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THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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THE MEDIEVAL METAL FACE FROM NOVOSIBIRSK REGION AS AN ITEM OF THE TRANSCULTURAL MATERIAL COMPLEX IN WESTERN SIBERIA*

Medieval bronze anthropomorphic faces from Western Siberia represent a special type among the metal figurines. The purpose and chronology of the bronze faces have been the focus of debate in the archaeological literature. The Middle and Lower Ob regions in the northern parts of Western Siberia represent the main dispersal area of bronze faces. Discoveries of such faces beyond the stated area are quite few and are of considerable interest, not only because of their spatial distribution, but also because of distant connections between various Western Siberian regions. The bronze anthropomorphic face was incidentally discovered in the Upper Ob region (Krokhalevka-57 in the vicinity of Novosibirsk). This item, which was found in a distant southern periphery of the dispersal area, is of interest as belonging to one of the categories of medieval transcultural material complex. The specific morphological features of this artifact suggest a greater age as compared with other medieval bronze faces discovered in Western Siberia.

Keywords: *Western Siberia, Middle Ages, metal anthropomorphic face, transcultural material complex, incidental archaeological finds.*

Introduction

The Kudryashovsky Bor (pine forest) and its surroundings represent one of the richest archaeological areas in the Novosibirsk Region (Molodin, Borodovsky, Troitskaya, 1996; Troitskaya, Sumin, Adamov, 2012; Sumin et al., 2013). Among various archaeological sources, incidental finds are of special importance (Roslyakov, 1990) because they are regarded as indirect indications of the sites that have not yet been discovered (including burial sites and sanctuaries), and because these objects can be considered museum pieces. Available written records suggest that artistically valuable things have been revealed in the Kudryashovsky Bor area for hundreds of years, beginning in the first quarter of the 18th century (Messerschmidt, 1962: 74–78).

Description of the face

The archaeological site of Krokhalevka-57 was discovered and registered by E.A. Sidorov in the Kochenevo District of the Novosibirsk Region in 1985. Sidorov described the site as a settlement without any relief features, located on a dune elevation stretching along the Chik River floodplain close to the confluence with the Kamyshenka River. The territory of the site has long been a field of arable land,

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and its borders were established on the basis of the area of the surface artifact dispersal. The site stretches for 300 m from north to south and 150 m from west to east and occupies the area of 5.12 ha. The surface collection of artifacts includes Irmen ceramic fragments of the Bronze Age, and animal bones (Sumin et al., 2013: 120).

In spring 2012, an anthropomorphic face made of "white bronze" (Fig. 1) was discovered on the pasture land in the central part of the dune. The item is 9 × 3.1 × × 0.2 cm, weighing 26.35 g. It is rhomboid, and the image is executed in low relief. The face has a helmet-like headgear topped with a round projection showing a distinct small groove. A similar projection is observed at the chin of the face, but it shows the groove outlines only at its edges. The possibility cannot be excluded that these parts were used for attaching the metal item to some base.

The upper part of the face with the "helmet" is made using a low relief technique. The helmet gently reaches the nose or the helmet part covering the nose. The inner part of the helmet is outlined with the decorative groove which terminates at the nose. This groove possibly highlights the nose element as an integral part of the helmet construction. The eyes and mouth of the face are depicted by ovoid depressions.

The item is cast of a nonferrous metal that can be tentatively designated "white bronze". The multi-element analysis of the alloy composition, implemented using the Hitachi TM 3000 electron microscope and the Brulcer Quantax 70 energy-dispersive x-ray fluorescence spectrometer (operated by M.M. Ignatov), has shown the main qualitative features of the alloy. The area in the upper nose-part on the obverse side of the face (Fig. 2) exhibits a copper content of 45.8 %, a tin proportion of 48.4 %, and a lead proportion of 5.7 %. The analysis of the reverse part has shown the proportions of 46.0; 49.2 and 4.8 % respectively. Thus, the face was made of a tin-based alloy corresponding to the features of the "white bronze". The sprue was likely located close to the lower portion of the face at the chin projection.

Fig. 1. Human face from Krokhalevka-57.

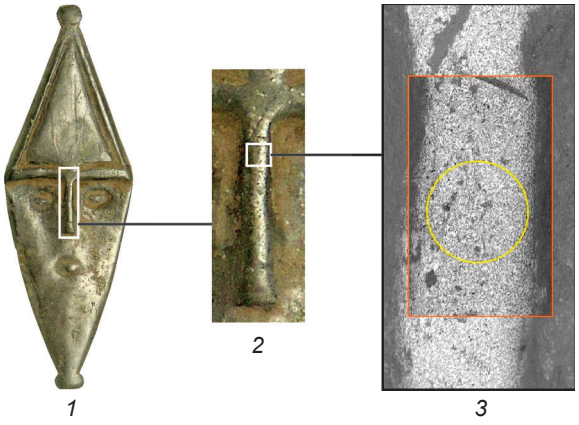

Fig. 2. Part of the Krokhalevka-57 face that was subjected to energy-dispersive x-ray fluorescence analysis.

Analogues and period of existence

It should be noted that the main area of distribution of these artifacts is situated in the Middle and Lower Ob region that is at a considerable distance to the northwest from the Upper Ob. Few similar items have been reported from Barsova Gora in the Surgut region of the Ob (Karacharov, 2002: 44, fig. 20). The data from the Saigatinsky III burial ground suggest that bronze faces represented part of the grave dolls (Zykov et al., 1994: 82, fig. 65, 66; Karacharov, 2002). Formerly, such images were interpreted as belonging to ancestors-warriors who were worshiped and buried (Cherkasova, 1987: 24). Other researchers believe that these items were used as masks covering the doll-faces (Zykov, Fedorova, 2001: 61, 62). Apparently these objects served certain ritual purposes.

There are also various viewpoints concerning the period when bronze faces were used in Western Siberia. A.I. Soloviev argued that many such images showed metal helmets. The morphological features of this armory may be well correlated with the real objects, which gives the grounds for age estimation (Soloviev, 1987: 61–64, Plate XV). K.G. Karacharov proposed to date these items to the 8th–9th centuries (possibly the very beginning of the 10th century) AD (Karacharov, 2002: 49, 50). The upper