

# Claroscuro 16 (2017)

Revista del Centro de Estudios sobre Diversidad Cultural

Facultad de Humanidades y Artes

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– the case of Arkaim

Fuente: *Claroscuro*, Año 16, Vol. 16 (Diciembre 2017), pp. 1-28.

Publicado por: [Portal de publicaciones científicas y técnicas \(PPCT\) - Centro Argentino de Información Científica y Tecnológica \(CAYCIT\) - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas \(CONICET\)](#)

URL: <http://ppct.caicyt.gov.ar/index.php/claroscuro/>

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ISSN 2314-0542 (en línea)

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**Constructing heritage:  
Archaeology and the post-Soviet heritage production  
– the case of Arkaim**

Construyendo el patrimonio:  
Arqueología y producción de patrimonio post-Soviético.  
El caso de Arkaim

*Victor A. Shnirelman\**

**Resumen**

La Rusia post-soviética es una sociedad plural donde las opiniones de las minorías sobre el pasado están bien representadas y compiten entre sí por el patrimonio cultural. En contraste con el período soviético, los arqueólogos han perdido su posición como los únicos guías e intérpretes del pasado remoto. Hoy en día, son desafiados por productores de "pasado alternativo", líderes de nuevos movimientos religiosos, científicos esotéricos, empresarios étnicos y políticos radicales. "A quién pertenece el pasado" se convirtió en un tema candente. En este artículo analizaré una lucha dramática por el sitio de la Edad del Bronce de Arkaim entre los arqueólogos y sus opositores, y exploraré cómo ese sitio arqueológico se convirtió en un centro importante para varios movimientos religiosos post-soviéticos, quienes son los que visitan Arkaim hoy en día y por qué lo hacen. Haciendo esto, qué están buscando allí, qué símbolos están construyendo en las colinas circundantes, y cómo tratan los restos arqueológicos

**Palabras clave:**

Rusia, patrimonio cultural, nacionalismo, esoterismo, Neo-paganismo, Arkaim

**Abstract**

Post-Soviet Russia is a plural society where minorities' views of the past are well represented and compete with each other for cultural heritage. By contrast to the Soviet period, archaeologists have lost their position as the only guides to and interpreters of the remote past. Nowadays, they are challenged by producers of "alternative past", leaders of New Religious Movements, esoteric scientists, ethnic entrepreneurs, and radical politicians. "Who owns the past" became a hot issue. I will analyze a dramatic

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SHNIRELMAN, Victor A. (2017) "Constructing heritage: Archaeology and the post-Soviet heritage production – the case of Arkaim", *Claroscuro. Revista del Centro de Estudios sobre Diversidad Cultural* 16: 1-28.

Recibido: 03 de Marzo de 2017

Aceptado: 25 de Julio de 2017

struggle for a Bronze Age site of Arkaim between archaeologists and their opponents and explore how an archaeological site became an important center for several post-Soviet religious movements, who are those people visiting Arkaim nowadays, and why are they doing this, what are they searching there, what symbols they are constructing at the surrounding hills, and how they treat archaeological remains.

**Key words:**

Russia, historical heritage, nationalism, esotericism, Neo-paganism, Arkaim

After a struggle for Stonehenge (Chippindale 1990; Bender 1998) it is a truism to argue that nowadays archaeologists have lost their monopoly over the control of important prehistoric sites. The point is that a plural democratic society consists of numerous groups with their own outlook and agendas. To achieve their gains they extensively use symbolic capital, which more often than not is informed by the views of the remote past. There are two major reasons for that – political and religious. The former focuses on personal freedom, political autonomy, territorial boundaries, separatism and irredentism, and the latter – on the origins of particular religions and religious communities, their rites and ceremonies, their symbols and future. The crucial point is a community's destiny, which demands for a view of historical prospect. A common sense argues that a glorious future is an extension of a glorious past. That is why one can commonly observe a tireless search for both glorious past and great ancestors that might legitimate either an established political order or the claims for its transformation. Yet an idea of the remote glorious past cannot materialize but in archaeological remains. Hence, there is a growing public interest to archaeological sites and artifacts accompanied with numerous attempts to provide them with various meanings, which go beyond the scope of plausible archaeological hypotheses and shock professional archaeologists.

As it is evident nowadays, a historical heritage is a cultural product, which suggests various approaches and evaluations, and provokes lively dialogue (Bender 1998: 150-151). Yet, not all the past residues are perceived as historical heritage. To be taken as such, an ancient site has to demon-

strate certain important qualities. Firstly, it has to be associated with ethnic or national ancestors, who have made a valuable contribution to a development of the given culture or state. Secondly, it has to approve cultural originality informed by architecture, art, warfare, writing, political organization, ritual practices, and the like. Thirdly, all these features have to be clear and unquestionable. Finally, the site has to meet the demands of contemporary people, to contribute into a historical memory, to inspire high emotions, to develop social cohesion and even political mobilization with the references to ancestors' glory and their great achievements.

If not every ancient site is able to be considered historical heritage, one has to pay attention to a process of selection. Hence, it is important to know who is making choice, what is selected in particular, why and for what goals. Thus, evidently a historical heritage is being constructed rather than revealed. Moreover, paradoxically as it is, authenticity is by no means a crucial point. What is important is a symbolic role of the site or artifact, which is able to foster political consolidation or mobilization.

This issue is worth discussing with a reference to Arkaim, a Middle Bronze Age site situated in the Southern Urals region in the steppe zone southward of the city of Chelyabinsk not far from the Russian-Kazakhstan border. Arkaim is a round, fortified settlement, with a diameter of about 150 m, dated to ca. 17th-16th centuries BC (21st – 18th cal BC) (**Fig. 1**). It is surrounded by two concentric walls, built of clay and blocks of rock, heaped on a log frame. On the inside, semi-subterranean living quarters, with hearths, cellars, wells and metal-making furnaces are attached to the walls (**Fig. 2**). There were sixty this sort of houses, opening onto an interior street, along which there was a channel with water collecting wells. In the center of the settlement, there was a square. Gates led into the settlement on each of the four sides. All the evidence points to a unified plan, and this, in turn, points to a society with leaders or chieftains of considerable authority. This impression is strengthened when one takes into account that, to-date, twenty three such round or square sites of the Middle Bronze Age have been discovered in a region of circa 400 km X 150 km, encompassing

the Chelyabinsk and Orenburg Oblasts and parts of Bashkortostan (all in Russia) and Northern Kazakhstan. Some archaeologists call this region “the country of the towns” (Zdanovich 1992; 1997).



Fig. 1 A plan of Arkaim site



**Fig. 2** Semi-subterranean houses and a reconstructed wall

Unfortunately, Arkaim is still a less studied site, which raises many questions. In particular, a scarcity of material remains is extraordinary there. Economic basis of the Arkaim-like sites, where numerous animal bones combine with no traces of farming, is still unclear. To what extent local population was sedentary or nomadic is unknown. A scarcity of slag put into question a character of the local metallurgy. A function of the outer ditch is also unclear since its irregularity puts into question its defensive function. A hasty identification of Arkaim as a “temple” and a less professional study of its “astrological function” make interpretations especially difficult. Therefore, many preliminary conclusions sound today less convincing and give rise to doubts (Petrov 2009).

The reasons of a public interest towards Arkaim were twofold. Firstly, according to certain scholars, the site was associated with the Indo-Aryans or, at least, with the Indo-Iranians before their dispersion. Secondly, some

archaeologists assumed that it was a temple and its inhabitants served rituals at the surrounding hills. The first idea was picked up by nationalists searching for the glorious ancestors, and the second one made Arkaim an important cult center for the new religious movements. There were good reasons for this at the turn of the 1990s because a collapse of the Soviet Union with its atheist and internationalist ideology provided a space for both various nationalisms and religious movements.

From the late 1980s on, the Russian nationalism clashed with regional nationalisms growing up in certain republics. The Russian nationalism aimed at the state's territorial integrity and a privileged status of ethnic Russians, whereas regional nationalisms struggled either for national independence or, at least, for an upgrade of their political status and privileged access to exploitation of local natural resources. At the same time new religious movements needed ritual centers, which served as such in the remote past and could be used today. Arkaim met all these demands perfectly well.

Being persecuted in the Soviet period, the Aryan theory came back onto the scene during the last 25-30 years. At the same time, the term "Aryans" enjoyed various meanings in different ethno-political and religious milieus. By that, the scholars usually mean Indo-Aryans, who have separated from the earlier Indo-Iranian entity in the Bronze Age and moved to India. Yet, more obscure views became popular outside the academic community. The Iranian-speaking nationalists (Ossetians, Tajiks) used the term "Aryans" for their own ancestors (for example, see: Slanov 2013). Those ones, who linked themselves with the Indo-European cultural tradition, went back to scholarly views of the late 19th century and identified the "Aryans" with all the early Indo-Europeans in general. This was practiced by the Russian and Ukrainian nationalists. There were their own nationalists among the Turks, who associated their ancestors with the early Eurasian tradition and, as a result, provided them with the "Aryan heritage." Finally, there was occult science, based on the Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy, which viewed the "Aryans" as the "Fifth rooted race." Noteworthy, Blavatsky defined race with a reference to spirituality rather than physical appearance

and, in this view, most of the modern people belong to the “Aryans.” To put it differently, there were many activists by the end of the 20th century who claimed “Aryan heritage.” It is no wonder that Arkaim proved to fit in the agenda of all of them.

The Russian radical nationalists interpret the early Indo-European dispersal throughout Eurasia as an expansion of the “Aryan ancestors” which legitimizes the Russian borders and, if necessary, even claims for neighboring territories. For them, this serves a strong argument for a territorial integrity of Russia as though it was confirmed by millennial history. Arkaim added new arguments: firstly, archaeologists provided data on the extensive movements from “the country of towns” to various directions, and second, these people enjoyed domesticated horses and chariots, which made long migrations possible (Kuz'mina 2008; Grigoriev 1999; Anthony 2007). In this context, nationalists viewed Arkaim as the earliest town on the Earth and a center of the evolved civilization, where the vast Eurasian territories began to be settled from. The Russian nationalists had no doubts that it is their “Slavic-Aryan ancestors” who accomplished all those feats.

Since 1991 on, they manifested an excitement with the esoteric “Hyperborean idea,” which pointed to the Arctic area as the homeland of the “Aryans,” the “white people” (Shnirelman 2007; 2014a). Allegedly, climatic aggravation and glaciations had made those “Aryans” leave for friendlier environment, which they have found in the Southern Urals as their “second homeland.” It is there that they have shaped a civilization, which became a cradle of many Indo-European peoples, including the Slavs especially. Allegedly, the “Aryans” moved from there and occupied all the Eurasian territory between China and the Carpathian region. The proponents of this concept view the Southern Urals as a center of the Vedic religion and as an area of the most ancient state, which capital was the holy Arkaim. Some activists call this state the “Slavic” or the “Russian.” They associate Arkaim with the early Slavic fortified settlements (Kanevskaja 1990; Nechipurenko 1994; Razorenov 1994; 1995; Ozarenov 1999; Torop 1995; Asov 1996a; 1996b; 2008: 265-277; Danilov 1996: 37; Trekhlebov 1998: 11-14; Mal'tseva 2000:

21; Spiashchaia 2001: 5; Nazhimova, Kasimov 2005: 30-31; Putenikhin 2006: 35-37; Tsarevsky, Tsarevskaja 2006: 71-76; Perin 2012: 105-111) despite there was more than two thousand years gap between them let alone a distance in many hundreds miles.

They imagine some “Ural Rus’,” that allegedly has enriched humanity with some invaluable knowledge. In addition, according to radical ecologists, the Urals region including Arkaim, i. e. “the country of the Russes-Aryans,” proves to be “our Motherland” (Khanzhin et al. 2010: 107). One can find the same ideas in the novels of radical Neo-pagan journalist Roman Perin (2010; 2012).

Noteworthy, a substantial contribution to the myth of Arkaim was made by a professional archaeologist, a director of the archaeological project Gennady Zdanovich. Even at the scholarly discussion in the Institute of Archaeology in Moscow he claimed that Arkaim might be a national idea for contemporary Russia (Koreniako, Kuz'minykh 2007. Also see: Zdanovich 2006). This idea was picked up and disseminated by some other scholars (for example, see: Palkin 2012).

The Southern Urals is imagined as the center of the world (legendary *Belovodie*, sometimes), where Zoroaster was born and lived. And thousands of pilgrims rush there annually at a certain time to enjoy a super-natural energy allegedly abound there (for that, see: Kalinin 1997; Shnirelman 1998; 1999; 2001; 2011; 2014b; Ugaev 2006; Belolipetskaia 2008; 2010: 73-75).

All these romantic views of Arkaim are highly ethnocentric and aim at forging xenophobic stance among the Russians. Indeed, their advocates talk of the “great Aryan civilization – the Mother of the Russian stock,” remind the Russians of their allegedly “racial roots” and the “Aryan origin,” call Arkaim the “birthplace of the proto-Slavic group of the Aryan people,” and complain that nowadays the “white race” depends spiritually on some alien culture originated “from the prophet Moses.” The industrial plans for flooding Arkaim were depicted as the case of blasphemous attitude to the “Aryan ancestors” heritage, which has been barely rescued by the “national-

patriots.” Moreover, the radical authors point to the “plot” as though it makes the “official historians” keep silence about the early settlements of the “Slavic-Aryans” in the Urals, their civilizing role and “indigenous status” in the region (for example, see: Perin 2012: 20-21, 109-110).

This concept suffers from megalomania and is being enriched with new fantasies and bizarre assumptions over time. The contemporary Russian radicals sometimes push Arkaim a thousand years and more back in time to represent it as “earlier than the Egyptian pyramids” and at the same time to argue that iron was produced there. They also identify Arkaim with Asgard, a legendary homeland of the early Germanic god Odin. They are searching for this myth among the Slavic ancestors, whom they identify with the Cimmerians. A devoted promoter of the faked “Russian Veda” and “Book of Vles” a journalist Aleksandr Asov views Arkaim as a confirmation of his own fantasies about the “Slavic-Russes” participation in the Trojan war. Many Russian ultra-nationalists believe that the “Aryan civilization” of Arkaim and other sites in the Southern Urals demonstrates the climax of the Slavic spiritual creativity, after which a long epoch of decline and degradation began (for details, see: Shnirelman 1998; 1999; 2001; 2014a; 2015).

The Russian radicals alike, the Bashkir nationalists are also searching for their remote prehistoric ancestors. They also believe that the Aryans have brought culture and civilization from the Southern Urals. For example, the director of the Magnitogorsk firm “Ab-Zelil” Al’ Fatih Fazylov, who had been elected the chief of the Bashkir tribe of Tam’an in 1994 (Grigoriev 1994), has discovered the Bashkir people’s roots in the Late Palaeolithic cave of Shul’gantash (Kapova) and revealed the essence of the early Bashkir outlook in swastika. He was fascinated with Arkaim, which design he identified with the “Bashkir swastika.” He believed that the Aryans, who arrived from the Southern Urals, enriched the humanity with culture and civilization (Al’ Fatih 1997: 15-20). Therefore he ascribed Arkaim and the related sites to a spiritual heritage of the indigenous people of the Southern Urals, i. e. Bashkirs (Al’ Fatih 1997: 35). Noteworthy, trained economist Fazylov

has got interested in the Bashkir origins and antiquities of the Southern Urals in 1987-1988 just after sensational discoveries at Arkaim were extensively covered by mass-media.

Fazylov has followers in the Republic of Bashkortostan, who also address the “Aryan theory.” Some of them argue that the Ufa region, which allegedly included Arkaim, was the homeland of all the humanity and a birthplace of the Bible. Yet, in their view, the Aryans were the Turkic-speaking people, and both Zoroaster and Jesus Christ were of the Turkic origin. These views are promoted by the former pilot affiliated with the Ministry of Extraordinary Situations, and currently a tutor of the “*Znanie*” (Knowledge) Association of the Republic of Bashkortostan Nail F. Valitov who presents himself as a “historian-linguist.” He established an occult group which allegedly carried on “scholarly studies.” He argues that the Turkic language was a proto-language of the humanity, and that both the human homeland and a cradle of all the civilizations were situated in the Ufa region. All the “holy people” originated from there, and the Mother of God visited the region as well. Valitov acknowledges that the Aryans arrived from the North, yet identifies this North with the Ufa region and Arkaim. He argues that it was there that the Teacher lived, the Bible was compiled, Zoroaster and Jesus Christ taught and all the major civilizations were shaped including the “Holy Rus’.” Valitov imagines Russia as the “spiritual core of humanity,” yet identifies the “Russes” (“light people”) with the Turks, or “Great wise men.” And the Bashkirs are depicted the direct descendants of the Arkaim dwellers (Valitov 2005a; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c). Similar views are developed by the Ufa writer and a specialist in physical culture Vladimir P. Putenikhin (2006), yet in his imagination ethnic Russians rather than the Turks were the direct Aryan descendants.

Later on, Valitov shifted to more modest view. He skipped an identification of the Bashkirs with the direct descendants of the legendary Aryans, but still stuck arguing that the Southern Urals were an “Extreme North” and, thus, a cradle of all the languages and civilizations. Actually he shifted from ethnic Bashkir nationalism to Russian imperial nationalism and

claimed that it was Russia which had a civilizing mission in the world. And he kept identifying the Southern Urals with the heart of the Earth, Arkaim being its center where all people of Europe, India and China were rooted. Finally, he predicted prosperity in Russia in the nearest future (Valitov 2009).

The Bashkir philologist Salavat Galliamov goes much further. He also looks for the Bashkir homeland in the Southern Urals, views them the earliest people in the Earth and identifies them with the Aryans. Yet, he separates the Bashkirs from the Turks and identifies them with the early Iranians instead. In addition, he reveals the close linguistic relationships between the Bashkirs, the English people (Galliamov 1997: 184-186), and even the Kurds (Galliamov 2005: 26-60). He also ascribes Arkaim to the Bashkir ancestors and imagines Zoroaster as the Bashkir prophet who has been born, lived and died in the Southern Urals (Galliamov 1995: 44-45; 2005: 80-92). Moreover, he assumes that Zoroaster has been buried under a well known mound of Sintashta excavated between 1972 and 1986 and called “the Teacher’s grave” by Zdanovich (Zdanovich 2004; 2006; Galliamov 2005: 91-92).

Galliamov’s ideas were approved by the Bashkir historian M. Kiekbaev (Galliamov 2005: 6-9). They were also disseminated by the local media (Sabitov 1996a; 1996b) and supported by the Bashkir writer Gazim Shafikov who believed in the Bashkir ancestry from the “Arkaim Aryans” and presented swastika as their heritage (Shafikov 1998: 306-314, 322-339).

Being fascinated with a theory of migration, initially Galliamov identified the Indo-Iranian homeland with the “country of towns” in the Southern Urals where the Aryans, including the Kurds’ ancestors, dispersed throughout Eurasia from (Galliamov 2005: 26-60). While having received a support from the Kurds, he changed his mind and began searching for the southern sources of the Bashkir “Aryanism.” Ever since, he acknowledged that the Kurds were the indigenous people in Kurdistan, where allegedly the Indo-European homeland was situated. He depicted a grand Indo-Iranian migra-

tion from the Zagros Mountains through Central Asia to the Southern Urals, which, in his view, confirms the “Aryan ancestry” of the Bashkirs (Galliamov 2007). While making the Bashkirs the close relatives of the Europeans, this “Aryan idea” allows them to distance from the image of “barbaric nomads” and to obtain the “noble image” allegedly characteristic of the Aryans. Moreover, with a reference to the “Bashkir-Kurdish mythology” Galliamov argues that the European scientific knowledge (logic, math and astronomy) is rooted in Arkaim (Galliamov 2009). This is an evident struggle for a symbolic capital.

Inspired with these ideas, the inhabitants of Bashkortostan began taking part in pilgrimage to Arkaim. For example, a workshop on regional history for teachers of the Bashkir language was held there in September 1994. Arkaim also attracted attention of the media of Bashkortostan, which used to exploit quasi-scientific themes. There is a special climate at Arkaim, it is said, there is “bio-energy” there, it is a “sacred place”; and finally, some authors claimed that both Peter the Great and Adolf Hitler were searching for Arkaim in the past (Mikishev 1994).

The brand of Arkaim is favorably used by the commercial organizations. Nowadays not only occult groups and travel agencies appropriate this name in Ufa but also hotel, café, country club, and more.

The Bashkir scholars were more careful, yet some of them were also tempted with ethnocentrism. For example, the late Bashkir archaeologist Nyiaz Mazhitov did the best to Turkify the early nomads (Sakae and Massagetae) of Kazakhstan and Central Asia (Mazhitov, Sultanova 1994: 40-75). He promoted this view in his chapters in the textbook in history of Bashkortostan. Noteworthy, whereas in 1991 he ascribed the main body of the Sakae and Massagetae tribes with the Iranian language and assumed that one could find some Turkic-speaking tribes among them, the Sakae or their major part turned into the Turkic-speakers in the further textbook editions (Akmanov 1991: 21; 1993: 9-10; 1996: 13; Rasskazy 1992: 12-14). It is also worth noting that, while mentioning Arkaim in the textbooks, the Bashkir authors commonly decline to discuss a language of its inhabitants. Yet, they

persistently call it the most ancient town in Russia (Akmanov 1993: 9-10; 1996: 9-10; Mavletov 2001: 50).

Whereas there are various ideas about origins of the Arkaim-like sites among the scholars, Mazhitov was searching for their roots in Central Asia and Southern Kazakhstan. He also identified these sites with the ancestors of contemporary population of the Southern Urals, Ural-Volga region and, partly, Siberia, including the Bashkirs. To be precise, later on he avoided discussing the language issue and acknowledged that there were but only hypotheses on the Bronze Age people's language (Mazhitov, Sultanova 2010: 49, 53-54). At the same time he did not fail to identify these sites with the "early state" (Mazhitov, Sultanova 2010: 51). Thus, in his view, it was in the Southern Urals that the earliest state emerged at the territory of Russia, which provided Bashkortostan with symbolic capital.

An aspiration to appropriate Arkaim is observed in Kazakhstan as well. Some native journalists write about the "Aryan civilization in Kazakhstan" with a reference to this site. They argue that the "country of towns" encompassed Northern Kazakhstan where there were even more outstanding towns than Arkaim (Kunelekova 2005). There are attempts to Turkify Arkaim and to associate it with the Kazakh allegedly "Aryan ancestors" (for example, see: Kuanganov 1999: 45-47). Even the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev referred to "ancient roots of spirituality" allegedly linked with the "Aryans" of Sintashta and Arkaim (Nazarbaev 1999: 79, 273-274).

The book has been published in Kazakhstan, which goal was to ascribe Arkaim to the Turkic historical heritage. Its author glorified the proto-Turks and ascribed to them an invention of bow and arrows, a domestication of all the major domestic animals, an introduction of pottery and metallurgy as well as the earliest town-building, a revolution in military skill, a creation of "Zend-Avesta," and an introduction of the world religions including Christianity. Even Celtic cross was presented there as the "Tengrian one." The book focused on Arkaim as allegedly the most evident witness of the earliest Turkic civilization (Narymbaeva 2007: 293-296, 427-429, 449-

450). Moreover, while claiming that the Indo-European family of languages was an artificial construction, the author argued that the Turks and Iranians (Aryans) had common origins, but it was the Turks who influenced the Aryans culturally rather than vice versa (Narymbaeva 2007: 303-308). As a result, the author claimed that the Turks have been shaped between 20 and 30 thousand years ago, occupied various Eurasian territories albeit under various names, and significantly affected culture and languages of various Indo-European people (Narymbaeva 2007: 318).

Since recently one can come across Arkaim in the Kazakhstan's textbooks. For example, a textbook in history of Kazakhstan for the sixth grade puts Arkaim as the "earliest town" at the borderland between Kazakhstan and Russia (Sadykov et al. 2006: 38), and one finds it at the territory of Kazakhstan in the textbook for the tenth grade (Zholdasbaev 2006: 66).

In his turn, the Kyrgyz scholar calls the Kyrgyz the "Aryans of the Scandinavian type" and appropriates Arkaim as the earliest Kyrgyz heritage. Yet, in his view, the "Aryan cradle" was situated in the Fergana valley rather than in the Southern Urals (Tukembaev 2011: 17, 87, 94).

The esoteric scholars also take part in this tense discourse. For them Arkaim is important mostly as a place of the Aryan rituals. The first was Tamara Globa who visited Arkaim immediately after it has been publicly associated with astronomic knowledge. She viewed the site in mystic terms as though it served one of the "towns-observatories" situated at the 52nd latitude where the "Earth touched the Sky." According to her, these towns-temples were to rescue the world from misfortunes. She believed that Arkaim served a big horoscope, which predicted that the Aryans would come back again to their homeland at the Aquarius Era. For her, the Urals was the "center of the world," and the "country of towns" – a middle of the Earth. The fact that Arkaim has come back from non-existence meant that the "Urals would collect the Aryans" and "would become a place of their spiritual concentration" after thousands years of the "rule of darkness." Those who were skeptical towards the "Aryan idea" and found evident Nazi traits in it were accused by Globa for "fear of the Russian future, which will

be followed by the world.” Moreover, she did the best to rehabilitate not only the “Aryans” but swastika as well, which she identified with a “symbol of relationships of Rus’ with the Aryan race” (Globa 1993: 79, 82; 1994a). To confirm this she referred to icons of swastika at the Arkaim pottery and claimed that swastika was embedded into the design of the site. An idea of unity of the “white race” also found room in this discourse. The Zoroastrian astrologists were obsessed with the ideas that Zoroaster was allegedly born at the Belaya Hill, the Aryan homeland situated in the Southern Urals, and the Aryans were the “ancestors of the Russian people.” After Globa, some other occult scientists (Putenikhin, Tsarevsky, Megre, and more) have paid attention to Arkaim and devoted the whole volumes to it.

Together with the Neo-pagans and many other followers of the new religious movements, the esotericists glorify Arkaim as the “capital of the Russian-Aryan civilization” and a “symbol of the Russian glory,” where the “proto-Slavic group of the Aryan people” came from. Yet, the esotericists focused on the preparation for a transition from the Piscean era to the Aquarius era that had to arrive after Apocalypse, which they expected to happen between 2000 and 2002 (for example, see: Mal’tseva 2000a: 7, 30-36, 70; Ermakova 2003: 48-49). While doing this, they did not forget about the “Aryan ancestors,” who lived long before the harsh epoch of *Kali-Yuga* and provided with the models of noble behavior and great wisdom.

At the same time regardless of the passions around Arkaim in science-fictions, fictions and textbooks, the site enjoys peaceful and friendly environment. People arrive there from various regions of Russia, and there are Russians, Bashkirs, Tatars, Kazakhs, and even Kalmyks among them. One can observe a variety of religious communities at Arkaim – esotericists, Krishnaites (**Fig. 3**), Shivaites, Shamanists, Neo-pagans, Muslim mystics and many others. They either held their ceremonies and rituals simultaneously side by side, or use the same spots or hills one after another, or take part in the same mass rituals, which collect dozens or even hundreds of people (**Fig. 4**). There is no competition for the ancestors there. Instead, there is a common aspiration for recovery, spiritual recreation, and trans-

formation. Alike, attributes of various religions co-exist there peacefully. For example, near the Shaman hill one can see a Muslim gravestone and a Krishnaite stone lingam behind it close to the big stone altar.



**Fig. 3** Krishnaites



**Fig. 4** An occult ritual

Nowadays, many tourists arrive to Arkaim neither to see excavations nor to visit the museum. They are more interested in taking part in rituals, contacts with Superior forces, getting knowledge from sorcerers and occult scientists, learning from astrologists, initiation to ancient “Egyptian wisdom,” recovery through meditations and receiving vital energy from Cosmos. According to opinion poll, in summer 2006 more than 80 per cent of the visitors arrived to Arkaim in order to contact with “higher energy,” and 90 per cent of them were city-dwellers (Ugaev 2006: 185-186). At Arkaim many of them look for ritual practices rather than for theoretical knowledge: contacts with “poles of energy,” watching the cloud patterns, meeting the sun-rise, meditations at the top of the hills, interpretations of the dreams, sacrifices, prays, or, if they are lucky, watching UFO. Many tourists do not fail to climb the closest hill and to walk along a stone spiral:

for some this means a recovery, for others – throwing away a negative energy, and for the third – a rite of repentance.

Arkaim is especially attractive as a “homeland,” “absolute beginning,” a place of the first creation, where one can get renovation (“eternal return,” after Friedrich Nietzsche and Mircea Eliade). And this is directly linked with the ideas of awakening, renaissance, recreation, recovery, transformation, beginning of a new life, as though it is relevant to both particular individuals and Russia in general. Esotericists (Reurichians) teach people that the “Aryans” would come back to Arkaim after completing a full historical cycle. The lasting harsh epoch would finish, and the new Golden Age would arrive instead. Allegedly, the prehistoric Arkaim inhabitants have got into sleep, which lasts till nowadays, but the time is ripe to awaken, because the *Kali-Yuga* cataclysms are at the agenda, and the happy *Satya-Yuga* period is ahead. Russia is to be a spiritual leader of the humanity the more so that it was from there that the “Aryan race” spread out over the world. Therefore, people from all over the Earth have to come to and to meet in Russia to become the united humanity. In this respect, view of Arkaim as the “national idea of Russia” is materializing.

Arkaim has failed to become the “national idea,” but instead it turned into tourist Mecca. Since recently, various cultural organizations together with travel agencies held festivals there annually. It proves to be especially attractive for the Ministry of Culture of the Cheliabinsk region, which organizes Eurasian folklore-ethnographic festivals “Arkaim” annually since 2005. The last one the 11th festival was held in July 2016. Usually there are performances of the Russian and Bashkir folklore teams primarily from the South Urals region (from Cheliabinsk, Ekaterinburg and Ufa most of all). There are also master-classes in traditional handicrafts, competitions in and displays of traditional cooking, and other entertainments. On their part the esoterists held a “festival of Love and Unity of people of the Planet Holy Rus” there. It is held by the All-Russian patriotic movement “For a Statehood and Spiritual Revival of Holy Rus’.” The Krishnaites arrange their own festivals aimed at shaping a strong “Aryan society.” People arrive

from various parts of Russia and also from abroad for these festivals. At the same time Arkaim turned into an attractive brand nowadays, and respective cultural events are held not necessarily at Arkaim itself. For example, a Festival of contemporary culture ARKAIM focused on displaying fashionable clothes was held in Almaty in the late May 2014. At the same time since 2010 onwards, a conference is held in Arkaim annually, which focuses on the problems of contemporary civilization and collects scholars and pseudo-scholars together (for example, see: Zagidullina 2010).

Before the mid-1990s, when only enthusiasts visited Arkaim, it was the early site itself that served a ritual place. Until the very early 2000s, tourists were permitted to pray and meditate at the excavated area, but then this practice has been banned. Nowadays, rituals take place mainly at the surrounding hills, the hill of Ration situated ca. 8-10 km from the site being the major one. Visitors give romantic names to the local hills: Bold hill became Shaman hill, Rook hill – the hill of Love, Cherkasy hill - the hill of Ration, and Arkaim hill – the hill of Confession. The closest Shaman hill was the first to be used ritually: the visitors have made a large stone spiral (Labyrinth) at the top of it in the late 1990s (**Fig. 5**). Later on, some other symbols – from swastika and mandala to the Star of David and Egyptian hieroglyph – began to appear at the slopes of the hills or on their tops. For example, in 2009 I saw words “Hare Krishna” made of stones at the hill of Confession. There is also a war of symbols: some are being destroyed to be replaced by some others. All these constructions have a magic importance for the new tourists and provide their ritual activity with deep meaning. To put it differently, the tourists actively explore all the area adjacent to the archaeological site and extend the borders of the local culture-historical heritage.



**Fig. 5** stone spiral at the Shaman hill

What is important to them is an image of the heritage rather than its authenticity. It is evident from what follows. Archaeologists have established an archaeological park where they have made reconstructions of the semi-subterranean houses from the Chalcolithic settlement of Botai (North Kazakhstan) (**Fig. 6**) as well as reconstructions of the prehistoric slab graves, erected a stone replica of the nomadic idol, and built up the Temir mound with an artificial “Sarmatian grave” inside to meet the demands of experimental archaeology. Some tourists view this sort of models as authentic prehistoric sites and artifacts. Therefore they make offerings for the nomadic idol (Ermakova 2003: 21-22) and serve rituals near the Temir mound (**Fig. 7**). And in the semi-subterranean houses they worship a family oven and ask the “patron of Russia” to help to build up comfortable dwellings, and the “Supreme Ration” to provide with astrological

knowledge, which, in their view, the early Aryans enjoyed (Ermakova 2003: 30-38, 45-47).



**Fig. 6** models of the semi-subterranean houses from Botai



**Fig. 7** Temir mound

Barbara Bender (1998) has revealed a conflict between a conservative approach of the archaeologists who want the heritage to be a “dead museum” and countercultural demands that the heritage should actively serve modernity and be embedded into contemporary life. A similar conflict is observed at Arkaim, where there are several interest groups with their own views of the heritage. Firstly, there are archaeologists who view heritage in academic terms as authentic antiquity, which major function is education. Secondly, there is general public, which encompass several interest groups – ethnic nationalists and new religious movements (NRM). Ethnic nationalists are mostly interested in historical heritage, which can legitimate their political ambitions and goals, whereas NRM include also several different groups with their own views of the heritage and its role. Esotericists need but appropriate “magical places,” whereas Neo-pagans want the spot to be strictly connected with an activity of their remote ancestors. At the same time, esotericists also demonstrate high emotions if the spot proves to be associated with the “Aryan prehistory” whoever the “Aryans” were. Even some archaeologists are tempted with the esoteric views and glorify the “Aryan spirituality” as though it is crucial for the contemporary humanity.

Hence, the historical heritage is constructed, although by various groups in a different way. Archaeologists are mostly interested in authenticity of the prehistoric remains. Yet, they can develop an archaeological park of models and replicas for general public. The tourists are interested both in entertainments and in meeting their spiritual demands. Ethnic nationalists call to glory and past achievements as well as moral features and creativity of the ancestors. It provides them with high self-respect and deep emotions. The believers value an archaeological site as a marker of the “magic place” that was intensively used by prehistoric people for prayers. Hence, they are mostly interested in a place for prayers and meditations rather than in archaeology as such. Archaeology confirms their hope for local powerful magic forces and an effectiveness of ritual practices at the given spot that has been selected by the ancestors not by accident.

To conclude, I think that archaeologists should be aware of a nature of the public demands for both their data and the results of their studies. It is important to know who exactly and for what reasons is interested in their production and how and why their discoveries can be used and abused by non-professionals. That is why general publications on the Bronze and Early Iron Age archaeology and, especially textbooks in archaeology, should integrate special sections discussing ethnocentric, racist and religious interpretations of archaeological data. These problems should be discussed with the students for them to understand their responsibility and to be well equipped for a dialogue with general public.

### ***Acknowledgement***

A study was financially supported by the Russian Foundation for Fundamental Studies grant no. N°15-31-11109.

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