

GENDER ANALYSIS OF 1990-1992 EXCAVATIONS OF
BURIALS IN POKROVKA RUSSIA

by

Jennifer Rose Lorge

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Jennifer Rose Lorge, B.S.

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The following work examines in detail the data recovered from the 1990-1992 burial excavations at the site of Pokrovka in southern Russia dating from the second half of the second millennium B.C. to fourteen century A.D. The objective is to evaluate the grave goods found among male and female Early Sarmatian nomads with a specific emphasis on the distribution of artifacts traditionally associated with weaponry, religion and weaving. This study is attempting to reinforce and reevaluate interpretations in regards to the gender roles of Iron Age nomads inhabiting the Eurasian steppes. This study will show that nomadic men were involved in religion and weaving more than previously thought, and women may not have been the so called “warriors” as they have been described.

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INTRODUCTION

Across the Eurasian steppes lie the burial mounds, or *kurgans*, of Sauro-Sarmatian nomads of 2,500 years ago. Without a written language, there are only ethnographies, archaeology, and the limited accounts of Greek historians to help reconstruct their past. Sauromatians were believed to be ancestors of the Amazons. Amazons, according to Greek legend, were powerful man-hating women warriors. Men were their enemy; only to be used for procreation. They despised males so much that if they gave birth to a son they killed or crippled him (Webster Wilde 1999).

This mythical tale of warrior women created intrigue among scholars as women of the steppes were found to be buried with weapons; especially because these finds were so close to the fabled homeland of the Amazons, near the Black Sea (Webster Wilde 1999). But were these weapons really used for fighting and warfare? Did these women use their tools in the same way as the men of their tribes?

Ancient nomadic civilizations appear to blur gender roles in a way that previous archaeologists had never taken into consideration. When the first *kurgans* of Eurasia were excavated, it was assumed any burial that contained weapons was that of a man (Webster Wilde 1999), and any burials that contained artifacts associated with domestic duties was that of a woman. But in the Eurasian steppes this is not always the case.

According to interpretations about these women buried with weapons they were fierce warriors in battle. At the end of these interpretations, scholars add as a side note that the warrior women were probably either back up forces only called upon when necessary, or defenders of their homes (Davis-Kimball 2002; Webster Wilde 1999), but there is no evidence yet to back up

these assumptions. Nomads needed to be self-reliant, so that they could operate and protect their encampments while others were gone trading and fighting (Davis-Kimball 2001). This would lead to a few well rounded individuals with diverse skills, and this notion should be seen among grave goods. The more variety of goods, the more skills the individual could perform.

In contrast to the multiple interpretations as to the role of women in nomadic steppe societies, there has been little speculation about the role of men other than that the vast majorities were fierce warriors. However, there is little data to support this simplistic statement.

This study will use raw data from the burials uncovered during the 1990-1992 excavations of Pokrovka, Russia to examine differences and commonalities between specific grave goods according to biological sex in an attempt to determine alternative theories pertaining to the roles of men and women in Sauro-Sarmatian nomadic societies.

BACKGROUND

The Eurasian steppes are located between modern day Ukraine in the west, and just past the Tien Shan and Altai mountain ranges of central Asia in the east. (Figure 1). This 6,000 mile expanse of land contains a harsh environment including deserts, grasslands, and mountain ranges. In the summer, the temperatures can reach as high as 130 degrees Fahrenheit, while the winter season can drop to as low as -30 degrees Fahrenheit (Davis-Kimball 2002:xiii).

The nomads of this region in the past and present migrate from season to season in search of grazing pastures. The first peoples of the steppe were originally hunters, and began traveling due to the natural seasonal migration patterns of the wild animals they hunted. About 3,000 years ago, these hunters transitioned into herdsmen because this occupation produced readily

accessible resources such as protein and dairy, which became their food staples (Kunanbaeva nd:2). Though these peoples no longer hunted wild animals, they still migrated at the end of every season, for two reasons. The first is because different locations prove to be better habitats during the different seasons of the year. In the winter months, nomads would seek shelter along the edges of forests, in river valleys, or an alcove in the mountains in order to keep winter winds at bay. In the summer they needed large plains and readily available water sources so their herds could thrive. The second reason that nomads continued to migrate seasonally is because if pastureland was overused it would become infertile for many years to come. However, if herders used the land for just one season, it would take only one year for all of the nutrients to rejuvenate (Kunanbaeva nd:2-3), which is just enough time for the people to return the next season.



Figure 1. Map of Eurasia with an emphasis on the location of the site of Pokrovka (after Davis-Kimball 2002: xvii).

There are four main nomadic tribes that inhabited the ancient Eurasian steppes (Table 1). They were all Indo-Iranian peoples, and the earliest three were all known as fierce warriors who had a similar language and culture (Guliaev 2003:112). The Scythians were the most well documented of these tribes because they lived along the northern coast of the Black Sea between the seventh and third centuries B.C. and had the most contact with Grecians in trade and warfare. Ancient Greek historians provided the only contemporaneous accounts of ancient nomads who did not have their own system of writing. Whether these were accurate descriptions, exaggerated truths, or fantastical stories, are not completely certain, but archaeological finds from the past 50 years are providing evidence to support many claims of the ancient Greeks.

Table 1. Chronology of the Early Nomads (Davis-Kimball 2002:21)

Saka	Eight to third centuries B.C.
Scythians	Seventh to third centuries B.C.
Sauromatians	Late seventh/early sixth to fourth centuries B.C.
Early Sarmatians	Fourth century B.C. to second century B.C.
Middle Sarmatians	Second century B.C. to A.D. second century
Late Sarmatians	A.D. second century to fourth century

The most relevant story is that of the Amazons as told by Herodotus. According to Herodotus the Amazons in the seventh century B.C. were a tribe comprised only of women. They were fierce warriors and killed many men, who were their primary enemy. During a battle against the Greeks in the Amazonian homeland near the southern coast of the Black Sea, the Amazon women, upon losing, were taken captive and placed on Greek ships sailing for the north coast. In the middle of the journey, the Amazonians were able to take control of the ships. However, they did not know how to navigate, so they were unable to sail back to their homeland. They kept heading north and landed in the nomadic Scythian territory. The Scythians were

known to be fierce warriors and the two tribes began to battle. Once realizing that they were fighting women, the Scythians ceased combat. Instead they sent soldiers to marry the Amazons, because such fierce women were sure to produce children who were also skilled warriors. The newly formed couples left Scythian territory and traveled westward toward the Don and Volga rivers, and the southern Ural Mountains. This area became known as Sarmatia and their offspring, the Sauromatians (Herodotus IV:110 – 116).

The Greeks were a highly patriarchal, male-dominated society, and to see a woman fighting would have been considered unnatural. It is likely that this shock of gender role defiance created an exaggerated story of the fierce Amazonian women. The Greeks may also have wanted to keep their own women in line, and to do this they stated that the way the Amazonians act is opposite to how a real woman should behave (Davis-Kimball 2001). Another reason that these historical accounts may not be completely accurate portrayals of real people is because the Greeks only knew these nomadic tribes and warrior women through combat, and did not know, or write, much about the daily lives of the nomads.

Archaeological remains from the graves of female nomads provide material evidence to support the claim that some nomadic women fought with weapons. Whether their fighting was a regular or occasional occurrence, and if they fought on the offensive or defensively are factors which should be examined more in detail. It is possible that in these ancient societies, as it is with modern Mongol and Kazakh nomads, that boys and girls were equals. In contemporary nomadic societies, both boys and girls are taught from a young age how to ride horses, herd the animals, and use weapons, until they reach puberty. In ancient times this equality would have taught women to be self-reliant, so when the men are away trading and raiding they could protect the herds, and manage pasturelands, and families without the help of men.

In contemporary steppe nomad societies the *yurt*, or portable home, is strictly divided in two halves based on gender. One side of the *yurt* is the men's domain. This is where all the horse gear and religious prayer books are located. The other half of the *yurt* is the women's side containing cooking implements, and items such as clothing and blankets. Depending on which nomadic group one is looking at, the men's half may be on the left or the right, and the same for the women. Among the Kazaks of Kazakhstan and Western Mongolia the left half of the *yurt* is the men's side whereas among the Changpa and the Rupshupa nomads of Ladakh the left half of the *yurt* is the women's side (Ahmed 2002:143). The two sexes sleep on their designated halves, and in some nomadic societies including the Kazaks, the wives give birth on the man's side of the *yurt* to symbolize that the child belongs to the husband's descent line because they are patrilineal societies (Davis-Kimball 2002:43).

Archaeological site of Pokrovka

The cemeteries that make up the burial site of Pokrovka are located in southern Russia, along the border of present day Kazakhstan. Specifically, Pokrovka (Figure 2) lies on the left bank of the Ile River which is located in between the Don River valley and the southern peaks of the Ural Mountains (the ancient territory called Sarmatia). The ancient nomads who inhabited the site of Pokrovka are known as Sauro-Sarmatians, because the majority of individuals excavated at the site date from the sixth to second centuries B.C., and the burials indicate a presence of both Sauromatian and Early Sarmatian culture (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:17).

It is believed that all nomadic cemeteries, including Pokrovka, are summer encampments. This is because in the fall, winter, and early spring the ground is solid due to the cold and eventually below freezing temperatures. If someone died in any season other than summer, their bodies would be removed of and then filled with grasses and herbs in order to support the body

and to prevent it from smelling badly. The deceased would then be wrapped in felt, the same felt used to cover their *yurts*, and tied up. Then they would be placed in trees in order to be protected from wild animals of the steppes. Bodies of the deceased may have been intentionally broken during these processes in order to transport them more easily, or limbs may have accidentally broken during the long migrations at the end of each season. Due to the cold in winter, some of the bodies began to naturally mummify (Davis-Kimball 2002:22).

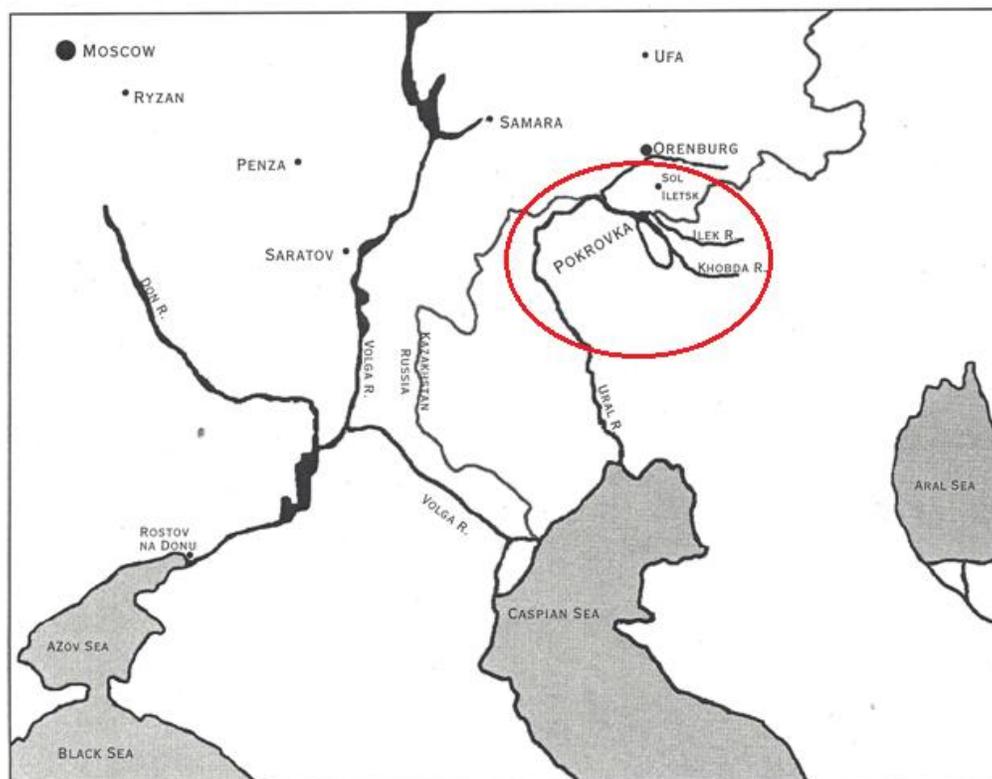


Figure 2. Map of the site of Pokrovka on the left bank of the Ileik River and surrounding areas (after Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:V).

Some of the bodies in the later Pokrovka burial excavations show examples of injuries incurred after death during transport or the mummification process. These particular burials contain a layer of organic ashy remains left over from the felt blankets that the bodies were wrapped in for preservation. One man in particular was surrounded by this blanket of ash, and

had a disarticulated right leg containing no signs of bone repair (Davis-Kimball 2001). This means that the leg was broken after death.

According to Davis-Kimball there are three different types of women buried within the cemeteries of Sauro-Sarmatians. The first category is called the Hearth Women. These women were buried with imported ornaments and jewelry, and broken bronze mirrors. They tended to household and domestic duties. The second group of women is labeled Priestesses. In their graves are fossilized shells, stone altars, chalk or ochre, and fully intact bronze mirrors. The third type of female burial is the warrior women. Their graves contain weapons. The weapon most commonly found among these women warriors are bronze and iron arrowheads.

The excavations of Pokrovka started with the initial land surveys conducted in 1990. These surveys were organized by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Archaeology, Moscow, and headed by Yablonsky. In 1991, the Institute of Archaeology, Moscow, and the Orenburg Pedagogical Institute led the first excavations at the site in which excavations at cemetery 2, *kurgan 2*, were conducted. The next field seasons, from 1992-1995, were conducted by the small Russian-American archaeological team co-led by Yablonsky and Davis-Kimball (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995). In total the Pokrovka excavations included 13 cemeteries. The nomads who once lived at Pokrovka are considered middle class (Davis-Kimball 2002:22) as compared to upper class or “czar kurgans” which contain a greater amount of elaborate grave goods (Davis-Kimball 2002:45).

For this report I will be using information only from the initial excavations of 1990-1992. This includes Cemeteries 2 and 8 found in the eastern region of the site, and a total of eight *kurgans*, 39 burials, and 50 individuals. Some of these were shared burials, and they contained more than one body. In these instances I looked at the burial descriptions and figures found in

Kurgans on the Left Bank of the Ilek: Excavations at Pokrovka 1990-1992, and sorted out which artifacts were associated with which individuals based on their nearness to the different individuals.

Extreme weather temperatures more readily preserve organic materials. At Pokrovka the cold temperatures were not extreme enough to preserve all organic materials (Davis-Kimball 2002:27) though there are a handful of samples which have remained. This means that the majority of artifacts recovered are made from non organic substances consisting of stone and metals.

METHODOLOGY

In order to organize and view my data I entered information about the burials obtained from *Kurgans on the Left Bank of the Ilek: Excavations at Pokrovka 1990-1992* into a Microsoft Access database. I organized the individuals by cemetery number, *kurgan* number, and burial number which produced a unique identification number for each individual. I also ordered them by biological sex and age, as well as the time period in which the individuals lived and the corresponding culture of the time period. The majority of individuals from the 1990-1992 excavations of Pokrovka lived between the fourth to second centuries B.C., and the culture equivalent to this time is called Early Sarmatian (Figure 3). Because of this I will focus my data analyses on the thirty individuals from the Early Sarmatian period. Among these individuals, thirteen are male, nine are female, three are children, and the sex could not be determined for the remaining five individuals (Figure 4). I will not include the children in my analysis of burial goods because there was only one unidentifiable object in association with one child, and the

other two had no grave goods. The sample size of 27 adult individuals is small and does not fully represent the entire site of Pokrovka or the Early Sarmatian society.

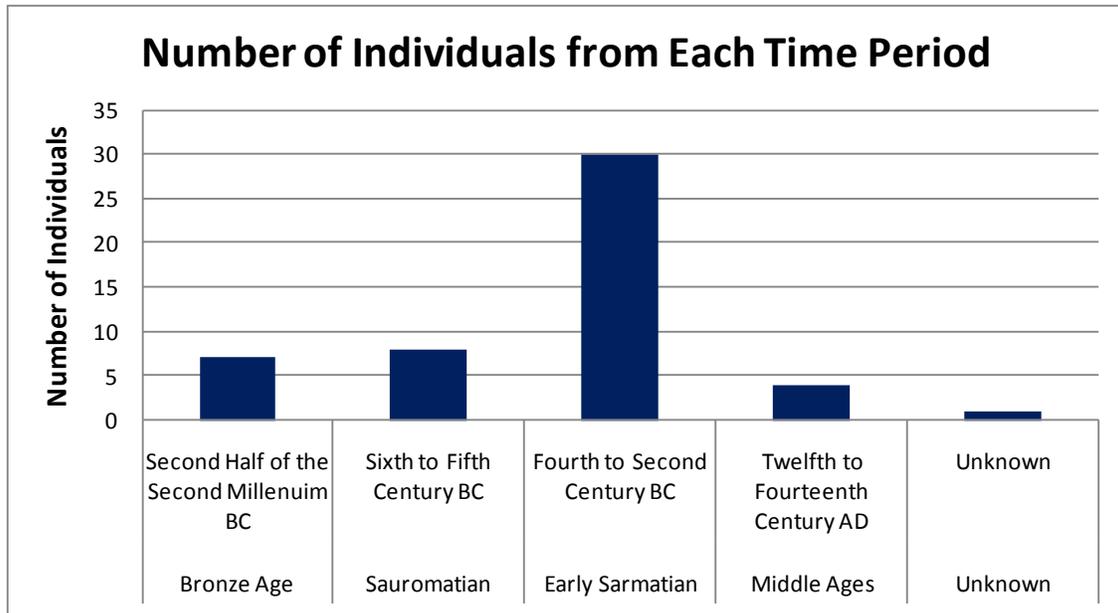


Figure 3. Total number of individuals from each time period and the corresponding culture of the time period.

The other categories in the database relate to the burial goods found in the individual graves. The list of goods includes objects of weaponry and tools such as iron daggers, iron swords, iron spears, iron arrowheads, bronze arrowheads, iron knives and whetstones. There were also objects associated with religion and household duties including shells, bronze mirrors, jewelry which consists of beads, rings, and earrings, spindle whorls (used for turning animal wool or hair into yarn), and stone altars which are thought to be used for grinding chalk and ochre into pastes for religious purposes. Pots were considered a unisex and unigender burial good because they were found among men and women in a relatively similar proportion. The remaining categories included animal remains that were found in the burials, artifacts made from bone, organic remains, horse gear, buckles, the shape of the burial pit floor, if the burial had a

wall built around it, if the burial was disturbed or robbed, and the last category were miscellaneous artifacts made from bronze or iron.

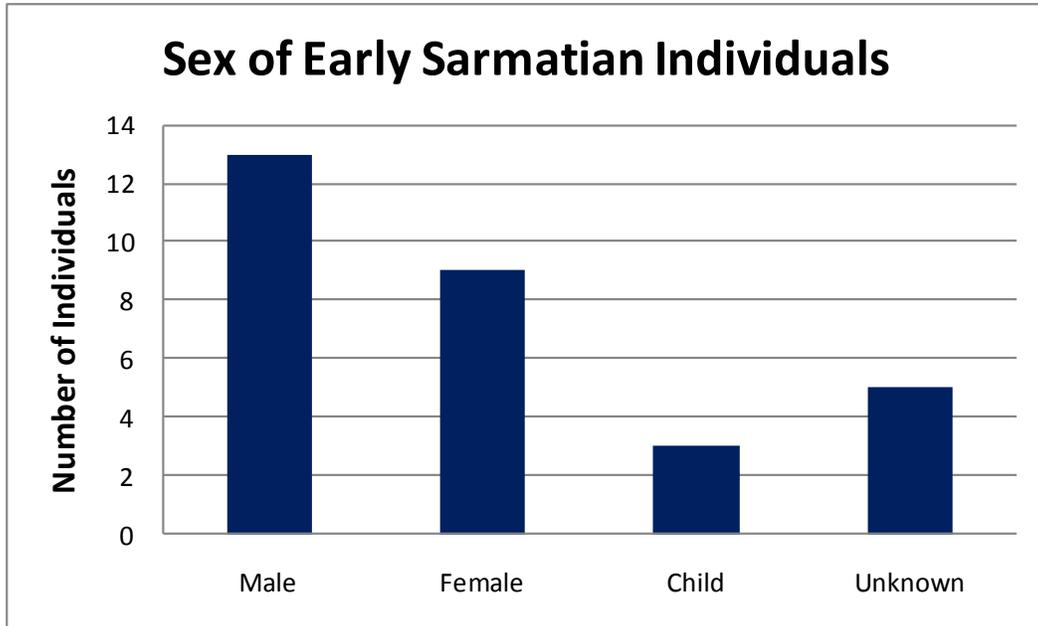


Figure 4. Biological sex of the 30 Individual Early Sarmatians.

DATA ANALYSIS

Shared Burials of Pokrovka

Among the sample of 30 Early Sarmatian individuals from cemetery 8, there are four shared burials. The first shared burial is in *kurgan 2*, burial 2. It consists of three individuals including an adult male (20–40 years of age), a one year old child, and a 15 year old of indeterminate sex. The map of this burial suggests that the infant was buried after the adult and placed on top of his feet (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:135). The second multiple burial is located in *kurgan 2*, burial 3, including an adult male (35-45 years of age), and a seven year old child. The third grave is found in *kurgan 5*, burial 1, with one older adult male (50-55 years of age), and a child.

The last shared Early Sarmatian burial does not follow the previous pattern of an adult male buried with a child. *Kurgan* 6, burial 3, holds a male (40-45 years of age) and a female (30-35 years of age). This one in particular is interesting because based on the relative positioning of artifacts within the burial; the female is associated with iron arrowheads, a few beads, and an iron knife, while the male is associated with two spindle whorls and a pot. The woman is associated with weaponry and tools while the man is associated with weaving.

Because there is a pattern of young children being associated with adult men, this could suggest the men in question were father figures, and the person through whom the child traced their lineage. Contemporary nomadic societies are patrilineal, and it is generally believed that ancient nomadic societies were patrilineal as well. However, the concept of women warriors, and by extension “women power”, is raising the possibility of matrilineal descent among ancient steppe nomads. It would be an interesting study to determine if the individuals in the shared burials, specifically the children and the adult males, were related by looking at their DNA. If the DNA were to prove that the adult men were in fact the biological fathers of the young children, this would provide significant evidence that ancient steppe nomads were patrilineal societies. As mentioned earlier, in some contemporary nomadic societies the women give birth on the male side of the *yurt* in order to symbolize that the child belongs to the father’s descent group. This could be analogous to the children being buried with adult men in the archaeological record.

Distribution of Weapons and Tools

Of the thirteen men, eight of them were discovered with at least one weapon or tool, two men were found with only whetstones and the remaining three had no weapon related artifacts buried with them (Figure 5). Males number M6 and M7 (their individual identification numbers were produced based on the numeric order of the specific cemetery, *kurgan*, and burial numbers of the

individual) have an unspecified number of iron points, meaning that they have more points than are represented in the data. Because the exact number could not be known I assumed the count of one for each location they were found.

In particular the two males, M6 and M30, have the most weapons in their graves. These two appear to be of a higher status than the rest, and possibly celebrated warriors. They respectively have seven and five different types of weapon or tool related items buried with them. Individuals M7, M14, and M21 also appear to be significant warriors, though they have less weaponry in their graves when compared to M6 and M30. In total 77% of the men have at least one grave good that has been attributed to weaponry or tool use including whetstones, points, knives, swords, or spears.

As previously stated, the site of Pokrovka is most known for its “women warriors”. Early Sarmatian women, as well as men, were buried with weapons contributing to the idea that Eurasian nomad women fought in battles alongside men. Of the nine women in question, four were buried with weapons (Figure 6). Female F3 was even buried with more weapons than most of the men. An interesting feature about her grave is that 18 of the 20 points were placed in between her legs. She appears to be an individual of higher status than the rest of the women because of the high amount of iron points buried with her. I would label woman F3 as a potential warrior. She appears to be going outside of her gendered norm as the rest of the females have a small amount and small variety of these items buried with them.

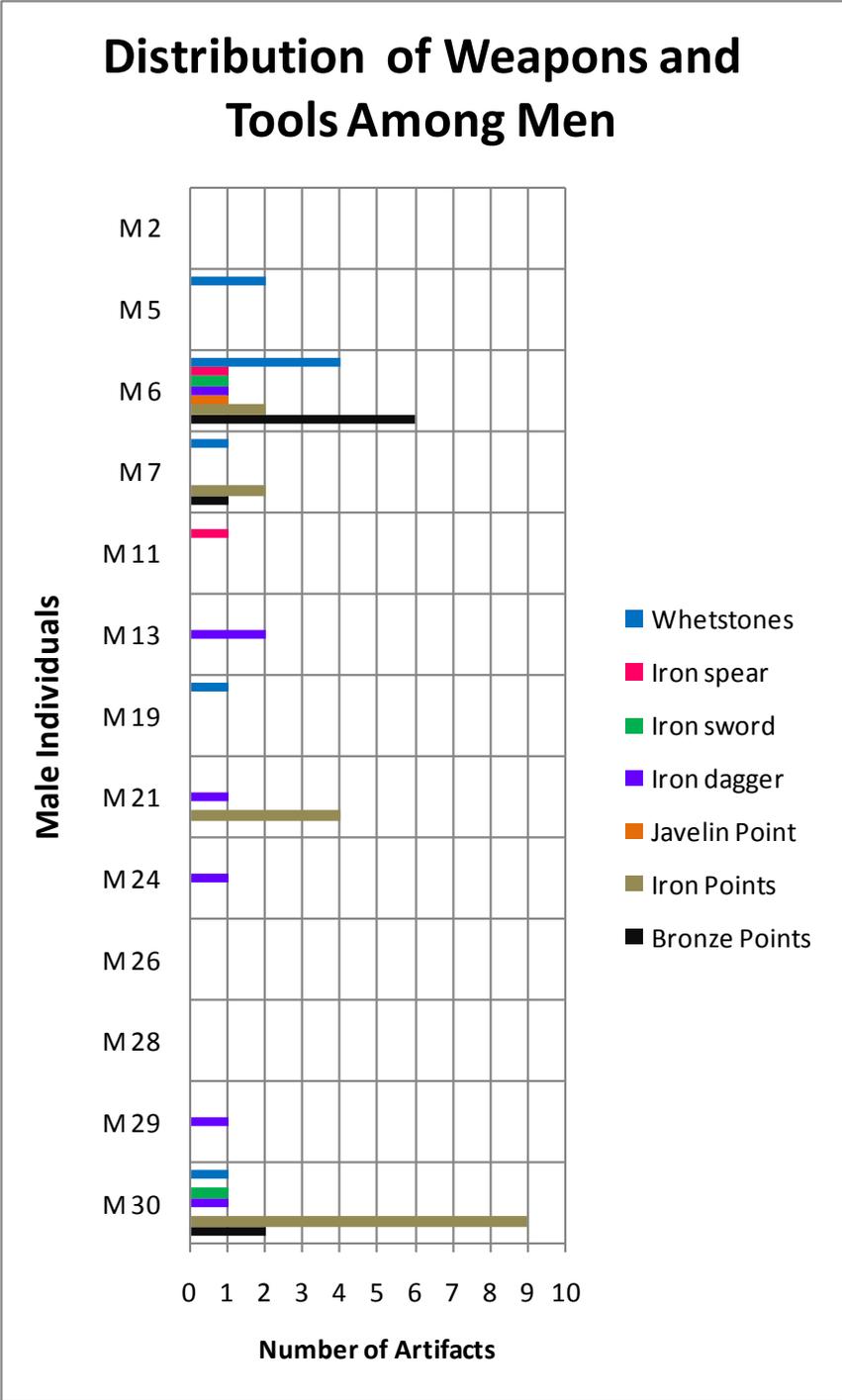


Figure 5. The number of different weapons found in the burials of men. The “M” stands for Male, and the corresponding number is their unique identification number.

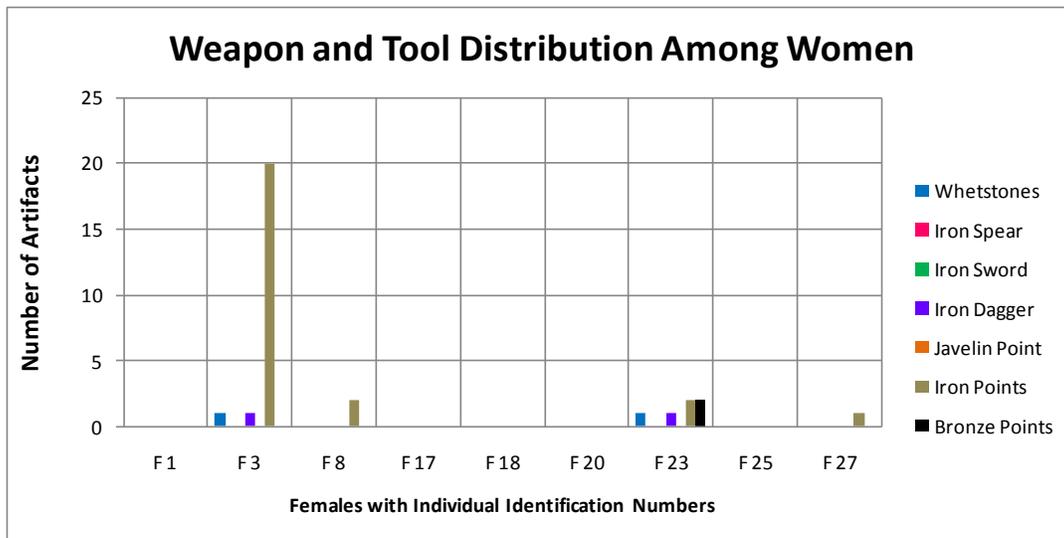


Figure 6. Weapons distributed among females at Pokrovka. The women are sorted by their unique individual identification numbers.

Even though Figure 6 shows that female F27 was buried with one iron point, in actuality there was more than one, however the points had been molded together and the exact number was unidentifiable.

The main weapon related artifact that is attributed to Eurasian women is arrowheads, and the data support this association with about 27 points found buried with four women. According to the data compilation, the only other two warfare or tool artifacts associated with women are whetstones and daggers, and there are no more than one or two of these in each individual grave where they are found. The women have a much smaller variety of weapons associated with them when compared with the men. Of the nine women, 44% were found with weapons or tools in their graves compared to the 77% of men. However, the sample size is small and does not fully represent the entire site of Pokrovka or the Early Sarmatian society.

It has been suggested that women who are found with one or two arrowheads as grave goods may belong to a certain clan of elite warriors who use arrowheads as a symbol of their clan identity (Berseneva 2008:150). This would suggest that the arrowheads were symbolic and

not actually used. A way to determine if women were using the weapons that they were buried with is to conduct bioarchaeological analyses to determine muscle activity stress to see if women used bows and arrows often (Hanks 2008:15).

There is some controversy as to whether nomads used bows and arrows for hunting or exclusively for warfare. Marina Moshkokova says that the real weapons used in warfare consisted of swords, lances, and battle axes, which are not as common among ancient nomadic grave goods, and that bows and arrows, iron dagger, and knives could easily be used as tools or for hunting (Moshkova 1994 as cited in Hanks 2008:26). In contrast, some Russian specialists believe that the construction and characteristics of the nomadic bows indicate that they were used for battle rather than hunting (Khudyakov 1986 as cited in Berseneva 2008:139).

I believe the iron knives found in the Early Sarmatian burials could be either a ritual item or most likely an everyday utilitarian tool, but not an item of warfare. These iron knives are almost always found among the remains of sacrificed animals. These animal remains, most commonly sheep ribs or legs, are thought to be ritual food sacrifices sent with the individuals on their journey to the afterlife. Because the iron knives are found among ritual animal sacrifices, one could correlate that the iron knives among the bones are also an item of ritual (Guliaev 2003:117). Another interpretation is that the knives were placed in the graves for the deceased individual to cut up the sacrificed animal for consumption while on the journey to the afterworld, or simply for use utilitarian use the afterlife. The iron knives are equally distributed between men and women, so they are a gender neutral object (Figure 7).

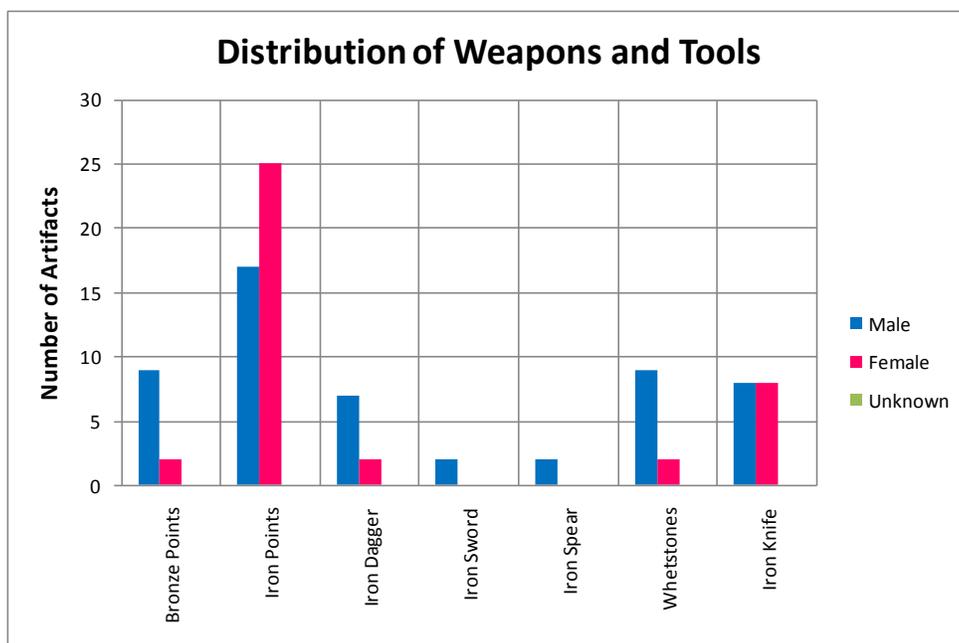


Figure 7. *Distribution of weapons and tools found among men and women.*

This analysis suggests there are two other objects that should be classified as utilitarian tools rather than weapons, the whetstone and dagger. Whetstones are used to sharpen the edges of iron objects including points, swords, and daggers. Daggers are similar to knives, in that they could be used as everyday cutting tools, not necessarily for warfare.

Swords and spears are generally associated as weapons of warfare and in my sample they are only associated with men. A higher percentage of men are found with tools, men have a greater variety of these objects, and men have a larger amount of tools than women, except for the iron points. However, the high number of points found with females is increased significantly because of the one woman who is found with 20 iron points. She deviates from the rest of the women when it comes to using tools and weapons which otherwise, as the data suggests, is the man's domain.

Distribution of Religious Artifacts and Remains

My data shows that religious artifacts, including portable stone altars, shells, bronze mirrors, and traces of ochre and chalk, are found among the burials of both men and women at Pokrovka (Figure 8), however it is speculated that “the religious leaders of ancient nomads were almost always women” (Davis-Kimball 2002:69). Among the small sample there were a total of four men, four women, and one individual of unknown sex who were buried with goods or organic remains associated with religion. I left the individual of unknown sex out of my data analysis. Out of the sample of thirteen men, 30% were associated with religious objects, compared to 44% of women from the sample of nine female individuals. These percentages enforce the idea that women were more involved in religion and had a more varied selection of religious grave goods; however men appear to play a more vital role in religion than literature suggests. If all of these individuals were in fact religious leaders, then there were an equal number of priests and priestesses because both four men and four women were found with items of religious nature.

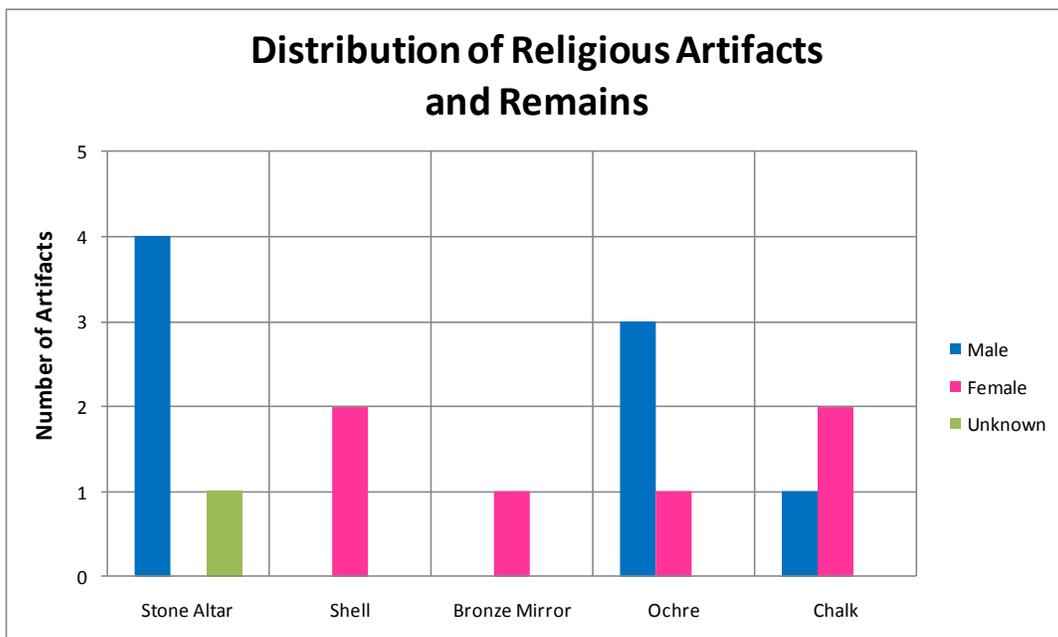


Figure 8. Distribution of grave goods associated and remains with religion.

Women have a more varied selection of religious artifacts because they alone are found in association with fossilized shells and bronze mirrors (Figure 9). In fact these two artifacts are most consistently found in the burials of religious priestesses in the steppes (Davis-Kimball 2002:59). None of the women in question have a large amount of religious artifacts in association with them, so I would not label any of them as priestesses. The female individual F25 is also found in association with 386 beads which appear have been attached to her clothing at her ankles and wrists. This implies that this individual in particular may have some important status in society. Along with her, individuals F8, F20, and F21 were also buried with beads.

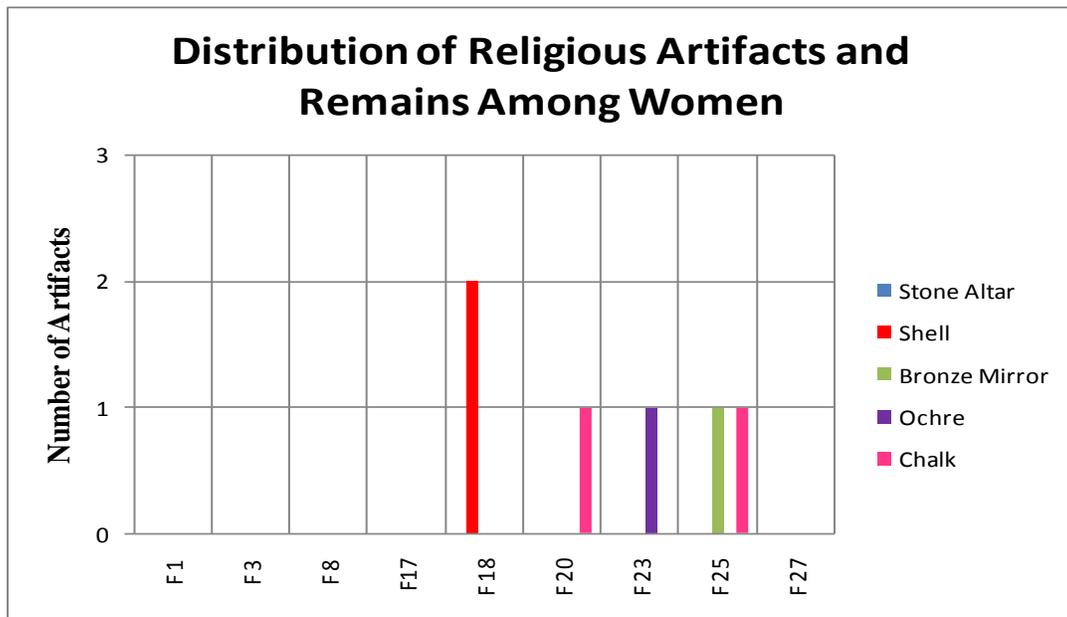


Figure 9. Distribution of artifacts associated with religion found among women.

Interestingly the data suggests that men appear to be more involved in religion than anticipated (Figure 10). “Sacrificial altars.....were the hallmark of priestesses, and among their uses, they may have served as mortars to grind the chunks of colored ores into powder: these magical colors became body or textile paint” (Davis-Kimball 2002:29). However, no women in

my sample were found buried with portable stone altars (Figure 11), only men. And many of the stone altars were found with ochre pigments still inside of them.

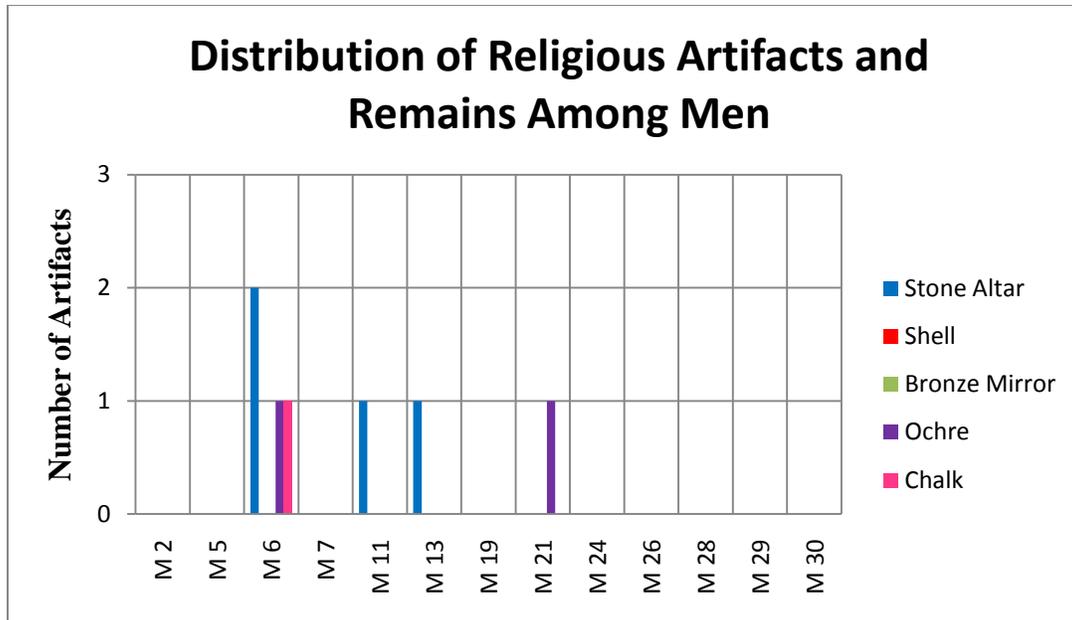


Figure 10. Distribution of artifacts associated with religion found among men.

It has been suggested that there were only a small number of biologically male religious leaders among the ancient nomads. These men took on a feminine role in society, and were castrated (willingly or otherwise), or cross-dressed. Sometimes these men would even marry other men, as is the custom among some modern day male nomadic priests (Davis-Kimball 2002:180). The theory that all male religious practitioners took on female roles in society can be disproved by looking at the data about individual male M6. He was found with two stone altars, the most of any individual, as well as chalk and ochre remains inside of or near the altars. He was also the individual with the most weapons and tools found in his burial. The previous data about weapon and tool distribution concludes that weapons and tools were the domain of the men. This means that M6 is not practicing a typical female’s role because of his weapon and tool repertoire, but still appears to be practicing religion.

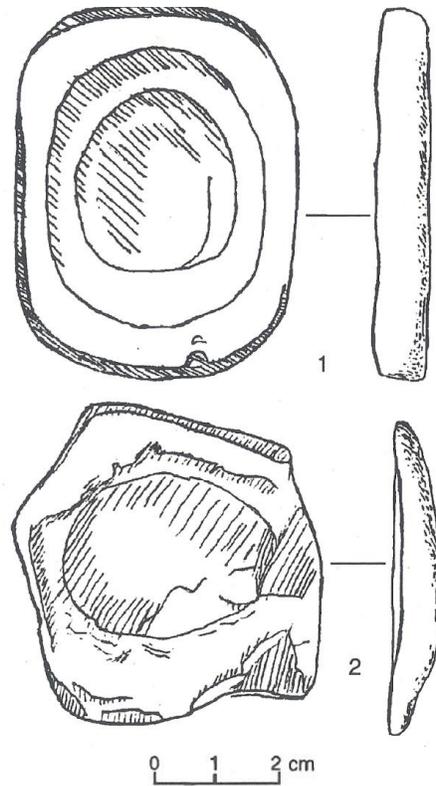


Figure 11. Portable stone altars found in the burial of individual M6 (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:150)

Animal Sacrifices

Animal remains are found among many graves in Pokrovka. Archaeologists believe these to be ritual sacrifices, so that the deceased have food for the journey to the afterworld. If iron knives are found among grave goods they are usually located amongst these remains. These knives may have been ritual in nature, and left with the animal remains so the deceased could cut the meat of their animal sacrifices. They most likely served as an Iron Age “table knives” (Berseneva 2008:142), or general utilitarian tools thought to be useful in the afterlife.

Among the ancient nomads of the steppes, horses were considered essential for battling. There are three burials that contain horse remains; including two males aged 40-45 (M7 and M30) and one female aged 40-45 (F3). Individuals M30 and F3 also had a large amount of

weapons associated with them when compared to the other adult individuals. My sample shows that horse remains are not common, and were only found with people between the ages of 40 – 45 years old of both sexes. These people could have been elders and given special sacrificial horse offerings because of their importance to the society.

Distribution of Artifacts Related to Weaving and Sewing

The nomadic grave goods associated with the domestic tasks of weaving and sewing include spindle whorls (Figure 12), awls (Figure 13), and a needle. These tools would be used for weaving wool and hair to make yarn, punching holes into the textiles, and finally sewing. These instruments are used to create such textiles as felt that both lines the top of the yurt to keep the heat inside and is used for wrapping the deceased, clothing, and blankets for the cold weather. According to some scholars only women are buried with spindle whorls. Davis-Kimball says that “spindle whorls...were only found in women’s burials” (Davis-Kimball 2002:29), and Guliaev notes, “alongside the weapons, these Amazon graves contain a full set of purely female objects: clay and lead spindle whorls; bronze mirrors; bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces made of bronze, gold, silver, and glass” (Guliaev 2003:115).

According to my data, these statements are false because four spindle whorls were found with a total of three men, and two additional men were each found with an awl. This greatly contrasts with the only two women associated with sewing objects. One possessed a spindle whorl and the other a needle (Figure 14).

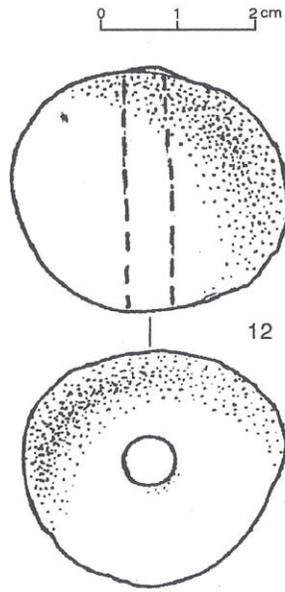


Figure 12. Spindle Whorl found with individual F20 (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:153)

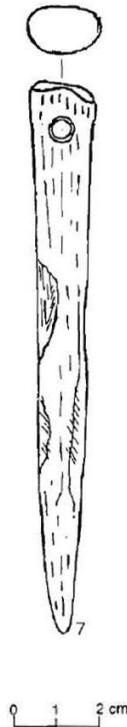


Figure 13. Awl found with individual M7 (Davis-Kimball and Yablonsky 1995:151).

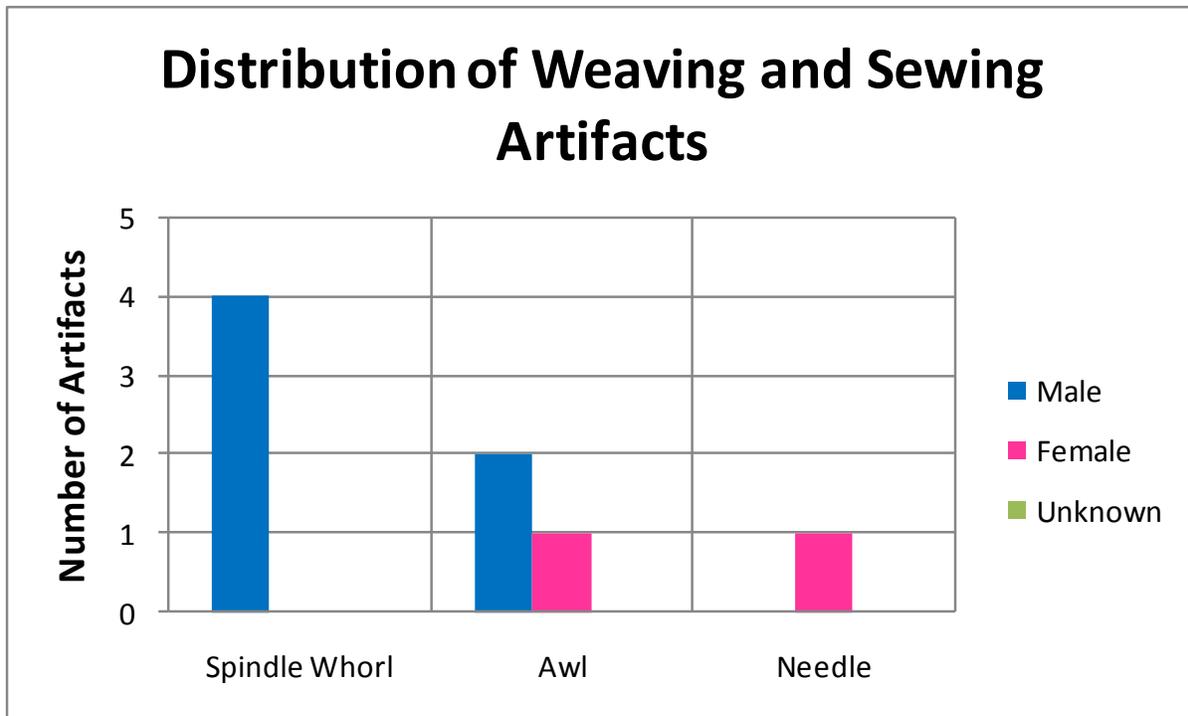


Figure 14. Distribution of artifacts used for sewing.

This data very much suggests that men in ancient nomadic steppe societies were involved in weaving. A total of five men, or 38.5%, were buried with sewing artifacts (Figure 15), whereas only two women, or 22%, were associated with sewing artifacts (Figure 16). Because the majority of spindle whorls were found among men, this could suggest that men were more involved in creating yarn and using awls to punch holes into fabrics, such as the leather they work with to create horse gear. The needle found with one woman could suggest that women were more involved in sewing and finer needlework.

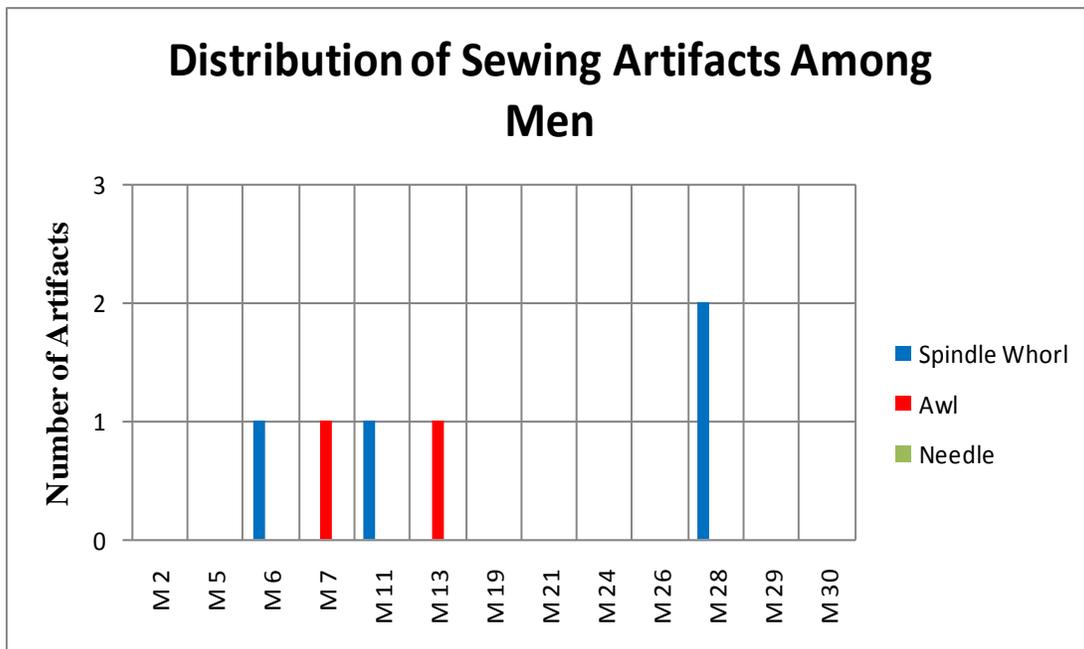


Figure 15. Distribution of sewing artifacts among men.

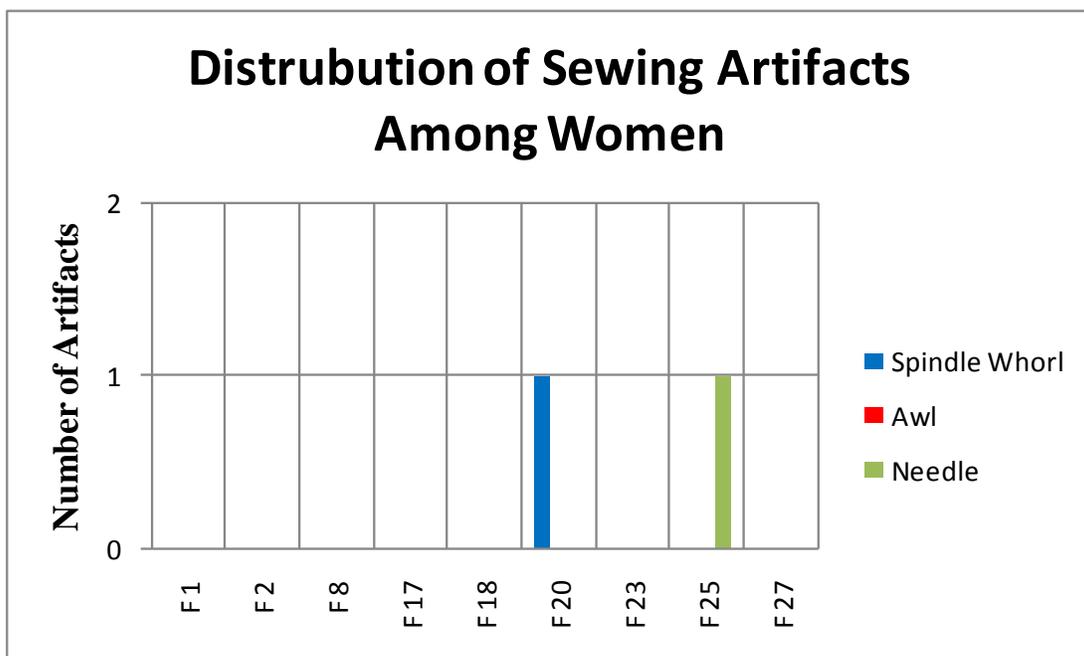


Figure 16. Distribution of sewing artifacts among women.

Cross-Cultural Examination

There are no known people who are direct descendents of the Early Sarmatians. There is a nomadic group living in the territory where the Sarmatians used to roam. These contemporary patriarchal, patrilocal, steppe nomads are called Kazaks (sometimes spelled Kazahks), and “although they inhabit the same region once ruled by ancient steppe nomads, the Kazaks cannot be viewed as the true ethnic descendants of any of the nomadic tribes who once lived in Eurasia. Instead, they are a mixture of the many groups who lived in these lands throughout the millennia” (Davis-Kimball 2002:23).

The boundaries between “male” and “female” daily tasks in modern day Kazak societies are more flexible for young children rather than adults. For example young girls and boys both help their mothers in the kitchens and their fathers in the fields. In traditional Kazak society tasks were assigned by gender. Women sewed clothing, wove rugs, and made wool while men worked with ceramics and leather (Ember and Ember 2003:576). Today the Kazaks are more urbanized and have specialized careers, most of which are still divided by gender. Cross dressing is rare and homosexuality is viewed as unnatural (Ember and Ember 2003:578).

An ethnographic study of the Kyrgyz nomadic group in Kyrgyzstan described their way of life and gender roles:

The transhumant life-style required that both men and women operate independently of one another; thus, both sexes rode horses and knew how to hunt and prepare food. Women were principally in charge of putting up and striking the large yurt, caring for all domestic animals used as food sources, and shearing sheep for wool to construct felted rugs (*shurdak*). Both men and women herded nondomestic animals as well. Although tribal organization of the clan system included a de facto male army to protect pasturelands, there are legends of Kyrgyz women warriors. [Kuenhast and Stroughes 2002:5]

This example shows that men and women both partake in many of the same tasks such as riding horses and preparing food, but specific tasks are designated to each sex as well because the women are more responsible for setting up the *yurt* and the domestic surroundings.

Changthang is a region in Ladakh, an area of northeastern India near Tibet. The pastoral nomads here are called Changpa, and among the Changpa nomads both men and women weave. The men generally weave male items which include horse gear and sometimes the tent of their *yurt*. It is likely that both of these tasks require the use of spindle whorls and awls like the archaeological assemblage of Pokrovka shows associated with men. Among the Changpa nomads women are not to weave the exterior of the *yurt*. This task is for men only.

In Changthang, it is only the men who weave the tent from the yak hair. Women also weave, but never the tent...weaving in Changthang... is something undertaken by men AND women. Sewing, however, is man's job. The men in general weave the "male" items: saddle blankets, saddlebags, etc. However, where the men are not available, the women are permitted to undertake this work too. However, women must not weave the tent. [Rösing 2006:67]

This ethnographic example shows how men and women both partake in weaving, however within the task of weaving there is still a gender division of what is considered appropriate for men to make compared to what is appropriate for women.

Another society in which male nomads weave are the Rupshupa of Rupshu located in Ladakh. The women are the main weavers and sewers in this society, but men do their fair share of these activities as well. According to ethnographer Monisha Ahmed:

While spinning is an all-female activity, twisting is a male one... The female spindle is a slender cone of willow wood with pointed ends. It has a shaft length of approximately twenty-five centimeters, and is not weighted down with a spindle whorl...The spindle is twirled in a clockwise direction with the right hand while the left hand feeds the yarn onto the spindle and pulls it out into long threads of wool.

The male spindle is larger in size than the female spindle, and has a shaft length of about forty centimeters. It is held in the man's right hand and turned in

an anti-clockwise direction, while the left hand feeds the yarn onto it...men also twist using a spindle weighted down at one end with a wooden whorl. [Ahmed 2002:71,73]

In this society, like the Changpa, there is a gendered division among weaving. Both sexes weave however, men and women have different size spindles and only the men use spindle whorls, which can also be seen in the archaeological record. There are also restrictions as to what each sex can do with their spindles; women spinning yarn versus men twisting it. It is also common among nomadic societies to see men working with one specific fiber and women with another. Among the Rupshupa, women spin wool from sheep and yak, and men twist goat and yak hair, and twist yak wool if it is necessary (Ahmed 2002:75). A similar observation about Ladakh nomads made by Jaya Jaitly (as cited in Ahmed 2002:75) states that both men and women spun wool into yarn, but the women only spun sheep's wool while the men spun yak and goat wool.

Although both sexes partake in weaving, they still find a way to differentiate what is female and what is male. "Textile production in Rupshu reflects the complimentary but separate worlds of women and men, and gives dimension to their concepts of gender" (Ahmed 202:76).

The tasks are egalitarian, but there appear to be strictly constructed social ideas about what behaviors are appropriate for men and women. However, if one of the sexes were to try an activity of the other sex, there is generally no stigma attached to it (Dimaggio 2003:2).

The archaeological evidence, with the reinforcement of the accounts of the modern Changpa and Rupshupa peoples, suggests both men and women weaved in the past. Gender role patterns existed in the past, but appear to have been less strict, when compared with ethnographies of today. Female F3 did not adhere to her domestic roles like the rest of the women, and she was honored in death by being buried with the points that she presumably used. This means that she

was fully accepted by society when she took on a masculine role or at least a role different from that of the other women.

CONCLUSIONS

In the past it was assumed that traditional roles of nomadic women included domestic tasks, sewing, cooking, and religious leadership. Among men the main objective was warfare and battling, and my data has provided support for some of these claims, and contrary evidence for others.

In the category of weaponry and tools knives, daggers, and whetstones, can be placed in their own grouping as utilitarian tools. The knives were evenly distributed among men and women, implying that the knives served a multitude of purposes. Daggers are similar to knives in that they could be used for utilitarian purposes, though they also could have been used in combat. Whetstones are simply a tool because they are used to sharpen weapons and knives, and were still found with more men than women. The weapons and tools were found with a higher percentage of men than women (77% of men were buried with a tool or weapon compared to 44% of women). A greater variety of these objects were associated with men, and swords and spears are only found among men. This provides evidence to support that men were the ones who wielded weapons. However, there are some anomalies such as the case with female F3. She had more iron points than most of the men. This suggests that she broke away from her gendered norm, because the other women associated with tools had no more than a few points adding to the notion that the majority of warriors were men. Female F3 shows that some women may have taken on more masculine roles within society. She was honored in death with a grave deposit of

many points, and this might show that ancient Iron Age nomads were more accepting of blurring gender lines because she was commemorated and not shunned for her role reversal.

Regarding religion, men were found with more stone altars, than women. This shows that men are associated with the grinding of ochre's and ores into pigments for ritual events such as body painting and burial decorations on the deceased. Male M6 disproves the idea that nomadic men who practice religion take on the role of a female. This is because he is buried with a large quantity and large variation of weapons and tools which have been proved to be masculine. This means that some religious acts were in fact carried out by masculine men, not just women and feminine men. The data also shows that shells and bronze mirrors are objects only associated with women.

The distribution of weaving and sewing artifacts suggests archaeologically that the ancient nomadic men of Pokrovka were using spindle whorls to create yarn, and awls to punch holes into textiles. There is ethnographic data from the Changpa and Rupshupa nomads of Ladakh that shows men and women both partake in weaving, however the tasks are very much differentiated by gender. Men weave certain fibers, a certain way, using certain tools and the same socially constructed norms apply to women. The final product that each sex creates may be restricted as well. This ethnographic evidence in combination with the spindle whorls associated with men in the archaeological record provides a convincing argument that ancient nomadic men as well as women were weaving, and that the act of men weaving was a social norm as it is today.

There is also significant evidence in the archaeological record to suggest patrilineality. Of the shared burials containing an adult and a child, the adult is almost always male. This pattern can be seen in the later excavations of Pokrovka, as well as among other ancient nomadic burials

excavated in the Eurasian steppe. In some contemporary nomadic societies, such as the Kazaks, the children are born on the male side of the *yurt* to symbolize that the child belongs to the father, and this could be represented archaeologically by children being buried with their fathers. Future DNA tests between the adult males and children who are buried together could prove or disprove my theory.

The gender roles of a past society are hard to interpret from grave goods alone, but with the help of ethnographic information interpretations about social roles can be pieced together. At Pokrovka both sexes are associated with weaponry and tools, religious artifacts, and sewing and weaving. There appears to be a general division between the gender roles of the ancient nomads, however they do not seem to be strict. If one chose to blur the gender lines by doing something traditional of the other sex it was acceptable.

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