Materials for the ancient landscape reconstruction in the Adzhiel landscape compartment in the Eastern Crimea (the first stage research results)

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the reconstruction of the ancient landscape in the territory of the landscape compartment around Adzhiel gully in the Eastern Crimea near the Sea of Azov (further, we will use the words “Adzhiel gully” regarding the gully itself and “Adzhiel tract” regarding the whole territory surrounding the gully). In the period of antiquity, the Bosporan Kingdom included this territory. The migratory routes of the Scythians and other peoples from Europe to Asia passed through the zone. Our studies included a review of available historical sources, data of old and modern topographic maps, satellite and aerial images, soil and geological maps, magnetic prospecting, archeological excavations and surveys. The research resulted in collection of the materials representing the modern state of archeological sites in the zone and ones showing the development stages of the key object – the ancient “Belinskoye” hillfort. Based on the results of the work, it was concluded that the anthropogenic impact on the ancient landscapes began during the Upper Paleolithic period and ended, in general, in the late Middle Ages, but the period of maximum anthropogenic changes begins in about II c. AD and ends in approximately V c. AD. We drew conclusions about the high degree of preservation of ancient landscapes on the greater part of the tract except for the places where settlements were located directly.

1. Introduction

Researchers have been attracted for a long time by studying not only individual archeological sites but also the entire surrounding area and changes taking place in it due to the action of natural factors and human impact. The relationship between the location of ancient settlements and the environment, potential for agricultural production is obvious. Dependence of the choice of the settlement location from the landscape features is also apparent. In this regard, the analysis of historical situation in a particular area when it has one or more dominant objects of human impact on the environment is of an undoubted interest. The issue of cultural-historical landscapes as an independent field of scientific research was raised at the beginning of XX century in the works of both Russian and foreign researchers (Berg, 1915; Sauer, 1925). Further development of the cultural landscapes concept and their classification was continued in the works of mid-twentieth century (Hartshorne, 1939; Saushkin, 1946; Milkov, 1973). Many works published over the last decade are devoted to the formation of anthropogenic landscapes. The concept of cultural landscapes and their classification are contained also in the governing documents of the UNESCO (UNESCO, 2012, Annex 3). Anthropogenic evolution of landscapes in the context of the historical and archeological study of the areas occupied also an important place in modern Russian historiography (Nizovtsev, 2010, p. 5).

The territory of the modern Kerch and Taman peninsulas, which in the ancient period was the core of the Bosporan Kingdom, is not an exception in this respect either. Large-scale archeological researches in the last decades of XX – early XXI centuries have made it possible to obtain quite detailed maps of archeological sites of different period located on this territory. Systematic archeological excavations have been being carried out on a part of them. In some cases, it is possible to restore the individual stages of their formation (Maslennikov, 2003, 2010, Zavoikin, 2011, pp. 18–39). However, until now, despite the understanding that the modern landscape of the Kerch and Taman peninsulas is largely the result of anthropogenic impact, in general, there is no detailed reconstruction, even of individual objects, not to mention the natural-economic systems as a whole.

According to V.A. Nizovtsev’s opinion, which we fully share, the main tasks of anthropogenic landscape genesis are: “1) to identify anthropogenic changes in landscapes leading to a change in the landscapes themselves; 2) to establish a “zero” reference point for anthropogenic changes, i.e., initial changes occurring under the human influence and leading to anthropogenic changes, and on this basis – to the age of anthropogenically-derived landscapes; 3) to determine the

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role of landscapes in the formation of different material cultures, ethnoses, anthropogeocoenoses, antropo (demo) ecological systems or ethnonsocial nature management systems; 4) to establish specific types and systems of nature management in specific landscapes, i.e., the consequences of nature management that caused anthropogenic dynamics of landscapes and the formation of anthropogenic, cultural and cultural-historical landscapes” (Nizovtsev, 2010, p. 6).

It is through careful studying of separate, relatively closed local objects that is possible to reconstruct the general picture of the evolution of the natural landscape under the influence of anthropogenic factor on a vast territory (for example, on the scale of the Kerch Peninsula). The basis of such local objects is settlements of different chronological periods and types. In the central part of the Adzhieil tract, at least for Roman and Late Antique time, the ancient “Belinskoye” settlement represented such a foundation. Our publication is devoted to the research conducted in the territory of the Eastern Crimea by researchers of the Tula State Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University in collaboration with scholars of other research centers in Russia and Ukraine.

Specifically, we are talking about research in the area of the Adzhieil tract. The tract occupies part of the territory of the Eastern Crimea adjacent to the Sea of Azov; it is located about 45 km west of the eastern tip of Crimea and covers an area of about 40 km². (Fig. 1). Its name was received from the Adzhieil gully located here.

The Adzhieil tract is one of the areas of the Eastern Crimea, which played an important role in ancient times. Going from north-west to south-east, the Adzhieil gully is impassable and separates a significant part of the Kerch Peninsula, and is one of the natural protective boundaries of the Eastern Crimea. As a result of the research carried out in the 20th century, many barrows and a number of ancient archaeological monuments of other types, including the large ancient “Belinskoye” hillfort, were discovered on the territory of the tract. Probably the Adzhieil tract territory played a strategic role in the defense system of the Bosporan Kingdom and the “Belinskoye” hillfort was likely to be a local political center.

Conducted here by the authors in 1996–2013, studies consisted mainly in archeological excavations and geophysical studies (magnetic prospecting) of the “Belinskoye” hillfort itself and its necropolis. However, further in 2014–2016 archeological survey was carried out on the greater part of the tract that made it possible to raise the question of the cultural and historical landscape formation in the whole area of the Adzhieil tract.

The materials presented in this article are preliminary and are based mainly on the results of long-term excavation of the ancient “Belinskoye” settlement and its necropolis, as well as on the results of pedestrian visual archeological surveys in the northern part of the Adzhieil tract.

The chronological period which takes landscape changes are studied under the influence of anthropogenic factor; and it covers the time from the archeologically confirmed moment of the human appearance on this territory up to the early Middle Ages.

The history of Crimea and especially of the Kerch Peninsula has always been distinguished by a special ethnic originality. Another 50 thousand years ago, a man of the Cro-Magnon type appeared in Crimea and superseded the Neanderthals and eventually settled widely on the whole territory of the peninsula. According to a number of ancient authors (Herodotus, Strabo), in the first millennium BC, various tribes and peoples lived in Crimea (Maslennikov, 2001). Mountain and foothill Crimea was inhabited by the tribes of Taurians, the bearers of the Kizil-Koba archeological culture. Judging by the description of the ancient authors, they traded in piracy, plundering ships passing along the shore. In the steppe Crimea Scythian tribes dominated. At the turn

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**Fig. 1.** The Adzhieil tract location on the map of Crimea.
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