

THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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**ETHNIC AND CULTURAL MOSAIC IN WESTERN BARABA DURING
THE LATE BRONZE TO IRON AGE TRANSITION
(14TH–8TH CENTURIES BC)***

In the Late Bronze Age, a group of cultures dominated by that of the Irmen had appeared in the forest-steppe area located on the right bank of the Irtysh River basin. Different parts of this region were inhabited by populations from the Irmen, Suzgun, and Pakhomovskaya cultures as well as those related to the Relief-Band Ware culture. The degree of their interaction appears to have varied. Evidence suggests that the intensive development of this group occurred during the subsequent transitional period, which spanned from the Bronze to the Iron Age. Populations that inhabited the north, west and south-west regions migrated into this area to establish large and fortified trading posts.

Keywords: *Late Bronze Age, Bronze/Iron Age transition, Irtysh River basin, Western Siberia.*

Introduction

The Ob-Irtysh forest-steppe area, referred to as the Baraba forest-steppe, is thought to have been developed by Man as far back as the Late Pleistocene. Stemming from an extensive study of this region begun in the late 1970s, a theory of the historical and cultural development of populations within a time span ranging from the Neolithic to the Late Middle Ages (Molodin, 1983) was suggested as early as the 1980s. Archaeological data from the subsequent studies carried out in the area have made it possible to develop and introduce a number of fundamental concepts underlying new reconstructions for the Bronze Age (Molodin, 1985), Early Iron Age

(Polosmak, 1987), and Early and High Middle Ages (Elagin, Molodin, 1991; Baraba..., 1988), as well as the Late Middle Ages and the Modern Period (Molodin, Sobolev, Soloviev, 1990).

One result obtained from the study that focused on the burial and settlement complexes, providing unique information, allowed substantial expansion of the range of data sources needed to revise the assumptions of the theory, and sometimes to change the theory. The efforts aimed at enhancing the theory have been particularly increased by wide use of methods employed in natural and exact sciences by archaeologists, or, in other words, by a multidisciplinary approach (Molodin, 2010a; Multidistsiplinarnyie issledovaniya..., 2013).

The large volume of evidence (obtained from excavations) accumulated to date, in addition to theoretical insights, makes it possible to examine on a fundamentally

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new level the processes of ethnic and cultural genesis that occurred in the region, now specifying and circumstantiating separate phenomena locally. This paper focuses, in particular, on the circumstantiation of the cultural and historical processes that occurred across the most-studied area in the Baraba forest-steppe during the Late Bronze Age and the Bronze to Iron Age transition.

Results

It should be understood that the natural boundaries of the western part of the Baraba forest-steppe, or the forest-steppe region of the Irtysh basin, were the Irtysh River in the west; the Ob-Irtysh interfluvium in the east (the upper reaches of the right-bank tributaries draining into the Irtysh are the Om, Tartas and Tara Rivers); the border between the forest-steppe and taiga zones in the north; and the border between the Baraba forest-steppe and the Kulunda steppe in the south (Panadiadi, 1953) (Fig. 1).

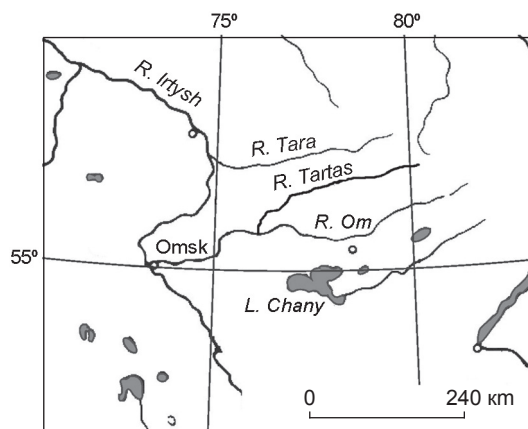


Fig. 1. The right bank of the Irtysh River basin.



Fig. 2. A typical landscape of the northern part of the Baraba forest-steppe.



Fig. 3. A typical landscape of the central part of the Baraba forest-steppe.



Fig. 4. A typical landscape of the southern part of the Baraba forest-steppe.

Owing to climate change, the boundaries of landscape zones in the area were always changeable. In wetter climates, the taiga massifs appear to have moved southward; then the forest-steppe also receded southward, recovering the steppe areas. These natural climatic phenomena had a profound, and sometimes decisive, influence on the development of ethnic and cultural situation in this region.

Given these variable boundaries, it may be suggested that the region had a north-south extent of ca. 210 km and a west-east extent of ca. 225 km, with a total area of about 47,250 km² (being comparable in area with such modern states as Denmark and Belgium).

When referring to this territory as the forest-steppe, it should be remembered that not all parts of it provided environmental conditions equally favorable for human habitat. Factors such as environmental ones sometimes determined the pattern of economic activity for populations that inhabited these areas. Therefore, the more densely forested northern area of the forest-steppe, abounding

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