

# Royal Mound "Baygetobe" from the Burial Ground Shilikty

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**Abstract**—Mounds are one of the most valuable sources of information on various aspects of life, household skills, rituals and beliefs of the ancient peoples of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the objects associated with the cult of the burial of the dead are the most informative, and often the only source of knowledge about past eras. The present study is devoted to some results of the excavations carried out on the mound "Baygetobe" of Shilikty burial ground. The purpose of the work is associated with certain categories of grave goods and reading "Fine Text" of Shilikty graves, whose structure is the same for burials of nobles and ordinary graves. The safety of a royal burial mounds, the integrity and completeness of the source are of particular value for studying.

**Keywords**—Animal style, barrow, Baygetobe, dromos, Shilikty.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**S**HILIKTY mounds are located in the eponymous valley in Szaysan district of the East Kazakhstan region. Three sides of Shilikty valley stretching to a length of 80 and width of 30 km are surrounded by mountains: Tarbagatai in the south, Sauyr in the east, Manyrak in the north. Currently more than two hundred burial monuments of Saka-Usun time survived in Shilikty. About fifty of them belong to the royal and elitist.

Studying Shilikty archaeological sites began in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. G.N. Boki was the first researcher of the given mounds. He excavated and studied burial mounds of Shagan oba located in the eastern outskirts of Shilikty Valley. At the end of 40-60's of the twentieth century, archaeological research of Shilikty monuments was conducted by S.S. Chernikov, who excavated 13 mounds. Since 2003, the elite Saka monuments of Shilikty Valley have been studied by our research group (supervisor A.T. Toleubaev). Up to now, the group investigated three large and several small mounds. Sensational material was obtained from the mound called "Baygetobe", located on the south side of the village Zhalshi. Mound belonged to the royal personage. A huge amount of golden products were found here. All of them are in a highly artistic manner typical of the art of the early nomads, the so-called Scythian-Siberian animal style. Many of the items are unique and have no analogues in the Scythian-Saka art.

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## II. ARCHITECTURAL PECULIARITIES OF THE MOUND "BAIGETOBE"

Structurally, the mound Baygetobe consists of three levels. The first level is a wooden tomb, built at the level of the surface of the earth. The walls of the tomb comprised two-row checkered frame, where the open space between the logs was filled with stones. The eastern side of the tomb was in the form of a truncated pyramid. Floor area of the tomb was about 20 m<sup>2</sup>. The tomb was blocked by a tight-fitting log rolling close to one another. The height of the tomb is 4.1 m (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 The tomb of logs

A stone mound round, with a perimeter of more than 65 m and a height of 4.9 m was erected above the wooden tomb. In the middle of stone mound predatory hole was clearly read. In the eastern part of the rock fall a pole of about one meter height was set. At its base a head and horns of a mountain goat are preserved, the wreckage of pottery filled with burnt bones were lying near. The entire surface of the stone mound was heaped with the bones of sheep and goats, and bones of a horse were also met among them. This obviously suggests some funeral feasts held after the burial of the deceased in the tomb and the erection of a stone mound over it.

The third level was an earthen mound erected over the stone mound. Its preserved height is 7.9 m, diameter from north to south – is 99 m, from east to west is 97.4 meters (Fig.2). At the base, closer to the edge of the earthen mound it had a ring fence with large rocks [1].



Fig. 2 Baygetobe barrow. General view

Earthen covering of mound, in its own turn, consisted of four construction stages. Between some of the tiers minor superficial layer of the earth can be traced, which indicates that small breaks took place in the construction of individual stratigraphic levels earthen mound.

On the eastern side of the tomb big and small underground corridors dromoses were built. Length of large dromos connected with the tomb with a small door is 15.65 m, width is 2.5-3 m, and depth is 0.9-1 m. Its upper part is covered across with the stacked logs. The middle part of dromos is completely littered with stones. The absence of the entrance to the dromos, backing part of the underground passage stones already during its construction, a complete absence of findings there serve as evidence of its purely ritual purpose (Fig. 3).

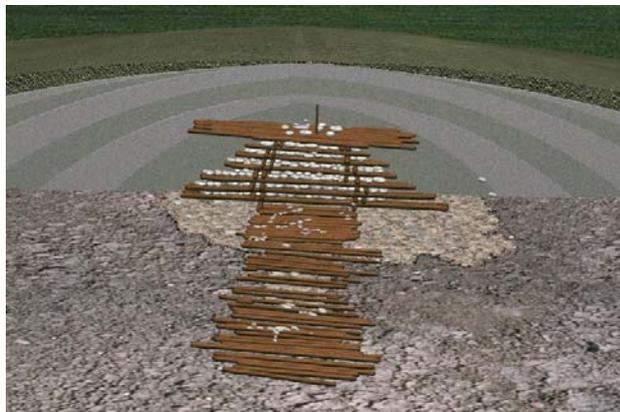


Fig. 3 Reconstruction of the burial chamber and dromos

Overall dromos was blocked with logs with a diameter of 12 to 18 centimeters. Judging by the tracks, the length of the logs is not less than 6 meters, and the longest ones reach up to 8 meters. Logs were stacked in a thick continuous layer. Dromos on the east side was discovered in a burial mound number 5 Shilikti, excavated by S.S.Chernikov in 1960. According to the researcher, the dead man was carried through the dromos, and then after the funeral rites logs were firmly laid, forming the roof [2].

Dromos-corridor in Besshatyr mounds are not long and not underground, built on the east side of the tomb in the form of a narrow corridor, and is a continuation of the burial chamber [3].

Burial pit with dromos, under a mound of large burial mound number 1 of Kenes (VI-V centuries BC) and the burial mound number 6 Berlik related to IV-II centuries BC are known in northern Kazakhstan [4].

Corridor-long dromos are known in the Lower Syrdarya mounds of the VII-V century BC. In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC burial chambers with dromos designated for collective burial were widespread in the eastern steppe region [5].

Next to the large dromos a small dromos was built, which is connected with a large dromos at the entrance to the tomb. The width is 0.8 m and a depth is 1.4. This dromos was functional. The organizers of the funeral penetrated the tomb through it.

In general, dromosa as a constructive element of burial structures are known in the materials early Saka and Saka monuments of Eastern, Northern Kazakhstan, Zhetisu region, Lower Syrdarya and the Aral-Ural steppe region. The studied materials provide the preliminary conclusions about what we know of the early Iron Age sites in Kazakhstan and neighboring regions of Eurasia. The earliest burial mounds with dromos are Shilikti royal burial mounds. Dromos in the barrow "Baygetobe" is of a complex structure, having both functional-practical and ritual-philosophical significance. The tradition of building entrance corridor to the east side of mausoleum, in our opinion, originates from Begazi necropolis of the Late Bronze Age [6]. These and many other questions related to dromos in monuments of Saka- Scythian world are of particular interest for the study of the genesis of architectural and design features of the early Iron Age burial mounds of the Eurasian steppes and their ideological and philosophical foundations.

### III. THE ACCOMPANYING INVENTORY OF THE BURIAL CHAMBER

Like most other "royal" burial mounds this one was looted in antiquity. The robbers laid in the center of the barrow pit depth of 4 m, then they cut through the hole in the wooden house and penetrated into the interior of the tomb. Subsequently, the inside of the tomb was completely filled with earth, which entered through the hole left by the thieves. Despite the partial robbery valuable findings were identified in the mound.

In the eastern half of the tomb, at different layers of the soil filling the bones and the golden plates from the clothes people buried here were found. Inside the tomb a well-treated stone stele 2.8 m was discovered. Apparently it got there in the course of predatory excavation.

Totally in a burial mound Baygetobe of Shilikty-3 4303 instances of golden products were found, including 153 plaques in the form of a leopard mask, 36 plaques in the form of a golden eagle, 20 plaques in the form of deer, 39 plaques in the form of a wolf cub (cub), a plaque in the form of sculptural image argali, one button-badge in the form of a five-pointed star, 23 ornaments in the form of bells, 63 corrugated pipe decorations, 17 strips of sheet gold, 7 pieces of gold leaf procrastination, 141 pieces of miniature pendants

hemispherical shape of miniature cup-2835 pendant with solder lug, 223 piece miniature tubular beads, 743 pieces annular beads and a tiny hook [7].

The most unique finding of the mound is a plaque in the form of a five-pointed star. A five-pointed star depicts. Star is of very correct form, dark blue lapis lazuli stone is inserted in rays of the star (Fig.4). A round insertion of a horn is inserted in the center of the star. The background of the star comprises bone paste. Rays of the star are framed by a thin gold band. The back and edge-button plaque are wrapped in gold leaf. On the reverse side there is a gold loop, set in the middle of the plaque. The five-pointed star is very rare in the Saka-Scythian art. We are aware of only two cases of a five-pointed star image. One is in the earring from Olbia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the other is from the Golden Hill near Simferopol, Uybat chaatas of Tashtyk era [8].



Fig. 4 The metal plate “five-point star”

In one instance the decoration in the form of argali of pure solid gold is presented (Fig. 5). It is the largest and most massive of all known clothing accessories. The eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth and hooves of argali are inlaid with turquoise. A young male argali is drawn there. The muscles of the neck, arm, jaw and grits are highlighted. Hooves are raised. The animal is depicted in a pose of preparing to pounce. The sculpture is very elegant; the proportions of the body are strictly complied with. On the reverse side there are two loops for sewing. Mountain sheep in the art of Saka and Scythians is quite common. He is known to us from Pazyryk, subjects of the Tagar time from Minusinsk Basin, in the North, Central Kazakhstan, in Arzhan [9].



Fig. 5 The metal plate in the form of “argali”

By its composition significant-button clasp in the form of animals of the panther mask is very complex and sacred ornament (Fig. 6). This ornament was conventionally called Bars by us. If we look closer the decoration from different angles, then it is possible to discern three different compositions. From a distance, the decoration resembles the face of the beast feline. If to look more closely, the head and horns of two mountain goats, illustrated face to face are clearly seen on the clasp. Eyes, mouth and ears of these animals are decorated with turquoise. The third image in this decoration can be seen in a side glance: profile of the decoration resembles a soaring giant bird.



Fig. 6 The metal plate in the form of panther mask

Decorations in the form of the deer. The basis of the decoration comprises two deer heads looking in opposite directions (Fig. 7). Horns of deer are intertwined and form a single composition that resembles the sprawling branches of willow. Mouths, nostrils and ears of the deer are inlaid with blue turquoise. On the reverse side there are three clasps. A similar golden ornament in the form of a deer with horns intertwined was found among subjects Zhalauly treasures in the Zhetisu area.



Fig. 7 The metal plate called "deer"

The decoration in the form of an eagle is made of pure solid gold. It indicates a bird of prey curled his head on the right side. Its beak is strongly bent, but not spiral as in the pictures of griffins. The upper mandible is outlined. The eyes are large and round. The upper part of the body and wings are highly stylized and composed from convex stem like band in the form of an open semi-circle, tapering towards the end. The lower part of the body, legs, tail is also highly stylized. They are also composed of wavy curved convex stripes running down from the bird's neck to the tail. Eagle claw is also stylized and ends with a ring. During a careful inspection, it is possible to see a snake, clutching an eagle's paw. The tail of the snake at the same time forms the lower torso of the bird. This story reflects world view of Sakas, which displays the struggle between two principles, the earthly and the heavenly, the struggle of representatives of two elements - earth and sky (Fig. 8). S.S. Chernikov found nine instances of plaques in the form of eagles in the burial mound number 5 of Shilikti.

But they were made of gold leaf by knockout by flat bas-relief on the matrix, so their safety is worse than the plaque of "Baygetobe." In addition, if the eagle's foot has a snake head on a plaque from Baigetobe, this story found by S.Chernikov is almost lost, and there is a hole in its place. Turquoise in the eye of the latter eagle has an fine through-hole, the end of the beak is not connected to the lower band and does not have loops sewn on the back. In addition, if our eagles turned their head only in one direction (to the right), part of the eagles from the fifth mound oriented their head to the right, some are to the left. In the rest ours and the eagles from the 5<sup>th</sup> mound are similar. It is impossible to encounter such decoration in Kazakhstan. Outside Tarbagataya similar bronze plaque was found in the Zuyevsky burial ground on the Kama, dated as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC by A.V. Sbrueva. Distant echo of Shilikti style of an eagle image are a figure of eagles from Minusinsk basin [10].

Comparing all known images of eagles, it is possible to make the following conclusion. Eagle from the mound number 1 of burial Shilikti-3 is the most advanced, the earliest of all known images of the eagle sewn on plaques Saka-Scythian cultural and ethnic community.



Fig. 8 The metal plate called "golden eagle"

The decoration in the form of a wolf (bear) is of great importance (Fig. 9). In this decoration an image of predatory animal's baby is shown. The head and nose just reminds new born wolf cub. However, the body, feet, tail resemble a bear cub. The images of creatures that combine the features of a wolf and bear were encountered in the Scythian-Saka fine arts before. On the back the ornament has two buckles.



Fig. 9 The metal plate in the form of wolf-cub or bear-cub

Another unique finding of the burial ground Shilikti-3 is an ornament in the form of throat like tube. Perhaps these golden items decorated with edge clothes. Similar golden fluted tube were found in the monuments belonging pre-Saka period.

Among other golden items miniature ornaments deserve a special attention, the smallest of which has a diameter of less than 1 mm. Barely discernible to the naked eye these microproducts' lower sides were soldered lugs for sewing the garment. Such a delicate process of jewelry making these very tiny ornaments and even smaller soldering tabs to it impossible without the use of binoculars and knowledge of complex technological methods of microsoldering.

Gold jewelry from Shilikti burial, without exception, are the decorations for clothing, made of very high grade gold (940-970) and represent a unique piece of jewelry, most of which have no analogues in the Saka-Scythian cultural space.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

According to the structure and architecture of the mound, burial rites, funerary inventory, as well as to the radiocarbon analysis, the monument dates back to the VIII century BC. Baygetobe mound from the group Shilikti-3 was a complex and grand architectural structure, which provided a socio-religious and natural security goals. The size of the mound as a social sign is of no doubt. Alongside this, burying only one man in a huge mound demonstrates his special social status. Location of the mound "Baygetobe" in the overall layout of the barrow group (heading, starting the group) also highlights

the particular situation of a person who was buried there. Burial of the dead man in the golden vestments of royalty is a testament of this person's royalty. The construction of the tomb close to the ground, not in the burial pit may also have social and religious significance and is associated with the ideological sanction of early nomadic state.

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