

THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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Handles of Early Iron Age Cauldrons from Southwestern Siberia

Handles of Early Iron Age bronze cauldrons from southwestern Siberia are described with reference to their ritual meaning. Typological features, such as knobs, arcuate, or square shape, are relevant for dating. Two chronological groups are established: the Tagar (second half of the 1st millennium BC) and Xiongnu-Xianbei (late 1st millennium BC to early 1st millennium AD). The interpretation of handles depends on the context. At settlements (Turunovka-4) and in certain hoards (First Dzhirim) of the Late Bronze Age, they can belong to foundry scrap. However, handles occur in long-term ritual sites such as Aidashenskaya Cave, suggesting a different interpretation. Indeed, at Eastern European forest-steppe sites of the Xiongnu era, handles of cauldrons had been intentionally buried, most often near water sources, where the summer camps of nomadic herders were situated. A similar situation is observed in southwestern Siberia, from the Baraba forest-steppe to the Middle Yenisei valley.

Keywords: *Early Iron Age, southwestern Siberia, metal cauldrons, rituals, cauldron handles, early nomads.*

Introduction

Fragments of any complex metal products represent a category of artifacts, the interpretation of which allows us to consider a whole range of problems, including technological design features, and the ritual and semantic meaning of these products. These items include cast metal cauldrons widespread in the 1st millennium BC to the early 1st millennium AD on the territory of several landscape zones of Eurasia. Structurally, they consist of three parts: a pedestal, a body, and handles. Each of these parts was formed separately and, before casting, they were assembled into one product. The destruction of metal cauldrons during their various uses (domestic and ritual) most often occurred precisely on these parts (handles, fragments of the body and the pedestal). There are known attempts to repair cauldrons with a broken handle (Fig. 1). In the hoards of the Early Iron Age (First Dzhirim, Fourth Uibat, Prigorsk, Idrinskoye) on the Middle Yenisei

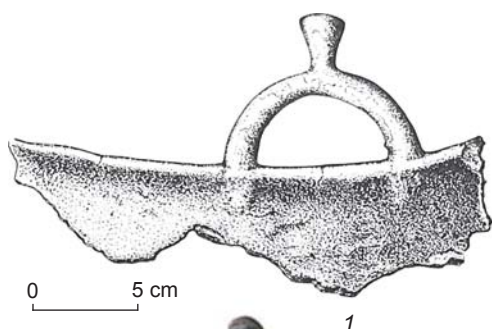
(Borodovsky, Oborin, 2018: 89, fig. 2, 2–6), the fragments of handles, bodies, and pedestals of metal cauldrons have quite often been found. However, fragments of cauldron handles made of non-ferrous metal from the Late Bronze Age constitute a special category of such finds. They occur in housing, burial, ritual, and production complexes, as well as among accidental finds, from the Ob-Irtysh interfluvium to the Middle Yenisei. This article is devoted to the interpretation of such items in southwestern Siberia of the Early Iron Age.

Results of research

The handles of metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age from the territory of the southern part of Western Siberia are classified according to the preservation of the original structural interface with the edge of the cauldron's body. Among the finds, there are the walls of cauldrons with



Fig. 1. Metal cauldron with a missing handle (outsirts of the city of Kansk, Krasnoyarsk Territory).



a handle and separate handles. In the first case, there is variability in the degree of destruction of the entire vessel. Some of the found fragments are quite large; for example, a find from the bank of the Kan River (Fig. 2, 2); and others are small fragments of the rims: from Turunovka-4 (Fig. 2, 1) (Molodin, 1985: 165; Stepnaya polosa..., 1992: 471, tab. 121, 15), the First Dzhirim hoard (Fig. 3, 4, 5) (Borodovsky, Oborin, 2018: 89, fig. 2, 2–6) and Aidashenskaya Cave (Fig. 4). The separate handles of cauldrons are represented by the finds from Voznesenka, Podsoyki (see Fig. 3, 1, 2), and by a specimen from the funds of the Minusinsk Museum of Local Lore (see Fig. 3, 3). The handles with nail-shaped protrusions (see Fig. 3, 1, 2) correspond to the type of destruction of the cauldron from the vicinity of Kansk (see Fig. 1). The interpretation of such finds can have several options. A number of scholars believe that there are several ways, levels, and types of interpretation in archaeology (Garden, 1983: 166; Klein, 1991: 316). According to J.-C. Gardin, the literature often presents simple interpretive constructions consisting of an identification of coincidences and possible cultural influences (1983: 153). With this approach, interpretation is a logical paraphrase establishing similarities between archaeological sites scattered in space and time. Compiling a list of such paraphrases leads to the identification of a number of “consistent patterns” in interpretations (Ibid.: 154). When studying accidentally found handles of the Early Iron Age metal cauldrons, this procedure is extremely important for clarifying the historical and cultural context, which allows one to attempt the reconstruction of the meanings contained in them.

The level of interpretation also includes descriptions of artifacts and their assemblages, revealing their meaning and functions (Klein, 1991: 316), since the purpose of an item or part of it can often be associated with certain ritual activities. In this regard, attention should be paid to the interpretation of the placement in the ground of some significant parts (handles) of metal cauldrons. In particular, according to one point of view, the deliberate burial of fragments of Hunnic cauldrons with handles near water sources is a reflection of certain rituals (Mänchen-Helfen, 2014: 323). According to the hypothesis of Y.I. Spasskaya, ancient nomads, going over to their summer camps in the spring, performed the ritual of “leaving the

Fig. 2. Fragments of cauldron walls with handles.
1 – Turunovka-4 (Baraba forest-steppe); 2 – bank of the Kan River, 3 km north-west of the village of Terskoye (Kansky District of the Krasnoyarsk Territory).



Fig. 3. Handles of metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age from southwestern Siberia.

1 – Voznesenka (Middle Yenisei, Krasnoyarsk Territory); 2 – Podsoпки (Middle Yenisei, Krasnoyarsk Territory); 3 – Minusinsk Museum of Local Lore (MKM, A OF-9702/1); 4, 5 – First Dzhirim hoard (Middle Yenisei, Krasnoyarsk Territory).



Fig. 4. Finds from Aidashenskaya Cave (Kemerovo Region).

goods” by the water (one cauldron or a series of them), and having returned back in the fall, they used them again (see (Mänchen-Helfen, 2014: 323; Dzhumabekova, Bazarbaeva, 2017: 114)). The analysis of location of the sites where Early Iron Age cauldrons were discovered as accidental finds in the valley of the Middle Yenisei and its tributaries (Fig. 5) really demonstrates these sites’ connection with water sources (rivers, streams, and lakes).

In turn, the cases of finding fragments of metal cauldrons are interpreted as a ritual “killing” of products during the ceremony (Krasilnikov, 2019: 270). However, this contradicts the pragmatic meaning of the ritual of “leaving the goods”. Nevertheless, the facts of the

possible ritual destruction of metal cauldrons were also recorded in burial complexes of the Scythian-Sarmatian period. For example, on the left bank of the Don River, in a burial near the village of Novaya Chigla (Talovsky District, Voronezh Region), a heavily damaged bronze cauldron was found. Its body was thoroughly dented and torn apart. It lay at the southeastern wall of the grave pit, while broken vertical handles with three knobs lay at the northeastern one. The pedestal was absent (Berezutsky, 2017: Fig. 3, 7, p. 22). In the Upper Ob region of the Early Iron Age, signs of such ritual destruction of a cauldron are evidently present in burial 1, mound 5 at Novotroitskoye-2 (Shulga, Umansky, Mogilnikov,



Fig. 5. Location of the places of discovery of metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age as accidental finds on the Middle Yenisei.

1 – near the village of Askiz, Askizsky District of the Republic of Khakassia; 2 – near the village of Stantsiya Kamysheta of the same district; 3 – near the village of Orositelny, Ust-Abakansky District of the Republic of Khakassia; 4 – near the village of Bolshaya Tes, Novoselovskiy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory; 5, 6 – near the village of Drokino, Emelyanovskiy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory; 7–11 – near the village of Terskoye, Kanskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory; 12, 13 – the village of Tashtyp, Tashtypskiy District, Republic of Khakassia (MKM, No. 10108, GE, No. 1123.36); 14 – the village of Matkechik, Beiskiy District, Republic of Khakassia (KNKM, unnumb.); 15–17 – the village of Sabinskoye of the same district (Ochet..., 1893: 23) (MKM, No. 10076, 10098); 18, 19 – Sayanogorsk, Republic of Khakassia (MKM, No. 10117, 10105); 20 – the village of Ochury, Altaiskiy District, Republic of Khakassia (MKM, No. 10074); 21 – the village of Kaptyrevo, Shushenskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 6659); 22–24 – the village of Salba, Ermakovskiy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (Tallgren, 1917) (MKM, unnumb., 10069); 25 – the village of Kazantsevo, Shushenskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 10068); 26 – the village of Nizhnyaya Koya of the same district (MKM, No. 10065); 27 – the village of Sredny Kuzhebar, Karatuzskiy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 10141); 28, 29 – the village of Izykh, Altaiskiy District, Republic of Khakassia (MKM, No. 10085, 10109); 30–32 – the village of Krivaya, Minusinskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 10062, 10119, 10071); 33 – the village of Soldatovo of the same district (MKM, No. 10095); 34 – the village of Tigritskoye of the same district (MKM, No. 12845); 35 – Abakan, Republic of Khakassia (MKM, No. 10092); 36, 37 – the village of Kuragino, Kuraginskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 10059, 10096); 38, 39 – the village of Bragino of the same district (MKM, No. 10087, 10075); 40 – the village of Tagashet of the same district (MKM, No. 10084); 41 – the village of Borodino, Bogradskiy District, Republic of Khakassia (Tallgren, 1917: Tab. XII); 42, 43 – the village of Bolshaya Salba, Idrinskoy District, Krasnoyarsk Territory (MKM, No. 10093, 10061); 44 – the village of Bolshoy Telek of the same district (MKM, No. 10086); 45, 46 – the village of Knyshi of the same district (MKM, No. 10066, 10072).

2009: 80). It should also be noted that the character of the breaking of the handle of this cauldron is similar to the find from the Sargat settlement of Turunovka-4 (see Fig. 2, 1). In the southwestern Siberia, the ritual purpose of broken-off handles of metal cauldrons is indirectly confirmed by their presence in Aidashenskaya Cave (see Fig. 4) (Molodin, Bobrov, Ravnushkin, 1980: 48–50, 158, tab. XIV, 1–3).

The size of the handles is also quite informative in relation to the ritual use of the cauldrons, because it is related to the total volume and mass of the vessel. Some of the handles are small in size, and clearly correspond to small metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age (see Fig. 2, 2). Such vessels were hardly adapted for everyday cooking of meat (Demidenko, 2008: 58, 59). However, they played the same role as large cauldrons. Possibly, the contents

of the small cauldron could be qualitatively different (Ermolenko, 1998: 114). Perhaps it was a fermented milk or narcotic drink (Berezutsky, 2017: 24).

A fragment of the wall of a cauldron from the First Dzhirim hoard is very curious. It has a relief sign in the form of three vertical lines, the end of one of which is bent (see Fig. 3, 5; 6). According to the translator S.L. Savosin, if the image of this sign is rotated 180° (Fig. 6, 2), then

it will look like the hieroglyph 川 (Fig. 6, 3) – *chuan*, usually meaning ‘river’ (as, for example, in the name of Sichuan Province 四川 ‘four rivers’). It is important to emphasize that this hieroglyph is not one of the family hieroglyphs indicating the identity of the master. It can only be associated with the place of manufacture of the product. This hieroglyph also has other meanings: ‘way’, as well as ‘cook’, which is consistent with the direct purpose of the cauldron.

The inversion of the hieroglyphic image could be due to the technological features of the production of the cauldron. Before it was cast, a mold was made from clay, determining the internal volume of the body. Further, after drying, it was covered with a layer of wax equal to the thickness of the wall of the future cauldron. Then, everything was coated with clay, the wax was melted, and bronze was poured. Each part of the cauldron (body, pedestal, and handles) was made separately and could be turned over in different directions. Probably, in the course of such manipulations, the hieroglyph was applied in such a way that it got turned upside down on the finished product.

Conclusion

The handles of metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age from southwestern Siberia are presented in several versions: with a fragment of the body wall (Turunovka-4, a find from near Kansk, Idrinskoye and First Dzhirim hoards, Aidashenskaya Cave), with a part of the rim (Voznesenka, Podsopki), and a handle alone (an item from the Minusinsk Museum, the First Dzhirim hoard). Regarding the latter variety, it should be noted that such handles are usually discovered among accidental finds from the Middle Yenisei (cauldron from the Ninya River, near the village of Kamyshta).

The cartography of the handles of metal cauldrons of the Early Iron Age in southwestern Siberia reveals specificity of localization of such finds. First, they are concentrated mainly on the periphery of the area of the main production of metal cauldrons of the Tagar time and places of their accidental discovery in the valley of the Middle Yenisei and adjacent territories (Voznesenka, Podsopki, and the vicinity of Kansk). Second, only some of these finds (a fragment of a wall with a handle from the Kan River) are associated with waterways, where whole cauldrons (five near the village of Terskoye) and the accompanying hoards (First and Third Terskoye hoards) were found (Borodovsky, Oborin, 2021). Possibly, the cauldrons’ handles that were found near waterbodies have ritual significance and symbolize the whole product. Third, the handles of metal cauldrons in the production hoards of the Early Iron Age on the Middle Yenisei show a completely different topography. These sites (the First Dzhirim, Idrinskoye hoards) are usually located far from

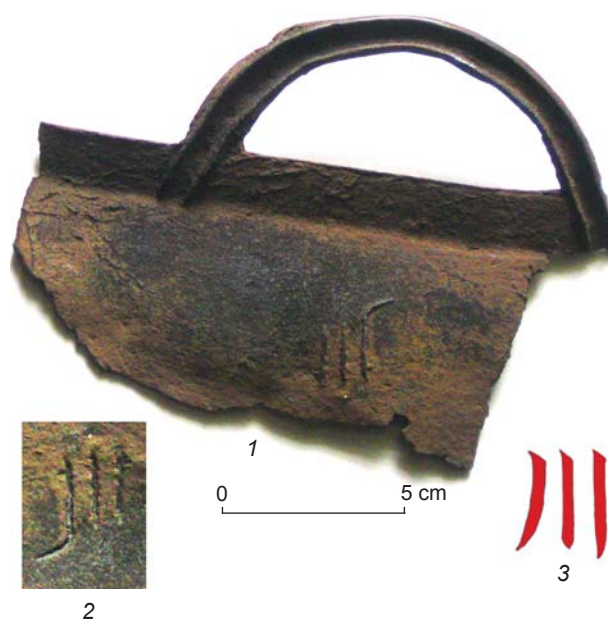


Fig. 6. A fragment of a cauldron with a handle from the First Dzhirim hoard.

1 – wall with a sign; 2 – image of the sign; 3 – hieroglyph 川 *chuan* – ‘river’.

water sources—on elevated areas of the terrain. Fourth, the finds under consideration are fragments of imported products from adjacent or more distant territories. This is typical both for the Baraba (Turunovka-4) and Mariinsk-Achinsk (Aidashenskaya Cave) forest-steppe, and for the Middle Yenisei valley (a fragment of the cauldron from the First Dzhirim hoard, which wall contains a 川 sign, possibly related to a certain Chinese hieroglyph associated with water element).

The morphology of fragments of metal cauldrons with handles reflects almost all the typological and chronological diversity of such products for the entire period of their existence in the Early Iron Age. It should also be noted that among the finds under consideration both “Tagar” bronze culture (Turunovka-4, Aidashenskaya Cave, Berezhnyaki, Podsopki, and a find near Kansk), and “Hunnish” bronze culture (First Dzhirim hoard) are represented. This fact may point both to the long existence of the tradition of ritual burial of handles from metal cauldrons and to the later use of early metal cauldrons before they were damaged owing to natural wear and tear or deliberate breakdown.

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