

*Bronze Age***The Eurasian Steppes and their Cultural Progeny**

By D.T. Potts

The Making of Bronze Age Eurasia (2007) PHILIP L. KOHL. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. xxiii + 296 pages; \$85.00, £ 48.00. ISBN 978-0-521-84780-3.

The Urals and Western Siberia in the Bronze and Iron Ages (2007) LUDMILA KORYAKOVA and ANDREJ VLADIMIROVICH EPIMAKHOV. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. xxiii + 383 pages; \$99.00, £55.00. ISBN 978-0-521-82928-1.

Cambridge World Archaeology's list continues to grow and a recent pair of studies adds to the increasingly large body of English-language archaeological literature on Eurasia. These new volumes—P.L. Kohl, *The Making of Bronze Age Eurasia* (hereafter *Eurasia*), and L. Koryakova and A.V. Epimakhov, *The Urals and Western Siberia in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (hereafter *The Urals*)—are in many ways complementary, though perhaps more by accident than design. As is only to be expected, the perspectives and theoretical concerns of an anthropologically-trained American archaeologist (Kohl) who has long been one of the leading disseminators of Central Asian and Caucasian archaeology in the West, are very different from those of two Russian archaeologists (Koryakova and Epimakhov). While there is some overlap in subject matter, there are plenty of areas in which the books differ and complement each other, geographically and chronologically as well as in theoretical scope.

When I was an undergraduate, Ruth Tringham's *Hunters, Fishers and Farmers of Eastern Europe, 6000-3000 B.C.* (London, 1971) was my introduction to European archaeology and a geographically-challenged student could have been forgiven for thinking that the Bosphorus was about as wide as the Atlantic, for the gulf between European and Near Eastern archaeology, intellectually at least, was massive. Central Asia was not yet even a concept for many of us (and not just undergraduates), though that was to quickly change with the publication of Masson and Sarianidi's *Central Asia: Turkmenia before the Achaemenids* (New York, 1972). It is,

therefore, intriguing to note that Kohl's overview of the Chalcolithic prelude to his main subject opens with a discussion of Cucuteni-Tipol'ye sites in Bulgaria and Romania, a subject that was squarely within the purview of Tringham's book. This begs the question, just where are we when we speak of Eurasia, and how do we draw boundaries to delimit the object of study? What stays in, and what remains out, in presenting a survey of this subject?

This is an extremely difficult question, and it is not addressed directly in Kohl's introduction. The frontispiece (p. xxiii) shows a map of the 'Eurasian Steppe Zone and the Greater Ancient Near East', which indeed extends (p. 126) from Hungary in the west to Manchuria in the east (Bulgaria and the Aegean have somehow been joined to Turkey in fig. 1.1, perhaps a Freudian archaeologist with Eurasian interests would have something to say about this?), but the scope of the book is much broader. The penultimate chapter (ch. 5), examines, among other things, 'secondary states east of Sumer', including the recent discoveries in southeastern Iran (Jiroft/Halil Rud region) and Xinjiang. But why stop there? There is not much rhyme nor reason in what has been included (obviously some sites and finds could not be omitted) and what has not. One suspects that writing a book devoted to Eurasia in the literal sense, Europe + Asia, was never on the agenda. One can see why Kohl has been vague about the geographical boundaries of his study, which in reality would never have been fixed, but a reader is nevertheless often left wondering why some topics or cultures were included and others were not.

By contrast, *The Urals* is concerned with a much more narrowly circumscribed region. Fig. 0.1, a 'physical map of Eurasia, with area under study', extends from China to the North Atlantic, taking in all of northern Europe and Asia. The southern margin is a line that seems to run quite arbitrarily through Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern India across to southeast Asia (obscured by the scale on the map). *The Urals* is concerned only with 'the central part of northern Eurasia', clearly outlined by a solid black line on Fig. 0.1, which includes 'the Cis-Urals or easterly part of eastern Europe, the Trans-Urals or the westerly part of Siberia, coinciding with the basin of the river Irtysh, mainly its western bank' (p. 2). The only inconsistency

seems to be a chronological one. The date of the latest material included varies from region to region and while some coins from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD are included from Glyadenovo (p. 274; discussed further below), this is generally later than most of the Iron Age data discussed. Moreover, although the authors suggest (p. 19) that the Late Iron Age ended at 600 AD, their table 0.5, 'Chronology of the Iron Age', generally cuts off sometime after 300 AD, and there is certainly no consistent treatment of Parthian (ca. 250 BC - 250 AD), let alone Sasanian (ca. 250-650 AD) material in Eurasia, or of the material culture of indigenous groups, like the Alans and the Huns, who were contemporaries of the Sasanians. It would probably have been preferable if the authors of *The Urals* had picked an historical event, like the collapse of the Achaemenid empire, the death of Alexander the Great, or the foundation of the Sasanian empire, or even the Islamic conquest if they were truly intent on dealing with the Late Iron Age, and applied this chronological datum consistently across the region to bring the book's coverage to a conclusion.

It would be extremely easy to go on about problems like these—not faults or errors, but archaeological, palaeoclimatic, chronological, and sociological problems that appear on virtually every page. There are so many problematic aspects of terminology (definitions of cultural groupings of varying size and their constitution), chronology, and socio-economic reconstruction in these volumes—each of which tries to present a brief but still coherent overview of an absolute mountain of primary literature and data—that one could harp on about all of these shortcomings. But certain it is that Kohl, Koryakova, and Epimakhov are acutely aware of these issues, as the repeated caveats, qualifications, and cautiousness exhibited on virtually every page testify.

Instead, let me be up front in saying that, having read both volumes, I am absolutely disinclined to harp on about shortcomings for I am overwhelmed by the sheer richness of the archaeological materials presented. I would advise all readers to simply enjoy this archaeological richness, revel in the names of cultures and their distinctive material that will be foreign to many, and just enjoy what is offered here. By the time I was halfway through each of these books, I had come to the conclusion that there was simply no

point in worrying about whether culture X was nomadic, or culture Y was a fusion of cultures A and B. These are not the sorts of issues that the authors, no matter how competent, can solve. They have diligently surveyed the literature, primary and secondary, presented the prevailing and dissenting views on these and many other issues, but often concluded that we simply don't know the answers yet. Rather, instead of taking all of this to heart and quibbling with the interpretations, I found it far more productive to simply try to soak up, at least in a first reading, what was for me mostly new data about which I had previously read very little.

While it may sound deeply unacademic and downright uncritical, it is perfectly possible to read these volumes without paying too much attention to the interpretations of either the authors or their predecessors. To even list the many fascinating topics discussed in *Eurasia* and *The Urals* would require more space than I intend to devote to this review, but by way of a sample, albeit a non-random one, let me single out a few.

In *The Urals* I was struck by the clear discussion of the Sintashta culture (p. 66ff); the presentation of the manifold variants of the Andronovo cultures (p. 123ff); the summary of the 'Bronze Age Trajectory' (p. 178ff); the explication of the many Eurasian worlds of the 1st millennium BC (p. 201 and fig. 5.6); the theoretical discussion of the origins of Eurasian nomadism (p. 209ff); the ethnohistory of the Scythians and Cimmerians (p. 222ff; cf. Dandamayev 1979, 1992:159-162; Zadok 1977:121-124); the numismatic finds (Kushan and Han Chinese) from the Glyadenovo bone-producing site (p. 274); the evidence of Choresmian writing using Achaemenid-style Aramaic ('Reichsaramäisch') from Isakovka (p. 304ff); and the heavy iron weaponry and armor of the Sargat culture (fig. 8.18), which is particularly interesting in light of what we know about the evolution of the armor and weaponry of Parthian and Sasanian heavy cavalry (so-called *clibanarii*, cf. Mielczarek 1993; Olbrycht 1998).

In *Eurasia* I was particularly interested in the discussion of the huge Cucuteni-Tripol'ye sites in Romania and Bulgaria (p. 23ff); the Caucasian (Kura-Araxes culture) connections with Halaf and Uruk Northern Mesopotamia (p. 68ff); the dispersion of Early Transcaucasian

settlements and their dating (p. 96ff); the sources of the tin used in Georgia and Armenia (p. 108); the Karashamb silver goblet (pp. 116-117 and fig. 3.28); the extraordinary anchor-shaped axes from Karashamb, Bedeni, and Kyurduluk (fig. 3.29); the up-to-date treatment of horse domestication (p. 137ff); the detailed discussion of Bronze Age herding vs. Eurasian mounted pastoral nomadism (p. 158ff); the presentation of data on the impressive Kargaly metallurgical complex and the extraordinary bone tools found there (p. 170ff); the presentation of the Gonur Depe 'royal' burials in Turkmenistan (p. 196ff); and the treatment of the Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex or BMAC materials (p. 201ff).

As noted above, the sheer breadth of both *The Urals* and *Eurasia* necessarily enforced a large measure of selectivity on the authors with respect to the choice of subject matter. While *The Urals* attempts to be fairly systematic and aims for more in-depth coverage (albeit within a smaller geographical area), *Eurasia* is characterized by a more punctuated approach. This is presumably because, in Kohl's opinion, "The evolutionary 'action' takes place in different areas at different times across the steppes and along the northern frontier of the Ancient Near East. In the Neolithic, cultural developments are most spectacular in Anatolia; in the Chalcolithic, it is the Balkans, stretching across Romania, Moldova, and western Ukraine, then the Caucasus, southern Central Asia and eastern Iran, across the Urals and so forth" (p. 258). These shifts, he suggests, are reminiscent of "the modern historical era with its consecutive shifts in world power from Portugal and Spain to the Netherlands, France, England, and, currently, the United States".

The premise that centers of political or economic power have changed over time is uncontroversial, but the corollary suggested here, that 'the evolutionary action' in antiquity was akin to a moveable feast, seems questionable. Such a view privileges sites and periods from which we may have rich data and/or extraordinarily interesting finds—like the ones cited above—but at the same time this only accentuates the enormous gaps in our knowledge. It is also a view that, perhaps unconsciously, reflects the exigencies of teaching. When faced with teaching a geographically and temporally broad course over

a semester of 13 or 14 weeks, academic archaeologists have grown accustomed to presenting only the highlights of each area because it would be both boring and impossible to cover all periods in all areas under discussion. This selectivity, I suggest, is more responsible for the impression that the centers, 'where the action is', shifted from the Balkans to eastern Iran and across the Urals, than any devolution or stagnation in those areas following periods of seemingly great cultural activity. One can chart just as interesting a survey of cultural evolution in any one of the areas discussed by Kohl, as across them. It is merely a matter of scope and purpose.

In conclusion, I have intentionally said nothing about the very interesting observations on archaeology and language or the Indo-European problem in *Eurasia*, just as I have not dwelt on the often suspect sociological categories and reconstructions in *The Urals*. As noted above, there is an enormous amount one could criticize at a conceptual level in the past century of archaeology across Eurasia, but it seems more productive, now that Western scholars have access to such an immense range of material, to simply look at it, think about it, come to one's own conclusions, and not dwell on the shortcomings of this or that interpretation. My only quibble with these otherwise fascinating and highly stimulating books concerns a few technical matters. Too many of the photographs and drawings are of sub-standard quality for works published by Cambridge University Press. In many cases the original scans were probably not done at a high enough resolution. More annoying, however, is the large number of spelling and syntactical errors in *The Urals* which should have been caught by a competent copy-editor. I have no intention of recording here for posterity every one I came across, but it is clear that misspellings like 'Athlantic' for Atlantic (table 0.1); 'Parphian' instead of Parthian, 'Assiria' for Assyria, or 'Neo-Babilonian' for Neo-Babylonian (table 0.5), should have been caught. Russian syntax and usage in English is perfectly acceptable from a non-native speaker, but again, it is the responsibility of the copy-editor to sort these problems out before a book appears in print. Examples abound, such as, 'The continuance of aridity and moisture, if to judge by comparative data from eastern Europe and northern Kazakhstan, was different on either side of the

Ural mountains' (p. 10); or 'Here the climatic and landscape variability was not as contrasting as in the south, but it did take place' (p. 11). It is perfectly obvious what the authors meant, but that is not the point. This is not acceptable English for a volume published by CUP. Some names have been mangled as well. One suspects that the editors had no idea what the authors of *The Urals* meant (p. 274) when they referred to the Kushan ruler 'Kundzhula Kadfiz'—commonly known as Kujula Kadphises—or Tsar (!) Khuvishka—another Kushan ruler better known as Huvishka.

In conclusion, these two books are very welcome additions to the burgeoning body of English-language literature available on the prehistoric and early historic cultures of Eurasia. They provide helpful syntheses for non-experts in the field, opening up these vast areas to archaeologists more familiar with the adjacent areas. Undoubtedly they will fulfill admirably what must be one of their main goals—to stimulate more research by a wider array of scholars on the archaeology of the vast super-continent of Eurasia. □

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