

# The Historical and Archaeological Significances of the Mohe Cultural Layers at Utesnoe-4

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## Archaeology in Russia's Maritime Region

Utesnoe-4 is one of a number of sites within the Ussuriysk / Уссурййск archaeological cluster. Fyodor F. Busse, chairman of the Society for the Study of the Amur Region, was foremost among Russian specialists who observed sites near Ussuriysk at the end of the nineteenth century. His expeditions found many sites from the Bohai and Jurchen periods in the modern Primorye / Приморье region (Busse 1888, Busse and Kropotkin 1908). Between 1911 and 1928, another member of the Society for the Study of the Amur Region, officer A.Z. Fyodorov, excavated the same sites, but due to the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, Fyodorov was executed and all archaeological research in the Far Eastern region came to a halt (Kim 2011, Vasil'eva 1989; 1990; Kim, Burdonov and Mezentsev 2017).

Despite the interest by Soviet and Russian scholars, the cultural layers of Utesnoe-4 were impossible to locate since they were deeply embedded under non-cultural layers. This site was found by accident. During the 1990s, the banks of the Razdolnaya River (Раздольная река, known before 1972 as Suifun / Суйфун, after the Manchu word for 'river snail' *suifun* 水虱; on the Chinese side of the Sino-Russian border, the river is still called Suifen River 綏芬河) became severely eroded. In November 1996, a group of local young *Резерв* ("Reserve") archaeologists, under the guidance of A. V. Burdonov, found the site where one of the riverbanks had collapsed, identifying it as a multilayered site. The "Reservists" informed the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Vladivostok of their discovery (Kim, Burdonov and Mezentsev 2017). Persistent financial problems greatly hampered this post-Soviet institute which, in 1991, stopped financing field research altogether (Ivliev and Klyuev 2006: 42). Having

conducted virtually all explorations of Jurchen and Bohai archaeology since 1976, the Institute was greatly aided by amateur archaeologists organised in clubs. Whilst their number has significantly decreased (a reduction from twenty to three between 1989 and today), their contribution should not be underestimated. Amateur archaeologists play an active role in locating Jurchen and Bohai settlements and participate in many regional and international archaeological expeditions. In combination with financial support from private sponsors, including Korean or Japanese research institutions (Boldin 2006; Boldin and Gel'man 2005, 2008; Mun, Lee and Boldin 2004, Nikitin and Jung Suk Bae 2007), the Institute has been able to continue its work on a smaller scale (Artem'eva 1999; 2003; 2005). Given the continuing erosion by the river, it is a race against time to preserve crucial historical data.

We conducted research into specific medieval layers. The study of the Mohe and Bohai layers yielded interesting results. The Mohe (Russian: Мохэ; Chinese: Mohe 靺鞨; Korean: Malgal 말갈) tribes inhabited what is now the Russian Far East, North Korea and North China from the third to the eleventh century. The Mohe played a major role in relations between the Chinese empires, Korean kingdoms and the Bohai state (Okladnikov 1959; Okladnikov and Derevianko 1973; Kim 2014). International scholars, however, have voiced different opinions concerning the cultural, social and ethnic structures of the Mohe (*Istoriia Severo-Vostochnogo Kitaia* 1989; Kyuner 1961; Kim 2011). The state of Bohai (Russian: Бохай; Chinese: Bohai 渤海; Korean: Parhae 발해) existed from the late seventh to the early tenth centuries (*Istoriia stran zarubezhnoj Azii v srednie veka*, 1970). Korean specialists consider Bohai as an heir to Koguryo culture (Parhaesa 1996; *Koguryo yonguhwae kukjaehaksuldaehwae jonghaphoron* 1999; Lim 2008), while Chinese archaeologists present it as a part of the Chinese state, a “provincial power of the Tang Empire” (Yao Feng 2001; Sung Hung 2001).

### Material Evidence

Based on the classification of ceramics in the medieval layers of Utesnoe-4, we could identify it as belonging to a Mohe site of the Bohai period. The layers were dominated by Mohe ceramics, but also specimens from Bohai. The present article explores the Mohe layers of Utesnoe-4, where Russian specialists had found *kangs* (Chin.: kàng 炕; Manchu: *nahan* ᠨᠠᠬᠠᠨ; Korean: *ondol* 온돌), a bed-stove heating system used throughout north-eastern Asia. Usually located under the floor, a *kang* in Bohai and Jurchen houses could consist of two or three channels, but sometimes be much more complicated. Ceramic evidence suggests that this cultural layer dated from the Bohai period. Since Mohe tribes lived along the Bohai periphery, we can surmise that this settlement was the centre of a peripheral Bohai district.

However, virtually none of the Mohe tribes used *kangs*, in contrast to Bohai and Jurchen settlements. Since the quantity of fragments belonging to Mohe ceramics outweighs that of Bohai ceramics (376:263; the 2009 campaign yielded a ratio of 833:355), we have to consider this settlement as a Mohe site. Inhabitants of this settlement preferred to use locally made utensils, if only because they were cheaper

than imported ceramics. Finds include wholly intact Mohe vessels, whilst it is inconceivable that the Bohai population would have expressed a preference for Mohe products. Bohai civilisation was recognised by Japan and the Tang (Ivliev 2005), but the same is not true for the Mohe tribes. We can therefore safely assume that Utesnoe-4 was a Mohe settlement which absorbed artefacts from Bohai as the dominant cultural entity.

However, this settlement was also a place of war. Destroyed by fire and never restored, human remains were unearthed at the site. After a long time, a new settlement was established, which belonged to the site's Bohai layers, as evidenced by fragments of Bohai ceramics and the *kang* system. Military campaigns were carried out by the Bohai rulers Da Zuorong 大祚榮 (698–719), Da Wuyi, 大武藝 (719–738), Da Jingmao 大欽茂 (738–794), Da Renxiu 大仁秀 (818–830) and Da Yizhen 大彝震 (830–857) (Han 1994). However, we believe that the Mohe settlement of Utesnoe-4 was destroyed during another period. If the Mohe settlement had been destroyed during the eighth or ninth centuries, Bohai settlers would have reclaimed it. Utesnoe-4 was an important settlement because it was located on the banks of a big river, enabling transport, trade, agriculture, but also military control over neighbouring districts. Had Bohai destroyed Utesnoe-4, they would swiftly have reclaimed it. However, it would take a long time before this site was rebuilt.

This opens the option that Utesnoe-4 was destroyed in the last decades of the Bohai state. In 926, Khitan Liao annihilated Bohai, though only controlled the western and central parts of the former Bohai state, while the eastern part had gained independence. Until the eventual absorption into the Jurchen Jin empire, the population subdivided into many small tribes, repeatedly attempting to reestablish the Bohai state, whilst fighting against each other and the Khitan (*Istoriia Severo-Vostochnogo Kitaia* 1989:30). This period would certainly have lacked the peaceful conditions necessary for rebuilding the settlement by a Bohai population.

### **Osteological Evidence**

The osteological research of Utesnoe-4 produced interesting results: The Mohe people of this settlement pursued hunting, cattle-breeding and fishing for their livelihood. The osteological evidence thus shows bones and bone fragments of the black and brown bear (*Ursus thibetanus* G. Cuvier and *Ursus arctos*), boar (*Sus scrofa*), various kinds of dog (*Canidae*), horse (*Equus caballus*), household pig (*Sus domesticus*) and cattle (*Bovidae*), *et cetera*. Utesnoe-4 in both the Bohai and Jurchen eras stood out for its fishery. Since fish bones decompose relatively quickly, archaeologists only rarely find osteological remains of fish (Alekseeva and Boldin 1986; 1989; 1994; Boldin 1986; Panasenko and Gelman 2008; 2009). In contrast, animal bones and fur are typical finds, providing proof for an extensive fur trade which attracted Sogdians, Tocharians and other traders from Central Asia to the Bohai and Jurchen territories (Shavkunov 1985: 146–155; 1988: 100–105; 1990; 1992; 1995; 2001: 11–16; other scholars have not commented, see Kim 2011). The situation in Utesnoe-4 is very different, since in the Mohe layers Russian archaeologists were

able to find large quantities of osteological remains: 1038 fish bones were counted, as opposed to 958 bones and fragments of animal origin, including birds. Fishery in Utesnoe-4 thus played a dominant role.

Certain fragments of osteological materials from Utesnoe-4 could not be identified, in particular in terms of age, if destroyed by fire or mechanical damage. ~~What could be recovered, however, produced interesting insight~~; earlier cultural layers, for instance, abound with bones of young cattle, while in later layers the bones of older cattle were found. This suggests that the earliest population of Bohai raised cattle for beef, but that in later periods, Bohai settlers chiefly used cattle for agriculture, as draft animals and ate these animals only when the cattle became ill or grew too old to be used in the fields (Alekseeva and Boldin 1986: 78–84; Alekseeva and Boldin 1989: 81–85). Apart from socio-economic insight, these objects allow us to see how agriculture developed in this region (Song Ki-ho 1992, Kim 2011).

Some additional observations can be made based on the discovery animal bones at Bohai sites located near the Ilistaya River (Река Илитсяя; pre-1972 name: Lefu / Лефу or Lefa / Лефа). Since Utesnoe hunters would not have returned to their homes with all the bones of the killed animals, simply with their furs and with the meat which they had not already eaten themselves, we have to assume that these sites belonged to rival hunting communities. These sites are situated seven to ten kilometres from each other and would have inhibited the activity of hunters of Utesnoe-4 considerably. In another discovery, archaeologists excavated seventy-five shells of folding molluscs (*Bivalvia*) and scallops (*Pectinidae*), and remains of two crabs (*Brachyura*). Due to their size, we can conclude that the crabs were from the sea, not from the local river, despite the distance (nearly 100 km). Given the considerable travel involved, the osteological materials indicate the productivity of the Mohe fishing economy.

Osteological materials of fish reveal scales from carps (*Cyprinidae*) and salmon (*Salmonidae*). The latter, salmon during the period of spawning, the Mohe at Utesnoe-4 could extract directly from the river; but crabs and scallops could only be obtained from the sea. The possibility of trade with Mohe tribes located by the coast has been mooted (Vostrecov, Piskareva and Rakov 2003), but Utesnoe-4 was a fishing settlement. For the inhabitants of this site, fishing by the sea coast was more appropriate than trade with other tribes who lived in sea districts. The best season for fishing carp is the summer, whereas autumn is ideal for salmon, when it is time for spawning. This, however, coincides with the hunting period for deer, bears, otters and other providers of pelage. Based on the archaeological evidence, i.e. the lack of bones, salmon fishing was more lucrative for the inhabitants of Utesnoe-4 than hunting in the autumn. And even if they did hunt during this season, conceivably in combination with fishing salmon, they did not leave animal bones at the site. Be this as it may, fishing was the main source of livelihood for the Mohe people of Utesnoe-4. Furthermore, pre-Bohai settlers had developed pig-breeding, which included the Mohe (Okladnikov 1959; Okladnikov and Derevianko 1973). But the general im-

portance of pig-breeding is not reflected in the osteological evidence of Utesnoe-4: merely a few porcine bones were discovered on site.

In terms of material evidence, our expedition found metal hooks and ceramic sinkers, as proof of a developed fishing economy. Mohe hunters used poisoned arrowheads, either of made of metal or bone, for hunting (Bichurin 1950: 71, 92). No arrowheads for hunting purposes could be encountered here, whereas other Mohe sites produced these in copious amounts (Boldin and Horev 1990; Nikitin, Gelman and Boldin 2002). We can therefore safely conclude that the Mohe layers of Utesnoe-4 are unique, because only at this site the Mohe exclusively lived of fishing.

### Conclusion

As shown above, the Mohe settlement of Utesnoe-4 was an interesting place. This paper has considered osteological materials and traces of economic activity. The materials suggested that this site was a fishing settlement and a trading point on the river. In terms of economic activity, Utesnoe-4 was unique not only in the Maritime Region, but also in north-eastern Asia. On the basis of ceramic evidence, Bohai culture was the dominant influence on this Mohe settlement. In contrast to other known Mohe sites, the breeding of cattle and pigs, as well as hunting, were not at all prominent at Utesnoe-4, where fishing and trade predominated. Due to the considerable erosion by the local river, it is not possible to estimate the original size of the site. But the results of our excavations at Utesnoe-4 during two fieldwork seasons have demonstrated its archaeological importance.

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