

SILVER IN YAKUTIA IN THE 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

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**Annotation.** Silver has been a favorite metal of jewelers in Yakutia since ancient times. But, unfortunately, up to the present time, how the metal was mined or delivered in the territory of Yakutia was not sufficiently covered in the literature. In this work, on the basis of archival documents, we will try to explain information about silver products and their distribution in Yakutia, and sources and ways of silver supply before the 17<sup>th</sup> century for Yakut blacksmiths. Silver items in the territory of Yakutia were undoubtedly produced by local craftsmen until the 17th century. It is not known for certain where they were delivered or mined from. However, there were known silver deposits on the territory of Yakutia at that time. This is visible by the evidence of the Yukagirs with silver ore on the Neroga River. One of the sources of silver supply may have been Transbaikalia, from the deposits developed by the Daurian prince Lavkay. Undoubtedly, the Yakut diaspora lived in those places (confirmed by official documents of the 17th century), which, perhaps, left its traces in the toponym of Transbaikalia. We do not know what they did, but it is quite possible to assume that they were intermediaries in the trade of Chinese goods between the Daurian and Yakut princes. The most common silver item in demand not only among the Yakut, but also the Evenk and Yukaghir population of the region, was a silver circle. Undoubtedly, it was considered an attribute of the social status of its bearer and, probably, of faith - the worship of the sun, which gives warmth and fertile summers to the northerners.

**Keywords:** Silver, XVII century, silver products, silver jewelry, Yakuts

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**Introduction.** Silver has been a favorite metal of jewelers in Yakutia since ancient times. According to F.M. Zykov, the earliest written source about the presence of Sakha silver jewelry was left by the Polish exile Adam Kamensky-Dluzhik, who was exiled from 1662 to 1668 in Yakutia [1]. Historian, B. Polevoy, wrote an article about his work for the first time [2]. He quoted this work: “They wear great earrings in their ears, like silver plates, they wear circles on their foreheads, and silver and copper hoops around their necks” [2]. It should be noted that this work by Adam Kamensky-Dluzhik was published in the journal *Polar Star* in the translation

of A. Barkovsky. In this translation, the above quote sounds a little different: “Women ride horses, and have large earrings in their ears, like silver thalers, they wear circles on their foreheads, and silver and copper hoops around their necks” [3]. The well-known Yakut ethnographer, G. V. Ksenofontov, wrote: “There is no need to share much about the very old acquaintance of the Yakuts with silver. We do not have certain data that the Yakuts could themselves smelt silver ore before the arrival of the Russians, but there is no doubt that they had silver in large quantities in internal circulation and went with all kinds of jewelry and outfits...” [4].

But, unfortunately, up to the present time, how the metal was mined or delivered in the territory of Yakutia was not sufficiently covered in literature. In this work, on the basis of archival documents and literary sources, we will try to explain details about silver products and their distribution in Yakutia and sources and ways of silver supply before the 17th century for Yakut blacksmiths.

**Material and methods.** We studied published historical materials from the RGADA archives and literature on the history of Yakut silver as well as published and unpublished materials (a number of documents published by us) from the archives of RGADA. The study of the mate-

rial is facilitated by an extensive bibliographic source of monographic studies containing materials on the silver of Yakutia [1,5–7].

Results obtained. As early as 1639, the Lena governors received information about the presence of silver among the Vitim Tungus. So, according to reports to the Yenisei servant Maksimko Kirilov, the Vitim Tungus sold a silver circle for 10 altyns and said that silver was coming to them from the Shilka River [8]. It was established through questioning that the Daurian prince Batoga lives on the Vitim River. He received his silver from Prince Lavkai. The first information about Prince Lavkai was told by the interpreter Kondraty Myasin in 1640 [9]. In a response dated 1641, the governors wrote: "... yes, on the same, sir, Shilka river near Prince Lavkai, at the mouth of the Ura river, under the ulus, silver ore is close in the mountain, and from that say, sir, Daurian princes Lavkai, with comrades, they smelt silver ore, and say, sir, there is a lot of silver ore, and then say their silver diverges in many parishes and uluses for sale, and they sell, say, sovereign, silver on sable, and say sable, sir, they buy from them Chinese people on the Shilka River for damask and for all sorts of goods ..." Further they write that: "... yes, into the Shilka, sovereign, the river flowed from the left side of the Gil river, and the Yakut and Tungus people live along that river "[8].

In 1640, the Lena governors Peter Golovin and Matvey Glebov wrote about the questioning of servicemen Postnik Ivanov and Prokopy Lazarev, who said that: "... yes, the Yukagir, say, sovereign people have silver, and where they have silver, Posnichko does not know ..." [10]. In 1642, three Yukagir amanats were brought to Yakutsk. So they said: "... on that river of the Neroga, not far from the

mouth of the sea, in the mountain, in the cliff above the river, silver ore, and a little higher than that silver ore, on the same river, people live on the ravine of the Nattyla clan, yurt, say, are made in the ground, and those, say, people have a lot of silver, and those people are on foot, they have no deer and horses, and the river is good for fish, and those people feed on fish. The governors gave the tithe's manager, Elisha Buza, the Punishment memory ... to visit the Neroga River firmly" [8]. Apparently, neither silver ores nor the genus Nattyla were found.

Evidence of the existence of silver in the Yakut environment before the arrival of the Russians is mentioned in the Yakut custom of shert. One of the means of coercion to pay yasak to foreigners in Eastern Siberia was the "shert" (oath – andagar in Yakut). Yakut professor, M. M. Fedorov, considered it as an important form of "a legal act that secured the rights and obligations of the natives" [11]. In archival documents from 1642, there are records of the trial of the custom of straight shert among the Yakuts. Onyukei, called in this case, answered: "... and hitherto, I have seen the Russian people, the Yakuts of the Borogonskaya parish, Vata, and Onkok, were sherting, also sables gnawed on a birch, and swore by the sun, and scraped silver. They drank in kumys." He further stated: "And now I haven't seen that wool, they don't shear that wool, they don't scrape silver and don't drink, and they don't scrape the bones of a bear's head and don't drink it. And now we all drink from silver" [12].

The monograph by Bakhrushin and S. A. Tokarev gives examples of silver items used in everyday life and trade. So, according to the documents of 1665, a malachai with a silver circle was listed as a bride's dowry. In 1667 - "Lamutz women's

breastplate" with silver circles was valued at 20 sables. In 1680, Bayagantay Orosun gave 5 horses, 5 mares, 3 sables, 2 foxes, as well as a cauldron and a silver circle as payment for treatment to shamans and healers. In 1692- 1693, Borogonian Irgen complained about Molokun: "And Molokun took from me for bargaining, going to the Verkhoyansk winter hut, a sable and a silver circle ..." [13]. In the "Reference book of the Yakut command hut" there are cases with a mention of the use of silver: 1. Judicial cases. 1644 "On the counterfeiting of silver coins by the Yakuts; 2. 1672-1673, "According to the petition of the Yukagir girl to the man in service Fedot: "... he, Fedot, plucked from me, your orphan, two silver circles, and three copper bells" [14]. In a complaint from 1694 about the looting of the grave, it is written: "... that we Adurakko in 201 (1693) buried our father Terenechka according to our Yakut faith, and put dresses with him on a sleigh of lynxes, sewn from five lynxes, an iron fraternal belt notched with silver, yes, a knife in a sheath - framed with silver, bone shank, copper sheath, silver circle weighing a ruble; malachai bunt of a lynx and a sable and half a lynx with the eyes, a palm tree, two silver feathers and a linen robe ..." [15].

From the second half of the XVII century, in the documents of the Yakut clerk's hut, we notice a record of the increase in the mention of silver in various civil cases, and from the second half of the 18th century, silver items began to appear in the burials of the Yakut nobility [16]. In the collections of the National Art Museum of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) there are only a few collections of silver from the first half of the 19th century, and the main part of the collection is represented by the second half of the 19th century

and the beginning of the 20th century. [17].

Summing up the results of the Yakut-French archaeological expedition, E. Krubezi and A. Alekseev write: "With the exception of one of the first imported crosses, not a single silver object was found in the burials" [18]. Detailed analysis of the results of archaeological research in the 14th-17th centuries show that no silver items have yet been found during this period, and only items made of iron, copper, brass, and bronze are found [19,20]. In the burial places of Yakutia, silver items began to be found in large numbers from the second half of the 18th century. So, A. D. Strelov described the three richest burials of the Yakuts, which he excavated near the city of Yakutsk, and he found silver items in all of them: three silver round plates sewn to a fur hat, two silver rings and one silver cross, not of Yakut work. The copper coins found with the date, 1747, allowed the author to date the burials to the second half of the 18th century. [16].

In 1955, I. D. Novgorodov summed up the results of 91 archaeological excavations in Central Yakutia, carried out by the Yakut Republican Museum of Local Lore. E. Yaroslavsky. Based on the analysis, the author draws the following conclusions: "Contrary to expectations, there were few silver jewelry in the ancient graves. It is characteristic that the older the burial, the less silver it contains, and in the most ancient graves of the 17th century, it is almost completely absent. It remains an undoubted fact that the Yakuts themselves did not know how to make beads and mine silver." Based on the scarcity of tin and copper jewelry in ancient graves, he also doubted that the Yakuts knew how to work with copper and tin before the arrival of the Russians [15].

In 1965, archaeologist, I.V. Konstantinov, unearthed 59 graves dating back to the 18th century in three central regions of Yakutia (Churapchinsky, Tattinsky and Megino-Kangalassky). In 18 of them he found silver circles, i.e. in 30.5% of all burials, and in 16 - rings made of base silver. In addition, he found a silver hoop with chasing, silver bracelets, openwork silver pendants, separate silver circles for decorating a plain bag, and pendants made of silver patches (coins) of 1751 [21].

In excavations carried out from 2002-2009, the Yakut-French archaeological expedition did not find a single local silver item in the Yakut burials, but A. D. Strelov, I. D. Novgorodov and I. V. Konstantinov found them relatively often. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the Yakut archaeologists deliberately unearthed the graves of famous wealthy families, and the Yakut-French expedition mainly came across the graves of commoners.

**Discussion.** The most common silver item of the 17th-18th centuries was undoubtedly a copper or silver circle - tuosakhtha. Usually it was sewn on a fur hat. The etymology of the word tuohakhta is from cf. manchu tosi (the white spot on an animal's forehead) [22]. What significance this decoration had for the Yakuts has not been clarified up to the present time. Silver circles were used by both Evenks and Yukagirs, which emphasizes their international significance and the common belief of the northern peoples - sun worship. On the other hand, this item was sold as a commodity [8]. The Yakuts of that time knew about the place of silver mining on the Shilka River in the possessions of the Daurian prince Lavkai [9]. The intermediaries of trade between them were probably the Tungus and Yakuts, who, according to the data of 1641,

lived near the possessions of Lavkaya on the Gil River [8]. Probably, under the Gil River, the left tributary of the Shilka, which was the Kiya River. On this river there is the village of Kokuy, in the "Toponymic Dictionary of the Trans-Baikal Territory" we find: "There is also an opinion that Kokuy is a generic Yakut name" [23]. Indirect confirmation of the trade of Yakut princes with the Daurian can be found in the data of archaeological excavations of the 17th century: silk scarves, black and white beads of Chinese origin, and Chinese coins in the Kulun-Atakh sites [24]. In their response, the Lena governors Peter Golovin and Matvey Glebov wrote: "... Chinese people buy from them [Daur] on the Shilka River for kamki and for all sorts of goods ..."

Due to the fact that tuosakhtha is found mainly in the burials of wealthy Yakuts, it can be assumed that it is a sign of the special social position of its bearer. An animal from tuosakhtha (with a white round spot on the forehead) is sometimes called by the Yakuts kyunneeh (kyun - sun). In some cases, it was found in burials that silver circles lay separately under the cap, on the chest or under the arm. In this regard, we should recall the Yakut proverb: "The time has come when the sun must fall, and the kyusenge should break." According to Yakut beliefs, if a kyusenge (a round iron object with a hole in the middle) of a shaman's clothes breaks during a ritual, the shaman must die immediately. Apparently, sometimes the "tuosakhtha" after death is specially separated from the cap. Archaeologist I. V. Konstantinov noticed that in the XVIII century, metal circles began to be found more in women's head-dresses. The author believed that he recorded the beginning of the transition of metal circles into the category of women's jewelry, which finally

took shape in the 19th century. [21].

According to archival documents, it can be seen that silver was used among the Yakuts even before the arrival of service people to the Middle Lena, but, probably, because of the high cost and rarity, it was not put in the grave. So, with the prices of that time, a silver circle cost 20 sables [13]. Approximately from the middle of the XVII century, silver became more frequently mentioned in documents of that period. This is probably due to the increase in the turnover of the silver ruble in Siberia after the publication of the Letter of 1657, dated April 8, "On the admission of new silver rubles: quarters and other small coins into circulation and on the prohibition of trading in copper money in Siberian cities" [25]. In this regard, it should be noted that some of the silver circles were re-forged from Russian silver rubles. So, in the case of the robbery of Terenechko's burial from 1696, his sons complained that they had put in their father's grave "... a circle of silver, weighing a ruble", that is, made of a silver ruble. By 1697, the tsarist officials in Yakutsk had become so wealthy that on October 28, the Tsar's Letter "On the prohibition of embassies and all oth-

er ranks from wearing rich clothes" was issued. The charter says, "...that service people in Siberia and especially in the Yakutsk region dress in velvet dresses, woven with brocade, gold or silver, in which the first ranks appeared at the royal court of the 17th century and only known holidays. Their wives and children dress up in expensive fabrics, with gold and silver lace, and winter dresses are worn of sables and black-brown foxes" [26]. On the other hand, since 1658 servicemen began to write replies about finding silver ores [27]. From 1774 to 1781, silver was smelted at the Yandybalsky silver mine [26]. Since 1812, on May 28, according to the Senate decree, "On granting the right to all Russian citizens to find and develop gold and silver ores, with payment of taxes to the treasury" announced publicly: "... to grant all Russian subjects to find and develop gold and silver ores" [28]. All this, undoubtedly, gradually increased the turnover of silver in the territory of Yakutia. The conclusions of I. D. Novgorodov from 1955, that the Yakuts did not only mine and independently process silver but also tin and copper before the arrival of the Russians, were not confirmed by the data of subsequent studies [1,21].

**Conclusion.** There were silver items in the territory of Yakutia before the 17th century, and they were undoubtedly produced by local craftsmen. Where they were delivered from or where they were mined is not known for certain. Probably, silver deposits on the territory of Yakutia were known at that time. This is understood by the evidence of the Yukagirs about silver ore on the Neroga River. One of the sources of silver supply may have been Transbaikalia, from the silver deposits developed by the Daurian prince Lavkay. Undoubtedly, the Yakut diaspora lived in those places, which probably left its traces in the toponym of Transbaikalia. We do not know what they did, but it is quite possible to assume that they were intermediaries in the trade in Chinese goods between the Daurian and Yakut princes.

The most common silver item, in demand not only among the Yakut, but also the Evenk and Yukaghir population of the region, was a silver circle. Undoubtedly, it was considered an attribute of the social status of its bearer and, probably, of faith - the worship of the sun, which gives warmth and fertile summer to the northerners.

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