

Archeological Studies of Bohai in Russia

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1 Introduction

The state of Bohai (in Russian: *Бохай*, in Korean: *Parhae* 박해, in Chinese: *Bohai* 渤海) existed in what is now the Russian Maritime Region (Primorskij krai/Приморский край), North Korea and Northeastern China from the late 7th to the early 10th centuries AD. Few written records of the state survived, so archeological research is of primary importance for Bohai studies. Archeologists of all countries which are part of the area where Bohai once existed are excavating sites of Bohai state and have gathered interesting materials.

Unfortunately, the tradition of retrospective nationalisms, so powerful in East Asia,¹ influenced the perception of Bohai in the area, especially in North Korea and China. Chinese and North Korean scholars often had to interpret the archeological evidence in accordance with the nationalism-driven politics. Korean specialists see Bohai exclusively as an heir to Koguryo culture, while Chinese archeologists present it as a part of the Sinic world, a “provincial power of the Tang Empire”.

Russian archeologists might have not been quite free from such outward pressures, but political demands influence them to a lesser degree than their Chinese or North Korean colleagues. They see in Bohai sites elements of both the Koguryo and Tang cultures. Meanwhile, in the Western academic literature Russian studies of Bohai remain largely unknown. In this article we hope to present the history of Russian archeological studies of Bohai, from their beginnings in the 1870s and up to the present day.

2 Archeological studies of Bohai in Russia before the October Revolution (1917)

Archeological studies of Bohai in Russia began in 1870–1871, when the Russian Geographic Society sent an expedition to the South-Ussurijsk region by Peter Ivanovich Kafarov [Петр Иванович Кафаров] (1817–1878), a prominent historian of Asia. Kafarov proposed the first periodization scheme for sites in the Russian Maritime Region.² In his periodization he suggested fairly correct dates for the Bohai period, which he dated to the 8–10th centuries A.D.³ His periodization scheme for archeological sites in the Russian Maritime Region became the basis of the currently accepted one and was better than the periodization proposed by the Russian scholar Vladimir Klavdievich Arsenev [Владимир Клавдиевич Арсеньев] (1872–1930),⁴ whose work focused on the early 20th century.⁵

P. Kafarov was the first scholar who used the archeological materials to demonstrate that the territory of the modern Russian Maritime Region was a place where Bohai culture once existed.⁶ He

1 Pai Hyung-Il 2000.

2 Kafarov 1871: 91–96; Vasileva 1989: 39.

3 Kafarov 1871: 92.

4 Arsenev 1947: 313–318.

5 Vasileva 1989: 40.

6 Shavkunov 1994: 4.

used archeological materials as well as textual sources, but unfortunately did not inform his readers which texts he had selected for his research. From his writings it seems obvious that he had access to some texts which remain unknown to modern scholars, and some of his remarks based on those texts were eventually confirmed by archeological excavations.⁷

Some Russian scholars believe that the first archeologist to start Bohai-related research was Mikhail Ivanovich Venyukov [Михаил Иванович Венюков] (1832–1901), an officer in the Russian Army. However, Venyukov's publications clearly demonstrate that he only wrote about archeological sites but did not conduct any considerable excavations. Therefore it might be difficult to describe him as an “archeologist”.

In 1884 the Branch of the Russian Geographic Society was founded in the Southern part of the Russian Far East. The branch came to be known as *Obshhestva izucheniya Amurskogo kraya* [Общество изучения Амурского края/The Society for Studies of the Amur Region (SSAR)]. The SSAR conducted studies of archeological sites, including those dated to the Bohai period. Results of these studies were regularly published in the society's periodical *Zapiski Obshhestva izucheniya Amurskogo kraya* [Записки Общества изучения Амурского края/Mémoires de la Société des études de la région de l'Amour].

The SSAR chairman Fedor Fedorovich Busse [Федор Федорович Буссе] (1838–1896) also proposed his own classification of archeological sites of the Russian Maritime Region.⁸ This classification is in many aspects similar to the periodization suggested by Kafarov.

In 1908 Lev Alexeyevich Kropotkin [Лев Алексеевич Кропоткин] (1842–1921), a member of the SSAR, got access to the work of Busse and published “*Ostatki drevnostej v Amurskom krae*” [Остатки древностей в Амурском крае/Ancient remains in Amur region].⁹ In this work Kropotkin described all archeological sites known at the time and also provided references to the persons who had first discovered these sites.

3 Bohai studies undertaken during the Soviet period.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s Russian scholars did not study Bohai much, but in 1953 the Far Eastern archeological expedition of Alexey Pavlovich Okladnikov [Алексей Павлович Окладников] (1908–1981) began its work, and in the 1950s the archeologist Ernst Vladimirovich Shavkunov [Эрнест Владимирович Шавкунов] excavated Bohai sites near the Krounovka River. The research of this interesting area continued well until the 1990s. In the process of this excavation scholars found new Bohai settlements and temples. Data obtained from the archeological sites of Krounovka now play a major role in Bohai studies.

In 1962 E.V. Shavkunov completed his PhD dissertation which dealt with the study of Bohai. In the Soviet Union it was the first PhD thesis to deal exclusively with Bohai issues. In 1968 he published a book on this topic: *Gosudarstvo Bohai i pamyatniki ego kul'tury v Primore* [Государство Бохай и памятники его культуры в Приморье/The state of Bohai and its cultural relics in the Russian Maritime Region].¹⁰

7 Vasileva 1989: 39–40.

8 Busse 1888: 3–5.

9 Busse and Kropotkin 1908: 25–48.

10 Shavkunov 1968.

In 1969 a Russian-Chinese armed conflict erupted at the island of Damansky (Zhenbao). By that time the Russian-Chinese relations had been strained for years. Unfortunately, these uneasy relations between USSR and China had great impact on research undertaken in the area. The Chinese government made considerable territorial claims in the Russian Far East and Southern Siberia, so Chinese scholars were pressed to find historical evidence which would support these claims. On their turn, Soviet scholars tried to refute these statements (needless to say, they were under constant political pressure to do so). It is not unusual for archeological material to be used by contending nationalisms, but in this particular case the intensity of the conflict and the authoritarian nature of political regimes in both states made the confrontation particularly bitter and ensued that only “politically useful” findings and conclusions could possibly be made public.

Unfortunately, Bohai studies were not left outside these politically driven polemics. For example, Soviet scholars, who were studying politics of Bohai, wrote extensively about the war between the Tang Empire and the state of Bohai, paying great attention to victories of the Bohai forces and emphasizing the independence of Bohai state, while at the same time trying to play down the results of this war, which made Bohai to re-confirm its inferior position vis-a-vis the Tang Empire in the tributary system. The underlying political message was clear: The area of Bohai was independent from China and zealously guarded this independence, if necessary by force.

These influences are clearly revealed in the books by Alexey Pavlovich Okladnikov [Алексей Павлович Окладников] (1908–1981), published in 1959 and 1973. In his earlier book the author actively used Chinese materials and without much critical reflections on them,¹¹ but in the book he published in 1973 both Okladnikov and his coauthor Anatoliy Pantelevich Derevyanko [Анатолий Пантелейевич Деревянко] perceived the Chinese material from a different perspective and treated it with a great deal of criticism and suspicion.

One of the few positive results of the politically motivated polemics of the 1960s and 1970s is that after this conflict Russian scholars began to take a more critical approach towards positions of Chinese historians and archeologists which had hitherto often been accepted wholesale. One of the arguments the Chinese frequently use when they describe Bohai as “provincial power of the Tang Empire” is the absence of Bohai coins. But Russian archeologists found in the area an Abbasid drachma from Central Asia and insist that this is an indicator of an economy in which foreign currency may have been used.¹² They laid stress on the argument that absence of excavated coins is not sufficient evidence to deny that Bohai had existed as an independent state – after all, we know many cases when a politically independent and rather developed state survived without its own coinage.

Another argument used to criticize the Chinese position on the issue is related to a peculiarity of the Tang civil examination system which clearly distinguished between examinations held for the subjects of the Tang emperor and examination held for the subjects of the other states (the latter were known as *bingongke* 賓貢科 in Chinese or as *pingongkwa* 빙공과 in Korean pronunciation). Alexander L'vovich Ivliev [Александр Львович Ильин] stresses that Bohai students are mentioned in the Chinese sources (e.g., in the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書) to have sat for the *bingongke* exam, and this clearly indicates that for Tang officials they were outsiders.¹³

11 Okladnikov 1959.

12 Shavkunov 1988: 103.

13 Ivliev 2005: 461.

Many Russian scholars criticized the interpretations made by Korean and Chinese scholars concerning the cemeteries where two Bohai princesses were buried. The third Bohai king Da Qinmao 大欽茂 [Korean transcription: Dae Hŭmmu 대흠무] had two daughters. One them was buried in a tomb which shows the style of the Koguryo period, while the tomb of another princess demonstrates considerable Chinese influence. Both Korean and Chinese archeologists present these tombs as an evidence for the dominance of Koguryo or Chinese culture in Bohai and insist that Bohai was a Korean (or, alternatively, Chinese) state.¹⁴

Russian scholars, however, do not accept this position, because, as E.V. Shavkunov once wrote, if we follow this theory, we arrive at a clearly impossible conclusion – that one daughter of the Bohai king was Korean, while another daughter was Chinese.¹⁵

However, in spite of (or perhaps due to) the tense political polemics, intense studies continued to be conducted at the archeological sites of Bohai. In the 1960s and 1970s Soviet archeologists excavated several new sites, among them the ancient town of and the rural settlement of Novogorodeevskoe as well as the ancient towns Nikolaevskoe-I and Nikolaevskoe-II.¹⁶

The rural settlement of Novogorodeevskoe is situated near the Arsenevka river. It has two layers. During excavations of this site in the years 1972 and 1973 Russian archeologists collected a number of artifacts and remains, including the 5500 animal bones or bone fragments.¹⁷

The ancient town of Novogorodeevskoe is situated close to a village which bears the same name. This is a multi-layer site, which includes two Bohai layers.

Nikolaevskoe-I and Nikolaevskoe-II are sites which are located in Partizansk district. Russian scholars have been excavating both sites since the 1970s. As a result, archeologists have collected rich materials that illustrate the economical activity and handicrafts of the population of Bohai.¹⁸

4 The present situation of the archeological studies of Bohai

However, the economic crisis of the 1990s had its impact on the state of Bohai studies in Russia. Russian scholars found a number of potentially interesting Bohai sites but presently often do not dispose of enough funding in order to be able to initiate excavations.

Nonetheless, a large number of Bohai sites, excavated in the 1980s and 1990s, produced a wealth of archeological materials. It gives us rich opportunities for studies related to Bohai tile and ceramic production, its agriculture, metallurgy, glass production, as well as commerce, military, arts and other areas.¹⁹

Some interesting results were achieved through research of bones found at the Bohai sites. The research allows telling which animals were used by Bohai population, and for which purposes. For example, in many Bohai sites earlier layers abound with bones of young bulls while in later layers

14 Song Ki-ho (et. al.) 1996: 3–5.

15 Shavkunov 1995: 119–122.

16 Semenichenko and Shavkunov 1972; Semenichenko 1973, 1974; Boldin and Semenichenko 1976, 1977, 1978.

17 Alekseeva and Boldin 1989: 80.

18 Shavkunov (ed.) 1994.

19 Boldin 1989; Nikitin 1989; Gelman 1990; Shavkunov (ed.) 1994; Boldin, Ivliev, Horev and Shavkunov 1990.

bones of older bulls were found.²⁰ For this reason one may draw the conclusion that the earliest population of Bohai usually raised bulls for beef, but that in its at late periods Bohai people mainly used bulls in agriculture as draft animals and ate these animals only when bulls became ill or grew too old to be used on the fields. Besides, these artifacts allow us to see how Bohai agriculture developed in this region. South Korean scholars are aware of the importance of this research, too.²¹

It is not difficult to notice that studies of Bohai in the USSR were generally based on the archeological evidence. There were various reasons for this obvious reliance on archeology:

- 1) language problems (with few exceptions, Russian scholars who study Bohai are not familiar with Asian languages and therefore are not able to use primary textual sources),
- 2) a politically motivated tendency to deny or play down the relations between Bohai and the Tang Empire (therefore many Soviet sinologists did not use new Chinese materials in their studies of Bohai history),
- 3) a widely established opinion that Japanese and Korean manuscripts did not provide much new information as regards the history of Bohai.

Recently the situation changed, since the perestroika and the subsequent collapse of the USSR greatly increased academic freedom and to some extent undermined the old nationalism-based approach to history (or rather made it less obligatory). In 1992 North Korean and Russian archeologists jointly excavated the site near the village Konstantinovka, and from 1993 on South Korean and Chinese scholars worked together with their Russian colleagues in excavating Bohai sites in the Russian Maritime Region. Another change came about in that Russian scholars began to research Bohai from a non-archeological perspective. So, in particular Russian scholars finally began to pay more attention to Chinese materials, gaining access to hitherto unavailable information. Moreover, Russian scholars begin to pay attention to Korean historical materials and to search for additional data there.

The extremely difficult economic situation of the 1990s led to a near complete halt of archeological projects in the area. So, for example, the Society for Studies of the Amur Region [SSAR] does not conduct archeological excavations any more, although it has long enduring experience in archeological research. Now the SSAC concentrates on publishing historical materials in his periodical "Transactions of the Society for the Study of Amur Region" [*Zapiski obshchestva izuchenija Amurskogo kraja*/Записки Общества изучения Амурского края], organizes museum exhibitions and arranges other educational activities. But due to the ongoing economic problems, this periodical has not been published regularly in recent years. The persistent financial problems also greatly influence the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of Peoples of the Far East (FEBRAS) at the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences which was established in 1976.

As a result of the economic crisis, many archeological expeditions in the area can be conducted only as long as they receive financial support from Japan or the Republic of Korea. Japanese archeologists have demonstrated a special interest in the Kraskinskoe site, while South Korean scholars directed their attention not only to Kraskinskoe, but also to Korsakovskoe, Cherniatinskoe and Gorbatskoe sites. It is remarkable that the otherwise reclusive North Koreans also joined the international cooperation in the area (partially because Bohai plays such a major role in the officially

20 Alekseeva and Boldin 1986: 78–84; Alekseeva and Boldin 1989: 81–85.

21 Song Ki-ho 1992.

endorsed North Korean vision of the national history).²² North Korean specialists, after having excavated North Korean sites, began research together with Russian colleagues in Konstantinovskoe site in 1992. Having gained rich archeological experience of excavating Bohai sites, they also expressed their interest in conducting research of the Kraskinskoe site. However, they could not do this for political reasons, since the site is being officially studied by the South Koreans, and unauthorized contacts with colleagues from the South might be risky for North Korean scholars in the current political climate. Now North Korean scholars participate in international conferences in Russia where they already did their best to make the present state of Bohai studies more broadly known to North Korean scholars. For example, North Korean archeologists and historians took part in conferences held in Vladivostok in 2004 and 2007.

The Kraskinskoe site can now be seen as probably the most interesting ancient town of Bohai period currently discovered and excavated. The site was enclosed by high earthen walls of a peculiar structure, with a tower being situated at a distance of every 20–30 meters, each tower controlling an adjacent part of the wall. Precisely this site is used as a basis for distinguishing Bohai sites from sites of Mohe tribes who settled around Bohai.²³ Although Russian archeologists have been excavating this site for more than 20 years, the largest part of Kraskinskoe site has not been studied well so far. Near the site Russian archeologists found a Bohai cemetery, one sepulture has been excavated.

Many Korean and Japanese archeologists also expressed their interest in the Kraskinskoe site. Japanese teams are actively studying fortification, while the Koreans usually excavate the inner part of the town. A certain role is again played by the political dimensions of the research, since in recent years the nationalist-minded South Korean archeologists are looking for archeological evidence which might prove that Bohai was a “Koguryo” and, therefore, “Korean” state (this is related to the ongoing polemics with China where scholars also make attempts to “appropriate” Bohai and Koguryo). But in spite of the fact that many fragments of Bohai ceramics discovered at the site show a clear influence of Koguryo culture, no direct material evidences of a “Koguryo connection” have been discovered so far.²⁴

It seems that the Kraskinskoe site was an important seaport, used for trade and other exchanges between Bohai and Japan. Its geographic conditions are very convenient, and one can believe that this port was one of the places where the Japanese missions rested while traveling to China through Bohai. This site has very rich archeological materials, showing the high level of Bohai culture and handicraft. In the Kraskinskoe site Russian scholars use innovative methods of research. For example, in 2004–2006 Russian archeologists at this site employed electric profiling and magnetic methods, and in 2006 a geo-radar method was used as well. The use of these methods, relatively expensive, was made possible by partial economic recovery of Russia and slight improvement of the financial situation in the archeological research after 2002–2003.

Recently Russian archeologists working at the Kraskinskoe site found numerous traces of a large flood, superstratum and substratum of the inhabitable layer. This discovery confirmed the importance of this port town for Bohai. It is clear that the town suffered a large and devastating flood, but by all appearance, after the flood this port was rebuilt and resumed its activity. The author saw these excavations himself while taking part in archeological expeditions in 1999, 2005 and 2006.

22 Song Ki-ho 1990: 269–282; Chang Kuk-chong 2001: 192–196.

23 Ivliev 2005.

24 Shavkunov (ed.) 1994.

These results of the research could be published in archeological reports only with support of South Korea and Japan. Indeed, financial support of several organizations from the Republic of Korea these days play the major role in supporting Russian scholars of Bohai.

But many Russian scholars are pursuing independent research. An example is Vladimir Ernstovich Shavkunov [Владимир Эрнестович Шавкунов], a son of Professor E.V. Shavkunov. He made use of reports of several archeological excavations and analyses of ceramics from sites of the Russian Maritime Region and came to conclusion that not the entire area of present-day Russian Maritime Region was included in Bohai state. He insists that only the eastern part of this region was ruled by Bohai monarchs.²⁵ He thinks that the Okrainka and Koksharovskoe sites (1 and 2) were Bohai towns, perhaps being an isolated Bohai district or enclave. The perception of those sites as an enclave is based on the large distance from other Bohai sites and seeming absence of any communication routes in the area. In the opinion of V.E. Shavkunov, the center of this isolated district was Koksharovskoe-1, because among those three sites Koksharovskoe-1 is the biggest. But other Russian scholars believe that the entire Russian Maritime District was once Bohai province.

The center of Bohai archeological studies is the above mentioned Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of Peoples of Far East (FEBRAS). Scholars of this institute have conducted practically all archeological excavations in the Russian Maritime Region. The Institute issues the quarterly journal *Rossiya i ATR* [Россия и АТР/Russia and the Pacific].

About a dozen Russian specialists are now engaged in research of problems related to Bohai in different fields (history, archeology, politics, art, etc). Leading scholars of the archeological field are Vladislav Innokent'evich Boldin [Владислав Иннокентьевич Болдин], Evgeniya Ivanovna Gel'man [Евгения Ивановна Гельман] and Yuriy Gennadievich Nikitin [Юрий Геннадьевич Никитин], as well as – in the historical field – Aleksandr L'vovich Ivliev [Ивлев, Александр Львович] and Nikolay Nikolayevich Kradin [Николай Николаевич Крадин]. Boldin is now excavating the Kraskinskoe site,²⁶ Gel'man has permission for the excavations of Gorbatskoe and Kraskinskoe sites,²⁷ and Nikitin excavates several Bohai sites,²⁸ including Cherniatinskoe. Ivliev is a specialist of Chinese Bohai studies and participates at archeological expeditions,²⁹ Kradin concentrates in his research on the political history of Bohai.³⁰

Many more Bohai settlements and sites are known to scholars, but research of those sites has been quite slow so far. The major reason is the persistent shortage of funds, while another is the lack of trained specialists who would be able to study these sites efficiently. The combined efforts of the archeologists and historians trained in East Asian textual traditions will also be helpful.³¹

Nonetheless, in spite of all these current problems, Russian archeological studies of Bohai develop within fields which combine archeological and historical aspects and also use various research methods.

25 Shavkunov 2005: 31.

26 Boldin 2005; Boldin and Geman 2005; Boldin, Gel'man and Leshchenko 2006.

27 Gel'man 2002; Boldin and Geman 2005; Boldin, Gel'man and Leshchenko 2006.

28 Nikitin, Gel'man and Boldin 2002; Nikitin 2005.

29 Ivliev 2005, 2007; Boldin, Ivliev, Horev and Shavkunov 1990.

30 Kradin 1990, 1995.

31 D'yakova 2008.

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