

LONG-TERM MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH PROJECT OF SETTLEMENTS AND BURIALS IN TUVA REPUBLIC – THE ANCIENT PUZZLE OF SCYTHIAN WANDERINGS IN EURASIA

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Abstract

Tuva Republic is located in the centre of Eurasia, the southern part of Siberia. The area comparable to Uruguay is inhabited with density of only 1.85 people per km². Over the centuries, Tuva was affected by variety of powers: in the 6th-8th century, Tuva was included in Turkic and later in Uyghur Khaganate. In the 13th century the territory of Tuva was conquered by the Mongols whose influence prevailed until the middle of the 18th century. Chinese ruled later, until the territory gained independence in 1921, but in 1944 Tuva joined Soviet Union, later Russia Federation. Archaeological excavations in Tuva are regular in a large scale; however, the most important and largest excavation project in Russia and even worldwide takes a place at planned railway connection of Kyzyl-Kuragino, hundreds of kilometres long. Project is supported by the authorities of Russian Federation and Tuva Republic, Russian Geographical Society, the company “EVRAZ” and other supporters. Tuva’s Valley of the Kings historically has been a major area of interest for archaeologists because it contains the largest burial mounds in the region of Tuva and in all the region of Altai. Therefore, the studies performed prior the construction of railway are the salvage of the World’s Heritage. Leading archaeologists from Russia (e.g., Marina Kilunovskaya, Vladimir Semenov) as well as from other countries perform research projects. Additionally, each year from 2011 volunteers are invited by Russian Geographical Society to participate in excavations. Tuva’s Valley of the Kings is an area of interest for multidisciplinary scientists due its largest burial mounds (kurgans) in the region. Large amount of burial sites are still under the study and have been dated by radiocarbon and archaeological methods. Each year archaeologists find great masterpieces of art as well as figures of animals, tools and other artefacts. According to the studies of Dr. Mikhail Piotrovsky, pins with animals carved into golden surface are assessed as “encyclopaedia of Scythian animal art because you have all the animals which roamed the region such as panther, lions, camels, deer and other”. It applies to the original Scythian style of the Altai region, which eventually moved to the Black Sea region and finally affected the style of artworks in the ancient Greece. The research showed that fierce nomadic Scythian tribes wandered around the Eurasian steppe, from the northern borders of China and Mongolia to the west, the Black Sea region, around the period from the 7th to 3rd centuries B.C. In the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. they interacted with the ancient Greeks who had colonized the Black Sea region (Ukraine and Kalmykia). Research has shown that the ancient Greek influence was evident in Scythian culture and tools. The long-term systematic archaeological excavations and analyses of artefacts will open secrets of the Scythian history through times in order to solve the puzzle of ancient wanderings of peoples in Eurasiblica.

Keywords: Scythians, Tuva, burial mounds, kurgans, Kyzyl-Kuragino project