

Russia's Scythian Past Lost Tribes And Lost Origins



By Phil Butler

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WE KNOW relatively little of the legendary people known as the Scythians, but what we do know is largely derived from the father of history, Herodotus. The great Greek thinker spoke authoritatively about these fascinating nomads, but archaeologists are just now learning how a vast civilization suddenly vanished. A recent expedition in Crimea, and an ongoing effort known as “Kyzyl – Kuragino” in Siberia, promise a new insight into the warlike people who once ruled over much of Eurasia.

One of the largest scale projects of the Russian Geographical Society (RGS), the “Kyzyl Kuragino” in the Tuva Republic has as its aim the discovery and preservation of vast cultural and historical value. The RGS has organized volunteer expeditions over the past five years comprised of winning contestants from 74 regions of Russia, and from 40 countries



worldwide. Excavations in the so-called Valley of the Kings in Tuva back in 2003, whispered of a Russian greatness attached to an idea, rather than to some preconceived notion of nation. Fast forward to today, a 2003 find at a secret site in Crimea tells of a formidable people, perhaps the fabled Colchians even, who were keep-

ers of the fabulous golden fleece the Argonauts sought. Join us in a brief excursion into the world of the Scythians, a people peculiar in their “new ideas”, and their relationships with the world around them.

The enigmatic Scythians ruled the vast grasslands of Eurasia for a millennium. Legendary for their savagery on the battlefield, these horse warriors struck fear into their contemporaries in Greece, and in the Persian Empire. Unlike any of their neighbours in 700-something BC, or since, these unusual people had little use for the worldly trappings most identify with advanced civilizations. The Scythians left no major cities, but only the scattered grave mounds known as kurgans, which speckle the landscape of time from Mongolia to the Black Sea and Crimea. It is fair to say, no one yet knows from whence they came.

One of the more interesting theories of the origins of these Scythians is that they were of the lost tribes of Israel. The name Scythian is at its root “Isaac”, or “Saka” or “Sacaе.” Depending on which language or dialect one applies, most of the lands that now surround what was Scythia used variations of the name to describe the warlike herdsmen. It’s interesting to note here, it has always been assumed that the missing ten tribes of Israel had been either “abandoned by God”, or that they simply “died out.” However far fetched this idea may sound, around 730 years before the birth of Christ, the people of Israel were scattered to the four winds, and simultaneously a nomadic people appeared in South Russia that would eventually conquer anyone who attacked them. The name “Scythians” (tribe of Isaac) spread across much of the known world before the Roman times. Looking at the Biblical record, Genesis 21:12 foretells: “And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.”

Whoever these fierce nomads were, the significance of the most recent archaeological finds is amplified by the fact that the culture of the Scythians emerged almost exactly as the Bronze Age gave way to the Iron Age after the 1st Millennium BC. Assuming coincidences occur in flurries across recorded time, we might simply write off the people the Greeks feared as “barbarians” as only noteworthy barbarians that passed in time, like so many others. An initial reading of Herodotus’ account today leads us to consider such a conclusion, but delving deeper we find a fabulously rich society, and a uniquely Russian one in many ways. The unusual ideology of these Scythians possessed, the concept of “the

people” or “true freedom,” was legendary in Persia and other bordering nations.

Concerning the land, these Scythians had great regard. However, the tribes professed no real ownership of it, but rather domain over it. The distinction is subtle perhaps, but I believe the attitudes of these people correlate directly with some ideals held by current day Russians.

The aforementioned sense of freedom, or “the will” has special significance here. One overriding trait of these Scythians is illustrated in their brand of defensive warfare. For those of you who recall various invasions of Russia in modern times, “Scorched Earth” as a policy of defensive warfare mirrors what the Scythians exacted on their foes in the Iron Age. And “the will”, this idea is echoed today when you talk to average Russians. Freedom, or the national “will” even, has a lot to do with space and openness, just as it must have been for these ancient nomads.

Moving on to the recent finds in Crimea and elsewhere, we find even more interesting theories: these under-publicized nomads were special in the extreme. Herodotus, the father of history, said the Scythian’s women were in fact the original Amazons. Herodotus also recollected bizarre drug induced blood rituals, frenzied cannabis and opium feasts where sacrifices may have been carried out. [Isaiah 57:5, Jeremiah 3:6]. The Crimea finds in particular, tells us much of what the ancient Greek historian related was more truth than fable. Taken in total, the fact that the history of the Scythians is as remarkable as it is, and that it has been so overlooked, creates a whole new series of questions. Who were these people really? How could history be revised so as to diffuse their impact, and why? We are only now beginning to uncover this impact and the parallels with today’s societies.

A major power of ancient times, a people that crushed their enemies, the Scythians are also unique for having been ignored by so many historians. A people who crushed the Assyrian Empire, and twice defended their homeland against the mighty Persian Empire, got scarcely a footnote in Western historical texts in centuries past [Psalm 83:3?].

Even the so-called Royal Scythians of the Northern Caucasus and Black Sea area got much attention in the colleges and Universities of the UK, the U.S., or even continental Europe. These fascinating nomads who migrated EASTWARD from what is now Crimea, may have had more impact on human history than anyone previously imagined.

Historians today are trying to piece together the puzzle of the Scythians using such fields as DNA profiling, Anthropology, linguistics, and even intense studies of the climate change record in the Tuva region. In the time of the Scythians, for instance, environmental conditions in Siberia are now shown to have been perfect for herding and agriculture by an extended period of higher rainfall. An arid and barren landscape across this band of modern day Russia was transformed into a fertile plain, ideal for grazing animals. This explains in brief how the Western branch, or Royal Scythians, saw fit to extend their reach onto a new and fertile horizon. The theory does not explain who these people really were though.

The epic of the people Herodotus claimed were the literal Sons of Heracles further amplifies their legend. According to the historian, Scythians were born out of the Greek hero mating with a serpent/human goddess, one of the sons of this union becoming the first chieftain of this new nation. Legends of Scythian women fighting like the “Amazons” alongside their men, the rumours of being the lost tribesmen of Israel, there’s no end to the mystique attached to this magnificent steppe culture. Why, there are even studies that suggest the Scythians are the ancestors of the American plains Indians, the sole reason the Great Wall of China was built, the original people of Briton and Camelot even.

Of conjecture and theory, another fascinating tidbit is to be found in an ancient Persian cuneiform text in Iran known as the Behistun Inscription (or Old Persian: Bagastana, meaning “the place of god”). Written by Darius the Great in multi-lingual form, the stone inscriptions are said to reveal the lost tribes of Israel. And for those of you who enjoyed watching “Raiders of the Lost Ark”, Nazi interest in the scripts cut short by WW 2 peak the imagination. These texts, essentially the Persian version of Egypt’s Rosetta Stone, are the basis for understanding all ancient history in the region. Reading these reports and stories now, I find myself

visualizing the movie star Harrison Ford, plundering about in Crimea, pursued by leather clad Nazis, mad scientists of Hitler, intent on some paranormal quest for power.

Trying to make any summation of my own story here, I find it extremely difficult now. As I type this, I find myself enthralled by the continual discoveries of my own. The implications of these finds, and the new evidence that tends to bind human history together, I find it ultimately spellbinding. The wild assertions of Herodotus now come into focus. These seem to be more fact than fiction for me. At the same time, ideas



stemming from my mental-visual cortex, those of golden artefacts and DNA sampling, anthropological and cultural linkages, all this and more paint Russia and the land mass surrounding her in a whole new light. Why there's even speculation Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) is the last Scythian, owing to his wisdom aligned with mortal combat skills. I

am serious, in case you wonder, and standing back from the human condition of today, anyone should be measuring conclusions.

The tide of world events today, particularly Crimea being once again included as part of Russia, force us to rethink what may have been considered myth, fantasy, or conspiracy theory even. The aforementioned "secret" digs in Crimea, the Allard Pierson archaeological museum and the University of Amsterdam holding onto Scythian treasures from Crimea, are these a series of coincidental events? What can the ancient Scythians tell us about today? This is the ultimate question. I think it is pretty clear, based on two days of my own study. The answer is --- "maybe something."



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