of Siberia, lying north of 75° north latitude, encompassing over 850,000 square km. This book represents the first English language monograph on this vast region.

A substantial portion of Khlobystin's professional work is reflected in this volume; the primary excavation data are derived from 1967–1974 and 1981 surveys through a large portion of the interior of the Taymyr Peninsula. This monograph is largely derived from Khlobystin's full doctoral dissertation (completed in 1982), originally titled *Drevniaia istoriia Taimyrskogo Zaporliar'ia I voprosy formirovaniia kul'tur severa Evrazii* or *Ancient History of Taymyr and the Formation of North Eurasian Cultures*. It was co-edited by V. V. Pitulko and V. IA. Shumkin from the original dissertation. This volume is translated by Leonid Vishniatski and Boris Grudinko and edited by William W. Fitzhugh and Vladimir V. Pitulko. Editorial changes were limited to additions of more recent literature, a preface, Khlobystin's bibliography, and an appendix of relevant literature published after 1990.

The book consists of four chapters arranged to cover the archaeology in chronological order, illustrating successive periods of occupation in Taymyr, from initial colonization (Chapter 1), Neolithic (Chapter 2), early Bronze Age (Chapter 3), and early Iron Age and Medieval Period (Chapter 4). Each of these chapters includes a relatively self-contained summary of important sites and brief discussions of pertinent problems of each period. Site summaries in these chapters follow a similar format, with one- to three-page overviews of important sites (generally those radiocarbon dated and/or stratified), then shorter summaries of undated sites/components with technologically or stylistically similar artifacts. A summary of technological and typological differences and similarities among Taymyr and other Siberian regions is presented at the end of each chapter. Khlobystin includes discussions of raw material use, tool function, and population movements, the last inferred from typological similarities with artifacts from dated sites in other regions. Chapter 5 is a more theoretically oriented chapter, focusing on somewhat disparate topics (e.g., social organization inferred from settlement patterns, bronze casting technology, and the origins of reindeer herding), but those where Taymyr data shed some illumination. A brief five-page conclusions section (Chapter 6) summarizes the wealth of information provided in Chapters 1–4. Each chapter will be described and considered in turn.

Chapter 1 reviews the evidence of the initial colonization of the polar regions of Eurasia (summarizing per-

tinent information up to 1982, but this is conveniently supplemented with more recent data by the editors). The Tagenar VI site is the only radiocarbon-dated assemblage for this early period in Taymyr, at about 6,000 ^{14}C BP. Several other undated sites are described with similar assemblages (primarily microblades, conical microblade cores, and microburins), termed by the author of a "Mesolithic-type," broadly similar to other assemblages in northeastern Asia (p. 27). These sites represent a unifacial blade industry, with little evidence of bifacially worked materials. Inferences about tool function are provided for artifacts from these (and subsequent) sites, apparently derived from low-powered microscopic evaluation. There is also an interesting discussion of the problem of the "relictual Mesolithic" or "Epi-Paleolithic" in Siberia, where a clear demarcation between Late Pleistocene and Holocene material culture could not be made, and Khlobystin includes a review of Siberian Mesolithic assemblages (pp. 17–23). The author interprets the change from Paleolithic to Mesolithic and reliance on blade technology as related to the transition to colder steppe vegetation, forcing a change in subsistence strategies and employment of a more mobile toolkit (p. 42). He concludes that Mesolithic sites in the Aldan region (of the Sumnagin Culture, Mochanov 1977) are related to the Taymyr Mesolithic/Early Neolithic sites, though separated by an immense distance, and interprets the initial colonization of Taymyr from the east (p. 43).

Chapter 2 reviews the Taymyr Neolithic, where Khlobystin's interpretations are somewhat hampered by lack of radiocarbon-dated assemblages. Sites like Abylaakh I, Glubokoe I, and Maimeche IV are dated to this period, and form the basis of the characterization of the Taymyr Neolithic on the basis of ceramic typological comparisons with other Siberian regions. Lithic technology in this period is similar to the preceding but with additions of new arrowheads and small net-impressed pottery vessels. The Maimeche IV site is notable for personal ornaments, including possible bracelets and medial and lateral labrets. Khlobystin proposes that the origin of wearing lip ornaments was eastern Siberia, where it then spread east to North America and west to Taymyr (pp. 69–71).

Chapter 3 reviews the Early Bronze Age period, which Khlobystin links with two cultural traditions: (1) Pysasina, descended from the Taymyr Neolithic; and (2) Ymiakhtakh, part of a widespread culture found in the Aldan region, the latter derived primarily from similarities in pottery design, morphology, and temper (pp. 84–85). Khlobystin links check-stamped pottery development and spread with the spread of the Ymiakhtakh culture across Siberia. Abylaakh I is the most significant Taymyr Ymiakhtakh site, with a hearth dating to about 3,100 ^{14}C BP. This date is also associated with crucible fragments and drops of bronze. Artifacts relating to bronze casting (sandstone and clay molds and crucibles) also provide evidence for early bronze-casting technology in the region. Khlobystin makes an interesting argument for Yukagir ethnogenesis, using linguistic correlates for copper and iron among Yukagir, Samoyedic languages, and languages of other unrelated Siberian groups (pp. 108–109).

Chapter 4 reviews the early Iron Age and Medieval period, periods little understood in northern Asia given the relatively few sites found and investigated (p. 111). Khlobystin identifies and investigates several Iron Age and Medieval cultures in the Taymyr region. The Ust-Polovinka site provides important information about this period, with stratification, rectangular semisubterranean houses (about 30 sq. m), and evidence of five successive settlements dating to three occupation periods (between 2,500 and 900 ^{14}C BP). Hearths were the locus of bronze casting, and a number of metal forms are described. Pyasina and Malokorenninsk cultures are defined by pottery typology and technology, as both are characterized by similar lithic assemblages. A third cultural tradition, Ust-Cherninsk, characterized again by distinctive pottery, is derived from the Ymiakhtakh culture and contemporaneous with Pyasina. The Vozhpay culture reflects an intrusion from west Siberia and is reflected in the Dyuna III site (pp. 155–169), dating to about 1,000 ^{14}C BP, and this last is linked by Khlobystin to Samoyedic speakers and direct ancestors of Nenets and Enets (pp. 168–169).

Chapter 5, entitled "Early Economic and Social Development of Taymyr," is written in a different vein from the preceding chapters. Khlobystin synthesizes three disparate topics: settlement pattern/social organization, development of bronze casting, and development of reindeer herding. He reconstructs settlement patterns and social organization for the Taymyr region in a sequential fashion. He situates archaeological data from Taymyr within a theoretical framework reliant on ethnographic analogy. His approach consists of inductively reconstructing social and economic organization from archaeological data, assessing ethnographically derived analogs, and interpretation through examination of similarities and differences among these analogs and the archaeological data. Using this approach, Khlobystin reconstructs settlement strategies (temporary camps for the Mesolithic, temporary sum-

mer camps and semisubterranean winter sod houses for the Early Neolithic, etc.) and subsistence (reindeer hunting supplemented by fishing from the Bronze Age (though no distinctive fishing implements were found) (pp. 172–173). He argues these temporary camps tied into caribou migrations. Khlobystin's use of the direct historical approach in linking more ethnographic and archaeological analogs provides the reader with useful detailed descriptions of northern Siberian dwelling types. Khlobystin also examines social variables such as kinship and gender roles with respect to the Taymyr archaeological record (e.g., the origin of the bilateral kinship system of the Nganasan, speculations about ritual behavior and bronze anthropomorphic figures of the Bronze Age).

The origin and development of bronze casting industries are extensively discussed, including resulting inferred changes in economy (pp. 181–186). This work provides a fundamental baseline from which numerous early metal industry studies could be conducted. The origin of reindeer herding is examined (pp. 186–193) from the perspective of excavation results from Dyuna III and elements of the Vozhpay culture. Khlobystin suggests early Samoyedic-speaking groups shifted to reindeer herding before moving north from the taiga to the tundra (pp. 188–189). He outlines various scenarios by which reindeer herding could have developed (e.g., reindeer decoy use in hunting).

Chapter 6 primarily summarizes the complex cultural history of Taymyr over the last 6,000 years, focusing on ethnogenesis of prehistoric cultures and Samoyedic speakers (Enets, Nenets, Yukagir). Khlobystin links the colonization of Taymyr by the Sumnagin culture, later Neolithic cultures adopting Belkachi technology, followed by migration of Ymiakhtakh culture intermixing with descendents of earlier cultures during the Bronze Age. In this manner, successive cultures in Taymyr reflect both migration and diffusion from cultures in the Aldan region and can be linked with widespread movement of ideas and people. This chapter synthesizes the data in a clear manner, and one should read this chapter before Chapters 1–4 to better situate the numerous cultural traditions mentioned throughout the text (often with little context).

The analyses and syntheses of a large amount of cultural material from numerous excavations will be a welcome addition to the English-language archaeological literature of Siberia. Many researchers' knowledge of northernmost Asian archaeology is limited to a few site-specific publications (e.g., Giria and Pitulko 1994; Pitulko et al. 2004). The effect of this work for Western understanding of the Taymyr and northern Asian prehistory in general will be considerable. In addition to the regional coverage, Khlobystin developed many key ideas about the development of bronze casting and reindeer herding through the excavations described in this monograph.

This volume is very well illustrated with excellent line drawings of ceramic and lithic artifacts, photographs of ongoing excavations and artifacts, and line drawings of stratigraphy. The edited nature of the work is evident in the disparate styles used to illustrate artifacts (black and white photographs with varying backgrounds and resolutions, illumination, and quality, and line drawings) and stratigraphy. With 173 figures, this volume provides excellent data on lithics and pottery for important sites, and the inclusion of thirteen plan maps of sites or portions of sites are welcome additions. However, there is only one regional map of the Taymyr Peninsula as a whole, and this does not include information on site locations, topography, or ecological zones. Such information provided in graphic form would help the reader locate sites and understand changes in environment and the potential effects on human populations. A master table or figure illustrating the major periods and cultures would also have been useful for those unfamiliar with this region. In some cases, more detailed spatial information might be useful, such as at Kapkannaya II, where assemblages identified as Ymiakhtakh, Pyasina, and Mesolithic/Early Neolithic were found together in a relatively small area (p. 33).

The interpretations offered by Khlobystin are somewhat hampered by the relative lack of radiocarbon-dated assemblages. Several of the important sites could have been treated to monographs of their own (e.g., Taegar, Ust-Polovinka, Dyuna III), but the summaries provide critical information for Taymyr and Siberian prehistory in general. His theoretical orientation—reliance on typological similarities among assemblages (e.g., correlations of largely undated pebble tool industries), concern with ethnogenesis, and relative importance of migration and diffusion (external factors of culture change) over internal cultural systems change—may strike North American archaeologists as "old-fashioned" cultural historicism, but Khlobystin's inferences are well-developed and substantiated by an encyclopedic knowledge of the primary data and of overall Siberian prehistory.

The editing on this monograph is excellent, especially in the placement of figures and their citation in the main text. The translators did a superb job, with subtle differences in scientific description (e.g., specific lithics or landscape

terms) rendered clear and succinct. Minor quibbles aside, this work offers important primary data, regional synthesis, and interpretation that are a most welcome addition to the English language corpus of Siberian archaeology. The book is approachable by nonspecialists, and communication is not fatally hindered by unfamiliar terminology and jargon. Western scholars who are not fluent in Russian but are interested in northern Eurasian or Arctic studies have been helped considerably by the publication of this monograph, and all involved should be commended.

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