CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE SETTLEMENT OF PASTORAL TRIBES IN CENTRAL ASIA

While the south saw the development of the farming cultures of Anau and the BMAC, in the north in the steppes the Andronovo culture and its representatives established contacts with the farmers and gradually began their advancement southwards. We can discern three stages of the migration of the pastoral steppe tribes to Central Asia: stage I – Sintashta-Petrovka; stage II – developed Timber-grave and Andronovo of the Alakul’, Fedorovo and mixed types; stage III – late Timber-grave and Andronovo with applied-roller ceramics. The number of the northern sites invariably grows and in the Final Bronze Age (13th–9th centuries BC) they occupy the whole territory of the region.

The Timber-grave and Andronovo tribes of the Alakul’ type emerged in the late second and third quarters of the 2nd millennium BC in the Urals and western Kazakhstan, while the Fedorovo type tribes emerged in central and eastern Kazakhstan. They were extremely expansive which was conditioned by the peculiarities of the steppes’ ecology and their economic and cultural type. The exhaustion of the pastures around a settlement would compel its inhabitants to change their location every 25 years. The pressure of the excess population on the limited resources of the steppes would require them to develop new territories. The Fedorovo tribes advanced into Siberia. In Kazakhstan the processes of active integration among the tribes and the formation of mixed types of sites were underway. But the principle direction of movement was into those regions of Central Asia that had already experienced cultural interaction and assimilation of the steppe tribes with both each other and with the southern farmers. This led to the formation of numerous and quite original types of sites. Their mixed character presents difficulties in their classification and causes debate among scholars as to their attribution.

The sites of the steppe population are united under the terms Andronovo (Chernikov 1957: 30; Zadneprovsky 1966: 213; Gryaznov 1970: 40; Askarov 1962a: 3,17; Gulyamov et al. 1966: 187, 213; Avanesova 1979; 1991); Tazabagab-Andronovo (Masson 1959: 116,117; Avanesova 1985); of the steppe type (Kuz'mina 1964a: 147, 154; 1988: 35, 36; Mandel'shtam 1966: 242-243; Masson 1966: 208, 261; Itina 1977a: 232). It is advisable to apply the last term to assemblages from wind-eroded sites where the ceramic complex is not informative enough and does not contain diagnostic material. It should be emphasized that all the ceramics of Central Asia with the exception of the Fedorovo type are poorly ornamented, the decoration being usually located in one zone (over the shoulder), more rarely in two zones (over the neck and shoulder). This choice of zones reflects the traditions of either the Petrovo-type sites or the Timber-grave culture and differs from the Alakul’ principle of placing ornament on the rim and shoulder with a gap on the neck and the Fedorovo one of decorating the rim, the
shoulder and the neck. Late Fedorovo pottery is marked by poorer ornament and a shifting of the ornamented zones. In accordance with the statistically stable aggregate of the dwelling types, the burial rite and the ceramics one distinguishes in Central Asia several independent cultures and types of monuments of the Andronovo cultural community.

Tazabagyab culture: The Aral Sea Littoral variant

This culture was discovered to the south of the Aral Sea in the desert over the ancient dried-up river-beds of the Amu-Darya (future Khorezm). Around fifty settlements have been discovered: Kavat 3, Angka 5, Bayram-Kazgan, Kokcha 15, 15a, 16, Dzhanbas 21 and the Kokcha 3 cemetery (Tolstov 1948, 1962; Itina 1961, 1967, 1977, 1978; Vinogradov et al. 1996). Large settlements are absent; the dwellings are located in twos and threes among the fields. The house is semisubterranean of timber-frame type measuring 7-12 x 10-14 m. In the center there is a square (more rarely circular) hearth with clay sides, storage pits and querns. The entrance is a corridor-ramp leading to the open terrace.

As distinct from the other steppe cultures, Khorezm’s economy was based on irrigation farming. The 150-200m long canals would irrigate small rectangular fields (Andrianov 1969). Cattle and particularly ovicaprids, horses and Bactrian camels were reared. The short-term sites in the sands point to a mobile type of cattle-breeding. The use of wheeled transport is evidenced by clay models of wheels. The source of ore was the Bukan-tau and Tamdy-tau mountains, where ancient workings and copper-smelteries were discovered (Itina 1977: 136, 137). The findings of a special ladle for pouring metal and stone molds are indicative of the household exchange type of metalworking. With regard to the types of articles, particularly adzes and figure-of-eight temple rings, Khorezm belonged to the western Andronovo metallurgical province and was especially close to the Elenovka-Ushkatta center.

The ceramics of Khorezm are hand-made and represented by the pots of the Andronovo type with a rounded shoulder or a ledge, the Timber-grave biconical pots, jars and specific vessels with a globular body and a narrow neck. Sixty percent of the pots are decorated with an ornament executed in indented (20%) or plain stamp and incision. Apart from the Andronovo and Timber-grave elements of the geometrical ornament, there are specific open triangles, and triangles with a fringe.

The cemetery of Kokcha 3 contains around a hundred burials in earthen pits (there were no kurgans). The dead lie flexed, their head to the west, men on their right, women on their left side. There are double burials of mixed sex. At the head stands one, rarely, two vessels; women occasionally wear bracelets, temple rings, beads. The cults of Khorezm are also evidenced by figurines of the horse and camel.

The cultural attribution and origin of Khorezm’s sites are disputed. A. Askarov (1962a: 3,17; 1966: 187, 213); Gulyamov et al. (1966); Zadneprovsky (1966: 213), M. Gryaznov (1970: 40), and N. Avanesova (1962: 57-59) assign these sites to the Andronovo culture. On the other hand, S. Tolstov (1962: 57-59) and M. Itina (1977: 139, 140, 176) regard them as a special culture formed from the