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Burial complexes of the Catacomb culture: To the 20th anniversary of the work of the Steppe Archaeological Expedition of State Historical Museum in Remontnensky district in Rostov region

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Abstract. The study discusses the results of the excavations and the studies of the burial complexes of two local variants of the catacomb culture of the Middle Bronze Age of the Northwestern Caspian Sea region in the Remontnoye district (Rostov oblast). Being based on a comparative analysis, the author argues the validity of the allocation of local variants of catacomb culture — Eastern and Western that were adjacent to each other and entered into cultural contact. It is manifested in the use of similar tools, weapons, jewelry and dishes decorated in the same style but with the allocation of the local features of production technology figuration. According to the author, these features are the hallmark for determining the cultural identity of the burials of the Manych catacomb cultures.

Keywords: funeral rite, archaeological findings, typological method, East Manych Catacomb Culture, EMCC, West Manych Catacomb Culture, WMCC, the Bronze Age.

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Погребальные комплексы катакомбной культуры: к 20-летию работы Степной археологической экспедиции Государственного исторического музея в Ремонтненском районе Ростовской области

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Аннотация. Рассматриваются результаты исследования погребальных комплексов двух локальных вариантов катакомбной культуры эпохи средней бронзы Северо-Западного Прикаспия на территории Ремонтненского района Ростовской области. На основе сравнительного анализа авторы аргументируют обоснованность выделения локальных вариантов катакомбной культуры — восточного и западного, которые соседствовали друг с другом и вступали в культурный контакт, что проявляется в использовании сходных орудий, оружия, украшений и посуды, декорированных в едином стиле, но с выделением локальных особенностей технологии производства и орнаментации. По мнению авторов, эти особенности являются критерием определения культурной принадлежности погребенных манычских катакомбных культур.

Ключевые слова: погребальный обряд, археологические находки, типологический метод, восточноманычская катакомбная культура, западноманычская катакомбная культура, эпоха бронзы

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In 2022, it took place the twentieth field season of the Steppe Archaeological Expedition of the State Historical Museum (thereafter — Steppe AE SHM) which conducts salvage excavations in the Remontnoye region (Rostov oblast). The systematic archaeological researches were not carried out in this area until 2003 when the expedition began. Prospecting works were made only in the late 1980s. That time B.A. Raev has compiled the first archaeological map of the Remontnoye district. In its turn, in 1991–1994 the Novocherkassk archaeological expedition maintained an additional inventory reconciliation registering 472 mound groups which included up to 5000 mounds. The excavations started in 1989 when three

burial mounds of the Early Bronze Age — the Late Middle Ages were explored along the route “Tihiy Liman — Krasnoarmeysky”. In 1992 there were examined nine mounds of the Lysyansky I–III burial grounds near Kievka village. In 1994 — the Polovets mound “Sladkiy” near the farmstead Razdolny as well as two mounds of the Gashun–VIII burial ground [1].

Since 2003 the systematic scientific researches have been carried out in the Remontnoe region (In the frame of the Steppe AE SHM). During the time what has passed since the beginning of its work, it has been maintained a study of the numerous burial mounds left by culture-bearers of the Eneolithic Age, the Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age and the Middle Ages. Spanning from 2003 through 2021 there were examined about four dozen mounds from burial grounds located at the territory of Remontnoye village and the Remontnensky district. In addition to it, in the different years the separate expedition teams (led by Belkevich E.V., Ibragimova E.I., Kovalev D.S., Leonova N.V., Omelchenko I.S., Panasyuk N.V.) conducted exploring surveys of the outskirts of Remontnoye village. The result of these explorations became an identification of the previously unknown decaying archaeological monuments (mounds, locations) as well as clarification of the condition of already registered objects. As part of the expedition work there were approbated the various innovative methods allowing for a more detailed study of traces of the different epochs. Also it was created a representative radiocarbon database [2]. Each field season it was maintained a collection of soil samples for the geochemical, spore-pollen, phytolith, bioturbational analyses, collection of wood samples as well as a herbarium of the local flora for a geobotanical description of the area where the archaeological sites are located. Over the years, specialists from the foreign universities took part in the expedition taking samples for radiocarbon and mass spectrometric analyzes (In the frame of maintaining of joint projects of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR). Materials from the Remontnoye district’ burial mounds were included in the permanent exposition of the Historical Museum (Hall IV) and were presented at the international exhibition “The Bronze Age: Europe without Borders” (the State Hermitage Museum, the State Historical Museum, 2013) as well as at the exposition “Nomad. Between the Heaven and the Earth” (2014) dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the SHM Department of archaeological monuments.

Steppe AE SHM not only conducts excavations and monitors burial mounds and sites collapsing as a result of anthropogenic and natural influence but is also a talent foundry of the qualified archaeological personnel. Over the years, many specialists from the various fields, students and graduate students from Moscow, Voronezh, Rostov–on–Don and Volgograd universities have worked at the expedition. Shishlina N.I. (an employee of the SHM Department of archaeological monuments, Doctor of the Historical Sciences) is a leader and the scientific consultant of the expedition. Basing on the materials obtained while working at the Remontnoye district, there were defended three candidate's theses (Mimokhod R.A., Kazarnitsky A.A., Panasyuk N.V.). These data became the basis for a series of publications in the different areas of research [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14].

Over the course of twenty years of the archaeological work there were excavated mounds from the burial grounds Peschany–I, Peschany–IV, Peschany–V, Temrta–I, Temrta–II, Temrta–III, Temrta–IV, Temrta–V, Sukhaya Termista–I, Sukhaya Termista–II, Ulan–IV, Nemashkalov–VI. There more than two hundred burials of the different eras were found. Most of them (more than one and a half hundred) belong to the different stages of the Bronze Age, three dozen burials date back to the Early Iron Age, forty items date back to the Middle Ages. A unique finding was made in 2012 in mound 15 of the Peschany–V. It was the main burial dating back to the Eneolithic period. Besides, excavation of sites and locations of the Middle Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age was carried out in the Bolshaya Elista, Gashun–Davsta, Kerest, Tseket, Denisov, Nemashkalova, and Peschanaya gullies.

So, the most representative serie of burials dates back to the Bronze Age. A characteristic feature of the Remontnoye district (located at the Middle Ergeny) is a large number of burials of the Early Catacomb chronological horizon. Over the past period, the Steppe Expedition has studied four dozen of such burials. It is likely at that time the area was inhabited by a large group of people who left a significant number of burial mounds with burial structures characterized by the similar funeral rituals [15].

The next chronological horizon is associated with the monuments of the Manych Catacomb cultures. For today, more than 60 burials of the developed Catacomb period have been studied in the mounds of the Remontnoye region. Based on the peculiarities of the funeral rite and the differences in the maintaining equipment

they are attributed to both the Eastern and Western Manych Catacomb cultures. Whereby, the burials of related cultures were found even within the same burial ground (Peschany–V). It is obvious that this region was a contact zone between two related population groups.

The burial grounds and mounds of these cultures are located in close proximity to each other, on both banks of the river Dzhurak–Sal (although no multicultural burials were found within the same mound). The series of burials of the Eastern Manych Catacomb culture from the most studied burial ground Peschany–V includes: destroyed burials 3–6 from Mound 4, burials 3, 4, 5 from Mound 5 (excavations took place in 2007). The findings attributed by Western Manych Catacomb culture include: burials 4 and 6 from Mound 1 (excavations — 2003), burials 3, 5, 7 from Mound 15 (excavations — 2012), burials 1 and 5 from Mound 16 (excavations — 2013 under the leadership of Ibragimova E.R.), burials 4, 5, 6 from Mound 18 (excavations 2014), burial 3 from Mound 13, burial 5 from Mound 16 and burial 4 from Mound 17 of the Peschany–IV burial ground (excavations –2015, 2018, 2019).

Thus, the monuments in the vicinity of Remontnoye village are located in the contact zone of the Manych Catacomb cultures marking its northern border for today. In the south such border can be called with burial grounds Rashevatsky, Zolotarevka–3, 4, 6, 7, Ilyinsky–I where there are also burials within the same mound group performed according to both the WMCC (West Manych Catacomb Culture) and EMCC (East Manych Catacomb Culture) rituals.

Differences between the burial traditions of WMCC and EMCC have been noted in a number of works [16; 17]. Despite the general similarity in the design of the catacombs, the Western Manych monuments are characterized by a right-sided position of the buried with a predominance of orientations into the western and northern sectors [18. P. 96]. The burial set also allows us to talk about the mutual cultural proximity. However, their ceramics have differences in both forms and methods of figuration [19; 20].

The common feature of all Manych burials studied by the Steppe AE SHM is the absolute predominance of secondary graves. There is not a single burial with which the construction of the original mound would be associated. All Manych complexes were built in the earlier Pit mounds or Early catacomb culture mounds. Although there is a group of 7 burials situated in the center of the mound with significant additional fillings associated with them. Similar

additions were made to five burials made in the eastern and western sectors of the mound (Ulan–IV 3/5; 4/14 and 15; Sukhaya Termista–I 1/5 and 6). It is natural that these burials have the most strict grave structures (N–, T–, U– and G–catacombs). In other cases only parts of pits or chambers have survived or they have been completely destroyed.

In addition to the central part, the Manych Catacomb complexes occupy mainly the eastern half of the mound (18 burials). Whereby, they are located in the relative proximity to the main graves. A significant group of burials (16 burials) was built in the western half of the mound mainly in the western and southwestern direction (these burials were located in the foundation of the mounds). The overall picture changes greatly while analyzing individual mounds containing several Manych secondary complexes. Thus, in the Peschany–V burial ground in mounds 1, 15, 16, 18 the burials were in the center or in the eastern part; in the mound 4 and 5 the complexes are located in the center and around a circle. It is worth noting that in the first case we are talking about the Western Manych monuments, and in the second — about the Eastern Manych monuments. The location of the secondary burials in the eastern part of the mound used to be a standard for the EMCC [21]. However, in the Sukhaya Termista–I and II burial grounds the complexes which most likely should be attributed to this culture were located in the western side.

In our opinion, the location of the WMCC burials in two mounds of the Ulan–IV burial ground is very indicative. The burial ground is located on the western periphery of the studied microregion and contains a large number of burial complexes from the different epochs. In Mound 3 there were studied 14 Western Manych burials, whereby 9 of them were children's. All of them were inserted into the embankment into the southern half of the mound (mainly the southwestern and southern floors); most of them did not have secured grave structures. In Mound 4, on the contrary, burials of adults predominate (4 out of 7); they are located in the center and around a circle; T– and N–shaped catacombs have been recorded for them. Based on the sample of WMCC burials at our disposal, we can conclude that culture–bearers preferred the eastern half of the mound, mainly its northern sector. This refers to the burials that let into the mainland, along with catacomb structures, most of them are related to the burial of adult individuals. A similar situation is marked in Mound 4. Mound

3 which became a children's necropolis during the developed catacomb period contains burials in an embankment and there were no burial pits here or have not been secured. Burial 5 from this mound, which was apparently the main one for this horizon, has an N-shaped catacomb structure and is located in the southeastern sector.

An analysis of the age and gender composition of people buried during the developed catacomb period demonstrates an evident predominance of children's burials (21; two of them included two children). The age of children does not exceed 9 years, a significant group consists of infants and newborns. Only in one mound were found burials of teenagers (Peschany–V 16/1 and 5), whereby the similarity of the location and details of the ritual suggests their synchronicity. This is a marked contrast to the age composition of individuals of the previous Early Catacomb horizon where the number of adolescents is significantly higher in relation to other groups. The largest number of children's burials have been studied in Mound 4 of the Peschany–V burial ground, Mound 1 of the Sukhaya Termista–I burial ground (here the Manych catacomb burials belong only to children) and the abovementioned Mound 3 of the Ulan–IV burial ground. Among the adults buried during this period men predominate (8 out of 11 individuals whose sex was determined) a.

Noteworthy is the presence of a large number of partial burials, the so-called "packages" (Peschany–V 5/5 and 18/6; Ulan–IV 3/27 and 4/14). According to Andreeva M.V., such burials make up no more than 4% in the WMCC [21; p. 87]. Not having a comparative data for the WMCC, we would venture to suggest that the situation is relatively similar that is to say this type of inhumation is extraordinary. In our sample, similar burials were found in mounds with both Eastern and Western Manych catacomb burials. All of them were made in the foundation of the mound; in one case, filling was associated with this burial (Ulan–IV 4/14). In the latter case, the burial of an adult in the form of a "package" was located together with the skeletons of two children.

Analysis of the inventory of Manych catacomb burials allows us to identify some features that may become the character of a cultural indication. Thus, only in the Eastern Manych children's burials were so-called drinking bowls found (cone-shaped hollow bone objects with an oblique cut at the narrow end (Peschany–V 5/3 and 6; Peschany–IV 13/3)). It is quite natural that astragalus appear in children's burials, although they are represented by the

single specimens as well as the maximum number (55 pieces) was found in the burial of a mature man (Ulan–IV 3/5). Favorable conditions of keeping and careful fixation of the material yielded a remarkable series of wooden products: bowls, dishes, disks, pins and almost an entire vehicle. The set of metal objects is quite standard and characterizes the ordinariness of the examined burials for the developed catacomb horizon. A knife and an awl were found in two burials (Ulan–IV 3/5 and 4/15), and warty and barrel-shaped beads were found in four. 58 % of the burials contained ceramic items (various vessels, incense burners, braziers) in their inventory. Many findings are presented in fragments.

Basing on the results of two decades of research on mounds in the vicinity of Remontnoye village we can come to the conclusion that the mound burial grounds which are located here mark the contact zone between two related catacomb cultures — East and West Manych. Despite the general similarity in the design of the burial structure and the burial set of the two cultures, differences in the orientation of the skeletons, in the forms and in the methods of decoration of the ceramics have differences even within the same mound. It makes possible to use ceramic forms and tools as cultural indicators even within the same burial ground or mound.

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