EVOLUTION AND TYPOLOGY OF ANCIENT AND EARLY MEDIEVAL HORSE BARDING IN CENTRAL ASIA

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In the context of military-technological development and the expansion of heavy cavalry in ancient and early medieval Eurasian oases and steppes, it is essential to examine the evolution of horse armor (barding) in Central Asia, its impact on equestrian combat tactics, and its role as a marker of elite social status.

In the course of the literature review and source analysis, the main typological approaches to protective equine gear were considered, key theoretical frameworks regarding lamellar and laminar armor systems were identified, and results from previous archaeological studies were examined. To achieve the stated objectives, an analysis of horse barding structural evolution was conducted based on archaeological finds (metallic/organic armor plates, chamfrons, harness fittings), iconographic sources (Sogdian murals, terracotta reliefs, toreutics), and a comparative analysis of equipment across nomadic and sedentary contexts.

The obtained data showed that the development of Central Asian horse armor progressed from heavy, rigid coverings during the Kushan period toward more modular, articulated systems in the Sogdian-Turkic era, significantly increasing equestrian maneuverability while maintaining optimal defense.

Based on the study conducted, it can be concluded that Central Asian horse barding represents a unified technological tradition shaped by the synthesis of urban

metallurgical production and nomadic tactical requirements, serving as a critical indicator of specialized military organization along the Silk Road.

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