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A FEW MYTHS ABOUT BUDZHAK YAMNA CULTURE

Summary

Graves of the North-West Pontic were identified by N. Merpert into a specific cultural version of the Yamna cultural-historic entity community (Мерперт, 1974). Later on, L. Klein referred them to a particular "Nerushay" culture, which I. Cherniakov renamed into the "Late Yamna Budzhak" culture¹. In our view, the specificity of the Budzhak culture was manifested already at its formation stage, which allows synchronizing it with the Yamna cultural-historical region in general: 3100-2200 BC and not only with the late Yamna period. Two stages in the genesis of the Budzhak culture can be identified: the early and the late, with the boundary within the range of 2600/2500 BC. To date, almost 600 Eneolithic and Early Bronze barrows have been excavated in the North-Western Pontic Region; about 3000 burials of the Budzhak culture have been found. It is significant that, three fourth of the barrows were built by Budzhak tribes themselves, while in other cases they used Eneolithic or Usatovo mounds.

Five main positions of the buried body can be identified (fig. 1):

Some researchers distinguish up to 50 positions of the buried person, depending on the position of the hands and the inclination of the skull (Яровой, 1985). Others consolidate all variants of the position into three poses: supine, on the right side, on the left side, or even into two poses: supine, on the side. Certain grave goods are often associated with the buried in certain position, allowed the identification of "ritual groups". Some finds are common to different groups.

There are suppositions that the differences between the groups are chronological, and connected with living in different geographical zones – steppe and

¹ Other researchers also suggested their names, but the name introduced by I. Chernyakov, in its various versions (Budzhak culture, Budzhak culture version, Budzhak culture group) proved to be the most commonly used

forest-steppe. There is an opinion that people of Budzhak/Yamna culture inhabited only the area between the Carpathian and Dniester Rivers. It is also assumed that the eastern border between the Budzhak/Yamna culture and the Southern Bug variant of the Yamna culture is carried out on the border of Mikolaiv and Odessa region of Ukraine.

The author attributes these assumptions to the myths about the Budzhak/Yamna culture.

Key words: *Early Bronze Age, North-West Pontic, Yamna cultural-historical community, Budzhak/Yamna culture.*

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КІЛЬКА МІФІВ ПРО БУДЖАЦЬКУ ЯМНУ КУЛЬТУРУ

Анотація

В статті йдеться про деякі характеристики Буджацької (Ямної) культури. Вони стосуються як географічних зон (степ-лісостеп) та їх меж, так і території розповсюдження буджацьких пам'яток. Автор обґрунтовує помилковість стереотипів, пропонуючи інший погляд на ці питання.

Ключові слова: *ранній бронзовий вік, Північно-Західне Причорномор'я, Ямна культурно-історична спільність, Буджацька/Ямна культура.*

Actuality. In recent years, Yamna culture and migration of its population to the West has attracted the attention of many researchers. The North-West Pontic, probably, is the territory from which the advance to the South-Eastern and Central Europe went. The result of this process was not only a change of the cultural context of the Balkan-Carpathian area, but also the formation of the specific Budzhak culture, included in the Yamna cultural and historical community.

This culture was a "connecting link", and the territory of the North-West Pontic was a kind of "bridge" between the East and the West.

Discussion. This culture had long attracted the attention of both Ukrainian and Moldavian archaeologists. Almost four decades ago, sev-

eral propositions were formulated that repeat themselves in our time. However, they are closer to myths than to reality.

1. The boundary between the South Bug variant of the Yamna culture and the Budzhak culture runs approximately along the administrative boundaries of the Mykolaiv and Odessa regions of Ukraine. The maps of the South Bug variant include the barrows to the west of the South Bug. The maps of the of the Budzhak/Yamna culture of North-West Pontic do not include the barrows to the east of the Tiligul river (Шапошникова та ін., 1986).

2. Forest-steppe region covers the northern half of the North-West Pontic, and there are some differences of steppe and forest steppe population. At an early stage people of Budzhak/ Yamna culture lived in the territory between the Carpathians and the Dniester, at a late stage - only in the Budzhak steppe (the southern part of the Dniester-Danube inter-fluve) (Дергачев, 1999; 2021, Topal 2022).

3. The Yamna population only inhabited the territory of the Carpathian-Dniester region and almost did not live in the interfluves of the Dniester and South Bug rivers (Дергачев, 2021).

All of these assumptions can be refuted.

1. The northwestern Black Sea coast stands out as a special geographical region The North-West Black Sea Region stands out as a special geographical region. From the east it is bounded by the Southern Bug River, from the west by the Prut and Danube rivers. The southern border is the Black Sea, and the northern border is the forest steppe.

Within the boundaries of this geographical area, a special variant of the Yamna culture (Merpert, 1975) and, later, a special culture of the northwestern Black Sea were identified. Soon the “South Bug variant of the Yamna culture” has been singled out, and it was located in the area between the rivers South Bug and Ingulets (Шапошникова та ін., 1986: 5). However, according to the authors, the western border of this variant was west of the Southern Bug, along the administrative boundary between the Odessa region and the Mykolaiv region of Ukraine. It does not coincide with the geographical territory; the border between the regions could not serve as a barrier to the ancient population. Traditionally, geographical objects (mountains, rivers, seas) could be cer-

tain barriers to the movements of the ancient population, although they were not impassable either. As a result, part of the burial mounds of the Northwestern Black Sea coast attributed to the South Bug variant of the Yamna culture.

Some cultures (Usatovo, Budzhak) or cultural types/variants (Bolgrad variant of Gumelnitsa culture, Khadzhide cultural type, Tudorovo and Balta variants of Belozerska culture) are connected only with the North-Western Black Sea region in Eneolithic and Bronze Age. Thus, according to geographical and cultural indicators, the North-West Black Sea Region can be distinguished as a certain archaeological microregion. This term (microregion) can be defined as spaces of socio-ecological interaction, an area limited territory with certain natural boundaries, saturated with archaeological monuments, diverse in typology and cultural affiliation. These features are typical for the geographical region of the North-Western Black Sea coast and for its archaeological context.

Therefore, in our opinion, the Budzhak culture should include all the kurgans located between the rivers South Bug, Prut and Danube, regardless of the modern administrative zoning.

2. Let us consider the northern boundary of the region and, in this connection, the question of the ratio of two great geographical zones: steppe and forest-steppe in the North-West Pontic. This boundary is important for determining the boundary of the geographical region of the North-West Pontic. This border will also define the boundaries of both the archaeological microregion and the Budzhak archaeological culture. The question of “steppe versus forest steppe” is also relevant because some researchers are of the opinion that the population of the south versus the north as living in different geographical zones, and therefore there are differences in their grave goods.

Undoubtedly, the population of the south is richer: here we see a concentration of prestigious finds. Nevertheless, this may not be due to living conditions in different climatic zones. These differences are related to with the proximity of some part of the population of the Budzhak culture to sources of well-being: to salt estuaries, where they could collect salt, and to crossings to the Balkan-Carpathian region, to metal

mines. It is not without reason that there are almost no tombs of the Catacomb Culture in the territories near the most important crossing of the Danube, near Orlovka/Kartal, but there are tombs of the Budzhak/Yamna Culture. Not many tombs of the Catacomb Culture have been found in Romania. The Budzhak tribes did not want to share their sources of wealth with the outsiders.

There is no reason to set the steppe and forest-steppe populations against each other in the Yamna time. It can be confidently asserted that almost the whole (or even the whole) territory of the North-West Pontic in the Eneolithic and Bronze Age belonged to the steppe zone. It is assumed that the forest-steppes appeared in the post-glacial time and the border between them and steppes was almost unchanged.

Academician Lev Berg is an outstanding geographer, climatologist and founder of landscape science, analyzed landscapes, climate, soils and other indicators (Берг, 1947: 286-287). He concluded that the southern boundary of the forest steppe zone of Eurasia was the northern outskirts of the Bălți Steppe, Republic of Moldova. Then the border between steppe and forest steppe in Ukraine passes along the line Balta-Kremenchug-Poltava-Valuyki and further to the east (fig. 2.1).

The climatic axis (“Voeykov axis”) passes approximately along this line, which reinforces L. Berg's concept. This axis is the axial portion of a high atmospheric pressure band stretching across Eurasia roughly along the 50th parallel. Among the steppe zone Lev Berg distinguishes two large forest-steppe islands – Codry/Codrii mountains (Republic of Moldova) and Donetsk ridge (Ukraine and Russia), and they are associated with vertical differentiation, not related to the border of the steppe and forest-steppe. Later Fedor Milkov conjectured the hypothesis that the Codry mountains and Donetsk ridge are the remnants of the forest-steppe, without taking into account all those environmental and climatic parameters that Lev Berg used (Мильков 1951: 12). The border between steppe and forest-steppe, according to F. Milkov, in the North-West Pontic passed south of the Codry and south of Kishinev/Chișinău. Then the border between steppe and forest steppe in Ukraine passes along the line Kropyvnytskyi-Dnipro-Donetsk-Urupinsk (fig. 2.2). This hypothesis was recognized as the only correct one for a long time, al-

though it was not supported by the data of other studies, as L. Berg. At present geologists and geographers (including Ukrainian researchers) have returned to L. Berg's position, according to which almost the entire territory of the North-West Pontic Region enters the steppe zone (Федотов, 2008). With the aridization of the climate in Bronze Age, the steppe zone expanded. Nevertheless, some archaeologists remain on the old positions, replacing socio-economic explanations with obsolete natural-ecological ones.

Mapping of burials with different ceremonial groups indicates that they all lived throughout the North-West Pontic (Иванова, 2001-2002: 314, рис. 4). The concentration of "rich" burials with metal near salt estuaries and Danube crossing is quite understandable. However, most of the burials have no grave goods, and it is these burials that are known throughout the territory. Burials of different ceremonial groups are found in the same stratigraphic layer of the mound, in the same burial. The explanation must be sought in the social structure of society. Different ritual groups represent different social groups of Budzhak/Yamna society (Иванова, 2001). It is impossible to reduce all differences in funeral rites solely to the chronological factor. This is confirmed by numerous scientific works that have appeared in the last 50 years, devoted to the sociological interpretation of funeral rites.

3. There is an opinion that the people of the Budzhak/Yamna culture lived exclusively in the interfluvium of the Dniester and Prut (or in the Carpathian-Dniester region) and almost did not inhabit the territory between the Dniester and the Southern Bug (Дергачев, 2021). This situation does not reflect the reality: the irregularity of the location of the burials of the Budzhak/Yamna culture on the archaeological maps is related, above all, to the level of archaeological excavation in the region. Almost all the kurgans of the North-West Pontic were excavated in future construction sites – building of gas pipelines, irrigation systems for fields, automobile road and so on). Scientific research of kurgans was not carried out with the money of the state (USSR, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova). These construction works were concentrated in the southern part of the region, especially in the south between the rivers Danube, Prut and Dniester. Not the real situation, but the economic necessity

determined the archaeological map of the North-West Pontic. Burial mounds excavated in the North-West Pontic, indicate that most of them are connected with the Budzhak/Yamna culture. The people built new barrows or used existing Eneolithic barrows.

The military topographic map of European Russia (Russian_Shubert topographic maps of 3 versts) demonstrate thousands of mounds located between the rivers Dniester and Southern Bug. The map began producing in 1845 at a scale of 1:126000. Some of burial mounds have been lost by now, but undoubtedly, the whole area of the North-West Pontic was evenly settled.

The Budzhak (Yamnaya) culture should include all barrows and burials of this type, located in a specific archaeological microregion - North-Western Black Sea, and not only those that are located between the Carpathians and the Dniester. Fragments of maps of the territory from the Dniester to the Southern Bug allow us to be convinced of this (Free Map. Старовинні карти України). For example, on the map XXX, 8, it is possible to see 823 burial mounds, on the map XXVII, 8 – 791 ones, etc. (fig. 3). In the steppe zone between the Southern Bug and the Dniester there are more than 5,800 burial mounds. Between the rivers Prut and Dniester (on the territory of the Republic of Moldova) is known 6290 mounds (Topal, 2022). Consequently, there is no reason to say that only the Carpathian-Dniester area was inhabited.

The Budzhak steppe (the area between the Dniester and the Danube) is the most densely populated kurgan region, with 4,400 known kurgans (Topal, 2022).

At different times people sought to settle it, using its resources (salt) and the advantageous location near the Danube crossings. In addition, today this area is the most technically developed in the Odessa region.

Conclusions. The Budzhak/Yamna culture inhabited the entire North-West Pontic, not only to the west of the Dniester. The northern boundary of the region was along boundary between steppe and forest-steppe, substantiated by academician Lev Berg. Thus, almost the entire territory of the Northwestern Black Sea Region was in the steppe zone. The differences in the funeral rites and grave goods of the different groups of the Budzhak culture are not connected with their liv-

ing in the different geographical zones, but determined by the social (and probably also ethnic) context. The radiocarbon data confirm the simultaneity of residence in the region of population groups with different ceremonial traditions. Kurgans, located west of the Southern Bug River, should be included in the Budzhak/Yamna culture, despite their placement in the Mykolaiv region of Ukraine.

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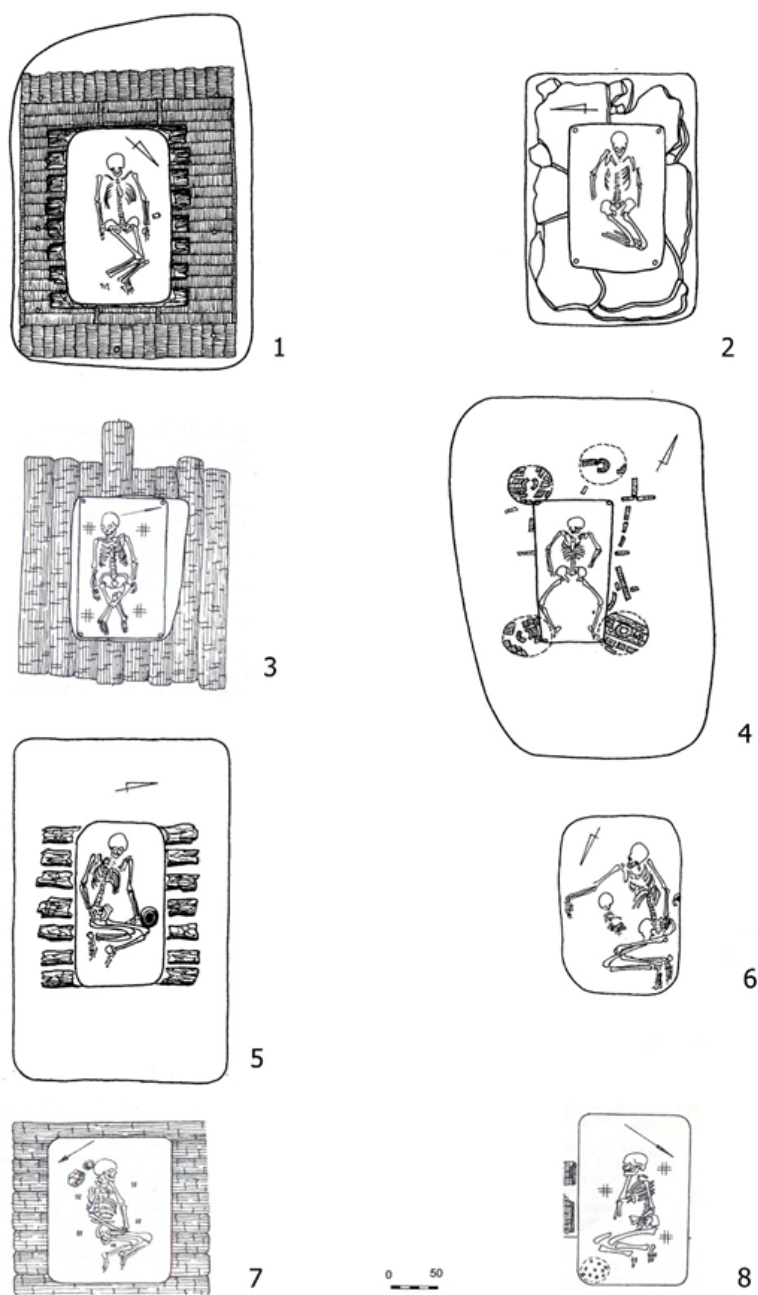
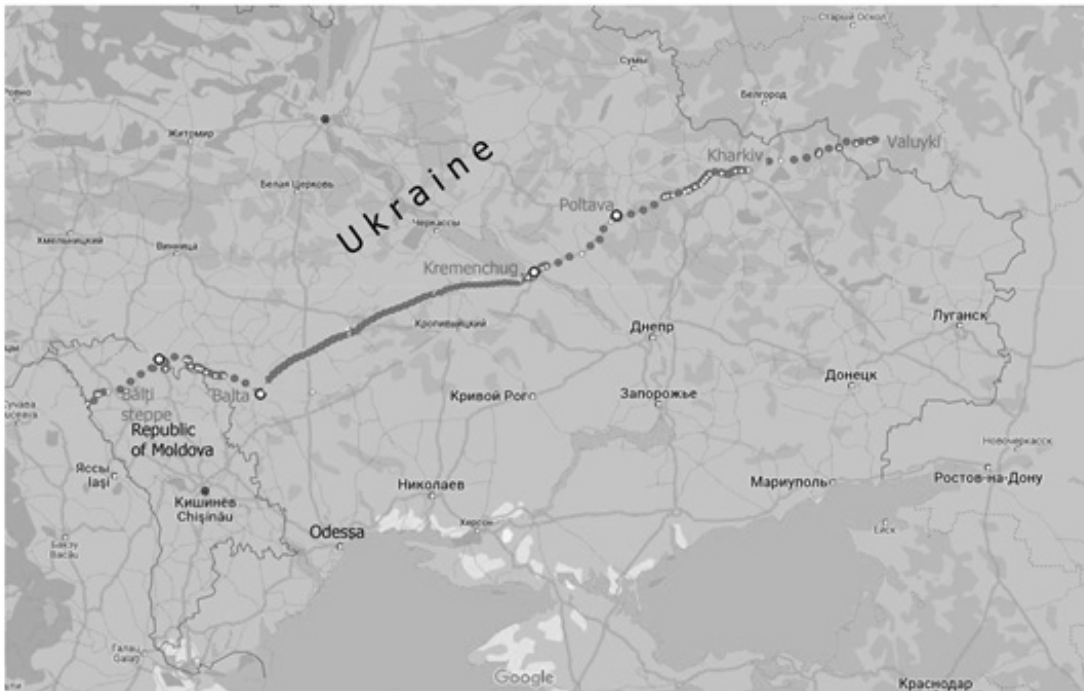
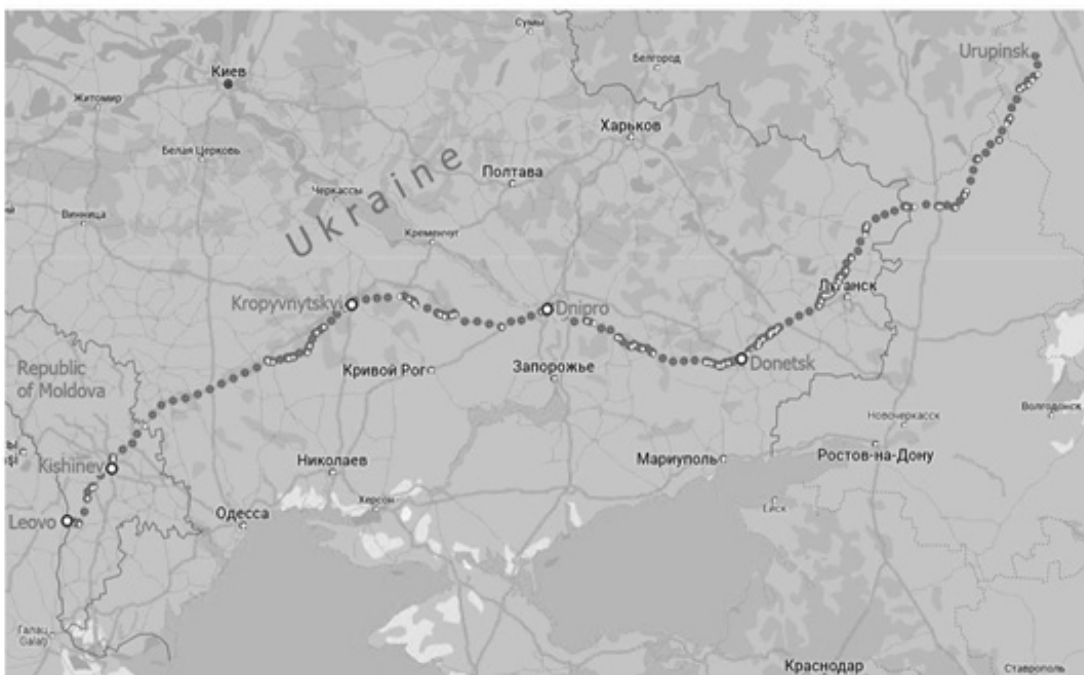


Fig. 1. Five main positions of the buried body

1 – Semenivka 14/12; 2 – Bilolissia 3/26; 3 – Olănești 1/29;
 4 – Novoselytsia 19/16; 5 – Bilolissia 11/9; 6 – Nerushaj 9/9; 7 – Olănești 1/15;
 8 – Purcari 1.14 (after Иванова, 2021)

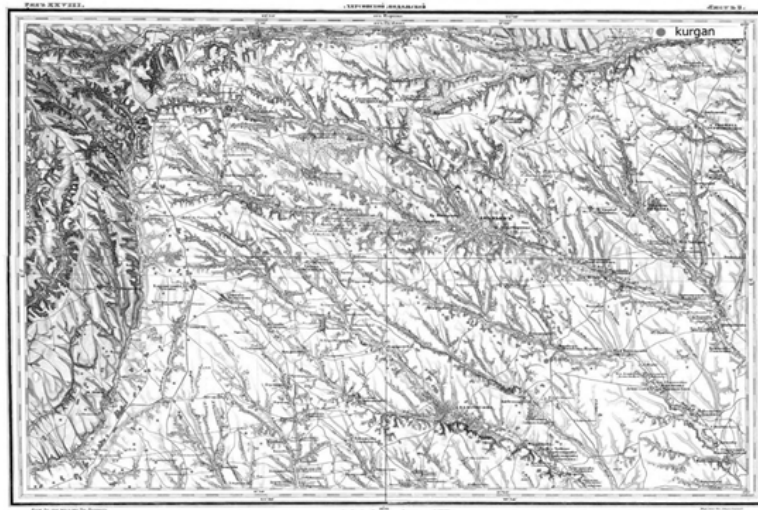
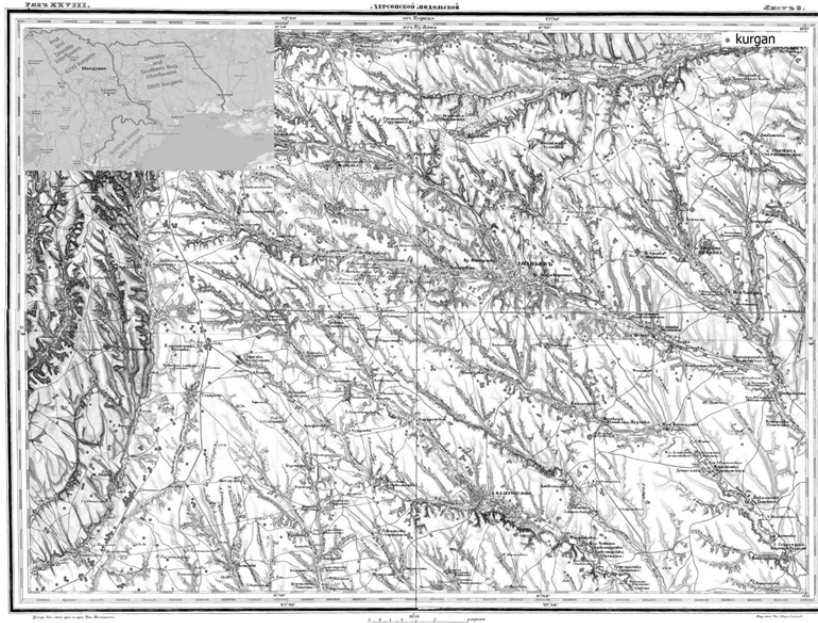


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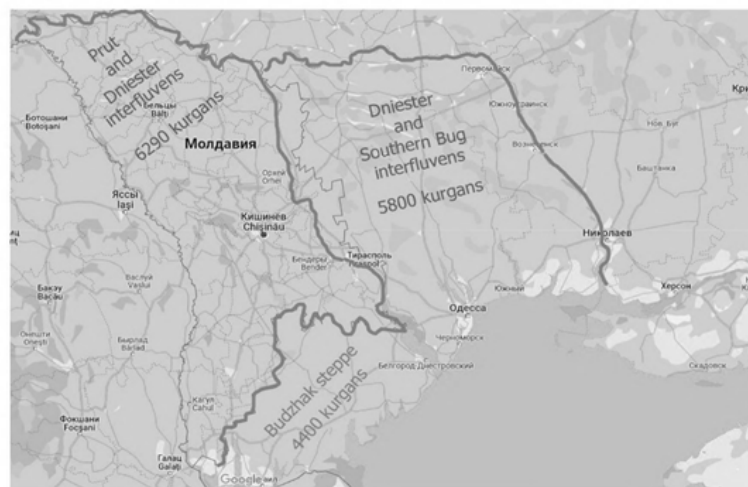


2

Fig. 2. Border between steppe and forest-steppe according to L. Berg (1) and F. Milkov (2)



1



2

Fig 3. Kurgans in the military topographic map of European Russia (Russian_Shubert topographic maps of 3 versts), list XXVII, 8