

THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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TRIQUESTRUMS OF THE SCYTHIAN PERIOD IN THE NORTHERN ALTAI

Triquestrums, or ornaments of female headgear widely used in Gorny Altai and Tuva during the Scythian period no later than the 1st millennium BC are described. Most of them were found in unlooted Early Iron Age burials on the lower Katun River (Chultukov Log-1, Barangol-1 and 2). The decoration of triquestrums reflects all the diversity of Scythian-Siberian animal style. The fact that these ornaments are distributed in the northern Altai suggests that they were a distinct element of the northern local variant of the Pazyryk culture.

Keywords: *Altai, Early Iron Age, Scythian period, headgear, Scythian-Siberian style, Pazyryk culture.*

Introduction

Triquestrums are a specific feature of the Early Iron Age culture of Southern Siberia. The term was introduced by A.D. Grach with reference to embossed circular gold adornments from Tuva (Sagly Bazhi II, burial mound 3; Duzherlig Khovuzu I, burial mound 2). These objects resemble a cockade with the representation of a carnivorous bird's head (Grach, 1980: 35, 36). Ornate tops of thick metal pins (Fig. 1, 3; 2, 3; 3, 1) named triquestrums were discovered at the Maima IV burial ground in the lower reaches of the Katun River. They were composed of a thick iron rod and a cast bronze base bearing zoomorphic and solar images and covered with gold foil (Burykina, 1989: 69; Kireyev, 1994: 41).

In our view, the term 'triquestrum' can be used with reference to complex robust tops of pins made of various materials (gold, bronze, and iron) and decorated in the

Scythian-Siberian style. Compositions may contain from one to three images and a solar swirl-like design. A series of such artifacts was recovered from graves of the Scythian period in the northern Altai (Cherny Anui-3, Pokrovsky Log-5, Surtaika-1) (Molodin, Borodovsky, 1994: 24; Gelmel et al., 1996: 111, fig. 1, 5; Kiryushin, Stepanova, 1999; Abdulganeyev, 2005: 44, fig. 1, 8; Borodovsky et al., 2008: 54, fig. 18, 5). In the lower and middle Katun, they were encountered in female burials attributable to the northern local variant of the Pazyryk culture. There they were found in association with wigs dyed black (Kubarev, 1987: 135; Fenomen..., 2000: 78, 163–167) (Fig. 1). The most representative collections of triquestrums originated from burial grounds of the Scythian period on the right bank of the lower Katun: Chultukov Log-1 (burial mounds 9, 11, 12, 37, 46, 47), and Barangol-1 (burial mound 2) and Barangol-2 (burial mound 7).

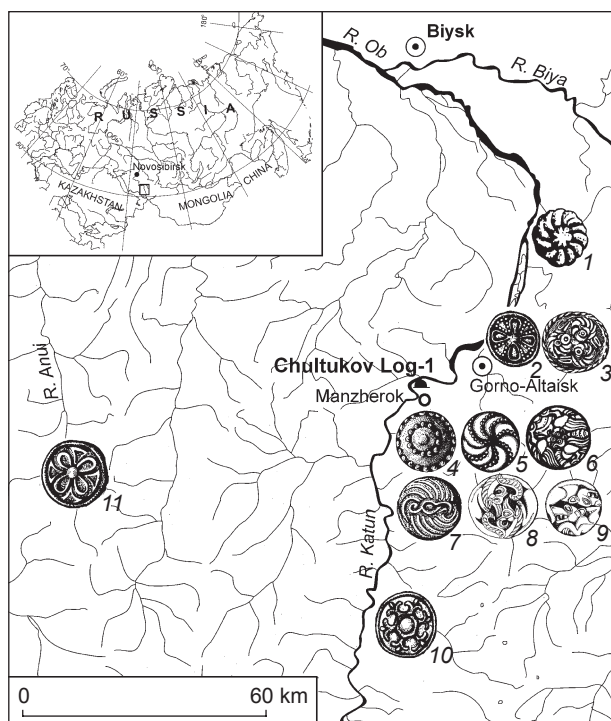


Fig. 1. Distribution of triquestrums in the northern Altai.
1 – Surtaika-1; 2 – Maima XIX; 3 – Maima IV; 4–6 – Chultukov Log-1;
7–9 – Barangol-1 and 2; 10 – Verkh-Elanda-2; 11 – Cherny Anui-3.

Burial assemblages with triquestrums from the mountain valley on the lower Katun

Burial mound 13 of Maima IV yielded remains of a headgear with a framework of iron stems located next to the cranium of the buried woman. Judging by fragments preserved thanks to the effects of bronze oxide, the headgear was made of felt and had the shape of a cap. One of the rods ran horizontally through the cap from its back part to the peak. A thick bronze plate covered with gold and bearing three images of ram heads (Fig. 2, 3; 3, 1) was attached to this rod. The other rod was placed vertically over the peak and ended in a rifled wooden top, leafed with gold foil (Akimova et al., 2008: 29). Iron pins were also found in the burial (Burykina, 1989: 69; Kireyev, 1994: 41).

In burial mound 1 of Barangol-1, four deceased were placed on the right side with their legs flexed. Their heads were oriented towards the southwest. Skeleton 1 belonged to a man 60–65 years old. A poorly preserved iron dagger, approx. 20 cm long, was found in association with this skeleton. Skeleton 2, a woman 45–50 years of age was located to the right of skeleton 1. The following grave goods were discovered at the head area: a jug-like ceramic vessel with the neck bearing an incised net design;

disarticulated sheep vertebra, and an iron knife. Three iron pins used for fixing a hairdo were also recovered from that area. Two pins are nail-like with the head covered with gold foil; the third pin was topped with a bird figurine. Two S-shaped ear-rings made of bronze wire were discovered on the skull. Skeleton 3 belonged to a child of 5–6 years of age. This skeleton was poorly preserved in the wet soil. A circular decorative bronze plate in a poor state of preservation was discovered close to the child's skull. At the head area of skeleton 4, which was of a woman 18–20 years old, stood a jug-like ceramic vessel in the left corner of the grave pit. The body of the vessel was decorated with an incised net design and S-shaped scrolls. Sheep vertebra and a blade iron knife were located close to the facial part of the skull; a grinding stone lay near parietal bones. A bronze ear-ring with a loop covered with gold foil rested on the skull. A discoid bronze decorative plate in a poor state of preservation was found next to it. A large medal-like mirror in a case, possibly decorated with four sewn-on canines of Siberian deer, maral was located next to the right femur. Caked iron objects were

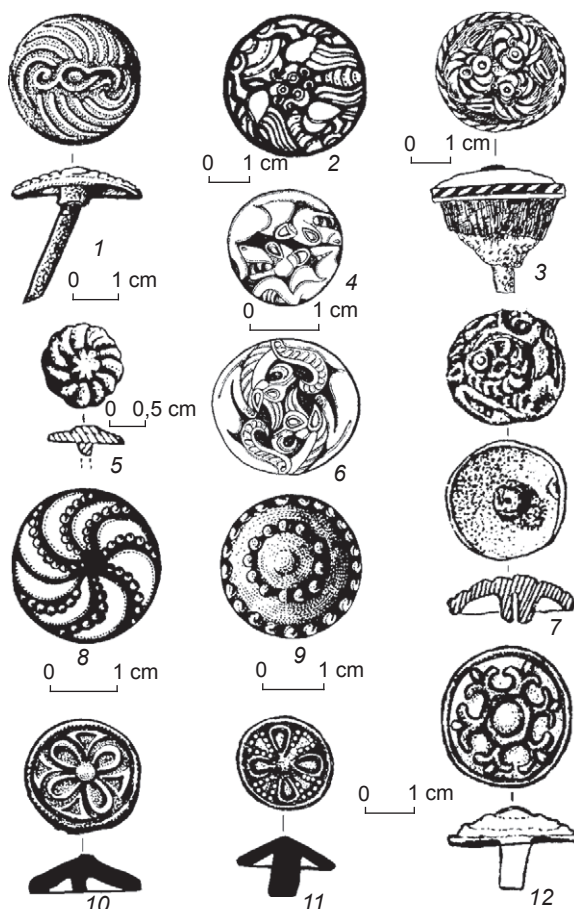


Fig. 2. Triquestrums from the northern Altai.
1 – Barangol-2; 2, 8, 9 – Chultukov Log-1; 3 – Maima IV;
4, 6 – Barangol-1; 5 – Surtaika-1; 7 – Pokrovsky Log-5;
10 – Cherny Anui-3; 11 – Maima XIX; 12 – Verkh-Elanda-2.

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