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Research

ARCHAIC MOTIFS IN NORTH RUSSIAN FOLK EMBROIDERY AND PARALLELS IN ANCIENT ORNAMENTAL DESIGNS OF THE EURASIAN STEPPE PEOPLES

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For some one hundred years now Russian folk embroideries have attracted closest notice. Towards the close of the 19th century several magnificent collections of such embroideries were assembled. Further, researches conducted by V. Stasov,¹ S. Shakhovskaya², V. Sidamon-Eristova and N. Shabelskaya³ initiated the systematization and classification of the various types of ornamental designs in Russian folk embroidery. These same authors also made the first attempts to decipher the intricate narrative compositions so characteristic of folk tradition in Northern Russia.

The surging interest in the folk arts and crafts caused a series of notable studies to be devoted to analysis of the narrative and symbolical content, the specific techniques and the regional dissimilarities of Russian folk embroidery. However, most authors concentrated on the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations and the archaic three-element compositions incorporating stylized and transmuted representations of, more often, female and, less often, male pre-Christian deities. It is this group of motifs that has always fascinated students. A somewhat specific group consists of the geometrized motifs of North Russian embroideries, which, as a rule, accompany the basic elaborated narrative compositions—although frequently such motifs are exclusive in the decoration of towels, sashes, skirt hems, and shirt and blouse sleeves and shoulder yokes, which explains their importance for art historians.

It should be noted that along with an analysis of the complex narrative designs, greatest note was paid by A. Ambroz⁴ in his well-known articles to the geometrical symbolism as archaic in Russian embroidery. Further, in her fundamental monograph published in 1978 G. Maslova⁵ extensively considered the evolution and transformation of geometrized ornamental motifs in terms of their historico-ethnographical parallels, which regrettably go no further back than the 10th-11th centuries.

B. Rybakov has always highlighted the archaic geometrized symbolism in Russian ornamental design. Thus, ever present in his writings of the 1960s and 1970s⁶, and, especially, in his 1981 treatise concerned with the paganism of the ancient Slavs is the point that the folk memory has preserved and carried through the ages in the orna-

mentation of embroidery, wood carving, and folk toys the profoundly ancient weltanschauungs rooted in the dust of the millennia.⁷

Most fascinating in this respect are the collections of Northern Russia museums especially from places that had been populated by the Slavs in the 9th and 10th centuries prior to the Christianization of Russia. To all practical intents, there were no large ethnic units, there that spoke a different language, while the remoteness from the central states, the relatively peaceful existence (the North-Eastern part of Vologda Province was hardly ever ravaged by war), plus the dense forests and the isolation of many inhabited localities due to marshes and the absence of roads, all served to preserve patriarchal mores, and economies, and also ensured a jealous affection for ancestral beliefs, thus implying the preservation of the ancient symbolism as encoded in the ornamental motifs of embroidery.

Of particular interest are the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, embroideries deriving from the North-Eastern sections of Vologda province and the neighbouring districts of Arkhangelsk province. Toponymical evidence shows that in those times these parts were hardly populated at all by Finno-Ugric tribes. Most of the names are of a Slavonic origin and furthermore most are extremely ancient, as for instance, Dubrava⁸ (which means forest). Thus, of 137 localities in the Tarnog district of the Vologda region only six have distinctly Finno-Ugric names. We may hence presume that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the population here was comprised of direct descendants of those Slavonic (Krivichi?) groups that had migrated to these parts in the 11th century, bringing with them the time-hallowed traditions in their ornamental designs, which succeeding generations brought down almost to the present.

The ornamental designs we shall describe below possess the following salient features. They were commonplace in the North-Eastern districts of Vologda region and current right up to the 1930s. Further they were employed to embellish exclusively articles of a sacral significance, such as women's blouses, notably the hems, shoulder yokes and sleeves, and also aprons, headdresses, sashes and towels. "The preservation in embroidery of the extremely early stages of human religious mentality... derives from the ritual character of the articles embroidered... the many that could be listed include the bridal kokoshnik diadems, shirts and blouses and mantles of wedding trains: *One special ritual item, long dissociated from its domestic twin, was the richly and intricately embroidered towel. Such towels were employed to offer the traditional bread-and-salt symbol of hospitality and welcome, to serve as the reins of wedding trains, or to carry a coffin and let it down into the grave. They were also used to adorn the "beautiful" corner in the house where the icons were hung, while the icons themselves, were deposited on towels⁹ specially made for the purpose (my italics — S. Zh.)*", writes Rybakov about this "Tinen folklore". It is precisely such sacred ornamental designs that are to be seen in the Russian folk embroideries from the ethnographical museum in Vologda, which,

quantitywise, will further serve as the comparative material used in attempts to elucidate parallels between the ornamental designs of North-Russian embroideries and those of the peoples inhabiting the vast expanses of the Eurasian steppes and forest-steppes at different times in history.

The lozenge and the rhombic meander represent one of the oldest ornamental motifs of the Eurasian tribes. It is to be found in paleolithic times, employed for example, to decorate sundry artefacts of bone, that were recovered from the upper paleolithic Mezin site near Chernigov in the Ukraine. In 1965, paleontologist V. Bibikova surmised that the spiral meander, the broken bands of meander and the rhombic meanders on items recovered from the Mezin site originated as an imitation of the natural design on the ivory of mammoth tusks.¹⁰ She conjectured therefrom that for upper paleolithic man this motif symbolized the mammoth which in turn embodied, as the basic target of the hunt, the concept of plenty and power (Fig. 1). This motif comprised of rhombic meanders, spiral meanders and zigzags or flashes survived over the millennia (Figs. 2, 3, 26 and 27) modifying, but retaining their time-hallowed substance. We encounter this symbol of good fortune and prosperity and as a protective totem on both religious items and on pottery, in other words storages of food and water, again in later cultures, as for instance, the Balkan cultures (Figs. 2 and 6), the South-East European culture, the 5th millennium B. C. Tripolye-Cucuteni culture, etc. Rybakov notes: "The rhombic meander motif is encountered on vessels, especially the lavishly ornamented ritual vessels, on anthropomorphic figures of clay, also of an unquestionably ritual character, and on the clay thrones of goddesses or priestesses".¹¹

On Tripolye-Cucuteni pottery we encounter a stable repetition of the meander motif, which already differs to some extent from the upper paleolithic Mezin design, in that it is still more heavily geometrized and stylized (Fig. 7). Apposite instances are afforded by the decor of the pottery recovered from the Frumushika I, Khebeshtsi I, and Gura Veyi sites. All these meander motifs are, as a rule to be observed on pottery of the late Early Period and early Middle Period of the Tripolye-Cucuteni culture.

It should be noted that the swastika design may already be discerned in the bands of the double, right- and left-handed meander on bone artifacts from the Mezin site (Fig. 1). This is one more characteristic motif of Tripolye-Cucuteni decor, used either in its simplest version (Fig. 32) or with projecting lines from each bent arm of the cross (Fig. 52). Further the Σ -motif characteristic of Tripolye pottery decoration (Fig. 8) and likewise encountered to the north of Tripolye (Fig. 9), as well as the swirling triangle with its scroll head points are transmutations of the meander motif.

Summing up, we may outline a range of ornamental motifs, that though limited and unquestionably not exhausting the entire richness of Tripolye pottery decor, is still sufficient to characterize this

culture, which we shall invoke further to draw comparisons with subsequent periods in history. They include the meander and its variants such as the spiral meander, the swastika (Figs. 46, 48, 50 and 51), more complex swastika designs, the Σ -motif (Figs. 12 and 13) and the swirling triangle with its scrollhead points (Figs. 44 and 49).

To establish the closest affinities, timewise, we shall naturally address ourselves to the pottery of cultures that, at different times existed within the present territory of the USSR on sites once occupied by the Tripolye culture. Oddly enough such affinities in the pottery of cultures antedating the Timber-Frame (*srubnaya*) culture, and, for that matter, in the last named culture itself, are few and far between. The basic elements of the decor of Timber-Frame culture pottery, which according to B. Grakov¹² dates to the 16th-12th centuries B.C. are chains of lozenges, rhombic lattices and rows of triangles on the shoulders of vessels, with bodies frequently carrying the characteristic slanted crosses, now and again composed of two intersecting Σ -motifs.

Further stages in the evolution of the traditional ornamentation of pottery, incorporating an astounding plethora of sundry versions of the meander and swastika motifs, are to be encountered in the pottery of the Andronovo culture (also of the 17th-12th centuries B.C. according to S. Kiselev)¹³ immediately contiguous to the Timber-Frame culture. These two cultures concurrently existed over a lengthy period throughout the vast expanses of the steppes and forest steppes of the territory that is now the USSR. Kiselev indicated the affinity between the pottery decor of these two cultures observing that "... one cannot fail to note the obvious superiority of even early Andronovo pottery over the kindred Timber-Frame pottery".¹⁴ One cannot but concur. The extraordinary richness and diversity of meander and swastika motifs in Andronovo pottery decor are beautifully illustrated in the artefacts published in treatises concerned with the prehistory of Southern Siberia by Kiselev, in the monograph "The Bronze Age in Western Siberia"¹⁵ by M. Kosarev (Figs. 15 and 16) and also by V. Stokolos¹⁶ (Fig. 17) and F. Arslanova¹⁷ (Figs 18, 28 and 34) in their respective articles. Like the Timber-Frame culture the Andronovo culture with all its different versions ranged over a vast territory. Its western-most artifacts are to be found in the Timber-Frame culture area along the line between Donetsk and Voronezh.¹⁸ In the east the Andronovo culture extended along the southern Trans-Urals up to and including the Minusinsk depression. In the north it was bounded by the Southern Urals, while in the south it entered Northern Afghanistan. According to the evidence N. Chlenova¹⁹ cites in her article, Andronovo pottery in its Alakul version was common in Central Asia between the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya, especially so along the banks of the Amu-Darya but also in the Kyzylkum desert. She has indicated the impact of Andronovo pottery in its Fedorovo version, (the classical Andronovo version), and in its Alakul version on Amu-Darya Cherkaskul pottery. She also

indicates that now and again Fedorovo type pottery can likewise be encountered in digs along the banks of the Amu-Darya. "Uniting the Amu-Darya region of Cherkaskul pottery with the North-Siberian, Urals and Volga region, we find that the Cherkaskul culture extends for 2,400 km from Kurgan-Tube to Kazan."²⁰ In the Amu-Darya region we find Cherkaskul pottery together with Alakul and Tazabagyab pottery; further Cherkaskul pottery is often encountered in the same sites together with Central Asian Khurmantau and Fedorovo pottery. "*These stabilized combinations warrant our uniting the pottery of these three cultures into one group*"²¹ (my italics.— S. Zh.). Speaking of the purely Fedorovo pottery encountered west of the Urals, N. Chlenova says that it is known in forest and forest-steppe regions to the north but no further than the 56th parallel.²² One must necessarily add the vast expanses where the Andronovo tribes coexisted with the Timber-Frame tribes for so long a period, that ethnic and cultural contact between them was inevitable. This is well illustrated by the chart that Chlenova has appended to her article. The most intensive area of contacts was the Volga basin. Thus Timber-Frame and Cherkaskul pottery has been recovered from the same sites in Bashkiria, Timber-Frame and Fedorovo pottery has been found on identical sites near the Volga city of Kuibyshev, while a vessel of the transitional Timber-Frame Fedorovo version has been recovered from digs near the Volga city of Volgograd.²³ Noting the extent of Bronze Age cultures, Chlenova indicates that a distance of between 1,200 and 2,500 km and more was not "the exception but rather the rule, reflecting the considerable mobility with the Kurmantau culture stretching for 750 km, the Cherkaskul culture for between 1,200 and 2,400 km, the Abashevo culture, for 1,350—2,300 km, the Alakul culture, for 1,300—2,150 km, the Fedorovo culture, for 2,500—2,700 km, and the Timber-Frame culture, for 2,700—3,000 km."²⁴

B. Grakov says: "For some now unfathomable reasons of an inner order, during their first periods of between the 16th and 12th centuries B.C. the Timber-Frame tribes demonstrated constant migratory tendencies".²⁵

During the same period Andronovo tribes display similar tendencies and, evidently towards the middle of the second millennium B.C. began to move intensively eastwards. Kiselev places the Andronovo culture between the 17th and 12th centuries B.C.²⁶ Kosarev says that: "In the transition period from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age Andronovo traditions of ornamental design localized for the most part in regions contiguous to the Southern and Central Urals."²⁷ He has dated the formation of the Andronovo type Cherkaskul, Suzgun, and Yelovo cultures as existing on the southern fringe of the West Siberian taiga and in the northern part of the forest steppes within the last quarter of the second millennium B.C.²⁸ He concludes that "the regions of the localization of the listed

ornamental (cultural) traditions should evidently be associated with definite ethnocultural areas".²⁹

The Andronovo tribes were both farmers and stock-raisers, as repeatedly stressed by all the students of their culture. Thus, M. Gryaznov³⁰ noted the prevalence of beef and dairy cattle in Andronovo herds. Describing what must have induced Andronovo tribes to migrate eastwards in the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. Kosarev notes: "Evidently the Bronze Age migration boom, more specifically the far-ranging Andronovo treks to the Altai, the northern regions of the Ob basin, the Khakassian Minusinsk depression and the northern regions of the land between the Ob and the Irtysh Rivers were largely due to the frequent droughts of the xerothermic period which many scientists believe incident to the Andronovo epoch."³¹ During that period, due to growing dryness accompanied by the drying up and disappearance of many lakes and rivers, the periodical forest fire hazard increased greatly, which must have changed the scenery of the southern fringe of the West Siberian taiga, engendering large expanses of steppes and forest-steppes. "The frequent forest fires resulted in firesites continuing throughout the initial period of reforestation, that is during the forest-steppe stage".³²

The extensive pastures, plentiful, fertile floodlands and conducive climate may have all caused the growing Andronovo population to migrate bringing along the traditional ornamental motifs of decor and the traditional rituals, as cherished memories of their ancestral homeland.

The classical Fedorovo version of richly ornamented Andronovo pottery has been recovered primarily from barrows. Kosarev hence conjectures: "*The highly decorative pottery of the classical Andronovo style with its profuse geometrical ornamentation was of a ritual nature* (my italics—S. Zh.) which is why it was particularly characteristic of barrows and altars".³³ This points to a ritual sacred significance of the lushly ornamented pottery, with decor so reminiscent of the ornamental motifs in the late Early period and early Middle period of the Tripolye-Cucuteni culture. On the classical Andronovo (Fedorovo)-pottery the characteristically Tripolyan meander spiral and swastika, acquire greater diversity, through preserving the old archetype. Moreover, we know that precisely proceeding from these ornamental motifs experts identify all the different types of Andronovo cultures. Describing the specific character of the ornamental decoration of the pottery in question, Kiselev says that it is most singular, and that the provenance of the different motifs is zonal and that the place of a motif in each zone is usually the same."³⁴ He also says that the intricately formed Andronovo ornamental patterns "in all likelihood were seen as conventionalized symbols ... and their specific meaning, their symbolical significance is stressed by their specific complexity".³⁵ M. Khlobystina is still more specific "Evidently, there existed a kind of communal nucleus, a community bound by norms

of patriarchal law, which in turn possessed definite *graphic symbols for clan affiliation, which the historian regards as encoded in the intricate interweave of the geometrical motifs of carpet-design pottery decor.* (my italics—S. Zg.). It may be presumed that the dominant element of such ornamental motives is a range of figures disposed on the vessel's shoulders. Evidently, a study of their number and their combination,—of Z-signs meanders, broken lines and their variations—may be definitive for elucidating the structure of each community."³⁶

We share Khlobystina's view of the sacrosanct tradition and the meaningful content of Andronovo decor, for it was not fortuitous for such decorated vessels to be deposited in graves, where they most likely discharged the function of a clan or tribal totem, serving as a kind of identify card on the dead person's journey to his ancestors who by this token were to recognize him as a member of their clan or tribe. In this respect the ornamental pattern on Andronovo pottery likewise acted as a talisman on the journey into the hereafter.

Hence, we may once again state—a point that must be specially noted—that the carpet-design decor on Andronovo pottery was most likely a totem, a symbol of clan and ethnic affiliation for the person whose possessions were thus decorated. This evidently continues throughout the Karasuk period between the 17th and 12th centuries B.C., when the Scyth-Siberian Animal Style developed and during the Tagar period between the 7th and 1st centuries B.C. when often encountered on the celebrated open-worked Minusinsk belt plaques, in addition to representations of animals, is an ornamental design characteristic of Andronovo pottery decor, more specifically a lattice of S-symbols (Fig. 11). These clasps or buckles, common throughout the middle reaches of the Yenisei River during the 3rd-1st centuries B.C. are to be met with the Ordos and Inner Mongolia—apparently due to the migrations starting at the turn of the Bronze and the beginning of the Iron Age of the tribes populating the southern fringe of the West Siberian taiga to the more southern regions. Responsible was apparently the wetter climate which drastically expanded swamps and caused the taiga to encroach upon forest-steppes and steppe-lands territories. Nonetheless, yet in the Tashtyk period, extending from the 1st century B.C. to the 5th century A.D., the tribes populating the Minusinsk depression were distinctly Europoid, which is borne out by the terra-cotta portrait mask recovered from some family burial vaults. Kiselev quotes a Chinese chronicler who noted that the "Kyrgyz", who inhabited what is today Khakassia, had "red hair, rosy cheeks and blue eyes". He adds that the 8th-century scribe Ibn Mukaffa had written of the Kyrgyz that they had "red hair and white skins". The same is reported by a Tibetan source noting that the K'inc'a (the Kyrgyz) had blue eyes, red hair and "a disgusting, i.e., unlike the Tibetan, Mongoloid) appearance."³⁷ Further, among the items Kiselev recovered from the ruins of an edifice near Abakan are some fascinating bronze door handles of local workmanship, that represent the fantastic counte-

nances of horned genii which "forcefully emphasize the non-Chinese features. At any rate they are even more Europoid than the most Europoid of contemporary Tashtyk funerary masks."³⁸ He adds: "The mask handles convey distinctly Europoid features, particularly emphasized by the highbridged nose. We see a Europoid's large features, of the type prevalent in Southern Siberia from oldest antiquity and virtually up to the start of the Christian era."³⁹

We may thus state that the traditional ornamental pattern of meander, swastikas, and Σ -symbols characteristic of Andronovo pottery decor continued to persist throughout Western Siberia and more specifically the Minusinsk depression up to the start of the first millennium A.D., with some motives reaching Ordos and Inner Mongolia.

It should be further noted that timewise the closest affinities with Andronovo decor are to be found in North Caucasian sites of the turn of the second and first millennia B.C., which period almost dovetails with that of the colonization by Andronovo tribes in the 13th century B.C. of Southern Siberia's steppes and forest-steppes. Apposite instances are afforded by the artefacts that V. Markovin recovered from a burial vault by the village of Enghikal in Ingushetia that date back to the middle of the second millennium B.C. They include plaques and fibulae with disk-shaped finials, embellished with die-stamped swastikas and meanders (Fig. 57).⁴⁰ He adds that "regrettably North Caucasian Bronze Age pottery has been but little studied and hardly any comparisons have been drawn between it and the pottery of the steppe cultures";⁴¹ yet, "... there is no doubt that precisely the steppe tribes from the lower Don area infiltrated the Kuban basin".⁴²

Among the artefacts R. Munchayev recovered from the Lugovoi cemetery in the Assinsk gorge in Checheno-Ingushetia, there is a high proportion of bronze plaques in the form of a double oval with die-stamped swastikas in the middle of each (Fig. 40). He adds that "... these items were always found near the skull or chest which allows to regard them as temple or pectoral plaques,"⁴³ in other words, as protective totems. Note that both in the Nesterovo and Lugovoi cemeteries in the Assinsk gorge, mounds were now and again raised over burials. Munchayev believes that there were cases when the ancient tribes here also erected barrows. All this is most reminiscent of Andronovo tradition—also indicated by the obligatory presence in burials of vessels and adornments, embellished with ornamental motives that are more than traditional of Andronovo artifacts.

In all likelihood analogous functions were discharged by the sheet bronze diadems embellished with an ornamental pattern identical with the decor of the double oval Lugovoi plaques, which B. Tekhov recovered from the Tli graves in Northern Ossetia (Figs. 38 and 39). These diadems are decorated with circles, triangles and lozenges and also as a rule with meander and swastika type motives. Tekhov says

that similar diadems were recovered from a Styrfaz chamber-tomb in the Northern Caucasus, from the Armenian village of Geharot and from sites in Azerbaijan and Iran.⁴⁴

He has also indicated the characteristic meander and swastika motives on the Koban-type axes recovered from the same Tli burials.

Swastika-type motives complicated by many protruding lines are also to be observed in the decor of finds unearthed in a number of places in Azerbaijan as for instance, on a clay die and also on the walls of a temple and in the plaster work of an earth dwelling from the ancient village of Sary-Tepe, on the wall by a hearth (Fig. 29) and the pintaderas (Figs. 54—56) of the village of Babadervish, which date back to the 12th-8th centuries B.C.⁴⁵

Consequently, the archaeological finds made in the Northern Caucasus and partly in the Trans-Caucasus, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, provide us with specimens of the use of ancient sacred ornamental motives that are characteristic of Mezin site artefacts decor and of Tripolye-Cucuteni, Timber-Frame and, especially, Andronovo pottery. Moreover, in the Caucasus these motives most likely have the same sacred functions of talisman and possibly of tribal and clan totem as were characteristic of Andronovo and, likely, Tripolye cultures.

We encounter echoes of swastika motives in Scythian jewellery, more specifically in the decor of horse trappings recovered from the Northern Pontine area. A. Meliukova believes that the openwork swastika plaques, also to be encountered in Thracian hoards are of Scythian origin, and adds that they appeared in the Northern Pontine area in the late 6th century B.C.⁴⁶ True, in Scythian art, all these forms have been markedly modified and transmuted (Fig. 47) to meet requirements of the conventionalized realistic trend known as the Scytho-Siberian Animal Style.

We would now like to turn to the Vologda material. The appended table furnishes specimens of the traditional ornamental motives of peasant embroideries and ornamental weaving, common in the North-Eastern districts of Vologda region. We noted earlier what the historical and ethnic situation in these parts was like and we have no reason to question the Slav, or rather, East-Slav, Russian origin of these ornamental patterns. All the samples supplied are details of elaborate ornamental patterns that embellished headgear, sashes and belts, aprons, shirts and blouses and towels, items mostly sacred that beside having a purely domestic usage were talismans. One must say that the resemblance is amazing. As in the entire range of the Andronovo decor, in North-Russian embroidery and ornamental weaving, too the compositions are divided into three horizontal registers with the often repetitive top and bottom two enclosing the central register that as a rule displays the vitalmost designs from the angle of semantic significance. This is precisely where we encounter a diversity of meander and swastika motifs (Fig. 58) which are absolutely identical with the Tripolye (Fig. 52) and Andronovo

(Figs. 33 and 34) decor as well as with the North Caucasian and Trans-Caucasian motifs of the 13th-8th centuries B.C. and Scythian decor (Fig. 41). Thus, if the ornament from the Babader vish site (Fig. 29) embellished the wall behind the altar in a 12th-8th centuries B.C. dwelling had an unquestionably ritual significance the absolutely identical pattern, a composition of lozenges, which adorns the hem of a North-Russian peasant woman's blouse, is also of a ritual nature (Fig. 31).

The design on the pintadera from the same site has an affinity with the pattern of a wedding towel (Fig. 61) and with the design on the stitched inset for a Vologda towel (Fig. 59). Further, the detail from the ornamental pattern of an Andronovo vessel (Fig. 18) is almost identical with that of the embroidered hem of a blouse (Fig. 24), while the embroidered towel end (Fig. 5) is absolutely identical with the intricate meander weave that embellishes an Andronovo clay vessel of the middle of the 2nd millennium B.C. (Fig. 4) etc. etc. (see Figs. 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 30 and 60). The existence of such affinities is likewise confirmed by east Slav archaeological finds. Thus, the intricate swastika on the clasp or buckle of 1220-1260 (discovered in the late 1960s at the Tikhvin digs in Novgorod (Fig. 36), is identical with the motif that the Vologda peasant woman U. Terebova employed in the 1910s for the wedding towel of her daughter (Fig. 37). Most exciting in this respect is the slate spindle whorl, carrying a scratched design in the form of a six-armed Orthodox cross enclosed within spiral meanders and swastikas that was unearthed at a Slav farming site of the 11th-13th centuries near Ryazan and published by G. Polyakova (Fig. 42).

The list could be greatly extended. However we shall merely state that while with different nations similar ornamental patterns may converge, one is hard put to believe that peoples thousands of kilometers and thousands of years apart could—if they are not ethnogenetically linked—invent quite independently of one another such intricate ornamental patterns, which are identical down to the smallest detail and which, furthermore, discharge the same ritual functions of talisman and totem.

Refraining from far-reaching conclusions, we shall merely note that as our analysis is restricted to the steppes and forest-steppes of the USSR, we have not invoked analogous Indian and Persian items, if we did so the appended table of affinities would be much longer. It is our profound conviction, however that, such material should be invoked as representing a most serious problem for the science of history in the foreseeable future. The affinities to be observed in the spiritual and material cultures of the ancient Slavs and, for instance, of the peoples of North Western and Western Indian and Iran—both in olden times and partially today—are too numerous to be ignored.

Currently, Soviet archaeologists have amassed a wealth of evidence warranting the assumption that actively involved in the

ancient cultures mentioned above were the carriers of the ancient forms of Indo-Iranian or Aryan⁴⁷ languages. Thus Ye. Kuzmina says: "Evidently an in-depth, research, into the Indo-Iranian traditions of the visual arts imagery semantics—for which archaeology has already yielded plentiful evidence—will be crucial studying the intricate ethnic history of Southern-Central Asia and Afghanistan".⁴⁸ It must necessarily be added that the quoted region likewise incorporates the vast expanses of the Eurasian steppes and forest steppes.

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