

Ancient Khakasses and the Permian Cis-Urals

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The ancient Khakass state, which in the ninth–thirteenth centuries united peoples of the Sayan-Altai plateau from Irtysh to Baikal, has left a significant trace in the history of Eurasia. This state is represented by an expressive and easily determinable complex of Askiz archeological culture. According to some researchers, this culture was developed by the direct ancestors of the Khakass people.

The wide distribution of iron items of a specific form, often decorated by incrustation and appliqué of silver, copper and occasionally gold, constitutes the characteristic feature of Askiz antiquities. These items were used as decorations for horse harnesses and the equestrian warrior's outfit and are usually united by a common design. These objects are so distinctive that they can be identified easily among the complexes of traditional decorations of other cultures.

By the last decade of the twentieth century Askiz antiquities were identified in the materials of medieval archeological cultures across a vast territory of Eurasia – from the Irtysh region to the Danube region. In the Permian Cis-Urals Askiz objects are represented in the materials of the archeological complex of the sites of ancient settlements at Telyachiy Brod, Rozhdestvenskoye, Kylasovskoye, Gorodischenskoye and Salomatovskoe and at the Plotnikovskiy burial ground. Thus the problem of interaction of ancient Khakasses with eastern Europe also involves the region of the Permian Cis-Urals.

As a result of long-term interaction with the representatives of Askiz culture, a specific line of adornments came into being in Volga Bulgaria – imitations of Askiz iron objects but made of bronze.¹ These imitations together with the genuine Askiz iron objects are also represented among the antiquities of the Cis-Urals.

Askiz objects are widely represented in the materials of the Rozhdestvenskoye archeological complex on the Obva River in the Karagai District of the Perm Region. This complex can be identified as the medieval city of Afkula, mentioned in Arabic and Persian sources.²

¹ К. А. Руденко, *Тюркский мир и Волго-Камье в XI-XIV вв.* Казань 2001.

² А. М. Белавин, Н. Б. Крыласова, *Древняя Афкула: археологический комплекс у с. Рождественск.* Пермь 2008, 603 с.

In the materials of the Rozhdestvenskoye archeological complex more than 60 Askiz objects have been discovered. In the collection of belt and harness sets of the Rozhdestvenskoye ancient settlement, Askiz objects make up 11 percent of items.

These Askiz objects are represented by iron belt buckles, both whole and fragmentary, and by cover plates, a hook, a pendant and details of a saddle.

The iron belt buckles are represented by frame-like buckles, fragments of shield-like buckles, and details of pivot-hinged buckles (Fig. 1.1).

Shield-like buckles were used both in everyday costumes and in horse harnesses. They are widely spread among the antiquities of southern Siberia and include items produced by Askiz masters.

The shields of *pivot-hinged buckles* are especially interesting. They are ornamented by such decorative details as waists, cross cuts, elements concave on the sides, and copper incrustations. Claw-ended shields are characteristic of a range of other objects of Bulgarian origin. Most of these buckles can be attributed to the objects of the Kama Bulgaria "askizoid" type. By the end of the twelfth century pivot-hinged buckles were out of fashion.

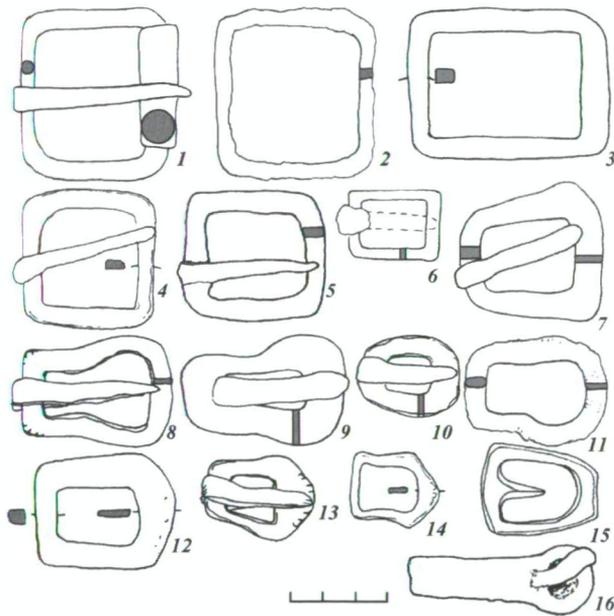


FIGURE 1.1
Iron belt buckles

Belt covers are represented by rectangular and square covers, decorated by circular ornament, copper incrustation and waists.

Some of the covers with a rectangular section are squeezed on the sides in the middle, with claw-shaped ends and a ring in the base – these are distribution blocks of the horse harness belt. Distribution blocks of similar form have been

discovered in the monuments of Askiz culture and of Bulgaria of the tenth-twelfth centuries.

A large wide belt cover with a decorative waist, clear division of the decorative field and a ring was also discovered. Such covers were probably used for the triple joining of the belt in a light bridle of the era. Similar covers were also found in the Askiz culture from the end of the tenth to the twelfth centuries;³

“Eyeglass”-shaped belt covers with round ends, with a prominent center and loop, were used in the bridle set in combination with hooks. According to the majority of researchers of Askiz antiquities, belt covers of this kind are specific to Volga Bulgaria, but are also spread among Askiz antiquities, where, according to I. L. Kyzlasov, they are considered to be a form, “reflecting the influence of the West”.

In addition, several metal-plate covers with slots for joint pins are represented in the materials of the Rozhdestvenskoye archeological complex. Among these covers there were rectangular items with figured ends, and an oval-shaped one like a four-petal rosette with an eye for a ring pendant. Direct analogues for the rosette covers with rings could be found in the complexes of the Oglakhtinsk era of the Malinovsk period of Askiz culture. In the Permian Cis-Urals a belt set with rectangular, oval and rosette-shaped covers and with a pivot-hinged buckle, the shield of which is decorated by an openwork lattice ornament, was found in the Plotnikovskiy burial ground. Radiocarbon tests attribute the site to a date from the thirteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Hooks are represented by big, rectangular items with figured “waists” and a joint ring. The passage to the hole for the ring is decorated in the form of the head of an animal (Fig. 1.2).

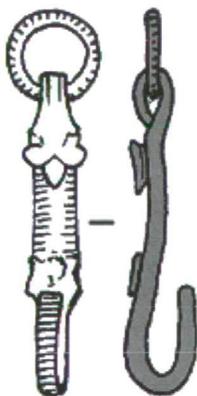


FIGURE 1.2
hook

An iron *on-belt holder* with a figured loop is original. We suppose that such a holder could have been used to mount the quiver hook or an axe. Traces of cop-

³ И. Л. Кызласов, „Аскизская культура,” САИ, вып. ЕЗ-18. Moscow 1983, с. 33.

per incrustation on the complex-figured convex surface of the holder show that it belongs to the Askiz type.

S-shaped metal washers, met in the construction of quivers of nomads, are of specific interest.

The collection also includes an iron triangular item, reminiscent of the basis for headdress plumes, which are found in southern Siberia (Fig. 2.1).

A very original object which was found in the Permian Cis-Urals is a hook for saddle belts and for lacing (Fig. 2:2). Exact analogues are known among Askiz antiquities and findings of the Zolotarevskiy complex, in Novgorod, Novogrudka, and the Slobodka settlement, where, according to I. L. Kyzlasov, they indicate the presence of Askiz equestrians.

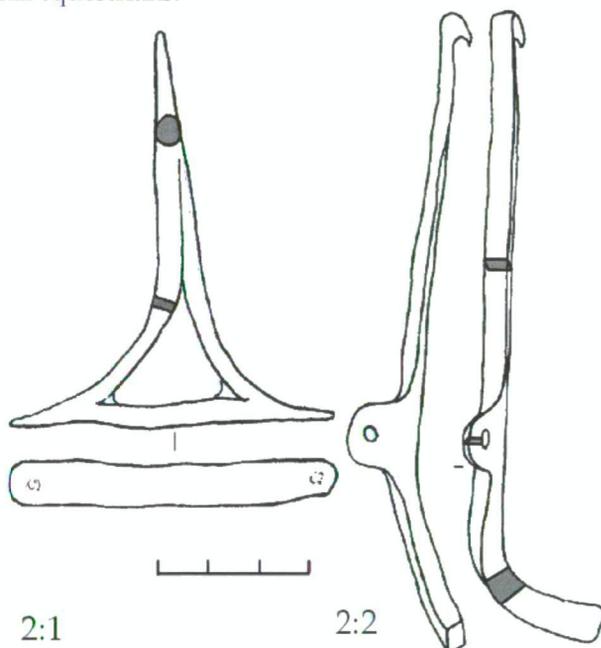


FIGURE 2.1, 2.2

Apart from the details of the belt sets and items of horse equipment, everyday life items adopted from the ancient Khakassess were also found on the territory of the Permian Cis-Urals. In particular, these are two-pronged forks. In general, this type of cutlery was used by the peoples of Europe rather late in history. Forks are found among the Khakass materials of the twelfth-fourteenth centuries. In the Permian Cis-Urals such forks have been discovered in the Kudymkar site and the Gorodischenskoe settlement, those from the latter site having well preserved bone handles. In 2008–2010 fragments of two more forks were found on the site of the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement.

In 2010 a weight and an ingot were found on the site of the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement. Tests performed by the chemistry laboratory of the Perm State Pedagogical University show that these objects were made of tin with insignificant

traces of admixtures. It is known that one of the main suppliers of tin to eastern Europe was Altai. These ingots could be raw materials for bronze casting and jewelry production, which, according to the evidence of numerous finds, was developed in the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement. According to V. A. Vinnichek, such ingots could have been used as a means of payment. He also mentions that ingots are often found in places associated with many Askiz objects.

Thus, the range of finds of Askiz type in the materials of the Cis-Urals is quite substantial. The majority of the objects could have been used as items of trade. But the presence of Askiz iron items, ornamented by incrustation, and a hook for lacing, which was indispensable equipment for an Askiz equestrian, make us think that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries Khakasses could have visited the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement as members of trade caravans or on their own trade or military and diplomatic missions. "Kasaba Afkula" might have been the place that was visited by Askiz warriors and merchants in the course of their expeditions along the trade routes of eastern Europe in the pre-Mongolian period. Maybe these equestrians were guarding Bulgarian trade caravans to Rus, to the land of Visu, to the land of Chulman, to Siberia and Central Asia. Most of the Askiz finds were discovered in excavations on the edge of the riverside steep, which shows that there might have been an "Askiz homestead" on the territory of this settlement.